

Crisis and Problematicity: Europe from the Perspectives of

Edmund Husserl and Jan Patočka

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Declaration

The author hereby declares that this thesis is the result of his own original research and does not contain the work of any other individual. All sources that have been consulted have been identified and acknowledged in the appropriate way.

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Lorenzo Girardi

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Abstract (English)

During the past century a discourse of crisis has accompanied the discourse on Europe. While there has been talk of various crises in relation to Europe, up until a certain point in the 20th century the dominant crisis was a crisis of the European spirit. Since modernity, Europe had based itself on a rationalism that held that reason was the key to a meaningful existence. The catastrophes of the First and Second World War as well as the impoverished experience of the world that this rationalism led to caused Europe to abandon reason as its fundamental principle. Nothing, however, has been put in its place as the spiritual principle of European existence. This thesis analyses this crisis on the basis of the hypothesis that the crisis itself might contain valuable insights that can be used to address Europe's situation. It does so by looking at two key authors regarding this theme: the founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and one of his last students Jan Patočka (1907-1977). Both approach Europe's crisis on the basis of phenomenology – the philosophical inquiry into meaningful experience. But whereas Husserl feared the end of Europe and sought a restoration of the faith in reason, Patočka felt he had already witnessed its end and could no longer have recourse to any optimistic faith. The phenomenological work of these authors is compared on this basis, showing their respective solutions to the crisis, and the limits to these solutions. Their phenomenological analyses of the experience of the world are used to address the sense of a world that has become deeply problematical and to see whether this experience itself can serve as the foundation for a new idea of Europe with a focus on the political consequences of this in particular.

Abstract (Dutch)

De afgelopen eeuw is het discours omtrent Europe vergezeld door een discours van crisis. Hoewel er sprake was van verscheidene crises met betrekking tot Europa, was tot een bepaald punt in de 20^{ste} eeuw de dominante crisis er een van de Europese geest. Sinds de moderniteit had Europe zich gebaseerd op een rationalisme dat de rede als de sleutel tot een betekenisvol bestaan zag. De catastrophes van de Eerste en Tweede Wereldoorlog alsook de verarmde ervaring van de wereld waartoe dit rationalisme leidde, zorgde ervoor dat Europa de rede als fundamenteel principe los liet. Er kwam echter niets in de plaats van dit spirituele principe van het Europese bestaan. Deze dissertatie analyseert de crisis op basis van de hypothese dat de crisis zelf waardevolle inzichten kan verchaffen welke gebruikt kunnen worden om Europa's situatie het hoofd te bieden. Het doet dit aan de hand van twee sleutelfiguren betreffende dit thema: de grondlegger van de fenomenologie Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) en een van zijn laatste studenten Jan Patočka (1907-1977). Beiden benaderen Europa's crisis op basis van de fenomenologie – het filosofische onderzoek omtrent betekenisvolle ervaring. Maar waar Husserl het einde van Europa vreesde en een herstel van het geloof in de rede zocht, voelde Patočka dat hij dit einde al meegemaakt had en kon hij zich niet meer tot een optimistisch geloof in de rede richten. Aan de hand hiervan wordt het fenomenologische werk van deze auteurs vergeleken, waarbij hun respectievelijke oplossingen voor de crisis alsook de grenzen hiervan aangetoond worden. Hun fenomenologische analyses van de ervaring van de wereld worden gebruikt om de ervaring van een wereld die diep problematisch is geworden te verhelderen en om te zien of deze ervaring zelf als fundering voor een nieuwe idee van Europa kan dienen met hierbij een focus op de politieke gevolgen hiervan.

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Abbreviated references to the work of Husserl

<i>Hua VII</i>	<i>Erste Philosophie I (1923/24)</i>
<i>Hua VIII</i>	<i>Erste Philosophie II (1923/24)</i>
<i>Hua XIV</i>	<i>Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Zweiter Teil: 1921-1928</i>
<i>Hua XV</i>	<i>Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Dritter Teil: 1929-1935</i>
<i>Hua XXVII</i>	<i>Aufsätze und Vorträge. 1922-1937</i>
<i>Hua XXIX</i>	<i>Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie. Ergänzungsband. Texte aus dem Nachlass. 1934-1937</i>
<i>Hua XXXV</i>	<i>Einleitung in die Philosophie. Vorlesungen 1922/23</i>
<i>Hua XXXIX</i>	<i>Die Lebenswelt: Auslegungen Der Vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1916-1937)</i>
<i>Hua XLII</i>	<i>Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie. Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik. Späte Ethik. (1908-1937)</i>
<i>Hua Mat. IX</i>	<i>Einleitung in die Philosophie. Vorlesungen 1916-1920</i>
<i>HuDo III/3</i>	<i>Briefwechsel. Band III. Die Göttinger Schule</i>
<i>Ms.</i>	<i>Husserl's manuscripts</i>
<i>APS</i>	<i>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy</i>
<i>CM</i>	<i>Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology</i>
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic</i>
<i>FTL</i>	<i>Formal and Transcendental Logic</i>
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Philosophy as Rigorous Science (Logos Essay)</i>
<i>VL</i>	<i>The Vienna Lecture</i>

Abbreviated references to the work of Patočka

BCLW	<i>Body, Community, Language, World</i>
<i>Crisis Review</i>	<i>Edmund Husserl's 'Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transcendente Phänomenologie'</i>
BME	<i>Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz</i>
HE	<i>Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History</i>
HSCA	<i>Husserl's Subjectivism and the Call for an Asubjective Phenomenology</i>
IHP	<i>An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology</i>
ILI	<i>Ideology and Life in the Idea.</i>
KEE	<i>Ketzerische Essais zur Philosophie der Geschichte und ergänzende Schriften</i>
LP	<i>Living in Problematicity</i>
LS	<i>Liberté et sacrifice: Ecrits politiques</i>
NE	<i>Europa und Nach-Europa: Die nacheuropäische Epoche und ihre geistigen Problemen</i>
NP	<i>Negative Platonism: Reflections concerning the Rise, the Scope, and the Demise of Metaphysics – and Whether Philosophy Can Survive It</i>
NWPP	<i>The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem</i>
MPR	<i>On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion</i>
PE	<i>Plato and Europe</i>
PSW	<i>Philosophy and Selected Writings</i>
TMF	<i>Time, Myth, Faith</i>
<i>Varna Lecture</i>	<i>The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger</i>
VE	<i>Vom Erscheinen als solchem. Texte aus dem Nachlass</i>

Where available, reference is made to and quotes are taken from the English translation of any works used. In cases where no such translation is available, all translations are my own.

Europe has what we do not have yet, a sense of the mysterious and
inexorable limits of life, a sense, in a word, of tragedy. And we
have what they sorely need: a sense of life's possibilities.

– James Baldwin¹

¹ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (London: Penguin, 1991), 23.

Introduction

There is no shortage of discourses of crisis in relation to Europe. This was as much the case a century ago as it is today. Today, these discourses are predominantly economic and political. Much less prominent is the talk of what can be called Europe's spiritual crisis; a much-debated topic during the first half of the 20th century. For better or worse, Europe at that time was globally dominant in virtually all conceivable areas: politically, economically, scientifically, technologically, and so on. And still, for all of this, there was a growing discontent and uncertainty about what this meant for European life and whether it was, in fact, as positive as the optimistic rationalism of the 19th century had taken for granted it would be. The First World War revealed that precisely what was taken to be Europe's excellence could also be its downfall. Europe's existence was put in doubt; not just its physical existence, but the value of the spiritual principles on which it had based itself.

While various crises have dominated the public discourse on Europe over the past decade, this spiritual crisis is hardly present. Perhaps this is due to the absence of any shaking of Europe's total existence such as the First World War provided a century ago. For all its troubles, Europe – at least Western Europe – has been relatively peaceful, economically prosperous, and politically stable since the Second World War. For all the talk of crisis, then, Europe itself, as a whole – if one can still speak of it as such – is not necessarily seen to be in crisis.

This does not mean that the spiritual crisis has been resolved. Renewed debate regarding the freedoms and institutions that Europeans have valued – think of current debates surrounding freedom of speech or religion – can be seen as a sign that Europe's unclarity or uncertainty regarding its principles remains. While contemporary Europe no longer identifies itself with rationalism the way it has done in the past, nothing has been put in place to fulfil a similar role as Europe's fundamental principle either. Economically and politically most of Europe is integrated more than ever, but a sense of what it might mean to be European is largely absent. While there is increasing talk of the European Union as a community of values instead of a purely economic or political union, what this would mean concretely remains vague. What Europe's principles are or should be, as well as where they come from and how they are justified, remains woefully underdiscussed. If principles are mentioned at all, this often remains superficial. Perhaps more importantly, they are taken for granted as if the past century has not shown them to be deeply problematic, as if there had not been a deep crisis of the principles which were thought to belong to the very idea of Europe.

The aim of this thesis is to provide insight into this situation. It investigates Europe's crisis on the basis of the hypothesis that this crisis itself might contain valuable insights that can be used to address Europe's situation. Typical for accounts of the crisis is that Europe is identified with a single element that has contributed substantially to its development – often either its rationalism or Christianity. The crisis would be the loss or distortion of this element; the solution its reestablishment. But what can be done when this is

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no longer a viable option? And what if this would actually lead us to overlook something that might only manifest itself in a situation of crisis? If this is the case, then it might be worth it to think the crisis through to its end.

The crisis discussed in this thesis can be called a crisis of rational civilization. While there are other possible and valuable perspectives from which to approach the topic – a crisis of religion, for example, in line with the idea that Europe is fundamentally Christian – Europe will be taken to be based on reason. Not only does rationalism play an essential role in most accounts of the crisis – whether they take Europe to be based on reason or not – but as will be shown there are important connections between modern rationalism and the idea of Europe itself. That is not to say that Europe somehow is the embodiment of reason. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of what over the past centuries has been an important part of the way Europe has understood itself, however ideologically biased this may have been.

It is important to note that this thesis does not advocate any such ideological position. Instead, it takes a typical position regarding Europe as its context in the attempt to understand and develop it from an internal perspective. It is on the basis of this perspective that Europe can be said to have been or still to be in crisis. It might even be the case that this perspective itself inherently leads to crisis or even its own dissolution. The attempt to think the crisis through to its end and to gain a critical distance from within thus entails going along with the narrative that accompanies this perspective. In a way, what is attempted here is to see how far this European perspective itself can be taken.

A comparative study of ideas other than that of Europe and of comparable discourses of crisis would be of tremendous value, but exceeds both the scope of what is possible in this thesis as well as the competencies of its author. If this approach ends up being too lenient to some aspects of the European perspective it takes as its subject-matter and its context, then the hope is that this serves to bring out certain of its characteristics and not to proceed on the basis of hidden biases. As much of the content of this thesis concerns Europe's self-understanding more so than its reality, some idealization and simplification is perhaps unavoidable. This, of course, does not excuse the author from taking responsibility for any uncritical instances of this.

Aside from a European perspective, the theme of this thesis is approached from a phenomenological perspective, specifically as can be found in the work of the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and one of his last students, Jan Patočka (1907-1977). There are many philosophical approaches one can take to Europe's crisis. While the crisis of reason is a prominent topic in phenomenology it is by no means exclusive to it. The work of the *Frankfurter Schule*, for example, is not only largely dedicated to the same topic, but also resonates greatly with the approach taken in this thesis. As will be discussed, however, the crisis is related to the loss of a meaningful world. This means that phenomenology – as the inquiry into meaningful experience – is of special value here. Moreover, several

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phenomenologists have explicitly linked this problematic to reflections on not just Europe's crisis, but on the idea of Europe itself.

That is not to say that what can be found in either their work or in this thesis is what could be called a phenomenology of Europe. That is, this is not an investigation into an experience of Europe, of Europe as an intentional object of experience. Neither is it a social-ontological investigation into Europe as a form of social identity. Rather, it is an investigation into what at least for a certain period in the 20th century was seen as a crisis in Europe and – even if it was perhaps not entirely particular to Europe – seen to be originating from what Europe had taken to be its spiritual foundation, that is, the possibility of basing all facets of its existence on reason.

Although other phenomenologists have written on this topic, the work of Husserl and Patočka is of particular relevance.² Both see Europe as based on reason and advocate a rational Europe, but are also deeply critical of the way this has concretely played out over the past centuries. They provide genealogical accounts of how what they have taken to be Europe's distinguishing characteristic – its rationalism – itself led to its crisis. In both of their accounts the idea of the world plays a crucial role. However, there are also important differences between Husserl and Patočka. The crucial difference on the basis of which their work is approached in this thesis lies in their different approaches to the crisis. These can be seen as representative of two distinct approaches one can take to a crisis in general which will be argued to respond to two different historical situations.

Husserl developed his diagnosis of and response to the crisis in the wake of the First World War. He saw the origin of the crisis to lie in the loss of Europe's faith in reason, ultimately due to its one-sided, positivistic conception of reason which led to a naturalistic conception of the world. This dominant form of rationalism was in need of correction so as to restore the faith in reason and set Europe on its proper path again. While Patočka initially follows this account, after the Second World War he starts diverging from his former teacher. The crisis becomes total in a way that prevents any 'simple' restoration of the faith in reason. Whereas Husserl feared the end of Europe, Patočka was convinced that he had already witnessed it.

The similarities and contrasts in their work make these two authors well-suited to the aim of this thesis. Moreover, they present concrete arguments and frameworks on the basis of which the approaches they are taken to represent can be criticized and developed further. Specific cases always show more than general approaches and Husserl and Patočka

² See e.g. Scheler's essays after the First World War (2010) and Heidegger's infamous comments in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (2014). There are also phenomenologists who are rarely related to the topic, but can nonetheless provide a helpful contribution, such as Stein – who it should be noted is one of Europe's patron saints (see e.g. the recent volume *Edith Stein – Europe and its Identity* (Machnac et al. 2018)). Authors who can be considered to work in the wake of the phenomenological tradition have also taken up the topic of Europe and its crisis (see e.g. Derrida 1992; Nancy 1996).

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provide us with exemplary cases of two distinct approaches. The hypothesis of this thesis being that the crisis itself might provide helpful insights when it is thought through to its end, Patočka's later work provides a philosophy that developed on the basis of this end. Husserl's work provides a helpful contrast to that of the later Patočka and what will be argued to be the limits of the former shows the value of the work of the latter for Europe's contemporary situation.

Some cautionary remarks are warranted as the works of Husserl and Patočka are not only related to each other and to their respective historical contexts but also interpreted through the lens of the distinction between two approaches to the crisis.

First, it is not the intent to historicize their work, that is, to reduce their thought to their historical circumstances. While the aim is to see their philosophy as a response to these circumstances, this does not mean that it is not the content of their work and their argumentation that counts. In particular, it will be shown how their respective approaches not only respond to two different historical situations, but also how they are based on what are ultimately two different analyses of the idea and experience of the world. Yet, if their work is to be used to address Europe's contemporary situation, differences in circumstances cannot be left out of account. While a comparison of the work of Husserl and Patočka on this basis has not been done before, ultimately the aim of this thesis is not this comparison itself, but to see what this can contribute to Europe's current situation.

Second, the works of Husserl and Patočka are interpreted as representing two approaches to the crisis. Although this will be argued for on the basis of their own work, this nonetheless entails approaching their work on the basis of a framework that is not necessarily theirs. Any such interpretation involves the risk of a certain amount of interpretative violence. While the accounts given of Husserl's and Patočka's respective approaches are justified as much as possible on the basis of their own writings and taking into account the full scope of their writings as well as the current state of the literature, the hope is that any possible interpretative moves that do not find their origin directly in these writings capture something of their approaches that may not have been visible otherwise, rather than distorting them.

As third and last word of caution, it must be said that while this approach to the work of Husserl and Patočka is in accordance with the aim of this thesis and sheds light on their work, it unfortunately also prevents a more in-depth and expansive look at the specifically phenomenological aspects of their work. It would exceed the scope of this thesis to not only present, but critically reflect on all relevant phenomenological moves these authors make. In particular, this goes for Husserl's phenomenological method and Patočka's criticism of it – a topic that itself deserves an entire thesis. While no debate regarding their phenomenological approaches is settled here, the hope is that they are portrayed in a way that does justice to their work while contributing to the topic of this thesis. Any thesis involves decisions as to what to exclude and as the main topic of this thesis is not phenomenological methodology but Europe's crisis, it is deemed justifiable that the more strictly

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phenomenological work of Husserl and Patočka is presented only insofar as it helps to understand their respective approaches to Europe's crisis.

The thesis is divided into three main sections followed by a conclusion. The first section provides the overall context and background to Europe's crisis on the basis of the connection between the idea of Europe and rationalism. Its aim is to provide a general overview drawing on a wide range of sources rather than presenting any particular account. The section starts on the basis of what will be referred to as Europe's 'Grand Narrative' (section 1.1). This is the narrative that sees Europe as essentially based on reason as opposed to tradition, myth or religion. It sees Europe's history as a teleological process of rationalization which the Grand Narrative takes to be the source of Europe's supposed scientific, economic, social and even moral progress. Rather than being a particular view of the world, this is taken to be a universal point of view so that Europe is seen as the embodiment of the striving for a rational civilization that is essentially universal rather than as a particular culture amongst others.

Although the Grand Narrative is an ideological instrument, it has played a crucial role in the way Europe has understood itself and – to some extent – the way it has concretely taken shape. To understand the place of the Grand Narrative in Europe's development as well as to show its ideological nature, an account will be given of the development of the idea of Europe (section 1.2). This will show how this idea came to be, how the Grand Narrative came to be a part of it, but also how this narrative has arguably come to an end after the Second World War.

The Grand Narrative was viewed with suspicion by some virtually since its inception. It was accompanied by what can be seen as a narrative of decline which will be discussed on the basis of the disenchantment of the world and what some argue to be the culmination of Europe's history in Auschwitz (section 1.3). Throughout modernity it became increasingly clear that the rationalist worldview was ill-suited to deal with questions regarding the meaning or meaninglessness of human existence. In fact, it could be seen as impoverishing life rather than contributing meaningfully to it. The catastrophes of 20th-century Europe were made possible by this combination of disenchantment and rationalization, the lack of higher values and the increased means to act. That which Europe took to be essential to its existence led to catastrophe, leaving it with a deep uncertainty about its rationalism to the point of abandoning it as the explicit, fundamental principle of its total existence.

This state of crisis is analysed by looking at the concept of crisis, the solutions often offered to it, and its contemporary consequences (section 1.4). A crisis is shown to be the culmination of a development where an internal contradiction in this development is revealed that forces a decision between the opposing elements. On this basis a distinction is made between two kinds of crisis, 'imperfect' and 'perfect'. The former sees the crisis as the result of an incorrect interpretation or implementation of, in this case, Europe's rationalism. The

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problem is seen to lie not with this rationalism itself, but with a wrong perspective on it that can be corrected. A perfect crisis, however, is experienced as more decisive. It sees the contradiction exposed by the crisis to be either incorrigible or as having been decided against, in this case, Europe's rationalism. The prior trajectory can no longer be reinstated or corrected, but is to be rejected entirely. These two forms of crisis are taken to roughly correspond to the situations after the First World War and after the Second World War with the work of Husserl and Patočka respectively representative of these situations. To repeat the prior word of caution: these classifications are not absolute. But while exceptions to them exist and will be discussed, as far as the idea of Europe in the 20th century goes these classifications are not without their truth and value either.

More concretely, the crisis will be discussed as a deadlock for Europe where it cannot adhere to its former optimistic rationalism. The disenchantment of the world and the role of reason in the catastrophes of the 20th century have made this impossible or arguably naive. What this has meant for Europe is that it has increasingly made room for relativism and a renewed focus on culture and religion without any proper way of keeping the possibly undesirable outcomes of this in check. While this in effect entails the end of the modern idea of Europe, it will be indicated that this may have signalled a largely implicit transformation of the idea of Europe after the Second World War, an indication that will be developed further in the conclusion of the thesis.

This overview of Europe's crisis is followed by Husserl's specific account of it in section 2. Husserl conceives of Europe as a civilization based on ideality. This is discussed as a break with the empirical and with tradition through the transcending of particular, relative worldviews towards the one, universal idea of the world (section 2.1). Husserl does not take Europe to have achieved such a world, but rather sees it as the establishment of the striving towards it through an infinite task. The origin of this teleology in ancient Greece and the problematical relation between the empirical and the ideal, specifically as pertaining to the origin of the ideal, are discussed critically in relation to any possible Eurocentrism that this might entail.

As Europe is equated with what Husserl refers to as this 'teleological sense', the crisis is a loss of the faith in this teleology, that is, in the possibility of reason meaningfully giving shape to European life (section 2.2). This is discussed in relation to the crisis of the sciences which will be interpreted as distinct from – but contributing to – the crisis of spirit. A one-sided rationalism in the form of the positivism and naturalism of the sciences is taken to neglect the concrete experience of human existence as well as matters of the human spirit in general. It is this neglect combined with the catastrophic experience of the First World War that puts the prior optimistic rationalism in doubt. The solution Husserl offers lies in his concept of the life-world as the concrete world of experience that is overlooked by the sciences. It is this domain of human existence which is to be brought to the fore so as to clarify the

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functioning of the sciences and to serve as the foundation of a rational approach to human existence.

The life-world is analysed in its various layers to see what role these play in Husserl's solution to the crisis (section 2.3). As the meaningful context of human existence in general, the life-world is initially a particular cultural world. Husserl's aim is to overcome this sense of the life-world towards a universal sense of the world. Although it is often acknowledged that this project has its basis in Husserl's account of experience, how this exactly works often remains undiscussed. This section provides a detailed account of the way Husserl's solution to the crisis – and his rationalist project in general – has recourse to the experiential structures that make up the life-world, specifically the fundamental layer of the life-world which will be referred to as the world as horizon. It is this horizon which allows for the continual extension of experience beyond any concretely given object and the incorporation of everything we encounter into a single world of experience. Husserl's rationalist teleology is thereby related to the teleological structure of subjectivity. This is criticized on the basis of the distinction between two kinds of experiential horizon and the purely formal nature of the horizon to which Husserl has recourse as a solution to the crisis. The limits of the phenomenological justification of his solution to the crisis will be shown specifically on the basis of the supposed unity of the world which Husserl takes as his goal; a unity, which it will be argued, that he cannot properly account for.

Having argued that Husserl's phenomenological justification has its limits, it is shown that his solution relies not so much on any evidence of the possibility of the world that he takes as his goal, but on a motivation for its realization in the form of practical reason and faith (section 2.4). Precisely as a goal – specifically as an infinitely distant one – the world that Husserl aims at is not an experiential given subject to concrete phenomenological description. It is an uncertain possibility, the realization of which relies not so much on a theoretical justification, but on a practical one. It will be shown that Husserl's reliance on faith in this context has a religious aspect to it – a religious aspect which is rarely discussed as pertaining to the foundations Husserl's project as a whole. Although his solution to the crisis is not refuted, the formal nature of the teleology that Husserl has recourse to as well as his reliance on faith make it possible to question its outcome. Shaping the life-world on the basis of an entirely formal measure might entail an emptying of those elements which make the life-world meaningful for us. It will be argued that there is a tension between Husserl's rationalist project and his phenomenological results. This matter is not definitely settled as for Husserl this infinite task essentially can never be a settled matter, its goal always remaining a possibility. In the situation where one has lost faith in a good outcome, however, it is worth looking at alternatives.

In section 3, Patočka's work will be presented as such an alternative. Patočka takes Europe to be based on the care of the soul as originating in ancient Greek philosophy, which, despite its differences from Husserl's account, follows the latter in basing Europe on a

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form of insight. To highlight the distinctiveness of Patočka's later work, it will be viewed against the background of his earlier, more Husserlian work (section 3.1). This early work is discussed as largely following Husserl's rationalist approach. What changes in the transition to his later work – a change that will be attributed to the influence of the Second World War – is a focus on the inherently problematical situation of human existence rather than the belief that what Patočka refers to as 'problematicity' can be overcome. The focus of the interpretation of Patočka's divergence from Husserl is the former's denunciation of the faith to which Husserl has recourse, as well as his turn towards an asubjective phenomenology which will no longer allow him to have recourse to the teleological structure of subjectivity in overcoming the crisis.

As the later Patočka takes Europe to be based on the care of the soul, it is first looked at what this consists in (section 3.2). It is discussed as the possibility of a higher form of human existence enabled by the transition from what Patočka refers to as a pre-problematical world to a problematical world. This transition comes about through the experience of problematicity which shakes human existence free from its mythical existence in what was experienced as a pre-given order in which it initially found itself. The care of the soul is discussed on the basis of its three forms which Patočka derives from Plato: the shaping of the self, the manifestation of the world, and the care of the soul in relation to the community. Although it arguably receives the least amount of attention in Patočka's own works or in the literature, it is this third form that will be argued to be the proper foundation of Europe through the initial failure of the care of the soul. It is this failure that necessitates reflection on the political conditions in which the care of the soul is possible and on the basis of which the theory of the just state arises.

Patočka's account of Europe is discussed on the basis of the various transformations of the care of the soul and of its accompanying political ideal in particular (section 3.3). Patočka takes Europe to have developed on the basis of subsequent failures to satisfactorily give shape to the care of the soul in society – from the Greek *polis* to the Roman Empire and the Christian idea of a holy empire. It is the Christian transformation of the care of the soul that ultimately leads to its abandonment in favour of modern rationalism which can no longer provide meaningful direction to human existence. While this rationalism was the basis of Europe's global dominance, it also led to its spiritual and ultimately its political demise. These will be discussed in terms of Patočka's account of overcivilization and decadence as well as his reflections on the post-European age.

The clearest indication Patočka provides of a solution to this situation is discussed to be a form of Christianity (section 3.4). While this is a prominent position in the literature on Patočka, on the basis of his work it can also be argued to be insufficient as it relies on what will be referred to as a mythico-metaphysical remnant. That is, it has recourse to a faith that – while it might be useful in countering the objectivistic tendencies of modern rationalism – also interprets the transcendence that Patočka sees as constitutive of human existence and the

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experience of problemat�city in terms of a transcendent end-point. This is shown to go against core tenets of Patočka's philosophy and to moreover remain ineffective as a solution, because it relies on something not actually present to human existence. However, rather than rejecting Patočka's indication of a solution via Christianity, it is developed based on his suggestion that what is needed is a demythologized Christianity. This will be discussed on the basis of Patočka's account of sacrifice, which indicates precisely the experience that lies at the root of Patočka's recourse to Christianity, but does so in a way that precludes the introduction of transcendent elements.

Patočka's account of this experience of problemat�city is discussed in relation to his project of 'negative platonism' which is linked to his phenomenology (section 3.5). What Patočka refers to as 'meaning's point-zero' is interpreted, with reference to the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, as a moment of significance inherent to all experiences of meaning and as that which is encountered in the experience of problemat�city. This will be argued to provide the possibility of refusing nihilism without having recourse to myth, religion, or metaphysics as attempts to safeguard an absolute meaning of the world. On this basis, problemat�city is argued to be inherent to all meaning and not to be the result of the human being's incapacity to grasp or establish a non-problematical meaning of the world, without having to conclude that the world is ultimately meaningless. Problemat�city is thereby interpreted as a cosmological insight along the lines of the second form of the care of the soul and as the basis of Patočka's fundamentally ateleological concept of history. This concept of history is linked to his (brief) critique of Husserl's recourse to teleology as a solution to the crisis.

This interpretation of problemat�city as not only an experience, but a form of insight or knowledge allows for the development of Patočka's political thought along the lines of the third form of the care of the soul (section 3.6). Most accounts of his political thought focus on the inherently resistant capacities of human existence, ending up with a fundamentally dissident politics. However, Patočka also suggests the possibility of a theory of the state based on the care of the soul. While this remains undeveloped in his work, in this section this is worked out on the basis of the developed interpretation of problemat�city. After discussing how problemat�city can serve as the foundation for a new kind of community through what Patočka refers to as the solidarity of the shaken, this will be developed as a foundation for modern liberal democracies. While Patočka himself mainly pointed to the problems of modern liberal democracies, linking his work to that of others such as Claude Lefort shows how his account of problemat�city can be useful in providing a specific interpretation of and justification for liberal democracy. Both the value and limits of this will be discussed in relation to the place of freedom in democracy. Ultimately, while the insight into problemat�city can be used to argue for a particular political system, more is needed if this system is to be successful and if Europe's spiritual situation is to be turned around. This leads back to the problem of myth or religion which may be necessary supports of any political system.

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The conclusion of the thesis will reflect on the possibility of an idea of Europe after its modern, rationalist form, and in which way the work of Husserl and Patočka can contribute to this. If the end of the Grand Narrative in Europe after the Second World War designates the end of the modern idea of Europe, if this can be interpreted in terms of the experience of problemat�city, and if this experience can not only be seen as a part of what Europe always has been, but also as more fecund than initially expected, then this contains the possibility of articulating a new idea of Europe. What such an idea might concretely entail for European existence will be discussed in terms of the problematical European identity it entails and the empirical conditions necessary for establishing such a new spiritual shape of Europe on its basis.

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Europe is often talked about but rarely properly defined. This rarely seems necessary. The context often makes clear enough what is meant. However, any closer look is bound to run into problems. Even a mere geographical definition is problematic. Europe is not a continent in the proper geographical sense of the term, but rather a peninsula of Asia. More so than the physical boundaries between Europe and Africa or the Americas, its geographical border with Asia is a matter of convention. Europe's history is unthinkable without Russia, but it has never been a settled matter to what extent it is part of Europe. There are also the European parts of Turkey and the territories of European nations on other continents. Historically, culturally, and politically the matter is not much clearer. The vagueness at the heart of these difficulties might even be helpful in talking about something so diverse as if it were a single entity. Yet, it is clear that Europe is *something* and virtually everything that it could be imagined to be has been considered to be in crisis at some point or another. Consequently, any idea of a crisis of Europe as a whole would be as difficult to define as Europe itself. It could be that this problematic identity is itself indicative of or conducive to a crisis.

Despite these difficulties, one can speak of Europe with relative ease. There is or was an idea of Europe, the general outline of which most people – at least most Europeans – could agree upon. It is an idea that characterizes Europe by its rationality. Even critics, whether of this idea or of Europe itself, will generally not dispute that it is something that Europeans have believed. It might not be historically accurate, it might be deeply ideological and subject to disagreement, but it is an indisputable fact that when thinking of Europe a story largely familiar to everyone comes to mind and this is a story that has been crucial to the self-understanding of Europeans for centuries.

This story is Europe's *Grand Narrative*. Speaking of a narrative in a rather loose sense rather than of an idea avoids the problem of having to address what it might mean to speak of Europe as an idea and all the theoretical baggage that this entails before it is even made clear what is to be explained on this basis.³ For all of its shortcomings, the Grand Narrative has been a generally shared feature of Europe's historical consciousness and self-understanding. These shortcomings will be discussed, specifically by putting the Grand Narrative itself in the context of the development of the idea of Europe. This will clarify how this Grand Narrative itself could come to be, but also how it came to an end – at least in part. Aside from providing a genealogy of this narrative, it is also placed in the context of the more pessimistic narrative that has accompanied it. This will help to show how the Grand Narrative can be seen as a narrative of decline rather than of progress without deviating from the essential connection between the idea of Europe and rationalism. What can be considered the

³ The historical development of the idea of Europe is provided in section 1.2, while what it means that Europe is seen on the basis of an idea is discussed in the context of Husserl's work in section 2.1.

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inherent outcome of Europe's history of rationalization is thematized in terms of the disenchantment of the world and the catastrophe of Auschwitz.

With rationality leading to catastrophe, a Europe that understood itself on this basis cannot but have become uncertain of itself. Arguably, this was more so the case for Europe than for the West as a whole, as it is Europe which not only provided the setting for catastrophe, but which was also its main perpetrator. The resulting state of crisis in which Europe finds itself is discussed on the basis of an analysis of the concept of crisis, the solutions often proposed, and the way the crisis has concretely shaped European consciousness and what consequences this has had.

1. Europe and Crisis: Narratives and Ideas

1.1 The Grand Narrative

When thinking of Europe a familiar story easily comes to mind. It is a story that tells us what Europe is, in one fell swoop covering its core principles and two-and-a-half millennia of its supposed history. Europe has its “Grand Narrative,” as Gress has put it (1998, 1). In Taylor’s terminology it is a “master narrative,” a “broad framework picture of how history unfolds” (2007, 573). Neither uses these terms to speak of Europe specifically. Their focus is the West: Europe and some of its former overseas territories, the United States in particular. While there is a significant overlap between the narratives of Europe and of the West, they are not identical. The relation between the idea of Europe and the idea of the West will be dealt with in section 1.2, where it will be shown that Western identity precedes European identity. It is not until the 20th century that these identities start to diverge in a significant way. In some sense it is the very collapse of the Grand Narrative that will give the idea of Europe its specificity in the 20th century. To avoid misunderstandings ‘the West’ will be used up to the point where it becomes pertinent to further specify Europe’s eventual separate path. Up until then, the Grand Narrative of the West coincides with that of Europe.

The typical version of the Grand Narrative is as follows:

The liberal Grand Narrative presented the West as a coherent entity emerging triumphantly through history in a series of stages, each contributing an essential element to the whole. Western civilization, according to this story, was a synthesis of democracy, capitalism, science, human rights, religious pluralism, individual autonomy, and the power of unfettered human reason to solve human problems. The most important stages, or Magic Moments, of Western evolution were ancient Greece, Rome, the synthesis of classical civilization and Christianity, the European Renaissance and the voyages of discovery, the rise of modern science, and, in the last two centuries, the rise of modern liberal democracy, the spread of prosperity, and, with the end of the Cold War, the prospect of global peace and stability. Cumulatively, these Magic Moments shaped the spiritual, geographical, political, and moral entity defined by the narrative as the modern West. (Gress 1998, 39)

It would be fair to say that most Western educated men and women from at least the past century would be familiar with this account, even if not with all the specifics or being in full agreement with it. The Grand Narrative was standard material in 20th century Western education.⁴ Perhaps with more clarity than a century ago, we can say that this narrative is not a neutral, disinterested version of history. It had a political purpose. As a lowest common denominator in higher education and public opinion, it proved useful in creating a broadly shared Western identity. Although it is not a particularly accurate account of history, the Grand Narrative tells us a great deal about how the West understood itself. One cannot understand the West, even today, if one does not take this self-understanding of its path as a special one in world-history into account.

⁴ For a detailed account of its place in education in the United States in particular, see Gress (1998, 29-36).

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What defines the West according to the Grand Narrative is not a particular people. Nor is its history essentially the history of events in the geographical area we have come to call Europe and the (former) overseas territories of the peoples inhabiting this area. Instead, the West is defined by certain principles and ideas. What binds these principles and ideas together is their supposed rationality and universality, what we can refer to as the spirit of reason. This was the backbone of an ideal that, in Berlin's words, holds

in the first place that, as in the sciences, all genuine questions must have one true answer and one only, all the rest being necessarily errors; in the second place, that there must be a dependable path towards the discovery of these truths; in the third place, that the true answers, when found, must necessarily be compatible with one another and form a single whole, for one truth cannot be incompatible with another – that we knew a priori. This kind of omniscience was the solution of the cosmic jigsaw puzzle. In the case of morals, we could then conceive what the perfect life must be, founded as it would be on a correct understanding of the rules that governed the universe. [...] Even if we could not ourselves reach these true answers, or indeed, the final system that interweaves them all, the answers must exist – else the questions were not real. (Berlin 1992, 5-6)

It would be superfluous to list all those who held the West to be unique in its use of reason and saw this as the source of its supposed scientific, economic, social, and even moral progress. One prominent example of someone who held that Western civilization and *only* Western civilization produced cultural phenomena of universal significance and value based on reason was Weber. Weber provides a useful example, because he goes well beyond indicating the advanced stages of Western science and technology as particular phenomena present within the West. Rather, reason is seen as the defining characteristic of the West as such. He does not hesitate to also point to, for instance, the rationality of Western music, Western architecture, or the pillar of Western political and economic life: the trained official (Weber 2001, xxix-xxxi). The Grand Narrative holds reason to be the motor of Western history, which consequently is characterized by an ever increasing rationalization:

It means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means. (Weber 1946, 139)

While others are limited by myth or religion, the West understands the world through reason. Without any limit to what this reason can accomplish, gradually everything comes within its grasp. As summed up by Hazard:

A political system without divine sanction, a religion without mystery, a morality without dogma, such was the edifice man had now to erect. Science would have to become something more than an intellectual pastime; it would have to develop into a power capable of harnessing the forces of nature to the service of mankind. Science—who could

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doubt it?— was the key to happiness. The material world once in his power, man could order it for his own benefit and his own glory, and for the happiness of future generations. (Hazard 2013, xv-xvi)

The increasing use of reason in all areas went hand in hand with the disenchantment of the world and the secularization of society. This makes the Grand Narrative what Taylor has called a “subtraction story.” It explains progress “by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge” (Taylor 2007, 22). Weber, who is certainly aware of the formative influence of religion on modernity, likewise speaks of the process of rationalization being “obstructed by spiritual obstacles” (2001, xxix). This subtraction story can take various forms. The dominant one in the Grand Narrative is that “in the Renaissance, people freed themselves of superstition and released their minds and their imaginations” (Gress 1998, 44). The “particularism and narrow-mindedness of Christendom” were left behind “for the progressive universalism of civilization” (Gress 1998, 261).⁵ The West, in many versions of the Grand Narrative, finds its realization in or is even synonymous with modernity.

Like most intellectuals of his time, Weber was aware that rationality could also be found in other civilizations. It could not be denied that India, for instance, had forms of mathematics that for a long time were more advanced than anything found in the West. But Weber also held that while reason was not foreign to others, they did not make it central to their existence in the way the West did (2001, xxxvii). The West, not India, China, let alone any other civilization, made rationality its goal and incorporated it into every facet of its existence. In doing so, the West was seen as a next stage of civilization, or indeed civilization as such. Its great service to humanity was that it spread reason around the globe. Rationalization and a *mission civilisatrice* went hand in hand. As Valéry put it:

Other parts of the world have had admirable civilizations, but no part of the world has possessed this singular *physical* property: the most intense power of radiation combined with an equally intense power of assimilation. Everything came to Europe, and everything came from it. Or almost everything. (Valéry 1962, 31)

Rationalism coincided with universalism. Reason provided a universal point of view, no longer distorted by particular perspectives. Although no single individual possessed this view as such, “the whole succession of mankind ought to be considered as one and the same man who continues to exist and learn” (Pascal *Fragment d'un traité du vide*, quoted in Ricoeur 2007, 83). Reason provided the measure for the progress not of a particular people, but of humanity as such. It was through reason that humanity was first constituted as such, providing a point of view from which it could be viewed as one. With a single measure for all it was also assumed that there was a single end for all, an ideal society “to which all societies will

⁵ A somewhat novel version of the subtraction thesis is to be found in the work of Blumenberg who takes not just medieval religiosity, but also the ancients as his targets. For modernity to arise, Western scholars not only had to rid themselves of the former, but also of the authoritative and restricting status of ancient science, art, and literature (Blumenberg 1983, 33).

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gradually converge because of the higher rationality of its institutional arrangements" (Wagner 2005, 48). Whatever form it may have taken, the West was characterized by a teleology. Deviations from it were not essential, but temporary. Any downsides to rationalism, if they were seen at all, were simply the cost of progress. Arguably negative phenomena could even be incorporated into the Grand Narrative based on the idea that progress comes about through antagonism as in Kant's "unsocial sociability" (1970, 44).

Ancient Greece was seen as the birthplace of this spirit of reason and consequently the Grand Narrative posits it as the birthplace of the West. As Hegel said, the ancient Greeks "made the world their home" (1995, 149). They discovered higher, transcendent truths that uprooted them from their particular traditions and confronted them with the world as such. They were at home in one place as much as the other, because, as Thomas More's *Utopia* put it, the way to heaven is the same from all places. The West's rationalism and universalism consisted in this Greek gift named philosophy, which on this basis was aptly defined by Novalis as "homesickness – the urge to be everywhere at home" (1997, 135). Because of the perceived Greek origins of philosophy, the Grand Narrative focusses single-mindedly on ancient Greece. It is "an axis of continuity that began with the Greeks, jumped lightly over the Romans, Christians, and Dark Age Germanic tribes, to land, finally, in modern America and modern liberalism" (Gress 1998, 38). The ancient Greeks already saw themselves as embodying the idea of civilization and the Romans too measured themselves by this Greek standard (Gress 1998, 57).⁶ Although ancient Greece is no longer unproblematically held to be the singular origin of Western civilisation, even these days there are historians who think "it cannot be totally wrong to place Athens at the start of Europe's 'special path' in world history" (Meier 2005, 1).

Whereas the Grand Narrative's emphasis on ancient Greece is often to the detriment of other important sources of the West, it is flexible enough to accommodate these. It does not take much to turn what it takes to be an essentially Greek story into a Graeco-Roman, -Jewish, or -Christian one. This can be done for ideological reasons or simply because of the impossibility of denying the historical significance of these non-Greek influences. Yet, it is ancient Greece that takes the centre stage and to which these other sources of the West are related and from which they take their significance.

The role of the Judaic legacy has become a staple of the Grand Narrative through Strauss' classic formulation of "Jerusalem and Athens." "Western man," he writes, "became what he is, and is what he is, through the coming together of biblical faith and Greek thought" (Strauss 1967, 45). Yet, when ancient Israel – or, for that matter, the empires of the ancient Near East – are included in the Grand Narrative, it is not as an early stage of the West, but as

⁶ Bregue sees this Roman inferiority-complex towards the Greeks as essential to Western identity insofar as it gave it a drive to improve itself. In an interesting subversion of the Grand Narrative, he upholds Greek superiority, but makes the subsequent Roman inferiority the West's defining characteristic (Bregue 2002).

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its prehistory. It is only a *Hellenized* Judaism that is attributed a prominent role, first and foremost in the form of Christianity.⁷

Just like Judaism only has a place in the Grand Narrative insofar as it is Hellenized, in similar fashion Christianity is made subservient to Greek reason. Weber again provides a good example. He attributes an undeniable role to Christianity in the rationalization of certain domains of life. But the Christianity responsible for this is a “Christianity under the influence of Hellenism” (Weber 2001, xviii). If Christianity is seen as a decisive stage in the Grand Narrative, it is because it is seen as more rational than prior religions. And it is more rational because it is more Greek. Christianity is attributed some importance only to be left behind again in the march of progress. That is, if it is not altogether seen as a lapse from Greek thought from which the West recovered with the Renaissance.

Like Christianity, and in connection with it, the Roman Empire also has its undeniable place in the history of the West. But its role is downplayed in the Grand Narrative as well. The Roman Empire, it is said, may have spread Greek civilization, but it did not add anything to it. The West may be unthinkable without Rome, but its gift to the world was essentially Greek. Some did not even credit the Roman Empire with this: “If the progress of the Greeks was lost upon other nations, it was for want of a communication between the people; and to the tyrannical domination of the Romans must the whole blame be ascribed” (Condorcet 1796, 258).

The Grand Narrative presents the history of the West as the development and spread of reason. It seemingly comes into being *ex nihilo* with the ancient Greeks and culminates or is to culminate in the rationalization of the entire world, leading to peace and prosperity. It does not take much knowledge of history to see that reality has not corresponded to this ideal. The Grand Narrative is both a supposed history as well as an ideal of what the West, according to its own principles, should be. If it is conceded that the West more often than not did not live up to this, what nonetheless distinguishes it, according to the Grand Narrative, is that at the very least it had this ideal: “[it] acted ill but honored the good” (Benda 2007, §4). Schlegel’s witticism regarding the supposed pre-eminence of the Germans seems apt to describe the West: “The Germans, one hears it said, are as to the development of their artistic sense and their scientific spirit, the first people in the world. Admittedly – only there are very few Germans” (Schlegel *Kritische Fragmente*, §116, quoted in Brague 2002, 149).

The Grand Narrative is not only a poor account of history. It is also unhelpful in understanding how the ideas of the West and of Europe came to be and how they came to be associated with the idea of reason. These ideas have a long, complex history, at best only part of which matches the rationalist Grand Narrative. A look at this history will help to clarify the place of the Grand Narrative in the development of the idea of Europe.

⁷ The Jewish people were seen as a part of European modernity in some cases, but precisely not as Jewish, but as intellectuals.

1.2 The Idea of Europe

While the Grand Narrative has been fundamental to the West's self-understanding over the past centuries, it is a reductive narrative. In positing the West as a beacon of progress, it scoots over the fact that for most of its history, well into the 20th century, and arguably still today, it was not as rational, secular, or free as those in the West sometimes like to think. Likewise, the West's scientific, technological, and economic superiority is relatively recent considering the two-and-a-half millennia the Grand Narrative covers. The roots of this eventual superiority might be old, but that does not change the fact that – judged by its own standards – the concrete reality of the West was relatively backwards for most of its history. In many ways, it was not until the 17th century that it surpassed the East (Delanty 1995, 32-33).

Looking specifically at the idea of Europe, it is not just the content of this idea as provided by the Grand Narrative that can be questioned, but also to what extent it provided a basis for a shared European identity.⁸ For most of Europe's history, the existence of a European identity was experienced only by a select few (Rietbergen 2015, 550). In particular, a European identity based on reason could not but have a limited reach. Most of Europe's population for most of its history was illiterate and uneducated and consequently could not actively participate in such an identity. Of course, the peoples of Europe had their ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliations. But these were largely particular, far removed from the rationality and universality associated with the idea of Europe in the Grand Narrative. Even where these affiliations had a more universal character, such as was arguably the case with Christianity, these did not necessarily amount to a shared European identity for most people. The rise of literacy and education certainly helped spread a European identity, but this is a fairly recent, late 19th-century event (Delanty 1995, 6).

Regardless of its actual scope – whether it'd be the length of its historical existence or the breadth of its acceptance among the people – there is something like a European identity and this fact itself might be seen as noteworthy. Pagden claims that only Europeans have persistently described themselves “to be not merely British or German, or Spanish but also European” (2002, 33; see also Delanty 1995, 85). While there are good reasons to doubt the claim that this is unique to Europeans – even Husserl, who argues for a kind of European exceptionalism, mentions a similar sense of supranational kinship in the peoples of India (*VL*, 274-75) – this does not change the fact that it is not self-evident to identify oneself with something larger than one's direct community, yet smaller than humanity as a whole.

The particular identities we find in Europe today often take the form of national identities. Yet, it is clear that Europe cannot be the mere sum of these identities. Flitner has pointed out that the particular national identities of Europe (the nation-state being a relatively recent, modern invention) were themselves preceded in history by the larger unity of Europe

⁸ As will become clear in the following, more so than the idea of Europe, the idea of the West provided something like a broadly shared identity throughout most of Europe's history.

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– whatever shape this unity may have taken (1952, 12). Europe cannot be defined as the sum of its nations, because in some form or another it preceded and helped shape these nations. Consequently, it cannot be defined as a simple transcending of the particular insofar as the larger unity it transcends towards is given prior to or as constitutive of the particular. Moreover, the larger unity of Europe as well as its tendency towards an increasingly more encompassing universality were not the outcome of a deliberative or continuous process of nations establishing a balance or union amongst each other, whether with the 1648 *Peace of Westphalia*, the 1815 *Concert of Europe*, or the 1992 *Maastricht Treaty*. Rather, it was shaped by historical contingencies.

The Grand Narrative suggests a largely smooth and coherent development, with the possible exception of a medieval lapse into a perceived backwards religiosity, but is able to do so only by glossing over Europe's internal differences and excluding external influences. This coherency is simultaneously the main draw and the biggest flaw of the Grand Narrative. In order to give a coherent shape to Europe's development, in order to make it into a coherent narrative with a unitary meaning, it had to distort history until it was barely recognizable. In reality, there was no single, straight, only at times interrupted line from Plato to NATO, as Gress summarizes the Grand Narrative (Gress 1998). Insofar as we admit such a line into history, we must also acknowledge its dead ends and detours. Europe was shaped by a plurality of stories, many of which neither began with Plato nor ended with NATO.

Before presenting a more historically accurate account of the development of the idea of Europe,⁹ it is worth pointing out in advance two prominent elements crucial to the shaping of the idea of Europe that are neglected by the Grand Narrative. These are the Germanic influence and the role of Eastern Europe. Paradoxically, while the Grand Narrative focusses on ancient Greece, which by no reasonable standard can itself be called European,¹⁰ it leaves out these elements to which the idea of Europe owes its very existence. This is a clear sign of the ideological function of the Grand Narrative, which purges those elements which are either deemed unwelcome or which simply do not fit into it easily enough. The cases of the Germanic influence and the role of Eastern Europe are different than the already mentioned downplaying of the Judaic, Christian, and Roman sources of Europe. While the latter are allowed some measure of integration into a narrative dominated by ancient Greece, the former tend not to play a role in it whatsoever.

The connection between Germany and ancient Greece is an important 19th-century trope, at least in what would become Germany. Yet, it is not a trope that gave the Germanic influence on the idea of Europe any sustained traction as part of the Grand Narrative. Whereas

⁹ It is important to distinguish between an account of the history of Europe, which the Grand Narrative purports to be, and an account of the development of the idea of Europe itself. These will in part overlap, but insofar as a history of Europe is presented in this section it is done only to account for the historical genesis of the idea of Europe itself.

¹⁰ Which does not mean that Europe cannot have a Greek origin. Origins, precisely due to their status as origin, are not entirely of the same kind as that which originates from them.

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in the 18th and 19th centuries it was widely recognized that the Christianization of the Germanic tribes and their appropriation of the imperial legacy of the Roman Empire were fundamental in the creation of Europe, the role of Germany in the two world wars drastically changed this (Gress 1998, 174). 'Germanic' came to mean barbaric, antithetical to the Grand Narrative. This came almost naturally. One could easily point to the downfall of Roman civilization under pressure of invading Germanic barbarians, leading Europe into its Dark Ages. This simplifies both the decline of the Roman Empire and the distinction between 'Germanic' and 'German', but the Germanic influence was expunged from the Grand Narrative nonetheless.

Likewise, Eastern Europe served as the antithesis to Western freedom in the 20th century – first embodied by its imperial traditions, then by its disappearance behind the Iron Curtain. Like the Germanic influence on Europe, it was not difficult to exclude this other of Western civilization. Eastern Europe was not the Europe of republicanism, of overseas discoveries, or of capitalist success. All of this despite the fact that Eastern Europe was home to some of the most significant centres of learning and culture in Europe's history and the presence of similar imperial and monarchic traditions in the West.

Unlike the smooth development suggested by the Grand Narrative, the idea of Europe emerged in stages. It started out as an only vaguely defined geographical space in Antiquity, after which it became a cultural idea subordinated to the idea of Christendom in the Middle Ages. It is this rough geographical and cultural unity shaped in the struggle with Islam that in modernity would come to detach itself from its religious characterization and become the idea of Europe we are now familiar with. 'Europe' thus became the name of a geographical and cultural entity that preceded the idea of Europe itself. Insofar as we can speak of a historical continuity between these different entities, it is the idea of the West, however ill-defined, that provided it (Delanty 1995, 16). Moreover, in the short 20th century, from the First World War up to the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was the idea of the West which was the dominant idea, not the idea of Europe (Delanty 1995, 115). These subsequent stages in the formation of the idea of Europe will be discussed in order.

Europe was not an idea of any importance in Antiquity. It was a geographical notion used by the Greeks, but did not yet designate the continent now called Europe. Moreover, the ancient Greeks generally did not see themselves as part of Europe, but as something distinct from both Europe and Asia (Delanty 1995, 18). Some did liken themselves more to Europe than to Asia, but this was less a self-identification as European than an attempt to oppose themselves to the Persian Empire (Mikkeli 1998, 10). Such oppositional thinking between a Western or Occidental and an Eastern or Oriental world is a common thread throughout the formation of the idea of Europe. Importantly, when the ancient Greeks did occasionally speak of their part of the world as Europe, this included the Greek parts of Asia, and excluded most of the continent to their west, which was largely unknown to them (Delanty 1995, 16). It was through Greek exploration and colonization that the geographical

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notion of Europe gradually came to encompass the entire northern coast of the Mediterranean (Mikkeli 1998, 5).

Although it was not always without political or cultural undertones, the ancient Greek notion of Europe was a geographical one. Even if it can be said that Europe owes much to the legacy of the ancient Greeks, this legacy has little to do with their own understanding of Europe. The fact is that they had no political or cultural idea of either Europe or the West. Moreover, their world – and the world of Antiquity in general – as Delanty emphasizes, is more properly characterized as Oriental (1995, 16).¹¹ While the ancient Greeks did want to distinguish themselves from their eastern neighbours, they also owed them much of their culture and practices, not the least of which was the idea of law (Schelkshorn 2016, 56). The East was not just an Oriental background against which the Greeks established their independence, a sphere of Oriental despotism in contrast with Greek freedom, as the Grand Narrative would have it.

Neither can Greek reason be opposed to Oriental mysticism. The idea that philosophy is a Greek invention and a specifically Western enterprise only came about in the late 18th century (Bernasconi 1995, 240; Park 2013, 1). Rousseau, following the Greeks' own accounts, still called Egypt the mother of philosophy (1993, 8). Schubert's 1742 *Historia Philosophiae* mentions Greek philosophy only after that of other peoples (Bernasconi 1995, 252n1).¹² The historically inaccurate idea that philosophy has an exclusively Greek origin seems to have been held by only a handful of historians of philosophy in the 18th century, some of which were immediately criticized for it (Park 2013, 8). Consequently, if it can be said at all that the idea of Europe is inseparable from the idea of reason or, more specifically, philosophy, this cannot be used to justify a Greek birth of Europe.

More than ancient Greece, it is the Roman Empire which provided the foundation for the idea of Europe to come. This is both due to its imperial legacy and for the simple reason that it shifted the centre of the world of Antiquity west. The Roman Empire itself, however, while being the first major power to encompass a substantial European territory, was not European but Mediterranean. Like the Greeks before them, the Romans did not see themselves as European. Europe was still a vague geographical notion, one of many areas under Roman rule. Moreover, the Roman Empire claimed universality:

When, in the second century, the Emperor Antonius Pius was addressed as 'Lord of all the World' (*dominus totius orbis*), this merely gave legal expression to long-held Roman belief that, whether those who lived beyond their borders recognized it or not, the political realm of Rome and the human genus had been made one. (Pagden 2002, 42)

¹¹ For an account of the eastern origins of many elements of western civilization in general, see Hobson (2004).

¹² Poignantly, Greek philosophy is only mentioned after that of the Chaldeans, Persians, Phoenicians, Arabs, Jews, Indians, Chinese, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Celts, Scythians, early Romans, and that of the Etruscans.

Importantly, this claim, like that of Alexander the Great before, followed the Persian idea of a world-empire, not the Greek idea of democracy (Schelkshorn 2016, 57).

While the Roman Empire was not European, it did give medieval Europe many of its unifying features: the idea of imperial authority, Roman law, (Latin) Christianity, and Latin as a *lingua franca* (Pagden 2002, 44). Europe as an independent geographical and cultural space, however, could only come into being through the break-up of the Roman Empire (Delanty 1995, 16). Likewise, the idea of the West gained definition due to the division of the Roman Empire. With the eastern half of the Empire laying claim to the imperial tradition (which Charlemagne would later reclaim for the West), the western half gradually became defined by its (Latin) Christianity. This paved the way for the crucial overlap of the ideas of the West, Christianity, and geographical Europe (Delanty 1995, 23).

While the Roman Empire was crucial in shaping the idea of Europe, it must be emphasized that there was still no such thing as a European identity in Antiquity. By the 7th century Europe had gained more of a cultural meaning beyond its geographical use: “Europe was the continent of Japheth and his descendants, the continent of Greeks and Christians” (Mikkeli 1998, 15). This developed further through what can loosely be called the Frankish unification of Europe and the external threat of Islam. These would shape the West into something easily recognizable as approximating Europe as we understand it now. It has often been remarked that the Frankish empire was geographically coextensive with the area of the countries that created the European Economic Community (Mikkeli 1998, 18). The unity provided to medieval Europe by the Frankish Empire and later the Holy Roman Empire rested on the imperial legacy of the Roman Empire and the idea of a Christian community (Mikkeli 1998, 29-30).

Whereas European identity began to take shape in this period, in reality the unity of the Frankish empire was limited. Further, it did not cover the entire continent and the unity it did provide was not necessarily a *European* unity (Delanty 1995, 41; Mikkeli 1998, 19). Charlemagne did attempt to provide a form of cultural unity across his empire and was styled *Pater Europae* – father of Europe. But the unity of his empire was based on the unity of a Christianity which had come to overlap with the geographical notion of Europe, what will be referred to as Christendom.¹³ Christendom found itself in Europe, but it was not necessarily European.

While the Church to some extent had worked to create a Christian empire to unite Europe, this clashed with worldly imperial power. From at least the eleventh century onwards the Church adopted a different strategy. Rather than uniting Europe politically, the peoples of Europe were to be united under the banner of Christianity while retaining their

¹³ It should be noted that a fully fleshed out idea of Christendom did not yet exist during the period to which the term refers: “The sense of a fully defined Christendom only assumed its true shape as a singular, exclusive civilization in the Period of Romantic nostalgia following the French and Industrial Revolutions” (Wilson 2016, 78). Such a nostalgia, as will be discussed, is typical for and natural to situations of crisis.

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independence (Mikkeli 1998, 21). The conflict between the secular and the religious, what loosely can be seen as the imperial and the Christian legacies of the Roman Empire laid the foundation for a Europe of independent nations.

The Church's need for a united Europe to large extent came from the incursions of the Islamic caliphates. After having conquered the formerly Roman African and Asian coasts of the Mediterranean, these set their sights on Europe. The Iberian Peninsula came under Islamic control early on and as a consequence some would not consider Spain to be properly European well into the 19th century. Africa, Napoleon supposedly said, begins at the Pyrenees (Delanty 1995, 23). The Islamic conquests and their halting were central in giving Europe its borders. Two events were particularly significant for this. The first was the halting of further Islamic expansion into Europe at the battle of Tours in 732. Poignantly, this battle provided one of the first references to 'Europeans', which was used to designate the Frankish army (Delanty 1995, 23). The second was the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the consequent disappearance of the eastern half of the Roman Empire (Delanty 1995, 36). This meant the disappearance of its competing claim to the legacies of the Roman Empire, but it also left Europe directly exposed to the Islamic caliphates.

The combination of an eastern threat and the gradual acceptance of Christianity by the Germanic tribes gave a sense of identity to the peoples of Europe as a Christian bulwark against the non-Christian world. From the 8th century onwards, Christianity was hereby Europeanized as much as Europe was Christianized (Delanty 1995, 27). The resulting Christendom, as Delanty importantly points out, was "an identity born in defeat, not in victory" (1995, 26). The West would not regain the coasts of Africa or Asia in any important and less so in any inclusive sense.¹⁴ It was in the failure of Christianity to expand after the disintegration of the Roman Empire, in the shrinking of the western world, that Europe attained its identity (Delanty 1995, 38; Pagden 2002, 45). Telling is that whereas earlier western emperors still claimed world-sovereignty, no matter how ridiculous this claim was in reality, Charles V was addressed as *totius europae dominus*, "lord of all Europe," a clear allusion to and weakening of Antoninus Pius' claim to be *dominus totius orbis* (Pagden 2002, 45). This fact is especially important in light of the association between the ideas of Europe and that of universality. As Guénoun has stressed, while Europe claimed to be the place of the production of the universal, Europe itself only came into being when the production of the universal was halted (2013, 232).

More so than the Roman Empire let alone the ancient Greeks, it was the Frankish Empire that started to resemble Europe for the first time. Perhaps paradoxically, the unifying power of Christianity had the consequence that the term 'Europe' itself was used less frequently from the 12th century onwards (Mikkeli 1998, 30). It was Christendom, not Europe that provided a supranational identity and cohesion insofar as it existed. Moreover, it was this

¹⁴ The possible exception to this would be the part of French colonial Algeria that was administered as an integral part of France.

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Christendom that had a claim to universality, with Europe still being a particular geographical notion, though now one with more of a cultural and emotional charge.

The Frankish empire, through its wielding of the imperial power of Rome and its identification with Christendom, cemented the division between West and East. Religious, political and cultural elements came to overlap as they formed a coherent West up to the Baltic and the Black Sea which “took on the character of a moral-religious divide with the Occident signifying civilisation and goodness and the Orient barbarity and evil” (Delanty 1995, 26). This begins the transformation of the idea of Europe from a geographical notion to “a system of ‘civilisational’ values,” supplanting Christendom as the main cultural frame of reference (Delanty 1995, 38).

Once Christendom had given Europe its cultural unity, this unity could be detached from Christianity. In some sense, this was a logical outcome of the Reformation and the wars of religion, which did away with the unity provided by Christendom. The 1648 *Peace of Westphalia* ended the wars of religion, but not through the victory or hegemony of one of the Christian denominations. Rather, it ended by institutionalizing the plurality of these denominations. *Cuius regio, eius religio*: The ruler of each territory was to determine its religion (as long as it was one of the accepted forms of Christianity), while also allowing for the limited practice of other religions. Just as there was no religious hegemony, there was also no political hegemony uniting Europe. The balance of power now so typically associated with modern Europe was established. This Europe of nations had its predecessor in medieval Christianity’s abandoning of its attempt to create a Christian empire.

While the Treaty of Westphalia lay down the political foundations of modern Europe, the modern significance of the name ‘Europe’ itself is of slightly later date. As Balibar has pointed out, it acquired this significance in the confrontation between a hegemonic conception of Europe (represented by France) and a republican conception which was in favour of equality among different states (represented primarily by an Anglo-Dutch coalition). It was in the propagandistic writings of the latter “that the term *Europe* replaced *Christendom* in diplomatic language as a designation of the whole of the relations of force and trade among nations or sovereign states” (Balibar 2004, 6).

This idea of Europe, based on neither the Roman imperial legacy nor a Christian community, now became a *European* idea of Europe. The West, having previously had Roman and Christian forms, now became a *European West*:

The stage was thus set for the emergence of the idea of Europe as an orientation for secular identity. This was the formative period in the evolution of the concept; it was when the idea of Christendom had declined and the idea of the nation had not yet emerged as an autonomous notion. In the period from the Renaissance to the American and French Revolutions the idea of Europe consolidated as the cultural model of the West and became increasingly important as its political identity. The crucial point of convergence was the notion of the West. When the idea of Europe replaced Christendom as the dominant

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cultural model, the notion of the Occident was retained as its referent. In this way the idea of Europe became a secular surrogate for Christendom. (Delanty 1995, 68)

The West had come to mean a system of civilizational values through Christendom's opposition to a non-Christian East. With this transformation, a tension arises within the idea of Europe between the particularity of its geographical area and its universal aspirations. This tension had been a recurring theme in the history of the idea of Europe under the guises of the universalisms of the Roman Empire and Christendom. Now, with Europe itself becoming an idea aspiring to universalism, it again reaches beyond its particular existence, but this time under the name of Europe itself. Together with the idea of a Europe of independent states, this led to Europeans holding two kinds of identity. The sphere of the particular could be assigned to the national cultures of Europe, while universality could be assigned to European civilization as such. The tension between the universal aspirations of the Roman Empire and Christendom and their *de facto* particularity had seemingly been resolved, because Europe could have, or rather, *be* both.

This conceptual scheme lent itself well for a colonial agenda. Europe had civilization, while non-Europeans merely had culture (Delanty 1995, 93). A *mission civilisatrice* practically suggests itself. As a consequence, Europe's oppositional structure took on new form. Europe's other was no longer the East, but any other (Delanty 1995, 45). While this initially might seem a simple transposition of a familiar scheme, there is a larger transformation at work. Up until that point, Europe and the West had defined themselves by pushing back against the East in one form or another. But now, Europe was the superior entity by which the other was defined as non-European. Europe was no longer a frontier against the East, but itself a frontier expanding across the world.

Here the conditions are put in place to start understanding Europe along the lines of the Grand Narrative: A civilized, developed West in an uncivilized, undeveloped world. Of course, the rest of the world cannot just be seen as un- or underdeveloped in contrast to the West. Many parts of the world seen as underdeveloped owe their condition to Western incursions. Moreover, the idea that all societies must develop along the same lines, which makes the terminology of development possible, is a questionable one. Any measures transcending particular norms must be well-grounded, as adherence to a single measure brings with it the temptation to see those that do not develop equally as lacking. While this idea of Europe is not necessarily racist in itself, it is not far removed from it either as Wallerstein has pointed out (1991, 177).

In positing itself as the centre from which civilization was to spread over the world, Europe itself became internally divided, both spiritually and politically. The emergence of the new idea of Europe did not mean that the older idea of Europe, "a Christian bastion against the Muslim Orient" simply disappeared (Delanty 1995, 47). To some extent it is the tension between the representatives or heirs of these two ideas and their struggle for dominance in Europe that lay at the heart of the First World War. While over the centuries Europe kept

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reinventing itself as a Europe of nations with various outlooks, the idea of a lasting European order with these different outlooks present in it turned out to be untenable (Delanty 1995, 101). The tension between the particular and the universal, national culture and civilization, turned out not to be resolved, because there were different ideas about what civilization itself entailed. This tension could be ignored while Europe's focus was on the rest of the world, but when there was no more world left to conquer it was in Europe that it presented itself again.

