

**Once Upon a Time of Transition:  
Fourteen Exercises in Political Thought**



**Martin Palouš**

their “well-stabilized,” future-oriented, highly technological and thus more and more confident and assertive “reawakened” society.

The reality we cannot escape from is simple. We are not any more just citizens of our nation-states, signed into “social contracts” with our governments and protected from outside disturbances by their authority and the borders of our states. We may be Americans, or any other nationality, “first,” enjoying our standards of living, cultural traditions, and being afraid about the future of our own, now threatened and more and more insecure national democracies. At the same time, and more importantly, however, we cannot omit the basic fact that we are human beings in the first place – living beings endowed with reason, as the old classical political philosophers used to say – belonging today to the emerging planetary mankind. As such we all have now our personal, but at the same time universal responsibility to resist the totalitarian threat, to keep our societies open, to preserve our democracies against their totalitarian enemies, to guard the openness of our natural world that has acquired planetary dimensions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Because what is at stake today is what it always has been at stake throughout human history: to maintain in it that element of freedom which still is the very essence of our humanity.

## Afterword

### Orlando Gutierrez Boronat “The Universal Journey Within”

#### First impression

This book is, perhaps in proper Weberian fashion of true science, both the diary of an inner spiritual journey and a philosophical observation of how this journey, which constitutes not just the truth experience of Martin Palouš, but also of his country at a given moment, plays out in real historical time.

In the tradition of authentic philosophy, Palouš is both observer, analyst and participant: part of a group of democratic revolutionaries who stood up against Soviet power, eventually brought about a successful freedom revolution in their own country, and then affirmed this renewal of democratic and republican ideas in the international diplomatic world and through active solidarity with those still under the totalitarian grip.

The testament of the universality of these affirmations and the consequent constructive actions are evidenced by the fact that they trigger in someone like me, who although from a different culture and a different geographic region has come to experience the results of the onslaught of totalitarianism, a series of thoughts about the universal ontological nature of totalitarianism.

One does not “review,” a book of essays such as these, one shares the thinking that it inspires, and the certainties towards which its truth experience help to point the way.

## Thought and Storm

Neither history nor the realm of thought are constituted by "What Ifs," they are composed of real individuals, in historical time, whose personality function is generated at specific moments in the cultural and social development of their specific people. These individuals are simultaneously and personally also open, not just to given historical and cultural roles which they may or may not assume, but also to a *transcendent realm*, meaning that it has a life and rhythm all of its own which goes beyond the biological. Our species is oriented towards a *truth-beyond-circumstance* which structures its very ability to understand reality.

The connection between the political and social reality which man inhabits, within which he spends his life, and his sensibility towards a broader horizon where his being is not limited by death, can be thought to exist either *within*, which is to say in an unseen substantive continuum of what is real, or *without*, outside of man, in the overwhelming but also exhaustible world of nature.

The movement towards the crux, the matrix of his being, can therefore come in one of two ways: from the outside in, in a measurable process, or from the inside out, in a process that we have not yet learned how to fully gauge but the parts and phases of which tradition has identified.

The outside in perspective on the journey of man's conscience was described by Marxism as "*man thinks as he lives*." Ernesto "Che" Guevara once famously said that he didn't care if people weren't Communists inside, as long as they acted as Communism wanted them to act, because if they acted as Communists, they were Communists.

The great movements which have generated the liberating power of religion, philosophy, jurisprudence, republicanism, and democracy have been movements from the inside out, where the sovereignty of the uniqueness of the human experience overcomes the shackles placed on man's spirit by the petrification of the forms-in-becoming.

This petrification of the activity of consciousness through the separation between contemplation and action that is often brought about by the prolonged entronement of any given caste, creates a pseudo

essence or pseudo  
ideational gravity i  
closely to resembl  
therefore more eas

Palouš quo

Anybody w

the twentier

as I did, fin

sides by a f

the languag

are unanaly

exposed to t

the problem

cannot dea

partners in

of investiga

the represen

community

to criticize

discovered

And he go

discourse, in order

affirmation, refutat

philosophical contin

An element

emergence

thinkers. The

work for the

to continue

unattained b

another elem

schools did n

some time,

through the

teacher appr

<sup>580</sup> Eric Voegelin: *Auto*  
*Revised Edition with a V*

## Thought and Storm

Neither history nor the realm of thought are constituted by "What Ifs," they are composed of real individuals, in historical time, whose personality function is generated at specific moments in the cultural and social development of their specific people. These individuals are simultaneously and personally also open, not just to given historical and cultural roles which they may or may not assume, but also to a *transcendent realm*, meaning that it has a life and rhythm all of its own which goes beyond the biological. Our species is oriented towards a *truth-beyond-circumstance* which structures its very ability to understand reality.

