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Unresolved & Irresolvable: Crisis and Meaning after Husserl

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Citation

Murphy, C. (2022). *Unresolved & Irresolvable: Crisis and Meaning after Husserl*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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**Universiteit
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The Netherlands

Unresolved & Irresolvable: Crisis and Meaning after Husserl

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Master's Thesis in Philosophy: Philosophical Anthropology and Philosophy of Culture
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Introduction

In his 1936 lecture on the topic of “The Radical Life-crisis of European Humanity”, Edmund Husserl identified “a crisis which developed very early in modern philosophy and science and which extends with increasing intensity to our own day”¹. In this paper I will argue that the extension of that crisis has continued apace beyond Husserl’s lifetime and now hegemonically mediates contemporary existence, unresolved and undiminished, despite extensive critical engagement. My position is therefore a radical affirmation of the urgent relevance of Husserl’s crisis, contra commentators who prefer to engage with crisis as a topic of primarily historical interest. ‘Crisis’ is an unwieldy concept in philosophy which has inspired a variety of approaches inside and outside the phenomenological tradition. This paper is correspondingly unwieldy too, with much ground to cover in tracing the historical unfolding of the crisis Husserl identified. Nevertheless, I want to insist on the remarkable prescience of Husserl’s analysis for our own contemporary experience of the debasement of meaning and trivialisation of existence; and it is in this contemporary context that I will be investigating the conditions of Husserl’s crisis today.

This paper will make three fundamental claims concerning Husserl’s crisis: that Husserl’s own solution to the crisis failed; that Patočka’s development of Husserl’s analysis of crisis constituted both an improved critique and a failed resolution, distinct from Husserl’s; and that expanding the thematic consideration of crisis to include Debord’s notion of spectacle reveals that failure-to-resolve is rather the point of the philosophical tradition of crisis, and this failure bears out the success of the critiques of Husserl, Patočka and Debord. By this third claim, I mean to say that these critiques presupposed a necessity in resolving

¹Husserl, 1936 (1970), p. 16

crisis, lest it develop an insurmountable influence over human experience. I argue that crisis does now hold such an influence, and the possibility of its potential resolution has been lost.

In introducing Patočka and Debord's contributions, I will argue for their necessity in coming to understand the crisis in its dominance over existence. Nevertheless, on my way to proving the three claims stated above, I will be challenging the implicit assumption belying each of their critiques: that the crisis is resolvable, and their analyses provide the path to resolution. My insistence that the crisis remains unresolved is enabled, or forced upon me, by a relational innovation; instead of, in the manner of Husserl, Patočka and even Debord, holding myself aloof and critically distant from the crisis's dominance, I recognise myself as its product, as a complicit participant in crisis.

Approaching the crisis from within - instead of from beyond or outside - allows me to more clearly identify the failures of my predecessors in engaging with this crisis, and to orientate myself towards the boundaries and potentialities delimited by crisis rather than the impotent inclination to return to a *status quo ante*. This insistence on a forward-looking orientation produced from within the dominance of crisis is inspired by the genuine discoveries made by Husserl and Patočka in their insightful excavations of our conditions of crisis. Their injection of historicity into phenomenology demonstrated how new possibilities of existence are created, and old conditions foreclosed and subordinated, by changes in the human situation. Identifying our crisis as just such a changed situation, I reject the retrogressive solutions of Husserl, Patočka and Debord but, in emulation of their approach, I show how this crisis has engendered new conditions of human existence and argue that these new conditions must form the basis of a new exploration of an undetermined future relation to our unresolved crisis.

I begin in Chapter 1 by discussing Husserl's uncovering of our crisis, and then show how Transcendental phenomenology fails in its aim to resolve the crisis he had identified.

Subsequently, I introduce Patočka's notion of problematicity to reframe the crisis in its historicised unfolding and investigate the failure of 'Care of the Soul' to retrieve the possibility of meaningful existence. Finally in Chapter 4, on the basis of this expanded understanding of the scope of our crisis and previous unsuccessful attempts to resolve it, I introduce Debord's notion of 'spectacle' – not in order to present a new solution but rather to argue that the existential conditions required to resolve the crisis have been lost, but the genuine discoveries and radical insights provided by these theorists of crisis can catalyse us to recognise the boundaries and possibilities we can explore from within the crisis's dominance of existence.

Chapter 1: Husserl's Crisis: Science and the unexplained 'Life-world'

The crisis, which Patočka would go on to analyse, and which I argue endures in contemporary existence, was first identified in those terms by Husserl, so it is with him that our discussion must begin. I will first present his analysis of crisis, his concern with the debasement of meaning, and his advocacy of Transcendental phenomenology before introducing Patočka's critique of Transcendental phenomenology as a method of resolving the crisis. Although Husserl's discussion of crisis is illuminating and perceptive, I argue in accordance with Patočka that Transcendental phenomenology turns out to be an inadequate solution.

Husserl was addressing a series of interrelated problems in his writings on crisis. He intended the analysis of crisis to be the culmination of his central philosophical project, that is, the development of a rational account of that pre-objectivised realm of perception and experience which he termed the 'life-world'. He identified the exclusion of this 'life-world' from the increasingly comprehensive objective-scientific discourse as the source of this crisis.

Husserl's crisis is polytypic – one interpreter counts seven distinct crises, six of which are “etiologically” traceable to a ‘crisis of European philosophy’². Husserl outlined this relation in describing the crisis:

...all modern sciences [have] drifted into a peculiar, increasingly puzzling crisis with regard to the meaning of their original founding as branches of philosophy... 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... (Husserl, 1936 (1970), p. 12)

There is a sense, then, in which Husserl was addressing a specific crisis in the scientific disciplines since their detachment from their philosophical underpinning crucially

²Heffernan, 2017, p. 254

undermines the validity of their suppositions³. However, this paper will focus on a distinct and supervening sense of crisis which Husserl invoked: the success and dominance of this objective-scientific discourse has debased the experience of meaningfulness which human existence once entailed. Husserl's project of Transcendental phenomenology – as a methodological reorientation of the relationship between experience and 'objective' knowledge – is then understood as the recovery of this now lost meaning.