The First World War shattered the European balance of power, setting up a radical transformation of the idea of Europe that had by then existed for several centuries. Europe, at the forefront of science and technology, ruling the world, the embodiment of civilization itself, could not survive as such, because the idea of civilization could not survive as such (Delanty 1995, 109). As will be discussed in following sections, Europe ended up in a deep state of crisis where neither Europe nor the idea of Europe could remain the same. Europe's global dominance started to come to an end with the geopolitical centre of the world shifting to the United States. The European nations did not fall from the world-stage completely, but in having to share their prior dominance with the United States the idea of Europe was further subordinated to the idea of the West (Delanty 1995, 115).

That is not to say that there were no significant ideas of Europe in the short 20th century. A supranational European culture was a dream of many fascists. Importantly, as already hinted at, the fascist view of a 'New Europe' was not much of a departure from the modern idea of Europe: "In fact, fascist ideology can even be seen as the apotheosis of the idea of Europe since, along with doctrines of racism and imperialism, fascism explicitly promoted the notion of a European civilisation" (Delanty 1995, 112). The idea of a unitary and homogenous Europe also served as a welcome racial myth of origins for racist groups in the United States (Delanty 1995, 115). Within Europe, however, this idea disappeared as a mainstream view when Europe was forced to reinvent itself after the Second World War.

After the Second World War, Eastern Europe found itself under the influence of the Soviet Union which again provided a substantial Eastern threat against which the West could identify itself precisely as the West (Delanty 1995, 101). The idea of Europe became further subordinated to the idea of the West. Moreover, the idea of Europe lost much of its perceived value. It would not be until the end of the Cold War that it would come to the fore again explicitly with the disintegration of its communist other (Delanty 1995, 130). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, much of Eastern Europe sought to regain its European identity. This transition was not a smooth one:

The crisis in European society stems from this combination of events: the irony that Eastern Europe was unravelling at a time when Western Europe was undergoing a process of unification. The fact that European integration was in full swing when the Cold War unexpectedly ended led to increased uncertainty as to the identity of Europe. Europe not only found its identity as 'Western Europe' challenged by the disappearance of its alter-ego, 'Eastern Europe', but resistance within the Western European nation-states in the

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form of populism and neo-nationalism supplied an alternative to Europeanism.
(Delanty 1995, 141)

When the idea of Europe re-emerged, it was still haunted by its fascist appropriations and the ease with which the idea of Europe lent itself to them. Consequently, few dared to emphasize a shared European culture or civilization. The project of the European Union proved to mainly be an increasingly bureaucratic project with little nostalgia for Europe's past (Delanty 1995, 126). In the absence of a concretely experienced shared culture, the European Union was and still is characterized by "the antinomy of political, economic and military integration on the one side, and on the other social and cultural fragmentation" (Delanty 1995, 132).

Due to wavering support for the project of the European Union, recent years have seen an increased emphasis of the European Union on Europe's shared legacy. It is telling that the founders of the European Union have stated that if they were to start all over, they would begin with European culture (Van Ham 2001, 245). In what can be seen as an inversion of the modern idea of Europe, the focus has shifted toward Europe's internal integration, rather than the external expansion of European civilization across the world by its independent nations. The question is to what extent this can succeed in a Europe that in some ways is more divided than ever along various lines.

With seemingly little providing internal cohesion, in the 21st century this unity is again found by pointing to (perceived) external threats: Islam since 9/11, increasingly Russia over the past decade, and in recent years with the election of Donald Trump as president even the United States has become something of a foil against which Europe tries to establish an independent identity. Delanty – writing in 1995, but having lost remarkably little relevance despite the events of the past decades – was pessimistic about the possibility of Europe reinventing itself: "The collapse of communism in 1989/90 was the test case of the ability of Europe to evolve a new collective learning process. This did not happen and European identity became tied to an adversarial framework" (1995, 155).

While in the short 20th century the idea of Europe was largely subsumed under the idea of the West, not appearing again until the end of the Cold War, something like a new idea of Europe had begun to develop. The crisis in which Europe found itself after the First and Second World Wars, a crisis that did not take hold of the United States in the same manner, led to a divergence between the paths of Europe and the West. Whereas the United States could identify itself as the great Western victor in two world wars (and later the Cold War), Europe's victory was Pyrrhic. In both cases the enemy had been European. Europe, not the United States, was confronted with a devastation it had wrought on itself. Whereas from an American perspective the 20th century vindicated the Grand Narrative, for Europe it showed its destitution. Even if in Europe the First World War could be seen by many as a mere lapse in the march of progress (the enemy was not 'enlightened' Western Europe, but 'barbaric' Central Europe), the Second World War made this impossible for many. It was a more perfect crisis in the sense to be discussed in section 1.4.

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Politically taking a backseat to the West, Europe underwent what we can call a spiritual change. This change was never fully articulated into an explicit idea of Europe, both because Europe could coast along on the idea of the West and because this change was in strong opposition to the preceding idea of Europe. Nonetheless, it has tremendous consequences. Europe had experienced what its ideas had led to. Reason could neither guarantee civilization nor stop barbarity. Instead, it proved instrumental in committing evil. The Grand Narrative could also be seen as a narrative of decline leading to an impoverished experience of the world with its culmination in Auschwitz.

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1.3 The Narrative of Decline

1.3.1 Disenchantment

The process of rationalization central to the Grand Narrative and the idea of Europe was also seen as a process of disenchantment. Humanity's increased grasp on the world was made possible by it no longer relying on what Weber had referred to as "mysterious incalculable forces" or "magical means" (1946, 139). The world could be understood completely on the basis of intelligible forces immanent to it, rather than by recourse to mysterious forces transcending it:

The great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it. (Taylor 2007, 15)

This naturalistic outlook certainly led to many scientific and technological successes. Throughout modernity it was increasingly believed that reason could take over from religion in determining our view of the world in a meaningful way. Reason was deemed capable of providing an interpretation of reality on the basis of which one could lead a meaningful life. While this was taken for granted by many, in reality this proved to be a more uncertain thesis, leading to what Weber called the question of "the vocation of science within the total life of humanity":

Now, this process of disenchantment, which has continued to exist in Occidental culture for millennia, and, in general, this 'progress,' to which science belongs as a link and motive force, do they have any meanings that go beyond the purely practical and technical? (Weber 1946, 139)

Weber was by no means the first to ask this question. Already in the 18th century, relatively early in the overall process of rationalization, there were those who answered this question in the negative. Novalis called the brilliance of this progress a "borrowed light," impoverishing our view and experience of the world (1997, 149). Rousseau wrote that "our minds have been corrupted in proportion as the arts and sciences have been improved" (1993, 7-8). For all of its usefulness, reason "would not find and construct the essential thing we sought" (Novalis 1997, 149). By the early 20th century Weber, in a lecture which, it should be noted, was delivered during the First World War, could "leave aside altogether the naïve optimism in which science [...] has been celebrated as the way to happiness," a belief only held by "a few big children in university chairs or editorial offices" (1946, 143). The idea at the heart of the Grand Narrative had been criticized from its inception and possibly for a good reason.

Matters of value and purpose, of what is and what is not important in life, seemed to be beyond the reach of reason. Poignantly, the value of science itself could not be established through scientific means. In the end, these matters depended on nothing but "our ultimate position towards life" (Weber 1946, 143) – a position about which reason had nothing

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to say. Reason could neither provide a sense to the world nor direction to life. Or rather, the rationalist interpretation of the world as an immanent order of nature proved ill-suited to the central questions of human existence. Neither could one turn to the traditional values that transcended this immanent order. There was no longer any room for these in a disenchanted world. The tremendous consequences of this new worldview were indicated by Nietzsche:

What has happened, at bottom? The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of "aim," the concept of "unity," or the concept of "truth." Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of existence is not "true," is *false*. One simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a *true* world. Briefly: the categories "aim," "unity," "being" which we used to project some value into the world – we *pull out* again so the world looks valueless. (Nietzsche 1967, 13)

Pre-modern worldviews relied on the belief in transcendent forces to make sense of the world. While the process of rationalization gradually got rid of this belief, the very idea of this process still relied on categories first made possible by these transcendent forces, such as purpose and unity.¹⁵ But these categories themselves could not be established by means of reason. The belief that reason could provide a meaningful worldview to replace prior ones proved unsustainable. Because of this, Taylor has rightfully noted that it is better to speak of modernity as "the disruption of the earlier background" than of a "shift in background" (2007, 13). Disenchantment removed the supports on the basis of which we lived our lives. Incapable of replacing these supports, rationalization entailed a sense of alienation. Taylor is right on the mark when he writes that "our age is very far from settling in to a comfortable unbelief" (2007, 727).

Perhaps the most prominent, although certainly not the only, form of this alienation as a result of disenchantment is to be found in the loss of traditional communal bonds. The disruption of the social order became increasingly clear towards the end of the 19th century. It was arguably the main theme of the in this period burgeoning science of sociology, both widely mourned and seen as the cause of the ills of modern life. It is summed up well by Phillips: "relationships that are transitory, impersonal, and segmented; the loss of feelings of attachment and belonging; the absence of meaning and unity in our lives; the sharp dichotomy between public and private life; the isolation and alienation of the individual." Without community, the individual was left "exposed, unprotected, and unregulated" (Phillips 1993, 3).

Those who espouse this view, like the early sociologists and the communitarian thought they influenced, follow the likes of Rousseau and Novalis in seeing history not primarily in terms of the progress of reason, but as a process of decline and specifically the

¹⁵ Important references for this genealogical claim are the works of Löwith (1949), Jaspers (1953), and Nisbet (1979). The most important, although not entirely convincing, work against this claim is Blumenberg (1983).

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decline of community. Or rather, they see rationalization as the cause of its decline. Once, they hold, community was prominent and life was satisfying and meaningful, but now it has given way to society and its ills.

This distinction between community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*) goes back to the work of the early sociologist Tönnies which adeptly shows the type of worldview both are based on and which we can respectively call enchanted and disenchanting.¹⁶ Community is characterized by its organic nature. It consists of the natural bonds of language, custom, and belief. It is even “wedded to the land” with a certain “metaphysical character” (Tönnies 2001, 225). Community is inherently holistic, a collective unity oriented towards the same goals. The spheres of the private, social, economic, religious, and so on, form a coherent whole to the point that one cannot properly differentiate between them. All of this is held together by a worldview that is more or less mythological in nature in the sense that it provides an overall interpretation of reality that assigns each his or her proper place and role in not just the community, but in the world as a whole (Tönnies 2001, 38). This view of the world is one where, as Taylor puts it, “human agents are embedded in society, society in the cosmos, and the cosmos incorporates the divine” (2007, 152). There is an order to everything in which everything has its proper, natural place and meaning. There is a sense of security for those who experience the world in this way as “the meaning of their lives is given, settled in advance, and, for this reason, assured” (Castoriadis 1997, 341).

The importance of this pre-existing order in which community finds itself means that the latter is characterized by an orientation towards the past (Eliade 1959, 12; Voegelin 1990, 174-78; Gauchet 1997, 13). This order has an origin in a divine past, shaped by gods or divine ancestors. It is itself considered divine precisely because of its enduring nature. Yet, its endurance is not a fixed given. Having been created out of nothingness or chaos, it can also return to this. Indeed, the order of the world was most pristine closest to its creation, hence the ancient belief in the degeneration of the cosmos and of social reality (Bury 1920, 7-8; Koselleck 2002, 222-24). This underlies the focus of traditional communities on maintaining the status quo, of preserving the established order. Change meant corruption and disaster.¹⁷

From the point of view of community, society cannot but appear as decline. Society inverts the traditional holistic outlook. Instead of natural, it is characterized as artificial. Rather than resting on an innate sense of cohesion, it is a construction for the purpose of business and travel beyond the boundaries of the traditional community. Its people are precisely not *a people*, but individuals, “essentially detached,” looking after their own interests rather than that of the group. As Tönnies sums it up: “In *Gemeinschaft* they stay together in spite of everything that separates them; in *Gesellschaft* they remain separate in spite of everything that unites them” (2001, 52).

¹⁶ This distinction between two kinds of worldview can, in their own terms, be found in the work of both Husserl and especially Patočka, as will become clear in sections 2 and 3.

¹⁷ On the rituals associated with preserving or regenerating this order, see Eliade (1959, 12, 68-113).

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More than neutrally describing a development from one kind of communal existence to another, there are clear normative elements inherent to the distinction: “A young man is warned about mixing with bad society: but ‘bad community’ makes no sense in our language” (Tönnies 2001, 18). In society, “even relations that in practice are peaceful and friendly must be regarded as resting on a war footing” (Tönnies 2001, 249). Society is not seen as all bad. Tönnies recognizes that in it “all people, as reasonable beings and free agents, are *a priori equal*,” in contrast with the strong hierarchies present in communities (2001, 71-72). In general, however, the transition from community to society is seen as one of social and moral decline.

If community and the type of worldview it rests on are indeed the main source of social and moral norms, the transition away from them is naturally thought of in terms of a decline of these norms. Society deals with this by placing itself in a Grand Narrative: “Science and public opinion seek both to theorise about [society] as necessary and timeless, and at the same time to glorify it as progress towards perfection” (Tönnies 2001, 249). This attempt to posit itself as “necessary and timeless” mirrors the way that community maintains itself. Yet, its temporal dimension is different. Community emphasizes stability and an orientation towards the past, whereas society is inherently more dynamic and oriented towards the future. Just as from the point of view of community society cannot but appear as decline, society cannot but see community as backwards. However, it is clear that community is much better suited to provide social cohesion, a direction for life, and a meaningful worldview than society, which is more abstract and artificial.

While social alienation is a prominent feature of the disenchantment of the world, it is clear that the latter is not limited to our social reality or even our human reality. After all, no strong distinctions between these various spheres exist in the enchanted worldview. What disenchantment reveals above all is that reality as a whole is not primarily a human reality. Science over the past centuries has progressed to a stage where its results are fundamentally beyond any everyday comprehension. Whether it deals with realities on a subatomic or on a cosmic scale, we can no longer relate our understanding of physical reality to our everyday lives. The gap between what science tells us about the world and the way we experience it, entails that the world can no longer be taken as a home for humankind in the way Tönnies could say that communities are metaphysically “wedded to the land.”

Although we tend to see reason as helpful in providing a better overview of the world, increased rationality is characterized not so much by a better understanding of the world as by the increase in our ability to act in it. Technology more so than understanding bridges the gap between the modern conception of physical reality and our everyday lives. As Arendt put it: “Man can *do*, and successfully do, what he cannot comprehend and cannot express in everyday human language” (2006a, 264). The increase in our capacity to do things goes hand in hand with a decrease in our capacity to oversee the consequences of what we do. Unfortunately, this is a lesson that is often only learned through experience, when

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“rationality learns that it is easier to generate effects than it is to control them totally” (Janicaud 1994, 29).

The disenchantment of the world changes what reason is thought capable of, reducing it to instrumental reason. Specifically, the rigor of science and the previous scope of the spirit of reason become antithetical to each other. The prior conception of reason as being able to provide knowledge about the world that also has a practical importance to our existence is dissolved. The more ‘scientific’ reason becomes, the less it can provide meaning to our existence. The more it tries to give direction to our lives, the less scientific it becomes. The disenchanted worldview is taken to be the absolute truth of the world and instrumental reason the way to know it and act upon it. This reason cannot provide the ultimate means to deal with issues of human existence, yet it is all that is left. Janicaud put it well: “We calculate, for want of something better” (1994, 29). If the idea of Europe is intertwined with the idea of reason, this might be a sorrier state of affairs than those who advocated this connection could have imagined. The 20th century is filled with evidence of the fatal nature of the combination of a lack of higher values due to disenchantment and the new potentiality for acting provided by reason.

1.3.2 Auschwitz

It is evident that more powerful machinery, strategic planning, and an overall greater efficiency in achieving ends, were instrumental in making the catastrophes of the 20th century possible. Two World Wars, numerous death camps, the atomic bomb: These would not have been possible without the prevalence of rationalism in one form or another.

While it is clear that reason was at the very least instrumental to these catastrophes, the sentiment and the claims regarding the downsides of reason go further than this. The idea that reason and civilization themselves engendered barbarism became widespread in the 20th century, up to the point that Bauman could say that the likes of Hitler and Stalin did not depart from Western civilization, but were its most consistent, uninhibited expression (1989, 93). Reason was not just seen as instrumental, but as essential to the catastrophes of the 20th century. It did not just provide useful tools for barbarism in the form of science and technology. Neither were the ideas of reason and civilization mere ideological masks for carrying out atrocities. Instead, rationality itself and the virtues associated with it were discovered to have an inherent potential for barbarism, as Valéry already noted after the First World War:

I shall cite but one example: the great virtues of the German peoples have begotten more evils, than idleness ever bred vices. With our own eyes, we have seen conscientious labor, the most solid learning, the most serious discipline and application adapted to appalling ends.

So many horrors could not have been possible without so many virtues. Doubtless, much science was needed to kill so many, to waste so much property,

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annihilate so many cities in so short a time; but *moral qualities* in like number were also needed. Are Knowledge and Duty, then, suspect? (Valéry 1962, 24)

The disenchantment of the world left Western humanity with a bare instrumental reason that, for all of its efficiency, could no longer provide any higher aim, a purpose beyond itself. Reason could provide the means, but not establish any ends or be subordinated to any end outside of itself. Little was left of the idea that reason could be capable of guiding life. What was seen as the march of progress ended in Auschwitz.¹⁸

Auschwitz was an event beyond comparison. While it of course holds a tremendous significance for the Jewish people and other victims in particular, it also holds a special significance for Western civilization:

The Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilization and at the peak of human cultural achievement, and for this reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture. (Bauman 1989, x)

As Bauman continues, a neglect of this fact is not just offensive to the victims, but “also a sign of dangerous and potentially suicidal blindness.” Regardless of whether one thinks that rationality was a necessary, although not sufficient condition of Auschwitz (Bauman 1989, 13), or that “in the Auschwitz apocalypse, it was nothing less than the West, in its essence, that revealed itself,” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 35) if we want to understand the course of Western civilization, we cannot overlook the role of reason in the catastrophes of the 20th century.

The role of (instrumental) reason is perhaps nowhere more inconspicuous and pernicious than in rational bureaucracy, which was already indicated in the work of Weber and directly tied to Auschwitz specifically by Bauman, but also Meier and many others. Prior to the dominance of instrumental reason, social organization was based on traditional structures of command. Communities had a clear hierarchy in alignment with a worldview inhabited by transcendent forces. As the world became increasingly disenchanting and community developed into society, the experience of transcendence which supported this hierarchy ceased to play a determining role in the social organization. The traditional structures of command could not be maintained and were replaced by administration. Administration, of course, had always existed wherever there was any larger form of social organization. But now, it was no longer primarily a means to carry out commands from above. The administrative order took on an autonomous existence: “Modernity replaced the

¹⁸ I will follow Meier in using the term ‘Auschwitz’ to denote the organized murder perpetrated by the Nazis: “Following earlier usage (and because I know of no better term), I will let ‘Auschwitz,’ the name of the largest death camp, stand here for the entire policy of extermination that National Socialist Germany employed above all against Jews, but also against gypsies, the mentally ill, Polish intellectuals, Russian prisoners of war, homosexuals and others” (2005, 137). The term ‘Holocaust’, literally meaning ‘sacrifice by fire’, will be avoided because of its religious connotations. Not only can this be seen as offensive, but it also does not fit with the characterization of Auschwitz given here as proceeding from a radically immanent view of the world without transcendence (see also Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 37). Another reason to avoid the term is that it has come to singularly denote the Jewish disaster, similar to the Hebrew ‘Shoah’. While Jews were victims of Auschwitz in a unique way, many that died in the camps were not Jewish.

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traditional transcendence of command with the transcendence of the ordering function” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 88).

Auschwitz can, in part, be seen as the eventual outcome of this change: “While extermination certainly did not take place against the wishes of the Führer, he did not set the process in motion, nor did he at any point issue a specific order” (Meier 2005, 143).¹⁹ While orders were definitely given, it is not clear to what extent there was an overall plan with a top-down implementation. Although absence of evidence should not be construed as evidence of absence, it does seem that to some extent the bureaucratic process itself set things in motion. Orders are not needed when the logic of the process forces everything into one direction.²⁰ It was efficacy at work, seemingly without any goal that would be in need of justification: “This rationality does not propose any end *in itself*, and is not subordinate to any value: its end and its value are its own efficacy” (Janicaud 1994, 172).

Concretely, this took place through the highly rationalized military and state apparatus of Nazi Germany. It was systematic and orderly. Each part had its own specific task to carry out for maximum efficiency. This division and compartmentalization meant that no one had an overview of the entire process. No one was in charge of the whole, or rather, no one *needed* to be in charge of it. Everyone involved formed a part of it, but they did not and perhaps could not take personal responsibility for it. Responsibility did not lie with any part of the process, but in the whole represented by a bureaucratic apparatus that was essentially faceless and irreducible to any individual. As Meier suggests, had this bureaucracy not taken on an almost autonomous, faceless existence, perhaps Auschwitz would not have been possible (2005, 153). Bauman puts it in even stronger terms, saying that “*the very idea of the Endlösung was an outcome of the bureaucratic culture*” (1989, 15).

That is not to say that no one was responsible for or aware of Auschwitz. The Nazi leadership to some extent seemed to be aware of the seemingly autonomous bureaucracy that had taken over. Even if they were perhaps not in full control of the process, they certainly allowed it to take place. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, *Reich*-commissioner of the occupied Netherlands, is quoted as saying that

there is a limit to the number of people you can kill out of hatred or a lust for slaughter, but there is no limit to the number you can kill in the cold, systematic manner of the military “categorical imperative.” (quoted in Meier 2005, 154)

Seyss-Inquart was aware of something that many only realized well after the war: Auschwitz was not a residue of pre-modern barbarity “committed by born criminals, sadists, madmen,

¹⁹ As Meier notes, explicit orders for other crimes against humanity, such as the forced euthanasia program, were found, making it less likely that the lack of direct orders for Auschwitz was due to a cover up (2005, 143). It should be noted, however, that this remains a subject of much debate.

²⁰ Or perhaps we can follow Lacoue-Labarthe when he says that there was no conventional logic involved at all insofar as Auschwitz seemingly had no need of any external political, economic, social, or military goal that would hold up to scrutiny (1990, 35).

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social miscreants or otherwise morally defective individuals” (Bauman 1989, 19). Auschwitz was executed by regular men (and to a lesser extent women) caught up in a process that was eminently modern.

That so much could be done as the outcome of a rational process seemingly devoid of emotion does not mean that passions did not play a role. As the quote by Seyss-Inquart shows, the Nazis were very aware of the role the passions could play – whether for or against them. Where these passions led people to hesitate about atrocities, they were suppressed by the cold, systematic processes of reason. But they were also instrumentalized. Rather than having no part in the rational processes of destruction at all, they were let loose in it to fuel it. The military categorical imperative of which Seyss-Inquart speaks goes hand in hand with a passionate sense of duty deriving from an irrational attachment to the nation and the leader. Neither passions nor rational efficiency are inherently evil. The problem, and this may be a more troubling and banal evil than any evil intent, is that they no longer concerned themselves with what is right or wrong.²¹ Instrumental reason does what it does regardless of morality, because morality had become separated from it.

Auschwitz can thus be seen as the consequence of the paradoxical combination of the highest purposelessness being guided towards the most nefarious purpose. Neither could have existed in a world that was not thoroughly disenchanting, freeing efficacy from purpose and freeing up purpose from justification. Auschwitz both happened as if spontaneously and in accordance with a grand, horrible vision of a different society. Perhaps this is the purest expression of what Arendt has called the logic of the idea: An idea to be implemented at all costs and that makes its logic appear as the only one, as the natural way of things (1973, 469).

Some might take it to be counterintuitive to attribute the failure of civilization exemplified by Auschwitz to the disenchantment of the world. The Nazis showed a cold rationality, but also glorified passion, culture, the nation, tradition, the family, and even religion to some extent. All of these we attribute more to pre-modernity than to modernity, community rather than society, in other words, to a world not yet disenchanting. Their emphasis on these phenomena that seemingly clash with the idea of a disenchanting world should not cause us to overlook the disenchantment that is at their root.

The explicit appeal to these pre-modern phenomena is a reaction against a disenchantment that was very much an experienced reality. Insofar as this appeal was genuine, it was reactionary. But as Nisbet has noted, in many cases this backlash was more strategic than genuine. While the Nazis played up family, religion (at least early on) and traditional values, in reality they attacked these. Kinship and religious devotion can be instrumentalized for but are also inherently a threat to totalitarian regimes. They can form the basis of possible resistance. Consequently, traditional bonds had to be severed, substituted for

²¹ On this banality of evil, see Arendt (1963).

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“new and attractive political roles for each of the social roles embodied in the family structure.” The Nazis openly declared war on society in favour of community,

but what was essential was the atomisation of the family and of every type of grouping that intervened between the people as society and the people as a mindless, soulless, traditionless mass. What the totalitarian must have for the realisation of his design is a spiritual and cultural vacuum. (Nisbet 1962, 203)

Fascism held on to many of the features of the pre-modern worldview: a hierarchical societal structure, one’s place in this larger order, dedication to it as if belonging to a single organism with a shared purpose. But it did not hold on to this because it aligned with the order of a world that was still enchanted. Rather, it did so out of a cult of life and will, the immanent, naturalized remains of a disenchanted world. As Voegelin has noted well, after the disenchantment of the world, “immanence is not characterized as an absence of God, but as a presence of man; that is, man is the subject of whom immanence is predicated, man is very much immanent” (2004, 180). Voegelin also accurately perceived that whereas the 18th and 19th century responded to the disappearance or disruption of prior worldviews by creating new ideologies, the 20th century could not:

As a matter of fact, no great ideologies have appeared in the twentieth century. All the great ideologies, like Marxism or positivism, belong to the nineteenth century and are now practically exhausted. We have only the epigonal forms of the latecomers who, in bureaucratic or other institutional fashion, exploit ideologies that were created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (Voegelin 2004, 227)

Previous centuries still had the resources to respond to this disenchantment. By the 20th century, these had atrophied, leaving only immanence and caricatures of transcendence, with fascism exemplary of both.

It is important that the link between rationality and irrationality, civilization and barbarism, is not overlooked. If this link is real, then Auschwitz was not a temporary setback in the march of progress, a bump in the Grand Narrative. Instead, it should cause us to rethink this narrative. More so because even if Auschwitz itself was a unique event, requiring a specific set of conditions, “the factors that came together in that encounter were, and are still, ubiquitous and ‘normal’” (Bauman 1989, xiv). What is perhaps most difficult to grasp is not Auschwitz as such, but Auschwitz as the apotheosis of Western civilization. The triumphant Grand Narrative, the basis of the West’s identity can also be read as the set up for unspeakable catastrophes. Although the Grand Narrative was characteristic of the entire West, it is for Europe’s understanding of it in particular that Auschwitz had tremendous consequences. Rationalization played a similar role in the rest of the West, but it was only Europe that could be seen as both the place and the perpetrator of Auschwitz.

1.4 Europe's Crisis

1.4.1 The concept of crisis

The state in which Europe finds itself in the 20th century is one of crisis. While critiques of rationalism and a more pessimistic outlook on Europe's situation and future were already articulated before, it was the First World War that established crisis as a major cultural sentiment.²² Although there are many crises of various natures related to the First World War, the spiritual crisis that was the result of a shaken faith in reason was the most fundamental, because it affected the very core of Europe's spiritual life. As Valéry noted after the war:

The military crisis may be over. The economic crisis is still with us in all its force. But the intellectual crisis, being more subtle and, by its nature, assuming the most deceptive appearances (since it takes place in the very realm of dissimulation) . . . this crisis will hardly allow us to grasp its true extent, its *phase*. (Valéry 1962, 25)

Valéry was one of many to diagnose Europe as being in a state of crisis. Koselleck sees the frequency of this crisis-discourse as a reason to call the past two centuries the "age of crisis" (2006b, 381). As this indicates, crisis is more than a momentary state of modern Europe as a consequence of a singular event such as the First World War. For a crisis to have been possible at all, Europe must have been susceptible to what can be called the logic of the crisis. The possibility of crisis is so fundamentally intertwined with the structure of European modernity that Koselleck can go so far as to call crisis the "structural signature of modernity" (2006b, 372).²³

While the use of the term 'crisis' increased significantly after the First World War – both in absolute number as well as in the categories to which the term could be applied – this was not accompanied by any precision of meaning.²⁴ More of a catchword than a technical term, its theoretical exactness remained limited to the context of theories of history which we will see has a special importance. This general lack of determination made it applicable to virtually every situation, indicating a general sense of "'unrest,' 'conflict,' 'revolution,' and to describe vaguely disturbing moods or situations" (Koselleck 2006b, 399). Before it was used in this general sense, however, 'crisis' had a more determinate meaning.

Going back to its roots in the ancient Greek verb *krino*, in Antiquity 'crisis' was a relatively well-defined concept in the spheres of law, theology, and medicine: "The concept imposed choices between stark alternatives – right or wrong, salvation or damnation, life or

²² The First World War is often seen as a turning point in this regard, but the resulting sentiment was an expression of an ongoing process. Oswald Spengler's influential *The Decline of the West*, for example, was published towards the end of the war, but conceived in the decade before.

²³ See also Hardt and Negri (2000, 76).

²⁴ In the Weimar Republic 370 books were published containing the word 'crisis' in the title. And whereas the German book cataloguing system between 1915–1920 only contained economic crises as a separate category, by the early 1930s this had been expanded to agrarian, financial, industrial, economic global, capitalist, religious, political, revolutionary, and civilizational crises, as well as a category for solutions to crises (Graf and Föllmer 2012, 37).

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death" (Koselleck 2006b, 358). *Krino* meant: to separate, choose, judge, or decide. A crisis was both the state where a decision has to be made as well as the decision itself, combining the objective state of affairs with the subjective judgment of it. This is perhaps clearest in the medical use of the term:

In the case of illness, crisis refers both to the observable condition and to the judgment (*judicium*) about the course of the illness. At such a time, it will be determined whether the patient will live or die. This required properly identifying the beginning of an illness in order to predict how regular its development will be. Depending on whether or not the crisis led to a full restoration of health, the distinction was made between a perfect crisis and an imperfect crisis. The latter left open the possibility of a relapse.

(Koselleck 2006b, 360)

A crisis is fundamentally a judgment of a development and of a critical point in this development, bringing with it a sense of urgency. A critical state that does not yet appear as such, and consequently cannot yet be judged as such, is not yet a crisis strictly speaking. Conceptually, 'crisis' thus bears similarities to 'apocalypse' in its original meaning of revelation. It reveals something about what has been going on. Moreover, as we see in the distinction between a perfect and imperfect crisis, a crisis has a sense of finality. It presents two stark alternatives, one of which will be the definite outcome if the crisis is complete. Of course, as the medical use makes clear, it can be that one of the possible outcomes is more definite than the other. One cannot recover from death, but life is always open to new crises.

This medical meaning of 'crisis' was the dominant one throughout history. It is this use that was metaphorically expanded into the domains of politics, economics, history, and so on. Which is not to say that its judicial and theological meanings were not important. On the contrary, these started to determine the general use of the term around the turn of the 18th century, the period to which the modern term 'crisis' and its cognates in other modern languages date (Koselleck 2006b, 363).²⁵ In this revolutionary period the concept of crisis incorporated the judicial-theological meaning of a world-court, salvation, and the final judgment, albeit in a secular form (Koselleck 2006b, 358). Unmistakeably tied to the sense of revolution is the use of 'crisis' as "an expression of a new sense of time which both indicated and intensified the end of an epoch" (Koselleck 2006b, 358). It is in this form that the thought of crisis has an intrinsic connection to the philosophy of history. Beyond indicating their mutual dependence, Koselleck goes as far as saying that "ultimately one must indeed go so far as to call them identical" (1988, 12).

The application of 'crisis' to history seems to fit almost naturally, having its precursor in the judicial-theological use of the term. Yet, the idea of history as a development

²⁵ Although by this time 'crisis' and its various cognates had entered modern languages, the Greek *krisis* remained dominant for a long time in some of these. In Weimar Germany almost half of the books and articles on various crises bore the Germanised 'Krisis' instead of the properly German 'Krise' in the title (Graf 2010, 600-1). One example of this is Husserl's *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*.

with a possible culmination is predominantly modern.²⁶ The first to use 'crisis' in relation to a philosophy of history is Rousseau (Koselleck 2006b, 372). Rousseau sketches history as a process, albeit, as discussed, one of decline. He could only do this by positing an ideal that functions as the measure for this development with a crisis being the consequent lapse of this ideal. For Rousseau and many of his contemporary *philosophes*, history functions as an

undertaking to distinguish properly between what is original and what is artificial in the actual nature of man, or to form a true idea of a state which no longer exists, perhaps never did exist, and probably never will exist; and of which it is, nevertheless, necessary to have true ideas, in order to form a proper judgment of our present state. (Rousseau 1993, 44)

A crisis, as the "proper judgment of our present state," is only possible against the background of a measure usually taking the form of a utopian vision. Structurally, it does not matter much whether this utopia is posited at the beginning of history, in which case this history is one of decline, or at the end, in which case it is one of progress. It is not uncommon to place it both at the beginning and end, creating a story of fall and redemption. Many utopian ideas and the accompanying teleologies were thought of in times of decline in order to make sense of this decline and to counter-act it (Berlin 1992, 22; Voegelin 2004, 229). They provide a measure for history and consequently are the condition of possibility for the idea that history can either fail or succeed.

A crisis, then, is the situation that reveals an inescapable either/or, a moment where history is to be decided. Note that this does not mean that a crisis has to be valued negatively. It can also be a moment of great hope.²⁷ If a crisis is perfect in the sense discussed, the outcome will in principle exclude the other possibility. Eternal salvation is as much an option as eternal damnation. This points toward a further characterization of crisis as the point where it is revealed that the two parts of the disjunction contradict each other, leading to a paradoxical situation. Wallerstein aptly describes this in his useful outline of the concept:

I shall use "crisis" to refer to a rare circumstance, the circumstance in which an historical system has evolved to the point where the cumulative effect of its internal contradictions make it impossible for the system to "resolve" dilemmas by "adjustments" in its ongoing institutional patterns. A crisis is a situation in which the demise of the existing historical

²⁶ As discussed in section 1.3, pre-modern views tended to focus more on the past than on the future. There were, of course, the Judaic and Christian eschatologies. While Christianity was a decisive influence on Europe, for centuries the standard Christian view was that history had already been fulfilled with the coming of Christ. It was only with the Joachimite thought of the 12th century, when the second coming took longer than expected, that the future gained renewed emphasis (Löwith 1949, 154-57). Moreover, even as late as the 18th century, "the term [crisis] is found not in the work of progressives but in the writings of philosophers committed to the cyclic view of history" (Koselleck 1988, 161).

²⁷ "Actually, it is difficult to find any prominent author, politician, intellectual, or journalist in Weimar Germany who publicly used the notion of crisis in a pessimistic or even fatalistic sense. All of the contemporary authors, at least, left it undecided in which way the crisis would be resolved, if the old or the new – and in their view good – powers held an advantage and would succeed. Most of them considered the 'horrible, low state of the present' not as the end, but believed that the current 'Krisis' was a state of 'extremely severe, confused fermentation,' heading toward a near, light, and better future" (Graf 2010, 602-3).

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system is certain and which therefore presents those found within it with a real historical choice: what kind of new historical system to build or create. (Wallerstein 1991, 104)

In Europe's case, the crisis is clear. It posited itself as the bearer of progress through rationalization. But this trajectory itself engendered the contradiction that the highest form of rationalization also entailed the summum of irrational barbarity. Here we also see the difference between the dominant feelings of crisis after the First World War and after Auschwitz. If the First World War shook the general optimism regarding reason but for many fundamentally kept it intact or at least salvageable, Auschwitz made this much harder. It was akin to a final judgment, a definite demarcation of "right or wrong, salvation or damnation, life or death." More so than the First World War, Auschwitz stood for a complete loss of the faith in reason and the teleological trajectory that accompanied it.²⁸ It designated the end of the Grand Narrative. As Meier asked rhetorically: "What kind of framework could possibly include Athens and Auschwitz? What kind of whole?" (2005, 138). Insofar as Auschwitz seems to have invalidated the entire trajectory leading up to it, it was a more perfect crisis than the First World War.

Of course, this classification of the First World War and Auschwitz as respectively imperfect and perfect crises is in part an idealization. For many, the First World War was already experienced as a perfect crisis. And even after Auschwitz the Grand Narrative did not disappear completely. As much as Auschwitz gave cause to doubt this faith, "the elimination of Nazism, the expansion phase in the capitalist economy, and decolonization gave it a new lease on life for an additional quarter-century" (Castoriadis 1997, 264). While Europe had to reflect on its role in the catastrophes of the 20th century, the outlook for the West did not seem all that bad after the Second World War.

For those whose faith in reason had thoroughly been shaken, however, history gave plenty of reasons to justify their weariness. Reality caught up with any possible post-war optimism. This was emphatically put into words by Castoriadis, who is worth quoting at length to convey the sentiment of the disillusionment following this optimism:

The final awakening was late, but it was brutal. The recently decolonized countries did not rush toward the delights of parliamentarianism. Homo economicus delayed making his appearance; and when he did appear, as in several Latin American countries, his appearance was made in order to condemn the great majority of his brothers to the most atrocious misery, under protection of military men and torturers educated ad hoc by 'the greatest democracy in the world'. The environmental crisis and the outlook of 'zero growth' came to undermine from without the representation of the future as indefinite exponential growth before the oil shocks and an inflation rebellious to all remedies did so from within. Western man was long able to regard savages as ethnographic curiosities and

²⁸ In his short, but in-depth overview of the influence of the First World War on philosophy De Warren makes a comparable claim regarding the relation between the First and Second World War: "A new form of thinking that is fashioned as a response to the First World War becomes internalized into the conceptual vocabulary *after* the Second World War" (De Warren 2014, 732-33). See also Jünger (2016, 86-87, 95).

previous phases of history as stages in the march toward today's happiness; he could ignore the fact that, without anything obliging them to do so, six hundred million Hindus continue to live under a rigid caste system (at the same time that they practise 'parliamentary politics' and construct a nuclear bomb). Nevertheless, the exploits of Idi Amin and Bokassa in Africa, the Islamic explosion in Iran, the tribulations of the Chinese regime, the Cambodian massacres, and the boat people of Vietnam finally shook his sense of certainty that he represents the realization of the innate goal of humanity as a whole. If he had comprehended something of what is going on in Russia and in the countries Russia has enslaved, the Afghanistan invasion, and the instauration of a military dictatorship in 'socialist', 'People's' Poland, he would have had to account for the fact that the society in which he lives constitutes but a very improbable exception in the history of humanity as well as in its current geography. (Castoriadis 1997, 264-65)

The question is what consequences this has had for Europe, specifically as distinct from a West still beholden to the Grand Narrative. Before looking at what this meant for Europe's situation from the second half of the 20th century onwards, it is useful to look into the supposed solutions to this crisis. It is the inadequacy of these solutions, the failure of a way to address the crisis as much as the crisis itself, that has contributed to the condition in which Europe finds itself.

1.4.2 Supposed solutions

Faced with the idea that reason might engender an impoverished experience of the world and even barbarism, there are different attitudes one can take to its role in life. The two solutions that naturally suggest themselves stay within the framework of the dichotomy that forms the heart of the crisis. This amounts to either a stubborn and at this point arguably irrational adherence to the faith in reason and the Grand Narrative; or a denunciation of reason as the main guide for life, whether it be in the form of a renewal of the values thought necessary to keep reason in check or as a complete denunciation of reason in favour of culture or religion. Based on the preceding analysis neither of these options are viable in the long run for Europe.

If what has been said so far about the role of reason in the catastrophes of the 20th century holds any truth, then it is clear that a renewed faith in the very same reason cannot be a proper solution to the crisis. Nonetheless, there are those who choose precisely this option. Fukuyama, for instance, explicitly goes against the tide of pessimism that followed Auschwitz (1992, xiii). While acknowledging the specifically modern circumstances that made it possible, in the end Fukuyama sees Auschwitz as nothing but a "bypath of history" (Fukuyama 1992, 127).²⁹ He by and large tries to uphold the Grand Narrative, even arguing that it has reached its final stage, his famous thesis on 'the end of history'. Acknowledging the dissatisfaction that spread through society as a result of the disenchantment of the world,

²⁹ Fukuyama has been accompanied in recent times by influential intellectuals such as Steven Pinker, author of the book with the telling title *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (2018).

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Fukuyama holds that this is not so much a dissatisfaction caused by this end of history, but a dissatisfaction with the liberty and equality it provides (1992, 334).

While Fukuyama may have a point regarding the origin of this modern sense of dissatisfaction and that “it is not sufficient to simply cite the Holocaust and expect discourse on the question of progress or rationality in human history to end” (1992, 128), it might be a mistake to view Auschwitz as “a unique evil and the product of historically unique circumstances” (1992, 129). Overlooking the structural connection between Auschwitz and modernity, to repeat Bauman’s words, is “a sign of dangerous and potentially suicidal blindness” (1989, x). Moreover, Fukuyama does not seem to take seriously the extent of the shock caused by Auschwitz. His claim is that “one can recognize the fact that modernity has permitted new scope for human evil, even question the fact of human *moral* progress, and yet continue to believe” (Fukuyama 1992, 130). But the claim of the preceding sections is precisely that if one takes Auschwitz seriously it might become impossible to continue to believe.

At first sight, the second possible path seems more viable. It aims to renew the system of values and the experience of the world that kept rationality in check, in effect a re-enchantment of the world.³⁰ This can have an emphasis on culture or on religion (which, of course, cannot be completely separated from each other). In the European context, this can be coupled with the project of the search for a European identity in the form of a specifically European culture or religion. Although many of such attempts to re-enchant the world refer back to Christendom, as it was seen to serve this function in the past, this is by no means necessary. The search can also be for a more vaguely defined European identity to take on this role.

Whatever form the proposed identities might take, they are often sought in Europe’s past. Indeed, the widespread crisis-discourse is accompanied by a discourse on Europe. Talk of Europe is more prevalent than ever precisely in the century characterized by its crisis: “Crisis caused Europe to dig into its past again, summon greatness. As if terrified, caught in a trap” (Valéry 1962, 24-25). Europe’s social and cultural fragmentation calls for a “supposedly authentic European culture as substitute for the intellectual void of modernity and technological civilisation” (Delanty 1995, 110). If modern European civilization’s downfall was caused by an emphasis on reason to the detriment of culture and religion, a renewed emphasis on the latter seems a logical solution.

Exemplary for this solution is Novalis, who explicitly calls for a re-enchantment of the world: “The *world must be made Romantic* [Die Welt muß romantisiert werden]. In that way one can find the original meaning again” (1997, 60). For Novalis, this was very much a religious project. Famously, and not without reason if we look at the history of the idea of Europe, he equated Europe with Christendom. Religion was the key to “re-romanticising” the

³⁰ See e.g. Evans (2017), who explicitly makes the case for something akin to a new mythology to deal with contemporary problems that exceed our capacity to properly understand them, such as global climate change.

world and giving Europe a cohesive identity again: "Only religion can awaken Europe again and make the peoples secure, and with new splendor install Christendom visibly on earth once more in its old peace-bringing office" (Novalis 1997, 150). This centuries-old sentiment has not lost its appeal to some. Various European countries, prominently but not exclusively in Eastern Europe, are witnessing the rise of an explicitly Christian European politics. Recently and more philosophically, this sentiment was echoed by Vattimo, according to whom a proper affirmation of European identity "can be nothing else but the recovery of Christianity as the West" (2002, 74). While he acknowledges that this can also be in a secularized form, that is, Christianity as a cultural rather than a religious heritage, he clearly proposes a new religious vitality.

As mentioned, fascism as well explicitly appealed to culture as a remedy against the ills of modernity. Often this went hand in hand with an appeal to a cultural idea of Europe, which in many ways resembled the modern idea of Europe. Yet, the focus was no longer the supposed universality of European civilization, but the particularity of European culture. Europe was seen as superior, not because it transcended the level of particular cultures, but because it was seen as the best particular culture. In doing so, fascism explicitly appealed to older ideas of Europe, such as the Roman Empire and Christendom in the form of a (romanticized) Holy Roman Empire. Yet, as already argued, fascism should not be seen as a simplistic attempt to return to pre-modern conditions. The industrial fruits of modernity were too crucial to it. Rather, it strove for an aesthetization of life in the face of the disenchantment of the world. Unlike for Novalis, for fascism recourse to religion was no longer a viable option.

But one does not need to be a religious or fascist reactionary to make an appeal to a form of re-enchantment. After the 2005 French and Dutch rejections of the European Union Constitutional Treaty, Habermas also emphasized Europe's need for symbolism and "romantic ideas" (Habermas 2005). As mentioned, this sentiment was shared by the founders of the European Union, who have said that they would put European culture first if they could start over. While attempts have been made to establish a European cultural identity these have not been very successful. As Delanty has put it:

Most attempts to create a European cultural identity are pathetic exercises in cultural engineering: the Eurovision Song Contest, Euro-Disney, the ECU, the annual European City of Culture and the cultural apparatus of the new institutions was not the stuff out of which new symbolic structures could be built. European culture has generally signified the culture of the past not that of the state. (Delanty 1995, 128)

The problem with relying on culture from Europe's past is that it derives its cohesion as a *European* (as opposed to, for example, a Christian) past from the idea of a shared history, specifically from the Grand Narrative. But it is precisely this Grand Narrative which has lost its credibility. Similarly, those who seek the solution in an emphasis on culture to counteract the disenchantment of the world possibly do not take this disenchantment seriously enough. It was what Ricoeur has described as a "sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional

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cultures, which might not be an irreparable wrong, but also of [...] the creative nucleus of great civilizations and great cultures" (2007, 276). Disenchantment may have been the destruction of precisely that to which some appeal as a solution.

This process does not necessarily have to be as destructive as Ricoeur sketches it. Lévi-Strauss, for instance, saw Japan as an example of a country that managed to embrace modernity while retaining its living culture and tradition (2013, 122-24). But the problem is that in Europe's case culture and reason were either taken to be interwoven to a high degree or separated into the cultures of the nations and the reason of European civilization. One can wonder to what extent there are any *European* cultural resources to fall back upon that are not dependent on the idea of reason. Christendom did not survive the disenchantment of the world unscathed and the very catastrophes that reason brought about highlighted the weakness of Europe's culture as a means to keep barbarity in check. This weakness of Europe's culture is precisely what made Europe's crisis so pernicious as Voegelin pointed out:

That is one of the problems of the twentieth century. That is the reason why so many people today, since we don't have a myth of our own in our civilization, will now go back into archeology, into comparative religion, into comparative literature and similar subject matters, because that is the place where they can recapture the substance that in our acculturated, and now decultured, civilization is getting lost. That is why people all of a sudden become Zen Buddhists. You have to become a Zen Buddhist because there is nothing comparable in Western civilization to which you can fall back, if a dogmatism has run out, as the Christian has in the Age of Enlightenment. (Voegelin 2004, 178)

Appeals to past sources of a meaningful worldview confirm Lévi-Strauss' statement that for modern societies history has (again) acquired the function of myth (2013, 83). It provides the means to understand our current situation on the basis of an idea of a time when things had not yet gone wrong. Much of the thought of the previous centuries is obsessed, implicitly or not, by the idea of an original, proper state (be it of culture, religion, community, Europe, the world, or humanity) which makes any solution take the form of a renewal or return to such a state. As discussed, this is inherent to the logic of the crisis. Europe's trajectory of disenchantment can only appear as such if an ideal is posited that can then be presumed to have been lost.

The problem with these solutions is not only that they might not take our current situation and the development that leads up to it seriously, but also that they have recourse to a situation that perhaps never existed as such. Certain episodes from Europe's past are idealized up to the point of severe historical inaccuracy. This leads to normative claims that are remarkably unconcerned with the empirical reality needed to justify them. Such nostalgia has been attacked by many, particular in relation to communitarian thought that posits the prior existence of a wholesome community before the onset of society.³¹ In the case of Europe,

³¹ See e.g, Gusfield (1975) and Phillips (1993). Widerquist and McCall (2017) attack not just such a nostalgia, but the illegitimate use of supposedly past states of society in political philosophy in general.

we have already seen that the idea of Europe and a widespread European identity are relatively recent phenomena. The European cultural entity to which some want to return to fix the problems of modernity is a construction of a Europe that perhaps has never existed as such. If it did not exist, neither can it have given way to the forces of modernization nor can it be appealed to as a solution to the ills this has brought about.

Even if we were to assume that such a Europe did exist at one point, this by no means entails it would provide a viable solution. Although Vattimo does not seem completely free of this idea in his references to Christianity as the solution to Europe's crisis, he does rightly point out the flaw of thinkers who appeal to a past, supposedly more ideal situation that through processes of rationalization gave way to a disenchanted world with all the outcomes that entailed:

The basic flaw of such positions consists not only in the illusion that it is possible to return to these origins [...], but especially in the conviction that there might not *have* to come out of these same origins what has in fact come out of them. (Vattimo 1988, 5)

If we take the account of decline on which such positions rely seriously, then we cannot restart this process and expect a different outcome. Our current historical situation has to be taken seriously, even if only for the reason that it is the only concrete situation that we have to work with.

If we do take our disenchanted state seriously, another problem with the recourse to culture or religion becomes visible: Often it is a disingenuous solution. The usefulness of these sources for communal bonds, a meaningful way of life, and as a means to bring about a European identity is widely recognized. But over the past centuries it is precisely the belief in the *truth* of these matters that has been lost. Those who diagnose Europe's condition as the loss of a meaningful worldview and who propose a return to such a meaningful worldview without actually believing in it find themselves in good company, as Eagleton shows:

Machiavelli thought that religious ideas, however vacuous, were a useful means of terrorising and pacifying the mob. Voltaire feared infecting his own domestic servants with his impiety. Toland clung to a 'rational' Christian belief himself, but thought the rabble should stay with their superstitions. Gibbon, one of the most notorious sceptics of all time, considered that the religious doctrines he despised could nonetheless prove socially useful. So did Montesquieu and Hume. So in our own time does Jürgen Habermas. Diderot scoffed at religion but valued its social cohesiveness. Arnold sought to counter the creeping godlessness of the working class with a poeticised version of the Christian doctrine he himself spurned. Auguste Comte, an out-and-out materialist, brought this dubious lineage to an acme of absurdity with his plans for a secular priesthood. Durkheim had no truck with the deity himself, but thought that religion could be a precious source of edifying sentiment. The philosopher Leo Strauss held that religious faith was essential for social order, though he did not for a moment credit it himself. A philosophical elite aware of the truth of the matter – that there is no sure foundation to political society – must

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at all costs conceal it from the masses. If the Almighty goes the way of Olympian gods and Platonic forms, how are social order and moral self-discipline to be maintained?

There is something unpleasantly disingenuous about this entire legacy.
(Eagleton 2014, 206-7)

Whether the solution is sought in a renewed faith in reason or in culture or religion, the problem is similar. It is a solution that might work *if only we could believe in it*. But therein lies the crux of the problem. Our historical situation has led us to the point that this is precisely what many find they can no longer do. Europe finds itself in an ideological stasis, renouncing its civilizational values for what can be seen as theoretical reasons (disenchantment ridding us of belief in anything transcending the particular) as well as out of ethico-practical concerns (the fear of repeating Auschwitz).

1.4.3 Consequences of the crisis

Auschwitz can be seen as the defining event of 20th century Europe. A supposedly civilized Europe's inability to prevent it marked a fundamental change in European consciousness: "The exodus of those Jews who survived the Holocaust symbolised for many the end of European modernity. The European past became a burden rather than a utopia" (Delanty 1995, 113). The idea of Europe could not survive unchanged. Emblematic of the weakening of this idea was the occupation by the Soviet Union of Eastern and Central Europe after the Second World. Once home to several of Europe's great civilizational centres, their disappearance seemed to have hardly been noticed in the West. The real tragedy, as Kundera noted, was not the physical encroachment of the Soviet Union but the spiritual state of Europe:

The disappearance of the cultural home of Central Europe was certainly one of the greatest events of the century for all of Western civilization. So, I repeat my question: how could it possibly have gone unnoticed and unnamed?

The answer is simple: Europe hasn't noticed the disappearance of its cultural home because Europe no longer perceives its unity as a cultural unity. (Kundera 1984, 8)

Europe was no longer, and perhaps in light of the first half of the 20th century *could* no longer, be experienced as a valuable idea. It found itself uncertain of its identity, dispirited about its reality, and without a clear idea of its future. Moreover, it was clear that Europe's post-war fate was not in its own hands, but in those of its successors, the United States and the Soviet Union. After the First World War, Valéry already noted that what gave Europe's crisis its depth and gravity was "the patient's condition when she was overcome" (1962, 26). In the span of a few decades Europe went from self-identified centre of the world, peak of civilization, and a beacon of progress, to a ruin and devastation that was self-inflicted. When Valéry concluded that "we latter civilizations . . . we too now know that we are mortal," (1962, 23) that was an understatement. Europe was not just confronted with its mortality, but with its suicide. It had turned into what Kundera called a "small nation," "whose very existence may be put in question at any moment; a small nation can disappear and it knows it" (Kundera 1984, 8).

It was clear to many that reason had played a role in Europe's crisis. Whereas some doubted Europe's ability to live up to the ideal of reason, after Auschwitz many increasingly saw this ideal itself as the problem. The place and status of reason came under attack. Preventing the repetition of catastrophe became the first and foremost task.³² As the idea of civilization itself was put on trial, the problem was not so much that it was now in the role of the defence instead of the prosecution, as Finkelkraut put it (1995, 57). Visker has noted more accurately that it was "at once plaintiff, defendant and counsel" leaving us "with only the drama of an unhappy consciousness that doesn't know what to do with itself" (1999, 151).

With reason on the backbench, room was made for a resurgence of irrationality, religiosity, cultural particularity, and relativism, that is, non-rational³³ sources of spiritual life. This was not directly due to a renewed attachment to these matters. Auschwitz weighed too heavily on Europe's consciousness and conscience for that. But a void was left by the disappearance of reason from Europe's spiritual life that could easily be filled by what was non-rational. The possibility associated with the modern idea of Europe, always more a hope than a reality, of a rational interpretation of reality to guide humanity was discarded after it was seen what the dominance of reason could lead to. It was replaced by a relativism that stated that the truth of various views of the world could not be judged by the standard of reason.

Taken to its extreme, not even an objective theory of the variety and relativity of these worldviews could be provided, because that itself could be taken to be too rational or metaphysical. This is clear in, for instance, Vattimo's characterization of hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation or understanding: "Hermeneutics is not only a theory of the historicity (horizons) of truth: it is itself a radically historical truth. It cannot think of itself metaphysically as a description of one objective structure of existence amongst others" (1997, 6). This has radical consequences for the nature of the dissolution of metaphysics and the consequent relativism, but also for the interpretation of the disenchantment of the world. Instead of seeing these as uncovering some truth about the world, bare as it may be, these phenomena themselves are posited as merely part of a relative worldview with no more truth to it than any other. While it is undeniably true that they are part of a view made possible by a variety of historical, social and cultural transformations and not just by the theoretical uncovering of a truth, this does not *ipso facto* entail that they do not or in principle cannot convey a fundamental truth about the world. But this is precisely what Vattimo doubts:

Can we take all these (limited and rough) examples of the historico-cultural links of philosophy as chance points of convergence that have made possible the discovery of permanent structural truths? From the point of view of hermeneutics, on account of that

³² See e.g. the first line of Adorno's *Education after Auschwitz*: "The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again" (2005, 191).

³³ 'Non-rational' will be used rather than 'irrational' to avoid the negative connotations of the latter. That reason is not the determining factor anymore does not mean it plays no role at all or that what remains would be *de facto* irrational.

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within it which is irreducible to metaphysics understood as a universally valid description of permanent structures, one cannot see things in these terms. Hermeneutics, if it wished to be consistent with its own rejection of metaphysics, cannot but present itself as the most persuasive philosophical interpretation of a situation or 'epoch', and thereby, necessarily, of a provenance. Unable to offer any structural evidence in order to justify itself rationally, it can argue for its own validity only on the basis of a process that, in its view, 'logically' prepares a certain outcome. (Vattimo 1997, 10)

Any justification provided for this relativism, according to this train of thought, cannot but be subject to its own historical relativity. Yet, this relativity itself is a function of the dissolution of the idea of an absolute, overall interpretation of reality. By interpreting this relativity itself as a historical phenomenon and nothing but a historical phenomenon that we can explain on the basis of "an interpretative reconstruction of the history of modern philosophy" but that we cannot take to be a "descriptive metaphysical statement," (Vattimo 1997, 106) the door is opened for various new claims to truth of a non-rational, even irrational nature. The dismissal of the idea of any and all rationally intelligible truth transcending one's relative, particular perspective opens the door for a resurgent radical religiosity and a renewed focus on cultural particularism.

The resurgence of religiosity³⁴ observable in the latter half of the 20th century has taken various forms: from fundamentalisms and New Age type spiritualisms to post-secular thought and theological turns in philosophy. The connection between this resurgence and the breakdown of metaphysics has been noted by many.³⁵ The latter has opened the door for religiosity in a way that is instigated by a doubt in reason and by what reason had wrought, rather than a revaluation of this religiosity itself.³⁶ But this should not be seen as a simple return of the pre-modern after the failure of modernity. It is the development of modernity itself that gave rise to this resurgence of religiosity.

The roots of this doubt in reason and the consequent revaluation of religiosity go back to the Enlightenment. In this inherently critical period under the auspices of reason, it did not take long for reason itself to be subjected to rational critique. The faculty of knowledge itself was investigated in order to once and for all demarcate the domain of knowledge, as was done by Hume and Kant. In doing so, this critique also demarcated a domain of which

³⁴ 'Religiosity' will be used instead of 'religion', because the latter has connotations of organized religion. Much of the resurgence of religiosity lacks precisely the structured approach often provided by religion in its more organized forms. Moreover, in many cases it is not the return of any specific, established religion but the expression of a vaguely defined religious sentiment. This is exemplified by the Dutch term 'ietsisme' (literally: something-ism). The past decades have seen the rise of the belief in 'something' that remains undefined.

³⁵ See e.g. Finkelkraut (1995, 19), Vattimo (2002, 88), Žižek (2008, xxix), or Meillassoux (2008, 43-49).

³⁶ See e.g. Ratzinger: "If we have noted the urgent question of whether religion is truly a positive force, so we must now *doubt the reliability of reason*. For in the last analysis, even the atomic bomb is a product of reason; in the last analysis, the breeding and selection of human beings is something thought up by reason. Does this then mean that it is reason that ought to be placed under guardianship? But by whom or by what? Or should perhaps religion and reason restrict each other and remind each other where their limits are, thereby encouraging a positive path?" (Habermas and Ratzinger 2007, 65-66).

knowledge was, in principle, impossible. While this prevented false claims to knowledge of anything that pertained to this domain, this move could also be used as a legitimation for a different kind of access to it. Kant famously “found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith” (1998, B xxx). Such a move rests on the idea that reason might not have the final, only, or even any say on some matters.

In becoming aware of its limits, reason created a domain where it could not justifiably make any claims. While this means that claims regarding this domain with the pretence to rationality could be disqualified, the same cannot be done for supposed non-rational modes of access. As Meillassoux put it, “it becomes rationally illegitimate to disqualify *irrational* discourses [...] on the pretext of their irrationality” (2008, 41).³⁷ This gives non-rational modes of access an “immunity from the constraints of conceptual rationality” (Meillassoux 2008, 43). In effect this functions as a justification for the non-rational precisely in the domain where reason has to stay silent.

This means that the (rational) critique of rationality harbours within itself a “renewed argument for blind faith” (Meillassoux 2008, 49). A metaphysics that becomes detached from rational justification becomes fideism.³⁸ That is not to say that the auto-critique of rationality itself entails any non-rational position. It merely gives occasion for such positions by barring itself from making judgements regarding the truth of beliefs that do not adhere to any form of rationality. Moreover, as Berlin has remarked, what is beyond the rational becomes all the more compelling than what reason can analyse: “the deep, dark sources of art and religion and nationalism, precisely because they are dark and resist detached examination, and vanish under intellectual analysis, are guarded and worshipped as transcendent, inviolable, absolute” (1992, 195).

What remains is “a multiplicity of beliefs that have become indifferent, all of them equally legitimate from the viewpoint of knowledge, and this simply by virtue of the fact that they themselves claim to be nothing *but* beliefs” (Meillassoux 2008, 47). The content of one’s belief becomes less important than the strength of one’s conviction, as Berlin noted (1992, 186). We might admire the faith someone exhibits, regardless of whether we think there is something to it or not. Meillassoux succinctly notes the contemporary consequences of this train of thought: “The condemnation of fanaticism is carried out solely in the name of its practical (ethico-political) consequences, never in the name of the ultimate falsity of its contents” (2008, 47).

³⁷ “What philosopher nowadays would claim to have refuted the possibility of the Christian Trinity on the grounds that he had detected a contradiction in it? Wouldn’t a philosopher who dismissed Levinas’ thought of the ‘wholly Other’ as absurd on the grounds that it is refractory to logic be derided as a dusty freethinker, incapable of rising to the heights of Levinas’ discourse?” (Meillassoux 2008, 43)

³⁸ Similar arguments can be found in Assman (2010, 14-15) and authors more amenable to religion such as Scheler (2010, 142-43) and Voegelin (1990, 218).

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A philosophical example of this can be found, again, in the work of Vattimo. Posing the question of how we should deal with the dissolution of metaphysics, Vattimo does not choose the Gadamerian or Habermasian path of a dialogical consensus based on, for instance, a shared heritage. He explicitly opts for a “recovery of the Christian faith,” which he says is *enabled* by “postmodern pluralism” (Vattimo 2002, 5). As he continues:

In light of our postmodern experience, this means: since God can no longer be upheld as an ultimate foundation, as the absolute metaphysical structure of the real, it is possible, once again, to believe in God. True, it is not the God of metaphysics or of medieval scholasticism. But that is not the God of the Bible, of the Book that was dissolved and dismissed by modern rationalist and absolutist metaphysics. (Vattimo 2002, 6)

It might be that a case can be made that religiosity is inherently non-rational and should not be sullied by reason. But this raises the question of what this entails for modern societies. The practical solutions and concessions that have come to accommodate a plurality of views in modern societies seem to be out of reach when people are allowed to make claims that cannot be held to the standard of reason, are seen to be in principle inaccessible to some, and that can have a fideist fervour behind them that removes any healthy sense of doubt regarding such claims. The argument here is not that non-rational religious beliefs are inherently false and should thus be expelled from society completely. As Habermas says, we “must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth,” nor must we refuse others “the right to make contributions in a religious language to public debates” (Habermas and Ratzinger 2007, 51). But precisely insofar as the religious has potential to express truth and is allowed to make a contribution to public debates, it must be held to a certain standard that is not particular to itself.

The logic and concern is similar regarding the renewed focus on culture. While religiosity could lay claim to the transcendent that had been abandoned by reason, cultural particularism lays claim to the immanent *because* the transcendent has been abandoned. The values of civilization as transcending particular cultures could no longer be upheld, not only because reason could no longer claim to know what these values entail, but also because of the immoral acts carried out in their name or as a consequence of them. As Delanty put it: “All of the great promises of the Enlightenment were seen as failures and the European mind abandoned civilisation for culture” (Delanty 1995, 109).

While the 19th and early 20th century had no shortage of nationalisms and an emphasis on the particular, this often still went hand in hand with some form of the ideal of reason. The thought was that certain particular nations or peoples exemplified this ideal more than others, not that this ideal itself was false. The idea that this must be attributed to particular cultural or even biological characteristics of a nation or people is only a small step away. After the Second World War, however, the situation changed, with the particular becoming valued for itself. In the 1920s Benda already spoke of the “cult for the particular and the scorn for the universal” as a reversal of the previous values (Benda 2007, §3). But before

the Second World War this was done in an attempt to bolster one's own identity, that is, it was one's own particularity that was valued above all. After the Second World War, the fear of devaluing others led to the appraisal of their particular cultures.

This change in outlook becomes clear when we look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. After the war the American Anthropological Association submitted a statement to the United Nations commission working on drafting the declaration. The first and foundational principle of this statement was: "*The individual realizes his personality through his culture, hence respect for individual differences entails a respect for cultural differences*" (Executive Board AAA 1947, 541). Compare this to the Enlightenment creed that holds it "to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," such as we can find it in United States Declaration of Independence. The emphasis on human dignity in both documents is the same, yet whereas the modern ideal entailed rising above particular differences, after the Second World War it is these very differences which should be respected. The Enlightenment strove for a transcending of our particular cultures through the cultivation of one's humanity, whereas the post-war ideal emphasised one's particular culture.