The connection between the political and social reality which man inhabits, within which he spends his life, and his sensibility towards a broader horizon where his being is not limited by death, can be thought to exist either *within*, which is to say in an unseen substantive continuum of what is real, or *without*, outside of man, in the overwhelming but also exhaustible world of nature.

The movement towards the crux, the matrix of his being, can therefore come in one of two ways: from the outside in, in a measurable process, or from the inside out, in a process that we have not yet learned how to fully gauge but the parts and phases of which tradition has identified.

The outside in perspective on the journey of man's conscience was described by Marxism as "*man thinks as he lives*." Ernesto "Che" Guevara once famously said that he didn't care if people weren't Communists inside, as long as they acted as Communism wanted them to act, because if they acted as Communists, they were Communists.

The great movements which have generated the liberating power of religion, philosophy, jurisprudence, republicanism, and democracy have been movements from the inside out, where the sovereignty of the uniqueness of the human experience overcomes the shackles placed on man's spirit by the petrification of the forms-in-becoming.

This petrification of the activity of consciousness through the separation between contemplation and action that is often brought about by the prolonged enthronelement of any given caste, creates a pseudo

essence or pseudo substance, an image rather than a symbol, to which ideational gravity is attributed since its process at this stage, appears more closely to resemble the rhythms of what is material and sensorial, and therefore more easily comprehensible.

Palouš quotes Eric Voegelin's observations on precisely this:

*Anybody with an informed and reflective mind who lives in the twentieth century since the end of the First World War, as I did, finds himself hemmed in, if not oppressed, from all sides by a flood of ideological language – meaning thereby the language symbols that pretend to be concepts, but in fact are unanalyzed topoi or topics. Moreover, anybody who is exposed to this dominant climate of opinion has to cope with the problem that language is a social phenomenon. He cannot deal with the users of ideological language as partners in a discussion, but he has to make them the object of investigation. There is no community of language with the representatives of the dominant ideologies. Hence, the community of language that he himself wants to use in order to criticize the users of ideological language must first be discovered and, if necessary, established.<sup>580</sup>*

And he goes on to note that the dynamic of philosophical discourse, in order not to suffer from petrification, necessitates constant affirmation, refutation and renewal of the central arguments in the philosophical continuum:

*An elementary fact in the history of thought is the emergence of philosophical schools around prominent thinkers. The disciples of a Master strived to preserve his work for the future, to carry through his basic intention and to continue in the implementation of the task pursued, but unattained by him in his lifetime. Nevertheless, there is another elementary fact in the history of thought. Such schools did not last usually more than one generation. After some time, the most talented disciples started seeing through the limitations of the standpoint from which their teacher approached philosophical problems and realized*

<sup>580</sup> Eric Voegelin: *Autobiographical Reflections*. In: *Autobiographical Reflections. Revised Edition with a Voegelin Glossary and Cumulative Index*, 2006, p. 118

*the unattainability of the tasks he had set for himself. At a certain moment in time, they came to the conclusion that it was not possible to continue on the road marked out by him; that they were finding themselves at a new crossroads where they had to take new decisions, to unveil the open questions and issues behind all the answers the Master's philosophical "teaching" contained. By paradox, this moment of destruction of the teacher's legacy, however, does not necessarily mean its absolute end, its retreat from the human world and its fall into oblivion. On the contrary, it is exactly here where we can find the key to his potential immortality.<sup>581</sup>*

Further on, Palouš recognizes how Voegelin himself, in a sign of philosophical integrity, warned against transforming the "thought experience" of any one philosopher into a closed system:

*Voegelin is undoubtedly one of those contemporary thinkers who – probably against their will and in spite of their own warning that philosophy will not allow itself to be closed into any systematic philosophical teaching – did create a kind of philosophical school.<sup>582</sup>*

Reality does not emerge from the petrification of circumstance, it is attained through the active and vital process of abstraction. And abstraction, which is an indispensable component for man's life on Earth and his relationship with nature, cannot take place without transcendence. This is the life process at its apex of ascendance towards episteme, or full knowing, or knowing-in-certainty.

The great dilemma that lies with the transformative results of the inner spiritual journey and the external but necessary forms of temporal administration is that more often than not, a conflict develops between the two different ranges of vision which they synthesize.