Transcendental phenomenology would upend the crisis-inducing dominance of objective-scientific discourse. By means of the epoché, the phenomenologist could break away from the confines of scientific cognition in order to rediscover and affirm the concrete experience of the 'pre-given' life-world. The development of this project would eventually overcome the crisis of meaning by inverting the relations between human experience and objective-scientific discourse: now, all "objective-logical accomplishments" would be verified against "the primal evidence [*Urevidenz*] in which the life-world is ever pre-given"⁴. The epistemological validation of the pre-given life-world would ultimately anchor scientific activities in intuitive, concrete experience. Reality would be recast as fundamentally intelligible to human existence, and the confounding experience of meaninglessness, and thereby this crisis, would be resolved.

We now have a firmer grasp of the epistemological origins of this crisis for Husserl, whereby the experience of the life-world has been marginalised by objective-scientific discourse. And we have seen that Husserl would rectify this error by affirming the life-world as a source of meaningful experience more valid and more primary than the conclusions of abstract scientific calculations. To see how this informs Husserl's response to the crisis, we must further investigate how meaning has heretofore been debased.

³Hyder, 2003, p.116

⁴Husserl, 1936 (1970), p. 127

Section 1.1: The debasement of meaning

The crisis of meaning emerges from the dominance of a mode of understanding which deforms and debases the human experience of the world: “everywhere, in our time, the burning need for an understanding of the spirit announces itself”⁵. The dominant objective-scientific modality, untethered from its ‘experiential’ basis⁶, can only contradict or ignore this ‘burning need’. The *Urevidenz* of the life-world is discounted in favour of externally verifiable and replicable ‘objective-logical accomplishments’. (The utter inadequacy of this modality was particularly stark for Husserl in his analysis of positivist psychology, but the focus of this paper must remain on the experiential crisis of meaning, rather than particular crises of individual scientific disciplines).

For Husserl then, this crisis is the moment at which science has brought itself to its own dissolution, as the expanding negation of human experience has proven so untenable as to force a reckoning, eventually pointing the way to reinvigoration via the investigations of Transcendental phenomenology. Yet this crisis emerges precisely in a context of scientific explanatory success. This paradox, of an explanatorily successful paradigm leading to a less intelligible experience of the world, is the animating tension underlying Husserl’s crisis.

Husserl described how a reconceptualisation of reality arose from the successful application of scientific practices:

Infinity is discovered, first in the form of the idealization of magnitudes, of measures, of numbers, figures, straight lines, poles, surfaces, etc. Nature, space, time, become extendable *idealiter* to infinity and divisible *idealiter* to infinity... Now without its being advanced explicitly as a hypothesis, intuitively given nature and world are transformed into a mathematical world, the world of the mathematical natural sciences. (Husserl, 1935 (1970), p. 293)

⁵Husserl, 1935 (1970), p. 296

⁶Hyder, 2003, p.115

This transformation – a “surreptitious substitution [*Unterschiebung*]”⁷ – displaces the life-world as the basis for understanding in favour of the “mathematically reconstructed world of the mathematical natural sciences”⁸. The pre-objectivised experience of the life-world is unreconcilable to this mathematically reconstructed world. The scientific crisis of its untethering from its origins in philosophy is compounded by the retrospective delegitimisation of the provenance of meaning and relating to the world; that is, to our prescientific experience of the ‘buried’⁹ life-world.

As Patočka indicates in his consideration of the “Husserlian theory of modern science”¹⁰, the power of this delegitimisation springs from the material successes of the objective-scientific explanatory apparatus as it has developed through history. And it is this success which crystallises the intractability of this crisis: “the very practical advantages bestowed by science have become problematic, the emptiness of life has become almost tangible with the absurd possibility of a negation of all life”¹¹. It is only through the dominance of the mathematically reconstructed world as the hegemonic account of reality that this ‘absurd possibility’ has presented itself to human experience. Therefore, the crisis could only be overcome by upholding the validity and the primacy of our intuitive experience of the life-world, and the subsequent reconstruction of our understanding of reality.

In this section I have traced the historic process of the debasement of meaning in human experience as resulting from the growing dominance, to a point of hegemony, of the objective-scientific model of reality. Husserl acknowledged the extraordinary explanatory success of objective-scientific discourse, so his solution is to make a science of the prescientific experience of reality, the life-world. He called this science Transcendental

⁷Husserl, 1936 (1970), pp. 49-50

⁸Patočka, 1996e, p. 3

⁹Hyder, 2003, p.116

¹⁰Patočka, 1985, p. 142

¹¹Patočka, 1985, p. 146

phenomenology, and he hoped it could develop into the foundational science of human existence which could make reality both intelligible and meaningful to experience.

Section 1.2: The Promise of Transcendental Phenomenology

For Husserl, the resolution of the crisis of meaning would arrive with a systematic explanation of the life-world. This would be the task of Transcendental phenomenology, which would accomplish his aim of inverting the evidential hierarchy between the experience of the life-world and mathematical science: “Every evidence is the title of a problem, with the sole exception of phenomenological evidence... The only true way to explain is to make [it] transcendently understandable”¹². This explanation would resolve the twin aspects of the crisis: the ‘empty formalism’¹³ of scientific suppositions grounded in mathematical abstraction; and the affirmation of the non-objective experience of the life-world. The crisis would be overcome by making reality intelligible once more, thereby restoring meaning to experience.

Transcendental phenomenology accomplishes this by upholding the centrality of the life-world while overcoming the naïve realism which sustains the objective-scientific approach. The preliminary method of this ‘new science’ was an ‘epoché’ in respect to all objective sciences’:

An epoché of all participation in the cognitions of the objective sciences, an epoché of any critical position-taking which is interested in their truth or falsity, even any position on their guiding idea of an objective knowledge of the world. (Husserl, 1936 (1970), p.135)

The scientific epoché frees the phenomenologist to thematically assess the life-world in its ‘general structure’¹⁴. The non-naïve investigation of the life-world reveals our “‘subjective-

¹²Husserl, 1936 (1970), p. 189

¹³Friedman, 2009, p. 103

¹⁴ Husserl, 1936 (1970), p. 139

relative” *a priori*”¹⁵ which grounds the ‘objective *a priori*’ which in turn undergirds mathematical science. The next step in the methodical analysis of the life-world is the ‘Transcendental Reduction’, a total, systematic epoché which situates the phenomenologist “*above* the pre-givenness of the validity of the world”¹⁶. Husserl therefore hoped that by setting the total framework of the life-world as the grounding of all meaning and understanding of the world, and furthermore developing a science of the life-world, Transcendental phenomenology would overcome the crisis. Qualitative experience would be revalidated in this new understanding of reality, and a notion of meaningful human existence could be retrieved.