The reasons for this change are made clear in the rest of the statement as well as in the final version of the declaration. The second principle of the statement expresses that it is not believed that there is a universal, rational standard that transcends the plurality of particular cultures (Executive Board AAA 1947, 542). Any such standard is taken to be nothing but a function of a particular culture with no bearing on others. The final version of the declaration, in the second sentence of the preamble, explicitly refers to the "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind." Cultural relativism is justified by the theoretical problem regarding the existence of transcendent values that follows from the disenchantment of the world and by the practical concern of preventing false senses of superiority that could lead to a repetition of Auschwitz.

It is clear that cultural relativism itself is a theoretical position making a claim to truth as well as a position held out of practical concerns. While these practical concerns should not be dismissed, the idea that we are fundamentally incapable of transcending our particular identities in a meaningful way should not be dismissed without a proper justification either. Moreover, there are also practical concerns *against* cultural relativism.

The reversal of values that took place can be summed up as the change from "the right to reject their uniform" to the "right of everybody to wear a uniform" (Finkelkraut 1995, 104-5).³⁹ Rather than being the answer to an ethical problem, respect for particular differences is itself something that can and should be questioned. As Žižek rhetorically asked: "was not the official argument for apartheid in the old South Africa that black culture should be preserved in its uniqueness, not dissipated in the Western melting-pot?" (2008, 4). Universalism can be put to abhorrent use, but, it hardly needs mentioning, so can

³⁹ Finkelkraut attributes this expression to Ernst Bloch.

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particularism. This does not just come out in the glorification of one's own particularity and the disdain towards the other. Our very respect for the other's particularity might have ill consequences:

Ashamed of the way we have dominated the peoples of the third world for so long, we swear not to begin again and, to demonstrate our resolve, we choose to excuse others for not meeting the standards of European-style freedom. For fear of doing violence to individual immigrants, we confuse these new arrivals with the uniform fashioned for them by history. To let them live as they like, we refuse to protect them from the misdeeds or eventual abuses they might experience at the hands of their own traditions. Attempting to minimize the brutal experience of leaving home, we turn immigrants over, bound hand and foot, to other members of their community who are living abroad. In doing so we end up limiting the application of the rights of man only to societies identified with the West, believing all the time we have expanded these rights by giving peoples of other traditions the chance to live by the laws of their own cultures. (Finkelkraut 1995, 106-7)

While Finkelkraut powerfully expresses the possible consequences of cultural relativism for others, it represents a radical change of perspective for Europe itself as well. As Ricoeur says: "Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just *others*, that we ourselves are an 'other' among others" (2007, 277-78). The transformation of the ideal of universalism into itself nothing but a particular phenomenon,⁴⁰ entails the very dismissal of this project and indeed of the modern idea of Europe. The disenchantment of the world and Auschwitz, representing the theoretical and practical devaluation of the spirit of reason, have been the tools which Europe has used to ideologically disarm itself. As Eagleton puts it:

It is true that the West continues to believe, formally speaking, in such irrefragable absolutes as freedom, democracy and even (at least across the Atlantic) God and the Devil. It is just that these convictions have to survive in a culture of scepticism which gravely debilitates them. (Eagleton 2014, 198)

Europe has adopted a relativism that in the end not only undermines its own pretension to rationality and universality, but that puts it in a position where it can hand itself over to everything and anything as long as it does not have any such pretension. As Fukuyama puts it:

Relativism is not a weapon that can be aimed selectively at the enemies one chooses. It fires indiscriminately, shooting out the left of not only the "absolutisms," dogmas, and certainties of the Western tradition, but that tradition's emphasis on tolerance, diversity,

⁴⁰ This is done explicitly in the statement by the American Anthropological Society: "The problem of drawing up a Declaration of human Rights was relatively simple in the Eighteenth Century, because it was not a matter of *human* rights, but of the rights of men within the framework of sanctions laid by a single society" (Executive Board AAA 1947, 542). This perfectly follows the ideas underlying the Counter-Enlightenment, such as those of De Maistre's critique: "The Constitution of 1795, just like its predecessors, was made for *man*. But there is no such thing as *man* in the world. In the course of my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians etc.; I know, too, thanks to Montesquieu, *that one can be a Persian*. But as for *man*, I declare that I have never met him in my life; if he exists, he is unknown to me" (cited in Berlin 1992, 100).

and freedom of thought as well. If nothing can be true absolutely, if all values are culturally determined, then cherished principles like human equality have to go by the wayside as well. (Fukuyama 1992, 332)

There are several problems with the renunciation of universalism. First of all, a simple return to particularism cannot be a solution if the problem was a false universalism. If Europe's hubris lay in that it was actually particular from beginning to end, the acknowledgement of this particularism is the acknowledgement of a problem, not the solution to one. Moreover, if, as cultural relativism holds, there is nothing beyond the particular norms of a given culture, how can we take Europe to task for misrepresenting itself and others if that belongs to its own particular normativity? Implicitly, use is made of a norm that is not taken to be particular itself. And this has to be the case if this relativism is to be a well-founded relativism and not a knee-jerk reaction.

For Europe to have any meaningful relation to others, it must know itself. It cannot approach the other from out of a position of self-dismissal. As Gress puts it: "An empty vessel, a historically illiterate people, cannot give to others the respect it does not give itself" (1998, 556). Or in the words of Ricoeur: "In order to confront a self other than one's own self, one must first have a self" (2007, 283). Even if Europe is to let go of its universalist aspirations, it cannot forego any identity whatsoever if it is to confront the ethical challenges history has put to it. But as these aspirations are intertwined with the very identity of Europe, their dismissal cannot leave the latter intact.

Europe's self-understanding and historical trajectory have led it to a deadlock where it could no longer proceed as before. Unless Europe finds a way out of this it will either further hand itself over to the bureaucratic discourse that dominates Europe today in the absence of discourses that give value to the idea of Europe; or to a new Euro-nationalist populism that lays claim to the ideals of Europe in order to direct it against Europe's Islamic and African others without taking the critiques of this legacy into account. In both cases the idea of Europe will survive only through inertia.

The question is whether there is a way out of Europe's crisis. Specifically, whether there is a *European* way out that would somehow salvage the spirit of reason as the backbone of European existence while taking seriously and avoiding its past outcomes. If the paths discussed in the previous section are closed off, it is worthwhile to reevaluate the crisis itself to see whether it contains any answers. Rather than seeking the solution in the renewal of older sources, a "recovery of the Old West within the New" (Gress 1998, 48), as is often suggested,⁴¹

⁴¹ See also authors as diverse as Tönnies (2001, 257); Merleau-Ponty on the basis of Weber (1964, 205-6); Ricoeur on the basis of Heidegger (2007, 283); Fukuyama (1992, 326); and the special case of Lévi-Strauss, who does not appeal to Europe's past culture, but to the culture of others to help Europe regain its moral and social values (2013, 78). Yet, as he himself shows, the interest in other cultures, previously seen as 'primitive' in the eyes of Enlightenment Europe, first came about because Europeans saw them as earlier, more primitive versions of themselves. From other cultures, they sought "confirmation of their own beliefs about humanity's past" (Lévi-Strauss 2013, 10). The discovery of new worlds is seen as the discovery of an older world.

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the crisis itself might contain resources to address Europe's situation. In line with the analysis of the concept of crisis, Europe's crisis itself might contain a revelatory moment.

The strong relativist claim is that we are doomed to a relativity that makes the discovery of any truth or norm transcending our historical situation impossible. As Vattimo put it, we cannot "jump outside the [historical] process, somehow grasping the *arche*, the principle, the essence or the ultimate structure" (1997, 109). The hypothesis of what follows is that the crisis, as the moment where the Grand Narrative loses its hold on us, might be what allows us to do precisely this. To investigate this possibility a more theoretically robust account of Europe's crisis that takes into account its various aspects is needed to properly see what can be done on this basis.

The work of Husserl is perhaps the most in-depth version of the modern idea of Europe and its crisis. It exposes the limit of the idea of Europe and the limit of reason as a solution to its crisis precisely in pursuing this solution to its end. Whereas the work of Husserl takes this as far as it can go, the work of Patočka crosses this limit in a way that is indebted to the work of Husserl, but that ends up providing a radically different perspective where the crisis itself is not so much to be overcome, but turned into the new basic condition of Europe. Husserl's work can be seen as typical of the interbellum in treating the crisis as imperfect in the sense described above. Patočka's work on the other hand can be seen as typical for the situation after the Second World War in treating the crisis as perfect, as a final judgment that should not be overturned, but that instead reveals the inadequacy of Husserl's approach.

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As discussed in section 1, the period between the First and Second World War marks a crisis of the modern idea of Europe without letting go of it yet. Husserl provides an exemplary case of this, providing both a good, concrete example of the Europe of the Grand Narrative, as well as having an acute awareness of the crisis in which it finds itself. Patočka's characterization of Husserl in his review of *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (hereafter *Crisis*) as "perhaps the last principled rationalist among outstanding European philosophers" is one that he fully lives up to (*Crisis Review*, 27). Although Husserl provides an exemplary presentation of the modern idea of Europe, the aim is not to historicize his thought. Neither is it to simply follow what Husserl has to say on Europe. Rather, the aim is to look at his account as robustly worked out version of this idea within a theoretical framework that makes it possible to properly analyse it, its functioning, and to see where possible problems can be identified. In particular, it will be argued that Husserl's solution to the crisis relies on a justification which is at odds with his phenomenological approach.

The *Crisis* and what is known as the *Vienna Lecture* will be taken as the primary locus of his discussion of Europe.⁴² While the slightly later *Crisis* contains a more in-depth treatment of some of the major themes of the *Vienna Lecture*, it also arguably shifts the focus from the crisis of European humanity to the crisis of the European sciences. As will be discussed, interpreting the crisis of which Husserl speaks as primarily one of the sciences provides too narrow a view of what is at stake for him. Which is not to say that the *Crisis* does not remain one of the most extensive and valuable sources for the topic at hand. In the *Vienna Lecture*, however, the term 'crisis' is not yet applied to the sciences, but instead is Husserl's way into the idea of Europe, with the problematic of the sciences being a related matter that emerges through the primary discussion of Europe and its crisis.

The aim of the *Vienna Lecture* is stated at the beginning:

In this lecture I shall venture the attempt to find new interest in the frequently treated theme of the European crisis by developing the philosophical-historical idea (or the teleological sense) of European Humanity. As I exhibit, in the process, the essential function that philosophy and its branches, our sciences, have to exercise within that sense, the European crisis will also receive a new elucidation. (*VL*, 269)

⁴² This lecture, given in Vienna in 1935, was included as an appendix to the *Crisis* with the title *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity* (C, 269-99). Related texts from this period are the 1934 Prague Treatise (*Über die Gegenwärtige Aufgabe der Philosophie*), which was read out at the International Congress of Philosophy which Husserl was barred from attending by the German authorities (*Hua* XXVII, 184-221); and the 1935 Prague Lectures (*Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die Psychologie*, *Hua* XXIX, 103-39), which formed the basis for the *Crisis*. Research manuscripts related to the *Crisis* can be found in the same volume as the Prague Lectures, the *Ergänzungsband* to the *Crisis* (*Hua* XXIX). Some of the main themes Husserl deals with in this material can already be found in earlier texts, such as the five *Kaizo* articles from the early 1920s (also published in *Hua* XXVII) or even the 1910 *Logos Essay* (*Philosophy as Rigorous Science*), although the latter does not discuss the theme of Europe.

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The opening is clear: The topic is the crisis of Europe, the manner of proceeding is through the idea of Europe, and in doing so the role that philosophy plays in this will become clear. A central concept for what follows is introduced immediately as well, namely that of a "teleological sense." Husserl starts off with a preliminary discussion of Europe's crisis, which so far has been approached from the wrong angle by others. Specifically, the domain of spirit (*Geist*) has been neglected.⁴³ It will be considerations of spirit that provide Husserl with the proper starting point to engage with the question of Europe: its spiritual shape. This spiritual shape is characterized by reason, originating in ancient Greece. Having arrived at its proper starting point, the theme of the crisis is taken up again in the *Vienna Lecture* on the basis of the new insight into what Europe is. The crisis is taken to originate in a view of reason that neglects matters of spirit. The proposed solution is to restore reason to its proper scope as to include the domain of spirit.

The lecture takes some twists and turns, at points skipping back and treating topics anew on the basis of newly acquired insights. The following will treat the idea of Europe in Husserl systematically starting with an overview of this idea and a critical discussion of what it entails that Husserl thinks of Europe on the basis of an idea. This will be discussed to be less Eurocentric than it initially may seem, but not without its problems. In particular, it is the status of the idea at the basis of Europe which is shown to be in need of further clarification. It is argued that the fundamental idea at stake here is that of the rational, universal sense of the world that Husserl takes as his goal. Consequently, the crisis is shown ultimately to consist in the lack of the faith in the possibility of this world.

To clarify this idea of the world, a distinction is made between various conceptions of the world, highlighting their foundations in experience. It will be argued that while Husserl finds an experiential motivation for the world he takes as his goal, this nonetheless cannot fully justify its possibility. To argue for this, a distinction is made between the universal sense of the world that Husserl takes as his goal and the world as universal horizon of experience. The former will be shown to be motivated by the latter, but a further distinction between two kinds of horizons of experience – internal and external – will show why this is insufficient to fully justify the idea of the world that Husserl needs for his solution to the crisis. It will be shown that Husserl bridges this justificatory gap by relying on practical reason and faith. This lays bare a religious dimension to his solution which allows for the questioning of the world that Husserl takes as his goal. More so than leading to a meaningfully rational world, Husserl's teleology might entail a further disenchantment of the world.

⁴³ 'Spirit' is used here to translate the German *Geist*. This translation is not fully adequate, as 'spirit' does not carry the same connotations as *Geist*, which refers to 'human' (that is, not purely physical) matters such as culture or even ethics. This can be seen in the term *Geisteswissenschaften*, the English equivalent of which would be 'humanities' or 'human sciences'. The latter is a more apt translation of *Geisteswissenschaften* as it shows – as the German does – their scientific character. Of note is also that *Geisteswissenschaften* itself is a translation of the by now outdated English term 'moral sciences'. These connotations are important for Husserl and the practical, human relevance he attributes to the sciences.

2.1 Europe and Philosophy

2.1.1 The idea of Europe

As is the case for many discourses on Europe, Husserl starts with its crisis: “The European nations are sick; Europe itself, it is said, is in crisis” (VL, 270). This sickness is part of a more extensive analogy with medicine to be discussed in more detail in section 2.2. Relevant for now is that this sickness turns out to be of a spiritual character. Consequently, it concerns Europe as a spiritual entity rather than as a physical one. To properly pose the question of what is wrong with Europe entails knowing its healthy spiritual condition, that is, the proper state of Europe according to what defines it.⁴⁴ Husserl thus poses the question: “How is the spiritual shape of Europe to be characterized?” (VL, 273). Speaking of Europe in this manner means it is understood neither geographically nor on the basis of an ethnically defined people. This allows Husserl to include as European the United States and the English Dominions, beyond Europe’s geographical borders, and to exclude peoples such as the Roma, even though they “constantly wander about Europe” (VL, 273).

Before looking at what characterizes Europe’s spiritual shape, it is necessary to be clear on what Husserl means when he is talking of a spiritual shape. He defines it as “the unity of a spiritual life, activity, creation, with all its ends, interests, cares, and endeavors, with its products of purposeful activity, institutions, organizations” (VL, 273). There is a common spirit that binds all of Europe together and that transcends the differences of the particular European nations. It is this spirit that gives Europe as a whole a specific character distinct from other civilizations. Husserl is aware of the boldness of the claim that this spirit inhabits all of Europe. But while he is quick to add that it does not inhabit all individuals or social groups consciously and that it is not fully developed everywhere, he is nevertheless adamant that it “inhabits them in the form of a necessary course of development and spreading of the spirit of norms that are valid for all” (VL, 276).

It is not the presence of a spiritual shape as such that characterizes Europe. Any civilization – insofar as it can properly be spoken of as a single civilization – has its spiritual shape. Even an awareness of belonging to a civilization that transcends national differences is not unique to Europe according to Husserl. He mentions the similar case of India “with its many peoples and cultural products” which nonetheless has “the unity of a family-like kinship” (VL, 274-75). While both Europe and India gather different people under the umbrella of a supranational civilization, Europe and India do not share the same spiritual shape: they are alien to each other. This is not an absolute separation; spiritual shapes do not exist in complete isolation from others (VL, 274). The interplay between the familiar and the alien, “homeworld” (*Heimwelt*) and “alien-world” (*Fremdwelt*), is even a crucial constitutive part of all cultures and civilizations (*Hua XXXIX*, 157-72, 335-49).

⁴⁴ Of course, the crisis may have been the event to first make us aware of what this healthy condition would entail.

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If it is not a spiritual shape as such nor the supranational character of this shape, what is the distinctive characteristic of Europe? Although the interplay between the familiar and the alien is “a fundamental category of all historicity,” “historical mankind does not always divide itself up in the same way in accord with this category” (VL, 275). Europe's spiritual shape is “a supranationality of a completely new sort” (VL, 289). It is not what Husserl calls a “merely an empirical anthropological type,” of which he gives India and China as examples (C, 16). Empirical anthropological types are spiritual shapes that are determined by concretely existing empirical practices and cultural elements. In such types the idea follows the empirical. Europe's spiritual shape, however, is based on “an absolute idea” (C, 16). It takes its guidance from an idea that exceeds⁴⁵ all empirical determination and thus also Europe's own particularity. This distinction will be specified on the basis of the Kantian distinction between the concept and the idea. For now, it suffices to say that, according to Husserl, the guiding idea for Europe is not determined by any empirical particularity and as such Europe is characterized by a form of ideality and universality. It is because of this that he can speak of “the West's mission for humanity” (VL, 299)⁴⁶ which makes Europe exceptional or even unique. Husserl does not hesitate to call the process of rationalization and universalization that is to spread through all of humankind “Europeanization” (VL, 275).

Not only is Europe exceptional, but Husserl claims that this distinctive place among the civilizations of the world is recognized by non-Europeans. Others want to “Europeanize themselves even in their unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation; whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, would never Indianize ourselves, for example” (VL, 275). The charge of Eurocentrism is easily made.⁴⁷ Reference has already been made to Husserl's exclusion of the Roma “wandering” about Europe and the “merely” empirical anthropological types of China and India. Husserl's remarks on non-European peoples and civilizations often sound condescending. But this should not detract from the content of what he is saying and the intent with which he says it. This can be shown on the basis of what is perhaps the most infamous example of such a remark: “According to the familiar definition, man is the rational animal, and in this broad sense even the Papuan is a man and not a beast” (VL, 290). The duality of this statement is striking. The very idea of comparing the Papuan with a beast and the condescending use of the word “even” shows the low place Husserl accords him. Yet, in spite of any prejudice and condescension, it is still clear that in the end Husserl is affirming the status of the Papuan as a human being endowed with reason.

This is not to say that Husserl does not preach a form of European exceptionalism. Although the Papuan is said to be endowed with reason, the European “represents a new stage of human nature and reason” (VL, 290). The crux of the matter is the character of this

⁴⁵ Or is ‘absolved’, ‘freed from’ according to the etymological roots of ‘absolute’.

⁴⁶ In line with the changing relations between the ideas of Europe and the West in various periods discussed in section 1, Husserl does not distinguish between Europe and the West.

⁴⁷ See for instance De Man's criticism of Husserl's Eurocentrism (1971, 15-17) or Granel's accusation that Husserl's conception of Europe was “completely outdated” (1976, v-vii).

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new stage. Husserl emphasizes it is not grounded in anything empirical. For example, it is not a biological development: “There is, for essential reasons, no zoology of peoples” (VL, 275). Regardless of possible prejudices, philosophically he will not allow a crude racism to divide humanity. Any distinction that Husserl makes between peoples is not and cannot be based on any particular characteristic somehow found only in the European, because it is based on the overcoming of particularity through ideality and on the identification of unity within multiplicity. This is a capacity that belongs to all of humanity: “[it] can never cease, can never be completely absent, even if it remains undeveloped for factual reasons” (C, 350). Consequently, we cannot but agree with Moran when he says regarding Husserl’s remark on the Papuan that “although this might sound patronizing today, it is in fact a cry from the heart for the recognition of the universal rational humanity of all peoples” (2011, 477).

The discovery that Husserl associates uniquely with Europe is by no means intended to be essentially bound up with the particularity of Europe. It might be unfortunate that Husserl uses the name ‘Europe’ for something that is supposedly universal, but that in itself does not make the ideal itself Eurocentric. Indeed, as indicated in section 1.4, arguing against this ideal itself seemingly presupposes a universal standpoint from which such positions can be judged. An unnuanced, rejection of Husserl’s thought as Eurocentric *tout court* is not warranted. What he is advocating is precisely the overcoming of particularity, including that of what we commonly see as Europe: the empirical anthropological type of peoples and cultures in the geographical area called Europe. “Europeanization” is not the imposition of particular European values on others. As Miettinen puts it:

It is not primarily a matter of a unity of practices, customs, and values, but of a unity of will (*Willenseinheit*)—the will to give up on the absolute validity of one’s own homeworld for the sake of the shared horizon of philosophical ideality. (Miettinen 2011, 96)

This makes Husserl’s idea of Europe a peculiar one. In order to be itself Europe must stretch towards an end beyond itself. As such, for Husserl, Europe is neither the purely empirical anthropological type that we commonly refer to by the name ‘Europe’, nor the absolute idea beyond any empirical determination. The latter cannot itself properly be called Europe or European. Not only would it be paradoxical to refer to what is universal by what is commonly used as the name of something particular, but as an absolute idea it has no empirical reality to it at all. The fulfilment of this idea would be the point where all particular determination is superseded. Yet, its fulfilment is both infinitely deferred due to the nature of this idea itself and because for it to be anything at all, its carrier must have some empirical reality. There must be something concrete, be it an individual, a group, or an entire civilization, that directs itself at this idea. In other words, going against any purely spiritual characterization Europe must have an empirical reality of some kind. Europe can then only be the mediation between its own empirical reality and the idea. It is a particular civilization that tries to be more than itself, but at the same time can never fully leave itself behind.

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While not Eurocentric in intent, the question of whether this is Eurocentric or not revolves around whether the ideality that makes up the distinguishing characteristic of the idea of Europe is truly non-particular, or whether it turns out to be an idealization of Europe as an empirical anthropological type. If it is the latter, then "Europeanization" would be nothing but the imposition of Europe's particularity on others.

To summarize and prepare the discussion of some of the more specific characteristics Husserl attributes to Europe:

"The spiritual shape of Europe" – what is it? We must exhibit the philosophical idea which is immanent in the history of Europe (spiritual Europe) or, what is the same, the teleology which is immanent in it, which makes itself known, from the standpoint of universal mankind as such, as the breakthrough and the developmental beginning of a new human epoch – the epoch of mankind which now seeks to live, and only can live, in the free shaping of its existence, its historical life, through ideas of reason, through infinite tasks.
(VL, 274)

The idea which forms the basis of the spiritual shape of Europe is a "breakthrough," the "beginning of a new human epoch." As such, it has its peculiar relation to history, giving it a teleological sense.⁴⁸ The idea itself does not provide answers to the problems of humankind, but provides a way of proceeding. It is a task, a striving for increasing rationality and universality. The name for this task is philosophy. Husserl acknowledges that philosophy is only a partial manifestation of European culture. However, "this part is the functioning brain, so to speak, on whose normal function the genuine, healthy European spiritual life depends" (VL, 290-91). The establishment of Europe is intrinsically linked to the establishment of philosophy (C, 12).

Before going into more detail regarding what philosophy is for Husserl and what its breakthrough consisted in and how it came about, it is worthwhile to look at what it means that Europe is treated on the basis of an idea in the first place, as many of the characteristics Husserl ascribes to it follow from this. This will also point to a problem that, as discussed, has accompanied the idea of Europe in many of its forms, that is, the relation between the particular and the universal or the empirical and the ideal.

2.1.2 Europe as an idea

Husserl is by no means the first to relate Europe to an idea that exceeds its empirical reality. Claims to universality that went beyond their *de facto* scope were characteristic of the modern idea of Europe, as well as of its Roman and Christian precursors. Husserl, however, gives this

⁴⁸ As will become clear throughout the following, there are various kinds of teleology present in Husserl's work. Strasser has shown in what way teleology plays a role in most of Husserl's larger works from 1913 onwards and has given a classification of the different and divergent uses Husserl makes of it (1989, 230-31). In the following, the context will often make clear which kind of teleology is meant at any given point. To help avoid confusion, the teleology that Husserl sees as the infinite task in European history will in most cases be referred to as his 'rationalist teleology' as opposed to the teleological structure of subjectivity or experience.

a novel philosophical depth by explicitly discussing this idea *as* an idea. Hence, it is important to get straight what kind of idea he is talking about. To do so, the distinction – and tension – between the empirical and the ideal will be outlined, followed by the further Kantian distinction between the idea as a concept and what Husserl refers to as the “idea in the Kantian sense” (*Ideas I*, 342).

The distinction between the empirical and the ideal already appeared in the distinction between civilizations which are of an empirical anthropological type and those based on an idea. The former are based on concretely existing practices and cultural elements, what we, so to speak, could point to. The idea belonging to such an empirical anthropological type is an abstraction from this manifold of concrete phenomena to get to their common essence, their spiritual shape. For example: We see a more or less distinct group of people engaged in various activities: voyages of discovery, scientific innovation, trade, etc. While these are distinct practices, if we were to group them together and abstract from their particularities we might arrive at the idea of entrepreneurship. This idea may not consciously be part of the way this group sees itself. It may be a purely contingent fact that these activities, possibly with distinct origins and goals, lend themselves to be subsumed under a single idea. Nonetheless, calling such a civilization ‘entrepreneurial’ would not be off the mark. None of these activities in themselves are a complete instantiation of entrepreneurship: The idea transcends its empirical instances. But while it transcends them, it does have its basis in them. Changes in these particular practices and cultural elements would entail changes to the spiritual shape of such a civilization. This spiritual shape might be grasped consciously and an attempt can be made to keep a civilization in conformity with it, that is, it might be separated from its empirical roots and attributed an independent status. Nonetheless, ultimately it is derived from what is empirical and particular.

The relation between the empirical and the ideal is a long-standing problematic in the history of philosophy. As Derrida has notably picked up on, it is no less problematic in Husserl’s discussion of Europe (Derrida 2003). It is crucial to Husserl’s account that the empirical reality of Europe and its idea are strictly separated. After all, Europe is based on an *absolute* idea that is not based on empirical particulars (which from here on will somewhat abstractly just be referred to as ‘the idea’. What specific idea is in question here will be dealt with more concretely in the next section). It is precisely this absoluteness that distinguishes Europe from empirical anthropological types. Yet, Husserl claims that not just Europe, but *spiritual* Europe has *both* a spiritual *and* a geographical birthplace in ancient Greece (*VL*, 276). The concern is that this dual origin either makes the idea unintelligible or that it collapses the distinction between the empirical and the ideal.

The idea *qua* *idea* cannot have an empirical localization, whether in ancient Greece or anywhere else. Yet, Husserl’s repeated remarks on its origin refer to very specific times and places. Following Derrida, we can reject the possibility that these remarks are of a merely fictional or metaphorical nature. Although to some extent they have been “idealizingly-

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simplified,"⁴⁹ as Husserl calls it, it seems to be a question of "real and irreplaceable facts and of a history that is effectively historical" (Derrida 2003, 155). Indeed, Husserl points to several concrete empirical conditions to account for the idea's origins.⁵⁰ While Husserl does not go into great historical detail regarding these conditions, he acknowledges that empirical origins must have existed: "Naturally [the outbreak of this idea], like everything that develops historically, has its factual motivation in the concrete framework of historical occurrence" (VL, 285).

Yet, Husserl deems it "more important for us to understand the path of motivation, the path of the bestowal and creation of meaning [...] – a historical fact that must nevertheless have something essential about it" (VL, 285). That is, he is interested in the spiritual birth and the essential meaning of this historical fact more so than the empirical circumstances which gave rise to it. However, the lack of a proper discussion of the empirical origins that would account for this new bestowal of meaning means that the fact of its taking place in ancient Greece and nowhere else remains a mystery, a "great and irrational 'fact' of history" as Moran puts it using a turn of phrase derived from Husserl (2011, 494).⁵¹ Perhaps it was in ancient Greece and only there because historical fact had been "idealizingly-simplified"?⁵² In any case, Husserl, after asking how it could have historically become possible that this idea took root, simply contents himself with the fact that it did (*Hua* XXVII, 88).

If the idea can be led back to the empirical in any way, what prevents Europe from merely being an empirical anthropological type like any other? Husserl himself recognises the remarkable nature of this origin by speaking of it as an outbreak (*Aufbruch*), irruption (*Einbruch*), or breakthrough (*Durchbruch*) (VL, 273-74). The new human epoch he is trying to account for is not the result of a gradual evolution, but of a sudden rupture, fitting with his characterization of the transition from the empirical to the ideal as a "leap" (C, 345). It is indeed the leap from the empirical to the ideal that is at stake in this breakthrough. It inaugurates a new mode of history: The empirical succession of events given meaning in various ways through various traditions is interrupted by an idea which sets a universal task for

⁴⁹ This is the term Husserl uses for the characterization of the method of his exposition of the origin of the modern scientific spirit: "With Galileo the idea in question appears for the first time, so to speak, as full-blown; thus I have linked all our considerations to his name, in a certain sense simplifying and idealizing [idealisierend-vereinfachend] the matter; a more exact historical analysis would have to take account of how much of his thought he owed to his 'predecessors.' (I shall continue, incidentally, and for good reasons, in a similar fashion)" (C, 57). As Moran remarks, Husserl's 'ancient Greece' is "itself an idealization and simplification of discoveries scattered across Greek-speaking lands" (2011, 494).

⁵⁰ Specifically the interaction between various peoples as discussed in the following section. This to some extent falsifies Derrida's claim that Husserl "constantly fails to give an account of the actual genesis of this idea and its historical rootedness" (2003, 160).

⁵¹ Moreover, as Held has noted, many have simply not cared that much about the historical accuracy of Husserl's account (1989, 137). This makes sense: If one's view of history is determined by the Grand Narrative, it is very easy to simply accept this 'magic moment'. If one sees the Grand Narrative as an ideological fiction, it is very easy to simply dismiss it. In both cases the problematic of how an empirical-historical origin could ever lead to something that exceeds the nature of this origin is at risk of being overlooked.

⁵² The fact that elsewhere similar breakthroughs as the one Husserl attributes solely to Greek philosophy took place is the subject of the scholarship on what is called the 'axial age' as prominently discussed by Jaspers (1953).

humankind. This gives history an ideal, teleological sense which provides the measure on the basis of which Europe can be judged as healthy or in crisis. Yet, the problem of *how* this could have happened remains. This problem is articulated well by Dodd:

Does history, historical being, really anticipate its own transcendence; does it really occur in constant anticipation of its own being superceded? How is history, as we put it above, both a burden *and* a release? If the very *sense* of this break, thus “finality,” is intimately bound to that from which it breaks, then in what sense can we speak of a “break” with history at all? Or will the break itself remain somehow unaccountable, providing the subject with a position over the movement of the historical that reveals its relativity, but all the while immune to the consequences of its own genesis in this relativity itself? (Dodd 2004, 76)

Husserl gives an account of idealization that shows the relation between the empirical and the ideal in the case of the sciences – Galilean physics in the *Crisis* (21-59) and geometry in *The Origin of Geometry* (C, 353-78) – that will be discussed in more detail in relation to the crisis. Insightful as these accounts may be, they concern the idealization of empirical particulars, not the idea itself as absolute. Consequently, they do not invalidate the concern that the idealization that took place to create Europe’s spiritual shape may have been the idealization of a particular empirical anthropological type.

The problem that the idea of which Husserl speaks might be an idealization of Europe’s particularity is seemingly mitigated if we are more precise in our characterization of the idea as an idea in the Kantian sense. Such an idea is, by definition, not the result of generalization and abstraction from empirical particulars – what in Kantian terms would be a concept. Rather than having any determinate content, an idea in the Kantian sense provides consciousness with the rule for further determination of the empirical beyond what is concretely given. It does not project a concrete state to be attained, but, as Gasché has formulated it,

points to something in its object that is deficient, that still demands work. Conversely, if the object indulges in self-sufficiency and the illusion of complete determination, the idea has the subversive effect of breaking open such self-closure. (Gasché 2014, 34)

The possibility of perpetual critique that follows from this has been highlighted by Miettinen. He takes the tension between the empirical and the ideal not primarily to be the indication of a problem, but as one of the most productive aspects of Husserl’s idea of Europe. It can be employed “*in order to demand a creative transformation on the present state of affairs*” (Miettinen 2014, 281). Husserl himself warns against “the constant threat of succumbing to one-sidedness and to premature satisfaction” (VL, 291). Every attempt to realize the idea will be insufficient, but rather than being a reason to dismiss it, this is a reason to never be satisfied with the current situation.

Derrida too is aware of the status of Husserl’s idea as an idea in the Kantian sense and therefore inherently open: “Every totality, every finite structure is inadequate to it” (1978,

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200-1). Totalitarian concerns are seemingly put to rest by this anti-totalitarian moment. However, while recognizing Husserl's intent in utilizing the open character of the idea in the Kantian sense, Derrida is still not sure whether the problem is overcome. He further questions it on two accounts: how we can have and justify knowledge of this idea; and whether it does not contain a hidden sense of closure, an implicit and unwarranted (partial) determination. These issues will be discussed in more detail from section 2.3 onwards on the basis of Husserl's more strictly phenomenological work, but will receive a preliminary treatment here to see what the stakes are.

Granted that the idea is infinitely removed from any empirical reality, how can we have knowledge of it? According to Derrida, Husserl is absolutely certain that it is a genuine idea (2003, 154). But how can it be accounted for, especially phenomenologically, if it is an infinitely distant idea? It should be noted that Derrida overstates Husserl's certainty regarding the idea. Husserl calls it "the expression of a presentiment" (VL, 275-76) and "yet to be decided whether European humanity bears within itself an absolute idea or whether it is an empirical anthropological type" (C, 16). The breakthrough of the idea does not *ipso facto* entail either its empirical realization or full insight into the idea itself.⁵³ Indeed, clarity regarding this event is only arrived at in hindsight on the basis of those that have attempted to follow the course it set out. Yet, Husserl's professed uncertainty regarding the idea only exacerbates the problem of our knowledge of it. While recognizing the remarkable nature of the origin and idea of Europe, he leaves an explanatory gap. This makes it possible to question whether Husserl does not go beyond description, beyond the bounds of phenomenological method, in his account of Europe.

The other concern in part follows from Husserl's acknowledged uncertainty regarding the nature of the idea inborn in European humanity. It is the question whether he might implicitly assign a form of determination, that is, closure, to this idea that goes against its open-ended nature (Derrida 2003, 176). And this might even be necessary: If there is not some inkling of a final state, infinitely removed or not, then where is the rule of this idea taking us? Does it not have an implicit sense of closure that makes it function, regardless of whether this closure can actually be completed? If this is the case, then there might still be an unfounded idealization of the particular in play. It might be that Husserl, against his own intentions, attributes too much to the idea he takes as Europe's goal.

Although Derrida at times mischaracterizes Husserl's position, his questions are valid. It seems that we are faced with the dilemma of having to choose between granting the idea full ideality, that is, a complete independence from the empirical, and in doing so making its genesis unintelligible; or allowing for its origin to be empirical, making questionable its

⁵³ There seems to be something of a contradiction between Husserl's professed uncertainty regarding the idea and the positing of his own phenomenology as the final establishment of philosophy as the apodictic beginning on the basis of which we can properly address it. As will be discussed, it might be the case that although Husserl has arrived at his sought-after apodictic beginnings with his phenomenology, this still cannot fully account for the idea.

absolute ideality. A more specific look at what this idea actually entails on the basis of Husserl's account of philosophy will help make this problem clearer and allows it to be linked to Husserl's phenomenological findings.

2.1.3 Philosophy and the idea of the world

As discussed, Husserl takes philosophy to be central to the idea of Europe. The ideas of philosophy and of Europe practically coincide in the way Husserl speaks of them. This is because they share their origin in the same idea of the world. This origin is thematized on the basis of the breakthrough of a new sort of attitude: the theoretical attitude as characterized by an orientation toward the world out of non-practical concerns. All peoples, the ancient Greeks included, had their prior orientations toward the world. While this "mythical-practical" or "religious-mythical" attitude made the world a theme of inquiry to some extent, this was only the world as "traditionally valid for the civilization in question" (VL, 283). It was based on their particular view of the world:

To express it more fully: the historical surrounding world of the Greeks is not the objective world in our sense but rather their 'world-representation,' i.e., their own subjective validity with all the actualities which are valid for them within it, including, for example, gods, demons, etc. (VL, 272)

Their world is a pre-rational, still enchanted world that is simply taken to be the actual world. While there was a sense of the world as a whole, this was a particular sense that remained bound to the particular practical concerns found in it. "World-myths" related back to "specific territorial myths" (Hua XXIX, 43).⁵⁴ Husserl is keen to point out that this does not mean that these peoples somehow mistakenly lived in untruth: these worlds have their own "good, so to say honest sense," with a "truth that in this natural practical life is indispensable for this praxis" (Hua XXIX, 392).

Aside from this pre-rational sense of the world being particular, the orientation towards it was also primarily practical:

Insofar as the whole world is seen as thoroughly dominated by mythical powers, so that man's fate depends mediately or immediately upon the way in which they hold sway, a universal-mythical world-view is possibly incited by praxis and then itself becomes a practically interested world-view. (VL, 284)

Such a practical attitude is prominent in "priestly castes," who speculatively interpret the world "to serve man in his human purposes so that he may order his worldly life in the happiest possible way and shield it from disease, from every sort of evil fate, from disaster and death" (VL, 284).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Which is not to say that, despite their differences, these particular "world-myths" had no common, perhaps even universal features according to Husserl (Hua XXIX, 43).

⁵⁵ Eliade (1959) provides a more in-depth and phenomenologically inspired account of the way the world is practically relevant in this attitude on the basis of a comparative overview of a wide range of religions.

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With ancient Greek philosophy, according to Husserl, the “universal directions of interest” change to a “universal (‘cosmological’) life-interest in the essentially new form of a purely ‘theoretical’ attitude” (VL, 280).⁵⁶ This comes about because the ancient Greeks came to know of the worlds of others, their similarities and differences⁵⁷:

Through this astonishing contrast there appears the distinction between world-representation and actual world, and the new question of truth arises: not tradition-bound, everyday truth, but an identical truth which is valid for all who are no longer blinded by traditions, a truth-in-itself. (VL, 286)

Freed from the particular, taken-for-granted view of the world, one becomes free to marvel at the world: the wonder traditionally seen as the starting point of philosophy. The world becomes the object of an attitude that is no longer primarily guided by practical concerns. In a very fundamental sense, the establishment of philosophy is the establishment of a new form of cosmology (Hua XXVII, 186).⁵⁸ It is the new idea of the world, bound up with the new conception of ideality, which is the central idea in Husserl's account.

It is important to note that the genesis of this idea of the world involves two steps. The first is a relativization of one's own world. This is the realization that one's view of the world is but one among many and thus perhaps not the absolute truth. Hence, Buckley's claim that for Husserl philosophy begins in crisis (1992, 3). This sceptical moment is overcome by a second step. Although one's worldview might not contain the absolute truth, it might still provide a version of it. There is one world, but it is “mythologized in so many different ways by different peoples according to their traditionality” (Hua XXIX, 387). The new attitude thus entails both the “*radical demythization* [Entmythisierung] of the world” (Hua XXVII, 189) and the positing of a non-relative world. In more phenomenological terms, Buckley has called it the establishment of “a new type of consciousness directed at a new type of intentional object” (1992, 39). Note that the idea of the world posited here does not have any empirical content itself, but is “only a vague thought” (Hua XXIX, 45) to be worked out. Despite this, it is perhaps the most important thought of all of Husserl's philosophy insofar as it makes philosophy as such a response to the threat of irrationality and relativism. As part of the fundamental conception (*Urbegriff*) of philosophy, Husserl says that it concerns knowledge of the world as

⁵⁶ Husserl has been criticized for imposing a modern conception of science onto ancient Greek science (see e.g. Granel 1976, v-vii). A critical discussion of the accuracy of Husserl's account regarding this matter falls outside of the scope of this thesis.

⁵⁷ For Husserl's more detailed and somewhat more empirically oriented account of various stages this can involve, see (Hua XXIX, 41-46). In relation to this, Gasché relevantly remarks that the early philosophers were of heterogeneous origins, foreigners and exiles traveling outside of their homelands (2009, 26).

⁵⁸ In line with Husserl's account, others have shown that a properly articulated concept of the cosmos as well as the word itself only arose around the 5th century B.C. (Brague 2003, 11). Before then there was something like an experience of the cosmos, but it was so self-evident that it was not articulated, although some symbols like the Egyptian *ma'at* came close (Voegelin 2000b, 126; Brague 2003, 14). Even for the ancient Greeks, for whom the idea of the cosmos was such a central thought, the explicit meaning of ‘cosmos’ in the sense of an overarching unitary order for all of reality was not necessarily self-evident (Geuss 2014, 202-3).

a whole that can show how there is a rational rule to it “without which the world would be chaos and not a unitary world” (*Hua* VII, 288-89).

This conception of a non-relative, ideal truth entailed a new conception of infinity, although Husserl concedes that the ancient Greeks themselves did not properly grasp it yet (*C*, 21). Together they formed what Husserl called a “teleological idealism” (Ms. F I 40/43a). As Ströker has remarked, along with the new conception of ideal truth, this new conception of infinity is equally important to the establishment of the spiritual shape of Europe (2003, 316). The ideal truth posited to counter relativism was itself made “serviceable as material for the possible production of idealities on a higher level, and so on again and again” (*VL*, 278). Every goal itself becomes merely relative, “the pathway to ever newer, ever higher goals within an infinity marked off as a universal field of work” (*VL*, 278). The sceptical moment was retained as an impetus to approach “that infinite horizon in which the truth-in-itself counts, so to speak, as an infinitely distant point” (*VL*, 278). This leads to the conception of the world as the “idea of a rational infinite totality of being” (*C22*), that is, as an idea in the Kantian sense, as well as the accompanying conception of philosophy as the infinite task of coming to know this world.

Importantly, this task does not just pertain to theoretical knowledge of the physical world, that is, nature. Matters of culture are an important part of its universal domain, especially insofar as these make up a crucial part of the particular worlds in relation to which philosophy takes on the form of a reorientation (*VL*, 280). Philosophy does not start from a blank slate, but refers back to the naive view of the world. The content of this world it critiques and rationalizes: “There arise norm-concepts of the good, the beautiful, the truly good statesman, the genuine judge, true honor, true courage and justice, and the fundamental concepts of criticism itself: just, unjust, true, false, etc.” (*C*, 302-303). Everything that is found in the world must be deepened, justified beyond its initial and naive givenness in a procedural, methodological manner according to what Husserl calls “the spirit of critical self-justification” (*FTL*, 2).

The task of philosophy is not just the theoretical clarification of what it finds in the world. Instead, these are “truths which are destined to become norms” (*C*, 303). While these truths are discovered through the change from the practical to the theoretical attitude, philosophy is not purely theoretical:

For yet a third form of universal attitude is possible (as opposed to both the religious-mythical attitude, which is founded in the natural attitude, and the theoretical attitude), namely, the synthesis of the two interests accomplished in the transition from the theoretical to the practical attitude, such that the *theōria* (universal science), arising within a closed unity and under the epochē of all praxis, is called (and in theoretical insight itself exhibits its calling) to serve mankind in a new way, mankind which, in its concrete existence, lives first and always in the natural sphere. This occurs in the form of a new sort of praxis, that of the universal critique of all life and all life-goals, all cultural products and

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systems that have already arisen out of the life of man; and thus it also becomes a critique of mankind itself and of the values which guide it explicitly or implicitly. Further, it is a praxis whose aim is to elevate mankind through universal scientific reason, according to norms of truth of all forms, to transform it from the bottom up into a new humanity made capable of an absolute self-responsibility on the basis of absolute theoretical insights. (VL283)

Philosophy entails the "revolutionization [*Revolutionierung*] of the whole culture, a revolutionization of the whole manner in which mankind creates culture" (VL, 279). The full task of philosophy, then, relates the theoretical inquiry into the world to its practical cultivation for human existence. As summarized by Vázquez: "It exists in scientifically and philosophically shaping and interpreting the world given in appearance in such a way, so that in it the human being can take responsibility for its life aiming at truth" (1976, 185).

This inherently involves a new form of communalization: "the whole human surrounding world, the political and social existence of mankind, must be fashioned anew through free reason, through the insights of a universal philosophy" (C, 8). The discovery of ideal truths leads to a "community of purely ideal interests," centred on "ideas, which not only are useful to all but belong to all identically" (VL, 286). In fact, this is the first constitution of universal humanity as the correlate of the constitution of the one true world for all, a cosmopolitanism in a very literal sense.⁵⁹ Universal humanity is more than a category that would simply include all human beings. As Husserl says, "this 'everyone' is no longer everyone in the finite sense of prescientific life" (VL, 278). Here we can again see the difference, and inevitable tension, between the empirical and the ideal. The humankind Husserl speaks of is not the empirical group of all human beings, but the ideal community of all who use reason to rise above their empirical particularity and to free themselves from it.

Husserl speaks of this ideal community as spreading in a twofold manner: "as the broadening vocational community of philosophers and as a concurrently broadening community movement of education [*Bildung*]" (VL, 286). The primary carrier of the idea of universal humanity is a select group of "functionaries of mankind" (C, 17). This leads to the "internal division of the folk-unity into the educated and the uneducated," but it also follows that this community "is not limited to the home nation" (VL, 286). National boundaries are crossed as a new boundary is set, bringing with it a new division of humankind. Yet, this new boundary can be crossed, in principle, by anyone who takes this ideal of humanity upon him or herself as a task: "each can realize it in himself, each from every sphere of culture, friend and enemy, Greek or barbarian, child of God's people or of the people hostile to God" (*Hua*

⁵⁹ The idea that universal humanity cannot be reached by a gradual expansion, but only through a transcendent truth, and that the difference between particular communities and universal humanity is thus not one of degree, but of kind, is shown to be a historically prevalent idea by, among others, Bergson (1977, 32-33), Voegelin (1990, 46-47), and Assmann (2010, 2).

XXVII, 77). Gradually, the spirit of this task “draws all of humanity under its spell,” (VL, 277) leading to “a supranationality of a completely new sort”:

Now it is no longer a conglomeration of different nations influencing one another only through commerce and power struggles. Rather, a new spirit, stemming from philosophy and its particular sciences, a spirit of free critique and norm-giving aimed at infinite tasks, dominates humanity through and through, creating new, infinite ideals. They are such for the individual men in their nations, such for the nations themselves. But ultimately they are also infinite ideals for the spreading synthesis of nations in which each nation, precisely by pursuing its own ideal task in the spirit of infinity, gives its best to the nations united with it. (VL289)

It is clear that this “unity of rational internationality” (Hua XXIX, 16) does not consist in a shared cultural substance, but in a shared task. It is “an *absolute* norm of development, that is called to revolutionize every other developing culture” (Hua XXVII, 73). It is not just a new cultural configuration, but a new kind of cultural configuration with a “*form* that distinguishes it alone” (Hua XXVII, 73). On *a priori* grounds it cannot be realized statically, once and for all, because the idea of the world that lies at its basis is not a static idea. What can be achieved, however, is the best possible shape to accommodate this task (Hua VIII, 200). What this would look like concretely is left open.⁶⁰ A concrete and definite determination of such a cultural configuration cannot be prescribed, both because of the formal nature of this idea and because it takes the form of a critique and rationalization of traditional culture.⁶¹ Any concrete determination will depend on the particular world where this idea takes hold. What Husserl makes clear, though, is that the guiding normative ideas for this include

⁶⁰ In Husserl’s work there is a lack of reflection on the political specifics this would entail. With Depraz, we can say that the political is more of an epiphenomenon for Husserl than something he properly discusses (1995, 4). Yet, as Miettinen as pointed out, Husserl does entertain the ideas of a “supranation” [Übernation] or “suprastate” [Überstaat] “that would function as the ‘material’ equivalents of the ethical ideal of universal humanity” (2013, 298). Husserl’s own views on political institutions seem to have varied from “Fichtean nationalism (especially during the First World War), Kantian republicanism (beginning of the 1920s), and what almost seems like a mixture of Stoic cosmopolitanism and social internationalism” (Miettinen 2013, 298). Insofar as such political ideas are present, Knies is right to say that they “simply do not speak the ordinary language of politics” (2016, 36). Husserl offers no reflections on the concrete shaping of institutions, but only on their basic principles in the most general sense of the term.

⁶¹ The inherent teleological nature Husserl attributes to the ideal shape of society, although ultimately derived from the concepts of ideality and infinity discovered by the ancient Greeks, also shows his distance from the ancient Greeks on this point. Due to the latter’s equation of imperfection and impermanence, their ideal society could not have been thought of as reachable through a progressive movement, let alone as incorporating a dynamic element into this society itself. As Bury puts it: “It did not occur to Plato or any one else that a perfect order might be attainable by a long series of changes and adaptations. Such an order, being an embodiment of reason, could be created only by a deliberate and immediate act of a planning mind. It might be devised by the wisdom of a philosopher or revealed by the Deity. Hence the salvation of a community must lie in preserving intact, so far as possible, the institutions imposed by the enlightened lawgiver, since change meant corruption and disaster” (1920, 11). While Nisbet has later shown, on the basis of a wide range of studies, that the ancient Greeks did have concepts of progress and development (1979, 8, 12) it can still be said that in antiquity the typical view of society and the world was one of stasis or even of decline.

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the ideas of the infinite and true world as correlate of the idea of world-science; ideas of the true and genuine individual personal life and of a genuine community; and finally those of a genuine civilization and the 'ethical' ideas belonging to it, ideas of a universal science not merely of the world but of everything that is at all, be it an idea, an ideal norm, etc. (C, 333)

These are all teleological ideas which stand in a definite relation to each other: the idea of the world as an ideality to be constituted *ad infinitum* leads to the idea of philosophy as an infinite task and the idea of a humanity that takes shape as it takes this task upon itself. In each case, Husserl's goal is an ideal unity: between the various particular worlds, between different regions of the sciences, between nations and peoples, and in the end even a "complete synthesis of possible experiences" (CM, 62). This unitarian aspect is crucial throughout Husserl's philosophy, allowing him to overcome the idea of an ultimately fragmented humankind through the universality of reason.

2.1.4 Europe as re-establishment

Husserl himself does not always clearly distinguish between these different ideas and consequently it is not always clear what the primordial establishment (*Urstiftung*) he talks about refers to. At its core lies a new idea of the world. As will be shown, it is this idea which plays a crucial role in Husserl's diagnosis of Europe's crisis and consequently in his solution to it. The ideas of philosophy as the way to engage with this world and of universal humanity as the correlate of this world are equally important and inseparable from it, but structurally secondary. Consequently, the primordial establishment and re-establishments (*Nachstiftung*) of which Husserl speaks are different forms philosophy has taken on the basis of the same insight into the world, although not every establishment proceeds on the basis of full insight into this idea. Indeed, Husserl to some extent relativizes the ancient Greek achievement (although not its importance) when he says that it was not yet the full realization of the idea of philosophy. While it was the primordial establishment, it was not yet the final establishment (*Endstiftung*) which would have full insight into the idea of the world and the task of philosophy (C, 72).

Each establishment, while following the primordial establishment of the ancient Greeks, owes its existence to its own actualization of the same insight that also took hold of them. The latter's importance, as Buckley puts it, thus lies in its "creating of a new *possibility* for the future" (1992, 39). Following Dodd, we can say that every establishment, whether it follows an earlier one or not, is in itself original (2004, 74). Yet, as not every re-establishment is a final establishment, they can err in the way they go about conceiving the ideas of the world and philosophy. As will be discussed, it was what Husserl calls the new establishment (*Neustiftung*) in modernity – which in the *Crisis* is worked out on the basis of Galilean physics – that both gained more clarity regarding these ideas as well as conceived of them in a one-sided manner that ultimately contributed to the crisis of the European sciences and of European humanity.

2.1 Europe and Philosophy

As already indicated, this leaves Europe with a peculiar relation to its own identity, history, and origin. This peculiarity not only follows from its attempt to transcend the particular and thereby in a way itself, but also from the idea that Europe is a re-establishment of a primordial establishment. As said, Husserl speaks of the philosophy of the ancient Greeks as the primordial establishment of philosophy followed by re-establishments in modernity and with his own phenomenology. While he does not speak of Europe in terms of a re-establishment, since he equates the establishments of philosophy and of Europe (C, 12) it seems warranted to apply the logic of re-establishment to the latter as well.

The primordial establishment is an ideal beginning that does not just determine subsequent history by becoming part of a tradition, by being “sedimented” as Husserl calls it. While its results can exist in sedimented form, the insight that led to these results can and should be reawakened again and again (C, 71). Each establishment has to be original, but this very originality is in a certain sense non-original. As original every time and as not to lose its very significance and meaning, each establishment must be more than part of a tradition. As Dodd puts it: “the origin of philosophy is in the present, and it appears as the capacity for the present to question the past” (2004, 141). Indeed, philosophy involves a fundamentally critical attitude to the past, including its own heritage. In the words of Miettinen, it is “the first praxis not to take its own traditionality as given but as a question to be asked” (2013, 249).

Yet, every *re*-establishment needs to be connected to a primordial establishment. And with knowledge of the primordial establishment it cannot be a totally new establishment itself, it has to be some form of repetition.⁶² Tradition is thus not only that from which every establishment frees itself, but also the carrier of the possibility of every re-establishment itself, as Derrida has emphasized (2003, 164). At one point Husserl claims that philosophy “*appears without tradition, to create a tradition*” (Hua VIII, 320). Yet, due to the paradoxical nature of its establishment its opposite seems to equally hold: philosophy appears from a tradition to create something traditionless.

The problematic of philosophy’s relation to its own history is a result of the unresolved status of the relation between the empirical and the ideal which, in the end, designate two different modes of history: The empirical succession of events given sense in various ways through various traditions; and the ideal history starting with the irruption of the idea into empirical history as a task to be taken up by future generations. We can say that a re-establishment transcends empirical history to actively take up the ideal history of the task of philosophy. Yet, does it refer to the ideal side of the primordial establishment or to the empirical side? And can we separate these?

Applying the logic of re-establishment to Europe in relation to the ancient Greek primordial establishment would mean that Europe itself would need to contain an original

⁶² Only a total breakdown of history that removes all traces of the primordial establishment could clear the ground for an establishment as primordial as that of the Greeks. However, this is a possibility that Husserl himself does not entertain.

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moment that nonetheless refers back to an ancient Greek origin. Such a re-establishment would avoid the issue of having to place the empirical anthropological type 'Europe' in any direct causal-historical line from ancient Greece to the present day. While such a link could be constructed (as a causal-historical link must exist for the very idea of a *re*-establishment to make sense), the more essential connection would lie in Europe taking this legacy upon itself as a task. Yet, this task can be put as much to Europe as to others, regardless of the fact that Europe has explicitly identified itself with it. Others might refer back to the Greek primordial establishment in their own way. What, then, remains of Europe's supposed exceptionality except for the particular way that Europe takes this task upon itself? Even if granted that it may be that Europe first and foremost took this legacy upon itself, what matters is the meaning of the primordial establishment as a break from traditionality. Focusing on the empirical circumstances in which this establishment took place, that is, ancient Greece, highlights precisely the wrong aspect: its empirical side, rather than the overcoming of this empirical side.

Yet, as discussed, the breakthrough of the idea must have had empirical origins. And if it is the case that it did not take place everywhere (a claim that is much more tenable than the claim to Greek exclusivity), then the case can still be made that there must be something extraordinary about the empirical conditions that *did* give rise to it. This quickly leads to the idea that some nations are, somehow, 'special', although not because they have supposedly achieved the level of universality, but because their empirical conditions at least allow them to initiate such a task. Although this exceptionality would not directly lie in any substantial cultural content – as the idea precisely originated in the giving up of one's particular world through the encounter with other worlds – one could still hold that some cultural content is more conducive to such an encounter and the transcending of one's own world.

At the end of the discussion of Husserl's idea of Europe, then, we are still left with several problems and questions, answers to which will depend on the further investigations that follow. This will be done on the basis of the phenomenological grounding Husserl's work can provide for his account of Europe. Before going into this phenomenological analysis, Husserl's account of Europe needs to be completed with his account of the crisis in which it finds itself, which will also show why a phenomenological analysis is needed in the first place.

2.2 Crisis

2.2.1 Crisis in Husserl's work

The idea of a crisis becomes increasingly prominent in Husserl's work throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Many of the themes which are addressed in the crisis-writings can already be found in his earlier work, but what distinguishes the crisis-writings is that they integrate the various themes they contain, old and new, into an overarching account of Europe's crisis. Prompted by the sentiment of the time, the discussed conceptual connection between crisis and history almost naturally led Husserl to a philosophical account of history. In many ways his account is exemplary in following the logic of a crisis. That is not to say that Husserl himself explicitly articulated a concept of crisis. As Trizio notes, the term itself only appears occasionally, albeit in the important initial considerations and programmatic statements of the crisis-writings (2016, 193). This makes it clear that the crisis provides the context of Husserl's later philosophy, but does not always make it clear what it actually consists in. He writes of various crises: of science in general, of specific sciences, of philosophy, of culture, of European humanity, and so on. Corresponding to how these domains are related, their crises are related as well. Yet, this relation only becomes clear when they are treated as distinct issues.

The crisis of the sciences appears prominently in the title of the *Crisis*, but this is not necessarily the primary crisis for Husserl. As already alluded to, the slightly earlier *Vienna Lecture* does not yet speak of a crisis of the sciences (as pointed out by Trizio (2016, 193n7) and Heffernan (2017, 249)). It rather speaks of a crisis of European humanity. It will be shown that it is a crisis of philosophy – related to the idea of the world – which lies at the root of both the crisis of the sciences and the crisis of European humanity. It was philosophy first and foremost that threatened “to succumb to skepticism, irrationalism, and mysticism” (C, 3). It was to provide the overarching framework for all the particular sciences and to be the spiritual backbone of European humanity:

Thus the crisis of philosophy implies the crisis of all modern sciences as members of the philosophical universe: at first a latent, then a more and more prominent crisis of European humanity itself in respect to the total meaningfulness of its cultural life, its total 'Existenz'.
(C, 12)

Although the crises of which Husserl speaks can ultimately be led back to a failure of philosophy, it was the First World War that can be said to have revealed this failure. The war had a tremendous influence on Husserl's work and life. His two sons and many of his (former) students were at the front. Among the casualties was his son Wolfgang. Expressing the sentiment of the time, Husserl wrote: “This war, the most universal and profound fall into sin of humanity in the whole of its known history, has indeed exposed the unclarity and falsity of all ‘valid’ ideas” (*HuDo* III/3, 12). It revealed the “inner untruth, the meaninglessness” of the supposedly rational culture of Europe (*Hua* XXVII, 3). The general impact of the war is also stated in the opening pages of the *Crisis*, where Husserl speaks of the “change in in public valuation” that has “gradually become a feeling of hostility among the younger generation”

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(C, 6). The hostility of which Husserl speaks is a hostility towards the spirit of reason; the spirit which enabled the atrocities of the war and which was no longer thought capable of addressing the increasingly burning “questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence” (C, 6).

Despite the importance of the First World War and its aftermath as background for the crisis-writings, the crisis is not one of the First World War. Following Orth, we can distinguish between the acute crisis of this specific historical situation and the underlying crisis that it brought to light (1993, 336). There was a clear need for a material restoration and spiritual “renewal” of Europe after the First World War (as reflected in Husserl's *Kaizo* articles, *kaizo* being Japanese for “renewal”). Yet, a deeper reflection on the spiritual situation of the time was needed as well; not just on the spiritual situation after the war, but on the spiritual situation that led to it. The latter is to be found in the crisis-writings.

Notwithstanding this bleak background, these writings are not works of despair. Husserl wants to “justify our boldness in still daring to give a favorable prognosis (now and for our time) — as can be foreseen in our systematic-critical presentations — for the future development of a philosophy conceived as a science” (C, 197). As discussed, the use of the term ‘crisis’ in Husserl's day was not necessarily pessimistic. A crisis reveals a previously unnoticed shortcoming, motivating its own overcoming. In this sense it is a welcome phenomenon for Husserl, as noted by several authors (see e.g. Buckley 1992, 86; Dodd 2004, 2; Miettinen 2013, 83). The root of the crisis will be shown to lie in the imperfect attempt to realize the ideal of universal science in modernity, casting doubt on the philosophical ideal. In particular it was the role of idealization in the natural sciences that was crucial, both in how it led to the sciences' lack of insight into their own functioning as well as in how it led existentially relevant questions to be excluded from rational inquiry.⁶³ The role of idealization and the crisis of the sciences will be treated first in a way that sets up the discussion of the crisis of spirit, even though the latter is arguably the more fundamental issue. Doing so will trace the crises of the sciences, culture, and European humanity, back to the failure of philosophy to properly establish itself as a universal science and its failure to establish an idea of the world capable of dealing with matters of the spirit. Having clarified the nature of and the relation between the crises, an account will be given of Husserl's solution to them.

2.2.2 The crisis of the sciences

While for Husserl it is clear that the sciences are in crisis, he is aware of the counter-intuitive nature of such a claim. In the very first line of the *Crisis* he says that he expects that the title of the lectures on which it is based (*The Crisis of European Sciences and Psychology*) will “incite controversy” (C, 3).⁶⁴ As he asks in the title of §1: *Is there, in view of their constant successes, really*

⁶³ However, the impact of idealization goes beyond the sciences. Held treats it as an aspect penetrating all areas of (European) life (2013, 129-44) and Staehler has suggested the similar impact it had on economics (2017, 14).

⁶⁴ Although Husserl expects his claim that the sciences are in crisis will cause controversy, he is aware of it being a common topic, “heard so often these days” (C, 3).

a crisis of the sciences? Husserl will not deny the successes of the positive sciences, whether natural or human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) (C, 4). The validity of their results is not in doubt. If the crisis is not their lack of success, then what is it? Although the crisis of the sciences is central to Husserl's work and much has been written about it, recently a lack of a clear consensus on what the crisis he speaks of is has been highlighted (see Trizio 2016; Heffernan 2017).

Not all the crises spoken of in Husserl's work have a direct relation to the sciences and even in relation to the sciences we can distinguish various crises.⁶⁵ The loss of their meaningfulness for life will be discussed in the next section as an aspect of the crisis of spirit. The crisis that will be discussed here under the name 'the crisis of the sciences' concerns the fact that the sciences, successful as they may be, operate without proper insight into their own functioning.⁶⁶ Unlike the loss of their meaningfulness for life, what can be called the crisis of the 'scientificity' of the sciences is a problem internal to the sciences.

At the beginning of the *Crisis* Husserl explains that "the crisis of a science indicates nothing less than that its genuine scientific character, the whole manner in which it has set its task and developed a methodology for it, has become questionable" (C, 3).⁶⁷ Husserl's concern with the scientificity of the sciences leads him to an in-depth treatment of the role of idealization in natural-scientific method in §9 of the *Crisis*. The crux is that the sciences substitute an idealized, mathematically constructed world for the world given in

⁶⁵ Trizio (2016) has shown the importance of distinguishing between the various senses of the crisis of the sciences as well as the importance of showing how they are related. Heffernan (2017, 4) gives an overview of the two tendencies in the literature on the crisis as to what the crisis of the sciences is. The "traditional interpretation" (which he, seemingly following Trizio (2016, 206-7n24), attributes to Gurwitsch, Paci, Carr, Boehm, Ströker, Bernet, Kern, Marbach, and Dodd) takes the crisis to lie in their loss of meaningfulness for life, rather than in their inadequate insight into their own functioning. Heffernan gives Trizio as an example of an interpretation that instead takes the latter as the true crisis of the sciences. Trizio claims that the common identification of the crisis of the sciences with the loss of their meaningfulness for life is a mistake (2016, 192). Yet, he does not claim that this is not a part of the overall crisis. Heffernan's claim that these interpretations are mutually exclusive is too strong insofar as all mentioned authors would acknowledge both of these aspects of the crisis. Which specific crisis should properly be called *the crisis of the sciences* is a terminological matter that has little bearing on what these crises consist in. The crisis of the sciences in the sense of the loss of their meaningfulness for life is related more closely to the overall crisis of spirit. Hence, while acknowledging the importance of this sense of crisis in relation to the sciences, the 'crisis of the sciences' will here mainly refer to their inadequate insight into their own functioning.