<sup>581</sup> Martin Palouš: *Common Sense and the Rule of Law: Returning Voegelin to Central Europe*. In: Embry C. R. and Cooper B. (eds.): *Philosophy, Literature, and Politics. Essays Honoring Ellis Sandoz*: Columbia and London. University of Missouri Press, 2005, p.258-259

<sup>582</sup> Op.cit., p. 259

in the co  
source o  
establish  
in the v  
political  
America

where th  
The Cre  
upon wh  
freedom  
(life, lib  
words,

<sup>583</sup> Op.cit

<sup>584</sup> Op.cit

*the unattainability of the tasks he had set for himself. At a certain moment in time, they came to the conclusion that it was not possible to continue on the road marked out by him; that they were finding themselves at a new crossroads where they had to take new decisions, to unveil the open questions and issues behind all the answers the Master's philosophical "teaching" contained. By paradox, this moment of destruction of the teacher's legacy, however, does not necessarily mean its absolute end, its retreat from the human world and its fall into oblivion. On the contrary, it is exactly here where we can find the key to his potential immortality.<sup>581</sup>*

Further on, Palouš recognizes how Voegelin himself, in a sign of philosophical integrity, warned against transforming the "thought experience" of any one philosopher into a closed system:

*Voegelin is undoubtedly one of those contemporary thinkers who – probably against their will and in spite of their own warning that philosophy will not allow itself to be closed into any systematic philosophical teaching – did create a kind of philosophical school.<sup>582</sup>*

Reality does not emerge from the petrification of circumstance, it is attained through the active and vital process of abstraction. And abstraction, which is an indispensable component for man's life on Earth and his relationship with nature, cannot take place without transcendence. This is the life process at its apex of ascendance towards episteme, or full knowing, or knowing-in-certainty.

The great dilemma that lies with the transformative results of the inner spiritual journey and the external but necessary forms of temporal administration is that more often than not, a conflict develops between the two different ranges of vision which they synthesize.

<sup>581</sup> Martin Palouš: *Common Sense and the Rule of Law: Returning Voegelin to Central Europe*. In: Embry C. R. and Cooper B. (eds.): *Philosophy, Literature, and Politics. Essays Honoring Ellis Sandoz*: Columbia and London. University of Missouri Press, 2005, p.258-259

<sup>582</sup> Op.cit., p. 259

The truly noteworthy pillar of American political thought is that in the concrete political act of the founding of the American Republic, the source of the *vita activa* in political and social terms was clearly established as the *vita contemplativa*. The non-interference by state power in the *vita contemplativa* was sacralized as the essence of the entire political system. Palouš describes this philosophical uniqueness of the American republic like this:

*This figurative description of the process within which human knowledge is acquired, grows and is altered in the course of time, clearly implies an utterly different, much more positive attitude of "pragmatist" toward "common sense," than was the position of monism. At the same time, pragmatism has an incomparably higher appreciation for the singular facts given in the immediate experience of individual human beings, living in the presence of the known past, but open towards the unknown future.<sup>583</sup>*

The realm of the *vita contemplativa* was regarded as the place where the union with the mystical legacy of the Creator God takes place. The Creation is where God has bestowed upon man a moral framework upon which his existence in freedom can be based. This existence in freedom is continuous with the public and private domains in the republic (life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness...) in a real, "pragmatic," in other words, "problem-solving" manner.

Palouš comments:

*The hypothesis of the universe's "oneness," the hypothesis of one world consisting of things seen by an omniscient knower "as forming one single systematic fact," the hypothesis of the actual world being present to the senses of a human spectator always within the finite horizon of his mortality, but "complete eternally," has important implications. Its discovery and conscious acceptance signal a genuine revolution in the historical process of human self-understanding.<sup>584</sup>*

<sup>583</sup> Op.cit., p. 272,

<sup>584</sup> Op.cit., p.270,

The radical center of this political entity becomes then, not the ethno-state of the original polis, or the divine tradition of the Roman republic, but rather the direct, constant ever-in-the-present bond between the individual conscience and the moral intelligence at the core of all existence. The universal judge of character which Adam Smith described as "the Invisible Observer," and references to which we find going back to Pythagoras and Socrates himself, in the dialogue with his *daimon*, the inner divine perspective which is always engaged with him in what Martin Palouš poetically describes as "a soundless dialogue."

One of the key contributions to the world of the Czech Revolution specifically, but also of the other Central European transformations in 1989, is that the fluidity between this inner sphere of necessary freedom of thought and what we understand as the public realm, where historical action signifies specific subjects with specific results in active policy, was liberated from the confines of petrified Marxism.

The historicism denounced by Raymond Aron delegated the public sphere to the determinist machinations of material laws. This petrified Marxism has clung on tenaciously. I believe that the concrete political and cultural fact of the Central European revolutions has become a powerful challenge to the hold of this perspective over Western academia, and a rebuke to the replacement in the classroom of informed open thinking by slogans disguised as concepts.

Thus, action remains always also a contemplative function, and the expansion or contraction of the democratic charter becomes not a technical, deterministically automatic matter, but rather a permanent recourse to the "common sense," the philosophical nature in man's identity. The vitality of American existence lies in that it is a nation of individuals and not of trapped masses.