I have thus far shown why Husserl believed we had reached a state of crisis, and how he proposed to get us out of it. The delegitimisation of the evidence of the life-world had left no coherent role for meaning in existence, so Husserl proposed to make a science of the life-world through Transcendental phenomenology. First the preliminary epoché and then the generalised Transcendental Reduction would finally allow the phenomenologist to assess our pre-objectivised experience and begin to develop an understanding of the ‘straightforward “being” of the world’¹⁷. This new science aimed at a recovery of meaning in existence and the overcoming of crisis. Yet I argue that Transcendental phenomenology has in fact failed to resolve the crisis and to better illustrate the shortcomings of Husserl’s new science I will introduce the critique of his erstwhile student Jan Patočka.

Section 1.3: The Failure of Transcendental Phenomenology

Husserl believed that in identifying the ‘subjective-relative *a priori*’ of the life-world, he had discovered a reliable basis from which to appraise the world: “... I have freed myself through

¹⁵Husserl, 1936 (1970), p. 140

¹⁶Husserl, 1936 (1970), p. 150

¹⁷Husserl, 1936 (1970), p. 146

the epoché; I stand above the world, which has now become for me, in a quite peculiar sense, a phenomenon”¹⁸. The Transcendental reduction accomplishes a transformation of the relation to the world, but it leaves that “I” (or even, ‘we’¹⁹) - the subject - or what elsewhere Husserl calls the ‘disinterested spectator’, conceptually intact.

This raises the problem of whether the Transcendental reduction was not as total as Husserl had supposed: “We suppose the formulation – that phenomenology is a teaching about subjectivity, whether or not transcendental – is insufficiently radical”²⁰. I contend that Patočka’s objection here is not metaphysical – the criticism is not the hoary complaint that Husserl is committed to (subjective) idealism. Instead, he is raising a methodological objection: the Transcendental Reduction fails to problematise the manifestation of subjectivity. The phenomenologist’s subjectivity cannot be kept apart from – or above – the world as phenomenon because this begs the question of subjectivity’s unproblematic manifestation for the subject(s).

Transcendental phenomenology fails because it relies on subjectivity’s exception from the epoché; in fact, the Transcendental Reduction is incoherent without this exception. But subjectivity cannot be bracketed from the investigation into reality before that investigation has even begun, since that leaves no framework for an investigation into the manifestation of subjectivity itself – the very field of primary evidence which Husserl held to be the foundation of his new science’s reconceptualisation of reality, in the form of the life-world. The Transcendental reduction would therefore ‘falsify’²¹ Husserl’s genuine discovery of the phenomenological domain which challenges the hegemony of objective-scientific discourse.

¹⁸Husserl, 1936 (1970), p. 152

¹⁹Marosan’s (2021, p.149) demonstration of the centrality of intersubjectivity for Husserl would therefore not refute this objection.

²⁰Patočka, 2002, p. 40

²¹Ullmann, 2011, p.76

We might put Patočka's critique in Husserlian terms: what is really needed to grasp the reality of human existence is a total epoché of all parts, of all particulars and the particularisable: "the final answer to the philosophical question cannot be some existent"²². Therefore, (inter-)subjectivity must be rejected as the ultimate basis for reappraising the world since that too would be bracketed in this total reduction:

Rather *the structure of appearing must itself stand upon itself*. For this reason, I presume... that very *subjectivity itself* has to show itself as manifesting itself, as *a part of a deeper structure*, as a certain possibility... (Patočka, 2002, p. 41)

Patočka's central objection to Husserl here is that subjectivity cannot be exempted from the same problematising and bracketing which Transcendental phenomenology exerts on the 'pre-given world'. The Transcendental Reduction cannot account for the manifestation of subjectivity, nor therefore, the structure of manifestation and is consequently an unstable grounding for our understanding of reality. Husserl's verification of the 'Urevidenz' of the life-world as the 'subjective a priori', found after the Transcendental Reduction has been performed, is therefore an incoherent basis for upending the naïve realism of objective science.

This first chapter has introduced Husserl's concept of crisis as the debasement of meaning in contemporary existence. Husserl held that this experience derived from the dominance of objective-scientific discourse, which has in fact left reality unintelligible. I then introduced Husserl's phenomenological method, conceived as a programme for recovering the intelligibility of the life-world and thereby restoring meaning to human existence. In introducing Patočka's objection to this method, I have shown that because Transcendental phenomenology does not bracket subjectivity in the epoché, Husserl's account of the manifestation of reality as a phenomenon is incomplete. We are therefore no closer to an

²²Patočka, 2002, p. 41

intelligible or meaningful experience of the world. Rejecting the life-world and Transcendental phenomenology as conceptually insufficient to resolve the crisis which Husserl deftly and convincingly diagnosed, and which remains identifiable in those terms today, I will move in the next chapter to a consideration of how Patočka's more comprehensive 'problematization' of existence reframes the crisis of meaning and the question of its resolution.

Chapter 2: The Inexplicable Whole: Crisis as De-problematisation

Patočka's refutation of Transcendental phenomenology as a method of overcoming crisis is embedded in his wider philosophical account of meaning in existence. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Patočka develops a theory of irresolvable problematization as the hallmark of a (possibly) meaningful existence. What Patočka calls 'historical existence' was gained with the loss of 'natural existence', whereby a previously settled, rooted human experience has given way to new uncertainties and possibilities. I will continue to explore this experience of gain and loss in Patočka's genealogy of history and apply it to our present experience of crisis.

In my ensuing discussion of how crisis negates historical existence, I will introduce Patočka's paradigm of 'night and day' to elaborate on his phenomenological concern with concealment and appearing²³, and the disposition of wonder – as opposed to verification – in relating to an ultimately inexplicable whole which encompasses existence, potential and (non-)manifestation. I will then argue that this expanded revision of Husserl's scientific critique allows us to reframe the crisis as a force of de-problematisation and trivialisation.

Having accomplished that, I then repurpose Illich's discussion of 'iatrogenesis' to offer a novel interpretation of Patočka's historical project which distinguishes our moment of crisis from the 'shaking' which inaugurated historical existence, and to better understand the burden of problematization. Thus, I use this chapter to expand on how Patočka departs from Husserl's account of the crisis and indicate how he might begin to navigate out of it, but also to indicate the difficulty he will have in his eventual attempt to overcome the crisis through a recovery of the existential conditions lost in crisis.