⁶⁶ Trizio (2016, 207-8) gives a brief discussion of Husserl's earlier work going back to 1906/1907 where this sense of the crisis of the sciences is already present. Husserl's first book, *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, published in 1891 addresses a similar issue.

⁶⁷ The matter is complicated due to the fact that there might be two different senses of scientificity at play in the *Crisis*, as identified by Heffernan (2017, 242). The first is a sense we can call positivistic, the second philosophical. Positivistic scientificity, as the term suggests, has to do with the sciences insofar as they have already been reduced to mere positivistic science. Scientificity in the philosophical sense, however, lies closer to Husserl's philosophical ideal of science as also having practical relevance, that is, as capable of dealing with questions of human existence. While there is something to Heffernan's distinction between two senses of scientificity, especially considering the fact (discussed below) that Husserl attributes the given definition of a crisis to philosophy, in the context relevant here the term is usually used to designate science's capacity to achieve results in a methodological manner and its proper insight into its own functioning. This is the sense in which 'scientificity' will be used here which is in line with the sense of 'crisis of the sciences' used here.

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experience, the world in which we actually live. They “take for *true being* what is actually a *method*,” (C, 51-52) overlooking both the concrete world which forms the basis for any idealisation and the subjectivity which accomplishes it. A look into the role of idealization in the sciences will help make clear how such a mistake could have been made and what its consequences are, but also how close it comes to fulfilling Husserl's ideal of universal science.

The idealization of natural-scientific procedure has its roots in geometry.⁶⁸ Geometry deals with idealities – ideal shapes – which as such cannot be found in everyday experience. Even “abstractively directing” ourselves to the geometrical properties of the objects presented to us in everyday experience, we will never find the ideally straight line, the perfectly round circle, and so on (C, 25). Husserl takes the origin of the latter to lie in the increasingly precise measurements for practical purposes that first suggest the possibility of such ideal shapes. While these cannot be achieved empirically, they emerge as “limit-shapes” which can be approached (C, 26). At first it is only the shapes in question for practical purposes which suggest corresponding limit-shapes – that is, *this* circle, *that* line –, but this leads to the idea that all forms of spatiality are susceptible to be conceived as limit-shapes and ultimately as ideal shapes distinct from the concrete bodies from which they were derived initially.

While the origin of idealization lay in measurement for practical purposes, it provided a methodology suitable to the theoretical goal of exactly determining the true, objective being of the world. The importance of mathematics for philosophy and science was already recognized by the ancient Greeks.⁶⁹ In modernity, this insight led Galileo to revolutionize the sciences:

Starting with the practically understandable manner in which geometry, in an old traditional sphere, aids in bringing the sensible surrounding world to univocal determination, Galileo said to himself: Wherever such a methodology is developed, there we have also overcome the relativity of subjective interpretations which is, after all, essential to the empirically intuited world. For in this manner we attain an identical, nonrelative truth of which everyone who can understand and use this method can convince himself. Here, then, we recognize something that truly is—though only in the form of a constantly increasing approximation, beginning with what is empirically given, to the geometrical ideal shape which functions as a guiding pole. (C, 29)

What geometry did for spatiality, Galileo sought to do for all other aspects of nature (C, 33). Yet, this presents a problem insofar as not all aspects of nature are directly commensurable with this method. The geometrical properties of bodies could be idealized on the basis of limit-shapes suggested by the ever more precise empirical measurements afforded by relatively precise units of measurement (which are themselves approximations of the idealities they were supposed to represent). These units are easily expressed in number and thus easily

⁶⁸ Although what follows will mainly be based on the account present in the *Crisis*, Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*, likely written to be part of the *Crisis*, is a crucial reference here.

⁶⁹ Famously, but unverifiably, the following inscription could be found above the entrance to Plato's Academy: “Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here.”

compared: a length is easily measured by another length used as a standardised unit of measurement. Such a unit is not only translatable into all other lengths, but its relation to other lengths is easily expressed mathematically. Not all aspects of nature are as susceptible to providing such exact units of measurement. This goes for the sensible qualities of bodies that Husserl calls “plena,” comparable to Cartesian secondary qualities:

These qualities, too, appear in gradations, and in a certain way measurement applies to them as to all gradations—we “assess” the “magnitude” of coldness and warmth, of roughness and smoothness, of brightness and darkness, etc. But there is no exact measurement here, no growth of exactness or of the methods of measurement. (C, 34)

These plena can only be measured indirectly on the basis of the discovery that they are “closely related in a quite peculiar and *regulated* way with the shapes that belong essentially to them” (C, 35). To use temperature as an example: One cannot take a part of warmth to use it as a unit to compare to other parts the way this can be done with a length. But the regularity of the relation between the temperature of a body and its spatial extension means that the former can be measured accurately – though indirectly – through measurement of the latter. Non-spatial aspects of nature are thus mathematized by being led back to those aspects which geometry is so proficient at determining exactly. They are even interpreted in spatial terms:

What we experienced, in prescientific life, as colors, tones, warmth, and weight belonging to the things themselves and experienced causally as a body’s radiation of warmth which makes adjacent bodies warm, and the like, indicates in terms of physics, of course, tone-vibrations, warmth-vibrations, i.e., pure events in the world of shapes. (C, 36)

In this way, the idealization geometry afforded to the spatial aspects of nature is expanded to all other aspects of nature. It is taken as an *a priori* rule that “everything which manifests itself as real through the specific sense-qualities must have its *mathematical index* in events belonging to the sphere of shapes – which is, of course, already thought of as idealized” (C, 37).

Whereas in the case of geometry the idealized shapes are still, in a way, of the same kind as the shapes found in experience from which they were abstracted, in the case of indirect mathematization the plena are turned into something fundamentally different. It is not only a further, but a different kind of step removed from the way they are found in experience. This distance from experience is increased through what Husserl calls the “arithmatization” (C, 44) and subsequently the “technization” (C, 46) of the sciences. Arithmatization entails that

the actually spatiotemporal idealities, as they are presented firsthand [*originär*] in geometrical thinking under the common rubric of “pure intuitions,” are transformed, so to speak, into pure numerical configurations, into algebraic structures. In algebraic calculation, one lets the geometric signification recede into the background as a matter of course, indeed drops it altogether; one calculates, remembering only at the end that the numbers signify magnitudes. (C, 44)

Whereas idealization already abstracts from the way bodies are concretely experienced so that they can be determined mathematically, arithmatization gives precedence to the mathematical

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as such. The circumference of a circle, for instance, is no longer the circumference of any concretely experienced body or of the approximation of a limit-shape we can produce in our imagination, but rather fully expressed by the formula $2\pi r$. Arithmatization entails a separation of scientific result from anything actually given in experience and is consequently accompanied by a "superficialization of meaning" (C, 44).

Husserl is positive about the possibilities that arithmatization affords as it greatly expands the limits of thought beyond what can be experienced concretely (C, 44). The scope of today's sciences would be impossible without the ability to economize in this way.⁷⁰ Yet, the separation of the sciences from concrete experience comes with the risk of them becoming a mere technique: "a mere art of achieving, through a calculating technique according to technical rules, results the genuine sense of whose truth can be attained only by concretely intuitive thinking actually directed at the subject matter itself" (C, 46). A technique can be used without proper understanding of it or its results. It can even be learned and taught without insight into what it actually accomplishes and what its results ultimately refer to (C, 56). In *The Origin of Geometry* Husserl provides an example of this in relation to the education of geometry:

what we actually learn there is how to deal with *ready-made* concepts and sentences in a rigorously methodical way. Rendering the concepts sensibly intuitable by means of drawn figures is substituted for the actual production of the primal idealities. And the rest is done by success—not the success of actual insight extending beyond the logical method's own self-evidence, but the practical successes of applied geometry, its immense, though not understood, practical usefulness. (C, 366-67)

Because of the way idealization allows idealities a certain independence through which they can be known without repeating the idealizing accomplishment, the sciences run the risk of turning into mere technique. Such a lack of insight clearly did not impede the progress of the sciences, but for Husserl the problem is how a science oblivious to its own mode of operating can be called scientific in any proper sense. Perhaps more importantly, this lack of insight can lead to a misinterpretation of scientific results.

When results can be achieved without insight into how this is done and if these results not only become separated from their origins in intuition but can actually be manipulated to produce new results without any reference to intuition whatsoever, this can lead to "the surreptitious substitution of the mathematically substructured world of idealities for the only real world, the one that is actually given through perception, that is ever experienced and experienceable" (C, 48-49). While this world of idealities does (ultimately) refer back to the world as it is given in experience, it is "in principle not perceivable, in principle not experienceable in its own proper being" (C, 127). The view of the world the

⁷⁰ Descartes, in his Sixth Meditation, already gave the example of the chiliagon, a polygon with a 1.000 sides. While it is relatively easily dealt with mathematically, it exceeds the capacity of imagination to accurately produce it. It can be added that it also exceeds the capacity of perception to accurately identify it when presented with it.

sciences present as true is thus completely foreign to the actual experience of it. The world as we inhabit it is overlooked, devalued as less true, even though science itself

is an accomplishment which, in being practiced and carried forward, continues to presuppose this surrounding world as it is given in its particularity to the scientist. For example, for the physicist it is the world in which he sees his measuring instruments, hears timebeats, estimates visible magnitudes, etc. — the world in which, furthermore, he knows himself to be included with all his activity and all his theoretical ideas. (C, 121)

The fault of the crisis of the sciences does not necessarily lie with the natural sciences themselves. While their success can give rise to misinterpretations, the sciences themselves are flourishing and arguably doing what they need to be doing. It is a legitimate question whether their lack of scientificity is something they should concern themselves with. Is it not rather the task of philosophy to clarify the ground of the sciences? The misinterpretation of the results of the sciences and the consequent misinterpretation of the world are definitely made possible by their lack of insight into their own functioning. However, as will be discussed in more detail, much of the issue lies with philosophy's inability to provide a viable alternative to the naturalistic interpretation of the world.

Although the natural sciences have a negative role in Husserl's account of the crisis, it is important to keep in mind that the natural sciences as Husserl describes them come very close to fulfilling his ideal of philosophy as universal science, that is, a science capable of dealing with any and all phenomena. Mathematics was crucial in reshaping and developing this ideal as it re-emerged in the Renaissance:

From here [the advances in mathematics], thanks to the boldness and originality peculiar to the new humanity, the great ideal is soon anticipated of a science which, in this new sense, is rational and all-inclusive, or rather the idea that the infinite totality of what is in general is intrinsically a rational all-encompassing unity that can be mastered, without anything left over, by a corresponding universal science. (C, 22)

As said, geometry proved to be a way to overcome the relativity of the world as it is experienced towards nonrelative, ideal truths. When Galileo applied the same methodology not just to the spatiality of the world, but to the world as such in all its aspects, is this not a new establishment (*Neustiftung*) of philosophy in the form of mathematical physics? Mathematical physics provides the world with a "*universal causal regulation*," through which "the world is not merely a totality [*Allheit*] but an all-encompassing unity [*Alleinheit*], a *whole* (even though it is infinite)" (C, 31). This whole is not fully experienced, but determinable on the basis of an *a priori* idea of its all-encompassing unity, what Husserl calls "the universal *a priori* of the objective-logical level" (C, 141). Mathematical physics, then, seemingly developed a sense of the world that was universal insofar as all phenomena could be described and related to each other through their mathematical index.

Arguably, the substitution of the mathematical world for the world of experience and the consequent neglect of the latter was due to the fact that mathematical physics was

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essentially, but not necessarily explicitly, taken to be the fulfilled form of universal science. Its success can hardly be overstated: In the 19th century mathematical physics unified the experientially very different domains of optics, electricity and magnetism; in the early 20th century physics and chemistry were linked through quantum mechanics; and in the second half of the 20th century the Standard Model of particle physics was able to incorporate three of the four known fundamental forces into a single theory that also classified all known elementary particles. While the so-called 'theory of everything' is still very far away, the progress made by physics over the past centuries is astounding enough to make its possibility *believable*, though not guaranteed.⁷¹ The contrast with philosophy, as discussed below, could not be greater.

Yet, mathematical physics, despite its advances in the articulation of the concept of the world as rational all-encompassing unity and a corresponding universal science, is not the final establishment of philosophy, because it has a crucial lack: It has to exclude, in principle, not only an entire domain, but a *fundamental* domain. As long as it does not take the concrete world of experience into account and overlooks that the natural sciences are "a product of the spirit that investigates nature and thus presupposes the science of spirit" (VL, 297), it cannot fulfil the sense of philosophy as universal and ultimately grounding science. By overlooking its experiential foundations and the accomplishing subjectivity behind it and thus failing to recognise the need of a more fundamental science of spirit, this rationalism is rendered "superficial, in its entanglement in 'naturalism' and 'objectivism'" (VL, 299).

2.2.3 The crisis of spirit

The crisis of spirit can broadly be conceived as the consequence of the loss of rationality in the domain of spirit. The scope of this crisis goes beyond the sciences, although Husserl also relates it to the sciences as *The "crisis" of science as the loss of its meaning for life*, as it appears in the title of §2 of the *Crisis*.⁷² As discussed, Husserl's ideal of science includes a practical relevance for human existence. Yet, he sees the sciences neither living up to this ideal on their own, nor being successfully incorporated into an overarching philosophy in which they might find such a relevance.

⁷¹ For an excellent overview of this, see Watson (2016). Watson shows how the various sciences converged over the past centuries. He does not limit his overview to the various domains of physics, extending it to biology, psychology, history, economics, and other scientific domains. Importantly for Husserl's critique of mathematical physics as universal science, Watson also shows the convergence between domains other than physics. The entire field of biology, for instance, can be said to have been unified by the theory of evolution, with evolutionary psychology consequently unifying biology and psychology. Here and in the other examples he provides there clearly is a different *a priori* at work than that of mathematical physics.

⁷² Trizio has argued that this title and the corresponding paragraph describe the state of science as perceived in Husserl's day and that it is not a programmatic statement of Husserl's own view of the essential nature of the crisis of science (2016, 196). While Trizio convincingly argues for this, it is also something Husserl clearly agreed with. The issue of whether this should be called a part of the 'crisis of the sciences' proper or not has been discussed above.

The question is what science can mean for human existence. While Husserl, like many of his contemporaries shared the belief that the sciences of his day could not answer questions regarding human existence, for him this was not due to a fundamental impossibility, but due to their “positivistic reduction” to “merely factual science” (C, 5). This “residual concept” of science has “dropped all the questions which had been considered under the now narrower, now broader concepts of metaphysics, including all questions vaguely termed ‘ultimate and highest’” (C, 9). By excluding what Husserl at times refers to as the ethico-religious questions, science no longer has anything to say about the human being’s relation to itself, others, and its surrounding world (C, 6). Perhaps this is expressed best in his *Formal and Transcendental Logic* from 1929:

The belief that science leads to wisdom – to an actually rational self-cognition and cognition of the world and God, and, by means of such cognition, to a life somehow to be shaped closer to perfection, a life truly worth living, a life of ‘happiness’, contentment, well-being, or the like – this great belief, once the substitute for religious belief, has (at least in wide circles) lost its force. Thus men live entirely in a world that has become unintelligible, in which they ask in vain for the wherefore, the sense, which was once so doubtless and accepted by the understanding, as well as by the will. (*FTL*, 5)

It is important to be clear on which sciences are targeted here. The *Crisis* in-depthly – although not exclusively – deals with the natural sciences and singles out their lack of insight into their methodology and foundation. Yet, it is difficult to see how the natural sciences could have the mentioned existential relevance. Husserl himself has to refer to history to express this idea (C, 7). While a view of the sciences as encompassing the practical questions of human existence existed in the past, Husserl does not explain how this would work concretely. Noting this, Trizio gives some examples of his own:

Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, technical questions of natural science were often deemed relevant for moral and theological issues, especially in consideration of the problematic impact of the new mechanistic view of nature; and, at least with respect to life-sciences, the concept of teleology pointed to obvious religious implications. (Trizio 2016, 199)

While there is no doubt that natural-scientific questions can be relevant to ethico-religious issues, the question is whether they can also directly help solve these issues and give direction to human existence. The question is all the more urgent since Husserl himself has highlighted the failure of this project in modernity. The natural sciences seem to inhibit such an approach by abstracting “from all that is in any way spiritual, from all cultural properties which are attached to things in human praxis” (C, 60). The naturalistic worldview this leads to is by far the dominant scientific worldview, if not the dominant worldview as such in late modernity. This leaves us with “a peculiarly *split* world,” split between the world of the natural sciences and the world as the spiritual, cultural domain where all human praxis takes place (C, 61). The success of the former is mirrored by the neglect of the latter. The spiritual either remains unacknowledged as a possible domain of rational inquiry or is to be reduced to the physical.

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Yet, a purely physical conception of the world cannot harbour within it a home for persons, communities and cultures (*Hua* XXVII, 213).

Here it should be noted, as Buckley has done, that while much of Husserl's criticism is directed towards the natural sciences in the *Kaizo* articles the solution is sought through a reform of the human sciences (1992, 70; 78n1). Seeking existential guidance from the human sciences makes much more sense than seeking it in the natural sciences. This emphasis on the human sciences is corroborated by Husserl's critique of them in the *Vienna Lecture* (which as mentioned does not yet speak of a crisis of the sciences, but rather of a crisis of European humanity). There, he even goes as far as suggesting that the crisis is "a problem purely within the humanistic disciplines" (*VL*, 273).⁷³

The previously mentioned analogy with medicine clearly shows where the problem lies for Husserl. Whereas the natural sciences have developed medicine for physical illness, there is no scientific equivalent for ailing culture: "How does it happen that no scientific medicine has ever developed in this sphere, a medicine for nations and supranational communities?" (*VL*, 270). But it is not just that the human sciences have failed to provide a rational approach to the human spirit. It is not on their agenda at all anymore (*VL*, 272-73). Attempting to emulate the success of the natural sciences, the human sciences try to copy their methodology or take over the natural-scientific worldview that reduces the world to a collection of physical bodies and descriptive facts about these bodies. To some extent this is successful. As mentioned, Husserl makes it clear that he does not doubt the results of the human sciences (*C*, 4). Yet, these are the human sciences as positive sciences excluding all matters of valuation and thus precisely as lacking any normative element that would make them practically relevant to human existence. While they do take the spiritual as their object, they do not go beyond the merely descriptive level (*C*, 6; *VL*, 271). Any potential other approaches are deemed irrational, because rationality is equated with the perspective of the natural sciences. As already mentioned, the very idea that the sciences could have anything to say regarding the meaning or meaninglessness of human existence was considered childish by, for instance, Weber (1946, 143).

Yet, for Husserl, ultimately neither the natural sciences as such nor the human sciences as such (whatever form either might take) are at the root of the crisis. His scientific ideal did not know of a strict separation between the sciences.⁷⁴ Indeed the problem lies in this separation into different domains whose foundations and relation remain unclarified (*VL*, 296). While Husserl is critical of the sciences, he attributes their failure in this regard to philosophy's failure to provide an overall scheme to which the truths of the sciences could be related (*C*, 11). This inability together with the weakness of the human sciences on their own

⁷³ Further in the lecture it becomes clear that the problem lies with philosophy's inability to properly clarify the domains of the natural and human sciences (*VL*, 296), see below.

⁷⁴ Which is not to say Husserl was against the specialization of the sciences: "The much lamented specialization [of the sciences] is not in itself a lack, since it is a necessity within universal philosophy" (*C*, 195).

allowed for the encroachment of natural-scientific method into the human sciences, debilitating the possibility of a proper science of spirit that could help not only in clarifying the foundations of and relations between the various sciences, but that could also help in answering the ethico-religious questions. As Buckley puts it:

One could say that in an age when the natural sciences and technology are limited, the forgetfulness required by them poses no widespread cultural threat. Only in an age dominated by technology is the type of forgetfulness found in science a true threat, for it implies that the entire culture is one of forgetting and lack of insight. (Buckley 1992, 73)

Husserl's earlier mentioned definition of the crisis of a science is not directly applied to the sciences, but to philosophy (C, 3). This echoes his earlier claim that philosophy "is not yet a science at all, that as science it has not yet begun" (PRS, 73). Philosophy can only clarify the foundations of the sciences by being rigorous in establishing itself as truly universal science in a responsible way, that is, if it can fully justify its results and positions. Hence the much more debilitating nature of a crisis of scientificity for philosophy. It cannot survive as a mere technique.

The issue is not just that philosophy has in fact failed to provide the proper foundation of the sciences, whether natural or human. What has been lost is "the inspiring belief in its ideal of a universal philosophy and in the scope of the new method" (C, 10). The natural-scientific methodology that was thought to properly establish a universal science failed to do so. Leaving out matters of the spirit, it was neither universal nor meaningful for human existence, overlooking the very ground on the basis of which it proceeded. In the meantime, philosophy itself succumbed to the contrast between "the repeated failures of metaphysics and the uninterrupted and ever increasing wave of theoretical and practical successes in the positive sciences" (C, 11). While for Husserl philosophy had never properly been a science, now this ideal itself had succumbed.

Without a universal science to tie them together, the various spheres of life and the various sciences, insofar as they deal with different domains, are shattered without hope of making coherent sense of this whole. The *world* has become unintelligible, a problem (FTL, 5; *Hua* XXVII, 213). In line with the crucial idea of the world as total horizon at the basis of the ideal of philosophy, the crisis can be seen as the dissolution of this idea of this world. Ultimately, the problem is that of what Dodd has called "the *need for a world*," (2004, 32; see also Carr 1987, 238; Buckley 1992, 33) a world comprehensive and comprehensible enough to deal with both theoretical and practical issues. Indicative of the problem is that in Husserl's day there was no shortage of worldviews on the basis of which one could lead one's life. This very abundance exposed them as mere views, preference for which was not determined by their truth or falsity, but "according to our ultimate position towards life," to again use Weber's words (1946, 143). A worldview that would be both existentially relevant and scientific was no longer thought to be possible.

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The problem exceeded philosophy and the sciences, as Husserl took philosophy to be the spiritual backbone of European humanity:

Along with this falls the faith in "absolute" reason, through which the world has its meaning, the faith in the meaning of history, of humanity, the faith in man's freedom, that is, his capacity to secure rational meaning for his individual and common human existence. If man loses this faith, it means nothing less than the loss of faith "in himself," in his own true being. (C, 13)

The failure of philosophy led to Europe's "unbearable lack of clarity about his own existence" (VL, 297). It is not so much any particular belief or its justification that has been lost, but the idea that a view could ever be more than just one's beliefs; the idea that reason could provide us with something more.

For Husserl, however, the problem lies not with reason itself but with a one-sided conception of reason. He only speaks of the "apparent failure of rationalism," the failure of rationalism in its superficial form (VL, 299). Whether rationalism can or cannot live up to its ideal is still to be made out. That it has failed so far is no proof of its impossibility. Indeed, Husserl's historical investigation has shown where modern rationalism went wrong, exposing it precisely as a one-sided conception of rationalism, to be replaced by what he at one point refers to as "a kind of super-rationalism [Überrationalismus]" (Letter to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, 11 March 1935, 352).

2.2.4 The solution to the crisis

In the final paragraph of the *Vienna Lecture* Husserl explicitly presents us with the disjunction the crisis presents European humanity with

There are only two escapes from the crisis of European existence: the downfall of Europe in its estrangement from its own rational sense of life, its fall into hostility toward the spirit and into barbarity; or the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy through a heroism of reason that overcomes naturalism once and for all. Europe's greatest danger is weariness. If we struggle against this greatest of all dangers as "good Europeans" with the sort of courage that does not fear even an infinite struggle, then out of the destructive blaze of lack of faith, the smoldering fire of despair over the West's mission for humanity, the ashes of great weariness, will rise up the phoenix of a new life-inwardness and spiritualization as the pledge of a great and distant future for man: for the spirit alone is immortal. (VL, 299)

If we look past the somewhat bombastic rhetoric, the main components of Husserl's proposed solution to the crisis – both of spirit and of the sciences – becomes clear: a renewed faith in reason and an overcoming of naturalism. Renewing faith in reason is not an easy task insofar as the entire spiritual situation of the time can be said to be determined by the loss of faith in reason. Husserl sees the struggle as being one "between humanity which has already collapsed and humanity which still has roots but is struggling to keep them or find new ones" (C, 15). It is the latter group, those who still believe in the ideal of philosophy but cannot

sustain this ideal that are in the grip of the crisis the most. As Ströker put it: Crisis and crisis-consciousness belong together (1996, 310). Given that it is a question of the capacity to believe, Husserl asks: “what should we, who *believe*, do in order to *be able* to believe?” (C, 17). He gives a favourable prognosis, but what justifies his belief in it?

Such a justification regarding the possibility – although not necessarily the certainty – of realizing the ideal of philosophy, and *ipso facto* the ideal of Europe, guided his inquiry into the essence and historical development of this ideal. It is through this investigation, which showed the failure of the ideal, that “we can gain self-understanding, and thus inner support” (C, 14). It showed that the crisis was only the apparent failure of rationalism, indicating a solution or at least how to avoid past mistakes. Indeed, it is this investigation that according to Husserl for the first time properly revealed the rationalist teleology inherent in European civilization and how “all the philosophy of the past, though unbeknown to itself, was inwardly oriented toward [a] new sense of philosophy” (C, 18), “toward a *final form* of transcendental philosophy – as *phenomenology*” (C, 70).

What this investigation showed in particular was the role of the natural sciences, the great promise they showed, but also their concealing nature.⁷⁵ As Husserl put it, Galileo was “at once a discovering and a concealing genius [*entdeckender und verdeckender Genius*]” (C, 52). It is this concealing nature of the natural sciences that was crucial to both the crisis of the sciences and the crisis of spirit and that relates them (and their solutions) to each other. Although it was philosophy that failed to properly respond to this concealment, the possibility of a rational approach to human existence would perhaps not have become inconceivable if it was not for the utter dominance of the natural sciences and their forgetting of the actual, thoroughly human, world of experience. Husserl’s solution to the crisis thus lies in bringing to the fore the meaningful world in which we live, what Husserl calls the life-world, undoing its concealment and forgetting. As Waldenfels has aptly put it, though this world is “drowned out by science, it is brought to voice by philosophy” (1982, 25). The recovery of the life-world would:

- 1) Recover the foundation of the sciences and clarify their functioning
- 2) Recover the domain to which all human praxis is related
- 3) Recover the possibility of philosophy as universal science

The crisis of the sciences in the sense of their lack of insight means their results need to be led back to their origins in intuition. They need to be brought to full self-evidence by showing their source in the pre-scientific experience of the world. Science and its results are accomplishments that presuppose a foundation in the life-world and although this life-world

⁷⁵ It was not just the natural sciences and their objectivism and naturalism that Husserl discusses in the *Crisis*, but also various subjectivisms in modernity, what he calls the “attempts by transcendentalism to overcome the difficulties entailed by the idea of transcendental subjectivity and the method it requires” (C, 70). It is this other development, not discussed in this thesis, that helps set Husserl on the path to a final form of transcendental philosophy: phenomenology.

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is overlooked, it is never fully left behind in scientific activity. This means that ultimately “the universal a priori of the objective-logical level” through which the sciences determine the world in physico-mathematical terms is “grounded in a universal a priori which is in itself prior, precisely that of the pure life-world” (C, 141). Only through the latter can the sciences “achieve a truly radical, a seriously scientific, grounding, which under the circumstances they absolutely require” (C, 141). This involves a separation of the experience of the life-world from its natural-scientific interpretation through an “*ēpoche* of all objective sciences,” (C, 140) that is, a bracketing of scientific results, procedure, and most of all the *a priori* which makes these possible, as to reach an interpretation of the world that is not contaminated by the natural-scientific view of the world:

We wish, then, to consider the surrounding life-world concretely, in its neglected relativity and according to all the manners of relativity belonging essentially to it—the world in which we live intuitively, together with its real entities [*Realitäten*]; but [we wish to consider them] *as* they give themselves to us at first in straightforward experience. (C, 156)

This would address the crisis of the sciences, securing their scientificity by clarifying the basis of their results in concrete experience, but not yet fix the spiritual crisis which consists in the lack of a rational-scientific way of dealing with human affairs. It would clear the field for it by showing that the results of the sciences that were taken as absolute were abstractions and interpretations, but not yet itself provide a viable alternative. But when the life-world is thematized as the pre-given ground of the sciences, it can subsequently itself be made into a proper domain of inquiry (C, 121-23). It is not just defined by its function as ground of the sciences, but is a meaningful region in its own right to which all human activity is related. As such, it is precisely the domain of spirit which was abandoned by reason, leaving it vulnerable to relativism, mysticism and barbarism. By showing there can be a rational unanimity or concordance (*Einstimmigkeit*) regarding the life-world, these threats can be staved off and replaced by the possibility of a rational, universal culture.

Insofar as philosophy left this realm to what Husserl calls its “anonymity,” and even excluded it on the basis of the pre-eminence of the falsely universal *a priori* of the natural sciences, “philosophy could not fulfill the sense of its primal establishment as the universal and ultimately grounding science” (C, 112). By taking the life-world as its starting point philosophy can be turned into a rigorous science that is responsible in the sense that it can provide full evidence for its knowledge by leading it back to the most immediate form of experiential evidence that in that sense is an absolute starting point. What is called for, then, is “the great task of a pure theory of essence of the life-world” (C, 141) as the universal *a priori* of all human theoretical and practical endeavors:

for the sake of clarifying this [the accomplishments of modern science] and all other acquisitions of human activity, the concrete life-world must first be taken into consideration; and it must be considered in terms of the truly concrete universality whereby it embraces, both directly and in the manner of horizons, all the built-up levels

of validity acquired by men for the world of their common life and whereby it has the totality of these levels related in the end to a world-nucleus to be distilled by abstraction, namely, the world of straightforward intersubjective experiences. (C, 133)

That is the way that a phenomenological analysis can make Husserl's ideal believable again by grounding it in the apodictic evidence of experience. What this would lead to is the basis for a phenomenologically inspired worldview that does not succumb to naturalism, but that can provide a correction to it.⁷⁶ The question is whether this recovery and investigation of the life-world can be enough to achieve or make believable Husserl's goal.

⁷⁶ Husserl's disdain for worldviews is well known, yet often overstated. Staiti has convincingly argued that to some extent Husserl changed his mind on worldviews, no longer simply dismissing them because they are not rational: "His later work can be read as a deliberate effort to set the basis for a phenomenologically inspired worldview, which is designed to provide a viable alternative to the dominance of naturalism" (2014, 236). In line with the context of crisis of Husserl's later work, Staiti argues that Husserl's change of heart regarding the notion of worldview was instigated by the First World War and the spiritual bankruptcy of the time. Moreover, this is in line with Husserl's remarks on metaphysics as providing a worldview that is both existentially relevant *and* scientific in the *Logos Essay* (PRS, 123). One could argue that such a worldview would precisely no longer be a worldview, but the truth about the world, but that would not do justice to the phenomenon at hand. Moreover, the argument that Husserl is looking to instate a phenomenologically inspired worldview based on his investigations into the life-world of course does not mean that the life-world is itself a worldview. As Staiti puts it: "my argument is neither that the life-world somehow is a worldview, nor that Husserl's late phenomenology is all about worldview, but, rather, that a phenomenological investigation of the life-world yields a worldview, namely, a phenomenological worldview, which Husserl hoped would replace naturalism and positivism" (2014, 264).

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2.3 The World

2.3.1 The life-world and the universal sense of the world

The concept of the life-world is essential to Husserl's later work and in particular to his solution to the crisis.⁷⁷ It is developed in various stages and – even within the *Crisis* – there are different conceptions of it. Husserl acknowledges this by speaking of narrower and broader senses of the concept and of different levels or strata of the life-world (C, 122, 168). Difficulties arise when the term is used to designate incompatible concepts.⁷⁸ Providing an exhaustive overview of the many different uses and ambiguities of the concept exceeds the scope of this section. Instead, the focus will be on Husserl's use of the life-world in the specific context of his account of and solution to the crisis. This will reveal several senses of 'world' which Husserl does not always clearly distinguish between and which potentially problematizes his solution to the crisis and in particular the world he takes as his goal.

In general, for Husserl, the life-world is "what we know best, what is always taken for granted in all human life" (C, 123). It is the world in which we live precisely as we live in it, as opposed to the abstraction of the world that the sciences provide. It is this world, as taken for granted both in everyday life and by the sciences, which Husserl wants to investigate as it is concretely experienced. It is thus not a view or interpretation of the world, but the initial experience of the world of which there can be an interpretation, a "realm of original self-evidence" (C, 127).

Despite Husserl's emphasis on the life-world, it should not be forgotten that his inquiry into it is the starting-point, not the end-goal of his philosophy. This goes for both the problematic of the crisis of the sciences and that of the spirit. An ultimate clarification of the sciences cannot stop at the life-world, but has to take into account the constitution of the life-world by transcendental subjectivity. Likewise, the thematization of the life-world is only a first step in solving the spiritual crisis, because Husserl is not interested in any life-world whatsoever but in one that fits his rationalist and universalist ideals. Although it initially needs to be treated "in its neglected relativity and according to all the manners of relativity belonging essentially to it," (C, 156) this relativity must be overcome. To again make use of the words of Waldenfels: "Husserl first revolarizes *doxa* with respect to scientific reason only to finally devaluate it with respect to philosophical reason" (1982, 22). Before looking at a possible universal sense of the world, however, it needs to be clear what Husserl means when he refers to the life-world before scientific thematization.

At times when Husserl talks about the life-world, he is talking about a world of things distributed in space-time available to us through perception (C, 142). It might be

⁷⁷ For a brief overview of the concept before Husserl's use of it see Orth (2000, 29-31). For overviews of Husserl's uses of it as well as various ways to classify these see Carr (1974, 166), Steinbock (1995, 87-88), Orth (2000, 31-33), Zahavi (2003, 129-30), and Moran (2015, 112-15).

⁷⁸ Incompatible uses of the concept of the life-world have been noted by, among others, Carr (1970, 331-39), Orth (2000, 37), and Bernet (2005, 19).

tempting to understand this as the physical world, but we should be careful to distinguish this world from the world as discussed by the natural sciences. The latter is already an abstraction from the perceptual world. But even a bare perceptual world is not the life-world as we are most intimately acquainted with it, but only a single level of it (C, 168). Husserl is not always clear about this due to the emphasis on perception in many of his analyses. This emphasis is justified by the prominence of sensible intuition. Everything that exhibits itself in the life-world as a concrete thing has a bodily character, even if it is not a mere body (C, 106; *Hua* XXIX, 329). In this sense, the perceptual world is a privileged level of the life-world. All the more so because even in bare perception we do not perceive objects individually, but as belonging to an intersubjective world that exceeds any single object (C, 163).

Yet, we do not live in a world of mere bodily things. As experienced in everyday life, the life-world is a cultural world.⁷⁹ As Husserl says, only an infant or a mentally impeded person sees a perceptual world without grasping its cultural level (*Hua* XV, 231). Moreover, it is precisely as a cultural world that the life-world functions as “the universal field of all actual and possible praxis” (C, 142). Every praxis “presupposes *its* ‘truth and falsity’ in terms of what exists and does not exist, of what is right and wrong in the broader and broadest sphere of being” (C, 379). The truths and values that make the life-world more than a mere perceptual world, make it a secure ground for us, a homeworld as opposed to the alien worlds of others in which we can have difficulties finding our way around.

It is the life-world as including culture that Husserl is after as the most immediate world in which we live and as foundation of the sciences. It is true that the world as treated by the (natural) sciences resembles a bare perceptual world more than a cultural world. But while the latter is founded on the perceptual world, they cannot properly be conceived as separate (*Hua* XXIX, 260). The life-world as it is immediately given has to include the full garb of culture, lest we already distinguish between a perceptual world and a cultural world in a theoretical manoeuvre which Husserl precisely wants to avoid. Moreover, recourse to a mere perceptual world is clearly insufficient to address the spiritual crisis, whereas a thematization of the life-world as cultural world is a thematization of the structures that guide everyday praxis and are thus more relevant existentially speaking.

While this entails that the life-world as cultural world is the proper domain on the basis of which to address the crises, it also shows why this is not enough. It shows that what Husserl aims at here is the “changing, surrounding life-worlds of peoples and periods” (C, 147). The life-world encountered as such consists of a plurality of particular cultural worlds. The norms and values to be found in them are inherited through tradition, rather than rationally developed. As such, they are binding for the particular world of which they are a part, but do not necessarily have any validity beyond it. As Soffer has noted, it seems that

⁷⁹ On the importance of culture in Husserl’s analysis, see Staiti (2010).

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Husserl's return to the life-world is a return to a relativism, but not as the end of his philosophy but as its properly uncovered starting point (1991, 145, 191).⁸⁰

While all of humankind to some extent shares a common perceptual world, a bare perceptual world is insufficient to address the crises. As for the cultural world, it is evident that there are various cultural worlds with their own norms for life, only some of which are determined by reason. Thus, a return to the life-world as cultural world is a return to a cultural relativism that runs counter to Husserl's rationalist project. He wants to go beyond the plurality of cultural worlds towards a single universal sense of the world. The life-world as cultural world is what needs to be *made* rational so as to reach this universality. The step back from the world of science to the everyday, cultural life-world is followed by a step beyond it in the direction of the 'true' world, that is, a life-world with validity for everyone because it is shaped by reason.

As discussed, this idea of the world is central to what Husserl takes philosophy to be. He sees it as the goal of philosophy since its inception with the ancient Greeks who first discovered the world in the proper sense. The clash between different worldviews led them to the idea of a single world for all, and the same still goes for all of us:

Each of us has his life-world, meant as the world for all. Each has it with the sense of a polar unity of subjectively, relatively meant worlds which, in the course of correction, are transformed into mere appearances of *the* world, the life-world for all. This is the world; another world would have no meaning at all for us. (C, 254-55)

It is important to note that this is not the emergence of the *experience* of a single world, but the explicit thematization of the *idea* of it in the face of a plurality of cultural worlds. Experientially, as Husserl emphasizes in the quoted fragment, the world is always already "meant for all." It is the realization that the way the world is experienced might not be as universal as it seems in light of the encounter with others that calls for the re-establishment of the world in line with the universality that it was assumed and indeed experienced to have. The importance of the ancient Greeks for Husserl lies in the fact that instead of succumbing to relativism, they reacted against the plurality of different worldviews, of different cultural worlds, by postulating one, true world distinct from any particular view on it. It is not hard to see Husserl as a descendent of these Greek philosophers, operating within a climate of relativism and skepticism, but seeing this not as a reason to give up the dream of universality, but as a reason to rationally rethink it.

⁸⁰ As Bernet has noted, it is somewhat easy to just leave the matter at this level of phenomenological description and stay with a relativism that concedes important aims that Husserl set for his philosophy: "the question how manifold local and self-contained worlds refer to a common and unique 'open' world deserves more attention than life-world relativists are usually willing to concede" (2005, 19; see also De Warren 2015b, 142-43). Note that this does not exclude that Husserl might ultimately embrace a limited version of relativism at the level of the concrete life-world, as Soffer claims (1991, 143).

How, then, can this dream be realized? The various cultural worlds might share a foundation in a common perceptual world, but there is no such thing as a universal culture that they all reflect. Yet, as indicated, there are common elements to the various cultural worlds and necessarily so. Although there exist many different cultural worlds, they are all based on a universal *a priori* of the life-world (C, 239). As Staiti has argued, “there are dimensions of value and cultural ideals that belong *a priori* to the very notion of culture” (2010, 133). Among other things, “since they necessarily share the reference to pure nature, different cultural worlds must share more than just the reference to pure nature,” that is, inevitably there are similarities to the way this is constituted as part of the life-world (Staiti 2010, 133). In relation to this there are what Husserl calls fundamental generative features (*das Urgenerative*). All life-worlds are constituted, for example, on the basis of shared biological needs that direct our acting (*Hua* XV, 433-36). Similarly, although this may take shape in different ways, it is a structural characteristic that there is a sense of the earth as a foundation below us, the expanse of heaven above us, and so on (Husserl 1940, 319; *Hua* XXIX, 38).

While Husserl seeks the universality he takes as his goal in the common structure of all life-worlds, not all commonalities between life-worlds can be the source of a properly universal sense of the world nor are they necessarily rational. A common cultural content can be universal in fact, while not being so in principle. While the common constitutive features of the life-world are crucial in our understanding of life-worlds other than our own as Lohmar has emphasized (1998, 215), they do not account for the movement of universalization from the particular life-world to a world with a universal sense.

What is crucial for the universal sense of the world is a more fundamental level of the life-world. It is not some object or region of objects given within the life-world – cultural or otherwise – that might be shared between worlds, as this would already move in the direction of an objective science overlooking the life-world itself (C, 138-39), but the life-world as horizon for any object. This horizon is *pre-given* in the alterations of the life-world’s manners of givenness (C, 154). What is universal in the life-world is thus not something present *in* all worlds which they have in common, but precisely the sense of an infinite and indeterminate horizon against which things can become determinate. This horizon entails that there is, in principle, always at least an incipient extension of the life-world beyond the limits of any particular cultural world which as such is a partially determined, ‘filled in’ horizon. The life-world is an already (partially) constituted configuration of meaning that itself relies on a more universal horizon for its constitution (see Ferrarin 2015, 89). This latter horizon in principle goes beyond the limitation of any empirical particulars that would determine the life-world as a particular world, as an empirical anthropological type.

It is clear that there are two very distinct senses of ‘world’ at play here, to the point that Husserl says that the world “exists in ‘contradiction’ with itself” (*Hua* XV, 380). Aware of these different senses, although not always adhering to this distinction (see Ferrarin 2015, 88), he at times distinguishes between the life-world, in the sense of a particular, concrete

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cultural world, and what he calls the "world in general," that is, the world as horizon (C, 382). The latter can be seen as embracing all layers of the life-world and as its most fundamental layer. This distinction is crucial as it enables the project of actively shaping the life-world in terms of the world as horizon, suspending the contrast between them. This project is instantiated when the world in its horizational, universal sense in a manner of speaking enters history and shows the relativity of any particular life-world (*Hua* XXXIX, 55-56). This is precisely what Husserl says took place in the shift of culture in ancient Greece from a finite to an infinite mode of historical existence; the shift from a self-enclosed society in a particular cultural world to a form of universalization that incorporates the sense of the world as horizon into the very being of an existing life-world (*VL*, 279; *Hua* VIII, 200).

Concretely, this takes place in the discussed double move of critique and rationalization. As based on the world as horizon, this is a process that can never fully be completed. It is a teleological idea that is passively present in all experience and that can actively be taken up in the struggle for ever-increasing rationality and universality in the attempt to constitute the one world for all. Husserl's rationalist teleology is thus already present in the horizon-structure of experience. It is implicit within all life-worlds as its "fundamental category" (*Hua* Mat. IX, 187). The universal sense of the world is thus to be found in or can emerge from within the particular life-worlds, as many have noted (Landgrebe 1940, 49-50; Gasché 2009, 35; Miettinen 2011, 97; Moran 2011, 492; Staiti 2014, 286).

The idea of the world at stake in Husserl's rationalist teleology is thus a goal motivated by experience itself. Insofar as this universal sense of the world becomes an explicit goal taken up within a particular life-world, there no longer are just two senses of 'world' in play – concrete life-world and world as horizon – but three. This is because the universal sense of the world posited as a goal for the concrete life-world is not simply the same as the world as horizon as fundamental layer of the life-world. The world as horizon is not something constituted or to be constituted, but "a universal movement and synthesis in the movement of all my representations [*Vorstellungen*]" (*Hua* XXIX, 268; see also *Hua* XV, 235). It is the constituting activity that leads to the correlate goal-idea of a unitary world which would be the to-be-constituted object of this synthesis through a "critique of a universal experience that is to restore unity to all homeworlds that are to be synthetically connected" (*Hua* XV, 235). The question is what the status of this goal is and to what extent it is phenomenologically justified. The notions of the life-world and the world as horizon may have come about through phenomenological inquiry, but this is less clear for the goal that follows from this, as it is not given in experience, but motivated by it.

2.3.2 Teleology and horizon

The teleological nature of the world is an essential part of Husserl's solution to the crisis. It is what provides humankind with its infinite task, the continual striving for ever-increasing rationality, never leaving it satisfied with the current state of affairs. The goal is not something we can ever fully arrive at. It can never fully be given, because it has its basis in the horizational

structure of the world that allows for the ever further extension of experience. As such, the goal is an “infinitely distant and unattainable idea, of which only the form, as an absolute norm for the construction of all starting points, is given” (C, 305). As said, we can distinguish between the world as horizon itself and the idea of the realization of the universality it indicates in a concrete life-world always still to be achieved. The former guarantees the possibility of a continual extension of the life-world beyond its particular givenness, but the question is what justifies the possibility that this can be concretely realized, even only partially, in the way that Husserl needs it to address the crisis.

In the *Crisis* or elsewhere, there is no discussion of what this world that Husserl takes as his goal would look like concretely. It is a purely formal idea without any definable content. Nonetheless, Husserl does give some indications, calling it “a supranationality of a completely new sort,” a “spreading synthesis of nations,” and an “ideally directed total society” (VL, 289). As discussed, what he aims for is not any definite state of society, but a shape which best suits the further pursuit of this infinite task. This is to result in a more rational and arguably a more meaningful world – at least more meaningful than the naturalistic worldview can account for. Importantly, this teleology is to converge on some form of unity as to address the crisis of spirit. Such a rational unity, whatever form it might take, would function as his safeguard to relativism, allowing him to overcome the idea of an ultimately fragmented humankind through the universality of reason.

However, the idea of the world that Husserl takes as his goal is problematic and a look at this guiding idea of unity will make that clear. Although rationality and unity are traditionally taken to go together,⁸¹ in the *Crisis* Husserl does not give explicit arguments for why rationality entails unity, for why there can be *only one* rational conception of the world that is his goal. His rationalist teleology is based on the world as horizon, which allows for the superseding of any particular cultural world, but this by no means automatically entails the possibility of a single, universal world for all. There might be different, equally rational ways the world can take shape without these ways converging on each other. It has been remarked by some that this idea of a unitary goal might be Husserl’s greatest presupposition, and one that remains unclarified in his work, including by Patočka (*IHP*, 169; see also Soffer 1996, 115).

The claim in what follows is that the idea of the unity of the world and ultimately the idea of his goal as such – at least of its concrete possibility – is not properly justified. As several commentators have noted, at times Husserl treats the world in the sense of horizon, that is, as constituting or constitution-guiding, as a world to be constituted (Landgrebe 1974, 124; Steinbock 1995, 99-102; Welton 2000, 343). This allows Husserl to treat his ideal world as

⁸¹ “This is the profound significance of ‘reason,’ in the sense in which Kant distinguishes it from the understanding: the understanding applies itself to objects, embodies itself in the works of thought, it is already in dispersion. Reason is the supreme goal of unifying thoughts and works, unifying mankind, unifying our conception of virtue and happiness” (Ricoeur 2007a, 175-76). Importantly for the problematic at hand, Ricoeur goes on to call this unity indispensable, but formal, without any intuition that would fulfil this empty form (2007a, 176, 192-93).

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an object, that is, as something with a coherent, unified sense. This makes sense insofar as to experience something horizontally means to experience it as manifesting an underlying unity, as Mensch put it (1988, 353). But this in itself is, as we will see, no guarantee for future success of this process, in particular such as Husserl seems to imagine the outcome of this process.

Even if Husserl acknowledges the essential impossibility of a completed constitution of the world he takes as his goal, his reliance on its possible future, coherent, unified sense goes against the very idea of a horizon. A horizon is not an object with any form of synthetic unity, as Husserl himself is very much aware: "The world [...] does not exist as *an* entity, as an object, but exists with such uniqueness that the plural makes no sense when applied to it. Every plural, and every singular drawn from it, presupposes the world-horizon" (C, 143). It will be argued that for the same reason that it does not make sense to talk of the world in the plural, it strictly speaking does not make sense to talk about it as a concrete singular in the sense of an object either. That is, the world as horizon is not a thing to which these categories seem applicable. Treating it as such nonetheless, even as an ever-to-be-constituted object, means implicitly transforming it into a possibly unified, determined state. Although the full determination, the actual closure of this teleology, is constantly deferred, the very idea of a closure is fundamentally incompatible with the idea of the world as horizon. There is thus a fundamental tension between the world as horizon and the world as goal that is motivated by this horizon. The latter is not only not given in experience, but might be in conflict with it. If this is the case, it might be that Husserl – although he attributes a formal status devoid of content to it – still attributes too much to his goal, specifically, as will be argued, its unity.

The problem is that Husserl's rationalist teleology can only work as intended by relying on this idea of unity provided by treating the world as an object. If there is literally nothing, no final state at the end, what would this teleology be converging upon? There needs to be something to provide a measure to the process of overcoming a plurality of cultural worlds to a single world with a universal sense. Such a measure could only be provided by a concrete conception of this universal sense, that is, of the world in whose image the life-world is to take shape; or by a measure inherent in this teleology itself that would specify the direction of its development, that is, the universal – or rather, universalizing – sense provided by the world as horizon. It is clear that Husserl opts for the latter, but in doing so he arguably oversteps the boundaries of what this world as horizon can properly justify.

This can be shown on the basis of the difference between two kinds of horizon and two kinds of corresponding teleologies that are to be found in Husserl's analyses of the structure of experience. As will have become clear from the preceding and has been noted by others (Vásquez 1996, 6; 101; Staiti 2014, 285; Staehler 2017, 146-147, 175), the rationalist teleology that Husserl takes to be the task of European humanity is, in a way, a large-scale version or extension of the teleological nature of experience. This teleological nature of experience is found in what Husserl calls the internal and external horizons of objects of

experience. These two kinds of horizons roughly correspond to the difference between objects of experience and the world as horizon of experience. Importantly, they can be used to show precisely how the world in the sense of horizon is not like an object and how Husserl nonetheless seems to attribute features to the world as if it were an object.

A central idea of Husserl's phenomenology is that objects are never fully given in experience, but always in perspective. We always only perceive a particular side, a particular aspect, etc. Nonetheless, we have an awareness of the object as a whole. This predelineation of the object as a whole, an "*indeterminateness*" with a "*determinate structure*" is its internal horizon (CM, 45). On its basis we go beyond the multiplicity actually given in experience "toward a unity which 'appears' continually in the change of the modes of its givenness" (EJ, 80). It is this unity – the object that we perceive 'through' the manifold flux of experience, the object that allows for a "continuing realizing directedness of the ego toward the object" (EJ, 80) – which can always be fleshed out further. Importantly, this means that already on this very fundamental level subjectivity is structured teleologically.

In this respect, it is important to note that although we can never have a 'complete' view of the object, the object itself is there "in person" (*leibhaftig*), as "a pole of identity, always meant expectantly as having a sense yet to be actualized" (CM, 45-46). This actualization can never be completed. Husserl calls perception the attempt to accomplish something which by its very nature it cannot accomplish (APS, 39). Nonetheless, in perception we do approach the object itself as it receives ever further determination.

The object is not constituted in the manifold flux of experience as if it would just be the sum of various independent partial experiences. This process is object-led in the sense that this manifold gains its sense in relation to the object. This entails that they are not just free-floating appearances, but precisely appearances *of* an object. This is not a "blending of externals," but a continual further determination of something that already presents itself (C, 158). The measure for successful integration of the various appearances thus emerges from within this process itself in an interplay between the manifold of appearances and the object of which they are appearances. This means that no principle external to this experience itself is needed to function as a measure for success or failure of the constitution of an object. As Staehler puts it, the goal of this process is "the closer determination of the thing *in the process itself* [emphasis added]" (2017, 47).

The measure for the teleology of the internal horizon is thus present as the object which manifests itself in this experience. Of course, an object is never fully exhausted in this way and this process is open to correction, even to the point that the object can turn out to be completely different from how it was experienced initially. Nonetheless, there is *something* that presents itself and which functions as the measure for either success or failure of its further determination. Not all experiences are equally successful in bringing out the object, but we can take a certain richness of the object as optimal, for example, the best presentation of the object under normal conditions. A certain presentation of the object seen as typical is

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thus interpreted as norm. This optimal givenness is a goal that can itself be further substituted by a better presentation, a higher norm. In other words, the optimal is the intermediary between a simply given presentation as fact and the approximation of an ideal (see Steinbock 1995, 140-45; Welton 2000, 304-5).

This ideal is a peculiar one in that it not so much designates the object itself, but the infinite further determination of the object. It guides this process as an idea in the Kantian sense. As Steinbock notes, it is not a given that every new appearance will be able to be incorporated into the further constitution of the object, because the very idea of this further constitution is generated in this process itself (1995, 145). This idea strictly speaking has no content of its own. Yet, it is based on a given content that prescribes the rule for the further constitution of the object. As Ferrarin has emphasized, unlike for Kant, the rule for this is found in the thing itself, rather than in a concept (2015, 74). Although the internal horizon is thus a formal idea that helps account for the unity of the object, it is one that proceeds on the basis of a given content. This object-led element of the internal horizon entails that we cannot constitute the object in any way whatsoever, but only on its own terms. It vouches for the possibility of a harmonious synthesis of experience.

It is precisely this object-guided aspect that distinguishes the internal horizon from the external horizon. The latter provides a synthesis between objects of experience. As Husserl says: "For consciousness the individual thing is not alone" but "one out of the total group of simultaneously perceived things" (C, 162). The external horizon allows for the extension of experience from object to object and region to region. The crucial difference with the internal horizon is that although both are regulative principles prefiguring and ordering experience, the measures according to which they operate are very different. The external horizon has no object or content to it. It is not itself an object waiting to become determinate, thematic, or to present any objective sense itself (see Steinbock 1995, 108; Dodd 2004, 152-53; De Warren 2015b, 153). As opposed to the life-world, which already has some content partially determining it, the world as horizon is an openness that cannot be identified with any content. As Husserl says: "It persists in this openness" (C, 320). It is "devoid of any intuitively given framework that would require only more differentiated ways of sketching it in" (APS, 43).

Of course, the synthesis performed by either horizon may fail. We may have seen something wrong, a perspective may have been misleading, and in extreme cases, our experience may break up into a confused discordance of sensations. But if there is an object involved, it is this very object that presents itself in a new light which shows us we were wrong. It can push back against mistaken views on it. The same goes for the life-world, which is a horizon, but also a configuration of meaning constituted in a particular way with a particular cultural content. The ideal unity indicated by the external horizon or the world as horizon, however, does not have any content that can function in this manner. The world that Husserl takes as his goal based on this horizon thus lacks any measure on the basis of which its constitution can be viewed as proper or improper. The manner in which its constitution

takes shape is wholly contingent, not based on any given content or any object-sense, but on the support provided by intersubjectivity, as will be discussed below.

At times, Husserl fails to properly distinguish between the two kinds of horizon, in one stroke calling both object and world “infinite ideas correlating to a complete synthesis of possible experiences” (CM, 62). This should not lead us to overlook the fact that the constitution of an object and the constitution of the world are two distinct processes. Although both take the form of an infinite teleology, as Tengelyi has pointed out there are two different kinds of infinity at play here: actual and potential (2005, 480). The former, corresponding to the internal horizon, allows for an ever-increasing determination of the object. With every new perspective on it, we get closer to the thing itself despite never reaching it. The external horizon, however, operates according to a potential infinity. This is an infinity without any limit that can be approached and that could structure it, that is, without any principle guaranteeing harmony among its parts. Tengelyi is right in claiming that it is one of the most important features of Husserl’s account that “it is not the world as a whole but each single thing in its particular reality which is considered by him as an Idea in a Kantian sense” (2005, 493).

However, Husserl himself does not always strictly adhere to this distinction between different kinds of horizon. At various phases in his work he models his theory of the world as horizon on the givenness of objects.⁸² It has been suggested that Husserl makes this mistake of confusing the world as horizon for a totality of objects or a sort of total object because to some extent he was always under the spell of the kind of synthesis so successful in the one-sided rationalism exemplified by the natural sciences (see Waldenfels 1982, 32-33; Welton 1991, 602; Buckley 1992, 248; Held 2013, 73). While Husserl increasingly criticizes this mistake of treating the world in a way not proper to its horizontal character, even in his later work he is susceptible to this mistake.

It is the conflation between the two different kinds of horizon that provides Husserl with his goal of a unitary world as a measure for his rationalist teleology. Yet, as mentioned, when accounting for this goal he does not explicitly rely on the teleological structure of experience, although this still plays a role. Perhaps this is because, in the end, he is aware that the world as horizon cannot be treated as an object. But if the notion of horizon is insufficient to account for his goal and if he does not explicitly make use of his account of subjectivity in arguing for it, how does he try to justify it? In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl provides an explicit argument based on the intersubjective nature of the constitution of the world.

⁸² This is the case in *Ideas I* and in the *Cartesian Meditations* as noted by Carr (1974, 154) and Welton (2000, 345).

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2.3.3 The unity of the world

In the *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl explicitly addresses the constitution of the one world for all as a necessarily intersubjective constitution.⁸³ Intersubjectivity is crucial to his account of experience. Objects are constituted through a manifold of appearances, but this is not an individual process accomplished by isolated egos. Others provide perspectives on the same objects available to me and thus support my own constitution of these objects which thereby becomes an intersubjective process. The fundamental incompleteness of our experience requires others to fill it out and to provide a stable background that is independent of any individual, finite constituting capacity (see Mensch 1988, 160). A plurality of constituting egos provides a measure of stability to what is essentially a never-ending, contingent process that is always susceptible to future refutation and outright failure. That is why it is “*ultimately a community of monads, which, moreover, (in its communalized intentionality) constitutes the one identical world*” (CM, 107). Intersubjectivity is so crucial to the constitution of the world that Husserl says that in the absence of others, the world would lose its complete sense (*Hua* XXIX, 198).

If the world is constituted intersubjectively, then it makes sense to claim that all egos must be taking part in the shaping of the same world, even though no individual ego possesses it as a whole. Of course, Husserl allows for abnormalities, deviations from this multi-egoic but nonetheless single process of constitution. Yet, any abnormalities are taken by Husserl to only be possible on the basis of a prior normality against which it can be seen as abnormal (CM, 125). There is room for abnormalities and for not everyone having the same, identical experience of the world. Yet, although no one has the exact same experience of the world, in principle an identical world is the correlate of the intersubjective process of constitution as a whole. Everyone shares in the constitution of this one world of which each world-experience is thus only a relative approximation which – when this is taken up as a task – can converge on it in infinity,

However, this argument for the unity of the world that is to be constituted relies on the impossibility of a plurality of separate monadic communities. Although Husserl is quite insistent on the idea that there can only exist a single community of monads, this is not all that evident. The existence of multiple communities is inconceivable to him, “a pure absurdity” (CM, 140). But can we not say that it is only recently that humankind became aware of itself as a whole? Even now there exist communities in South America and Southeast Asia that live in complete isolation from others. It seems problematic to hold that they somehow

⁸³ In the context of the *Cartesian Meditations*, it might seem Husserl is only talking about a unified physical world, because of his emphasis on “*only one Objective world, only one Objective time, only one Objective space, only one Objective Nature*” (CM, 140). However, later in the text he makes it explicit that this involves “*all the problems of accidental factualness, of death, of fate, of the possibility of a ‘genuine’ human life demanded as ‘meaningful’ in a particular sense among them, therefore, the problem of the ‘meaning’ of history, and all the further and still higher problems. We can say that they are the ethico-religious problems, but stated in the realm where everything that can have a possible sense for us must be stated*” (CM, 156). In other words, what Husserl addresses here is precisely the world insofar as it has a place in his solution to the crisis of spirit.

take part in the constitution of our world or we in theirs. And even more extreme cases of separation are imaginable. Why, then, is the very idea of a plurality of monadic communities an absurdity for Husserl?

The argument Husserl provides is an answer to Ricoeur's question: "In' which consciousness is the plurality of consciousnesses posited?" (2007b, 150). Husserl's answer: "In my sphere of ownness, naturally" (CM, 107). Despite his emphasis on transcendental intersubjectivity, he cannot conceive of the plurality of monads except on the basis of a "constitutive primal monad relative to them" (CM, 140). This primacy of a single monad is crucial to his argument for the impossibility of a plurality of communities: "Accordingly they belong in truth to a single universal community, which includes me and comprises unitarily all the monads and groups of monads that can be conceived as co-existent" (CM, 140). While this accounts for the unity of the community of monads, this community is not that of all monads, but of all monads *insofar as they are conceived by the primal monad*:

For indeed the two intersubjectivities are not absolutely isolated. *As imagined by me*, each of them is in necessary communion with me (or with me in respect of a possible variant of myself) as the constitutive primal monad relative to them. (CM, 140, emphasis added)

Unity is here presupposed by relying on the synthetic nature of subjectivity – the fact that it is a fundamental feature that we experience everything as belonging to the same world – but not justified insofar as there can be communities of monads not conceived by the primal monad, as in the case of communities closed off from the rest of humankind of which we are unaware. Even if we grant that the mere thought of being in communion with possible other communities to some extent includes them into my world, this does not entail any real co-constitution of the same world. They would be included as possible others within my world, but not have an active part in it.

If there were separate communities and without an object to guide their progression in the same direction, they would *ipso facto* be constituting separate worlds. The measure of constitution lies in the process alone, hence a plurality of distinct processes of constitution might operate according to different measures or – if it is granted that they operate according to the same formal measure – different ways of proceeding according to the same measure leading to different worlds. This would be the case for separate monadic communities which would proceed on the basis of their own distinct, particular life-worlds and would thus start out with different material to work with, so to speak.

While it may be true that other communities and their worlds are only *de facto* separated and can in principle always form a single community, the question is whether they will always do so based on the same measure. As Staiti has noted, however deep they may be, cultural differences "cannot prevent the tendency to concordance, rooted in the deepest of the intentional functioning of transcendental subjectivity, from extending its activity beyond the constraints of pure perceptual nature" (2010, 140). But that the constitution of a single world

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– of not just perceptual nature, but also of culture – factually takes place, does not also entail that this would be the world in the universal sense Husserl is after. We can imagine the dominance of a single cultural world over all of humankind or a Gadamerian fusion of horizons between worlds, but such a world would be universal in fact, not in principle.

Moreover, as Soffer remarks, Husserl's analyses of intersubjectivity show that *something* must be in common or constituted as in common to form a community, but it does not show that this necessarily has to be the same in all cases or for all involved in the process. What one community shares with a second in their mutual constitution of the world is not necessarily the same as what is shared with a third community. Rather than constituting a single world, this communalization might form a tapestry of a variety of partial worlds. As Soffer concludes: "Therefore it does not show that the experience of the 'one' world and of the particular worlds as apprehensions of this one world are phenomenologically necessary" (1991, 184-85).

If there is nothing like an object to guarantee the actual unity of the world Husserl takes as his goal, there is nothing guaranteeing that the process of rationalization and universalization will end up at the same world for all peoples engaged in this project. Of course, it is likely they will through contact with each other, but in principle this does not have to be the case. Although Husserl calls it a pure absurdity, we can imagine completely separated peoples engaged in teleologies that are formally identical but that do not converge on the same world.

This means that Husserl *can* justify his rationalist teleology, the process of universalization, through his account of experience as inherently horizontal and indefinitely extendable and able to incorporate new experiences. But there is no experiential basis for his goal as a particular – that is, singular, rational, albeit not pre-determined – way in which this has to happen. If the unity this goal is to provide is not justified, neither is the move from the plurality of particular life-worlds to a single world with a universal sense.

Husserl says that the harmony of the monads that would guarantee the harmony of the world is not a "metaphysical" hypothesizing of monadic harmony" but fails to properly justify it otherwise (CM, 107-8). Of course, if ultimately the (transcendental) point of view that exposes this harmony is that of a primal monad, it seems that this harmony finds its sources in the synthesizing nature of subjectivity. The reason that the world is constituted as a unitary whole for us and that it is this world and not any other, is because the entire transcendental project based on the central actuality of the ego annuls other possibilities, as De Santis has noted (2018, 80). There would then be something to the claim that Husserl's primal monad plays a similar role to God in Leibniz' pre-established harmony and there is evidence in Husserl's work that points to a religious dimension to his solution to the crisis.

2.4 Motivation, Faith, Homelessness

2.4.1 Practical reason and faith

As said, Husserl does not explicitly justify the world he takes as his goal by recourse to experience. Arguably, the account of history in the *Crisis* is an attempt to show that his rationalist teleology is inherent to the development of history. Yet, this must be understood in the right way. Husserl does not conceive of his teleology as an autonomous process of historical development. He outlines a path from the Greek birth of philosophy to the Renaissance, into modernity, and up to the establishment of phenomenology itself as working towards the realization of his goal, but this is not a metaphysical claim about a necessary course of history. It is about the establishment and subsequent re-establishments of an insight regarding the world. It is the task that follows from this insight more so than history itself which is of importance to Husserl.