### A Spiritual View of Reality

A spiritual view of reality is endowed with a panoramic, expanding horizon. A cosmos of unlimited potential has been placed at the feet of a transcendent moral law.

A materialist view of human life is, ultimately and relentlessly focused on finality, on the inescapable certainty of entropy. Thus, all forms

and cor  
of the  
existen

of an a  
name o  
someth

parts of  
promise  
balance  
exampl  
Fidel Ca

better. T  
Commun  
allegian  
against r

<sup>585</sup> Aleksa  
In: Aleksa  
Vladimir  
Translated  
Willets un  
Hayward.  
<https://arch>

The radical center of this political entity becomes then, not the ethno-state of the original polis, or the divine tradition of the Roman republic, but rather the direct, constant ever-in-the-present bond between the individual conscience and the moral intelligence at the core of all existence. The universal judge of character which Adam Smith described as "the Invisible Observer," and references to which we find going back to Pythagoras and Socrates himself, in the dialogue with his *daimon*, the inner divine perspective which is always engaged with him in what Martin Palouš poetically describes as "a soundless dialogue."

One of the key contributions to the world of the Czech Revolution specifically, but also of the other Central European transformations in 1989, is that the fluidity between this inner sphere of necessary freedom of thought and what we understand as the public realm, where historical action signifies specific subjects with specific results in active policy, was liberated from the confines of petrified Marxism.

The historicism denounced by Raymond Aron delegated the public sphere to the determinist machinations of material laws. This petrified Marxism has clung on tenaciously. I believe that the concrete political and cultural fact of the Central European revolutions has become a powerful challenge to the hold of this perspective over Western academia, and a rebuke to the replacement in the classroom of informed open thinking by slogans disguised as concepts.

Thus, action remains always also a contemplative function, and the expansion or contraction of the democratic charter becomes not a technical, deterministically automatic matter, but rather a permanent recourse to the "common sense," the philosophical nature in man's identity. The vitality of American existence lies in that it is a nation of individuals and not of trapped masses.

### A Spiritual View of Reality

A spiritual view of reality is endowed with a panoramic, expanding horizon. A cosmos of unlimited potential has been placed at the feet of a transcendent moral law.

A materialist view of human life is, ultimately and relentlessly focused on finality, on the inescapable certainty of entropy. Thus, all forms

and contents of human action are fixed in time, since the material portions of the Earth's sustenance available are limited by the very nature of existence.

In one regard, totalitarianism offers the mediating, balancing role of an all-powerful state in order to confront the power of nature in the name of man. By doing so, the state will transform the Earth's scarcity into something more amenable to existence.

At the very least, it will better distribute scarcity, so all component parts of society have an equality of access and results. That, at least, is the promise. This sacralization of poverty as the only just way to sociably balance man's relationship with nature has been a key component of, for example, the Latin American totalitarian movement founded and led by Fidel Castro.

The state of war, Ernesto "Che" Guevara affirmed, makes people better. Totalitarian doctrine before the epochal transformations of Chinese Communism had a basic common denominator: either race or class allegiance was the only real political certainty in man's continuous war against nature.

Solzhenitsyn comes to mind:

*After the Western ideal of unlimited freedom, after the Marxist concept of freedom as the acceptance of the yoke of necessity – here is the true Christian definition of freedom. Freedom is self-restriction! Restriction of the self for the sake of others.*

*Once understood and added, this principle diverts us – as individuals, in all forms of human association, societies and nations – from outward to inward development, thereby giving us greater spiritual depth.<sup>585</sup>*

<sup>585</sup> Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn: *Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations*. In: Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn. With Mikhail Agurky, A.B., Evgeny Baraganov, Vladimir Borisov, F. Korsakov, and Igor Shavarevich: *From under the rubble*. Translated by A.M. Brock, Milada Haigh Marita Saplets, Hilary Sternberg, and Harry Willets under the direction of Michael Scammell. With an Introduction by Max Hayward. Regnery Gateway, Washington, D.C., 1975  
<https://archive.org/details/SolzhenitsynAleksandrIsaevichFromUnderTheRubble>



In his sojourn to America Solzhenitsyn discovered that ideology had begun to infest the American psyche. The founding of the American republic had begun to be reinterpreted, through ideology, in a way noxious to its ends.

*Ideology dismisses the individual's true stature as an expression of divinity and attempts to squeeze the individual into its utopian vision.*<sup>586</sup>

And riding ideology came totalitarianism:

*Ideology- that is what gives evil doing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors...*<sup>587</sup>

Totalitarianism cannot be understood simply as a malaise affecting a country where it took hold through its implementation by a first generation revolutionary regime. The actions of the West that have made such "implementations" possible are simply too numerous and essential for the consolidation in power of totalitarian states to be discarded as anything other than a different expression of the same ideational phenomenon generating totalitarianism.