²³Rodrigo, 2011, p.95

Section 2.1: Historical Existence

Patočka's most sustained engagement with the unfolding crisis is developed in his writings on history²⁴. For Patočka, history is not a perennial condition of human existence; some humans have lived in history while others have not: "...there undoubtedly exist – or at least existed until quite recently – 'nations without history'"²⁵. Patočka schematises human existence according to three modes: the 'non-historic', the 'pre-historic' and the 'historic'. For the 'non-historic' human, existence is (philosophically) non-problematic: "concealment [of reality] is not experienced as such"²⁶.

This question of the extent of reality revealed or concealed in human experience²⁷ is essential to Patočka's phenomenological account of history since it introduces the paradigm of problematization; an absence of 'concealment' would preclude the problematization of manifestation. In the 'pre-historic' world, the meaning of existence is pre-given, answered before it can be articulated as a question²⁸. This therefore prevents the 'pre-historic' human from engaging with existence in its problematization.

Eventually, something occurs to a person or community which inaugurates history: "In Patočka's view, history begins with a shaking, or a shock"²⁹. The shaking with which history begins prefigures the later crisis: "History differs from prehistoric humanity by the *shaking of accepted meaning*"³⁰. This shaking into history disturbs and revolutionises the experience of

²⁴*Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (1996), which are individually referenced in this paper. For more on the importance of understanding Patočka's work in the context of his historical thinking, see e.g. Palouš (2013): "The philosophy of history is clearly an essential or even the most significant part of Patočka's philosophy. It is, without any doubt, its ultimate achievement and its culmination" (p.80).

²⁵Patočka, 1996f, p. 28. The Czech term, *národ*, can be translated as both 'nation' and 'people'.

²⁶Patočka, 1996e, p.12

²⁷ "...the historicity of appearing as such" (Ullmann, 2011, 80).

²⁸Patočka, 1996e, p. 12

²⁹Chvatík, 2003, p. 5

³⁰Patočka, 1996b, p. 62

existence for the historicised human, making history the terrain of shaken and unstable understandings of reality and meaning³¹.

Because historic existence is problematic, Patočka contrasts it with ‘natural’³² existence. Natural existence is lost in the shaking into history, and non-problematic existence is irretrievable for the shaken. Yet in this newfound relation to problematicity, concealment is revealed as unrevealed and meaning is gained as an unanswerable question. Patočka is here pointing us towards an experiential spectrum of existence from non-historical through to historical and up to our contemporary crisis.

Historical existence opens the possibility of questioning life’s meaning, while the question itself is incoherent and inarticulable in ‘natural’ experience. Therefore, alongside the loss of non-problematic existence, the fall into history expands human possibilities, where unquestioned acceptance of the pre-given, apparently meaningful world is displaced by a mode of life which attempts to conceptualise and articulate the world posed as an unsolved problem. I would insist on the ambiguity of this characterisation of historical existence. Contra Evink, who proposes that “Patočka sees history as a continuous tendency of decline”³³, I claim that Patočka is instead pointing to a continuous state of renewal, which instantiates loss and gain, bereavement and potential, concealment and appearance as the characteristic feature of historical existence. This is the essential connection between history and phenomenology, the historicity of phenomenology, which allows Patočka to trace the relationship between problematicity and meaning, and how the crisis undermines that relationship.

³¹Patočka, 1996f, pp. 39-40

³²*“It is natural in the sense of accepting the community of all it contains as something simply given, something that simply manifests itself”* Patočka, 1996e, p. 25.

³³2020, p.216

In this section I have introduced Patočka's phenomenological-historical schema in order to show how problematicity supports the possibility of a meaningful existence, whilst incurring the loss of a 'natural' and unshaken dwelling in existence. This is what distinguishes 'historical' from 'natural' existence. I have shown why meaning can only be pursued as a shaken, uncertain possibility and, anticipating the forthcoming discussion of crisis in history, we have begun to see how a positivistic, reductive paradigm of knowledge forecloses that possibility.

Section 2.2: Problematic History

The historicity of phenomenology points to the contingent possibilities of appearance and existence in human experience. I will later apply this historicity to argue that our crisis is a point at which certain possibilities have been lost, but we must first investigate how problematicity emerges as a prerequisite for the possibility of meaning. This investigation foreshadows my argument that the crisis remains unresolved because this prerequisite has been foreclosed to human experience; crisis de-problematizes existence and therefore subordinates the conditions of its resolution.

Pre-historic existence aims to sustain and replicate life as it is; it loops on a continuum rather than unfolding in response to discoveries, criticism or new modes of understanding. Historical existence is untethered to this continuum, not least by its recognition of occupying its own space in history. From this recognition, a dual freedom and responsibility emerge in the face of the now apparent indeterminacy of existence:

History originates as a rising above decadence, as the realisation that life hitherto had been a life in decadence and that there is or that there are possibilities of living differently... The Greek polis, *eros*, tragedy and philosophy are different aspects of the same thrust which represents a rising above decadence. (Patočka, 1996d, pp. 102-103)

The marginalisation and burden of historical existence provokes the inauguration of philosophical discourse in order to cope with this loss of stability: "...the context of unsheltered life is one wherein everything previously taken for granted is now open for re-investigation"³⁴. The precarity and indeterminacy of existence demands a reflective responsibility for positions pursued "through the very ordeal of the undecidable"³⁵.

This confrontation with problematicity provides the impulse to dis-cover the world: "That, however, means life on the boundary which makes life an encounter with what there is, on the boundary of all-that-is where [the] whole remains insistent..."³⁶. The encounter with 'all that is' shakes human existence into acknowledging its own marginalisation and finitude. These are the conditions in which philosophy was inaugurated, but it is the gradual eclipse of this once-insistent whole in objective-scientific discourse which has made this confrontation with problematicity incoherent.

Concealment is a phenomenological, as well as historical, problem for Patočka. It underlines the marginalisation and finitude of existence because this confrontation is never a comprehensive grasping of 'all that is':

What reveals itself in its completeness is not the whole; these are just individualities, changeable details, varying with our movements, the diversity of perspectives... But this whole remains concealed.