What ultimately matters for Husserl in his philosophical account of history is the way it can be a source of motivation, the way past philosophers can inspire him regardless of the historical truth of his interpretations (*Hua* XXIX, 47-51). There are many remarks that show that Husserl – as far as its importance for his philosophy was concerned – was not that concerned with the factual accuracy of his account of history. He says we need to take it with a grain of salt (*Hua* XXVII, 84) and explicitly rejects a scientific concern for history (*C*, 393). The “poetic invention of the history of philosophy” serves the philosopher “in understanding himself and his aim” and that “which makes up philosophy ‘as such’ as a unitary *telos*” (*C*, 395). In part, his account of the history is a story that motivates his account of what philosophy should be.

As Hart has pointed out, the semi-fictitious nature of Husserl’s account of history thus does not make his goal itself a mere fiction (1989, 164). If the aim of Husserl’s use of history is to motivate, then it would be wrong to measure it by the standard of factual history. History cannot have a goal in itself insofar as “goals, tasks are only held by persons that pose tasks to themselves. In similar fashion that is the case where we take over a task from tradition” (*Hua* XXIX, 373). Even where we find goals in history, it is not their mere presence that makes them goals for us. Historical goals, precisely *as* goals, are there only insofar as we intervene in history in the attempt to shape it (*Hua* XXIX, 397). Husserl’s goal is invoked in a struggle for a better world, indeed, an infinitely better world. By definition it exceeds anything history has to offer. More often than not history seems to be going against this goal, to the point that Husserl can call his task “a struggle between patent reason and the powers of historical reality” (*Hua* XXVII, 106). It is thus no wonder that Husserl mentions that fictional accounts can motivate just as well or better than historical reality (*Hua* XXIX, 50-51).

Husserl needs to show that his rationalist teleology is a universal project that anyone can take up. A personal motivational account – for example, *my* reading of Plato led me to see history and philosophy as being so and so – will not suffice for this, as it by no means

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provides a rational, universal basis for his project. Soffer has suggested that the *Crisis* can perhaps be read as Husserl's attempt to bring his personal motivational history and factual history together (1996, 114). Of course, if this is what Husserl is doing – whether consciously or unconsciously – this is not how history is to be done. As Ricoeur has said: "If philosophy whispers the password into the historian's ear, what good is this detour through history?" (2007b, 154).⁸⁴

Understanding Husserl's detour through history, however, sheds light on the impossibility of supporting his goal by historical or indeed any kind of fact – including experiential fact. Instead of any fact in which it can be grounded, it relies on a motivation, a will to be rational and to make history rational. Rather than looking for a ground outside of itself, we can say that Husserl's rationalism is a consequence of humankind "understanding that it is rational in seeking to be rational" (C, 341). Husserl even says that "the absolutely rational person is regarding its rationality *causa sui*" (*Hua* XXVII, 36). This leaves us with the question of the nature, status, and – if the seemingly paradoxical nature of it is permitted – the source of this *causa sui* rationality, of this will to be rational. This question is of particular importance in light of the fact that we are never "the absolutely rational person" and thus have to motivate or sustain this will to rationality when confronted with a historical situation that calls rationality itself into question.

Husserl sees that the world – historically and in his life – does not live up to his ideal to the extent that he considers doubting this ideal itself:

Is it not better to say: Worldly life is a delusion, purposeless, nothing comes of it – ? I cannot conclusively affirm my life in the human community and the world, I can do that only when I believe in the sense of the world. "Theoretically" I have no reason for that. I cannot prove anything here based on experience (Kant). Experience teaches that, when in part many things also succeed, as a whole everything still fails. Nothing is definitive, every finality is relative. Universal decline devours everything seemingly eternally valuable. (*Hua* VIII, 355)

Husserl's crisis-sentiment here extends beyond the factual non-existence of his ideal. There are signs that it might be impossible. This can be highlighted based on a recurring and deeply personal example in Husserl's writings on ethics. On the one hand, there is the love of a parent for its child. The child is uniquely the object of its love, irreplaceable in its singular existence and as such represents an absolute value. Yet, Husserl equally speaks of the love for the fatherland, a love for which one can be called to war to sacrifice one's life (*Hua* XLII, 458). This indicates the possibility of an insolvable conflict between values, "where the sense of the choice consists in the incompatibility between disjunctive values" (*Hua* XLII 466). If such fundamental conflicts between the highest values are possible, it might not only be the case

⁸⁴ Insofar as Husserl read too much of his teleology into history out of practical concerns, it should be noted, as Ricoeur did, that he cannot give full precedence to his teleology over factual history (2007b, 171). He cannot fully disregard the latter, because otherwise there could be no crisis. Crisis can be seen as the moment where the powers of historical reality overtake the rationalist teleology, where it is shown that the latter is not (yet) real.

that the world is not yet rational, but that there is no final way to resolve certain dilemmas, that the final concordance which is to be found in the constitution of the world that Husserl takes as his goal is impossible.⁸⁵

Around him, Husserl sees more evidence of fundamental conflict than of the possibility of his goal:

What can bind us to our goal? Is it only the foolhardiness of striving toward a goal which is beautiful but only vaguely possible, one which is not definitely impossible but still, in the end, imaginary, one which gradually, after the experience of millennia, finally begins to bear a very great inductive probability of being unattainable? Or does what appears from the outside to be a failure, and on the whole actually is one, bring with it a certain evidence of practical possibility and necessity, as the evidence of an imperfect, one-sided, partial success, but still a success in this failure? However, if such an evidence ever was alive, in our time at any rate it has become weak, has lost its vitality. (C, 391)

Remarkably, it is from *within* the utmost uncertainty that Husserl suggests a “practical possibility and necessity” of his goal. In his later writings on ethics and metaphysics he explicitly relies on practical, rather than theoretical reason to support his goal (see also Kern 1964, 302; Bernet et al. 1989, 212). He even invokes Kant’s theory of postulates as containing a “deep truth” and as providing a source of strength for his thought (*Hua* XLII, 217; see also *Hua* XLII 215, 242). Fragments such as the following are telling:

The world must have a “sense.” In all individual and communal [*völkischen*] destiny there must lie a unitary and intelligible sense – philosophy must construct this sense in relation to the irrationality of the fact [of the world]. This is irrationality over and against theoretical-practical rationality. What must be believed, so the world can still have a sense, so that life can remain reasonable within it? The content of this faith cannot be justified through “theoretical” knowledge, but this faith is justifiable from the motive of a possible practical life of reason. (*Hua* XLII, 238)

Husserl’s use of teleology as a rational bulwark against relativism and the senselessness of the world is thus deeply connected with a faith in reason that is not itself theoretically justifiable.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Relevant for what will follow, Husserl relates this dilemma to the Abrahamic sacrifice, suggesting that it is faith, not reason which is to provide solace and reconciliation between seemingly contradicting values here.

⁸⁶ The aspect of faith on which Husserl relies seems to be confirmed by studies of the notions of teleology and progress as they occur in modernity. These studies are independent of Husserl’s use of these notions (although in some cases likely influenced by it). Importantly, they do not look into Husserl’s work and can thus be seen as external verification of the connection between teleology and faith set out here on the basis of Husserl’s work.

There seems to be a broad consensus that the origin of the teleological ideas we find in modernity is religious and specifically biblical; the famous thesis that the teleology that forms such an important part of modern consciousness is in some form or another a secularized form of Judeo-Christian teleology (see Bury 1920, 22; Löwith 1949; Nisbet 1979, 16). The main critique of this idea seems to come from Blumenberg (1983), but he seems to overlook certain important developments that other scholars have stressed, such as the shaping influence of Joachim of Fiore (see Löwith 1949, 156; Voegelin 2000a, 176). Voegelin has shown that the roots of these ideas go back further, although he is in agreement with the other mentioned authors as to the general structure and inherent religious dimension in them (Voegelin 2000b, 51).

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Throughout the *Crisis* he makes use of the terminology of faith, which in light of the quoted remarks seems to be more than mere rhetoric. He speaks of “the faith in ‘absolute’ reason, through which the world has its meaning” and identifies a lack of such a faith as the cause of the crisis (C, 10, 13). As Buckley has noted, whereas this aspect of faith is only hinted at in the *Crisis*, writings such as the *Kaizo* articles bring this aspect out more explicitly (Buckley 1992, 141) and this has been corroborated by other recent publications of Husserl’s *Nachlass* (see in particular *Hua* XLII).

It is important to note that this recourse to faith is not a sudden irruption of irrationality in an otherwise rational project, but a practical necessity for its realization. Husserl does not refute, but *refuses* the irrationality of the world (see e.g. *Hua* XLII, 379). Yet, this refusal to accept unreason over reason becomes problematic when it is connected to a faith in God.

2.4.2 The religious dimension of Husserl’s solution

This theological element is hard to pin down exactly, because there is not necessarily a robust and coherent philosophy of religion to be found in Husserl’s writings. In part, this is because Husserl does not set out to develop his philosophy as a philosophy of religion or as a theology. He calls it a “nonconfessional” (*Hua* XLII, 25) even “an atheistic path towards God” (*Hua* XXXIX, 166-67) not based on revelation. Philosophy is said to *autonomously* and *necessarily* arrive at these considerations, which causes Husserl to say that in infinity philosophy and theology overlap (*Hua* XLII, 260). His writings on this are fragmentary, not always consistent with each other, yet prevalent and important enough as to include them in any overall interpretation of Husserl’s work.⁸⁷ They are present not as addition to or embellishment of his philosophy, but pertain to its most foundational elements, in particular its teleological aspects, both as pertaining to history and to the teleological structure of subjectivity.

Husserl seems to associate God with his teleology in various ways. At times, he equates the idea of God with the realization of his goal beyond all finite instantiations of it (*Hua* XXVII, 33-34). Elsewhere, God is not the goal itself, but the drive or motivation behind the teleology (*Hua* XV, 385; *Hua* XLII, 203).⁸⁸ God would thus play a crucial role in Husserl’s project. He goes as far as calling the teleological structure of subjectivity the “divine will”

The relation between religion and teleology is thus not a mere historical, contingent fact, but a structural one. Teleologies are intrinsically oriented towards the future, inherently involving an aspect of hope or faith (see Bury 1920, 4; Löwith 1949, 6; Jaspers 1953, 213; Voegelin 2000a, 187; Ricoeur 2007a, 95). Koselleck has perhaps phrased it best when he said that they “compensate for a deficit of experience through a projection of the future” (2006a, 82). This establishes, in the words of Ricoeur, a “relation between the duty of thought and a kind of ontological hope” (2007a, 54). This seems to fit the analysis of Husserl’s work in this section.

⁸⁷ Chun Lo (2008) provides the most extensive overview of this dimension to Husserl’s work. See also Dupré (1968), Mensch (1988, 368-74), Melle (2002), Held (2010), and Drummond (2018, 149-51). Finegan discusses Husserl’s place in the so-called ‘theological turn’ of phenomenology which is often seen as a theological hijacking of Husserl’s project, but which is more in alignment with Husserl’s own thought than is often presumed (2012).

⁸⁸ Husserl’s various associations of God with either *telos* or teleology makes sense insofar as these cannot be separated from each other. They can be seen as two different perspectives on the idea in the Kantian sense.

2.4 Motivation, Faith, Homelessness

inside each of us (*Hua* XV, 381). While this might be at odds with the atheistic and nonconfessional path he set out, it is not all that peculiar to see such a meaning-giving, ordering element in our subjectivity on the basis of which one can strive for reason in a world that otherwise would be irrational and senseless, as a divine principle. Husserl's project is not just about a more rational world; he sees this to also be a more beautiful and ethical world, where an order is possible in which we can find not only happiness (*Glück*), but bliss (*Seligkeit*) (*Hua* VII, 16). Rather than the conflicting values Husserl sees around him and that he experienced first-hand, this would be a world with a coherent order of values forming a "synthesis of all relative values, in which an infinite absolute value realizes itself," which Husserl can only understand on the basis of the idea of God (*Hua* XLII, 203). The question is to what extent this reliance on a theological motif is still phenomenological and whether it might not undermine Husserl's project.

While God cannot be an object of experience, he is 'experienced' in the teleology of subjectivity. Husserl himself puts this in scare quotes as this is clearly not any ordinary form of experience (*Hua* XLII, 242). From the perspective of the constitution of the world, it very much seems *as if* there is a highest meaning-giving principle akin to God, at work:

What does "a teleological world" mean? The monadic system must be thus, that all its constitutive elements, connections, all subjective empirical capacities, etc., are ordered in a way as if a personal (or analogical to a personal) principle, which is directed towards the realization of the highest possible value of a universal monadic system, had created it as such. Accordingly an optimal world etc. As if an aristotelian God belonged to the monadic system as the entelechy of its internal development with manifold relative entelechies, all organized in Eros towards an "idea of the good." (*Hua* XLII, 242; see also *Hua* XLII 249-50)

God is thus experienced in this "Eros" that motivates us to engage in the rational teleology. Crucially, if this drive is part of the fundamental makeup of subjectivity, this means that the underlying motivation-structures of philosophy are universal, despite uneven development or divergent motivational trends among individuals or communities, which is precisely what was discussed to be needed for Husserl's solution to the crisis. As Soffer remarks, it is then only natural that once locally instituted within a given community, the task of this teleology will spread (1996, 110-11). It entails that "to the facticity of human existence always and necessarily belongs the idea of reason of a community of peace, and with it a realm of agreeing goals, and a world of humans, that everyone can affirm" (*Hua* XXIX, 270-71).

Although Husserl's rationalist teleology finds its source in the teleological structure of subjectivity itself, "the human being as human being is burdened with original sin, which belongs to the essence [*Wesensform*] of human beings" (*Hua* XXVII, 44). As said, we are never the absolutely rational person and as such cannot always sustain or actively take up the teleology present in us. Accordingly, Dupré has interpreted Husserl's use of God as a counter-measure against the contingency of his infinite task (1968, 202). It is the faith in God which as Eros, love, takes on the form of a motivation for Husserl's goal. Providing a similar

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reading to Dupré, Held sees an analogy with Plato's Idea of the Good beyond all being (2010, 727), a connection that Husserl himself also draws (*Hua* XLII, 251). As such, God would be the guarantor of the eternal possibility of Husserl's teleology, guaranteeing at the very least the possibility that a rational world could come to be even when humankind factually lapses into unreason and even when there is no further justification to take up an infinite task.

The presence of this religious dimension to Husserl's work and the role it plays in it make it plausible that instead of wavering in his adherence to the ideal of reason, he found a faith in its possibility through a faith in God. It is only an external guarantor, the role of which is taken on by God, that keeps his teleology on a straight path towards his goal as concretely the same goal for everyone. Husserl thus presupposes God as the "final meaning-giving total principle for truth, for being" (Ms. E III 4, 36a). Without such a principle there is nothing to guarantee the possibility of his ideal in the way that he conceives of it. As he says:

I can only be blessed, I can only be that in all suffering, misfortune, in all irrationality of my surrounding world, when I have faith that God exists and that this world is God's world. And if I want to hold on to the absolute ought with all the power of my soul – which is itself an absolute volition – then I must have absolute faith in his existence. Faith is the absolute and highest demand. (*Hua* XLII, 203)

Husserl's reliance on practical reason and faith make sense if we look at how he accounts for the historical inception of the rational teleology: the clash of different worldviews and the subsequent positing of the one, true, universal world as a goal. While it is easy to see how the experience of such a clash leads to the relativization of our worldviews, it does not automatically lead to the idea that they must be views of a single world, even though we cannot but experience everything as belonging to a single world. The overcoming of a plurality of relative worlds through the positing of a single world is a second step requiring its own justification. As argued, Husserl seems to do this by treating the world as horizon as a to-be-constituted object. But while this is motivated through the teleological structure of experience itself, there is no such object to actually provide the unity his teleology requires. Without it, his infinite teleology might lead nowhere, or at least not inherently toward the same world for all. It can be called a speculative idea insofar as it exceeds the boundary of what can strictly speaking be justified phenomenologically.

Although it is a speculative idea, this does not necessarily mean that it is wrong and that Husserl's goal is an impossible one. However, it is problematic insofar as it relies on the idea of a divine guarantor which itself cannot be justified but through an act of faith. As Held has remarked, this guarantor cannot fulfil its intended purpose if it does not provide anything real to anchor Husserl's goal in (2010, 735-36). The religious or theological aspects of Husserl's work do not seem to provide a proper justification for doing so. Miettinen has called Husserl's teleology "*post-theological* or *post-metaphysical*" (2013, 23-24). While he has correctly identified its relation to practical reason, Husserl seems to go further here than Miettinen is acknowledging. As Buckley has noted: "Ultimately, Husserl's optimistic rationalism can only

be supported by the theological dimension at work in his philosophy" (1992, 141; see also Melle 2002, 241; Drummond 2018, 150-51). That is not a philosophical sin *per se*, yet if one of the aims of Husserl's specifically phenomenological approach to the crisis was to provide a solid foundation for his solution in the form of a convincing justification or motivation of the rational world he takes as his goal and in which European humanity has lost faith, then this must be seen as a failure insofar as it relies on a religious faith that he cannot properly justify. A crisis of a lack of faith is not easily remedied by having recourse to faith itself.

2.4.3 Rationalism and homelessness

If Husserl has to rely on speculative or religious means to justify or motivate the rational and universal world that is his goal, then this allows us to question not just the unity upon which the plurality of cultural worlds is to converge teleologically, but this world as such. Importantly, this questioning can itself be motivated by Husserl's phenomenological analysis of what makes the life-world a meaningful world in which we can be at home, that is, a homeworld. On the basis of the preceding, Husserl's more strictly phenomenological work can be seen to be in tension with his broader rationalist project, as Carr has also argued (1987, 12).

This tension can be accounted for on the basis of Steinbock's reconstruction of the intended continuation of the project of the *Crisis* beyond the parts that were published. The questions regarding teleology which are fundamental to this project – and which for Husserl are fundamentally connected to the ethico-religious questions – were to be properly discussed only after the clarification of the life-world as a concrete cultural world (Steinbock 1994, 584). If this is the case, it must be considered as a serious possibility that the rationalist project with which Husserl set out and which preceded his analyses of the life-world, could be undermined by his findings regarding the latter. The question can thus be posed how his rational teleology would shape the life-world while bracketing Husserl's assumptions regarding its outcome, his faith in a good outcome, and the dubious introduction of a divine will guiding it. It might result in something very different than what Husserl himself imagined or hoped for, but could not properly justify.

Husserl's rational teleology is entirely formal in nature, more so than the formal nature of the internal horizon of objects. The latter has a measure for its further determination on the basis of a given content or object, but the world as horizon – which was argued to be the foundation of his rational teleology – does not offer any such measure. Operating on the basis of an entirely formal notion, but without a clear sense of how this concretely shapes the life-world, one can wonder whether this might not entail an emptying of its meaning.

What can be called a nihilistic moment is part of the way Husserl accounts for the historical inception of Europe's infinite task. It starts in crisis, in the exposing of the fact that the meaning of the world as given initially was not as absolute as was thought. If the principle on the basis of which this world is to be overcome through the second step of positing a

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different world has now become uncertain, the overcoming of this nihilistic movement has become uncertain as well. The life-world as a homeworld is shaken, but nothing remains to restore this sense of being at home in the world, which was one of the motivations for the project of the *Crisis* as a reaction to the formalization of the world by the sciences. Is, as Buckley has suggested (1992, 248), the rationalization of the life-world on the basis of a purely formal measure not akin to that of which Husserl accuses the sciences?

It would not do justice to Husserl's work if one were to take this as suggesting that Husserl's rationalism entails a dismissal of that which makes the life-world a homeworld. When speaking of philosophy's comportment to the life-world, he explicitly notes two possibilities: "What is traditionally valid is either completely discarded, or its content is taken over philosophically and thereby formed anew in the spirit of philosophical ideality" (*VL*, 280). Husserl opts for the second, not the dismissal of the traditional sense of the world, but as a transformation of it. He has to do this, because, as Miettinen put it, "simply dismissing existing traditions for the sake of a formal ideal would entail that one does away with the very process of constitution that characterizes the community in the first place, the bond that knit together the social fabric," that is, what makes the world a home for us in the first place (2015, 251). While this is certainly not Husserl's intent, the question is whether it nonetheless is not what his position results in.

The crucial question is how philosophical insights can transform the life-world in a fundamental way. That is, the question is how they can contribute to the life-world and not, as Patočka put it, be "*simply an elimination of what is meaningless and contradictory*" (*IHP*, 169). Husserl has made it clear that the accomplishments of subjectivity, such as those of the sciences, can 'flow into' the life-world and become part of its make-up as ground for future activities and accomplishments.⁸⁹ Importantly, he also connects this to his phenomenological

⁸⁹ Carr has noted that this process of sedimentation problematizes Husserl's account along other lines than the one taken here, but with similar results. As discussed, in the *Crisis* Husserl invokes the life-world as a pre-scientific world. Yet, sedimentation seems to entail that not just the sciences, but some of the results of the sciences can become part of the life-world: "we also have at our disposal and also *accept* a certain interpretation of these objects which is the legacy of science" (Carr 1974, 210). Beyond our account of the world, science seems to have an impact on our experience of the world. Carr goes as far as claiming that this may affect the very structure of the life-world and not merely the content, so that there would not even be a common structure for all life-worlds (1974, 210). This seems to be overstating it, as for a life-world to be a life-world there surely must be a common life-world structure. Yet, the problem of how to distinguish between the artificial construct of the world as provided by the sciences and other cultural accomplishments that make up our life-world and our interpretations of it are problematized by this. Husserl goes as far as saying that for the flowing into the life-world of scientific results, it does not matter where these come from, they "may even come from second-hand scientific acquisitions, even false ones, which I get from the newspaper or from school and which I may transform in one way or another in my own motivations or through those of my fellows who accidentally influence me" (*C*, 326). There does not seem to be any essential difference to the way scientific results and cultural accomplishments in general flow into the life-world. If this is the case, it seems that the matter of uncovering a pre-scientific life-world would not only be a matter of going back to a pre-scientific structural layer of the life-world, but back to something like an original life-world historically prior to the effects of science on it or even a world prior to all conceptualizations of it. But that is impossible, as these form a fundamental part of the life-world precisely as the world that we live in. Here we see that the world Husserl is aiming for, whether it is his ideal goal or a 'pure' life-world, might be "a world in which we in a very important sense do not or no longer live" (Carr 1974, 219).

results (*Hua* XXIX, 79-80). Yet, what does this result in? Husserl himself admits that the old naïveté of the life-world can never fully return after the transcendental-phenomenological re-orientation:

As a phenomenologist I can, of course, at any time go back into the natural attitude, back to the straightforward pursuit of my theoretical or other life-interests; I can, as before, be active as a father, a citizen, an official, as a "good European," etc., that is, as a human being in my human community, in my world. As before — and yet not quite as before. For I can never again achieve the old naïveté; I can only understand it. My transcendental insights and purposes have become merely inactive, but they continue to be my own. (*C*, 210)

While this can be seen as an enrichment of our understanding of the life-world, it can also be seen as a fundamentally alienating experience such as was contained in the inception of the rationalist teleology. Husserl's phenomenology provides a deeper understanding of the life-world, but understanding and a sense of being at home are two different things. One might be able to return to the natural attitude and a sense of being at home in the world, but this would be a return to the life-world as a particular cultural world rather than finding a sense of 'homeliness' in the phenomenological perspective.

Perhaps as important as the phenomenological discovery of the life-world is the discovery of the fact that we are not fully at home in it, especially not in the world as such rather than a particular life-world. We get access to the universal sense of the world through the collapse of our life-world, when we are put at a distance from it that reveals that our existence in what we took to be our homeworld might itself be uncanny. Indeed, one can go as far as calling the collapse of a cultural world a form of phenomenological reduction to the world, such as Bernet has suggested (2005, 20). What this reveals about the world is that we might not belong in it on a very fundamental level. As De Warren puts it:

This suggests that the recovery of a transcendental sense of the life-world is achieved through the discovery of the homelessness of transcendental subjectivity, or, in other words, its inhumanity: it is a pole of reference or activity onto which no perspective from within a world has a firm handle and yet without which no world in particular could be constituted. (De Warren 2015b, 152)⁹⁰

Carr hinges much of his criticism on this front on the different conceptions of the life-world in *Experience and Judgment* and the *Crisis*. However, Staiti has convincingly shown that these are intended as distinct projects by Husserl, but often confusedly seen as having the same aims due to Landgrebe's additions to and editing of *Experience and Judgment* (Staiti 2018). In the latter, Husserl/Landgrebe suggests an original life-world underneath its garb of ideas, but Staiti has shown that this is not so much about an original life-world hidden underneath this garb, but about pre-predicative experience as a part of the make-up of the life-world. Despite this common and longstanding confusion that Staiti has helpfully pointed to, the problem remains. This is particularly so in light of a similar analysis provided by Soffer, who notes a similar difference pertaining to the approach to the life-world in the *Crisis* and the supplementary material for the *Crisis*, the latter of which also suggests the return to a historically prior life-world (1996, 111).

⁹⁰ Heidegger, of course, despite his emphasis on human existence as being-in-the-world, also made a great deal about the homelessness of subjectivity and the uncanniness that goes along with it, which as will be discussed had a great influence on Patočka.

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What the preceding indicates is not just that Husserl's project exceeds the boundaries of what he can phenomenologically justify, but that it might involve transcending precisely those features which are constitutive of the life-world as a cultural world, a homeworld, as has been noted by many (Orth 1993, 346; Steinbock 1995, 207; Lohmar 1998, 213-214; Staehler 2017, 183). The cultural world provides us with what we need to move around in the world, perform tasks, go about our business as shaped in the interplay with others. It is a homeworld for us in being constituted together with others and as opposed to the alien worlds of others. Yet, this is what is to be transcended if we follow Husserl's teleology and little indication is given of anything that can replace the role that it plays and the meaning that it has in our lives. As Gasché puts it, the world Husserl takes as his goal is an ahuman one and "precisely its ahumanity secures that it is universally binding for all humans" (2009, 83).

The strength of Husserl's position is simultaneously its flaw. The formal nature of his teleology allows him to skilfully avoid the universal as a mere idealization of any empirical particular which would thus not be a true universal, but have an empirical basis. It allows for the continuous transformation of our world in a never-ending critique of it. Yet, this also seems to entail the uprooting of human existence. Locating the source of the teleological transformation of the life-world in the life-world itself was seen by some as a solution to this problem. Gasché sees this as one of the main roles of the life-world in Husserl's work: "Rooting the universal in the life-world is thus also an attempt to keep in check an immanent danger that lurks in the European idea of a completely uprooted human being (*aoikos*)" (2009, 38; see also Held 1989, 29; Staiti 2014, 286). Yet, this does not preclude the possibility of this nonetheless leading to the danger of uprooting. It is a tension that might arise from within the life-world, but that cannot be resolved satisfactorily.⁹¹

⁹¹ In Husserl's work we find indications of a project which does not transcend the particular in a way that might destroy it, but which can be said to embrace the particular while still engaging with the teleological process of establishing a better world. Husserl calls this project that of the community of love (*Liebesgemeinschaft*) rather than the community of reason and it can be seen as addressing some of the issues that arose with the latter (see e.g. *Hua* XIV, 172-75; *Hua* XV, 512). Although there seems to be increasing attention paid to this topic, as Miettinen has noted, there is little consensus regarding it (2013, 383). As with the religious dimension to Husserl's philosophy, this is most likely due to the fragmentary nature of these writings. Yet, it is worth briefly discussing it as it is identified by Miettinen as "an answer to the problem of the teleological ideal of humanity, and consequently, to the problem of ethical universalism" which does not negate, but "which would have corresponded with the inextricably open horizon of philosophical reason" (2013, 386).

The community of love would not be a community of those who have fully transcended their particularism. Rather, love would be respectful of, even emphasize the particular individuality of each, in the sense that a parent uniquely loves his or her child in its irreplaceable singularity (Miettinen 2013, 324). In this sense, love is also a motivational force as it aims to support the individual and its particular self-realization. As discussed, love more so than reason is a strong motivation for Husserl's project. The ideal community would consist of a unity not brought about through shared rational insight, but through love, motivating an infinite task (Miettinen 2013, 291; Ferrarello 2016, 179). A community of love thus consist in a reciprocal striving that does not leave behind the particular, but enriches it. Steinbock suggests that Husserl's ethical ideal might involve "a richness and diversity that is to be *generated*" (1995, 202). Indeed, Husserl gives the name love to this "blessed unity," the intimate interlacing of different wills that are nonetheless working towards the same in their own way and motivate and support each other's particular ways of doing so (*Hua* XXXV, 44).

Because of these problems, the teleological transformation of the life-world can be seen as damaging to it. Steinbock goes as far saying that “the attempt to establish the one world is in the final analysis unethical,” especially in relation to the life-worlds of others (1995, 254). In direct response to this, Miettinen agrees, but warns that “we should also resist the contemporary tendency to fetishize cultural limits for the sake of an irreconcilable asymmetry (2013, 377-78). If we take both positions to have their validity, the task is to find a way that avoids both an irreconcilable asymmetry of life-worlds and the transformation of the world into something that undoes its very being.

Arguably the most important finding, which cannot, and as will be argued should not, be teleologically overcome is, as Dodd puts it, that “the questionability of the world is irremovable” (2004, 156). This is in line with the universal sense of the world as based on a fundamentally indeterminate horizon and this should be the basis of a further development of this problematic. If the idea of the world at the basis of Husserl’s conception of philosophy is invalidated by his phenomenological results, this does not entail a total failure of his project, but is a reason to rethink it. If one of the discoveries of phenomenology is a fundamental sense of homelessness, or rather, the unhomely nature of the world itself, and if this is what the crisis reveals, then there might be a positive sense to the crisis. Crisis might even be synonymous with philosophy, as crisis and reflection go hand in hand, as Dodd has stated (2004, 48). Reflection and critique inherently come with the risk of certainties becoming uncertain so that crisis might be a part of the rationalism which Husserl espouses. It might even be its condition insofar as it shakes us loose from a naive view on the world. This positive sense of the crisis entails accepting the first step that establishes Husserl’s rational teleology, namely the clash of worldviews that puts our world into question, but not the second that tries to overcome this teleologically.⁹² In line with the analysis of crisis in section 1.4, it would take the crisis itself to be a revelatory moment, even if the truth it reveals might be an uncomfortable one. Yet, if philosophy is about living a life in truth, this is a truth that should not be avoided. It is in the work of Patočka that we can find such a position.

As promising as this might sound to deal with some of the issues outlined above, Husserl’s work on the community of love is provided only in sketches. Moreover, although it seems that love is a fundamental addition to the more rationalist line of Husserl’s project, explicit and systematic reflection on the relation between the two is missing (see Melle 2002, 247). Further, as Melle notes, this aspect of Husserl’s work still seems to rely on a religious dimension: “Reason and love, Husserl seems to think, are one only if placed into their full context of a divine world-order. Only through faith in God can we overcome any apparent contradiction between the rule of reason and the rule of love” (2002, 247). This is further suggested by the frequent combined presence of the themes of love, theology, metaphysics, and teleology in Husserl’s writings. Although this suggests that Husserl was aware of some of the problems addressed in this section, it does not entail a satisfying solution to them.

⁹² Miettinen also speaks of “the possibility of a *positive crisis* for present-day European humanity,” for which he interestingly draws on some of Husserl’s writings on Indian thought. Rather than providing a transcendent point of reference for reality – such as Plato’s Idea of the Good or Aristotle’s God – this thought “professes the transient ‘irrational’ character of the world of appearances.” It “does not do away with the meaninglessness of existence,” but in a way sanctifies it “and thus it avoids all questions of teleological development” (Miettinen 2013, 380). The highly interesting material Miettinen draws from is to be found in *Hua* XXVII (125-26) and the related *Sokrates-Buddha* manuscript.

3. Patočka: Europe and the Experience of Problematicity

Patočka's work is characterized by a great diversity in its themes as well as in its approaches. Yet, throughout the diversity and development of his work there is also continuity. The most broadly shared, but because of this also most general, characteristic of Patočka's philosophy as a whole is the topic of a life based on truth or insight.⁹³ Although this has meant different things throughout his work, it has always formed the basis of Patočka's idea of Europe. In his later work this is conceptualized on the basis of the Platonic motif of the care of the soul.⁹⁴ In what follows, the focus will primarily be on this later work, from the 1953 essay on *Negative Platonism (NP)* onwards to *Plato and Europe (PE)* and the *Heretical Essays (HE)*, both of which date from the 1970s. This is not only because that is where we can find Patočka's discussion of the care of the soul as the spiritual foundation of Europe, but also because this work diverges from his Husserlian beginnings. Although the diagnosis of Europe's crisis remains largely the same, it acquires a new interpretation that necessitates a new way of dealing with it. Patočka shares Husserl's concern regarding the problematical nature of the world, but starts to see what he refers to as problematicity as an inherent characteristic of the world that not only cannot be overcome, but that might itself offer valuable possibilities for human existence. While starting from similar beginnings, Patočka's work can thus be seen as a provocative development of Husserl's philosophy.

The difference in historical context between Husserl and Patočka will be taken as an important factor in this development. Although Patočka's philosophy was in a constant state of development, it can be said that a significant change took place around the years of the Second World War. As his work will be contrasted to Husserl's based on the different perspectives one can take to the crisis as outlined in section 1.4 – Husserl's that of the 'imperfect' crisis of the interbellum, Patočka's that of the more 'perfect' crisis after the Second World War – it is worth briefly looking at Patočka's earlier, more Husserlian work to highlight this difference in perspective.⁹⁵ This will make clear what changes in the transition from Patočka's early to his later work and what underlies this change. It is important to note, as was the case in the sections on Husserl's work, that the aim is not to reduce Patočka's philosophy to either its historical circumstances or to his biography. While these provide the problems to which his philosophy is the attempt at an answer, what ultimately counts are his arguments which we will see are phenomenological. This development of Patočka's work will

⁹³ 'Insight' is the translation of the Czech *nahlédnutí*, at times rendered as *nahlédn-utí*. Occasionally, this is translated as *looking-in* by Patočka's translators (see e.g. *PE*, 88). This translation retains the aspect of movement which is crucial to what Patočka means by this.

⁹⁴ Patočka already discussed the care of the soul in his lectures immediately following the Second World War, but without explicitly relating it to the spiritual foundation of Europe.

⁹⁵ For a more extensive look at Patočka's early work up to the 1950s, see Cajthaml (2014, 12-24).

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be linked to his project of an asubjective phenomenology, which forms an important phenomenological background to his discussion of problematicity.⁹⁶

As Patočka's later account of Europe is based on the care of the soul, the latter will be discussed first. Its origin in the experience of problematicity and the transition from a mythical, pre-problematical to a problematical life and world will be accounted for. The care of the soul can be seen as the actualization of the movement of transcendence which is present in this experience and which Patočka takes to be the central characteristic of human existence. As such, Patočka takes the care of the soul to be the possibility of a higher form of existence than the mere continuation of life. This will be discussed on the basis of the three forms of the care of the soul that Patočka finds in Plato: the shaping of the self, insight into the world, and the care of the soul in the community which indicates a theory of the state.

The third form of the care of the soul is of particular relevance for Patočka's account of Europe. He sees Europe as founded on the care of the soul after its initial failure led to the idea of a just state. Europe and the care of the soul develop on the basis of subsequent failures and transformations in Athens, the Roman Empire, and what he refers to as the holy empire as found in Christendom. The Christian appropriation of the care of the soul ultimately sets up the abandonment of the care of the soul and the dominance of the instrumental conception of reason and the objectivistic conception of the world which can no longer meaningfully address human existence. This leads to modern Europe's spiritual and ultimately its political demise.

While Christianity set up the eventual abandonment of the care of the soul, Patočka also suggests it might contain the resources to turn Europe's spiritual life around. Christianity's focus on inner life is seen as a possibility of reinstating a form of the care of the soul against the objectivistic tendencies of modernity. This suggestion will be discussed and criticized as ultimately dependent on what will be referred to as a mythico-metaphysical remnant. However, rather than fully rejecting this solution by means of Christianity, it will be radicalized on the basis of the experience of sacrifice. It is Patočka's account of this experience, which is an experience of problematicity, that most clearly suggests a path towards the demythologized Christianity he suggests, but does not fully develop.

This is worked out further on the basis of Patočka's project of *Negative Platonism* and his phenomenology which can be seen as philosophical thematizations of the experience of problematicity as a transcendence without recourse to anything transcendent. What Patočka refers to as 'meaning's point-zero' will be interpreted as the problematic, yet absolute meaning that he seeks to have recourse to in order to avoid both nihilism and any mythical or

⁹⁶ It should be noted that the development of an asubjective phenomenology occurs relatively late and only in brief sketches in Patočka's work. While it does not form the direct basis of his discussions of problematicity, it is an articulation of the approach that characterizes much of his later work in explicit discussion with Husserl's phenomenology. It is in this sense that it provides a helpful background for understanding the discussions of problematicity in their divergence from Husserl's approach.

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metaphysical moves. On this basis problematicity can be seen as an inherent characteristic of all meaning. It is thereby interpreted akin to the cosmological insight which was one of the forms of the care of the soul and which can thus be used to develop Patočka's thought in new directions. Rather than focussing on the care of the soul as a subjective principle to be established against the objectivistic tendencies of modernity (which, it should be noted, retains its value), this principle is itself interpreted in terms of problematicity as a more 'objective' characteristic of the world. As such, problematicity is not something that can be overcome, but that something that should be come to terms with.

This interpretation of problematicity is used to further develop the connection Patočka draws between problematicity and politics. Interpretations of his political thought as well as his own writings on politics often focus on problematicity as a disruptive experience that fundamentally leads to a dissident politics. However, taken as a cosmological insight, problematicity can be used to develop a more constructive politics in terms of (the principles of) a theory of the state. The more existential side of the care of the soul might be exhausted as a spiritual resource for Europe, but the truth on which it was based might still be of use. This will primarily be developed on the basis of the work of Lefort, whose account of liberal democracy makes use of a similar insight into problematicity. Although he was hesitant about this himself, Patočka's work will thus be developed as a possible foundation for a liberal democratic political system. As Patočka himself already indicated, this is not without its problems, as it still lacks the spiritual resources that would make such a system meaningful and without which it cannot function properly. Insight and the theoretical development of political principles on their own are not enough, leading us back to Patočka's idea of a spiritual conversion to support this.

3.1 Background to the Later Work

3.1.1 The early work

Patočka's proximity to Husserl in the 1930s can hardly be understated. He was one of Husserl's last students, fellow countryman and central to the *Prague Philosophy Circle* where Husserl delivered the lectures that were to be the basis for the *Crisis*. Patočka's 1936 *habilitation* thesis was the first book dedicated to Husserl's newly introduced topic of the life-world (or 'natural world' as Patočka calls it). It was published even before the *Crisis* was. As Novotný notes with great relevance for the topics to be discussed, Patočka became a close student of Husserl precisely when the latter was working on the problem of the unity of the world in relation to the situation of crisis (2017, 13). This had a great influence on Patočka which finds clear expression in his *habilitation* thesis: *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*.⁹⁷

In his thesis Patočka locates the source of the spiritual crisis of his day in the fact that "modern man has no unified worldview," (NWPP, 3) "no definite worldview proper to our way of life," "no one total image, or idea, of the order of reality" (NWPP, 6). He has his life-world, but also the interpretation of it by modern natural science, and these are in conflict, preventing any unity and the possibility to simply live in one's life-world in a naive, natural manner. The results of the sciences are "not simply a development but rather a radical *reconstruction* of the naive and natural world of common sense" (NWPP, 8). Yet, we cannot say there is no truth to the scientific view of the world either. As a consequence, "the naïve world is simply devalued," seen as derivative (NWPP, 8). As he puts it decades later in his *Heretical Essays* (referring to Arendt's essay already referred to in section 1.3): "In a sense, in their natural sciences [humans] left the earth long before cosmic flights and so have in reality lost contact with that ground beneath their feet to which they had been called" (HE, 115-16). This is not a sustainable situation as "alienated man finds it difficult to enter into the spirit of the self-prescribed role, or rather, the role prescribed to him by the objectivist view of his essence" (NWPP, 11).

Patočka's diagnosis of the crisis clearly bears great similarities to Husserl's and the same goes for his solution. Both views of the world are to be traced back to the subjectivity that constitutes them to show how they are related and thus not fundamentally in conflict (NWPP, 3). Thus, the unity of the world is the unity "of the spirit that shapes and sustains it" (NWPP, 5). Indeed, for the early Patočka "pre-existent subjectivity *is* the world" (NWPP, 20). By this he of course does not mean that the things we find within the world are products of subjectivity. The interrelatedness between the things in the world, the background against

⁹⁷ Although Patočka's *habilitation* thesis follows Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, this is not necessarily an accurate representation of his own views at the time. Heidegger's work already had become an important influence (see Cajthaml 2014, 13). Despite this, Patočka's actual written philosophy as found in his *habilitation* thesis will be taken as the basis of early work as to highlight the contrast with his later work and with that of Husserl.

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which they appear to us and make sense to us, is a product of subjectivity, or rather, it is a process of subjectivity (NWPP, 78).

As such, the unity of the world is not just something that already exists – otherwise there would be no crisis of a split world. As with Husserl, this is a unity that is to be established: “unity is something we need and something we can bring about – in philosophy – by our own efforts” (NWPP, 6-7). A coherence of meaning is to be sought through the use of reason that provides proper insight into the workings of science and reclaims the life-world as a domain of reason. Patočka portrays this position well and as typically European in an essay published just before the Second World War:

Here, man may appear to be a creature torn apart by internal fragmentation. He can never know, with absolute intellectual clarity whether or not he has attained a final coherence of meaning, the very bottom of himself. But unity of human effort and all rational legislation of life stand on the belief that it is possible to attain such coherence of meaning, that such coherence, reaching beyond all partial and intellectual understanding, truly exists. (European Culture, 6)

As for Husserl, for Patočka there is no doubt that Europe is and should be rational and that it is primarily the meaning of the dominant rationalism that needs to be investigated and corrected. This involves a “determined faith” in the possibility provided by “the teleological idea of European culture” (PSW, 155). In 1941 Patočka still writes that the true Europe has faith in reason, because it is only reason that can penetrate irrationalism and in doing so bring it to reason (KEE, 346). Any particular conception of reason might be “insufficient, cause crises or lead to absurdity. But one thing is nonetheless not possible: To solve the questions posed by reason and the crises caused by reason through any other means than through reason itself” (KEE, 348-49). To some extent Patočka will hold on to this throughout the development of his thought. Yet, what this means undergoes important changes during the years of the war and after.⁹⁸

3.1.2 The change in outlook

In a late text (most likely late 1960s or early 1970s) Patočka wonders whether Husserl’s *Crisis*-work remained insufficient not only due to his untimely death, but because there are problems with the work itself (*Die nacheuropäische Epoche und ihre geistigen Probleme*, 70).⁹⁹ Much has happened in the decades between his Husserlian *habilitation* thesis and this later work, both historically and in the development of Patočka’s philosophy, leading him to reject central tenets of Husserl’s work. Key aspects of both Husserl’s phenomenology and his optimistic rationalism are rejected, although Patočka never abandons either Husserl’s philosophical spirit or his admiration for his former teacher. If we follow Patočka’s writings on the

⁹⁸ For the development of Patočka’s phenomenological work on the world during the Second World War see Novotný (2017).

⁹⁹ This text is based on a manuscript which has been published in various forms which overlap in part but not completely. For the more extant version (which, however, does not fully include the text referred to here), see NE.

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development of the concept of reason, it becomes clear that for him Husserl's thought belongs to a previous age that Patočka was now barred from.

As Kohák puts it, Patočka was part of both the Enlightenment tradition and the tradition that responds "with the passions of the soul to the depth of Being," both important parts of the Western cultural heritage (1989, xi-xii). The former is the tradition of clarity and rigorous, scientific grounding. The latter consists of thinkers that believe in reason, but not the reason of the human being that reduces the world to a series of things and facts about these things, but the reason that forms the overall order and meaning of the world: thinkers such as Cusanus, Comenius, and Herder.¹⁰⁰ The distinction between the two traditions is the topic of Patočka's *Two Senses of Reason in the German Enlightenment: A Herderian Study* from 1942. There he notes that the more holistic conception of reason was based on a view of the world that was essentially drawn from ancient Greek metaphysics:

For this conception, the world is a One whose foundation is an eternal, complete system of forms. This eternal and only system is the ultimate truth, the ultimate reality, and this ultimate truth must be grasped by a perspective which is equally one and atemporal. This atemporal perspective, grasping being directly and so identical with it, that is Reason. Human reason is in part a participation in and in part an imitation of the working of Reason as such or of divine Reason, the Reason which is being itself, God. (PSW, 160-61)

Reason's goal was thus not to impose itself on the world to classify it and bring it to full clarity, but "to penetrate to the living heart of the world, while reason was essentially speculative reason, the seeker of unity, analogy, and harmony" (PSW, 161). Although Husserl is not mentioned here, one can see traces of both traditions in his work. In that sense, Husserl was a product of a different age compared to many of his contemporaries, an age where the modern conception of reason "for which what is basic is not what is one and harmonious but rather what is clear and distinct" (PSW, 162) had not yet fully taken over. In Husserl's philosophy, what is one and harmonious was still thought achievable on the basis of what is clear and distinct.

Yet, the modern conception of reason gradually become the dominant, even the only one.¹⁰¹ It has its ultimate exponent in what Patočka in the 1930s called *titanism*. Titanism does not attempt to make itself at home in the deeper order, the "living heart" of the world, but revolts against it and substitutes an order of its own, "full of confidence in human power, in man's ability to take charge of his own affairs" (PSW, 141). The world was to be grasped rationally in the new sense, yet modern humanity was still accustomed to the older sense of reason and the world. It failed to resist "the temptation to seek the old truth, the old ideals, the old harmony in the new perspective and givens" (PSW, 163). As Patočka puts it in his later work, it attempted to attain the old goal with new means (HE, 86). This was doomed to fail as

¹⁰⁰ It should be noted that Patočka also made important contributions to the Comenius-scholarship.

¹⁰¹ The renaissance is a crucial period for Patočka in this regard. For an overview of Patočka's account of it, see Cajthaml (2014, 72-77).

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it tried to find in the new conception of the world what it had to expel for this very conception to be possible. Yet, as Patočka notes, it is likely that without this “harmonic, optimistic accent, a remnant of an earlier spiritual epoch, [...] the Enlightenment would never have prevailed in the European world” (PSW, 171).

In the 19th century the new conception of reason reaches its fullest extent. But it is also in the 19th century that the cracks in the new view of the world are starting to show:

it was in the course of this century that it became clear that none of its preconditions had been met: relative meaning turned out to be non self-sufficient, science for example was unable to actually capture the entirety of the universe, human action could solve partial difficulties, but was incapable of mastering the universe [...]. (TMF, 11)

The consequences of this do not become clear until the 20th century, which Patočka called “something like the ‘truth’ of the nineteenth” (HE, 113). It is in the 20th century that “science has become the authority in every realm; we could no longer exist without it. Yet reason, its foundation, no longer attracts us, no longer appears to us as the key to the cosmos” (PSW, 224). Humanity’s older attempts to shape life have been “swept away – definitely, it now seems” (HE, 95). From here it is only a short step to what was discussed as the national socialist fusion of “an irrationalism of goals with a rigid rationalism of means” (PSW, 157), and a “spontaneous renewal of the sacred” (HE, 112). What Patočka calls “the demonic” reaches its peak precisely in “the age of the greatest sobriety and rationality” (HE, 114). Husserl’s work can be seen as the last great attempt to address this situation on the basis of a unified conception of the two senses of reason.

Patočka’s account as presented so far largely follows or is commensurable with that of Husserl. Yet, whereas it seems that Patočka initially laments the loss of the older harmonious view of the world (something which he arguably never fully abandons), already towards the end of the 1930s he starts presenting an alternative. In his 1939 *Life in Balance, Life in Amplitude* he speaks of two attitudes, one which seems to correspond to his earlier position, the other prefiguring his later work.¹⁰² The first comprehends “Man as essentially founded harmoniously; called to happiness and a balance of his forces, which in the future will be achieved” (LP, 32). For this attitude, life is “essentially simple”:

Let’s live rationally [...] and we will reach the best that Man can possibly attain: harmony, balance, and bliss to that degree to which natural pains and losses allow Man. Those cases where life has not yet achieved harmony are due to the influence of mental, and mainly intellectual defects that are possible to get rid of through education, and to the influence of improper social institutions that are possible to get rid of through a rationally guided social process. (LP, 33)

¹⁰² It should be noted that the two attitudes of which Patočka speaks in this essay do not correspond to the two senses of reason from the 1942 essay.

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Whereas Patočka calls it natural to think in this way, he also sees that reality does not correspond to this. Seemingly obvious thoughts lead to their opposite, that which inspires future happiness leads to tragedy, and the possibility for a new life to moral decay (*LP*, 34). The framework of the crisis and the contradiction it reveals are clearly visible: The teleological trajectory of rationality itself engenders its opposite.

What changes compared to Patočka's earlier position is that it no longer seems that harmony is the ultimate goal of life. As opposed to balance, the second attitude of which he speaks emphasizes what he calls *amplitude*. The human being is most human where the seemingly fixed form of life is scattered and where everything is problematic, unsteady and extreme. This is not presented as a deviation from the normal situation of life, but as something always present underneath its surface (*LP*, 32). It is by "taking off into amplitude" that one is free, that one can "attain that which Man *truly is*, and thus that which he *truly can be*" (*LP*, 40).¹⁰³ In a text written around the same time as *Life in Balance*, *Life in Amplitude*, Patočka is clear about where the inner depth of the human being reaches its peak: Not in the harmonious, but precisely there where tension is strongest (*Das Innere und die Welt*, 69). These are early articulations of the role of transcendence and the experience of problematicity which become the focus of Patočka's later work on the care of the soul.

The change in Patočka's outlook can be related to the Second World War.¹⁰⁴ This is warranted not only from a historico-biographical perspective, but also because Patočka himself conceptualizes a distinction between the situations after the two world wars. Whereas the First World War was undoubtedly an event of tremendous proportions for Patočka (he calls it "the decisive event in the history of the twentieth century" (*HE*, 124)), it was not necessarily universal in character (*ILI*, 90-91). It shook, but did not completely do away with the status quo of optimistic rationalism of before the war. While the background of the First World War consisted in the conviction that there was no "factual, objective meaning of the world and of things, and that it is up to strength and power to create such meaning within the realm accessible to humans" (*HE*, 120-21), there were also exceptions to this. Patočka speaks of the First World War as giving prominence to a new form of the optimistic rationalism of the 19th century in the guise of socialism (*ILI*, 90-91) and claims that the entry of the United States into the war was not a power-play, but based on emancipatory motives (*HE*, 120-21).

¹⁰³ Incidentally, Patočka already conceptualizes this using the Platonic concept of the *chorismos* so important to his later project of *Negative Platonism* (*LP*, 40).

¹⁰⁴ Patočka's change in point of view has also been linked to his religious attitude. As Chvatík put it: "It also seems that, whereas up until *circa* the middle of the century, the vantage point of his philosophy is that of a Christian believer, in later years his religious attitude gradually takes a different shape" (2015b, 137). This is highly relevant for the overall approaches Patočka takes before and after the Second World War, which likely had an impact on his personal beliefs. Yet, reservations are called for, because even the earlier, arguably more religious Patočka is, as Kohák put it, "a distinctly religious and yet an unbelieving man" (1989, 16). As will become clear, this is a characterization that seems apt for Patočka throughout his life, even when in his later work he seeks a solution to the crisis in Christianity.

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This meant that the First World War was easier to approach “from the perspective of peace, day, and life, excluding its dark nocturnal side” (HE, 120), that is, as an exception to rather than an expression of the status quo. Although this was neither easy nor necessarily successful, at least the attempt could be made to make sense of the war “in terms of nineteenth-century ideas” (HE, 119). The situation after the Second World War was different. It was more radical,

everything down to the naked, physical roots was engaged in this war. It was no longer a way only bound within the limits of a clear political plan and budget; it also was not a war that would compromise only the old ideologies which had more or less become antiquated thus leaving people a certain intellectual reserve untouched by the fight. Everything was cast into the struggle. (ILI, 92)

Even after the war, the state of war remained. It was a “war that establishes itself as permanent by ‘peaceful’ means” (HE, 133). Although he does not mention it here, one needs to keep in mind that Patočka is writing this during the Cold War. Not only did the mobilization of society remain, whether militarily or economically, but any remaining struggle was no longer a struggle for higher ideals, but for power and survival. During the war the distinction between the front-line and the home front was already eliminated due to “aerial warfare that was capable of striking anywhere with equal cruelty” and after it the new nuclear reality made this a permanent condition (HE, 132). Thus, the situation of the Second World War could no longer be approached as an exceptional event, but could only be considered to be the new status quo. The older perspective no longer seemed applicable for this “epoch of the night, of war, and of death” (HE, 120).

This goes beyond Husserl’s crisis-sentiment in that it does not fear the end of Europe and the rationalism that formed its backbone. Rather, Patočka has already witnessed this end: “what has taken place before our very own eyes: *Europe has disappeared*, probably forever” (PE, 89). Although the irrationalism represented by fascism was defeated, Europe did not recover spiritually: “It is true that that irrationalism somehow evaporated amid the storms of our time. Yet has the faith in reason as Husserl understood it been restored? Surely it has not” (PSW, 224). Patočka refers to the way the playwright Eugène Ionesco described the mood:

And this mood is: a deep helplessness and inability to stand upon anything in any way solid. In the nineteenth century people still had, says Ionesco, the sense that they could somehow direct their fate, that humanity could control its affairs. This sentiment has completely abandoned us. Now we live with the opposite sentiment: something is carrying us away; and what is carrying us away is contradictory, it prevents us from taking a univocal position. We do not know what we want; no one knows. (PE, 6)

On the basis of his own writings, it seems fair to say that the change in attitude that marks the shift from the early to the later Patočka and indeed from Husserl to the later Patočka seems to have been a response to the situation of the Second World War. The kind of faith in reason

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that Husserl could still rely on was made impossible. After the Second World War, humanity was faced with “a nihilism that does not know what to do, which is not interested in any attitude, is absolutely unanchored, refuses every solution, and also refuses all help” (*LP*, 61-62).

3.1.3 Beyond Husserl

This change in Patočka’s outlook after the Second World War goes to the heart of Husserl’s teleological solution to the crisis. As discussed, this solution in part relies on Husserl’s use of practical reason and faith, a faith the later Patočka can no longer rely on. While Patočka does not extensively treat this topic in relation to Husserl, the late essay *On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion* (1977) discusses the theory of postulates in general and specifically in relation to Kant. The method of postulates, he says,

turns the *transcendent concepts* of a Creator God, of Providence and personal immortality, into objects of the experiences of moral freedom and justified faith. Without these *realities*, without the objective ends anchored in these concepts, human life has no support and its meaning falters. (*MPR*, 100)

Instead of going along with Kant that therefore we have to believe in these realities, Patočka invokes the character Ivan from *The Brothers Karamazov*. Whereas Kant’s argument relies on the space left for faith by the impossibility of knowledge regarding the reality or irreality of God, Providence and immortality, “Ivan grounds his refutation of moral theology on the impossibility of proving that a moral purpose of the universe is apodictically necessary” (*MPR*, 102). Patočka follows Ivan in asking “if they are not cognitions, how does one take them seriously, how does one attach to them the overall meaning of life?” (*MPR*, 113). It is clear that faith no longer is a sufficient motivating force and as such, for Patočka, “it follows that the philosophy of postulates is to be rejected entirely” (*MPR*, 127).

However, faith was not the only motivation for Husserl’s recourse to teleology. Although it was argued that Husserl’s goal could not fully be justified experientially, he based it on the teleological structure of experience itself as a motivation for his rationalist teleology. The early Patočka also saw the solution to the crisis in the constitution of the one world based on the inherent constitutive activity of subjectivity. His later abandonment of this solution is accompanied by a change in his conception of phenomenology. In his later work, he attempts to move away from what he perceives as Husserl’s subjectivism, because according to Patočka it “rests on a primacy of the subjective side of the world-phenomenon that is not grounded in the phenomenon itself” (*VE*, 124). This is in part motivated by the influence of Heidegger who provides a similar critique of Husserl’s phenomenological method and which had an important role in the way Patočka changes his phenomenological concept of the world. While Patočka retains an appreciation for Husserl’s “rejection of construction and its reference to more original sources of experience” (*Die Selbstbesinnung Europas*, 248), it is as to the nature of these sources that he comes to deviate from Husserl.

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To counter any subjectivism, Patočka aims to develop what he calls an “asubjective phenomenology,” which “abandons the idea of a subjective grounding, common in traditional transcendental philosophy” (*HSCA*, 18).¹⁰⁵ The subject as final explanatory ground is abandoned and what Patočka refers to as ‘appearing as such’ is no longer to be traced back to the accomplishments of subjectivity. The reason for this is that he takes the subject itself to be something given within the field of appearance and thus dependent on it just as much as anything else. Of course, that does not mean that it appears in the same way as everything else nor does Patočka think that Husserl treats the subject as only an innerworldly being. Yet, Patočka wants to maintain the absolute primacy of appearing as such and believes that it has a structure of its own that cannot properly be analysed when it is seen as founded in a subject (*VE*, 123).

Although Patočka upholds the primacy and autonomy of appearing as such, he does not refute the necessity of there being a subject of some sort. However, this subject is what he calls a “realisator,” not a constitutor or creator (*HSCA*, 32). Human beings “only offer existents the occasion of manifesting themselves as they are” (*HE*, 6). Patočka explains this well in a formulation that is as simple as it is eloquent when he says that “things are beautiful and true in themselves, but not for themselves” (*HE*, 57). They need something to appear to, but this does not mean that their manner of appearing is not their own. Phenomenology is thus to describe appearing as such, but not reduce it to the subject.

It should be noted that Patočka is certainly aware that it was not Husserl’s intention to absolutize subjectivity. He even defends Husserl against such criticisms (*BME*, 180). Yet, he still thinks that the fundamental reference to the subject in Husserlian phenomenology entails “the danger here of surrendering, of abandoning its discoveries in the field of appearing (i.e., in the field of modes of appearing) and embarking upon the terrain of a subjective construction” (*HSCA*, 31). The issue that Patočka takes with Husserlian phenomenology can be shown on the basis of his discussion of the phenomenological tools of the epochē and the reduction.¹⁰⁶

The epochē is the bracketing of all theses regarding the reality of what appears. This is not a denial of the existence of what appears, but a suspension of it so as to turn towards the world precisely and only insofar as it appears to us. In suspending all theses regarding reality, what remains is only appearing *qua* appearing. The epochē is thus a distancing from the world that turns towards what it distances itself from. To the epochē Patočka attributes great value as a phenomenological tool. It is what makes phenomenology possible in the first

¹⁰⁵ Patočka’s attempt to develop an asubjective phenomenology takes place relatively late in his work – mainly in the 70s. However, it is clearly foreshadowed in the decades prior to its explicit thematizing (see Cajthaml 2014, 112). An extensive, critical discussion of Patočka’s asubjective phenomenology in contrast with Husserl’s phenomenology and of Patočka’s criticism of the latter exceeds the scope of this thesis.

¹⁰⁶ Much can be said on the epochē and reduction in Husserlian phenomenology, but for present purposes it suffices to limit the scope of the discussion to Patočka’s interpretation of them.

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place and, as will become clear, as a distancing of oneself from reality it plays a crucial role in his philosophy as a whole.

However, Husserl utilizes the epochē to introduce a second step, the reduction. The reduction is the attempt to trace everything that remains after the epochē back to subjectivity as that which constitutes the world as given in our experience. This reference to constitution is problematic for Patočka as he takes it to be a move beyond appearing as revealed by the epochē. It is a further interpretation of what is given in intuition in terms of subjectivity that he takes to “contaminate” appearing as such with a reference to reality, as the subject is, in the end, a form of reality (*Epochē and Reduction*, 50-51; *VE*, 120).¹⁰⁷ As will be shown, this reference to a form of reality is something that Patočka’s philosophy will attempt to avoid for various reasons.

It is important to emphasize that this does not mean that Patočka takes Husserl’s findings to be false or without value. His criticism does not entail that “the sphere of appearing discovered by the reduction does not exist, but instead that this sphere of appearing is not the discovery of a constructive-constitutive noesis [*aufbauend-konstituierenden Noese*] elicited through a purely immanent apodictic looking-inward [*Inneschau*]” (*VE*, 238). That is, what the reduction uncovers might play a role in the appearing of the world, but it is not to be found within the field of appearance as it gives itself (*VE*, 122). This does not mean that the concepts that Husserl introduces to explain the constitution of the world are purely speculative. Patočka takes them to be projections mirroring the structure of appearing as such (*HSCA*, 34).¹⁰⁸ But *qua* make-up or activity of the subject, they are not to be found in the world as it appears.

Patočka’s criticism of the reduction and Husserl’s subjectivism explicitly follows Heidegger’s criticism of Husserl (*Varna Lecture*, 329; *VE*, 238).¹⁰⁹ Aside from Husserl’s work, that of Heidegger’s can be seen as the main influence on Patočka’s phenomenology. While studying under Husserl, he also attended Heidegger’s courses which clearly resonated greatly

¹⁰⁷ As a reason for this subjectivism Patočka says that Husserl appears to have discovered the epochē only after the reduction and that at first the distinction between the two was not yet clear: “In this way a subjective anticipation has already occurred, before the concept of the phenomenon as such could be clarified on the basis of the ἐποχή” (*VE*, 144).

¹⁰⁸ The validity of this critique cannot be extensively discussed here, but it should be noted that this is not that far removed from the way Husserl himself presented his method in *Ideas I* when he writes that “the Eidos of the noema points to the Eidos of the noetic consciousness” and that while these belong together eidetically, “in spite of this non-selfsufficiency the noema allows for being considered by itself” (*Ideas I*, 241).

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted that Patočka criticizes Heidegger’s early work, as does the later Heidegger himself, on similar grounds (*PE*, 170; *KEE*, 456; *VE*, 91; *Letter to Michalski*, 110-11). He further criticizes Heidegger’s work in general for not returning his analysis to “corporeity, the naturalness of human being,” which we will see to be an important part of Patočka’s philosophy (*PSW*, 270-71). As to corporeity, it is Husserl’s analyses of bodily existence that Patočka draws from more than from Heidegger’s work. The respective flaws and value of the work of Husserl and Heidegger is summed up in a letter where Patočka says that Husserl suffered from a lack of clarity regarding the fundamental ontological foundation of phenomenology, but had a better eye for concrete phenomena, whereas for Heidegger it was the other way around (*Letter to Michalski*, 113).

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with him.¹¹⁰ Patočka's inquiry into appearing as such is spurred on by Heidegger's criticism of Husserl and has to be seen against the background of a fundamental insight of Heidegger, namely that concealment is an intrinsic part of truth, of the unconcealment of the world (see e.g. *MPR*, 126; *HE*, 10). As Heidegger puts it, "concealment preserves what is most proper to ἀλήθεια as its own" (1998b, 148). At times, Patočka refers to this concealment inherent to every experience of the world as the world-mystery (*das Weltgeheimnis*) and Heidegger too speaks of it in terms of mystery, "not a particular mystery regarding this or that, but rather the one mystery – that, in general, mystery (the concealing of what is concealed) as such holds sway throughout the *Da-sein* of human beings" (1998b, 148). This "concealment of what-is as a whole as the foundation of all openness and all uncovering" is taken by Patočka to be the equivalent of what he appropriated from the philosopher – and fellow student of Heidegger – Wilhelm Weischedel as "problematicity" (*HE*, 77).

The insistence of Patočka's asubjective phenomenology to remain with appearing as such precludes leading the world back to the constituting activity of subjectivity. It analyses the world on its own terms without the possibility of any kind of primary project (*Entwurf*) of the world that the subject could impose on it, because the world is precisely the ground on which any project becomes possible in the first place (*VE*, 92). The world is always already given in a meaningful way that has a structure of its own that does not need the subject at its centre (*BME*, 261). Placing the focus on subjectivity nonetheless, as one would do to establish a teleology on the basis of its activity, leads to the mischaracterization of the world as primarily the correlate of the activity of the subject. This tends to treat it as something to be constituted, a totality of objects akin to a super-object, rather than the fundamental horizon of all activity of the subject.