Palouš himself reminds us that Voegelin referred to totalitarianism as the: "cadaveric poison of Western civilization." In other words, different symptoms of the same disease affecting culturally diverse social organisms in different manner, at different stages.

Given this state of ideological infection of the West, encountered at different historical moments by Voegelin, Solzhenitsyn, Havel and, as evidenced in this collection of essays by Palouš, the type of movement which resulted in the liberation of Central Europe from totalitarianism could not be properly understood by the West, save for a few enlightened sectors still within its fold, precisely because the movement itself was too Western. More about this further ahead.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

In his sojourn to America Solzhenitsyn discovered that ideology had begun to infest the American psyche. The founding of the American republic had begun to be reinterpreted, through ideology, in a way noxious to its ends.

*Ideology dismisses the individual's true stature as an expression of divinity and attempts to squeeze the individual into its utopian vision.*<sup>586</sup>

And riding ideology came totalitarianism:

*Ideology- that is what gives evil doing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors...*<sup>587</sup>

Totalitarianism cannot be understood simply as a malaise affecting a country where it took hold through its implementation by a first generation revolutionary regime. The actions of the West that have made such "implementations" possible are simply too numerous and essential for the consolidation in power of totalitarian states to be discarded as anything other than a different expression of the same ideational phenomenon generating totalitarianism.

Palouš himself reminds us that Voegelin referred to totalitarianism as the: "cadaveric poison of Western civilization." In other words, different symptoms of the same disease affecting culturally diverse social organisms in different manner, at different stages.

Given this state of ideological infection of the West, encountered at different historical moments by Voegelin, Solzhenitsyn, Havel and, as evidenced in this collection of essays by Palouš, the type of movement which resulted in the liberation of Central Europe from totalitarianism could not be properly understood by the West, save for a few enlightened sectors still within its fold, precisely because the movement itself was too Western. More about this further ahead.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

It is not whether the Central European Revolutions did or did not bring forth "new" ideas, it is that they restored vitality to the inward movement of humanity and hence brought to the world something far more healing than a new ideology: a *new understanding*.

## Human Rights

In this collection of essays, Palouš addresses what is a critically inevitable ontological issue in today's world: the metaphysical consequences of the doctrine of human rights. It would seem that in our world today, the constructive evolution of politics leads precisely both to human rights doctrine and an expansion of its understanding, of the axiological foundations of its universal tenets.

However, philosophical interpretations of natural science are heading in a different direction: towards the affirmation of a vision of reality that consists of a basically chaotic universe where islands of order have accidentally come into being in a disconnected manner.

It is amazing to find so many cases in the academia of social sciences in the West, and particularly in the United States, where in the literature of the social sciences, in lectures and in classroom activity, so many academics act as if totalitarianism had never existed or continued to exist, as if the great demonic force of the twentieth century were capitalism and the horror of the Gulag and the Cultural Revolution simply footnotes to this. As if this historical experience of totalitarianism, the fact of its happening, did not shed greater light on the understanding of the liberties and rights which have been passed on to the world by Classical civilization.

Perhaps that is why for so many in leadership positions in the West how to act, how to decide, in the face of totalitarianism becomes a constant perplexing enigma. There are too many in establishment academia that in every generation decide to "forget" what totalitarianism is, and what we have found it to be: the presence of malevolence in the historical realm. This malignancy constitutes the counterpart to and the rejection of, divinity as the source of human rights.

In this sense, writes Palouš:

*If one is looking for the spiritual basis of Havel's concept of politics of transition from Communism – his emphasis on the indispensable role of civil society in it, on active policies, both domestic and international, in the area of human rights, on civic education with the main goal to revive the spirit of responsibility for public matters in individual citizens and in raising general awareness that man qua man must cultivate his/her capability to "transcend" his/her finiteness and exist face-to-face with the Mystery of Being – it is neither a philosophically dressed-up version of progressivism, still present among liberal intellectuals of the West, nor utopianism of some other provenance fashionable in these days. It is Patočka's phenomenological philosophy of history that speaks out here. What is its message through Havel as its messenger? Thanks to him we can be better aware now that the success of a politician cannot be measured only by its concrete temporary political achievements, but by the impact of policies enhanced and implemented by him on the "soul" of his polis – a human collective that today takes the form of, but transcends at the same time, the level of nation-state.<sup>588</sup>*

Palouš further believes that it is critical in this debate to address the core meaning of the concepts which constitute human rights precisely because they may, unlike the derivative social sciences, offer a prudent instrument that may be used, from the realm of the social, to attain a better view of the cosmic horizon within man:

*Is it not true that without careful clarification of how these terms are constituted on the existential level, all answers to the question "what kind of God does human rights require?" could lead us astray and leave us lost in all sorts of metaphysical fallacies and perplexities?<sup>589</sup>*

<sup>588</sup> Exercise 12: Patočka between Masaryk and Havel

<sup>589</sup> Martin Palouš: *What Kind of God Does Human Rights Require?* In: Bucar, E.M. and Barnett B. (eds.): *Does Human Rights Need God?*, William Erdman's Publishing Company, Grand Rapids. Michigan and Cambridge, U.K., 2005, p.245

<sup>590</sup> Op.cit., p.