(Patočka, 2002, p. 73)

Humans in history no longer live in an immanently intelligible environment because they have become aware of the concealment of the world. It is now their task to make sense of - to find meaning in - the world they encounter. But because of the 'concealed whole', this task occurs in the certainty of their uncertainty. This is a further departure from Husserl's analysis because, unlike the Husserlian phenomenologist, historical existence never finds itself

³⁴Hubick, 2018, p. 51

³⁵Derrida, 1995, p. 5

³⁶Patočka, 1996f, p. 39

positioned 'above the world'; instead, all understanding of the world is affirmed as incomplete and problematic.

The problematicity of historical existence is irresolvable precisely due to the veracity of this uncertainty and indeterminacy:

The moment the problem were to be resolved, that same totalising closure would determine the end of history: it would bring in the verdict of nonhistoricity itself. History can be neither a decidable object nor a totality capable of being mastered... (Derrida, 1995, p. 5)

We must prod a little deeper into Derrida's summation here and keep in mind that with Patočka we are considering history as a mode of existence. When Derrida here alludes to the undecidable character of history, I contend that this is best understood in the context of crisis as the irresolvable problematicity of historical existence, the very problematicity which must be confronted in thinking through our response to the crisis. An attempt to resolve, or to negate this problematicity is an abdication of the responsibility to reinvestigate the indeterminate possibilities of the world as it is found. The mathematical abstraction of reality inside a paradigm of quantification and verifiability is just such an abdication.

We can see that this is where Patočka's analysis fundamentally departs from Husserl. Whereas Husserl posited that meaning could be recovered in the heroic reconstituting of reality as once more fundamentally intelligible, Patočka insists not only on the irradicable problematicity of existence, but on that very problematicity as the locus of any possibility of meaningful experience. Moreover, in the following section, I will introduce Patočka's paradigm of 'night and day' or, which is the same, 'darkness and light', to show that it is precisely this possibility of meaningful existence gained in the encounter with irresolvable problematicity which has been precluded by the ascendancy of the idealised mathematical reconstruction of the world.

Section 2. 3: Night & Day: Inauthentic De-problematisation

In discussing the place of night/ dark and day/ light in Patočka's phenomenology of existence, I will not only demonstrate the irresolvability of problematicity in historical existence but also highlight the mechanisms of trivialisation which have debased or neglected that problematicity, and thus engendered crisis.

The night is that domain of being of which a 'clare et distincte' idea cannot be formed, nor can it be empirically verified in experience since it is not directly accessible. The dark is the unmanifested source of all that is encountered in the light of apprehension: "...all that is in our day arises out of the unindividuated night"³⁷. This night/ day model encapsulates Patočka's ontological relation of being to manifestation:

Is there not... the primordial dark night of existents more primordial than all individuation? An individual brute existent (a hunk of lava on the moon) is determinate in its relations to other existents.

Those, too, are individuated. All existents are within a *universal being*. (Patočka, 1998, p. 168)

The objective-scientific explanation of the hunk of lava obscures the context underlying that existent's existence, which is unindividuated, universal and only partially manifested being. Patočka indicates that the discovery of the particular is the obscuration of the whole, because there is no place for pre-individuated being in the mathematical model of reality. This mathematical model closes off a genuine engagement with reality: "Despite its anti-metaphysical proclamations, science creates a counterfeit of metaphysics"³⁸. Yet because this counterfeit is advanced through self-abnegation, metaphysics as disavowal-of-metaphysics, the obscuration has itself been obscured.

This is essential for our understanding of the unfolding of the crisis because this obscuration of 'night', which forms the basis of objective-scientific discourse, reduces the comprehension of the world to mere materiality as well as rendering a meaningful self-

³⁷Patočka, 1996e, p. 23

³⁸Koci, 2018, p.19

relation to existence incoherent. It is the concealment of this universal being in the 'primordial dark night' which makes it inaccessible to objective-scientific explanations, and constitutive of the problematicity which sustains the possibility of meaningful experience.

The place of 'night' in Patočka's account of the crisis could be fruitfully compared to the role of the life-world in Husserl's. But whereas Husserl considered that it was the realm of (subjective) experience which science had marginalised and thereby made unintelligible, Patočka holds that it is existence itself which has been marginalised and negated. This unmanifested, undetermined being which contains and sustains manifestable phenomena is the 'deeper structure' to which Patočka had earlier alluded when dismissing Husserl's reliance on subjectivity. And as already discussed, Husserl had hoped to resolve the crisis by explaining and making a new science of the life-world, whereas it is the very inexplicability³⁹ of the 'night' on which Patočka insists.

This possibility of the non-manifestation of being, of the (partial) concealment of the world, gains historical existence the burden of problematicity and the possibility of relating to reality in awareness of its concealment. Discovering this fuller extent of reality locates human existence itself within universal being:

...the world in the sense of the antecedent totality which makes comprehending existents possible can be understood in two ways: a) as that which makes truth possible for us and b) as that which makes it possible for individual things within the *universum*, and the *universum* as a sum of things, to be.

(Patočka, 1998, p. 178)

On point b), darkness as the *universum* which holds within it the day of accessible existents demands engagement with the inexplicable, and therefore irresolvably problematic, thereby exposing the shortcomings of objective-scientific discourse. On point a), we see a kind of epistemological-existential responsibility in forming a relation to the totality of what-is, even beyond the realm of the explicable or conceptualisable: "...the wonder of being is no fable, it

³⁹Koci, 2018, p.20

manifests itself only to those who dare come to the boundary of night and day”⁴⁰. Whereas Husserl had emphasised the *cogito* and subjectivity in uncovering reality, Patočka holds up the *sum*⁴¹ as the irreducible, inexplicable whole which allows for phenomena to manifest in existence.

This is a key moment in Patočka’s analysis of crisis because it reveals the existential demands implicit in his phenomenology, and shows how the crisis opposes those demands. The responsibility to uphold the wonder of being by relating to an inexplicable whole arises only in historical existence. In pre-historical existence the individuated human’s subsumption into the *universum* of being is unproblematic in its facticity. A responsibly upheld relation to the unknowable – that is, something like a properly derived disposition of wonder gained in uncovering the domain of night – was an unrealisable potentiality in prehistoric existence.

This is a separate problem to the rational-scientific neglect, or erasure, of the inaccessible *universum* which we encounter in this crisis. But both modes of being preclude a relation to the explicitly unknowable, and therefore debase the possibility of meaning. It is on this basis that I frame objective-scientific discourse as a kind of trivialisation which opposes historical existence, because it renders incoherent our responsibility to take up the burden of problematization. This accounts for the experience of meaninglessness in crisis⁴², since meaning can only be pursued in the problematic relation to this inexplicable whole.