Patočka identifies this mischaracterization as the "fundamental difference between [his] present standpoint [in 1970] and that developed in 1936" (*NWPP Supplement*, 160). He also attributes this mischaracterization to Husserl as the claim to an "absolute philosophy, that circumscribes the universe as a whole and decides on its final meaning" (*VE*, 41). Such a philosophy deprives the world of its independence and the concealment intrinsic to it and thus, as will become clear, of the way of being peculiar to it. As Patočka puts it in his 1976 afterword to the French translation of his *habilitation* thesis: "The lesson to be drawn from the natural world is perhaps not what Husserl had in mind, i.e., that the world is an unconscious reason searching for itself," a search which the philosopher should facilitate (*NWPP*, 190). This changes what Patočka takes the crisis to be and consequently his approach to it. The world is no longer to be led back to subjectivity and with this the project of shaping

¹¹⁰ Not without its relevance, Patočka was more a contemporary of Heidegger than of the older Husserl. As Kohák has noted, whereas Husserl belonged to an era that was, up until the First World War, largely optimistic, this is much less the case for Heidegger and Patočka (989, 67). Moreover, Patočka's later view on science and technology as fundamental characteristics of modernity is indebted to Heidegger's views on this matter as found in e.g. *The Question Concerning Technology* (Heidegger 1977).

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the world can also no longer have recourse to the teleology indicated by the structure of subjectivity.

For Patočka, Husserl's teleological solution to the crisis and approach to the world, while put on a novel foundation, are typical for modern Europe. Yet, in his later work, this is not only seen as insufficient, but as problematic. As will be shown, this is not only because Patočka can no longer have recourse to the faith and subjectivity which supported Husserl's teleology, but also because "on *this* basis there is no reconciliation between human worlds, no universal human contact to be reached, but only a destruction of fundamental humanities [*Menschlichkeiten*] through a generalized emptying of world-mysteries [*Weltgeheimnissen*]" (*Die Selbstbesinnung Europas*, 257). If we see a subjective phenomenology as Patočka's approach to the world in a manner that does not empty the "world-mystery," then this can be seen as his attempt to counter the over-imposing nature of the modern conception of reason and to instead "penetrate to the living heart of the world," as he put it in his essay on the two senses of reason (*PSW*, 161).

3.1.4 Patočka's approach to history

Although Husserl's historical teleology is rejected, Patočka nonetheless shares Husserl's approach of inquiring into Europe's history to address its crisis. Like Husserl, he sees reflection on Europe as vital for the existential and historical situation in which it itself. Yet, the urgency of the matter stands in stark contrast to its neglect:

for the moment, we notice that Europe is terribly avoiding this reflection, that no one is taking care of this matter at all, that from the time that Husserl wrote his *Crisis*, in actual fact no philosopher has reflected upon this problem of Europe and the heritage of Europe. (*PE*, 152)

Even during the seminars which formed the basis of his *Plato and Europe*, Patočka is struck by the fact that all questions are "about phenomenology, and Heidegger, and so on, but that no question came regarding Europe," despite that fact that it is precisely the topic that contained his "most particular theses" and "that precisely a great deal in our actual life and our world is clarified through this historical perspective, and that for this reason we should really concern ourselves with this" (*PE*, 178-79). As is still the case today, "Europe in its political sense is always talked about, but at the same time, the question of what it really is, and what it grows out of, is neglected" (*PE*, 179).

The scope of Patočka's project is vast, but its aim is modest: to provide a European self-reflection that brings the topic to attention in the first place. What makes his reflection remarkable is that for Patočka it takes place after the end of Europe:

The "Decline of the West" that is spoken of is no longer a dark prognosis, founded on suspicions about the periodicity of the development of cultures, but an empirical fact,

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which our work attempts to clarify on the basis of a spiritual-historical analysis [*einer geistesgeschichtlichen Analyse*]. (NE, 229)¹¹¹

Although according to Patočka we have entered a post-European era, we cannot understand this era without a proper understanding of what Europe was and what led to its demise. As was the case for Husserl, this involves considering Europe's history as a unitary one based on a fundamental principle. He is fully aware that when speaking of Europe we need to differentiate between principle, reality, and heritage (NE, 211), and he is careful to emphasize that we should not neglect its weaknesses, temptations, and catastrophes; its concrete realizations such as philosophy, science, theology, and law; or the institutions in which these are realized such as the state, church, and scientific organizations (NE, 228-29). Although philosophy plays an important role, there is no single-minded focus on the history of philosophy, because he wants to avoid imposing a conceptual scheme on history that would only end up distorting it (*Die Selbstbesinnung Europas*, 272; NE, 229).

Patočka thus follows Husserl's approach by interpreting Europe's history on the basis of a single principle, but has more of an eye for the concrete and diverse elements that make up this history. Despite acknowledging the complexity of the matter, Patočka bases his investigation on what he takes to be the fundamental principle of Europe: the care of the soul as originating in ancient Greek philosophy. One can ask whether Patočka does not end up doing the kind of philosophy of history that he disavows when he attempts to understand Europe on the basis of a single principle, a principle that is moreover based on philosophy. Patočka himself is distinctly aware of this risk. He says that he does not want his explications to be taken "as some kind of idealism" as he "[does] not imagine that philosophy would be the driving force of the world and that it would even ever have any chance for this" (PE, 69). Although Patočka attributes a fundamental importance to the care of the soul, he is fully aware that "of course, Europe wasn't just that" (PE, 89). Moreover, Patočka is aware of the way the idea of Europe came into being historically, providing a brief account that matches the one given in section 1.2:

How did this Europe come into existence? Since when is Europe spoken of? In antiquity, Europe was a mere geographical concept. Europe became a historical-political concept that we can use as a name for a certain united singular reality, only in the Middle Ages. The Roman Empire is not any kind of Europe – of course Africa and a large part of Asia belonged to the Roman Empire – but this whole development had its own stamp. (PE, 10)

That is not to say that Patočka is free from any and all idealization and simplification. Although he himself insisted that he did not do so (HE, 41), in his preface to the *Heretical Essays* Ricoeur noted the danger that Patočka may idealize the Greek *polis* too much (HE, xiii). Tucker, not without warrant, went as far as saying that "Patočka endorsed absurdity" when

¹¹¹ *Geistesgeschichte* is German for what in English is known as 'intellectual history' or 'history of ideas'. Aside from the fact that these are not neatly turned into adjectives to fit the translation, the importance of the spiritual for Patočka makes it warranted to translate *geistesgeschichtlich* with "spiritual-historical" as not to lose what is at stake in his analysis.

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he referred to the Holy Roman Empire as the last remnant of the idea of a unified Europe based on the care of the soul (2000, 67). Over-idealization and -simplification are an inherent risk to the kind of analysis Patočka provides. If anything saves him from this is, it is the keen awareness of the catastrophes throughout Europe's history. In his account we find no smooth development, no unimpeded march through history. Instead, we find a history of failures. The project of the care of the soul leads from one failure to the next "and through catastrophe, despite their destructive consequences, this heritage is spread throughout the world" (*PE*, 89).

This does not decisively settle the question of whether Patočka presented too much of an ideal history. Although it ends with the for him undeniable end of Europe, he still interprets the failures in its history as partial successes. As he says, these catastrophes are ultimately transformed "from purely negative phenomena into attempts at overcoming that which had grown sclerotic and incapable of life under the historical conditions of the time" (*HE*, 83). The balance between an idealized history and the awareness of the way history actually played out remains precarious. However, Patočka's account of the care of the soul and the account of Europe based on it can be said to place this precarity between the ideal possibilities of human existence and the real way in which these played out at the front and centre of his analyses.

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3.2 The Care of the Soul

3.2.1 Introduction

Patočka's account of Europe is based on the idea that from the origin of the care of the soul in ancient Greece up until roughly the 15th century, the history of Europe is in large part "the history of the attempt to realize the care of the soul" (PE, 37). Europe's history after this period, however, is still thought of as a transformation of the care of the soul. Accordingly, to understand our contemporary situation, it is still necessary to inquire into the beginnings of this principle.

The situation that gave rise to the care of the soul is what Patočka refers to using the term 'problematicity'. This is the situation where the simply accepted, pre-given meaning provided by myth and tradition is thrown into doubt, 'shaken'. Not unlike Husserl, the importance of Greek philosophy for Patočka lies in its attempt to transform this uncertain situation into a positive project for life. This is what he discusses as the care of the soul as "the practical form of [the] discovery of the Whole and of the explicit spiritual relation to it" (HE, 82). However, this will be a very different 'Whole' and relation to it than the idea of the world as Husserl conceived of it. Instead of seeing problematicity as a fall into meaninglessness to be repressed, the care of the soul takes it to be "the discovery of the possibility of achieving a freer, more demanding meaningfulness" (HE, 63). It is on this basis that history can be seen as a history of "lift and decline, of the possibility of freedom and its undermining" (NE, 230).

Patočka's account of the care of the soul draws mainly from the work of Plato, where it is said to have three related forms.¹¹² These forms are referred to in various ways, but can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The first form of the care of the soul pertains directly to the soul itself. It concerns self-knowledge, and the deepening and shaping of the self.
- 2) Second, there is an "ontological design" or "ontocosmological project." The soul is that to and through which the world or what is also referred to as the whole manifests itself. This second form of the care of the soul thus concerns itself with this manifestation of the whole and shows the relation of the soul to the whole.
- 3) The third form is the care of the soul in the community and concerns the conflict between two ways of life that it leads to and the subsequent thought of a just state founded on truth.

(NE, 265, 281; PE, 95-97, 125, 180)

¹¹² Aside from Plato, Patočka counts Democritus as one of the founders of the care of the soul. Yet, whereas in Plato there is primarily a concern with the soul for its own sake, for Democritus this has more of an instrumental value. Whereas for Democritus one cares for the soul in order to better obtain knowledge, for Plato knowledge is a means for the betterment of the soul itself (NE, 255, 287; PE, 91). Although for Democritus too this has an existential importance, in this section Patočka's account of him will not be discussed.

At the basis of the three forms of the care of the soul lies what Patočka refers to as a movement of human existence dedicated to something higher than mere survival. According to Patočka, the soul can only be understood in terms of movement and already in Plato the doctrine of the soul took shape as a doctrine of movement (*NE*, 281; *KEE*, 294, 299). This movement should be understood as a movement of transcendence, what Patočka, following Heidegger, takes to be the fundamental trait of human existence (*HE*, 48).¹¹³

This brings the project of the care of the soul in relation to Patočka's discussion of the three movements of human existence. Although these will not be discussed in depth, they provide a helpful complement to his account of the care of the soul. The first two movements are the movements of 'anchoring' and 'self-sustenance'. These are dedicated to life in its physical or biological sense and are characteristic of (but not exclusive to) the pre-problematical world. The third is the movement of 'truth' and the care of the soul can be seen as the actualization of the possibility provided by this movement.¹¹⁴ What these movements entail will become clearer in the discussion of the pre-problematical world and the care of the soul.

3.2.2 The pre-problematical world

The pre-problematical world is a world of simply accepted meaning. It can be equated with what was discussed as the enchanted worldview of traditional communities in section 1.3.1. It is also akin to the way Husserl describes the life-world and Patočka indeed uses his equivalent term "natural world" to refer to the pre-problematical world (*HE*, 12). The meaning of this pre-problematical world is supported by a mythical framework, often through intermediate figures with a supposedly unique access to the cosmic order such as priestly castes and god-kings. Pre-problematical life is a life for the sake of life, dedicated to survival and sustenance (*HE*, 13). Although it focusses on physical need, it places this physical toil in the context of a divine order of the world. It accepts

the community of all it contains as something simply given, something that simply manifests itself. It is a community of gods and mortals, the shared life-space of those dependent on the nourishing earth and the heavenly lights and of those who are not so dependent and who thus constitute the most wondrous mystery of this world. They are

¹¹³ Transcendence is a central and recurring topic in Heidegger's work, but for an explicit account see the essays *On the Essence of Ground* and *On the Essence of Truth* (Heidegger 1998a; 1998b). Patočka will follow Heidegger in linking the transcendence characteristic of human existence to freedom and an experience of the world.

¹¹⁴ As is the case for the different forms of the care of the soul, the three movements of existence (which do not correspond to the three forms of the care of the soul) are referred to in various ways by Patočka. Combining different formulations, we can portray them as follows:

- 1) The first movement is that of sinking roots, anchoring, or the acceptance of a pre-given meaning.
- 2) The second movement is that of self-sustenance, defence, self-projection, self-abandoning, self-objectification, and the humanization of the world. Here, a meaning is bestowed on those meaning configurations already present.
- 3) The third movement is the movement of existence in the narrower sense of the word, the movement of self-finding in self-surrender, or the movement of truth, of the possibility of a new meaning.
(*BCLW*, 148, 157, 177; *PSW*, 268-69; *HE*, 29; *IHP*, 166-67)

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not dependent – yet their mode of being is such that a community with humans can be an advantage to them since what humans do ultimately for the sake of their own survival, the Sisyphean toil in service of self-devouring life, is the work of the gods, a participation in preserving the world order, linking what is above with what is below, earth and the lights, the visibly created with the real of darkness. (*HE*, 25)

The way pre-problematical humanity comes to exist in the world in this manner can be explained through the first and second movements of existence. The first movement, that of acceptance of the world and into the world, is determined by an “instinctive-affective harmony” with the world (*BCLW*, 148). It can be seen as describing human existence in its infancy – whether on a civilizational level or in a more literal sense.¹¹⁵ Initially, we find ourselves in the world, but we have little control over it or even over ourselves: “it is a region in which we are being moved rather than moving ourselves” (*BCLW*, 140). Acting here is “something that eludes itself, has no control over itself, is essentially incomplete” (*BCLW*, 140). Life is “not an autonomous whole,” but “fragmented into individual moments of good luck and ill, of happiness and sorrow, on which life focuses as if it had no overall conception; life is a series of moments” (*BCLW*, 159-60).

What allows such a world to become hospitable for us is the fact that we do not come into it on our own. There are others who take care of us before we are able to properly do so ourselves. They provide us with the basis for an attachment to the world (*BCLW*, 149). They accept us into it in a basic, physical sense. The first movement is thus characterized by a bond that takes the form of dependence (*NWPP Supplement*, 166). Even when we gain the capacity to take care of our own needs and start directing our own life, there is still a dependence on the world. It not only provides us with nourishment, but is the ground for all orientation. The world is encountered as a mysterious, nonindividuated “*force and power*” preceding us and ruling over us (*PSW*, 255). The physical or biological is dominant here and one can see how the struggle for life here becomes related to an experience of the divine.

The first movement already suggests the second movement of self-sustenance: “Home already points to more, because what is needed, must be procured, this entails an outside, the domain of objectivity” (*PSW*, 260). The safety of the world into which we are accepted lets us acquire the possibility to move beyond it, although still in service of the reproduction of vital processes (*BCLW*, 150; *HE*, 15-16). But when our basic needs are taken care of this is no longer done instinctually-affectively, but through work, that is, through the active shaping of the world around us. Hence, Patočka also calls the second movement the “movement of our coming to terms with the reality we handle” (*BCLW*, 148). We attain an immediate relation to the things in the world, no longer mediated by others and “no longer

¹¹⁵ Patočka’s discussion of the movements is somewhat abstract insofar as he clarifies their nature by treating them independently of each other. In reality these movements do not occur as such, but only as intertwined with each other.

the overall relationship to what is *already* but rather a relation to this or that present matter which requires our whole commitment" (*NWPP Supplement*, 171).

This capacity to shape the world around us introduces the distinction between work and production. The former is a continuation of the struggle to deal with immediate physical needs, the latter produces something lasting, "giving the human world the character of something firm, lasting, perennial, a skeleton underneath the constant form of vital reproduction" (*HE*, 16). This allows for the rise of civilizations and an orientation toward the future. Although this is a crucial development, these civilizations remain dedicated to "the transmission and preservation of life" (*HE*, 37). Because of this, Patočka says that "the great empires of the ancient world were in this sense monumental households" (*HE*, 15-16). They remain dedicated to the reproduction of the past rather than the production of something truly new. The past determines all becoming, because the divine "is placed in a mythical beginning in the form of an event, a fate, or a decision that gives its special imprint to everything that comes after, that explains and gives meaning to everything that follows (*TMF*, 6).

The pre-problematical world of these kinds of civilizations has a work-character throughout. Work is necessary, involuntary, and a burden that shows the bondage of life to life. But this burden is interspersed with moments of alleviation: pause, rest, the ecstatic and orgiastic which transcend the daily struggle for life (*HE*, 31). What Patočka calls the "ordinary" or the "everyday" is broken up by "the exceptional, the holiday" which both "unburdens" and "enraptures": "something [...] seems to break into our life and bestow on it meaning which it would not know otherwise. It is the dimension of the demonic and of passion" (*HE*, 98-99). Something that is not a part of the world of work takes over in these experiences. This is a form of transcendence that Patočka refers to as "ecstasy," which transcends the everyday struggle for life, but which is not yet freedom (*HE*, 101). In it one, one does not achieve personal responsibility, but surrenders oneself to a higher power through divine enthusiasm.

It is clear that the pre-problematical character of this kind of civilization does not entail that it is completely intelligible. It is not completely *non*-problematical. It has its mysterious elements which are impenetrable for ordinary humans and these play a decisive role in the way the world is experienced (*HE*, 12). The sense that there is an overall meaning to the world is made possible by the experience that there are powers that stand over humans and rule their destiny, giving them a place in the world (*HE*, 12-13). Aside from being experienced in ritualistic ecstasy, this mysterious dimension of the world is recounted in myth. Myth is what first provides the human being with a sense of the whole. It is "a picture of the world in its entirety" that does not distinguish itself from that of which it is a picture (*PE*, 52). When Patočka says that myth is like a picture, this should not be understood as if it were an explicit grasp of the whole. More than a picture, it is an experience of the world. As Patočka says: "Myth is a grand passive fantasy – a fantasy that is not aware that it is fantasy" (*PE*, 122).

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The imaginative “flows over into reality and reality back into the imaginative without a clear-cut line of demarcation” (TMF, 8).

Although mythical consciousness entails an experience of manifestation, this is interpreted in worldly terms so that “what-is and being, phenomena and the movement of their manifestation, converge on a single plane” (HE, 32). There is no clear ontological distinction between the things which appear within the world and the divine forces that are used to account for their appearance in the world. No differentiation is made

between the night which is a fact of experience and night as the darkness out of which the lightning of being strikes; between the earth that bears fruit and nourishes and the earth that is the backdrop of all that is, of the world which is not identical with any factual existent which, in turn, shows itself only against the backdrop of the world. (HE, 32)

Transcendence thus has a place in the pre-problematical world, but, as De Warren puts it, “does not break with the natural order of the world, and thus remains beholden within the world” (2015a, 145). As a result, this mythical world is mysterious throughout:

Mystery is everywhere in myth, it does not have a special and particular place. Not only is mystery not a specific category that would be differentiated from something else, it is a general character of the universe as uncontrolled and uncontrollable. There is “meaning” in everything recounted in myth, but this meaning is never an idea that could be formulated on its own, it is something that remains indeterminate. Myth is made up of presentiments and suggestions; it does not say anything definite and universal. (TMF, 8)

Myth thus combines the strange and mysterious with the everyday and mediates between these two dimensions. In doing so it provides human beings with a “safe ground beneath their feet, a ground of conviction, faith on which they may move about with certainty” (PE, 71). For all of its *Unheimlichkeit*, the pre-problematical world “is not a fundamentally problematic dimension, just as myth is not problematic, because everything is *given within* it, everything in it is already accounted for and complete in its own way: there, answers are given before questions” (PE, 135). Not everything is given as present to human existence, but there is a sense that even what is not given as such is, quite literally, in order. This prevents any explicit, thematic emergence of the whole. Hence, humans in this mythical world refer “explicitly only to parts of all there is, never to the world as a whole” (IHP, 2).

The possibility of penetrating this mysterious whole, that is, of insight, and even of breaking away from one’s given place in the world, is present in myth. Yet, it is not presented as a possibility for ordinary humans. The quest for another life is for divine or semi-divine beings, for whom, it should be noted, it rarely ends well (TMF, 9; HE, 17, 61). Nonetheless, in manifesting the whole, myth prefigures philosophy. Both arise out of the same “primeval situation of human revealedness, from that, that man is the creature who lives within the revealedness of the whole” (PE, 49).

In the pre-problematical world this movement of truth makes itself felt, but is subservient to the first and second movements of existence and suppressed by myth which is fundamentally in alignment with these two movements. Philosophy can only come about when this mythical framework is shaken and problematized. This possibility is always present, but remains hidden or is actively repressed. Pre-problematical humanity prefers “a modest integration into the whole of what is, and their social existence in community is appropriate to it, not deviating from the whole and the forces that govern it” (HE, 62). Although pre-problematical life is a life in service of physical needs, it does find itself in a meaningful world with a bond to the divine, art as an expression of this, and so on. Accepting problematicity means placing all of this at stake (HE, 25-26).

3.2.3 The care of the soul

3.2.3.1 *The shaking of meaning*

When it takes hold of human existence, the experience of problematicity entails the shaking of all previously accepted meaning:

Nothing of the earlier life of acceptance remains in peace; all the pillars of the community, traditions, and myths, are equally shaken, as are all the answers that once preceded questions, the modest yet secure and soothing meaning, though not lost, is transformed. It becomes as enigmatic as all else. (HE, 39-40)

Patočka remains vague about what would have caused such a shaking, even saying that “we would be asking erroneously if we were to ask what caused this shock” (HE, 62).¹¹⁶ He makes it clear that the problematical in a way is always present, but suppressed. That means that this break with tradition is less difficult to account for than the similar break in Husserl’s account was argued to be. It reveals something already there rather than constituting something new, even if the way of dealing with it might be radically new. On the other hand, this leads to the question of the nature of problematicity as a fundamental part of human existence – or, as will be argued, of the world – a topic which will be treated more extensively in section 3.5.

This shaking of what was previously accepted is a form of the third movement of existence, which Mensch is correct in suggesting we could call the movement of problematization (2017, 114). Patočka calls this movement “authentically human” (BCLW, 159) and “the most humanly significant of the three” (NWPP *Supplement*, 175). It shakes our “earthliness,” that is, our bonds to the physical or biological (BCLW, 151, 160). In doing so, it

¹¹⁶ One place that he says this shaking occurs for reasons that will become clear in the following sections is in the confrontation with finitude, that is, in battle: “The confrontation with finitude, with death and nothingness, shakes every role even though it is originally tied to a particular role, that of a combatant; that role, however, has the peculiarity that it shifts man to the periphery of humanity, out of the warmth of everyday being-at-home, into the freezing cold of nonbeing. In this confrontation, however, a disconnection of man and role takes place. A question is posed here, inevitably, and it is not answered by the social consequences of the threat represented by the organization of power, or by the analysis of humankind as so many constellations of forces. There remains the *view of the whole*, the fulfillment of the question that was capable of striking down the role, of evoking freedom, but not of giving it content and definition” (PSW, 263).

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paves the way for new possibilities of human life that are not necessarily dedicated to the perpetuation of life. Free from mere acceptance, one can marvel at the world, reflect on it, and question it. Whereas pre-problematical life knew mystery, but no wonder understood in this sense, here wonder becomes possible as “a shock really signifying the passage from unreflective faith to the sudden challenging of faith by the fact that something reveals itself” (PE, 73).

However, this revelation of the world also reveals its problematicity (PE, 45). The human being attains a unique position in standing over and against the world, but this entails that it is no longer a part of it in the same way. Although the pre-problematical world was a mysterious world, it was a world in which human existence had its place. Now, the human being is expelled from it (PE, 34). For Patočka, the crucial move of ancient Greek philosophy is that on this basis it developed “a *plan for lift*, one that stated it is not damnation, but *human greatness!*” (PE, 35). This insight could be the basis of a new life, one not dedicated and limited to survival. Rather than being drawn towards the physical, what Patočka calls a state of decline or even decay – as the physical by its nature does not last, human existence can achieve something higher, a lift out of decline.

In the context of Greek philosophy this happens with the discovery of the permanent and unchangeable reality behind the fleeting world of the senses (PE, 12). By caring for that which makes its manifestation possible, that is, the soul, one can share in this higher, more divine form of existence. For the Greeks, caring for the soul puts the human being in a state similar to the gods, whose life is taken to differ from human life “in its quantitative dimension, but not in its essence” (PE, 36). Although the shaken individual has lost the pre-given meaning of the world, it can undertake the quest for a new ground on which to stand, “to find something upon which stands the rest, and to find it in such a way that we might build in a solid, unshakable, tapped from the presence of existence itself, way everything that surrounds us” (PE, 75). Moreover, it can do so “free of the muting effect of tradition and myth” (HE, 39-40). The care of the soul is this attempt not only to stand firm in the face of problematicity, but to achieve something higher than was previously thought possible on its basis.

3.2.3.2 *The shaping of the self*

Insight into the whole makes possible a life based on insight rather than mere acceptance, bringing with it two great tasks: “to make what is pre-given intelligible and to shape the self” (NE, 209). These two tasks follow from the movement of the soul itself, which as Ritter has pointed out, has two related directions in Patočka’s account. There is what can be seen as a vertical movement in the form of a transcendence beyond the physical world. But at the same time this is a circular moment of the soul directed towards itself (Ritter 2017, 236). Where there is no clear end-point of transcendence, this transcendence itself becomes the focal point of the care of the soul. These two directions of movement become one in the examination of the good, famously beyond being according to Plato. What can be seen as the soul’s practical

concern with the good is thus related to a theoretical concern of something that transcends the physical world.

The care of the soul is equated with this examination of the good (*PE*, 120). This is because “the soul is that for which good and evil have meaning” (*NE*, 268). While the soul is a movement towards the good, this does not necessarily mean that there is a transcendent Idea of the Good to which the soul is drawn. As will be discussed in section 3.5, Patočka interprets the Platonic Idea in a very different way, focussing not on anything transcendent, but rather on the movement of transcendence itself. The soul is primarily a *self*-movement in striving for the good (*KEE*, 294-95; *NE*, 268, 287). The good only has meaning, only ‘exists’ in this movement. It is not something to simply be found in the world, but instead something to be established in it insofar as we have a concern for it that gives direction to the soul.

This directing of the soul gives its thoughts and actions unity. It turns the soul into something harmonious, free of contradiction, no longer subject to arbitrariness and no longer running the risk of losing itself in individual moments of pleasure and pain. Every position it takes is to be justifiable at all times. As Patočka says, “this Λογος remains standing, it does not flee, it does not change in discussion about what is the goal for me, what is the good for me, and so on” (*PE*, 216). On the other hand, the soul of someone who dedicates him or herself to sentiment or enjoyment

dissolves in the uncertainty of pleasure and pain, which naturally go hand in hand. This uncertainty lies in the fact that pleasure and pain do not have any defined limit, any defined form. They always want more and more – and there is never any end to them.
(*PE*, 86)

The soul is thus given shape in a quite literal sense: “the soul that is cared for *is* more, it has a higher, elevated being. This being is, so to speak, thickened, concentrated, it is always the same, it does not dissolve, does not blur” (*PE*, 120-21). As Ritter has emphasized, the soul is nothing separate from this activity: “To take care of the soul is not to take care of something. The soul consists rather in the care itself” (2017, 246). There is no soul in the proper sense of the term without this care, as a soul that does not care for itself runs “the risk of shattering into contradictory pieces” (*PE*, 85-86).

Concretely, this shaping of the soul takes place through insight, that is, thoughts which are considered binding insofar as they correspond to the eternal whole (*NE*, 262; *PE*, 86). Thought is the “organ” of the soul, “the organ of its being-good, its completion, the rise of its being” (*NE*, 262). This takes the concern with the soul out of the mythical-ritualistic sphere. What deepens the soul is no longer religious devotion or divinely inspired enthusiasm, but a relation to the divine through knowledge (*KEE*, 299). Philosophy’s novelty lies in this attempt to achieve transcendence in a disciplined, responsible manner as “the nonstatic, nonorgiastic counterpart” to the mythical-ritualistic forms of transcendence (*HE*, 103-4). Instead of “losing ourselves in the sacred” it consists in “*overcoming* everydayness without collapsing in self-forgetting into the region of darkness, however tempting” (*HE*, 102).

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However, this quest for responsible insight, that is, insight which we can justify, is not one that ever reaches an end. Every insight is questioned anew as to deepen it further. Truth is not given once and for all, but the matter of “a lifelong inquiry, a self-controlling, self-unifying intellectual and vital practice” (*HE*, 82). Even what seems self-evident can be questioned and problematized further and for those that care for the soul this is a necessary way of proceeding. As Findlay said and as will be argued further, “the foundation it uncovers must itself be recognized ever again as problematic” (2002, 105-6). Thus, more than any actual relation to the eternal, which would still be a mythical interpretation, it is inquiry that creates the unity of the soul and directs it towards something higher (*PE*, 92). It turns the experience that it does not know, of knowing this not knowing, into an experience of its own being, becoming its own foundation. The problematical is in a sense allowed to thrive and the soul shapes itself accordingly “in an activity which stems from a searching lack of meaning” (*HE*, 61).

Questions regarding good and evil, truth and untruth never arrive at an end, but what matters is that we concern ourselves with them, that we become the kind of being that concerns itself with them. Although Patočka speaks of the third movement of existence as an overcoming of finitude, it is an overcoming that also preserves or integrates finitude within it (*PSW*, 267; *BCLW*, 151). This is necessary, because although it is a movement that in a way breaks from life, it remains dependent on the physical and on the body in particular (*IHP*, 145). The body is not just that at which the first and second movements of existence aim through its fundamental character of need. It is also the place from which all actions, all movements, are initiated and what allows us to act in the first place. Thus, Patočka says that “in the soul itself there is something binding it to what is ‘lower’” (*KEE*, 297). The soul cannot be considered independently from the body. From that perspective, matters such as sustenance or even power and wealth can belong to the care of the soul. As Chvatík has put it: “The dead and unable cannot pull themselves into upswing” (2015a, 36). The body is thus both the place of decline and of the possibility of upswing or lift out of this decline. It is captured between “pure freedom and sheer objectivity” (*IHP*, 149-50). As Tava emphasizes, the movement of truth and thus the care of the soul takes place within and as the tension between these two opposing poles (2015, 103). It is neither a purely corporeal movement nor fully transcendent, but, as Patočka puts it, takes place “in the impure towards the pure” (*KEE*, 298).

For all of its focus on transcendence and the overcoming of mere objectivity, the care of the soul can thus be seen as “a march up to an apex which simultaneously prepares processes that prepare the way back, downward” (*BCLW*, 146). Drawing more on Aristotle than on Plato, for Patočka the ascent out of the cave is meaningless without the return to the cave (*PE*, 189). Ideas must be embodied in a quite literal sense. The example of this that Patočka points to is Socrates, who did not state the good, but inquired into it and established it in his life and thought (*ILI*, 93). As Tava has pointed out, Patočka’s thought thus does not intend a “kind of drift towards otherworldliness,” but instead “inspires a renewed participation in [the world]” (2015, 22). It is in this sense that Patočka can call action “a

question of truth" or "a way of truth" (PE, 218-19). What kind of being I am ultimately does not become clear to me through inner contemplation, but is revealed through the way I manifest myself in the world, that is, through what I do.

3.2.3.3 The manifestation of the world

Equally crucial to the way the soul manifests itself in the world is the way the world manifests itself to the soul. These are related because the soul is not only that which is capable of the good, but also that which is capable of – or perhaps it is better to say susceptible to – manifestation. It is what is capable of and concerned about truth understood as the manner in which things manifest how and what they are (PE, 26-27). The soul allows us to discern not just that there is being, but that it appears (NE, 282; PE, 16). This means that for Patočka the "fundamental possibility of man coincides with the problem of manifesting" (PE, 26). As said, human existence finds itself between sheer objectivity and freedom. This is because the human being stands between mere existence and the transcending of mere existence towards the appearing of existence, its phenomenality free from any physical determination. The human being can thus either "*capitulate and degenerate into mere existence*" or it can realize itself "*as a being of truth, a being of phenomenon*" (PE, 36).

While everything we encounter in the world manifests itself to us in some way, the shaken situation makes possible "an encounter with what there is, on the boundary of all that is where this whole remains insistent because something quite other than individual entities, interests, and realities within it inevitably emerges there" (HE, 39-40). It is an encounter with the world as a whole or the world as such rather than anything in it. When the natural way we are in the world is shaken, we find ourselves in a world into which we do not fully fit, in which we become aware of ourselves in a new way as we attain a certain distance to the world, and this distance allows this world to appear to us as such.

If the whole gives itself in this shaking, one could wonder what there is left to seek regarding this whole. But, "although the world shows itself, and shows itself in its entirety, it *never shows itself in the same way twice*" (PE, 73). A sense of the whole endures, but does not let itself be grasped. The task is to find "the fundamental, the grand through which everything else only then becomes what it is" (PE, 73). In other words, the task is to find the principle of this manifestation of the whole that shows itself, even if in this showing it also keeps itself back. This links the ancient Greek project of finding the *archai* of the world to phenomenological inquiry. But, as in myth, in ancient philosophy the question of manifestation was not yet clear as one distinct from the question regarding what manifests itself, from existence (PE, 142). It did not yet know of phenomenology as a distinct enterprise concerned with appearing as such. The unclarity regarding the difference between manifestation and existence can clearly be seen in Plato and the different ways Patočka presents his thought. Plato confuses the questions regarding manifestation and existence when he

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considers that, which is the principle, indivisible and permanent, as at the same time *higher existence*, not just what facilitates the manifestation of existence – in this Plato undoubtedly succumbs to the tradition of Greek philosophy, or better said, to the philosophy of that time, which considers as existent what is most present and most enduring. (PE, 103-4)

In doing so, Plato goes beyond reflection on manifestation towards a teaching of absolute being, that is, metaphysics (PE, 103-4).¹¹⁷ Plato does hit upon the fact that things in the world manifest themselves on the basis of something other than themselves qua existents, “but this light, in whose rays things can only then show themselves is comprehended [...] as a *hyperthing*” (PE, 140). As Patočka puts it at one point, Plato came close to something like phenomenology, but then coupled it with a fantastic physics, giving it a metaphysical interpretation (KEE, 300). In doing so, the ontological difference, the difference between being and beings, or, more phenomenologically speaking, between the manifestation of beings and manifest beings is ignored. It is this difference which Patočka says was revealed by the shaking of meaning (MPR, 127). It is understandable that such a radical new insight became interpreted according to a more traditional scheme and that it could not be acknowledged straight away. It is only in the wake of phenomenology that it has become clear that the problem of manifesting should be treated “*without regard to any kind of reality*” and that “*the structure of appearing must itself stand upon itself*” (PE, 41).

What matters in relation to the care of the soul is that despite its metaphysical misinterpretation, it is this independence of phenomenon from existence that makes the experience of the world one of freedom beyond the bondage to physical existence. The experience of the soul “consists in discovering that there is a depth to being, which the human being first discovers when it goes against the stream and general tendency of reality, against thingliness” (NE, 282).

3.2.3.4 Care in the community

The care of the soul might seem primarily to be an individual undertaking. It is, after all, what shapes the individual as separated from the bonds of the traditional community. Yet, Patočka holds that it is fundamentally related to the community and not merely negatively, through a distancing of oneself from the community. Care of the soul is “at the same time a care for the own soul and with this a care for the soul of the community, both of which are inseparable from one another” (NE, 260). Patočka states this connection more often than he elaborates on it, but in his work we can discern three reasons for it: the community is where we see the soul

¹¹⁷ It should be noted that Patočka also acknowledges that even when Plato did this, he “did not rigidify this into some formula” (PE, 103-4). According to Patočka, Plato never systematically presented the ontocosmological form of the care of the soul, at least not in writing, because “Plato *did not want* to pass on this system as something completed and capable of becoming tradition” (PE, 96). As will become clear from the discussion of Patočka’s *Negative Platonism*, Patočka attributes to Plato that he wanted to keep the movement involved in it alive, something which cannot be reified without precisely losing that which is its main thrust. Although Patočka largely articulates his account of the movements of existence on the basis of the work of Aristotle, he says that it is Aristotle, not Plato, in whom the transformation of transcendence into something transcendent culminates in ancient philosophy (NP, 182).

in action, the idea of a life that cares for the soul significantly overlaps with the idea of the political life, and the failure of the care of the soul necessitates a reflection on the kind of community where the care of the soul does not have to end in catastrophe. It is this last reason more than anything that provides the political foundation for Patočka's reflections on Europe.

Although the conception of the soul that is at stake here concerns the soul from an internal perspective, as discussed it still relies on its manifestation in the world through action. One sees the soul in action not through "a mystical look into oneself" but there "where justice and injustice are *visible – in the community*" (PE, 116). The care of the soul is thus only possible within the community. That is not only where we are tested by others, but where we can test ourselves, where we can see whether we truly live up to the standard created by the care of the soul and whether we can unwaveringly live up to it.

This is related to the second reason why the care of the soul is only possible within the community. The community is where it is possible to encounter a plurality of views that can make us question the things we have up until then naively accepted. That is, the community is the space that makes an awareness of problematization possible in the first place. Of course, this requires a particular kind of community where a plurality of views is possible and where at least some individuals are free from the life dedicated only to life. That is, it requires a community that already to some extent acknowledges problematization. This is what Patočka sees in the Greek *polis*. Drawing on the work of Arendt, he says that there "the sphere of the house ceased to be the core of the world as such, becoming simply a private domain alongside and juxtaposed to which there arose [...] a different, no less important public sphere" (HE, 23).

The public sphere is one of the fundamental possibilities of disagreement. As Patočka says, the *polis* is constituted by *polemos*, strife (HE, 43). The shaking of pre-given answers is thus not just the condition for philosophy, but "represents a nearly simultaneous – and in a more profound sense really unitary – origin of politics and philosophy" (HE, 61). What becomes possible that was not possible in the fixed order of pre-problematical civilizations is a truly political life, a life for the sake of freedom instead of for the sake of life itself (HE, 142-43). Here, one can start to care for the soul of the community, for the good of the community rather than for its mere survival. Here, one can pose "the question of the lawful arrangement of life in the community from the point of view of the thought of the just life" (PE, 104).

This is a precarious situation, because it inevitably leads to conflict. Conflict is part of the fundamental make-up of the *polis*, the spirit of which Patočka calls "a spirit of unity in conflict" (HE, 41). He even goes as far as saying that "one cannot be a citizen – *polites* – except in a community of some against others" (HE, 41-42). However, there are different kinds of conflict. There is the fecund conflict between those with different views who nonetheless have the shared goal of a life based on insight, a goal for which they are prepared to problematize their own views. But there is also the conflict between those who are and those who are not

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interested in such a life, those who try to live up to this standard and those who are not interested in it (*PE*, 93; *NE*, 269).

As mentioned, Patočka takes Socrates to be the archetypical figure of the care of the soul. Socrates exemplarily philosophized in public and famously rarely left Athens. His care of the soul took place in the community and was a care for the soul of the community, for the elevation of the public. But Socrates also provides the example of what this can lead to. In dedicating himself to a new form of life, he was “a constant thorn in the side of the entire community” (*PE*, 113). This was the case not because he wanted to overhaul all of society and replace traditional values with something completely new. Rather, “Socrates defends *with new methods* the old; he defends the thought that it is important not to harm, that it is better to undergo injustice than to commit it” (*PE*, 84). He defends standards that most people would already agree with, but not necessarily live up to. Consequently, “he uncovers them, reveals that they are *errant people, blindly wandering*” (*PE*, 84). For holding those around him not just to a higher standard, but to one that they claim to adhere to themselves, Socrates had to pay the ultimate price. Patočka even thinks that it is natural and understandable that those who engage in the care of the soul are persecuted:

For without a doubt, the care of the soul in a lawless city endangers a human being, it endangers the kind of being that stands for the care of the soul, just as that being endangers the city. And it is altogether logical that the city then treats it accordingly. (*PE*, 87)

Yet, despite the risks, like Socrates, those who care for the soul should not leave the community. It is their natural place where the actions of the soul are visible and where the explicit awareness of problematicity is possible. Hence, Patočka always stresses the necessity of courage for those who care for the soul (*NE*, 231, 272-73). But that does not mean they should blindly go down the path of Socrates:

The heirs [of Socrates] are no longer to die for philosophy, for the care of the soul and for the new community, but rather have the task to create the new community before their minds and then in reality. (*NE*, 271)

The death of Socrates is the event that provides the third reason for the connection between the care of the soul and the shaping of the community. It is in response to this initial failure of the project of the care of the soul that Patočka says the idea of the just state arose in Plato, the state where Socrates would not have had to die (*PE*, 50). If the care of the soul is to have a happy ending, a state is needed in which this is possible.

It is this political project of the care of the soul which Patočka sees Europe as trying to realize throughout its history. It is because Plato was “also the founder of the philosophical theory of the state” that Patočka calls him and not Socrates the “founder of European ideals” (*NE*, 210). This not only entails that for Patočka Europe was a political project from its very inception, but also that from the start this project was formulated as the response to a catastrophe. To understand how Patočka’s reflections on the care of the soul –

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particularly in relation to the political project that resulted from it – can possibly help to address Europe's contemporary situation, it is useful to look at his account of the subsequent transformations of the care of the soul and the way he sees Europe as having taken shape and having come to an end on its basis.

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3.3 Europe and After

3.3.1 The Roman Empire and the Holy Empire

The Greek *polis*, the birthplace of the care of the soul, ended in catastrophe, but left behind “an inheritance of thinking about the state where philosophers might live, about a state of justice founded not on mere tradition, but rather on *looking-in* [that is, insight]” (PE, 88). Precisely because this inheritance was not essentially attached to the particularity of the Greek *polis*, and even betrayed by the reality of the *polis*, it created

a heritage that can survive in the declining polis, and survives even the decline of Hellenism, and helps so that after the decline of the Roman Empire still another formation is conceived, that is, Europe in the proper sense of the word. The surviving of the heritage is obviously also its change, but this metaphysical foundation still endures. (PE, 129)

This heritage not only grew out of the decline of the *polis* but would perhaps not have been possible without it. As Patočka says:

Plato stands essentially at the end of the history of the Greek polis; he philosophizes already after its catastrophe. His philosophy after the catastrophe is to reconcile itself with the concrete situation and eventually to open further perspectives” (PE, 181).

It is in this way that the heritage of the care of the soul is passed on and survives. On this basis, Patočka takes the birth of Europe to take place in two waves: “upon the wreckage, first of the Greek polis, and then of the Roman Empire” (PE, 10). Although he is speaking of two fundamental waves here, the heritage that is shaped in them is taken up or transformed in five stages: The ancient Greek *polis*, the Roman Empire, what in section 1.2 has been referred to as Christendom but what Patočka usually refers to in terms of the Holy Roman Empire, modern Europe, and then the post-European age. Each of these takes up the project of the care of the soul, shaping it under its own historical circumstances, and each in a more general, more encompassing way than what preceded it (PE, 89). Nonetheless, Patočka speaks of two waves because it is after these waves – after the Holy Roman Empire – that the decline of the care of the soul sets in.

Although the heritage of the care of the soul – or rather, a particular variant of it, as will be discussed – began to spread globally with the onset of modernity, for Patočka this was the beginning of the end for Europe. Although, as discussed in section 1.2, the idea of Europe only became a properly European idea of Europe in modernity, for Patočka the true Europe that still took the care of the soul to heart was that of the Holy Roman Empire. To understand this, it must be understood what he meant by the idea of a holy empire, an idea which he takes to have developed in the wake of the Roman Empire.

The project of the care of the soul failed in the *polis*, because it not only could not prevent the death of Socrates, but in a way necessitated it. This resulted in reflection on the conditions in which one can care for the soul, that is, on the community or state in which one

can do so. This legacy was taken up in the Roman Empire through the tremendous influence of Stoicism on the Romans and “matured in reflection on the greatness and failure of the *polis*” (HE, 81). Stoicism did not create the Roman state, but according to Patočka elevated it to the level of a more ideal state, a more just state of law. The Hellenistic period is of crucial importance,

because there is the genesis of something like a conception of mankind, mankind as something universal, where everyone has a share in the common. All the problems that have not left humanity since originated there: the problem of the universal state, universal religion, social reconciliation, reconciliation among different nations. All these are problems of Hellenism, which found their crystallization in the Roman Empire. (PE, 11)

It is in this political reorientation of the care of the soul originating in Plato that the Greek heritage is passed on through Rome to what would become Europe. Yet, the Roman Empire failed as well. As the crucial reason for this failure Patočka takes its internal, spiritual failure. While the Roman Empire praised justice and universalism, it also glorified domination and remained attached to a certain ethnic foundation. Despite its universalism, the Roman Empire was rife with social and political inequality. Its reality did not live up to its ideal, resulting in an alienation between the people and the state. The Roman state was not capable of convincing its people that it truly was a state of justice (HE, 80-81; PE, 89).

The social tensions resulting from this forced a reconceptualization of the basic scheme of the Roman Empire. It came to redefine itself through Christianity so that “freedom is no longer defined in terms of a relationship to equals (other citizens) but to a transcendent Good” (HE, 106). Based on the existing imperial foundation this led to the idea of a *sacrum imperium*, a holy empire “not founded on the changeability of human things as Rome was, but rather on absolute truth, so that it would be the kingdom of God upon earth” (PE, 89). Crucial here is the introduction of “the guiding thought of this other kingdom, this other world, which is the world of the real truth,” which Patočka attributes to the influence of Plato on Christianity (PE, 89).

As said, it is this idea of a holy empire that Patočka takes to be determinative for what Europe will be. Europe “arose from the development of one version of the idea of the kingdom of God on earth” (PE, 89). It is the Europe of Christendom, of the Holy Roman Empire, in which Patočka sees the last great attempt to realize the care of the soul. In line with the discussion of the development of the idea of Europe, Patočka is correct in attributing the unifying factor of Europe to Christendom (HE, 79-80). Consequently, and as will be discussed in section 3.4, it is Christianity that Patočka will turn to in order to address Europe’s spiritual distress and political fragmentation at the end of modernity.

Although Patočka finds it hard to succinctly define the idea of a holy empire, he says that “in all of it the thought is alive of a universal empire and the thought of a polity grounded in final truth” (*Europa und sein Erbe*, 168). Specifically, the post-Roman holy empire

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has to provide a political answer to the “alienation between the state organism and the public on which it had been grounded” (HE, 80). The empire is thus reshaped,

no longer as this earthly state of the caesars with its all-too-human vacillation between arbitrary will and a will to justice, between natural despotism and the “natural law” on which civil law is based, but rather as a city based directly on a truth which is not of this but of the other world and whose norms and primordial model are set not by human but by divine power and by a sacred history entering into human history and drawing it into itself. (HE, 81)

It is on the basis of this transformation that the holy empire “gives rise to a much broader human community than the Roman-Mediterranean had been while at the same time disciplining inner humanity and giving it greater depth” (HE, 83).

This western Christian holy empire was not the only attempt at a holy empire, not even the only to take up the legacy of the Roman Empire. Patočka speaks of three versions of the holy empire, each with their own characteristics and origins. Aside from the Western one, we also find the Byzantine Eastern Orthodox version (of which Russia will be the heir with Moscow as the ‘third Rome’ after Constantinople) and the Islamic caliphates (HE, 80). All aim to establish themselves on an ultimate truth. Yet, the ways they do so differ and it is this that provides the Western version of the holy empire with its distinctive character. Moreover, this distinctive character is crucial to the way Europe has taken shape up to today.

While the unity of (Western) Europe was “forged in military expedition,” it was “constituted internally by the duality of spiritual and secular power under the supremacy of the former” (HE, 80). In neither the Byzantine nor the Islamic East there was such a separation of powers so that one could “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's” (Matthew 22:21). In the East, divine and worldly rule, religious and secular law, were united in and derived from a single divine source. The importance of the separation of powers in the West can hardly be overstated. It allowed Europe and specifically the Holy Roman Empire to take shape as an “inbetween between state and supra-state organization” (*Europa und sein Erbe*, 172). The Church was all-encompassing, but allowed for a plurality of states, cultures, ethnicities, and so on, to remain independent while still united under the single banner of Christianity. Importantly, the duality between the spiritual and the secular stood under the supremacy of the spiritual, whereas the secular was stronger militarily. This meant that neither had both the means and the moral authority to take full control and that both could be allowed to exist together; one in charge of Europe's secular life, the other of its spiritual life.

3.3.2 Modern Europe

This constellation has been decisive for modern Europe in separating the spiritual from the temporal. The divine is not found in the world, but beyond it, resulting in two separate domains of authority and a metaphysics that prefigures the modern conception of reason:

The distancing of humans from “nature,” which is no longer the locus of being human but rather something from which humans are separated by their unique unmediated relation, their relation to God, now enables them to perceive this “nature” as an “object.” (HE, 110)

The world becomes an object for the volitional machinations of the human being at its centre, because the divine is no longer found inside it, but transcends it, paving the way for the disenchantment of the world.¹¹⁸ As Patočka says: “Where the earth falls out of the centre of the world, the subject inserts itself into the centre of being” (KEE, 190). This leads to a shift from the care of the soul to what Patočka calls *the care to have* and ultimately the care about dominating the world (PE, 89; HE, 83). At the root of the care to have we initially still find a philosophical spirit looking to attain an understanding of the world, but now in the style of Bacon and Descartes for whom knowledge is power and thus needs to be effective, practical, or useful (HE, 84). Thus, from the 16th century onwards, the care of the soul transformed into the care to have through an inner dialectic of its Christian transformation until it became unrecognizable (PE, 89; HE, 83). While he will turn to Christianity as a resource for lifting Europe out of its decadence, Patočka thus also sees Christianity as an important source of this nihilism (HE, 69-70).

For a long time this nihilism was suppressed by the presence of older impulses. Certain material conditions were required to allow for the new spirit of the care to have to fully break through. Patočka attributes this to the discovery of the Americas and the colonization of the world (HE, 83). Suddenly, there were seemingly unlimited resources that could fuel the care to have, which became increasingly dominant as Europe set out to conquer the world on its basis. What is important is not just that it did so out of either a concern to understand or to dominate the entire world. That is already present in older civilizations. What is distinct about modern Europe is that it did so “on the basis of things” and “in absence of the world” (LS, 210-11, 248). That is, the conception of the world that the care of the soul concerned itself with and that could be the basis of a holy empire was suppressed in favour of that which the modern conception of reason could deal with in order to serve the care to have: the biological, physical, and objective. This leads to “an almost completely objectified world,” which leaves no room for anything like the care of the soul (NE, 216-17).

The change in Europe’s spiritual situation could not but also effect the political reality to which it was correlated. As Patočka points out, in modern Europe politics was tied to the economic and the social, not the moral (KEE, 193). Because of this,

From that time on the expanding western Europe lacks any universal bond, any universal idea which could be embodied in a concrete and effective bonding institution and authority: the primacy of *having* over *being* excludes unity and universality while the attempts to replace them with [hegemonic] power prove vain. (HE, 84)

¹¹⁸ Patočka thus sees Christianity as something like “a religion for departing from religion,” as Gauchet has called it (1997, 4). Comparable accounts are also found in the work of Voegelin (see e.g. Voegelin 2004, 80) and prefigured by Weber (2001).

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With the definitive end of what remained of the Holy Roman Empire at the beginning of the 19th century, for Patočka the last bastion of the care of the soul and the intermediate entity between Europe's particular nations and its spiritual authority, Europe is no longer a spiritually unified entity. While the Holy Roman Empire had not been the dominant force of Europe for a long time – if it even ever was so in the way Patočka conceives of it – throughout modernity this became increasingly explicit. Once the centre of Europe, it now was its eastern periphery with various western powers becoming the dominant European centres (*HE*, 85).¹¹⁹ For Patočka this designated more than a political shift in the balance of power. Throughout the 19th and 20th century crises arose in all domains, because “the political and social structures of Europe rest on something that society in its actual practice long since denied all trust and obedience” (*HE*, 92). Europe no longer had any spiritual principle that could serve as the foundation for its spiritual life. This situation came to a head with the First World War:

Nobody dared to establish an affirmative principle – the central powers in their hegemonic aspiration basically proceeded from the absence of a universal principle and attempted to compensate for this fault by means of the act, the re-establishment of a factual dominance. (*KEE*, 197-98)

It is this lack of spiritual principle and the resort to power that leads Patočka to say that the First World War “represented a definitive breakthrough of the conception of being that was born in the sixteenth century with the rise of mechanical natural science” (*HE*, 124). As discussed, the Second World War and indeed the entire 20th century only exacerbated this breakthrough:

The more modern technoscience asserts itself as the true relation to what-is, the more it draws everything natural and then even everything human into its orbit, the more the ageless traditions of balancing the authentic and the captivating are set aside and condemned as unrealistic, the more cruel will the revenge of orgiastic fervor be. (*HE*, 112-13)

The weakness of Europe's position became clear when during the Second World War (and not for the first time) it had to be saved by Russia and the United States, even though at its core they now operated on the basis of the same “biological-technical belief” of the care to have (*KEE*, 200-1). Europe's spiritual downfall already having taken place, the world wars signified its definite political downfall as well. It entailed the rise of other powers that would never let Europe be what it once was, even if it could. This is the breakthrough of the post-European era: “Europe was everything. [...] Now Europe entirely vacated its global position, lost its empires, its prestige, lost its self-confidence and self-understanding” (*HE*, 128-29).

¹¹⁹ Already in his essay on the *Two Senses of Reason* Patočka remarked on the difference in spiritual outlook between these Western European powers and that of Central Europe (*PSW*, 159).

3.3.3 Overcivilization and decadence

The problematic of the dominant 'biological-technical belief' in the 20th century is linked to what Patočka conceptualized in terms of overcivilization in the early 1950s and as decadence in the *Heretical Essays*. As in his early work, in his *Overcivilization and its inner conflict* Patočka defines European civilization by its rationality. But now he sees this as a form of *over-civilization* or *over-rationalization*. In this essay the inner tensions that the rationalization of society leads to are addressed on the basis of its two forms which he names *moderate* and *radical* overcivilization. Both entail a form of rationalism and universalism, but their essence and consequently the forms they take differ.

The moderate form of overcivilization rests on the two values of scientific truth and human freedom (*LS*, 121). The value it attributes to freedom is of particular importance, because it entails that the rationalism and universalism of this moderate form in their essence imply non-totality (*LS*, 114). As Gasché puts it, moderate overcivilization limits itself to the objective and impersonal aspects of life (2009, 379). This means rationalism does not penetrate all of life. It replaces the prior mythical or religious foundations of society, but does not set out to impose a new kind of total society. In this context Patočka explicitly refers to the modern struggles "about autonomy in the context of the central question regarding the determination of life's ultimate meaning" (*LS*, 119-20). In modernity, this played out in the context of religious freedom based on the idea that the individual answers directly to God without society as an intermediary. What this entails is that although society should be based on rational principles, space should be left for the self-determination of the individual which itself cannot simply be subsumed under such principles.

It is different in the case of radical overcivilization. To again use the way Gasché describes it: "radical over-civilization does not want to acknowledge these internal limits of universality and seeks to dominate life in its entirety by eliminating all the functions of life that do not conform to objective and impersonal rationality" (2009, 380). As an example Patočka gives the Soviet Union, in a certain sense the inheritor of the Byzantine holy empire, "ruling both human bodies and their souls" (*HE*, 129). There overcivilization "forgets its own finitude" (*LS*, 127). This is fully realized in the wars and totalitarianisms of the 20th century, where everything, including human life, becomes part of the total mobilization of society, part of the same accumulation and organization of forces. As Tava puts it, radical overcivilization thus ultimately turns out to have "more affinity with the irrational side of the human being than with cold universal reason" (2015, 12). This conclusion is shared by Meacham, who notes that radical overcivilization is unscientific in that it does not allow for even the possibility of the falsification of the principles on the basis of which it organizes society. The claim to rationality of radical overcivilization is thus

a claim to rationality that in fact overturns the very basis of rationality and is grounded not in scientific method, but in a particular worldview, in this case, concerning the

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behaviour of subjects and a particular view of the good life taken to be scientific in its ground. (Meacham 2015, 106)

While radical overcivilization was clearly one of the most pressing problems in 20th century Europe in the forms of its various totalitarianisms, it is the problem of moderate overcivilization that is arguably more pertinent to contemporary Europe. As Gasché has remarked, Europe's crisis is not just due to the division of European rationality into two forms and a tendency towards the radical form. While moderate overcivilization can be seen as an answer to its radical variant – in that it limits the latter's totalitarian tendencies by retaining a space for freedom – it is in crisis as well (Gasché 2009, 380). While it seems that it provides a good answer to radical overcivilization and in some regards is reminiscent of the idea of the holy empire on the basis of which Patočka conceptualized Europe, it has a crucial lack. In terms of the duality of secular and spiritual power, it keeps the former in check, but provides nothing in terms of the latter. While it retains a space for freedom, it does not provide any spiritual resources to direct this freedom and make it meaningful. Moderate overcivilization thus cannot function without "the inclusion of something that does not belong to the purely rational system of instrumentality" (*LS*, 142), without something that can offer more to life than mere life. In Patočka's words:

The crisis of liberalism, and, more generally, of moderate overcivilization is perhaps linked to the fact that *ratio*, as an element of life and of the diffusion of this form of civilization, is not the element of ultimate decision, of resolution, as regards the relation to the ultimate limits of the human being. *Ratio* cannot live alone: its essence is such that it is not enough for life as a whole, it demands to be completed or replaced by something else. (*LS*, 154-55)

As is the case in its radical variant, moderate overcivilization cannot deal with what is not objective, even though it does not exclude it. This means there is a significant risk of conservative, traditional powers taking control and civilization regressing to a pre-modern form of civilization, limiting the space of freedom again. Moderate overcivilization seems to provide but an empty framework incapable of giving meaning to human existence. With this, the issue of its decadence comes to the fore.

Patočka provides a definition of decadence in the fifth of the *Heretical Essays*, which deals with the question whether modern civilization is decadent and if so why. He relates it directly to the functioning of life:

A life can be said to be decadent when it loses its grasp on the innermost nerve of its functioning, when it is disrupted at its innermost core so that while thinking itself full it is actually draining and laming itself with every step and act. A society can be said to be decadent if it so functions as to encourage a decadent life, a life addicted to what is inhuman by its very nature. (*HE*, 97)

If the care of the soul concerns what ultimately makes human beings most human, then decadence is a consequence of its disappearance and replacement by the care to have. Patočka relates this to various phenomena: "addiction to things, to their everyday procurement, to

bondage to life" (*HE*, 113), sceptical relativism, indifference of pure intellectualism, aestheticism (*KEE*, 333), even boredom which is mentioned in one stroke with the experiences of combat and Hiroshima as decisive for the 20th century (*HE*, 114). Life is no longer dedicated to anything higher, but in a constant state of decline, a declension towards the physical. Moderate overcivilization itself might not necessarily drag the human being down, but it provides nothing to lift it out of decadence either.

The later Patočka sketches a pessimistic image of Europe, but he also sees that post-war Europe is not a complete failure. He is hesitant to answer the question whether our contemporary civilization is decadent in the positive (*HE*, 117). After the Second World War, European societies as a whole were richer than ever and used their wealth to carry out vast social projects (*HE*, 96). He even goes as far as saying that

this civilization *makes possible* more than any previous human constellation: a life without violence and with far-reaching equality of opportunity. Not in the sense that this goal would anywhere be actual, but humans have never before found the means of struggle with external misery, with lack and want, which this civilization offers. (*HE*, 118)

Although its social successes might make this era an optimistic one, Patočka says it is not a happy one (*KEE*, 364). Its potential is matched by its obstacles. Moreover, he seems pessimistic about the motives for the "gigantic work of economic renewal, the unheard-of, even undreamed-of social achievement" of Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. In the main, it was not a great programme of spiritual lift, but the result of the fact that "this continent has opted for demobilization because it has no other option" (*HE*, 132). It was the result of the ruination brought about by spiritual poverty. Aside from questioning its motives, Patočka also questions the results of Europe's social and economic successes. On a global level, they still contribute "to the deepening of the gap between the *blessed haves* and those who are dying of hunger on a planet rich in energy – thus intensifying the *state of war*" (*HE*, 132). Although they have their significance, in the end "exterior successes and failure can never be completely convincing as long as life decisions are concerned, about where is the real, where is the ultimate truth" (*ILI*, 92).

As a result, the old ways of proceeding are becoming less and less convincing, something that the beginning of the 21st century perhaps shows more acutely than the 20th century. As Tava has noted, this form of crisis is not a temporary setback from which we can recover by continuing along the previous path, but rather Europe's stagnation (2016a, 85). Europe's spiritual resources have been exhausted and the question is what can come after Europe that is not merely a repetition of the same. And the question is indeed what can come after Europe, as

Europe, that two-thousand-year-old construction, which managed to lift up mankind to an altogether new degree of self-reflection and consciousness, and strength and power as well, when this historical reality, which for a long time supposed that it encompassed all

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of mankind, that it is mankind and that all else is worthy of neglect, is definitely at an end.

(PE, 9)

3.3.4 Post-Europe

The end of Europe and of the care of the soul is not the end of Patočka's account. Europe destroyed itself, but also left its legacy. When Patočka says that the disappearance of Europe is perhaps the greatest event in world-history, this is not only because world-history for him is fundamentally intertwined with Europe's history, nor merely because it signals the failure of the program that lifted humanity to new heights. It is also because this event might signal the beginning of something new, not just after this event, but on its basis (NE, 220-21; *Europa und Sein Erbe*, 165). It is precisely the point at the end or limit of Europe that allows for a reflective stance on what Europe was as to find a solution from within the problem itself.

Although Patočka's reflections on post-Europe are novel, they are sketches at best. In a letter to the Polish philosopher Irena Kronska, he writes:

I have as yet hardly written on post-Europe, since the prefix 'post-' supposes the key term 'Europe'; so I thrash about, caught up in a web of problems and inquiries that could largely take up several lifetimes"

("Fragment Of A Letter To Irena Kronska," xx-xxi)

Yet, the idea of post-Europe is a crucial one and, in a way, as this fragment makes clear, the aim of his reflections on Europe. Like the Platonic-Christian message that Patočka attaches so much value to, it is a signal that there is life after the death of Europe. Or rather, as Tava puts it in contrast to the pessimistic tone often found in Patočka's work: "post-Europe does not correspond to Europe's ultimate collapse. [...] Nothing really ends with post-Europe" (2016b, 243). This means, as Hagedorn has noted, that there is no contradiction in the fact that Patočka philosophizes "after Europe's supposedly final catastrophe," but "stands nonetheless under the spell of Europe" (2011, 251). Both Tava and Hagedorn take this to mean that because of this it cannot be a question about simply reinstating what Europe has lost. The problem is precisely that what has been lost is still present, but in a form that no longer suffices.

While Patočka is by no means the only or first to talk about a shift from a European era to a global era, he is more sensitive than some to what this would entail. In his main, but unfinished, text on post-Europe, he refers to the work of Geoffrey Barraclough, one of the key figures in shifting the study of history from a European to a global perspective (NE, 225-27). Barraclough is keenly aware of Europe's fall out of the centre of world-history after the Second World War. But in writing about it, he still does so from the European perspective, that is, from the European periodization of history: Antiquity is followed by the Middle Ages, Modernity, and now a global, post-European era. Of course, such a periodization posits the global era we have entered as the extension of European history as it relies on a European conceptual scheme of history. While this is a natural way to do history for Europeans, it

projects a schema onto other civilizations that entails “a certain spiritual violence” (*PE*, 221-22).

To avoid such a distorting European perspective on history while also acknowledging the importance of Europe for global history, Patočka suggest speaking of a pre-European, a European, and a post-European phase of global history (*NE*, 227). Yet, as Hagedorn has observed – and as is the case for any designation with the prefix ‘post-’ – even here we can ask whether the focus is or should be *post-European* or *post-European* (2003, 29). That is, should the European perspective be fully left behind or should we still retain a (limited) attachment to it? And is fully leaving it behind even an option insofar as this is a move motivated by Europe’s history itself? There are remarkable similarities here between this break with Europe’s history after its end and Husserl’s discussion of the primordial establishment of Europe in ancient Greece. For now, we can hold that perhaps it is not only inevitable, but even desirable for Europe (but not necessarily others) to retain some of the European perspective of history. As Tava puts it:

Post-Europe is not outside or beyond Europe, but simply settles on its temporal borders [...], thus allowing the individual who inhabits it to look at Europe from a new standpoint, and from a detached and yet deeper and more responsible perspective. (Tava 2016b, 243)

If a way is to be sought to address Europe’s situation, it must be from a perspective that still has access to this situation and how it came about.

Patočka himself, although he acknowledges the problems with it, still gives pre-eminence to Europe’s history. He does so not just because of the fact that as European it would simply be impossible to completely break from European history, but also because he still holds that it is Europe alone that contained the possibility of true generalization (*PE*, 221-22). Regardless of any possible essential reasons for this, it can be taken as a fact that the globalization that took hold of the world during the past centuries did so in the wake of European modernity and on the basis of decidedly European roots.¹²⁰

The paradox is that Europe’s aspiration for universality has been achieved precisely at and on the basis of its end (*NE*, 211-12; *HE*, 143). Universality stands both at the end of European history and at the end of history as European (*HE*, 143). Europe, as Patočka says, “enabled the planetary era and then disappeared from the world stage in an unworthy way” (*Europa und sein Erbe*, 165). The rationality that made it the dominant force in the world may have been born in Europe, but because of its universal nature could not be kept exclusive to it. Even though Europe is no longer the dominant power in the world, the spirit which

¹²⁰ It should be noted that this does not entail that European processes were the only ones that played a role in globalization or that there have not been similar globalizing tendencies in other civilizations. As noted in section 1.2, for example, the Roman idea of a world-empire is to be traced back to its Persian precursor. See also Hobson (2004).