*If one is looking for the spiritual basis of Havel's concept of politics of transition from Communism – his emphasis on the indispensable role of civil society in it, on active policies, both domestic and international, in the area of human rights, on civic education with the main goal to revive the spirit of responsibility for public matters in individual citizens and in raising general awareness that man qua man must cultivate his/her capability to "transcend" his/her finiteness and exist face-to-face with the Mystery of Being – it is neither a philosophically dressed-up version of progressivism, still present among liberal intellectuals of the West, nor utopianism of some other provenance fashionable in these days. It is Patočka's phenomenological philosophy of history that speaks out here. What is its message through Havel as its messenger? Thanks to him we can be better aware now that the success of a politician cannot be measured only by its concrete temporary political achievements, but by the impact of policies enhanced and implemented by him on the "soul" of his polis – a human collective that today takes the form of, but transcends at the same time, the level of nation-state.<sup>588</sup>*

Palouš further believes that it is critical in this debate to address the core meaning of the concepts which constitute human rights precisely because they may, unlike the derivative social sciences, offer a prudent instrument that may be used, from the realm of the social, to attain a better view of the cosmic horizon within man:

*Is it not true that without careful clarification of how these terms are constituted on the existential level, all answers to the question "what kind of God does human rights require?" could lead us astray and leave us lost in all sorts of metaphysical fallacies and perplexities?<sup>589</sup>*

<sup>588</sup> Exercise 12: Patočka between Masaryk and Havel

<sup>589</sup> Martin Palouš: *What Kind of God Does Human Rights Require?* In: Bucar, E.M. and Barnett B. (eds.): *Does Human Rights Need God?*, William Erdman's Publishing Company, Grand Rapids. Michigan and Cambridge, U.K., 2005, p.245

This book of essays by Martin Palouš is a symbol of this new understanding, of the re-visiting of truth in a world supposedly beyond truth, beyond good and evil, some would even postulate, beyond history.

*The conflict between vita activa and vita contemplativa, the never-ending quest for the meaning of finite human life, does not take place in a vacuum, but always is a matter of concrete human beings finding themselves in concrete places and in concrete times. The context we have to pay attention to when reflecting on the relation between man and God is the open field of human history. Here we are touching upon an essential and important problem. The human openness towards transcendence and eternity introduces the element of movement into the human world.<sup>590</sup>*

Because it challenges the routine constituent perceptions of our modernity it is an uncomfortable book, as philosophical books should be. This is not a device where petrified ideas are groped, it is not a Communist Party training manual, or a collection of slogans and talking points. Thus, it is intense and refreshing, perhaps healing.

## Symbol

By symbol, I don't mean an expression of empty modern-day advertisement, but rather something far more important.

In tradition, a symbol is a truth experience constituted as a human work of expression, of knowledge, which activates that same truth experience in the seeker. Symbols are alive, energized in the present, interacting with the process of human consciousness. Symbol should be differentiated from image, which is to say a representation, or an artifact, that conveys a message.

Human rights as a doctrine are a symbol of man's self-discovery through the ages. 'Human rights' symbolize the universal condition of the experience of humanity. Its source is fundamentally divine. From the necessity of human rights, a universal moral intelligence, a supreme

<sup>590</sup> Op.cit., p. 246

intelligence, is recognized not as a remote engine of creation, but as an active, vital and indispensable ordering principle of human affairs.

It becomes incumbent, faced by the unrelenting presence of totalitarianism, to understand human rights doctrine as an instrument through which to explore the nature of divine action in human affairs. If then, human rights doctrine exemplifies the role in the temporal sphere of ideas of non-human origin, of ideas of a divine nature, then we must logically assert that the opposite must also be true: that those doctrines which have systematically and scientifically negated human dignity are anti-life, anti-God, anti-Christ. What Solzhenitsyn came face to face with was the non-human origin of a doctrinal malevolence directed at the destruction of the truth experience in history and of its human vessel.

Eric Voegelin also courageously identified this as 'Satanic intelligence,' which, aware of the system of logic and justice laid in the cosmos before man, turns against it in defiance. Yes, totalitarianism, in its diverse expressions, make up a modern-day religion, one based on evil.