The dominance of the day is the dominance of explicable existents over inexplicable being. Here is revealed again the inadequacy of the Transcendental Reduction. A phenomenology of concealment and manifestation could only be ‘a-subjective’⁴³, incorporating the deeper structure of the uninviduated *universum*. In fact, we now see that the attempt to overcome the crisis by making a science of the life-world, as an attempt at a

⁴⁰Patočka, 1996f, p. 40

⁴¹Ullmann, 2011, p.77

⁴²Koci, 2018, pp.21-22

⁴³Rodrigo, 2011, p.95

comprehensive explanation of reality and a basis for all understanding, is simply a variation of the objective-scientific impulse to deproblematise and thereby trivialise historical existence.

Patočka characterises the realm of the day as ‘familiar’ and ‘domestic’, and that domain of defence against the ‘horrible’, ‘threatening’ spectre of the night⁴⁴. However, the hegemony of the day is another component of the de-problematisation of existence, as an attempted safeguarding against the precarity and indeterminacy of historical existence. An existential relation to the *universum* is not achievable in terms of the day:

By unveiling everything [objective-scientific discourse] hides that whose essence resides in its remaining hidden... Authentic mystery must remain mysterious, and we should approach it only by letting it be what it is in truth veiled, withdrawn, dissimulated. Authentic dissimulation is inauthentically dissimulated by the violence of unveiling. (Derrida, 1995, pp. 35-36)

So it is that the crisis is precipitated by an epistemology of inauthentic dissimulation inasmuch as the element of night, in our own existence and in the totality of what-is, is exposed only in terms of the day, thus obscuring its reality.

What Derrida termed in the above quote ‘authentic mystery’ is the irresolvability of problematicity, so that every discovery and ‘objective-logical accomplishment’ which sustains the model of a verifiable and explicable reality acts to trivialise the burden of historical existence. I would further extend this objection to ‘inauthentic dissimulation’ once more to Husserl’s Transcendental phenomenology. The contrivance of the Transcendental Reduction postulates a transparent relation to our own subjectivity, which could form the stable basis of a new understanding of the world. This transparent relation is undermined by the affirmation of unmanifested being and our responsibility to relate to an inexplicable totality through a disposition of wonder.

⁴⁴Patočka, 2002, pp. 45-46

It is, instead, in the grasping of the irresolvable problematicity which characterises the human relationship to the world that a more viable response to the crisis must be advanced. In the context of crisis, this possibility has been diverted by the perversion of the philosophical impulse to understand the world:

The powerful penetrating ability of the human mind uncovers with an undreamed-of insistence, yet what it uncovers is right away seized by the everyday and by understanding of being as in principle already fully uncovered and cleared. That understanding which at a stroke turns today's mystery into tomorrow's gossip and triviality. (Patočka, 1996d, p. 114)

After the shaking into history, philosophy was inaugurated in the new awareness of problematicity and the search for meaning and truth beyond the pre-given. But the successes of this search, the uncovering of what had been concealed and the consequent series of 'objective-logical accomplishments' have come to obfuscate that initial context of problematicity.

The subsequent de-problematizing mode of discovery thereby constitutes the diminishment of historical existence, and debasement of meaning. The formation of a historical understanding of the world would, instead, entail an openness to mystery and wonder generated by the "explicit awe before being as a whole, the awe-full realisation that the totality of being *is*"⁴⁵. This openness becomes incoherent and unjustifiable in an epistemological framework which, bolstered by a history of trivialising explanatory successes, proceeds on the basis of the ultimate explicability and eventual verifiability of all phenomena.

In this section I have introduced Patočka's paradigm of night and day to explain why the problematicity of historical existence is irresolvable and how objective-scientific discourse has trivialised existence by absolving and rendering incoherent our responsibility to relate to the world in its problematicity. This awareness of problematicity had been the burden

⁴⁵Patočka, 1996b, p. 63

and gift gained in our shaking into history, so its loss in the wake of the hegemony of objective-scientific discourse has undermined historical existence. Humanity had already lost the old pre-given, settled meanings in the shaking into history, and gained the possibility of a profounder meaning pursued in the awareness of the world's concealment. And what I have now shown is that the crisis is the point at which this possibility has been extinguished, and we are left only with the trivial consolations of 'objective-logical accomplishments'.

Section 2.4: Iatrogenic Crisis

The earlier sections of this chapter have already discussed how historical events and developments instantiate a dynamic of loss and gain in human existence. In this section, inspired by the above discussion of history not as a 'tendency of decline' but as a process of renewal and change of the human situation, I will put forth a more radical reading of Patočka's historical schema culminating in crisis as a reaction to the burden of historic problematicity and, in turn, claim that historical existence itself had emerged in opposition to the burdensome conditions of pre-history. Using Illich's term⁴⁶, I label this process of oppositional reactions generating new (existential-historical) conditions which bear within the seeds of their own counter-reaction 'iatrogenic'.

This proves very productive for our consideration of crisis, and the question of its (non-)resolution, because, firstly, I show that, for Patočka, the crisis is resolvable only inasmuch as historical problematicity remains irresolvable but, secondly, as this paper will later show, the notion of an 'iatrogenic' crisis belies Patočka's attempt to 'undo' the conditions of crisis by retrieving the potential of historical problematicity as it once was - his preference for a *status quo ante*. My application of iatrogenesis to crisis follows the precedents of Husserl and

⁴⁶Illich (1976) uses the term *iatrogenic* to refer to (clinical) conditions that would not emerge without an intervention aimed at treating a primary complaint.

Patočka in ‘critically deconstructing’⁴⁷ their historicised accounts in order to re-ground our understanding of our present situation.

Patočka’s philosophy of history poses an often-overlooked enigma: in what does his primordial shaking consist? Patočka’s genealogy of history (and philosophy) exposes a bereavement in historical existence: the loss of natural life, of immanent meaning and of shelter in the world. History is gained by the loss of the *prima facie* intelligibility, meaning and shelter which the ‘pre-given’ world had once provided. The primordial shaking untethers existence from its previous settled domesticity: “...humans set out on a long journey they had not travelled hitherto, a journey from which they might gain something but also decidedly lose a great deal. It is the journey of history”⁴⁸. What is lost on the journey of history is ultimately irretrievable: my existence becomes forever marginal to the world.