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allowed it to be dominant “endures and seeks to subject all of humanity” (*Die Selbstbesinnung Europas*, 272).

It is clear that although Europe’s ideal of universality is in a way achieved through modern rationality and technology, this is not a positive gift to the world. As Patočka says, “European civilization became a global link in precisely that form which Husserl’s *Crisis of the European Sciences* showed to be decadent” (*HE*, 45). Yet, while this may have been catastrophic for Europe, Patočka holds that it is not necessarily so for the world at large. The ironic fortuity of history is that what can be seen as the Europeanization of other peoples is also what freed them from European domination (*Die Selbstbesinnung Europas*, 264). Now, these peoples are no longer passive participators, but actively take their place on the world stage and in history by European means: organization and technology, historical and political knowledge of European origin (*KEE*, 200).

In drawing all of the world into its project, Europe, in a sense, has made the entire world its heir (*KEE*, 197). While “these inheritors will never allow Europe to be what it once was” (*PE*, 9), they can also take up the legacy of Europe and do so in ways that Europe was not able to. Crucial here is that according to Patočka, these others still have living traditions¹²¹: “Everywhere here a sense for the world-mystery is still alive, everywhere lives the consciousness of the polydimensionality of the simple, but inexhaustible life” (*Die Selbstbesinnung Europas*, 273). European modernity has done away with all forms of transcendence, leaving it with a world of mere things on the basis of which no spiritual project can be undertaken. Patočka sees the situation as not yet so dire for others:

It is expected that all of these traditions, directly or indirectly, whether in a conscious reaching back or in elementary spontaneity, will assert themselves, that in them there will be a renaissance of matters of which no European had thought, that fusions between modern rationality and the unexpected will come to exist.

(*Die nacheuropäische Epoche und ihre geistigen Probleme*, 68)

Despite the globalization characteristic of it, what the post-European age reveals is not the existence of a unified, universal humanity. As Patočka says, even in the global era “there is no unitary humanity, only humanities” (*NE*, 225). As universal as part of Europe’s heritage may have become, the way that this has taken place precisely uncovers a plurality of spiritual roots in the world (*KEE*, 361).

The encounter between modern rationality and traditions in which the spiritual is still alive may lead to unexpected results and here Patočka sees indications of the possibility

¹²¹ Patočka speaks of various still living traditions: “Christianity in its various forms (Western Europe, the United States, Latin America, Africa, and as diaspora in the rest of the world), Judaism, Islam (Arabic world, Asia Minor, Persia, India, Indonesia, parts of the USSR, Africa), Marxism-Leninism (Soviet Union and the people’s democracies, China, albeit with a more archaic undercurrent), astrobiology (China, Japan, Hinduist India), Buddhism (parts of India, China, South-east Asia, Japan, etc.), neolithic-precolumbian traditions (Latin America), African traditions which in part are also Neolithic” (*Die nacheuropäische Epoche und ihre geistigen Probleme*, 68). A similar list can be found elsewhere (*KEE*, 361). Note that in both lists Christianity is still counted as a living tradition in Europe.

for something new. But this will only lead to a solution when post-European humanity does not repeat the mistakes of Europe (*NE*, 220-21). Patočka points towards the danger of post-European peoples succumbing to the same crisis that he designated in his habilitation thesis: the splintered life in two worlds and the risk of devaluing one of them (*Die nacheuropäische Epoche und ihre geistigen Probleme*, 69).

This seems to be as far as Patočka's reflections on the post-European era take us. While it opens the space for new possibilities, one can wonder whether we have not arrived at a repetition of steps. It seems we have ended up back where Patočka started with his habilitation thesis. Moreover, we can ask what perspective this provides for Europe. Assuming that other civilizations might have the resources to incorporate rationality into their traditions without coming into conflict with these traditions, this does not provide a way out for Europe. We cannot suppose that Patočka intends for others to find a way to meaningfully deal with the problem so that Europe can then take over their solution. Although Europe has become an other among others in a globalized world, it seems to be the case that in order for Europe to address its situation it needs to engage with precisely its own situation and not that of others:

Another question is whether within this, which we could designate as the European inheritance, there exists something that could to some extent be believable even for us, that could affect us in a way so that we could again find hope in a specific perspective, in a specific future, without giving in to illusory dreams and without undervaluing the toughness and gravity of our current situation. (*PE*, 12)

It thus seems that solutions must be found within Europe's own heritage in a similar way that Patočka holds out the hope that others can do so in theirs. One can wonder whether there is something alive there that might provide the spiritual resources to deal with the objectification of the world. Crucially, when speaking of the still living traditions in the world Patočka mentions Christianity in relation to Europe (*Nach-europäische Epoche und ihre geistigen Probleme*, 68; *KEE*, 361) and in the *Heretical Essays* explicitly turns to Christianity as a possible way of addressing Europe's situation. Even if he sees Christianity as having played a crucial role in the transformation of the care of the soul into the care to have, Patočka's turn to Christianity must be seriously considered. Even if it is to be rejected, as will be done in the following sections, it can contain clues to other possible solutions.

Although further inquiry thus involves a return to Europe's own heritage, the solution to be sought is one that should fit the post-European era. It should not remain closed in upon itself, which Patočka would see as antithetical to Europe, but should enable "a form of spirituality, that contains within it the seed of the answer to the question, how a positive reconciliation between spiritual plurality is possible, without lapsing into skepsis or reductionism" (*KEE*, 378). It should enable a form of universality that does not restrict itself to what is objective, but, as Lau has noted, prepares "the common ground for intercultural dialogue on the world-mystery" (Lau 2011, 237; see also Crépon 2006, 34). Although

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rationality has spread over the globe in its one-sided form, Patočka has hopes that this universality can act as a bridge and “force us to take seriously and as a like-minded thinking even what is most remote” (*Die nacheuropäische Epoche und ihre geistigen Probleme*, 68; see also *Die Selbstbesinnung Europa*, 273). Rather than turning to others for a solution to the crisis, Europe must find the ground on the basis of which a dialogue with others is possible in the first place. Before this can be done, it must be seen what kind of spiritual ground can be prepared on the basis of the possibilities that Patočka sees in and beyond Christianity.

3.4 Christianity as the Possibility of an Unheard-of *Metanoein*

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3.4.1 Christianity against Platonism

The suggestion that it is Christianity which might be capable of reinstating a spiritual principle that can lift Europe out of its decadence is clearly present, but not fully worked out in Patočka's work.¹²² As he says:

By virtue of this foundation in the abysmal deepening of the soul, Christianity remains thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought human outreach that enabled humans to struggle against decadence. (*HE*, 108)

In Gasché's formulation, those who take up this line of thought hold that Patočka maintains "the possibility of a Christian Europe that would finally make good on what announced itself with its emergence in the shape of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation—that is a genuinely Christian Europe" (2009, 239).¹²³ Christianity would provide the most promising option for the "gigantic conversion" or "unheard-of *metanoein*" that Patočka deemed necessary to turn European life around (*HE*, 75). Its "foundation in the abysmal deepening of the soul" is seen as a counter-measure to the objectivistic metaphysical tendencies within the European tradition that goes back to the Platonism at its root. According to Patočka, this Platonism is also still at work in Christianity and those who have taken up this line of thought thus seek a Christianity that has freed itself from this Platonism (*HE*, 110). As Derrida has put it, it is because of this Platonism that

Christianity has not yet come to Christianity. What has not yet come about is the fulfillment, within history and in political history, and first and foremost in European politics, of the new responsibility announced by the *mysterium tremendum*. There has not yet been an authentically Christian politics because there remains this residue of the Platonic *polis*. Christian politics must break more definitively and more radically with Greco-Roman Platonic politics in order to finally fulfill the *mysterium tremendum*. (Derrida 1995, 28)

The core of the solution sought in Christianity lies in this *mysterium tremendum*, the overwhelming experience of the divine that does not allow itself to be mastered objectively. If there is a resource to be found within Christianity to overcome its Platonism, this is the most likely candidate as Patočka sees this transformation of the Platonic way of dealing with the divine as the decisive feature of Christianity. Like Platonism, Christianity aims to transcend the everyday and the orgiastic, but the central Platonic motif that this is to be done through knowledge is rejected (*HE*, 110).¹²⁴ The divine Good is reinterpreted as something more

¹²² Already in his review of Husserl's *Crisis* he says that Europe is Christianity more so than rationalism – with the caveat that he does not see them opposed to each other, but related (*Crisis Review*, 27-28). Although at that point of his work, this is not yet connected to the principle of the care of the soul, the importance of Christianity for Europe is a lasting factor in Patočka's work.

¹²³ Most prominently this is found in the work of Derrida (1995), Hagedorn (2010; 2015), and Koci (2018; 2019).

¹²⁴ It should be noted that at times Patočka downplays the claim that Christianity does not involve knowledge: "It is said that Christian dogmata is irrational, but it is peculiar after all. No other religion other than that which passed

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transcendent, superior and thus more inaccessible to the human being than Plato arguably took it to be. This is precisely the reason it is experienced as a *mysterium tremendum*:

Tremendum, for responsibility is now vested not in a humanly comprehensible essence of goodness and unity but, rather, in an inscrutable relation to the absolute highest being in whose hands we are not externally, but internally. (HE, 106)

Hence, Patočka can say it was more so religion than philosophy “which discovered the realm of the personal” (BCLW, 10). This would seem to support claims such as that of Hagedorn that religious experiences are “the privileged field” of the transcendence which is Patočka’s subject-matter (2010, 143-44).¹²⁵ It would thus be a Christianity divested of its Platonism that would allow for transcendence in its proper form again. Indeed, Patočka himself says that it is through the *mysterium tremendum* that Christianity contains the possibility to counter the rationalism that overreaches in imposing itself on the world as a whole and through which it initially suppressed the care to have (LS, 154; HE, 69-70).

However, this possible solution has also been challenged and for good reasons as will be argued.¹²⁶ Patočka’s turn to Christianity is a heretical turn and one can thus wonder how Christian this solution would actually be. It is ambiguous what the Christianity after Christianity that Patočka has in mind would consist of and whether it can still properly be called Christian. In Chvatík’s reading, for example, Patočka aims at “a kind of non-Christian Christianity – a religion which though it does not have God, remains religious in character” (2003, 23). This meshes with Kohák’s interpretation which acknowledges that Patočka’s question is a religious one, but also suggests that “the deep underlying theme of Patočka’s thought may well be whether that question is susceptible to a secular answer” (1989, 105).

That Patočka sees the *mysterium tremendum* as an important possibility to bring about a different attitude towards the world is not a matter of debate. What is at issue is rather whether this is a viable solution. As the *mysterium tremendum* precludes any relation to the divine based on knowledge, the manner in which Christianity aims to give place to transcendence is through faith (HE, 66-67). Koci and Hagedorn in particular have interpreted

through Greek philosophy has dogmata. It is also peculiar that dogmata were not established merely by some kind of *sic volo, sic iubeo*, but that they were always prepared by a very circumspect discussion” (PE, 139-40). Of course, the distinction between Christianity and Platonism should not be exaggerated. The crucial elements of Christianity, Patočka says, are derived from Plato (PE, 89-90, 128). Although it can be instructive to pull apart Platonism and Christianity for analysis, Patočka ultimately agrees with Nietzsche that Christianity is fundamentally a Platonism for the people, although he of course gives this a more positive evaluation than Nietzsche did (PE, 70).

¹²⁵ In the author’s glosses to the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka engages with the question whether religion rather than philosophy is the locus of the conversion to a new meaning of life. While he rejects religion in favour of philosophy there because the former, while it senses problematicity, does not thematize freedom, it seems that here Patočka is mainly talking about pre-problematical religion. His critique here would thus not necessarily cover Christianity (HE, 140-43). Indeed, in the *Varna Lecture* Patočka distinguishes Christianity from pre-problematical religions, although the precise difference is difficult to grasp as he says the latter “conceived of the divine always as a power and a force” (*Varna Lecture*, 339). The shift from Platonism to Christianity that Patočka talks about very much seems to retain elements of the divine as a power ruling over humans.

¹²⁶ In particular, Derrida’s overemphasis of Christianity in his interpretation of Patočka’s thought has been criticized (see e.g. Učník 2011, 188; Maggini 2014, 104; Chvatík 2015a, 35).

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faith in terms of the experience of problematicity as “shaking open the very possibility of meaning, truth, freedom, and the experience of transcendence” (Koci 2018, 31; see also Hagedorn 2015, 38). There is no doubt that there is material in Patočka’s work that would support such an approach.¹²⁷ The passage where such a position is perhaps most explicitly put forward by Patočka can be found in a letter to the theologian J.B. Souček, where Patočka writes:

I am convinced that every God – independently of whether it is a single god or a plurality of gods – is an idol and a false god, as long as it is understood in a *mythological* way as pure origin, but not through faith as the condition of the possibility of human freedom, which is secured by the act of faith. (quoted in Hagedorn 2015, 31)¹²⁸

While faith receives a positive appraisal in this passage, it also brings to the fore a possibly problematic connection to God. The reference to God is permitted, but only if it is not “understood in a mythological way as pure origin.” That is, God should not be posited as an actual transcendent entity to which we can relate, because that would be a mythological or metaphysical move. Clearly this is still a part of at least some interpretations of Christianity. The question is whether Christianity can do without these elements. If we look at the way Patočka’s thought on Christianity has been interpreted, it seems that “the fully ripened form of demythologized Christianity” (*Varna Lecture*, 339) he seeks might be impossible.

3.4.2 The mythico-metaphysical remnant in Christianity

Although it is not always made explicit, interpretations of Patočka’s resort to Christianity often rely on God as a transcendent entity from which the transcendence of human existence originates. Hagedorn speaks of “a concrete goal, a *telos*, to the transcending move” (2010, 140). What he refers to as the “transcendent basis of the religious perspective” is what “affords us the possibility of calling the world itself into question” (2010, 147). In other words, transcendence is made possible and arguably meaningful by something transcendent beyond it.

Koci recognizes that Patočka’s work does not simply allow for such a move and says that faith is precisely the impossibility of thinking such an entity (2018, 29). Yet, he also holds that “for phenomenology of Patočka’s kind, theology is impossible to articulate, but it is not denounced” (Koci 2019, 11). This comes very close to what was discussed in section 1.4 as the legitimization of the religious on the basis of its non-rationality. Koci explicitly takes what he sees as Patočka’s silence on the matter “not as an opposition but an openness” for a theological reading (2019, 11). Indeed, he sees it as Patočka’s task “to name the one who transcends the objective” (Koci 2018, 31). Transcendence is made dependent on a transcendent insofar as the distance opened by it is “the distance between us and God about whom we

¹²⁷ Next to the *Heretical Essays*, the essay *Time, Myth, Faith* is an important reference for this approach.

¹²⁸ The letter itself is from April 8th 1944 and can be found in the Patočka Archives in Prague with signature 5052. As of yet it is unpublished.

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think in faith” (Koci 2018, 31). Such interpretations or developments of Patočka’s work become hard to follow if they are not taken to posit God as something transcendent at the end of the movement of transcendence. Indeed, in some cases this seems to be their very aim.

As discussed, it is the introduction of a personal god as opposed to the Platonic Idea of the Good as a transcendent object of knowledge that allowed for the possibility of the deepening of the soul that Patočka sees in Christianity. The core of this move can thus be seen to rest on a theological foundation, or as Koci puts it, “to be precise, in the actual plausibility and existential relevance of this theological claim concerning the impossible possibility” (2019, 11). Without the “actual plausibility and existential relevance” of the notion of a personal god, the solution sought in Christianity does not work. However, the fact that the notion of a personal god is necessary for this solution to work is not automatically an argument in favour of any theological claim. It can also be seen as problematizing this solution. Little remains of its viability if God in one form or another is taken out of the picture and it is precisely the “actual plausibility and existential relevance” of God that can also be argued against on the basis of Patočka’s work.

Although Patočka says that the difference between Christianity and Platonism lies in the metaphysical character of the latter (*HE*, 107-8), it is possible to attribute such a character to Christianity as well.¹²⁹ Patočka himself often does so. While he holds that Christianity starts from the experience of problematicity, the same goes for metaphysics (*LP*, 68). As is the case for metaphysics, this does not mean that it does not become entangled in attempts to overcome this experience by finding a secure ground outside of the human being. Explicitly referring to *both* Platonism and Christianity, Patočka notes a

desire for a lasting reality of meaning beyond the world and the reality here down below, to posit the “good,” “love,” unity, reconciliation, in short, all value, in a “true world,” an ideal world, which thereby devalues this world. (*MPR*, 122)

As Chvatík points out, this is not just a criticism of “a totalizing transcendent Highest Being,” but also of any “similarly totalizing and transcending (but non-being) Being that would be the bearer of absolute meaning; inaccessible for mankind and therefore problematical, but as a promise always present and searched for” (2015a, 35-36).¹³⁰ That is, this criticism would also affect the idea of God as non-being but still beyond the human movement of transcendence as an in itself non-problematical source of meaning. As Patočka notes, this has far-reaching consequences for how we should interpret the experience of problematicity:

As long as value is understood as an eternal spring of meaningfulness, Idea, or God as that which bestows meaning on things, human acts, and events, it remains possible to interpret

¹²⁹ Already in 1934, Patočka notes that religion goes beyond transcendence towards the transcendent, that “it posits the transcendent in place of transcendence” (*LP*, 22).

¹³⁰ That is not to say that it is irrelevant what kind of ‘being’ or ‘non-being’ the god that is invoked is. As discussed, it is a personal god, rather than as a metaphysical highest being. Yet, as Patočka remarks, “what a person is, that is not really adequately thematized in the Christian perspective” (*HE*, 107).

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the experience of the loss of meaning as a flaw not in that which bestows meaning but of that on which it is bestowed. (*HE*, 56)

The positing of a transcendent principle of meaning makes any strong interpretation of problematicity impossible. No matter how uncertain our lives are, the meaning of the world is ultimately secure. The *mysterium tremendum* would then not be all that mysterious in itself, but would only be experienced as such because of the limited capacities offered by human existence. While it is certainly true that for Patočka problematicity is a characteristic of human existence, this does not mean that it is derived from human existence as will be discussed further in section 3.5. To speak of the problematicity of human existence, while not necessarily wrong, can thus be misleading. It opens the door for what can be seen as a weaker, more subjective interpretation of problematicity that can lead to the quest for non-problematical views of the world.

As discussed, such a position is perhaps characteristic of Patočka's early work, but clearly goes against fundamental tenets of his later work which, as will be discussed, he argues for on phenomenological grounds. Yet, even in the later *Heretical Essays* – where problematicity is a fully developed theme – some of this earlier position remains. There, Patočka states he wants to uphold what he calls the “scepticism about the scepticism of dogmatically posited meaning” (*HE*, 74). That is, we are right to be critical of any given meaning that we might take to be absolute, but apparently we also need to keep open at least the possibility of its absolute truth. When Patočka tends towards this, he remains caught up in the kind of metaphysics he elsewhere tries to escape. Although such a metaphysical move “represents a barrier against the nihilism of meaning,” it also has a weakness “in the need to have recourse to metaphysical concepts while meaning and its loss are phenomena of concrete experience” (*HE*, 56). Again referring to both Platonism and Christianity, he says that “the meaningfulness of what-is is guaranteed even though individual existents can become worthless” (*HE*, 56).

Ironically, precisely the move that is to save the phenomena leads to their devaluation. That is how through Christianity the care of the soul transformed into the care to have. In excluding the divine from the world around us, this world becomes nothing but material with which we can do what we wish. The very domain of experience which is at stake is overlooked in favour of something supposedly higher. We can wonder what good an unproblematic world is if it is not the world in which we actually live. Chvatík has put it well when he said that “we will not be able to prevent [...] failure by an appeal to absolute meaning, just as we do not prevent death by a faith in eternal life” (2003, 26). If Christianity is to be the source of a new meaning of human existence, recourse to something not actually present to human existence will not do. What is experienced is a mystery that is problematical, but this experience itself does not necessarily point towards anything beyond this mystery. Otherwise, it would precisely not be a mystery and faith would not be needed. Patočka explicitly states that invoking God as the source of transcendence means that “this movement

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would lack all human closure, would have no practical value” and that it would entail “the irrationalism of that preventive being at whose mercy the meaning of being human then is” (PSW, 271). Taking this seriously, we can follow Kohák in saying that Patočka was not necessarily a “‘metaphysical’ atheist but a phenomenological one” (1986, 106).

Although Patočka certainly looks towards Christianity for a way out of Europe’s predicament, in his work we can find good reasons not to interpret this as advocating a turn towards faith. As discussed, after the Second World War Patočka seems to denounce the use of faith and of practical postulates and this denunciation is not just to be attributed to historical or biographical factors. Section 3.5 will discuss how Patočka argues against them on philosophical grounds. However, while this can be seen as a turn away from Christianity, interestingly this can also be understood this as a move that thinks Christianity through to its end, an end that no longer seems to be Christian.

3.4.3 Sacrifice and a demythologized Christianity

The question remains what a Christianity unburdened of what can be seen as its inherent mythico-metaphysical remnant would look like. As Chvatík suggests, the way Patočka takes Christianity to be relevant to our age might not be in the form of the instantiation of Christian faith, but precisely in its being lost (2011a, 275). As discussed, the experience of problematicity signalled the loss of an unreflective faith in myth and it is hard to see why the same experience would not also challenge the inherently more precarious faith of religion. In relation to this we can find a highly interesting discussion of Christianity in one of Patočka’s seminars.¹³¹

In these seminars, Patočka gives an interpretation of the last words of Christ on the cross: “Why has Thou forsaken me?” Rather than attempting to answer this question, Patočka asks the following: “What would have happened if Thou has not forsaken me? Nothing. Something can happen only if Thou hast forsaken me” (quoted in Chvatík 2011b, 319). This is not a condition to be overcome through a return of the divine in God that has become man, but the very basis on which something different can manifest itself: “And suddenly it turns out that the so-called better world there, in heaven that originally was the goal to achieve, was only a pretext to let appear something that was hidden” (quoted in Chvatík 2011b, 319). The start of an answer to the question of what manifests itself here can be given on the basis of Patočka’s discussion of sacrifice. The latter is not only a crucial topic in his work, but the sacrifice of Christ is taken to be a central feature of Christianity (*Varna Lecture*, 339).

According to Patočka, the very idea of sacrifice presupposes a difference between higher and lower, between divine and nondivine. It presupposes a certain significance: “A person does not sacrifice something that is indifferent to him, something that does not concern

¹³¹ The seminars referred to were privately held in the 1970s in Patočka’s apartment. They were recorded, transcribed, and published in the third volume of Patočka’s collected works in Czech. Fortunately, Chvatík quotes extensively from it and has translated full passages.

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him" (*Varna Lecture*, 336). The importance of sacrifice thus lies in the fact that it can introduce or rather *demonstrate* a difference of order in a world that no longer has any place for transcendence, for any distinction in the order of being. But the crucial characteristic of a true, radical sacrifice is that it *only* concerns this distinction, what will be discussed as the ontological difference, itself. It should not be a sacrifice *for* something, no concrete content or message should be attached to it. As Patočka says: "In a certain essential sense, it is a sacrifice for nothing" (*Varna Lecture*, 339). A true sacrifice should not be justified in name of anything, that is, it should not derive its significance from anything other than itself. As Tava has pointed out, it is thus not so much figures such as Socrates or Jan Hus (and we can arguably add Christ) which for Patočka would be instances of a pure sacrifice, as their deaths cannot be seen as separate from "a message which gave their action a clear sense" (2015, 75). Tava suggests it is rather the self-immolation of Jan Palach out of pure protest that is the emblematic figure of sacrifice.¹³²

Patočka's discussion of sacrifice – both in the *Varna Lecture* and in the *Heretical Essays* – does not lead into an extensive discussion of Christianity. It is rather the experience of war at the front which is taken as the paradigmatic case of radical sacrifice, because it shows the transition from a sacrifice with a relative significance to one that is significant solely in itself. Those sent out to the front sacrifice themselves, but initially in a way that makes their lives subservient to a goal set by others. Such a sacrifice is thus significant only insofar as this goal is significant, it has no meaning in itself. However, drawing on the descriptions of the experience at the front by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Ernst Jünger, Patočka notes that the actual experience at the front is different. The relative significance of sacrifice is lost as "it is no longer the cost we pay for a program of development, progress, intensification, and extension of life's possibilities, rather it is significant *solely in itself*" (*HE*, 129). Sacrifice, more precisely *self-sacrifice*, demands "*endurance* in the face of death" and this points towards a higher life than mere biological life, even if nothing concrete is encountered as higher (*HE*, 129). The irreducibility and singularity of one's existence becomes manifest as life "trips on *nothingness*, on a boundary over which it cannot step, along which everything is transformed" (*HE*, 131).¹³³ An absolute freedom is experienced precisely where all meaning is shaken. Importantly, Patočka speaks of this as the possibility of *metanoia* which he invoked in relation to Christianity (*HE*, 135).

Although the possibility of a positive appropriation of problematicity is indicated here, Patočka is also pessimistic of the possibility of such a *metanoia* on a grand scale. Even for the individual, this experience is not a lasting one, but a "summit" from which one "cannot but retreat back into everydayness" (*HE*, 134). In section 3.6 it will be discussed what possibilities this experience might nonetheless enable. For now, one aspect has a particular

¹³² It should be noted that this example is not entirely fitting: Prior to his self-immolation, Palach wrote several letters to the Stalinist regime demanding the end of their censorship and propaganda.

¹³³ Although he is not mentioned here, the reference to "nothingness" and the encounter with one's finitude show an influence of Heidegger's discussion of anxiety and being-towards-death.

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relevance. Patočka sees the modern age, devoid of belief in anything higher, as the pristine setting for a true sacrifice, a sacrifice not in name of anything else. A true experience of transcendence is made possible there where “no metaphysico-mythological remnants are responsible for it” (*Varna Lecture*, 338). It is in this context that Patočka relates the topic of sacrifice to Christianity when he suggests that “perhaps it is in this sense that we need to seek the fully ripened form of demythologized Christianity” (*Varna Lecture*, 339). It seems to be along these lines that we need to understand Patočka’s remarks on the sacrifice of Christ: “The sacrifice must go *to its end*. Thou hast forsaken me so that nothing remains for me to hold on to” (quoted in Chvatík 2011b, 318). This strongly suggests that it is not a faith in God, but a radical break with any such faith that is crucial in Patočka’s recourse to Christianity.

The question remains what becomes manifest through the experience that Patočka variously refers to as the experience of problematicity, sacrifice, or transcendence. It might be that as regards to this question religion is of no further help. Indeed, Patočka says that religion, not unlike myth, does not attain any clarity about this ontological experience and thus no “explicit clarity about the mode of being of the responsible beings that humans are” (*HE*, 101).¹³⁴ Whereas religious experience senses problematicity, it does not arrive at a proper understanding of it (*HE*, 143). What seems to be called for is a philosophical clarification of the experience of transcendence and of the world-mystery. Indeed, Patočka suggests that religion’s problems should be resolved philosophically (*HE*, 101-2, 142-43). In a way, that is a return to Platonism rather than to Christianity, but – as was to be the case with the return to Christianity – a Platonism unburdened by its metaphysical tendencies. As Patočka says, “Plato would not be Plato if he were not also more than Plato” (*NP*, 182). It is a return to what Patočka calls a *negative* Platonism that does not end up interpreting transcendence in terms of anything transcendent, taking from metaphysics “in a purified form, its essential philosophical thrust” (*NP*, 182). As such, it is also a turn to the philosophy which concerns itself with the manifestation of the world without confusing it with the question regarding existence, that is, phenomenology.

¹³⁴ In his advocating of a solution by means of Christianity, Koci also focusses on the ontological dimension and opts for an interpretation of Christianity as “*thinking Being*” (2019, 10). It is unclear, however, how this is to be reconciled with Patočka’s distinction between religion and philosophy precisely on this point.

3.5 Problematicity

3.5.1 The search for a global meaning

At the heart of Patočka's later writings lies the experience of problematicity, which it tries find a meaningful way of coming to terms with.¹³⁵ This is the project of the care of the soul. Even in his writings that are not on the care of the soul, Patočka's work "wonders about what *problematic* meaning signifies and in what sense problematic meaning may after all mean something positive" (*MPR*, 130). It has been discussed what a pre-problematical life entails, that the experience of problematicity marks the possibility of a transition to a new form of life, and that it lies at the basis of the *metanoesis* which Patočka hopes will turn around European life. This *metanoesis* is said to depend on "a stance of uprootedness in which alone a meaningfulness, both absolute and accessible to humans, because it is problematic, might be realized" (*HE*, 76). As was argued, both metaphysics and Christianity fail in fully attaining such a stance, as they ultimately place the source of the sought-after absolute meaningfulness in something with no meaningful relation to concrete, that is, worldly, human existence. Moreover, it is not this source itself which is taken to be problematic, but merely the human being's relation to it.

It is difficult to understand what Patočka may have meant by this puzzling reference to a meaningfulness that combines these seemingly contradictory characteristics. An extra difficulty lies in the fact that Patočka did not settle on any final position regarding this matter, instead trying to find a way between seemingly opposite positions. It will be argued that Patočka's position can be clarified by making explicit a distinction between two senses of 'meaning' or 'meaningfulness' that he refers to without always explicitly distinguishing between them himself.

Patočka's motivation for the search of a meaningfulness that is both absolute and problematic is motivated by his attempt to stave of nihilism. He sees the world as caught between two kinds of nihilism: one that remains attached to "inconsistent remnants of antiquated meaning" and another that carries through "the transvaluation of all values from the standpoint of strength and power" (*HE*, 73). In other words, a nihilism that remains attached to a mythico-metaphysical belief in something that would safeguard the meaning of the world and a nihilism that takes the world to be utterly devoid of meaning and thus sees meaning as something to be freely created through acts of will. The inadequacy of the first form of nihilism in its reliance on something not present to human existence has been discussed in the previous sections. The experience of meaninglessness, however, can be very real and Patočka says we need to take it "in all seriousness" (*HE*, 56). Experience thus points more towards the possibility of the absolute meaninglessness of the world than to the existence of an absolute meaning. Consequently, Patočka is worried that his reflections

¹³⁵ Even though it is not yet referred to as such, the diagnosis of crisis in Patočka's *habilitation* thesis can also be seen as motivated by the experience of problematicity as it concerns a world that has become problematical.

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“become lost in a hopeless pessimism,” as “all the phenomena we have cited seem to exude meaninglessness as the ultimate outcome of human striving for truth, that is, for authentic meaning” (*HE*, 74).

The dilemma between absolute meaning and absolute meaninglessness is spurred on by an argument of Weischedel’s, from whom, as mentioned, Patočka appropriated the term problematicity. According to Weischedel, all meaning presupposes further meaning (see Weischedel 1983, 170-73).¹³⁶ This can be illustrated on the basis of an example from Heidegger whose work forms an important background to both Weischedel’s argument and Patočka’s later work in general. Under normal circumstances a hammer has the meaning of a hammer. Yet, it cannot have this meaning independent from an entire referential network of meaning. A hammer quite literally makes no sense without presupposing nails, the house to be built, the wood that serves as the material, and so on. There is thus an ever more encompassing chain of meaning that is required to account for the meaning of the hammer. As with the hammer, the meaning of every other link in this chain is relative and dependent on the rest. Weischedel’s claim, which sets up Patočka’s dilemma between absolute meaning and absolute meaninglessness, is that for this entire chain of relative meanings to be meaningful, there needs to be some absolute, itself unconditioned meaning to ground it in. Importantly, Weischedel does not go as far as to claim that such an absolute meaning exists, only that either it or absolute meaninglessness is the final answer.

It is on the basis of this argument that Patočka holds that “life cannot rest on a relative meaning which itself rests on meaninglessness,” and that “no relative meaning can ever render the meaningless meaningful but, rather, is always itself dragged into meaninglessness by it” (*HE*, 59). Consequently, he rejects the Nietzschean option of embracing nihilism in name of a perpetual creation of new, but relative meaning: “it is impossible and illusory to resolve the problem of nihilism by a recourse to a relative and particular meaning” (*HE*, 59). However, this does not mean that Patočka concedes that everything is ultimately meaningless. This, after all, would go against our experience, which despite its lapses into meaninglessness certainly also includes experiences of meaning, relative as they may be. Patočka thus sees the Nietzschean active nihilism as just as dogmatic as the reference to an absolute, but inaccessible meaning (*HE*, 74). Neither the ultimate meaningfulness nor the ultimate meaninglessness of everything should be accepted naively.

In his attempt to navigate between these two extremes, Patočka is searching for something that can fulfil the function of an absolute meaning, something akin to an overall meaning or meaning of the whole, but that does not absolutize this in a metaphysical manner and that moreover is compatible with the experience of problematicity. It would have to be a form of meaningfulness that is not derived from any particular meaning, but that also makes no reference to any absolute beyond the world. It will be argued that Patočka’s

¹³⁶ Weischedel’s argument shows an interesting combination of two important sources of his thought: Heidegger’s phenomenology and Kant’s dialectic. He was a student of the former and editor of the works of the latter.

phenomenology allows for such a meaningfulness on the limit of inner-worldly meaning and transcendence, although as we will see it is not any meaning of the world in the traditional sense such as we can find in myth.

To understand how Patočka tries to account for this phenomenologically, his project of *Negative Platonism*, started in the 1950s but subsequently abandoned, can provide useful insights.¹³⁷ Although *Negative Platonism* is not presented specifically as a phenomenological project, its insights can be seen to provide the motivation for the asubjective direction in which Patočka takes his phenomenology.¹³⁸ Moreover, if, as argued, what is required is not so much a Christianity unburdened by its Platonism, but a Platonism unburdened of its metaphysical tendencies, then this is precisely what we find in *Negative Platonism*. Interestingly, this moves away from Patočka's focus on reinstating a subjective principle on the basis of Christianity. It is rather a move towards problematicity as a more objective insight, what Patočka would have perhaps called a cosmological insight in terms of the second form of the care of the soul.

3.5.2 Negative Platonism

The central move of *Negative Platonism* lies in its reinterpretation of the Platonic Idea as a call to transcendence rather than a transcendent entity that would bestow meaning on the entities which participate in it. It thus tries to avoid any metaphysical move by turning Platonism's most metaphysical aspect – its positing of a transcendent entity – into something explicitly anti-metaphysical. This is done by focussing on the notion of the *chorismos*, the gap between the empirical and the ideal world. Traditionally, the *chorismos* is seen as “a separation of something from something, of two regions of objects,” but this is precisely the interpretation that Patočka rejects (*NP*, 198). According to Patočka,

Chorismos meant originally a separateness without a second object realm. It is a gap that does not separate two realms coordinated or linked by something third that would embrace them both and so would serve as the foundation of both their coordination and separation. *Chorismos* is a separateness, a distinctness *an sich*, an absolute one, for itself. It does not entail the secret of another continent, somewhere beyond a separating ocean. Rather, its mystery must be read out of the *chorismos* itself, found purely within it.
(*NP*, 198)

The reference to a “mystery” of the *chorismos* is interesting in relation to the invocation of the *mysterium tremendum* in Patočka's discussion of Christianity. If, as was argued, Christianity ultimately relies on a mythico-metaphysical remnant, the *chorismos* radically precludes any

¹³⁷ For a brief outline and history of Patočka's project of negative platonism beyond the essay discussed here, see Arnason (2006, 8). Of particular interest is the fact that the essay on *Overcivilization and its inner conflict* was part of the project, highlighting the link between Patočka's metaphysical and political thought. Following Findlay and Tava, the essay on *Negative Platonism* will be taken as the philosophical ground of Patočka's later work on not just metaphysics and phenomenology, but also on Europe and politics (Findlay 2002, 68; Tava 2015, 7).

¹³⁸ Among others, Kohák has already noted the pronounced kinship between Patočka's negative platonism and phenomenology (1989, 59).

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such reference to anything transcendent. The Idea is reinterpreted on the basis of the primacy of the *chorismos*. It is nothing but a “shorthand for the *chorismos*” (NP, 199), a transcendence without anything transcendent. The experience of the *chorismos* is thus that of a transcendence in the sense of a distance with respect to reality, but it is not a transcendence onto anything transcendent that would exist independently of this movement. As Patočka says, this transcendence has “no positive content,” “no vision, no final terminus,” because above all it is the capacity to distance oneself from all that is given (NP, 196). The Idea is thus stripped of its “presentational, objective, iconic character” (NP, 199). What remains is “the pure supraobjective call of transcendence” (NP, 204).

While this transcendence is devoid of any content, it is not a meaningless movement. This pure distancing is precisely what allows for the detachment from the physical through what Patočka in the *Heretical Essays* will call the shaking from the bondage of life to life. Already in the essay on *Negative Platonism* the experience of the *chorismos* is called an experience of freedom (NP, 198). As when Patočka discusses the experience of the world made possible by the shaking of pre-given meaning, here too he says that the experience of the *chorismos* allows for an encounter with the world as a whole. It shows that “the content of passive experience is trivial, transient and insubstantial” and indicates “an experience of the whole, one pertaining to a global meaning” (NP, 193). Any truth based on this transcendence is thus “not relative and mundane, even though it cannot be formulated positively, in terms of contents” (NP, 205).

Crucially, a “global meaning” is indicated here for which “negative experiences” – that is, experiences such as the loss of meaning – are decisive (NP, 193). *Negative Platonism* thus concerns the kind of meaning that Patočka seeks in order to address nihilism without reference to any mundane or divine reality. What he here refers to as modernity’s “negative metaphysics of empiricism” (which absolutizes the empirical world) can only be avoided “by turning to the experience of transcendence and by seeking to use this experience to the full” (NP, 193). The Idea in this sense is “the power from which we derive all our ability to struggle against the ‘sheer reality,’ the reality that would impose itself on us as an absolute, inevitable, and invincible law” (NP, 199). It is the power to struggle against decay and what Patočka later will call decadence.

As discussed, Plato erroneously interpreted the Idea in terms of transcendent entities because of his unclarity regarding the difference between that which accounts for manifestation and the plane of existence which becomes manifest. This lack of clarity is shared by myth, which understood transcendence “in terms of something like an ontological metaphor” (HE, 32), and as was argued also by religion, which – while it allowed for the *chorismos* as the infinite distance between the human being and God – also ends up positing God as a transcendent anchor-point that makes this transcendence possible. In modernity the *chorismos* is not so much misinterpreted as it is excluded all-together in favour of the single

plane of empirical reality. As Patočka says: “modern explanations can preserve and understand everything about the Idea except the *chorismos*” (NP, 198).

All these approaches thus either misinterpret the *chorismos* on the basis of some kind of reality or exclude it all-together in favour of empirical reality. The central tenet of *Negative Platonism* and that which makes it *negative*, however, is that the Idea “is the only nonreality that cannot be explained as a construct of mere realities” (NP, 204). In other words, that which is to account for the manifestation of the world cannot be interpreted in terms of any kind of manifest existent. In ridding itself of the reference to any transcendent reality while retaining the sense of transcendence, *Negative Platonism* is said to shed light on “our given life-world, uncovering what had been hidden in it, its concealed meaning, its intrinsic structure, its internal drama” (NP, 197).

While this inquiry into the “internal drama” of the world does not take place in the essay on *Negative Platonism*, it makes clear what would be needed for such an inquiry. It should avoid proceeding “constructively and speculatively” (NP, 197), explaining “as real phenomena certain philosophical themes which modern philosophy for the most part rejected as corresponding to nothing in experience” (NP, 203).¹³⁹ As discussed, it is phenomenology that sharply distinguishes between the questions regarding existence and phenomena, the latter precisely not being a reality, but not an absolute *nihil* either.

3.5.3 The epochē and the phenomenology of the world

As discussed, Patočka favours a phenomenology that is based on the epochē, but that does away with the reduction. The bracketing of reality carried out by the epochē is fully in line with the project of *Negative Platonism*. As it is carried out in human existence, the epochē is always grounded in reality, but what it uncovers is the movement of transcendence as the movement from mere existence to appearance. It shows that there is a difference between existence and phenomenon, as the latter appears unaltered during the epochē whereas the former is fully excluded (BME, 441; VE, 190). What the epochē thus unveils is the *chorismos*, transcendence without any further point beyond it, from beings to the non-being of their appearing, which Patočka also refers to as the ontological difference (VE, 194).¹⁴⁰ As the fundamental tenet of Patočka’s later phenomenology, we can thus take that “appearing in its

¹³⁹ Importantly, the examples Patočka refers to here can all be said to be phenomenological. He mentions “pure spatial intuition (in Kant’s sense), the ‘and so forth,’ free of all content (and, ultimately of all definite geometric form of which Scheler said that it belongs to the characteristic traits of man as such, or also the Kantian theme of a productive imagination, that is, imagination that does not merely recombine sense contents but out of its own resources creates something like a synthetic scene which makes it possible to unify them and place them in perspective” (NP, 203-4).

¹⁴⁰ Although the ontological difference as Heidegger formulated is the difference between being (*Sein*) and beings (*Seienden*) and Patočka follows him in this, in Patočka’s work it becomes clear that this corresponds to the difference between existence and phenomenon or beings and the appearing of beings. Arguably this is also the case in Heidegger’s work, but this is a longstanding matter of debate the scope of which exceeds the present discussion.

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essence is not a reality, does not appear among realities and above all is not traceable back to them" (VE, 153).

Importantly, this ontological difference is not subjective. It is not created by the epochē, but brought to the fore by it (VE, 190). Indeed, the epochē itself is made possible by the ontological difference as what first reveals manifestation as something accessible to human existence (VE, 248). Hence, Patočka says that "this difference functions continuously in human life," albeit in a hidden way, and that "the *discovery* of the difference is linked to the shaking of all relative meaning and its reign" (MPR, 127). The epochē thus

follows the breakthrough of transcendence in its essential paths, as the human being follows itself in its essential possibilities, which are not psychological facts, but ways in which it takes over its existence or flees for itself, in which it *carries* its existence, exerts it. (VE, 208)

It is clear that the discovery of the ontological difference and the epochē as a way of "following the breakthrough of transcendence in its essential paths" are what Patočka elsewhere discusses in terms of the experience of problematicity and the care of the soul as enacting the possibility of the movement of human existence. Phenomenological inquiry would thus be crucial in clarifying this experience in a way that Patočka claimed religion could not do. It can be seen as a development of the ontocosmological form of the care of the soul. What Patočka calls "the phenomenology of the whole of the world" would be an attempt to look for a way between metaphysics and nihilism:

The phenomenology of the whole of the world [*des Weltganzen*] is not a metaphysics that seeks to discover a *true world* behind the appearances, but an attempt to make the appearances themselves transparent to the wholeness present within them. (BME, 264)

Similar to Husserl's recourse to the world as horizon of experience, the global meaning which Patočka is looking for is not sought as distinct from the relative meanings we encounter in the world, but to be found in their manner of appearing. The question is thus about the way in which the world as a whole is present in the meaning it gives to what we find in it.

3.5.4 Significance as meaning's 'point-zero'

Patočka's approach in both *Negative Platonism* and in his asubjective phenomenology precludes any absolute grounding of meaning such as he took Weischedel's argument to show was necessary. Phenomenology can not look for any ground outside of the phenomena and the horizons in which we find them. The world, in the sense of the whole of appearing as such, is taken to not only be the ground of the phenomena we find in it, but also to be self-sufficient as its own ground. The question is thus whether the way the world functions as a horizon can provide an absolute meaning. While holding that it is the whole that gives the particular meaning, Patočka asks:

But does this whole too, that confers meaning on things and provides the foundation for every meaning, insofar as in it the things emerge and vanish again and again, insofar as

they belong to this whole, insofar as they also are – does this whole too have a meaning?
(*BME*, 155)

Patočka denounces the metaphysical mistake where this whole is turned into something akin to an all-embracing object, that is, something that is meaningful itself (*BME*, 155). He explicitly states that the world, as the horizon that conditions all meaning, does not have anything like a meaning (*BME*, 264). The essence of the world as the field of appearing “consists in manifesting, disclosing and presenting other beings” and thus “it is impossible for it to be an absolutely self-contained being” (*HSCA*, 33). Meaning is only to be found in the content of the world, but crucial to the notion of the world as horizon is that it is not to be treated like anything inner-worldly, as was discussed in relation to Husserl in section 2.3.

Moreover, the content of the world is not only constantly changing, but also often meaningless. If meaninglessness itself is, in its own way, a phenomenon that can manifest itself, and if all manifesting is based on the world as horizon, then according to Patočka that entails that the latter should account both for the meaningful and meaningless (*HE*, 57). Precisely as the background of the full range of the experience of human existence, the world cannot provide an absolute meaning. If we take this full range seriously, from the meaningful to the meaningless, this indicates that we might confront what Patočka calls “meaning’s point zero” (*HE*, 56).

It is in this “point zero” of meaning that we are to locate the absoluteness that is disclosed in experiences where all meaning is shaken. As Sepp has rightly noted, what Patočka is trying to get at, then, is not some absolute meaning to replace a lost one, not an *other* meaning, but the *other of* meaning (2003, 163).¹⁴¹ When we encounter the limit of meaning, this is no longer an ordinary experience of meaning, but a confrontation with meaning as such. In the work of Nancy we can find a similar discussion that is helpful in clarifying what Patočka is getting at here.¹⁴² Nancy speaks of “the difference in meaning, or the difference of meaning” (1997a, 47) and of “meaning at the limit of signification” (1997, 58), the encounter with which, like Patočka, he refers to as a shock (1997a, 70).

¹⁴¹ Sepp’s thematizing of this “other of meaning” in terms of a border and limit brings this discussion in contact with Heidegger’s essay *Concerning ‘The Line’* (*Über ‘Die Linie’*) (later published as *On the Question of Being* (*Zur Seinsfrage*) (Heidegger 1976/1958). Patočka himself also refers to Heidegger’s work (specifically, his *Introduction to Metaphysics*) when he refers to this “discovery of meaning [...] beyond the limits of significances” (*MPR*, 126). Although *Concerning ‘The Line’* is not mentioned by Patočka, it is of particular relevance for this discussion. Not only is it thematically close to Patočka’s discussion, but it is also a response to Jünger’s *Across the Line* (*Über die Linie*) (Jünger 2016/1957). As discussed, the latter’s description of the experience at the front was an important source for Patočka’s discussion of sacrifice and the limit-experience that is the topic of this section.

¹⁴² There are remarkable similarities between the work of Patočka and Nancy. It is clear that this is in part because of the important influence of Heidegger on both. Although Nancy nowhere provides an in-depth discussion of Patočka’s work, he was familiar with it. On occasion he referred to it, albeit in a very general manner. The most important, albeit also brief, reference is in *The Sense of the World*, where in the very first line Nancy refers to the “crisis of sense,” a phrase which he attributes to Patočka and which is one of the main themes of Nancy’s work in general (1997b, 2). The only other reference to Patočka seems to be as an inclusion in a list of philosophers of history. (Nancy 1993, 144). Unfortunately, whereas the original correctly spells Patočka’s name, this translation renders it almost unrecognizable as “Paturca.”

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Following Nancy's suggestion, we can distinguish between the meaning of particular phenomena and this "point-zero" of meaning by calling the latter "*significance*" (1997, 23). Significance is not any particular meaning, but the "act or movement in which the possibility of meaning arises" (Nancy 1997a, 23). It is the taking place of meaning "understood as presentation or as coming into presence" which "pre-exists and exceeds any particular meaning (Nancy 1997a, 59). This "border" of meaning as Sepp calls it – and Nancy speaks of it in similar terms (Nancy 1997a, 70) – is not "a dividing line between fields of meaning" but an experience where the significance of meaning, its taking place as distinct from existence, comes to the fore (Sepp 2003, 170). As Sepp notes, it is absolute "because it is not related to any meaning and shatters every reference to horizon" (2003, 170). Or rather, it is a horizon beyond any concrete horizon, for which it seems apt to use Husserl's phrase *horizon of horizons*. Significance can, albeit only in a manner of speaking, be called the source of all meaning insofar as for any meaning to be encountered this meaning must present itself. Significance is, so to speak, this meaningfulness of meaning.

However, this meaningfulness itself is not something meaningful. As Patočka says, the ontological difference which allows for meaning in distinction from existence does not have a meaning in itself, but is what he calls an "openness" indicating "meaning as such" (*MPR*, 131). It has no meaning of its own and does not direct the content of any meaning given through it. It merely allows for it to take place and be experienced. There is no meaning to significance except the sheer presentation of the meaning which it itself is not. As Nancy puts it:

Meaning in this sense [as significance] is not *a* meaning; it is not a signification, whether determinate or indeterminate, completed or still in progress, already present or yet to be won. [It] is the possibility of significations; it is the system of their presentation and the limit of their meanings. (Nancy 1997a, 59)

To bestow a meaning on significance itself is the mistake of myth, religion, and metaphysics which each do so in their own way. They attempt to establish what Nancy has called "the *meaning of meaning*" (1997a, 59). That is, they attempt to give closure to the world in attributing a meaning to significance as that which allows meaning to take place, overlooking that it is fundamentally incommensurable with any given meaning. Although Patočka thinks this demand for totality is not as obvious in Husserl as in some of his more metaphysical predecessors (Hegel is mentioned specifically), he takes Husserl to also strive for such an "absolute philosophy, that circumscribes the universe as a whole and decides on its final meaning" (*VE*, 41). Chvatík has attributed the same tendency to Patočka in his quest for an absolute meaning (2015a, 36). But the interpretation of this absolute meaning as not *a* meaning, but as significance, relays this concern. Meaning, as the taking place of meaning, is absolute, but any concretely given meaning is fundamentally a problematical.

Although significance is not to be taken as something meaningful itself, it should also not be understood as meaningless. Significance, as the possibility of meaning as such,

does not indicate any particular meaning as a concrete way meaning is to take place. As Patočka says, there is no “primary project [*Entwurf*]” of the world (*VE*, 92). Yet, significance is not meaningless in the way that innerworldly phenomena can be meaningless. It is of a different category beyond the dichotomy presented by the meaning or meaninglessness of what we can encounter in the world. It is the condition of possibility of all meaning, but also of all experienced meaninglessness. Although it cannot provide any final, definite bestowal of meaning and although on its basis meaning can always be lost, significance entails that meaning can also always be regained. The experience of significance would thus be an experience beyond any particular meaning, an experience of meaninglessness at the limit of meaning that takes place in experiences of radical transcendence such as sacrifice or the encounter with the world as a whole. There, an absolute meaningfulness is experienced in absolute meaninglessness, that is, a significance that because it does not provide any concrete meaning is experienced as problematical.

3.5.5 The inherent problematicity of all meaning

Significance is thus neither meaningful nor meaningless as usually understood and the meaning it can give can also never be fully meaningful or meaningless. Rather, it is *problematical* in the sense that it inherently can never be a ‘completed’ or ‘definitive’. Understood in this way, this absolute ‘source’ of meaning which is not itself a meaning entails that problematicity is an inherent condition of any and all meaning, as has been emphasized most of all by Chvatík (2015a, 36; 2015b, 155). Patočka thus speaks of “the *problematic nature* of all meaningfulness” (*HE*, 57). Meaning is radically finite, “never *purely* positive,” and always “afflicted with negativity” (*MPR*, 130-31). This means that problematicity, seen as the absence of absolute meaning, is a characteristic of the world as such, not first and foremost of our relation to the world.

This more objective, what in terms of the care of the soul can be called cosmological, side of problematicity is often overlooked.¹⁴³ But while Patočka rarely stresses it, it is the foundation of his conception of problematicity, allowing for a much stronger interpretation of it and not necessitating the overcoming of problematicity, but the attempt to come to terms with it. This corresponds to his claims that the freedom of human existence in the shaking brought about by the experience of problematicity is “the obverse of the transcendence of the Idea,” a claim explicitly made in order to avoid any subjectivism (*NP*, 200-2; see also *HE*, 49).

¹⁴³ Cajthaml, for instance, while he recognizes a tension between the existential and cosmological sides of problematicity, interprets Patočka as reducing the latter to the former (2014, 50-51, 134-43). He rightfully addresses this problem, but overlooks the possibility that the opposite interpretation is also possible on the basis of Patočka’s work, even if Patočka himself did not take any strong position on this. The reason for this is that Cajthaml thinks that doing so would entail giving up the idea of transcendence without a transcendent, which he agrees is fundamental to Patočka’s work (2014, 142). The interpretation of problematicity given in this section avoids this problem because it bases the problematicity of human existence on problematicity as a cosmological truth that nonetheless does not have reference to anything transcendent.

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The connection between these two sides to problematicity is highlighted in the following quote:

If man himself is correctly described as an earthling, earth within him undergoes a quake. He discovers here his existence not as accepted and anchored but rather as naked—and he discovers at the same time that earth and heaven have a *trans*, a beyond. This means further that there is in them nothing capable of giving existence an ultimate support, an ultimate anchoring, a goal, a “why.” (*On the Prehistory of the Science of Movement*, 71)

The discovery of the fragility of human existence is the discovery of transcendence *and* of the lack of ultimate, transcendent supports. This discovery of a beyond *and* its emptiness is said to be the basic insight of the project of *Negative Platonism*, which is “that precarious position of philosophy that cannot lean on anything on earth or in heaven of which Kant spoke” (*NP*, 205). However, not despite, but because of this it is “always rich because it preserves for humans one of their essential possibilities, philosophy purified of metaphysical claims,” “the possibility of trusting in a truth that is not relative and mundane, even though it cannot be formulated positively, in terms of contents” (*NP*, 205). Although it entails that all meaning has a fundamental reference to a form of meaninglessness, this meaninglessness is also its very significance. Consequently, problematicity is not a fact to be lamented. Although Patočka makes reference to various extreme forms of experience, what problematicity indicates is also the relative significance and sufficiency of more everyday forms of meaningful experience.

In the end, the most important insight that Patočka takes from the work of Weischedel is not that there has to be an absolute, final meaning, but that “questioning and rendering problematic are not merely subjective acts and attitudes but presuppose problematicity as something further and transsubjective, as a transsubjective situation” (*HE*, 75; see also *LP*, 60). Interpretations like that of Findlay are thus mistaken to say that in Patočka’s account the final court of appeal is one’s own fragile humanity (2002, 105-6), because this fragility itself has its foundation in the fragility of the world. This not only tells us something about the human condition, but also about the possibility, or rather, the *impossibility* of absolute meaning. Problematicity, understood as the absence of absolute meaning, is itself absolute.¹⁴⁴ There is no final, ‘true’ meaning to the world and there cannot be. As Patočka says,

What, though, is the significance of this problematic nature if not that our very openness for things and for others warns us that we should not yield to the inclination to absolutize particular ways of understanding meaning and the meaningfulness appropriate to them? (*HE*, 57-58)

¹⁴⁴ Koci has denounced this move of interpreting problematicity itself as absolute, because “there is a certain adequacy still operative in what [Patočka] calls inadequacy,” (“inadequacy” more or less being a synonym for problematicity) (2018, 28). Yet, taking problematicity to be absolute does not preclude there being *any* adequacy, *any* stable meaning in our lives or the world at all. It merely precludes the existence of a total adequacy that could not, in principle, be overcome by inadequacy, just as inadequacy could never be fully overcome by adequacy.

3.5 Problematicity

Returning to Patočka's curious statement about "a meaningfulness, both absolute and accessible to humans, because it is problematic" (*HE*, 76), we can say that "absolute" and "problematic" refer to two different kinds of "meaningfulness" here. Meaningfulness as significance is indeed absolute, not relative to or dependent on any particular meaning. But meaning as a concretely experienced particular meaning is problematic, because it can never incorporate significance into any given meaning. This is also why significance would be accessible to humans *because* of the problematicity of meaning. We encounter it precisely where we run up to the limit of meaning that we can neither appropriate nor cross and that is thus experienced as problematical. It is thus the experience of problematicity itself that is "the genesis of a perspective on an absolute meaning to which, however, humans are not marginal, on condition that humans are prepared to give up the hope of a directly given meaning and to accept meaning as way" (*HE*, 77).

3.5.6 Ateleological history

This stronger interpretation of problematicity precludes the establishment of a crucial aspect shared by Christianity and Husserl's philosophy. It goes against any teleology that would take a non-problematical world as its goal. Even if this is done as a regulative idea, it still depends on the idea of a world that fundamentally goes against the problematicity inherent to it. A look at what Patočka takes history to consist in makes clear that although at times he seems to suggest establishing a teleology, what he fundamentally takes history to be entails that it cannot be teleological, but should rather be seen as radically ateleological.

As said, for Patočka, the pre-problematical world is also a pre-historical world. He defines history as starting with the awareness of problematicity (*HE*, 40-41, 62; *LP*, 69). This is because pre-history is only the perpetuation of what came before, "defined basically by the acceptance, transmission, preservation, and securing of life" (*HE*, 28). History begins when this is shaken. This in itself, however, does not preclude the instantiation of a teleological history such as Husserl interpreted this shaking of tradition. One can even find suggestions to this end in Patočka's work. Problematicity is invoked not merely as the end of pre-history, but also as the beginning of new possibilities and the "promise" of a more profound meaning that pre-history had to offer (*HE*, 63). He talks about this as "the negation of the past through a projection, a program of the future" (*TMF*, 5).

While an orientation towards a future different from anything given in the past overcomes pre-history's orientation towards a fixed past that determines all future, we should not be tempted to motivate a teleological view of history on this basis. The *Heretical Essays* contain an important reference to Löwith's work on the influence of Christianity on teleological accounts of history (*HE*, 69). If one were to follow Patočka's suggestion of a new Christianity to address Europe's decadence, one could see this is a call for a teleology as a rise out of the decline of decadence similar to Christianity's use of teleology as a call to a higher form of existence and the promise of another world. Hagedorn suggests this when he presents an interesting contrast between Löwith's and Patočka's views on teleological accounts of

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history. His claim is that that whereas Löwith valued this teleological aspect of Christianity negatively, Patočka saw it as a positive development (Hagedorn 2015, 38). While this is a correct reading of both, the reason Hagedorn attributes to Löwith for his negative view on teleological accounts of history is interesting. The reason given is that teleological accounts ultimately devalue the world we have before us in their focus on a future, better world. This is the very argument that Patočka invokes against metaphysics and religion. Their focus on something beyond this world devalues the world in which we actually live. Teleological accounts of history can thus be taken to go against certain fundamental aspects of Patočka's work, even if they are an improvement compared to the pre-historical and pre-problematic focus on the past and present.

In fact, the faith which would sustain such a teleology can, on the basis of Patočka's own interpretation of faith, be seen as a denunciation of it. As he puts it, faith "is the belief that no decision is ultimate or irrevocable" (*TMF*, 9). More so than somehow positing a less problematical world, faith entails that the world can always again be problematized. Of course, this can lead to the idea of an infinite teleology that leaves us never to be satisfied with the world around us as a drive to improve our situation as in Husserl's work. This in itself is not something Patočka would be against. But if this is taken to be guided by the idea of a world that is no longer problematical, then this would not only be unwarranted, but an illusion. The very demand of something like a fulfilment of the world is fundamentally misguided. And indeed, while Patočka says that "that which is most important, is always ahead of us" he says that it is precisely so in its very absence (*TMF*, 5).

Rather than the experience of problematicity being a ground on which to instate a teleology, we could thus say that teleology can be helpful in distancing ourselves from the world, but nothing more than that. To repeat Patočka's comments on the last words of Christ: "And suddenly it turns out that the so-called better world there, in heaven that originally was the goal to achieve, was only a pretext to let appear something that was hidden" (quoted in Chvatík 2011b, 319). One should not repeat what Patočka saw as the shortcoming of myth, namely "that it places in time something other than our human response to an unconditional call, that it attempts to render commensurable what is in its essence incommensurable" (*TMF*, 6-7). Teleologies inherently strive to do so, albeit not by placing the culmination of the movement of human existence in the past in a way that determines the present, but by placing it in the future. Yet, human existence, the world, or meaning in general are not goals to be realized and this is the explicit reason that Patočka rejects the philosophy of postulates (*MPR*, 126).

What should be taken from this is not that problematicity opens up the possibility of setting a goal that we can move towards in an attempt to overcome problematicity. As Patočka says: "History is nothing other than the shaken certitude of pre-given meaning. It has no other meaning or goal," and "the problem of history may not be resolved, it must be preserved as a problem" (*HE*, 118). When Patočka subsequently says that "the question is

whether historical humans are still willing to embrace history" (HE, 118), this is a reformulation of his earlier question of whether they are willing to take responsibility for meaninglessness (HE, 75-76).¹⁴⁵ This meaninglessness – it should be added – is fundamentally related to significance. Any attempt to overcome it would be the attempt to do away with significance. To engage with the experience of problematicity and the possibility of significance means to "see oneself as a being who after an auspicious beginning cannot and does not have the right to demand that kind of *happy end* that philosophy has constructed from Plato to Kant" (MPR, 130).¹⁴⁶ Trying to decisively force an ultimate meaning on the world only leads to alienation and the totalitarian consequences of radical overcivilization. To have faith in such a meaning rather than forcing it into existence seems not to be much of an improvement.

This means that while also having recourse to experience for his philosophy of history, Patočka takes a different turn from the one that Husserl took. As was argued, Husserl does not simply posit the idea of the world he takes as his goal, but motivates it through his teleological account of subjectivity. This move is precluded by Patočka's transformation of Husserlian phenomenology into an asubjective phenomenology, which as we saw cannot lead the world back to the constituting activity of subjectivity. It attempts to analyse the world on its own terms without the possibility of a primary project (*Entwurf*) of the world (VE, 92). The subject is only retained as that "in which takes place the process of ontological difference – that is to say, *transcensus*, transition, the stepping from existence to being" (PE, 169). As discussed, the way Patočka interprets this movement is fundamentally ateleological, it has no terminus. Consequently, unlike for Husserl, Patočka's recourse to experience does not motivate a teleology.

While there is no extensive discussion of Husserl's rational teleology in Patočka's work, the few remarks we find on it point in this direction. Patočka is fully aware that Husserl's teleology is infinite and formal in nature and that it is thus not simply the imposing of a totality onto the world. But he also sees that Husserl possibly oversteps the boundaries of experience and attributes too much to his telos:

Husserl does see that the teleology of history is not a teleology of predetermined and predefined goals, that it is, rather, a *reinterpretation of the preconstituted*, but he seeks to proclaim such an absolute goal nonetheless; he transcends a short-range finite teleology, but then tries to sneak it back in under a different guise. (IHP, 169)

Patočka questions the nature of the world this teleology is to result in if this "absolute goal" is not properly justified and

¹⁴⁵ This also seems to relay some of the concerns that Patočka's conception of history ultimately leads to historical relativism (see e.g. Cajthaml 2014, 114), as history is based on something which sets boundaries to any relativism – problematicity.

¹⁴⁶ Already in 1934 Patočka expressed a similar sentiment: "A philosopher cannot tell people, philosophize and ye shall be saved. Philosophy is not salvation, either by merit or by grace" (LP, 26).

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if it is not simply an elimination of what is meaningless and contradictory, if it is not a mere manifestation of what is purely given and its overcoming in the project of pure rationality, that is of clarity and justice. (IHP, 169)

There are two issues indicated here. First, if meaning itself includes an element of meaninglessness, then, as was argued, there is an element of meaninglessness that cannot be eliminated. Second, even if this meaninglessness could be eliminated, can this teleology provide more than critique, that is, does it have a constructive side to it that can motivate the constitution of a single, rational world for all? As Patočka asks:

What if we encounter, at the base of human potentiality, an inevitable plurality, which might entail a plurality of goals as well? What does that mean for the historical self-formation of humanity? To these questions we no longer find answers in Husserl's work. (IHP, 169)

The answers to these questions ultimately depend on Husserl's use of practical reason and faith, a faith the later Patočka can no longer rely on. While he asks it in a different context, Patočka's question regarding the possible plurality of human potentiality and historical self-formation suggests a link with his characterization of the post-European age. What this globalized age uncovers is a form of universal humanity based on the objective conception of reason that negates the full scope of human potentiality. But it also revealed the plurality of spiritual roots in the world. Patočka's critical remarks on Husserl's teleology can thus be seen as preparing the ground for other possibilities of "the historical self-formation of humanity" than the one that guided Husserl's philosophy. The question is what can be done when problematicity itself is taken as an absolute foundation.

