

Exploring the Undisclosed Meanings of Time, History, and Existence: Ricœur and Patočka as Philosophical Interlocutors: Introduction by the Editors

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This thematic issue of *Meta* is – as far as we know – the first and only extensive volume dedicated to the intellectual ties between Paul Ricœur and Jan Patočka. It examines the convergences and mutual inspirations to be found in the works of both thinkers. Jan Patočka (1907–1977) and Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) are both eminent representatives of the so-called “second generation” of phenomenology and crucial figures for the development of 20th century phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophy.

The main goal of this issue is twofold: on the one hand, it intends to highlight the potentials resulting from a synopsis of both thinkers and from the imbuing intersections of their thought, while on the other hand it depicts exemplary strategies of how to apply their phenomenological insights to

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lived human existence in the vast fields of history, religion, and politics, as well as in regard to practical issues such as memory, culture, and ethics. Both goals are reflected in the issue's title which not only presents Patočka and Ricœur as "philosophical interlocutors", but takes their ideas as an inspiration to further "explore the undisclosed meanings of time, history, and existence." Published in 2017, this issue also commemorates the 110th birthday of Jan Patočka and the 40th anniversary of his death. This, however, is not meant to indicate any preference given to one thinker over the other – quite on the contrary: it is a highly remarkable feature of all the contributions selected for this volume that the authors deal with both philosophers quite evenly at a high level of scholarly expertise.

Background & Context

So far there has been relatively little research on the philosophical intersections between the works of Ricœur and Patočka. The few existing studies have approached the topic either by way of comparing a neatly delimited aspect of their thought or by pursuing a more biographical interest without adequately addressing the philosophical dimensions. This second aspect (the biographical interest) was also induced by Paul Ricœur himself who, shortly after Patočka's death, published an article in *Le Monde* entitled "Jan Patočka, le philosophe-résistant" (March 19th, 1977). Not only did it reveal to a broader readership the truth about the tragic death of the Czech philosopher, it also portrayed his destiny as the exemplary case of a philosopher whose life and moral convictions are inseparable from his thought. In this article, Ricœur did his best to highlight Patočka's emphasis of the moral life and his appeal to reason as a highly remarkable (and disturbing) legacy for Western philosophers whose efforts at that time were – as Ricœur puts it – mainly directed at getting rid of moralism and at deconstructing reason.

Yet Paul Ricœur undoubtedly also has the merit of being one of the very first leading international philosophers who significantly contributed to the recognition of Patočka's phenomenological thought. His "Préface" to the French translation of the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*,

published in 1981, represented a fundamental text for Patočka's reception in the philosophical community at that time and continues to do so decades later. It is here where Patočka is rightfully situated within the phenomenological tradition, in the lineage of Husserl, Heidegger, and Arendt. It is here that a comparison between Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* and Patočka's last writings is drawn for the first time – a comparison that has been more intensely debated over the past years. And finally, it is here that Patočka's phenomenological heresies are clearly identified as original and profound manners of thinking the body-world relationship and the meaning of history.

These are not the only texts Ricœur devoted to the Czech philosopher. From 1981 to 2000, he continued to write introductions (such as the entry to the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*) and comprehensive studies of Patočka's work, from the difficult encounter of a theory that assumes the problematicity of all meaning with the spectre of nihilism ("Jan Patočka et le nihilisme"), to the intersection between two major issues that dominate Patočka's philosophy, namely the bodily presence in the world and the violence present in history ("Jan Patočka: de la philosophie du monde naturel à la philosophie de l'histoire"). Moreover, one may still add two other texts that, although not directly referring to Patočka, can be situated in the horizon of the relationship between the two philosophers. The first is the public lecture that Ricœur held within the series of *The Patočka Memorial Lectures at the Institute for Human Sciences* in Vienna, dedicated to "The Person: Its Ethical and Moral Structure" (1990), and the second is a presentation in Prague at an international congress for the abolition of torture, the title of which ("Fragile identité: respect de l'autre et identité culturelle", 2000) subtly reveals one of its most inspirational sources – Patočka.

However, the relationship between the two thinkers is by far not univocal: even though he did not write about Ricœur, Patočka intensely read his works and manifested a strong interest especially in the hermeneutics of the symbol and the hermeneutical critique of transcendental idealism. This can be seen clearly in his correspondence (as in the letters to Krzysztof

Michalski), but also in the spirit of some of the objections Patočka addressed to Husserl (e.g. in regards to consciousness as the site of pre-scientific life) and Heidegger, (the pre-eminence of Care or *Sorge* over other existential and unjustly ignored dimensions, such as action and corporeality).

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