The overlooked enigma is what provokes such an odyssey, such an uncertain venture into uncertainty, in the schema of Patočka’s genealogy:

Prehistorical humanity is a transition: it is close on the one hand to nonhistorical life in the poverty of its living only to live, on the other hand it anticipates the threshold of a new, deeper but also more demanding and more tragic mode of living. (Patočka, 1996a, p. 140)

Perhaps, then, historical existence is an oppositional reaction to this transitional pre-history. This might prompt an investigation into the conditions of pre-history. For Patočka, myth was the narrative mode emblematic of this transitional pre-historical life, and he notes:

The first thing that Gilgamesh does is to build a city, the city that stands solid and firm, something that is not possible to move somewhere else. It is built with asceticism, with hard work. The entire style of life changes then, everything instinctive and elementary has to be broken and tamed. (Patočka, 2002, p. 46)

⁴⁷Hanna, 2014, p.757

⁴⁸Patočka, 1996e, p. 25

The anthropological transformation inherent to the grand civilisational projects of pre-history should provoke our interest in the conditions of that ‘tamed’ pre-historical human, yoked to ‘ascesis’ in service of that city.

Existence in the ‘transition’ of pre-history is no longer merely devoted to its own preservation and reproduction, neither is it yet dedicated to its own responsibility and freedom. Instead, it is devoted to the interest of the community from which it emerges. On the basis of the iatrogenic paradigm, I claim that it is from these conditions that history (and philosophy) emerges as a *revolt against* the conditions of pre-historic existence. In considering our own aversion to the denatured, constrained conditions of pre-historic life, we can now recognise in it the makings of that epoch’s own existential crisis.

I can now clarify Patočka’s primordial shaking as a kind of *dénouement* to a previous unarticulated crisis, from which the inauguration of history and philosophy emerge as a compensatory adaptation. Derrida indicates how this might be conceptualised in his account of the development of a Patočkian schema of history:

... [a second *mysterium*] keeps [the first *mysterium*] inside unconsciously, after having effected a topical displacement and a hierarchical subordination: one secret is at the same time enclosed and dominated by the other... That, in short, is the history that would need to be "acknowledged," as if confessed!

(Derrida, 1995, pp. 9-10)

If history emerges in opposition to pre-history, it holds within itself the unacknowledged experience of the crisis of pre-history, and the inarticulable bereavement of the shaking into history: “One could compare it to a history of revolutions, even to history as revolution”⁴⁹. My iatrogenic model contends that historical existence reaches to the point of crisis in this epoch bearing within it the subordinated crisis of a previous epoch.

In reimagining Patočka’s ‘primordial shaking’ in this manner, the relation between the founding origin and the later debasement of historical existence – this crisis – is revealed.

⁴⁹Derrida, 1995, p.8

Historical existence emerges as an iatrogenic reaction to the crisis of pre-history, an injurious unshackling of life bounded to an unchosen other, a grasping of problematic potentiality in rejection of sheltered decadence. But then historical existence gives way to the contemporary effort to abstract, quantify and thereby de-problematise reality which can only trivialise historical existence, by shirking the confrontation with irresolvable problematicity and the inexplicable whole in its concealment.

Subsequently, it is on this model that I interpret the crisis as an iatrogenic condition nested inside the original iatrogenic condition of history as a reaction to pre-history, each of which stand opposed to – yet bear within them – the existential conditions which generated them.⁵⁰ What is most valuable for our discussion of this crisis is not a theory of history but the clarified portrait of the problematicity of existence, and how that has iatrogenetically provoked the crisis.

In this section, I have presented a novel account of the origin of the crisis by situating Patočka's 'shaking' as an event inside a series of iatrogenic reactions, which have culminated in our crisis today. We have thereby gained a better grasp of Patočka's phenomenological understanding of historical existence and how problematicity makes the pursuit of meaning intelligible. This makes clear why Patočka's eventual resolution to the crisis would recall this shaking, and urge us to rediscover our existential responsibility to relate to the problematicity of reality.

However, in the following chapters I will argue that this is where his analysis collapses. Although the crisis bears within it the burden of historical existence, those existential conditions are as lost to us as the pre-given meaning of the world was to the Ancient Greeks. We may conceive of historical existence in our bereavement of it, but the

⁵⁰This leaves unaddressed the transition of non-history into pre-history. This is naturally outside of the scope of our discussion of crisis, but could in principle be incorporated into an iatrogenic model.

existential conditions the crisis has imposed bears within them their own future reaction, and it is this reaction, rather than a preferred reconstruction of the past, that will shape existence beyond the crisis. If this crisis is a reaction against the conditions engendered in our shaking into history, as I claim it is, then any attempt to resolve this crisis by retrieving those conditions would be pre-empted by the conditions of crisis.

In this chapter I have elucidated the historical and phenomenological bases of Patočka's account of the crisis. The sense of 'meaning' which Husserl worried had evaporated from human experience has been transformed by a new understanding which holds that meaning must be gained in the problematicity of existence. The paradigm of 'night and day' has broadened the phenomenological scope of analysis of the crisis beyond Husserl's concern with the life-world. The introduction of a historical dimension presents an expanded notion of the crisis as the frustration and abdication of the existential responsibility to confront reality in its irresolvable problematicity. This emphasis on problematicity undermines Husserl's proposed solution in aiming for a newly intelligible understanding of reality based on the concrete experience of the life-world.

Historical existence generated this crisis because the explanatory success of objective-scientific discourse, originally driven by the uncovering of problematicity in the transition into history, was achieved in the de-problematisation of self-understanding, of the human relationship to being and of our knowledge of the world. This basis of understanding is not merely erroneous but trivialises and negates existence. Patočka sought to resolve the crisis by challenging the hegemony of objective-scientific discourse and retrieving the problematicity on which meaning depends.

In the following chapter, I will discuss his formulations of 'Care of the Soul' and 'Solidarity of the Shaken' which he advanced as methods of resolving the crisis. I will argue that although these formulations are compelling accounts of the paucity of our experience in

this crisis, they fail to resolve the crisis not least because Patočka's own account of irretrievable loss in the unfolding of history undermines any attempt to overcome the crisis through a recovery of the past.