3.6 Problematicity as Political Foundation

3.6.1 Problematicity as foundation

Patočka thematizes the experience of problematicity as the shaking of pre-given answers and the loss of solid ground. While this absence of final answers leads to the perpetual inquiry that characterizes the care of the soul, this should be seen as more than the loss of meaning and the attainment of a new attitude. Findlay, while he emphasizes what can be called the more 'subjective' side of problematicity when he says that the final court of appeal in Patočka's account is "one's own fragile humanity" and that "the foundation it uncovers must itself be recognized ever again as problematic" (2002, 105-6), has also noted that for Patočka problematicity itself can nonetheless serve as a foundation:

It is not the concept of the ground, the foundation in and of itself, with which he takes issue, but the concept of the unproblematic, solid ground that we artificially posit in our desire for a simple answer to our most difficult questions. Patočka conceives of philosophy itself as the development of the theme of the problematic; within the boundaries of an understanding of problematicity, he argues, it *is* appropriate to philosophy to seek something permanent, but only as long as it is understood that the ground sought is never simple and concrete, but always problematic. (Findlay 2002, 196)

As has been argued, problematicity is not only a trait of human existence, but inherent to any meaningful world in which human existence can find itself. This is not the result of a problematizing stance, but rather, any such stance is made possible by the problematicity of the world. Insight into problematicity is insight into the whole, comparable to the cosmological insight into the whole that was one of the three forms of the care of the soul and the absolute truth at the basis of Patočka's conception of the holy empires. As such, and against the seemingly ever problematizing nature of Patočka's philosophy, problematicity itself can be seen as a ground on which to stand. The interpretation of problematicity given in the previous section has argued it to be a more solid ground than one might initially expect, in the sense that problematicity itself can be seen as absolute, without doing away with its fundamentally problematic nature. Truly taking problematicity seriously entails more than "to accept meaning as a way" (*HE*, 77). It also says something about what is and is not to be done along this way.

Although the nature of problematicity may have been clarified, the question remains what has been gained. Problematicity has been argued to be an intrinsic and unsurpassable characteristic of meaning as such, but what can be done on this basis? What problematicity might enable for human existence has been indicated on the basis of the discussions of the care of the soul, sacrifice and significance. The experience of problematicity is not a mere lapse into meaninglessness, nor nihilism's pure denying of the meaning of the world. Although problematicity itself can not be overcome, "it is possible to overcome this absolute negativity, negative scepticism, negative nihilism without being dogmatic" (*LP*, 61). While Patočka's account does not end up providing an absolute meaning, the upshot is that

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an ultimate meaninglessness is also avoided. And while he takes it impossible to live in the certitude of meaninglessness, that does not mean that one cannot live with a problematic meaning (*HE*, 75). Problematicity should not be overcome, but accepted through what Patočka calls “a new mode of relating to what is meaningful” which is “a discovery of its continuity with the mysteriousness of being and what-is as a whole” (*HE*, 60-61).

In line with the reinterpretation of the Idea in *Negative Platonism*, the experience of problematicity can be seen as a call to action where the human being “ceases to fix his gaze beyond this world and instead turns his focus to what stands in front of him” (*MPR*, 130). But this is not a return to a non-problematical world where we can live in the security of a given meaning. It is up to us to ensure that the world is one in which meaning can take place. It is in this sense that Patočka says that we need to “accept responsibility for meaninglessness” (*HE*, 75-76). As Ritter has emphasized, for Patočka action cannot be led or measured by any given measure (2017, 236). This does not mean that everything is allowed and that all action is arbitrary, but only that no measure can be determined in advance. Any action would be the response to a specific situation that cannot be fully comprehended, because of which the outcome of this action cannot fully be predetermined. It is precisely because, as Chvatík says, “this question posed by the situation does not have an unambiguous answer” (2003, 4) that we have to decide on it. Doing so means deciding on its significance. Insofar as there is any absolute measure for our actions, it would only lie in this. To quote Chvatík:

Although the meaning they are finding and giving to their acts (as they are orienting themselves in the world) is relative, their deeds are absolute. They cannot be withdrawn. Hence human finitude and naughtiness contains the possibility of a rise and a fall that are not relative. (Chvatík 2011b, 324)

While this establishes the possibility for meaningful action on the basis of problematicity, the question is whether we can do more than provide a significant response to the situations we find ourselves in. In other words, the question is whether we can also shape this situation itself, as was the goal of the third form of the care of the soul, the shaping of a just community or state. If history is to again rise above decadence, this involves more than the actions of isolated individuals going against the decline of history. Society needs to be given shape on a larger scale to divert the course of history.

As mentioned, Patočka is pessimistic about the possibility of such a *metanoia* on a large scale. He wonders why the arguably universal experience of war of the 20th century did not bring it about (*HE*, 131). According to Patočka, the Second World War and the new “nuclear reality” that followed it “eliminated the distinction between the front line and the home front” (*HE*, 132). In a way, everyone was confronted with their own mortality. Yet, this still did not bring about any decisive change. It seems rather that history ended up where it began, “with the bondage of life to its self-consumption and with work as the basic means of its perpetuation,” but without any overall meaning to existence such as was characteristic of prehistory (*HE*, 74). The reason for the absence of any large-scale *metanoia* was that only few

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can deal with such a confrontation and transcend its initial phase of “meaninglessness and unbearable horror, absurdity par excellence” (HE, 126). Even for those who can do so, the ones who actively put their life at stake in an act of self-sacrifice, this experience is not a lasting one, but a “summit” from which one “cannot but retreat back into everydayness” (HE, 134-35).

Nonetheless, there are possibilities based on problematicity that Patočka indicated, but himself left undeveloped. One important part of the interpretation given so far that can be utilized to develop the political motifs in Patočka’s thought is the explicit interpretation of problematicity as a cosmological insight, a truth about the world. It is therein that we can find possibilities beyond that of political resistance, often the focus of what one can call Patočka’s political philosophy. Patočka’s discussions of political resistance and sacrifice, and indeed his own political resistance and sacrifice as part of the *Charta 77* dissident movement, have led many discussions of his work to emphasize such moments of resistance, overlooking moment where a more constructive political theory – the idea of a theory of the state – is alluded to. Without wanting to downplay the importance of dissidence for either his thought or his life, an attempt will be made to develop Patočka’s thought in the direction of a theory of the state, which he himself saw as a fundamental part of the project of the care of the soul and which might be useful to address what can be seen as certain limitations of the focus on resistance.

It is hard to pin down any specific political programme on the basis of Patočka’s work.¹⁴⁷ Yet, his thought is valuable precisely in dealing with the fundamental principles of any political programme. This is particularly relevant in Europe’s contemporary situation where faith in traditional conceptions of these principles has been lost. This means that we are left with political programmes which, even if there is a broad consensus about them, have become hard to justify and defend. It is regarding these fundamentals that Patočka’s work can be of help.

3.6.2 The dissident community

The experience of problematicity is hard to maintain without retreating back into everydayness and it seems difficult to build anything on such a transitory experience. To overcome this

¹⁴⁷ While there is a general agreement that much of Patočka’s work is political, there is no clear agreement on the nature of its political content. For an overview of Patočka as a political philosopher, see Manton (2007, 70-79). Some connect it to humanism, universalism and liberalism (Tucker 2000, 16; Findlay 2002, 129). Others see it as politically neutral, stating that we perhaps should not read any particular political program into what is mainly a defence of metaphysical openness (Arnason 2006, 24-25; Gubser 2011, 91). Again others find something like a middle ground, placing Patočka’s political work in the tradition of non-political politics (Homolka 2017; see also Manton 2007). The problem is exacerbated because of the seeming disconnect between Patočka’s philosophy and the political pamphlets he wrote as part of his involvement with *Charta 77*. The texts he wrote for *Charta 77* seem to espouse more of a traditional political thought that does not necessarily match with his philosophical work. On the other hand, the question is to what extent these texts should be included as part of Patočka’s philosophical corpus as they were written for a broader, non-philosophical audience.

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issue, Patočka introduces the idea of a new form of community built on what he calls the “solidarity of the shaken;”

the solidarity of those who are capable of understanding what life is about. That history is the conflict of *mere life*, barren and chained by fear, with *life at the peak*, life that does not plan for the ordinary days of a future but sees clearly that the everyday, its life and its “peace,” have an end. Only one who is able to grasp this, who is capable of conversion, of *metanoia*, is a spiritual person. (HE, 134-35)

This solidarity is the way to transform what seems to be an inherently singularizing experience into the foundation of a new community. Continuing his analysis of the experience at the front, where one is confronted with both meaninglessness and significance, Patočka says that it is not only one’s one relative importance for the overall war effort that is transcended. The other, including the enemy, is revealed as a fellow participant in this situation: “Here we encounter the abysmal realm of the ‘prayer for the enemy,’ the phenomenon of ‘loving those who hate us’ – the solidarity of the shaken for all their contradiction and conflict” (HE, 131).

As Sepp has noted, the experience of the limit of meaning is not only significant because it makes one aware of the limits of one’s own life-world. It is also significant because of “what is actually ‘transitional’ in such a conflict – that is the partner in the conflict” and because of “a coming together in a shared space of meaning” (Sepp 2003, 162). In having one’s entire world shaken and in becoming aware of the precarious nature of all meaning, it is no longer merely one’s own attempt to establish meaning in the world that is to be valued, but also, as Chvatík put it, “the possible meaningfulness of what [one’s] political enemy is fighting for with equal ardour” (2015a, 36). Solidarity is not found in expanding one’s own world to include the other or in crossing the border from one’s world into that of the other, but in crossing the border of meaning itself. As discussed, the true sacrifice where this border is crossed is not made in name of any particular message. In a way, it is a sacrifice for nothing. But because of this “in a certain sense it is a sacrifice for everything and for all” (*Varna Lecture*, 339).

However, if a community can be based on this, it seems that it remains a fundamentally dissident community:

The solidarity of the shaken can say “no” to the measures of mobilization which make the state of war permanent. It will not offer positive programs but will speak, like Socrates’ *daimonion*, in warnings and prohibitions. It can and must create a spiritual authority, become a spiritual power that could drive the warring world to some restraint, rendering some acts and measures impossible. (HE, 135)

This is in line with Patočka’s account of the experience of problematicity and the actions based on it such as the care of the soul and self-sacrifice. They concern the shaking of given certainties, a distancing from (though not abandoning of) the empirical world, and in relation to the community this seems to mainly lead to providing a provocative corrective, but no

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constructive contribution. Transcendence is equated with “the thrust to break up what exists, to desecrate what considers itself sacrosanct, to condemn the actual in the name of that for which we long and which is not” (NP, 200). In the end, Patočka seems to have little to say about what that “for which we long and which is not” would be in concrete political terms, leaving us with a fundamentally dissident politics. While he states that the fight against restraining forces is to be followed by the setting of new goals, he remains silent as to what these goals would be (*Intellectuals and Opposition*, 12).

The fundamental dissident character at the forefront of Patočka’s political thought is, of course not without its value, especially if we look at his own circumstances. After the collapse of the period of relative liberalization of the *Prague Spring*, the only improvement could come about in an oppositional way. As Tava puts it, “from politics carried out *with* communism and the goal of making its human essence emerge, to an anti-politics *against* communism, aimed at building dissent which could overcome it” (2015, 125). *Charta 77*’s dissent was to bring to light the incongruity between the ideal and the actual reality of the state and to thus undermine the latter as a whole. Effective resistance, as Tava has formulated nicely, “lies in demonstrating, not with theories, but through [...] ethical resistance, the inadequacies of the system” (2015, 45). It is to show that not only resistance, but a more just state is possible. The dissidence of *Charta 77* is an example of this. As Patočka himself said, it is through *Charta 77*

that [the Czech] people have once more become aware that there are things for which it is worthwhile to suffer, that the things for which we might have to suffer are those which make life worthwhile, and that without them all our arts, literature, and culture become mere trades leading only from the desk to the pay office and back. (PSW, 346)

This is how the shaken can be politically active. The shaken individual “is not of course a politician and is not political in the usual sense of the word,” but nonetheless “cannot be apolitical” (LP, 63). The community of the shaken is not to be a traditional political power, but to act against the excesses of society and to set an example to others that there are things that are more important than even one’s own life. Although Patočka does not directly link this to his discussion of the guardian class in Plato, the parallels are clear:

Upon them [the guardians], upon this intermediate, rests the whole state; upon their asceticism, upon their sincerity, upon the soul of their self-abnegation rest the mores of the social whole. They are also the model for all the rest. And those who live the life of the community, meaning to live for the community, for the whole, for others, only because they live in this kind of way for others, render possible something such as *the state of justice*. (PE, 106-7)

In Plato, this class is called *the guardian*, and in this is already encompassed the thought that these people guard rather than attack; they guard and protect the community. But so that they know under what circumstances to defend – this is not simple – at the same time they have to be aware, they have to know, they have to be clear about this most horrible and least daily occurring thing of human life. They are the ones who in every instance

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represent the extreme human possibility, which man in reality never escapes, he just does not think about it: that man is a mortal being and that life has its end. They constantly have this in mind, constantly are in the field of this extreme human possibility. For this very reason these people have to be specially educated, they have to be a kind of paradoxical combination of the man of extreme insight and extreme risk. (*PE*, 118)

Yet, can anything be said about what the society that is to be protected should look like? There is no doubt that Patočka's circumstances called for a dissident philosophy and Patočka provides an exceptionally deep one. However, one can question the relevance of his thought for politics in different contexts, especially in light of Patočka's own references to the possibility of a theory of the state. Tucker has pointed out the flaws of Czech politics after the *Velvet Revolution*, where many of those involved with *Charta 77* attained prominent political positions (2000, 17). He notes that the philosophy that proved suitable for political resistance was problematic when in power. The significance of institutions, of the state in general, was overlooked, allowing the old elite and new political opportunists to corrupt politics. In Tucker's analogy, if Patočka's life and fate parallel those of Socrates, the subsequent situation is reminiscent of the problems faced by Plato in Syracuse. Tava too presents as Patočka's great dilemma the possibility of conceiving dissidence "not as a simple oppositional energy of a negative nature, but as a force which was capable of taking charge of the foundation of a new form of statehood" (2015, 134). Patočka himself conceptualizes dissidence as not only significant in its pure resistance, but also in establishing a new situation:

there are two kinds of opposition corresponding to the two dimensions of transcendence: one horizontal, which is set against the give societal condition that is to be replaced by another; and one 'vertical', the opposition to the immediate in general, that which first provides room and meaning for the former kind.

(*Intellectuals and Opposition – Alternative End*, 24).

The political resistance of the community of the shaken is thus also to make room for new societal conditions. Although Patočka himself does not provide anything like a theory of the state, we can try to see how such a program can be developed on the basis of his work, which inevitably also means going beyond his work.

3.6.3 Towards a theory of the state

When Patočka stresses the importance of Plato as a source for the care of the soul, this is accompanied by the importance of Plato as the founder of the theory of the state (*NE*, 210). The moral ideals that developed from the care of the soul are mentioned together with the universal institutions it supposedly brought forth. These two projects often seem incompatible. The care of the soul in relation to politics seems to focus on resistance against oppressive political systems, rather than on anything constructive. This has caused some to claim that Patočka's thought, while politically relevant, cannot be valuable in establishing a

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constitutional order (see e.g. Findlay 2002, 171).¹⁴⁸ While any such attempt will certainly encounter difficulties, as will any attempt to translate principles into concrete institutions, these are not necessarily insurmountable. Moreover, if Europe's situation is to be addressed, then this side of the care of the soul cannot be overlooked. As discussed, what gave shape to Europe was precisely the idea of a theory of the state after the initial failure of the project of the care of the soul.

The development of Patočka's idea of the state will not be done by focussing on what can be seen as the subjective resistance that human existence can offer to objectifying political systems or on the personal responsibility that follows from the care of the soul. Instead, a more constructive theory of the state will be indicated by, in a way, circumventing human existence and focussing on the interpretation of problematicity as a cosmological insight. Considering the tight connection between the existential and cosmological sides of problematicity, this may merely be a matter of different emphasis, but it is an important one. This approach thus does not base any theory of the state directly on the care of the soul, but on the problematicity that is its founding principle. While Patočka does not take this approach himself in what can be seen as his more directly political writings, it does follow his reflections on the relation between the three forms of the care of the soul and the idea of a holy empire.

That is not to say that trying to establish a constructive politics based on the existential side of the care of the soul is wrongheaded. Patočka himself suggests this approach by his emphasis on the just state as the state where the one who cares for the soul does not need to die, but can flourish (*PE*, 110-11). This is the view taken by Tucker and further developed by Mensch (Tucker 2000, 19; Mensch 2016). The latter articulates a list of human rights that follow from Patočka's account of the problematicity and movements of human existence and that any just state should uphold:

Personal rights – for example, the rights to life, privacy and property – correspond to the first movement. They safeguard our initial growth and development in the “sheltering environment” of home and family. Similarly, economic rights, including those to gainful employment, safeguard the second movement of the world of work. To the third movement correspond our political and social rights. These rights – to association, assembly, petition, publication, and speech – safeguard the development of our humanity actualized by the third movement. As such, they preserve our ability to call into question the existing interpretations – be they social, economic, moral or political – that define our relations to others. So regarded, they preserve the motion of our problematization, understood as that of “living in truth.” (Mensch 2016, 154)

¹⁴⁸ Findlay quotes Chvatík that Patočka's thought “cannot be a guideline for political action and cannot found a political science,” although no source for this quotation is given. Findlay himself agrees: “It is certainly true that Patočka's thought is not suitable as a straightforward guideline for political activity; it is not the type of political thought to which one can look for specific help in establishing a constitutional order” (2002, 171). But he goes on to say that “this does not mean that it cannot be used in establishing a founding set of principles that will act as a guide for a science of political order” (Findlay 2002, 171).

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Although this approach is valuable and thematizes the crucial idea that “the actualization of [...] openness as political freedom demands a certain framework” (Mensch 2016, 156), it does not engage with the possibility of interpreting problematicity in different ways.¹⁴⁹ Yet, it is precisely different interpretations one can give of problematicity, focussing on either human existence or the world as such, that potentially has tremendous political consequences. Specifically, as stated, the issue that interpreting problematicity as something ‘subjective’ leaves open the possibility of claims to overcome it, to ultimate answers which would effectively abolish politics in favour of absolutism. This would entail a return to a pre-problematical world and consequently a pre-problematical social organization based on an absolute view of the whole. If there is a certain, absolute interpretation of the world that gives everything its place and meaning, there is no need for politics in any substantial sense. Only questions of implementation remain as it is more or less clear what is to be done, at least for those with a purported unique insight into the whole, whether it be a priestly caste, a god-king, or any technocratic governing body. Problematicity precludes such a top-down organization of society, because it is the awareness of the breakdown or absence of any such pre-given or to-be-established order.

Further, when problematicity is seen as a characteristic of human existence, it is something we can nurture, but Patočka is all too aware that people can fall back into decline. Any political system should not be made too contingent by being made dependent on the personal responsibility and insight of individuals. While Patočka often mentions Plato’s guardian class, the philosopher-king is notably absent. Political systems based directly on the care of the soul would be inherently unstable. Of course, a state apparatus cannot prevent decline either, but it can provide a stable framework independent of personal inclinations. As such, this state should not be derived from these inclinations, but from something more durable. Akin to Patočka’s account of the holy empires, it would be a state “to be founded not on the changeability of human things [...], but rather on absolute truth” (*PE*, 89). Although problematicity precludes the absolutization of any worldview, in its own way it provides a truth to adhere to.

It is in this sense that problematicity can found, set limits to, and give a justification for the constitution of a state. Problematicity is, after all and this cannot be stressed enough, a form of insight into the whole, that is, it is a form of knowledge. It might be a difficult insight, in the sense of both its attainment and its acknowledgement, but if the given interpretation of problematicity is taken seriously, it can function in this manner. One thing that Patočka is always clear on is that for the state to function it needs those who protect its laws, not on the basis of unquestioned views, but on the basis of insight (*PE*, 122). This is the role of the aforementioned guardian class, which, as discussed, has parallels to the community of the shaken. Instead of ruling on the basis of their insight, they should primarily

¹⁴⁹ Moreover, while Mensch gives an exemplary account of human existence on the basis of Patočka’s work, the actual development and concrete articulation of human rights and the framework that is demanded by political freedom on the basis of this account is done fairly summarily, taking up only a few pages of his book.

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protect this framework itself. Insofar as something of the care of the soul's combination of insight and courage is required by necessity, it is here. This can take and throughout history has taken various shapes: constitutional courts, senates dedicated to testing legislation against the constitution, military interventions to protect the integrity of the state, or groups that through their dissidence show what politics in the end truly is to be about.

Political thinkers whose work is similar to Patočka's have expressed concerns with strong claims to knowledge in relation to politics. The intertwining of knowledge and politics is often feared to have totalitarian tendencies. As Lefort puts it, in line with Patočka's philosophy, in totalitarian societies

A condensation takes place between the sphere of power, the sphere of law and the sphere of knowledge. Knowledge of the ultimate goals of society and of the norms which regulate social practices become the property of power, and at the same time power itself claims to be the organ of a discourse which articulates the real as such.

(Lefort 1988, 13; see also Arendt 1973, 470; 2006b)

Because of this a separation between the spheres of knowledge and politics is advocated for. Patočka would agree with this, as this is the problem he sees in the radical form of overcivilization, but that does not mean that we should not take the insight into problematicity seriously as a claim to knowledge. Indeed, it can be seen as one of the crucial advances over similar conceptions of politics that Patočka provides it with a strong foundation. Moreover, the Patočkan claim to knowledge regarding problematicity pre-empts concerns regarding totalitarianism, because its claim concerns the very exclusion of the absolute views that would form the basis of a totalitarian society. If the above stronger interpretation of problematicity is correct, politics can be based on the *knowledge* that an all-encompassing, absolute meaning to the world is impossible and that an alternative is thus always possible and possibly more legitimate. It is this exclusion which opens the space of politics and sets rigid boundaries for it, which can be interpreted on the basis of the by now classical distinction between the political and politics.

3.6.4 The Political and Agonistic Politics

The distinction between the political and politics goes back to the work of Carl Schmitt and Paul Ricoeur.¹⁵⁰ Of particular importance for the following is its appropriation by authors associated with the *Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique* run by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe. As mentioned, Nancy's work on meaning and significance shows important similarities to that of Patočka. As will be shown, the same goes for the work of Lefort, who can be seen as an associate of the *Centre*¹⁵¹ and who was an important figure in popularizing

¹⁵⁰ For a historical and systematic overview of this distinction see Marchart (2008).

¹⁵¹ Lefort presented his influential *The Question of Democracy*, which will be the basis for much of what follows, at the centre.

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the distinction between the political and politics. Their work can thus be useful in further developing Patočka's political thought.

Although Patočka himself does not thematize the political as such, the idea is arguably present in this discussion of the *polis*. As discussed, the *polis* established a public sphere following the experience of problematicity. Patočka takes it to be a space of strife that originates out of strife (*HE*, 43), necessitating "the space of freedom that citizens both offer and deny each other – offering themselves in seeking support and overcoming resistance" (*HE*, 41-42). It is a space of debate where one cannot but allow room for disagreement. This is the sphere of the political in the proper sense of the word, not just as social organization in line with a fixed order of the world, but as a space where true conflict, including between fundamentally different views of the world, is possible.

It is clear that a distinction is made here between the framework that allows for conflict and debate and any position taken in it. The *polis* is the space of the *political* where one can put forward one's views without their content, the basis for concrete *politics*, being dictated. The political, as the space that allows an actual polemic between a plurality of views that might be equally valid, is thus based on the insight into problematicity.

As Chvatík notes, the *polis* had a *politeia*,

a constitution engraved on stone and on display in a public place, a set of laws by which the community was instituted and which emerged, in controversy and dispute, as something which ultimately stood above the parties to controversy and made their freedom possible. (Chvatík 2009, 521-22)

If what institutes the *polis* is the experience of problematicity, then it seems that problematicity would need to be inscribed into the *politeia*, the constitution of any such community. This would be a political foundation separate from and underpinning the sphere of everyday politics. Such a constitution would of course be very minimal and does not solve any concrete political issues, but that is precisely where its value lies. It guarantees the framework which makes politics possible by holding absolutism at bay and in doing so does not overreach and attempt to dominate all of society as traditional absolutisms do. As Nancy puts it, the political does not provide meaning or direction, but keeps open the possibility for various ways of engaging meaningfully with the world. It "sketches out nothing more than the contour, or the many contours, of an indetermination whose opening might allow these affirmations to take place" (Nancy 2010, 26). This separation between two domains is in line with Patočka's account of the western version of the holy empire as founded on a distinction between divine and worldly rule or moral and political authority.¹⁵²

¹⁵² On this basis Cajthaml's interpretation of Patočka as advocating the unity of political power and spiritual authority seems mistaken (2014, 128, 131). While Patočka does at times suggest such a link, this is mainly in terms of dissidence as outlined in the above account of the community of the shaken.

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In line with the concept of significance based on his work, for Nancy “politics has withdrawn as the donation (the auto- or hetero-donation, whether human or divine) of a common essence and destination: it has withdrawn as totality or as totalization” (2010, 50). The political thus has what can be called an ontological dimension that does not provide a substantial determination of the community. This ontological dimension of the political, as Marchart has noted, is revealed in moments of crisis where the traditional foundations of society give way and new grounds for politics have to be sought (2008, 56).¹⁵³ This is the reason he gives as to why the concept of the political developed in Germany after the First World War and gained traction in France after the Second World War. In these situations, the empirical conditions were in place that made it possible to problematize previous foundations and move towards a post-foundational concept of the political.

Parallel to the way that the absence of an absolute meaning to the world did not designate the impossibility of meaning and significant acts, likewise the loss of the traditional mythico-religious foundations of politics and the institution of the political as fundamentally an indeterminate space is not the loss of meaningful politics. Instead, it entails that a plurality of positions is enabled as politically meaningful. Along these lines some have suggested to interpret Patočka’s political thought as a form of agonistic political thought (Caraus 2015, 248; Strandberg 2017, 44). Gray, a proponent of such thought, has explained well what this agonistic element entails:

Agonistic liberalism is that species of liberalism that is grounded, not in rational choice, but in the limits of rational choice – limits imposed by the radical choices we are often constrained to make among goods that are both inherently rivalrous, and often constitutively uncombinable, and sometimes incommensurable, or rationally incomparable. Agonistic liberalism is an application in political philosophy of the moral theory of *value-pluralism* – the theory that there is an irreducible diversity of ultimate values (goods, excellences, options, reasons for action and so forth) and that when these values come into conflict or competition with one another there is no overarching standard or principle, no common currency or measure, whereby such conflicts can be arbitrated or resolved. (Gray 2007, 103)

Importantly, echoing Patočka’s insight into problematicity, Gray too thinks that the incommensurability at the heart of this agonism “does not signify any imperfection in our understanding; it marks a feature of the world” (2007, 105). As Berlin – one of the founders of the idea of value-pluralism that Gray refers to – puts it, it is because of this that “we must engage in what are called trade-offs – rules, values, principles must yield to each other in varying degrees in specific situations” (1992, 17). It is not that such trade-offs are only useful in the absence of the power to implement one’s view onto society as the one and only truth. The point of the political agonism invoked here is not to enter a conflict that in the end only

¹⁵³ Moreover, Marchart makes clear that much of the French appropriation of the concept of the political goes back to Heidegger and his commitment to the ontological dimension of all areas of human existence which greatly influenced both Patočka and Nancy.

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leaves room for the victor, but to find reconciliation between fundamentally conflicting views without denouncing their possible truth and meaning.

However, as already argued, if we take the stronger interpretation of problematicity and the corresponding element of significance it entails into account, it is not entirely true that there is no overarching standard or principle. As Bernard has noted, Patočka does not just highlight “the phenomenal fecundity of the plurality of perspectives,” he also “gives it a cosmological foundation” (2015, 269). This means that despite the absence and impossibility of any single true view, this is not a relativism where everything goes and all views are equal.¹⁵⁴ Instead, it acknowledges the possibility of a plurality of meaningful and truthful ways of engaging with the world, but also sets limits to this in a way that can be institutionalized.

3.6.5 Problematic democracy

3.6.5.1 Democracy in Patočka and Lefort

The question is how to properly translate problematicity into political institutions. However, whereas Patočka’s account of problematicity is novel, the idea of keeping absolutism at bay and allowing for a plurality of perspectives to enter the sphere of the political is not. There is a wealth of political theory going back to early modernity that describes the institutional apparatuses that ward off absolutisms: the separation of powers, control of the state by the people, the right to free speech, and so on. Indeed, at times Patočka hesitantly acknowledges that his ideal state would look a lot like modern liberal democracies. Both the fifth of the *Heretical Essays* and *Overcivilization and Its Inner Conflict* provide very critical accounts of modern liberal democracies, yet do not lead to their full denunciation. Imperfect as they are, Patočka seems forced to recognize their success in improving material conditions, social equality, and the space they allow for freedom (*HE*, 117-18; *LS*, 119-20).

Like the relation of his work to politics in general, the relation of Patočka’s thought to democracy is a matter of debate. Tucker sees anti-democratic prejudices in Patočka’s work (Tucker 2000), whereas Arnason sees “a pronounced distance [but not disengagement] from politics in general and democracy in particular” (2006, 24-25). Patočka never wrote extensively on democracy and his mentions of it are not necessarily positive. He writes that “the real question concerning the individual is not at issue between liberalism and socialism, between democracy and totalitarianism, which for all their profound differences equally overlook all that is neither objective nor a role” (*HE*, 115). Although, as will be discussed, there is some truth to this, this does not mean that Patočka’s thought cannot be used to advocate a form of democracy.

¹⁵⁴ The proponents of value pluralism also stress that despite the impossibility of any view to be the one and only absolute truth, these views are not indifferent to truth (Berlin 1992, 79-80, 87; Gray 2007, 106). See also the brief discussion of the place of religion in society in section 1.4.

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Caraus in particular has suggested linking Patočka's work to democracy, saying that while Patočka has no explicit view on democracy, any democracy needs to accept his insights regarding problematicity (2015, 249). Her account largely follows the account given above regarding the foundation of the political in problematicity. However, together with Strandberg, she has pointed to the similarities between Patočka's political thought inspired by problematicity and the interpretation of democratic institutions given by Lefort in particular (Strandberg 2017, 44; Caraus 2015, 249).¹⁵⁵

There are several striking similarities in not just the content, but also the approach and at times even the style of Patočka's and Lefort's political thought. Lefort too connects the contemplation of forms of society to a new meaning of the idea of freedom (1988, 9) and sees what he calls "the operation of negativity and the institution of political freedom" as "one and the same" (1988, 27). When he speaks of "the irruption of a new meaning of history" as a result of "the dissolution of an almost organic sense of duration that was once apprehended through customs and tradition," these could have been Patočka's words (Lefort 1988, 16). He even talks about democracy as implying "an unprecedented historical adventure" (Lefort 1988, 24) because the indeterminacy it implies makes democratic societies "the historical society *par excellence*" (Lefort 1988, 16).

The crucial difference, however, is that Lefort disagrees with the suggestion – which he calls common in his day and which Patočka also suggests – that "the only difference between democracy and the totalitarian system is the degree of oppression" (1988, 27). Whereas for Patočka the real question was not between democracy and totalitarianism, because neither adequately addresses the place of human existence in their systems, Lefort thinks that democracy is fundamentally connected to the problematical situation of human existence.

Central to Lefort's interpretation of democracy is what he calls 'the empty place of power'. "Power," he writes, "becomes and remains democratic when it proves to belong to no one" (Lefort 1988, 27). In non-democratic political systems power belongs to an individual or specific group. Or rather, it is embodied in them insofar as this was part of a mythico-religious worldview where the one in power could be seen as "a mediation between mortals and gods" or other transcendent agencies (Lefort 1988, 17). In this way, the power of the one to whom it was seen to belong

pointed towards an unconditional, other-worldly pole, while at the same time he was, in his own person, the guarantor and representative of the unity of the kingdom. The kingdom itself was represented as a body, as a substantial unity, in such a way that the

¹⁵⁵ Moreover, as mentioned, Lefort's work is highly congruent with that of Nancy, whose discussion of the political not only shares Patočka's ontological or phenomenological insights, but is also often explicitly connected to democracy as well.

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hierarchy of its members, the distinction between ranks and orders appeared to rest upon an unconditional basis. (Lefort 1988, 17)¹⁵⁶

Clearly, Lefort's description of traditional forms of society and the way their organization and power structure were dependent on their worldviews matches that of Patočka's account of pre-problematical societies. However, Lefort's analysis of the undoing of this structure, specifically in the context of the institution of democracy, is more concerned with the concrete transformation of the way power is distributed through society. The democratic institutional apparatus "prevents governments from appropriating power for their own ends, from incorporating it into themselves" (Lefort 1988, 17). Despotism is avoided by preventing the concentration of power so that "the locus of power becomes *an empty place*" (Lefort 1988, 17).

As Marchart has noted, the ontological dimension of Lefort's account is often overlooked (2008, 85-86). Yet, Lefort is quite clear that for him democracy is not simply a form of government (1988, 24). The representation of power as an empty place is not a mere convenient change in the organization of society and its distribution of power, but the maintaining of "a gap between the symbolic and the real" (Lefort 1988, 225).¹⁵⁷ It is this gap that prevents the confusion of the (symbolic) rule of law with the (real) rule of power. What underlies Lefort's analysis of democracy is thus the disappearance of a final authority that could rightfully be seen to appropriate all power. Lefort refers the disappearance of such an authority

to the disappearance of the natural or supernatural basis which, it was claimed, gave that authority an unassailable legitimacy and an understanding both of the ultimate ends of society and of the behaviour of the people it assigned to specific stations and functions. (Lefort 1988, 34)

In other words, democracy is instituted by the shaking of the traditional worldview, which Lefort refers to as "the *dissolution of the markers of certainty*" (1988, 19). When this takes place, a fundamental indeterminacy enters society which opens debate about the foundations of its organization. Social practice becomes underpinned by the experience "that no one has the answer to the questions that arise" (Lefort 1988, 19). It is important to note that the reason this questioning, this indeterminacy, cannot be overcome is that it "does not pertain to the order of empirical facts, to the order of economic or social facts which, like the gradual extension of equality of condition, can be seen to be born of other facts" (Lefort 1988, 16). This indeterminacy at the heart of Lefort's account of democracy is what Patočka refers to as problematicity.

¹⁵⁶ As can be seen on the basis of this quote, Lefort's account mainly focusses on modern political absolutism which is not identical to pre-modern variants. As for the current discussion, however, they share the relevant characteristics.

¹⁵⁷ Although they approach it on the basis of different frameworks that cannot simply be equated, the gap of which Lefort speaks is very similar to what Patočka discussed as the *chorismos* in his *Negative Platonism*.

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Here, we thus have the fundamental link between Patočka's work on problematicity and Lefort's account of democracy that help complement Patočka's political philosophy. We can see Patočka's work as more concerned with the nature of the foundation of the political, working this out before attempting to construct a particular political system or kind of politics on it, even though he never developed this last part. It thus has a stronger normative element than Lefort's largely (but not exclusively) descriptive analysis. In line with Lefort's own account, we can follow Nancy in saying that democracy is not only and not first of all a political form, but that it is "first of all a metaphysics and only afterwards a politics" (2010, 34). Moreover, it is not just any metaphysics, but an anti-metaphysical one, or, following Patočka, a *negative* metaphysics that institutes a specific form of society. As Nancy says: "Democracy means the conditions under which government and organization are de facto possible in the absence of any transcendent regulating principle" (2011, 59).

3.6.5.2 *The limits of democracy*

The politics that follows from this is fundamentally agonistic. Lefort speaks of "an institutionalization of conflict" and "a controlled contest with permanent rules" (1988, 17). The absence of final answers entails the need for the recognition and acknowledgement of a plurality of solutions to all problems. This can only be done when there is a political space "which is so constituted that everyone is encouraged to speak and to listen without being subject to the authority of another" (Lefort 1988, 41). What is needed to institutionalize this is "a locus for opinions with no power" separated from "a locus for power with no opinions" (Lefort 1988, 34). This does not mean that opinions, that is, various approaches to human existence and society, are decisively divorced from political power. Rather, they must win their legitimacy through competition, consensus, and the reconciliation between different views.

But, as said, this does not mean that anything goes. While on the one hand the state is to be a neutral power as to allow the free competition between views, as has been argued this free competition itself has a foundation in problematicity. Lefort too, while upholding the neutrality of the state, sees that this neutrality is not indifferent to the content of political debate. While it appears to be neutral, "to have no opinions or be above opinions," the establishment of the modern liberal democratic state itself "occurred as a result of changes in public opinion, or in response to them" (Lefort 1988, 34-35). It follows that democratic state apparatuses are not "a matter of pure form" (Lefort 1988, 28). Democracy would thus have to be what has been called a militant democracy, which "is explicitly not neutral about its own principles and values – and puts in place strong checks on those hostile to its principles" (Müller 2006, 279).¹⁵⁸

As the foundation of democracy, problematicity sets limits to it. Problematicity makes it a particular kind of democracy that is itself absolutist insofar as it is limited by the

¹⁵⁸ The conceptualization of militant democracy goes back to the work of Loewenstein (1937a; 1937b).

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absolute nature of problematicity. Its universality, in the sense of its universal acknowledgement of the possible meaning and truth of all positions, comes, as Patočka said about moderate overcivilization, “at the expense of its totality with regard to the domination of life” (LS, 114). This is how it provides the basis for freedom. However, the self-limitation of this form of universality does not entail that it must allow all positions. Precisely in order to guarantee its own self-limitation, it must be vigilant in relation to perspectives that do not limit themselves. If we not only take the democratic space of the political seriously as founded on the insight into problematicity, but also take the views put forward in this space seriously, then we might have to restrict our tolerance towards some views, as argued by, e.g. Marcuse (Marcuse 1965). Tolerance would thus entail intolerance towards what would undermine this political space or towards what would undermine problematicity. As Marcuse put it: “Tolerance itself stands subject to overriding criteria” and is only universal when it is practiced, not just by the state, but also by those putting forth their views (1965, 84).

Such limits are already explicitly present in some liberal democratic states. Several articles of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany have as their purpose to defend its constitutional democracy by banning anti-constitutional parties, even allowing the limiting of basic rights in some cases. While the reasons for these articles are clear from a historical perspective, this is not necessarily a settled debate. A notable incident took place in the Netherlands in 2006 when the then Minister of Justice Piet Hein Donner stated that a democracy should be able to abolish itself: “If two-thirds of all Dutch people want to establish sharia law tomorrow, then should that possibility not exist?” Importantly, he called this “the essence of democracy.” Gray too, basing himself on a radical pluralist view, holds that “there is no democratic project that has authority for all peoples and all circumstances” and that democracy is but “a convenient device” (2007, 210).

If democracy is fundamentally linked to problematicity, then it cannot be seen as a mere means for views which are themselves not limited by anything but themselves. Neutrality, as said, does not equal indifference. What should not be allowed is any rise to power of non-problematical, ultimately totalitarian, views. Or rather, it should be prevented that such views attain enough of a following to change the social organization, whether through sheer force or through the open competition of views. The framework of the state and of the public space should be defended. As Lefort puts it, ultimately “no artifice can prevent a majority from emerging *in the here and now* or from giving an answer which can stand in for the truth” (1988, 41). But this should not be allowed to take place in a way that endangers “the right to denounce that answer as hollow or wrong.” As he continues, “the majority may prove to be wrong, but not the public space.”

3.6.5.3 Freedom in democracy

A state based on problematicity thus sets boundaries to freedom, at least insofar as it takes place within the space of politics. This seems to go against Patočka’s usual emphasis on the primacy of freedom and his attempts to safeguard it from interference of the state. Here, it is

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important to remember that these boundaries are not only necessary to guarantee the existence of a space in which freedom can exist, but also that they are based on the same principle of problematicity that freedom is based on. When problematicity is taken as the common principle of both freedom and the political, the apparent contradiction disappears. If we take Patočka's idea of freedom to be based on not just the experience, but the insight into problematicity, then Marcuse's claim holds that "liberty must be defined and confined by truth" (1965, 86). Moreover, the agonistic view of the political seems to avoid, in part, the problems with the rigid division between the private and public spheres that Patočka indicated in his account of moderate overcivilization.

As discussed, in Patočka's analysis of moderate overcivilization freedom was confined to the private sphere with the risk of becoming an empty concept. Freedom was essentially condoned as long as it did not interfere with the overall rationalization of society. That is, 'irrational' positions were not allowed to meaningfully enter into debates regarding the good and organization of society as a whole. Thus, moderate overcivilization, as Meacham put it, "remains a step away from a pluralist democratic space where political conflicts and opposing positions should be allowed not only to have space within the private sphere [...] but also within the public sphere" (2015, 105). The other side of this refusal of freedom in the public sphere, as Gray has noted, is that the neutrality of the state as devoid of all human elements entails "nothing less than *the legal disestablishment of morality*," (2007, 30) "in which nothing of importance is left to political decision, and in which political life itself has been substantially evacuated of content" (2007, 114). Moreover, as Berlin already indicated, a sharp division between public and private life does not work well, because "too many territories have been claimed by both" (1992, 31-32).

To prevent the formalization of politics, Laurukhin has suggested adjusting it through a stronger presence of the plurality of concretely lived human existence (2003, 82). This is one of the central tenets of the agonistic conception of politics. The establishment of an agonistic political space does not "transform opinion into private property," but instead, as Lefort said, "it is the right to address others and to listen to them" thus having one's views play a role in society (1988, 33). Democracy as conceptualized by Lefort is not a mere formal framework.¹⁵⁹ It is neither completely indifferent to the perspectives put forward in it, nor can it function without such perspectives actually being put forward. The distinction between public and private that Patočka worries about is not only not as strict as he presents it, but what he sees as the private is to play an active role in the public sphere in this account. It is true that on the basis of the account given here strict limits are imposed on the general framework of the state. But these limits themselves leave open as much as possible the actual

¹⁵⁹ It should be noted that the issue of the formal nature of democracy is exacerbated in the case of representative democracy where the agonistic element is downplayed or, rather, relegated to others on our behalf. This is a related, but separate matter that due to its scope cannot be discussed here.

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organization of society and are limits that a responsible freedom (as opposed to an arbitrary freedom) would need to accept as well.

However, that the state provides the space for freedom does not mean that this freedom is also nourished. The question is whether there can be a *political* solution for this problem. Perhaps there is only so much the state can do, the rest relying on the moral capacities of its citizens. The state is to enable this, not only by providing a framework in which it can take place without ending in catastrophe, but through education, which Patočka notes was the most important task of the state in Plato (*NE*, 273-74; *PE*, 121). The care of the soul cannot do without a theory of the state if it is not to end in catastrophe. But neither can the state do without the care for the soul of its citizens. Lefort agrees when he says that no institution can guarantee its own continuous proper functioning (1988, 43). Its legitimacy must be seen and experienced to remain credible. While everyone may be encouraged to make use of their political freedom, to speak and listen in the public sphere, Lefort says that it must also be constituted in such a way so “that everyone is urged to *will* the power he has been given” (1988, 41).

3.6.6 A civil *metanoein*?

No political system can function without the recognition of its legitimacy and this is particularly so in democratic systems as they require the active participation of their citizens. The question is thus how such a participation can be encouraged. This question is particularly poignant if, as argued, the political as such allows for various perspectives, but is itself largely neutral. Nancy has observed that democracy has always been accompanied by a civil religion, “a functional equivalent (not a surrogate) of law dispensed from on high,” that “without grounding law, would bless its political creation” (2011, 62). He thus speaks of a “spirit” of democracy,

not a spirit that would designate a particular mentality, climate, or general postulation, but the breath that must inspire it, that in fact inspires it, so long as we know how to make it our own, which requires that we first of all be able to feel it. (Nancy 2010, 29)

As discussed, traditional forms of the organization of society were embedded in a larger view of the world through myth or religion. But in the case of democracy this is more difficult, precisely because it is based on the problematization of such views. As Marchart noted, symbolic frameworks “which allow for the acceptance of interrogation, debate, questioning, and conflict as that which generates democracy” are needed (2008, 107).

The question is how viable this can be. On the one hand, the political is to separate itself from any content, keeping intact a fundamental separation between the symbolic and the real, only basing itself on the problematicity which does away with all mythico-metaphysical gestures. On the other, this very separation needs to be inscribed in a symbolic framework that gives meaning to the democratic system itself instead of only allowing for other possibly meaningful perspectives. Suggestions for civil religions, civil nationalisms,

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constitutional patriotisms, and so on, point at something important, but cannot subsist on their own. Berlin already noted that the acknowledgement of the validity of a variety of perspectives, the seeking of reconciliation, and so on, are not very inspiring as the basis of a political system. It is “not the kind of thing that the idealistic young would wish, if need be, to fight and suffer for, in the cause of a new and nobler society” (Berlin 1992, 18). Müller has pointed out that constitutional patriotism (and the same can be said for the other ideas mentioned) is something like “an aspirational oxymoron” (2006, 279). It separates itself from any concrete political content, but thereby precisely rids itself from anything that could provide a strong political attachment. Constitutional patriotism and similar ideas are “normatively dependent concepts” (Müller 2007, 11). That is, they rely on external sources to function properly and have always done so (see Markell 2000). A civil religion that would aim only at the functioning of society would not yet provide a meaningful politics. The will to take part in the democratic system is not enough, one also needs to have something to put forward in it.

The closest we come to something like civic virtue in relation to problematicity in Patočka’s work is the community of the shaken, which as mentioned takes on something like the role of Plato’s guardians. It is the community of those who not only have insight into problematicity, but have experienced it to its fullest and thus know why the state based on it is to be protected. Patočka is clear that in order to function the just state needs rules and protectors of these rules on the basis not of unquestioned religion or myth, but on the basis of insight (*PE*, 122). However, there are two problems with this. First of all, as discussed, those who are shaken and base their lives on problematicity do not themselves put forth any position. They do not busy themselves with politics, but speak “in warnings and prohibitions” when politics overreaches (*HE*, 135). Of course, such guarantors of the state via the guarding of truth does not only come about via dissent. Arendt has pointed to institutionalized forms of such guarantors in independent judiciaries, academia, and journalism. But, as she says: “There is no doubt that all these politically relevant functions are performed outside the political realm” (Arendt 2006b, 258). They protect the political and might inform politics, but themselves do not put forward any position – at least not in their role of guardians.

Second, this implies a distinction between the few who do this and the masses who have not taken the experience of problematicity to heart nor have acquired insight into it. In a very early text on *Platonism and Politics* (1933) Patočka suggests that the people at large might need myths. In his later writings he suggests that religion’s retention of mythical elements “shows that they are mythical elements we cannot do without” (*PE*, 151). He emphasizes that the transformation of myth into what he refers to as “the Platonic religion” entailed the use of myth (*PE*, 122). This means that proper myths are necessary, because “if there will not be proper myths, there will be improper ones” (*Platonism and Politics*, 343). As discussed, myth is not simply falsehood for Patočka, but can contain truth. For all its confusions, myth can be a “symbol in place of higher understanding” (*Platonism and Politics*, 343). To live completely and continuously on the basis of insight is a difficult, perhaps

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impossible task. But he also makes clear that, despite their confusions, myth and religion can be useful means to indicate and pursue a higher form of existence. Chvatík suggests that Patočka has recourse to religion for the required *metanoein*, “apparently precisely because this change should touch everybody, the whole mankind” (2011b, 322-23).

Overall, what is needed is something believable, even for us moderns or post-moderns, in order to provide the necessary perspective, but without giving in to illusory dreams and without undervaluing the gravity of our situation. With this, we have returned the idea of a spiritual *metanoein*. The question is whether it is possible to achieve such a conversion without mythical or metaphysical supports. Even if a “proper” myth were to be created (and one can wonder about the effectiveness of any artificial myth, especially in a thoroughly disenchanted age), it would fundamentally be in tension with the insight on which it is to be based. The insight into problematicity would undermine its very functioning just as myth would cloud this insight.

We have arrived at an indication of what is required, although not at any way of how to achieve it. In a way, a return to a previous position, but not without gain. In Patočka’s words:

What we can do at most is give meaning to our own life. We can, to be sure, always move further, extend and surmount our limitations, but at the limit of our possibilities we again find the very same possibilities with which man had been faced at the very beginning – the possibilities of myth and faith. All this does not mean that the historical distance we have covered has been simply a vicious circle. On the contrary, man has won along the way the faculty of *differentiation*. We can no longer relegate all truths to the same level, we can no longer close our eyes before the fact that neither mystery nor objectivity are omnipresent, and that myth and faith are not on a par with science, whereas philosophy in turn cannot be assimilated to any of them. (*TME*, 11)

Conclusion

Husserl's account of Europe was discussed as typical for the modern idea of Europe. It is the central role of reason in both the idea of Europe and its crisis that led him to a solution to the latter by means of reason. This solution was shown to rely on an idea of the world that Husserl took as his goal and which could not fully be justified. The motivation to take up the infinite task to pursue this goal was shown to rely on a philosophical or even religious faith – perhaps unexpected for a philosopher who is known for his rationalism. While this did not show that Husserl's solution to the crisis was wrong or his goal impossible, it could still be seen as inadequate on two accounts.

First of all, the impossibility of properly justifying the world that Husserl took as his goal in combination with the formal nature of the teleology by means of which he strove to achieve it, created room to doubt what a transformation of the life-world on this basis would entail. The rationalization of the world might entail its disenchantment in the form of a transcending of precisely what makes it meaningful to us. If the rational teleology Husserl has recourse to has a clear critical aspect to it that rids the life-world of what is irrational, but has nothing substantive to contribute to it, then this might entail an emptying of the life-world of its meaning. The return to the life-world as the meaningful domain of human existence to counteract the formal and naturalistic conceptions of the world by the sciences is thereby undone again by a move that suffers from similar flaws.

That is not to say that the life-world as uncovered by Husserl is itself a completely meaningful homeworld. As the world in which we live, is indeed not the world as it is interpreted by science. But we have to be careful in how we conceptualize any 'original' world that we may posit underneath this interpretation. It may not be a world that is as meaningful as is sometimes nostalgically or romantically suggested. It might be an inherently problematical world as Patočka took it to be: fragmented, relative, and always including the risk of lapsing into meaninglessness.

Second, Husserl's solution was shown to involve an element of faith. While this is more a feature than a bug – as only a form of faith can sustain an infinite task – it nonetheless entails that Husserl's solution is inadequate when the crisis itself is one of a loss of faith. While in principle it works to solve a crisis of a loss of faith in reason by a restoration of a faith in reason, in reality this is more difficult. The circumstance to which Husserl's solution is a response is precisely one where this faith has become untenable. Husserl himself acknowledges that his solution seems "inappropriate to [his] time" but that that is precisely what makes him, "the supposed reactionary, [...] far more radical and far more revolutionary than those who in their words proclaim themselves so radical today" (C, 289-90). For all of Husserl's spirit, however, his solution falls on deaf ears. The assumption and the context of this thesis being a situation of the loss of the faith in reason's ability to meaningfully direct human existence, Husserl's solution cannot but remain inadequate. On the one hand this might not be fair as it precludes his solution from the start. On the other, if his solution is to

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speak to us, it needs to do so precisely in the historical circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Patočka – to some extent dealing with precisely these issues – provides a much less clear answer to the crisis. He can be said to have been more sensitive to Europe's existential predicament. This was no doubt because despite the overlap in their lives, Husserl and Patočka were part of a different age. Because he takes the care of the soul as his starting point, Patočka's solution tends to emphasize one's individual attitude in the face of problematcity. While this is not without its value, the transition to a large-scale spiritual conversion remained absent. Patočka himself was unsure why it did not take place after the various catastrophes of 20th century Europe.

Patočka's solution too tends towards the use of faith. To some extent, the recurring roles of reason and faith in both Husserl and Patočka follows from their subject-matter. After all, the discussion of the development of the idea of Europe showed that Christianity and reason were the two main sources that made Europe what it is today. While Patočka is not free from some arguably unwarranted nostalgia to sources from Europe's past – and neither is Husserl – it is to his credit that he does not advocate a simplistic return to these sources, but seeks to develop them in light of the concrete situation with which he was faced. In his attempt to give a meaningful place to human existence in a problematical world, he relies neither on faith nor any mythical or metaphysical moves, attempting to stick to concrete experience. Arguably, Patočka does this more so than Husserl insofar as he takes the problematical experience of the world not just as something to be overcome, but something that has to be come to terms with.

If we can say that Patočka discovered *what* is needed to turn Europe's spiritual life around – and even more so what is to be avoided – the question of *how* this is to be accomplished remains unanswered. With special reference to the work of Lefort, Patočka's indication of a theory of the state based on the experience of problematcity was developed well beyond what he himself did. However, the problems left at the end were the same ones that he had encountered: the possibility of a society that is rational within certain bounds, but without anything that would make the system that follows from this itself meaningful and without any guidance for positions regarding life that one could put forward in it. The end-point of the discussion and development of Patočka's work is thus similar to that of Husserl's work: shaping the world rationally can be done to some extent, but reason on its own cannot meaningful support human existence and the concrete determination of the latter is left up to non-rational ways of doing so relative to specific contexts. The question is whether the only way to address this is to reinstate a form of myth or religion and whether doing so would even be possible in combination with the insight on which it is to be based. Arguably – and as pertaining to Europe specifically – what is needed is a new idea of Europe in light of which the suggested measures can be experienced as a meaningful solution.

Conclusion

While the modern idea of Europe based on the spirit of reason has come to an end, it was suggested that this end indicated a new – albeit implicit – idea of Europe born out of its catastrophes. It was Europe's loss of faith in its own idea that was argued on the one hand to have subsumed the idea of Europe under that of the West for much of the past century, but that on the other indicated a divergence from the idea of the West through Europe's abandoning of the Grand Narrative. On the basis of the discussion of Europe's crisis in the work of Husserl and Patočka, it is now possible to give some articulation to this new idea of Europe which shows both its continuity with and a break from the modern idea of Europe.

Patočka's hope was that the catastrophes of the 20th century would lead Europe to a spiritual conversion. Although he struggled with the question why such a conversion did not take place, he did not see or at least did not thematize the influence these catastrophes had on the idea of Europe beyond what he perceived to be its end. Throughout Europe's diversity and divisions, the European political project after the Second World War has been marked by the aim to never let such a devastation – Auschwitz in particular – happen again. While in section 1 the consequences of this have partially been criticized because the fear of the repetition of catastrophe has led to an unwelcome form of cultural relativism, this does not devalue the sentiment behind this.

The interpretation of Patočka's idea of problematicity as itself a fundamental insight into the world was taken to provide bounds for at least some of the issues that the abandonment of Europe's faith in reason led to in the form of particularism, relativism, *in extremis* even possibilities of new absolutisms. The dissolution of the idea of the world that was a part of the rationalism of the modern idea of Europe made possible the staving off of absolutisms and a certain respect for positions other than one's own as possibly equally valuable way of giving shape to human existence. Or rather, the breakthrough of the idea that the world is inherently problematical made this possible as it provided a claim to knowledge. As such, it remained in line with part of Europe's modern rationalism. The question was whether anything constructive can be done on this basis, especially in light of the fact that so much of what was and indeed still is valuable in Europe was based on the prior idea of the world.

While problematicity as an insight – a form of knowledge – was argued to be capable of serving as the foundation of a political system along the lines of modern liberal democracy, this was discussed to lack anything that can provide an attachment to such a system and to make it meaningful to human existence. Myth, religion, and to some extent the faith in reason, had provided this in the past. However, problematicity is more than just an insight. First and foremost, it is an experience. It is an experience that Europe has had throughout the past century, first during the First World War and arguably more decisively with the Second World War. These catastrophes showed that the world is fragile, that meaninglessness can always overcome any sense it might have been taken to have.

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Crucially, it is in this experience that Patočka finds the possibility of a form of solidarity, a form of universalism, that does not take up those who experience it into a unitary totality. Using a fitting turn of phrase from Guénoun, we can call this the possibility of “a universal *after the world*” (2013, 235). The solidarity of the shaken does not come about through the transcending of one’s existence towards a higher idea, that is, an abstract ideal of the world or of humanity that so often has been criticized as not truly universal. Rather, it comes about through transcendence as a radical detachment from one’s particular identity and from any such idea. Can the European political project in the wake of the Second World War not be seen as based on such a solidarity, as a coming together despite the particular differences that separated Europe?

It is often remarked – especially by those strongly in favour of the European Union – that the European Union and its predecessors were the cause of Europe’s long-lasting peace after the Second World War. Combined with its economic prosperity, it is all too easy to slip back into something akin to the Grand Narrative and to turn Europe itself into a substantial identity in opposition to others. What gets mentioned less and less with the passing of time is that this success of what Patočka may have referred to as ‘peace and the day’ was built on a nocturnal foundation. The rise of the new Eurosceptic right-wing in Europe, on the other hand, explicitly denounces what it sees as the constant and tiring reference to the catastrophes of Europe’s past. What are becoming the main or at least most prominent political currents in Europe both forego the meaning – or rather, the lack of any meaning – of the catastrophes on which post-war Europe was built. They promise a better tomorrow, but increasingly ignore or dismiss, as Patočka put it, “the *night*,” which came “suddenly to be an absolute obstacle on the path of the day to the bad infinity of tomorrows” (HE, 130).

If Europe can articulate itself anew on the basis of catastrophe – as it has done from its ancient Greek birth according to Patočka – this would be in the form of the detachment from any particular identity. While such an identity in non-identity might sound paradoxical, it was shown to be a part of the various forms that Europe has taken throughout history. For both Husserl and Patočka the task of Europe involves giving up the validity of one’s homeworld. Europe is still frequently seen as a “*transgressive* civilization (Bauman 2004, 7), an “eccentric culture” (Brague 2002), or any other figure that denotes a similar idea (see also e.g. Crépon 2006; Cacciari 2016). Of course, it must also be stressed, as Guénoun in particular has done, that Europe’s tendency towards self-transcendence has always been accompanied by an opposing tendency: “the inclination to take up this quest, to recognize it as its own, and thereby to endow its natives with an otherwise established identity, that of privileged possessors of the universal and superior specialists of the general” (2013, xi). Indeed, as discussed, the very idea of Europe came to be when its ‘eccentric’ movement was halted and it failed to establish itself beyond its European particularity in the Middle Ages.

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The difficulty of this tension between the particular and the universal, one's particular identity and the break with it, appeared in the discussion of Husserl's work in the conception of Europe as based on the re-establishment of an ancient Greek insight into the world. In the discussion of Patočka's conception of the post-European age a similar tension between the continuation of and break with tradition was present, except not at Europe's inception, but at its end. In both cases the discussion indicated the problem of fully transcending what came before. How can a new world be arrived at if we are so fundamentally related to the old?

However, if we follow Patočka and do not aim for the constitution of a new world, but aim to uphold problematicity, the problem dissipates. Existence is based in the empirical, the particular, tradition, and so on. In that sense, Europe will always be what Husserl referred to as an empirical anthropological type. But the task is neither to simply accept this particularity nor to overcome it fully. Rather, it is to meaningfully take a distance from it in the knowledge that this can never be a full break nor a transcendence toward something beyond. This entails living with a tension regarding one's existence, a tension made possible by a critical distance towards it. This is made possible by the experience of problematicity which shakes any thought of substantial identity or the attachment to tradition, uncovering the transcendence of all human existence. Counter to Vattimo's objection discussed in section 1, our historical situation is thus not completely inescapable. The traditions and narratives that shape our historical existence can – and in moments of crisis do – break down and this problematical situation can be linked to a form of insight that is – at least in part – beyond our historical relativity. Were the crisis only a moment internal to any narrative without revealing something about this narrative itself, then it can be argued it would not be much of a crisis.

As a political project, Europe's task is then to integrate particular identities and differences not by negating them nor by approaching them from a higher, abstract point of view that could reconcile them. For Husserl, Europe entailed the crossing of particular boundaries towards an ideality that would form the basis of a new community. This community would ultimately be the unification of humankind as correlate of the ideal unity of the world. While this remains an admirable goal, it is fraught with problems. On the basis of Patočka's work, however, the matter is not to cross the boundary, but to exist on it, as there is nothing beyond it. It is on this boundary that solidarity can be reached, even if – or rather, precisely because – it offers nothing itself. The more problematical conception of the world at the heart of Patočka's work entails a different formation of humankind as its correlate, one that is not guided by ideal unity, but by a shared existence in problematicity.

Such a form of community avoids the danger of the Eurocentrism of Husserl's approach. There is no risk of a false idealization of Europe as a particular empirical anthropological type if the role of Husserl's 'absolute idea' is taken over by problematicity, which enables a break with the empirical but is not an idealization. As discussed, Patočka's conception of the post-European world can be seen to entail the task of preparing "the

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common ground for intercultural dialogue” (Lau 2011, 237) and “the encounter of other foundations and other horizons” (Crépon 2006, 34). Transcendence is the prerequisite for this. Not just transcendence towards the other, but most of all the transcendence of the self. It enables the encounter with others not in terms of one’s self – in the sense of the perspective of one’s particular identity – but based on the shared features of human existence without homogenizing or leaving behind one’s particular form of existence. Such an encounter would be predicated on the transcendence uncovered by the experience of problemat�icity and intrinsically related to the fundamental indeterminateness that is part of all life-worlds which Patočka called the world-mystery.

Novotný has expressed the worry that this might nonetheless entail a form of Eurocentrism. Do we then not “push onto the rest of the world the task of openness to the mystery of things”? (Novotný 2015, 308) This, however, goes against the way that problemat�icity has been interpreted as a cosmological insight. Problemat�icity is not a particular phenomenon exclusive to the European worldview. As Merlier puts it: “Europe has no monopoly on the question of *problemat�icity*” (2017, 164). The experience of problemat�icity is not only where one’s particular worldview loses its grasp, but it is a fundamental possibility inherent to human existence as such. And it is indeed present in the traditions and practices of other cultures, making possible the “reconciliation between spiritual plurality” of which Patočka spoke (*KEE*, 378).¹⁶⁰ A valuable further line of research would thus be a comparative take on the experience of problemat�icity in non-European traditions.¹⁶¹

For Europe’s own situation, the question that remains is how to translate the insight at the basis of this new idea of Europe into Europe’s concrete existence. It was shown how the insight into problemat�icity can be used to found certain political institutions. The central issue that this ran into was how to motivate their proper functioning, that is, how to give meaning to them. With that, we returned to Patočka’s idea of a spiritual conversion and the possible necessity of something like myth or religion, or, it can be added, culture. Indeed, not only Patočka, but Husserl too ran into issues regarding the concrete motivation of their solutions to the crisis. Here, further research into the concrete ways that cultures take shape, incorporate ideas, and give these ideas existential relevance would be required. In particular, it would be necessary to see how problemat�icity can serve as a foundation not just for a political system, but for a culture that can support such a system. This could be done by linking Patočka’s work to that of authors concerned with the empty foundation of community

¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, Husserl’s remarks on Indian thought as discussed in footnote 92 above point to the presence of this experience in Indian culture. The reconciliation between spiritual sources in the world is also in line with indications given in the later work of Heidegger, where he holds that the West cannot remain in isolation but has to open itself to other inceptions from out of its own inception (2000, 201). In particular, Heidegger has forms of East-Asian thought in mind. ‘Inception’ (*Anfang*) is a term in Heidegger’s later work designating the source of the western philosophical tradition – both in the sense of its historical origin and as a certain fundamental experience of being. As mentioned, for Patočka this experience is the equivalent of the experience of problemat�icity (*HE*, 77).

¹⁶¹ As of yet, no such research as been undertaken as far as I am aware. However, comparable comparative research in relation to Heidegger’s work (see the previous note) is a blossoming field and would be an interesting starting point for such a project.

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– rather than of politics such as was done on the basis of the work of Lefort – such as can be found in the work of Blanchot (1988), Nancy (1991), Agamben (1993), Esposito (2010), and others.

One way to go about doing so would be to look into the concrete empirical conditions that could serve to establish or be conducive to the idea of the world as fundamentally problematical. This would be in line with the connection between such conditions and the rational teleology in Husserl's work, even though Husserl did not focus on these empirical conditions themselves. Such a project was arguably part of Patočka's investigation into Europe's development on the basis of the care of the soul as it inquired into the particular forms in which Europe took shape and how they related to the idea of the care of the soul and the way this was transformed in their mutual interplay. Crépon too has indicated this, saying that "the task of thought consists therein, to identify the forms in which the European idea can take shape in the particularity of a civilization" (2006, 46). Several aspects of such forms have already been indicated in either Patočka's discussion of Europe or the development of his political thought. One particularly relevant condition in relation to Europe and the European Union might be plurality or diversity as the empirical condition for the encounter with others that might lead to the experience of problematicity.

If the attempt to shape Europe's spiritual existence is to be successful and if for this something like myth, religion, culture, even a narrative, is needed, then this will be more successful the more this can be seen as a development of Europe rather than something completely new. That has been one of the reasons for taking an explicitly European perspective in this thesis. To appropriate Husserl's terms, re-establishments work better than primordial ones. To establish something truly new is difficult if not impossible. Europe has much to offer, but not virgin soil. Exhausted as it may be, there is still much that is of value in Europe's heritage, as long as one can find the right perspective on it.

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