It is precisely this which modern, secular, atheistic civilization has found so hard to countenance, as Hannah Arendt so ably described. The truth experience of totalitarianism and the struggle to resist it, laid bare the centrality of the struggle between good and evil in the human drama. In a modern world which has sought to build a society 'beyond good and evil,' the totalitarian enigma is a constant reminder of the eternal vectors of man's journey towards the source of knowing.

What the Central European revolutions did was to be the restoration of the axiomatic principle to political affairs: that which Havel described as "the Metaphysical Certainty."

Palouš evokes it as thus:

On the one hand, there is our being in the world which we share – engaged in three fundamental human activities: "labor, work, and action" iii – with the plurality of others. On the other hand, there are the noetic activities of man, taking place in the "soul," in the interior domus of his/her "self," i.e., in that inner space, where each of us can temporarily withdraw from the common world of appearances. iv As humans – belonging to the species *zoon logon echón*, animal rationale, according to the Aristotelian

The  
sha  
gre  
a d  
teac  
acti  
con  
spac  
repr  
soci  
soci  
sym  
spac  
wher  
591 M  
and B  
Comp  
volum

intelligence, is recognized not as a remote engine of creation, but as an active, vital and indispensable ordering principle of human affairs.

It becomes incumbent, faced by the unrelenting presence of totalitarianism, to understand human rights doctrine as an instrument through which to explore the nature of divine action in human affairs. If then, human rights doctrine exemplifies the role in the temporal sphere of ideas of non-human origin, of ideas of a divine nature, then we must logically assert that the opposite must also be true: that those doctrines which have systematically and scientifically negated human dignity are anti-life, anti-God, anti-Christ. What Solzhenitsyn came face to face with was the non-human origin of a doctrinal malevolence directed at the destruction of the truth experience in history and of its human vessel.

Eric Voegelin also courageously identified this as 'Satanic intelligence,' which, aware of the system of logic and justice laid in the cosmos before man, turns against it in defiance. Yes, totalitarianism, in its diverse expressions, make up a modern-day religion, one based on evil.

It is precisely this which modern, secular, atheistic civilization has found so hard to countenance, as Hannah Arendt so ably described. The truth experience of totalitarianism and the struggle to resist it, laid bare the centrality of the struggle between good and evil in the human drama. In a modern world which has sought to build a society 'beyond good and evil,' the totalitarian enigma is a constant reminder of the eternal vectors of man's journey towards the source of knowing.

What the Central European revolutions did was to be the restoration of the axiomatic principle to political affairs: that which Havel described as "the Metaphysical Certainty."

Palouš evokes it as thus:

On the one hand, there is our being in the world which we share – engaged in three fundamental human activities: "labor, work, and action" iii – with the plurality of others. On the other hand, there are the noetic activities of man, taking place in the "soul," in the interior domus of his/her "self," i.e., in that inner space, where each of us can temporarily withdraw from the common world of appearances. iv As humans – belonging to the species *zoon logon echón*, animal rationale, according to the Aristotelian

taxonomy v – we are able to interrupt temporarily all activities we have been busy with and to "think," i.e., to see our own situation in the world as if from a distance. vi In the fleeting moment of contemplation we are able to discover the abyss lurking behind and beyond ta phainomena, the appearances of things around us, things given to us in our experience. The fundamental, and always awful, i.e., awe and wonder evoking, difference between Being and Nothingness (between "is" and "is not") not only reveals the nature of things experienced, but also makes us aware of our own finite existence in time, of our life that will pass away in the moment of our death and still cannot be lived well, without being directed by the nous or reason; without being informed by knowledge that is permanently tested against the horizon of the divine eternity.<sup>591</sup>

### The 'Stillest Words:' Parallel polis and the solidarity of the shaken

Rebuilding politics in the aftermath of totalitarianism became the great task of the extraordinary Czech leader Václav Havel. He drank from a deep source: the humanist tradition of Czech intellectuals and the teachings of Jan Patočka.

Taking as a departure point the naturalness of the philosophical activity in the human soul, the constant questioning of reality and its constitutive components by the human mind, constitute the original public space. Man's dialogue with his consciousness, with his inner voice, represents the inner matrix of the public.

Dissidents trapped behind the Iron Curtain demonstrated what sociologists like Gene Sharp were discovering about other oppressed societies: that even under the worst conditions of repression, society symbolizes this inner primary action of philosophical authenticity, through spaces of public discourse that may be clandestine or open. These spaces, wherever they literally sprout, constitute the alternative city, the public

<sup>591</sup> Martin Palouš: *What Kind of God Does Human Rights Require?* In: Bucar, E.M. and Barnett B. (eds.): *Does Human Rights Need God?*, William Erdman's Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K., 2005, p. 244-245, In this volume Exercise 6

square, that remains alive as a reflection of a sovereign inner dynamic that no state, not even one as powerful as a totalitarian state, could suppress.

As an example of this, Palouš recounts what has become an iconic moment in the history of thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*And finally, the last encounter between Havel and Patočka, described in Havel's short text written in the spring of 1977 in Ruzyně Prison, where Havel was held in detention, investigated for the alleged "subversion of the republic in connection with foreign powers," used as the main source of information in this chapter.<sup>592</sup> It had taken place in the second week of January of that year, in the waiting room for the interrogated persons of the same state facility. The three fresh Charter 77 spokespersons – Patočka, Havel and Hájek – were sitting there, waiting for their turn, and were "philosophizing." Their conversation could have been interrupted in any moment by their interrogators, but "professor Patočka seemed to be utterly undisturbed by this fact: in an improvised seminary on the history of the idea of human immortality and human responsibility, he weighted words with the same care and prudence, as if they had had an unlimited amount of time for it." Havel didn't feel himself at that moment – as he had felt many times in Patočka's presence in the past, like a student whose only role was just to listen his professor and eventually take notes of what was said by him. He realized that at that moment he became an equal partner in a real philosophical dialogue. Patočka was visibly animated by this fact, too, and invited Havel to come to see him at home in the near future, so that they could continue at their conversation. Havel gladly accepted his invitation and wished to pay Patočka his visit as soon as possible, in the best case in the evening of the same day. But this proposed visit never took place. Havel was detained after his interrogation that day and returned home only four and half months later. Patočka passed away in mid-March, having suffered a stroke in the hospital where he ended, exhausted after a series of whole*

<sup>592</sup> Václav Havel: *Poslední rozhovor* [The Last Conversation]. In: *Jan Patočka. Osobnost a dílo*. Index, 1980, p. 105-109 (a short text written in Ruzyně Prison, where Václav Havel was kept in detention on May 1, 1977)

square, that remains alive as a reflection of a sovereign inner dynamic that no state, not even one as powerful as a totalitarian state, could suppress.

As an example of this, Palouš recounts what has become an iconic moment in the history of thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*And finally, the last encounter between Havel and Patočka, described in Havel's short text written in the spring of 1977 in Ruzyně Prison, where Havel was held in detention, investigated for the alleged "subversion of the republic in connection with foreign powers," used as the main source of information in this chapter.<sup>592</sup> It had taken place in the second week of January of that year, in the waiting room for the interrogated persons of the same state facility. The three fresh Charter 77 spokespersons – Patočka, Havel and Hájek – were sitting there, waiting for their turn, and were "philosophizing." Their conversation could have been interrupted in any moment by their interrogators, but "professor Patočka seemed to be utterly undisturbed by this fact: in an improvised seminary on the history of the idea of human immortality and human responsibility, he weighted words with the same care and prudence, as if they had had an unlimited amount of time for it." Havel didn't feel himself at that moment – as he had felt many times in Patočka's presence in the past, like a student whose only role was just to listen his professor and eventually take notes of what was said by him. He realized that at that moment he became an equal partner in a real philosophical dialogue. Patočka was visibly animated by this fact, too, and invited Havel to come to see him at home in the near future, so that they could continue at their conversation. Havel gladly accepted his invitation and wished to pay Patočka his visit as soon as possible, in the best case in the evening of the same day. But this proposed visit never took place. Havel was detained after his interrogation that day and returned home only four and half months later. Patočka passed away in mid-March, having suffered a stroke in the hospital where he ended, exhausted after a series of whole*

<sup>592</sup> Václav Havel: *Poslední rozhovor* [The Last Conversation]. In: *Jan Patočka. Osobnost a dílo*. Index, 1980, p. 105-109 (a short text written in Ruzyně Prison, where Václav Havel was kept in detention on May 1, 1977)

*day-long police interrogations.*<sup>593</sup>

This "philosophizing moment" in the face of repression (arrest and interrogation by the secret police), demonstrates what the Czech dissidents, and then Czech dissidents-turned-statesmen or turned-politicians, or turned-diplomats, have brought oppressed and persecuted people everywhere.

But it also constitutes a truth-event in the objective development of the human mind, in the continuum of human thought which keeps us aware of the immanent transcendence of our species, of its co-habitation in reality with an observing moral intelligence.

The ontological reality of common affirmative action of the human spirit in the face of persecution and repression transcends limitations of language and geography, it constitutes a new common ground where an authentic global community can be established. Perhaps, 'a republic of the soul,' a permanent parallel polis, city of God, where man's true voice is never adulterated or broken.

<sup>593</sup> *Exercise 11: Patočka Between Masaryk and Havel*