Chapter 3: Patočka's Solution to the Crisis

Allow me at this juncture to recap my argument so far and indicate where I propose to go in the following two chapters. I have shown that Husserl's crisis is a crisis of lost meaning. His resolution of this crisis was set up to fail, premised as it was on an unproblematic reliance on subjectivity as the foundation for a rediscovery of the world's intelligibility. Patočka overturned this proposal, insisting on the irresolvable problematicity of existence as constitutive of meaning as a possibility. And, in expanding on Husserl's narrower account on the loss of meaning as resultant from the explanatory success of objective-scientific discourse, Patočka constructed a much wider paradigm of gain and loss in human experience across epochs. History itself had been gained, as had the very possibility of conceiving of existence as meaningful or not. In other words, by applying Patočka's notion of 'night and day' to the theme of crisis, I have shown how he expounded on Husserl's historicised phenomenology⁵¹ in order to historicise historicity, and this enabled him to demonstrate the irresolvable problematicity which characterises human existence in its relation to the (non-)manifestation of phenomena. Meaning too has been historicised, and the conditions for its potentiality appear in certain conditions of human existence, and do not in others. In considering this theme of loss and gain in the context of Husserl's crisis, I introduced the notion of iatrogenesis at the end of the second chapter in order to claim that the crisis is an oppositional reaction against the conditions of historical existence which allowed for the possibility of meaning, against the burden of problematicity.

The following two chapters will therefore explore our possible responses to the crisis in this thematic context of gain and loss. Patočka asserted that even up to the modern era there might have been people(s) living outside of history, and so that may be even with this crisis. But for those who had uncovered historical existence, there could be no return to the

⁵¹Hyder, 2003, pp.115-116

unproblematised shelter of pre-history⁵². What I want to contend is that for those of us enmeshed in the experience of crisis, a return to historical existence as it once was is no less implausible. This is what belies his preference for the *status quo ante*. Historical existence has been lost, as I will come to argue in the final chapter. Our task is to confront the crisis as an unresolved feature mediating our undetermined future.

So, this third chapter will evaluate Patočka's efforts at reformulating historical existence, as Care of the Soul and Solidarity of the Shaken, but I will ultimately remain unconvinced of a project aimed at a reconstruction of existential conditions that have already been lost, not least because of the persuasiveness of Patočka's account of the contingent appearance of such conditions in his own philosophy of history.

The final chapter will introduce Debord because I want to show that inasmuch as spectacle and crisis are both representations of this iatrogenic reaction against the burden of historical existence, they are contributions to this same tradition of crisis, despite their divergent foundations in sociological and phenomenological philosophy respectively. Moreover, Debord makes a more definitive case for the loss of previous existential conditions of human experience, and their replacement or assimilation with new features. This helps me build my final claim that the conditions on which Patočka's solution would have depended have been lost.

To return to the topic of this chapter, I will consider in the first section the two inter-related concepts which Patočka advanced in order to respond to and ultimately resolve the crisis: 'Care of the Soul' and 'Solidarity of the Shaken'. I begin by placing Care of the Soul in the context in which Patočka understood it, as the key feature of the Ancient Greek inheritance to Europe. This is an important point of origin for Patočka's proposed resolution because he identified Ancient Greece with the origin of history itself – which, of course, I

⁵²Patočka, 1996e, pp.9-12

have already identified as the deeper progenitor of the crisis in my iatrogenic analysis of Patočka's historical model.

Care of the Soul facilitates a new understanding of human existence which would retrieve the possibility of a meaningful existence as the Ancient Greeks had enjoyed. This retrieved possibility lays the groundwork for an explicit resistance to the crisis in the collective awareness of reality beyond the life-negating paradigm of hegemonic objective-scientific discourse. Patočka called this communal resistance Solidarity of the Shaken. After further elucidating Patočka's own understanding of Solidarity of the Shaken, I will conclude this chapter in the following section with a preliminary evaluation of its prospects for resolving the crisis, and indicate why the terms of his own analysis of history and crisis undermine his proposed solutions. To bolster this claim, I will develop the motif of 'Europe' in Patočka's analysis to show how Europe's collapse prefigures the failure of his resolutions.

Section 3.1 The Promise of 'Care of the Soul' and 'Solidarity of the Shaken'

In this section, I will briefly contextualise Care of the Soul (COS) in its Greek origins, and then discuss how Patočka imagines it could counteract the degradation of existence as experienced in the crisis. I will then explore what kind of resistance Patočka envisions offering to the crisis in the application of Solidarity of the Shaken (SOS), and why I think we might hesitate to embrace it as a solution.

COS is a technical term which, for Patočka, designates the most precious legacy of the transition into historical existence which he identified as most fully accomplished in Ancient Greece:

This is that singular thing about Europe: as I told you, *only in Europe* was philosophy born in this way, in the awakening of man out of tradition into the presence of the universe, only in Europe, or better said, in what was the embryo of Europe: Greece. After the catastrophe of [the collapse of] the Greek *polis*, it became important that this *inheritance* remain alive... (Patočka, 2002, p. 88)

This ‘awakening’ is that shaken awareness of the *universum*, of that problematic realm of pre-reconstructed reality beyond the knowable, which made new demands on and created new possibilities for human existence. It is in those conditions of the Greek *polis* that Patočka identifies the formation of COS. Incidentally, we need not interpret this singular characterisation of Greece and Europe in a chauvinistic manner, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

The eventual untethering of the existential-historic impulse to uncover reality in the new awareness of its concealment from its philosophical basis, producing an all-encompassing geometrical-mathematical idealisation of reality, came to undermine those innovations which Ancient Greece had bestowed onto Europe:

...our entire spiritual sphere, built for two thousand years and concretised in forms of state, law, and culture, that lived and ruled the rest of the world from the territory of Europe, in a short time collapsed.

We live in a period following this collapse, and we live in an epoch of further and further decay of this past. (Patočka, 2002, p. 41)

The ‘spiritual sphere’ had been made brittle by the crisis of meaning and could not bear the weight of the barbarism of the world wars. The apex of European technical and political dominance produced the technological and humanitarian catastrophes which sealed its self-destruction. Patočka was therefore already looking backwards, conducting a historical survey of the origins of the crisis which he confronted in its apogee in contemporary Europe, when he came to formulate this Greek inheritance as COS.

As a technical innovation, Patočka traces the indirect development of COS through the pre-Socratics, to a more systematic account by Democritus and on to a complete tri-dimensional structure by Plato⁵³. Each dimension of this structure addresses the newly uncovered burden of historical existence so that, after Plato, COS serves:

⁵³Patočka, 2002, chapters 4-8

- “1. As the general philosophical teaching that brings the soul into connection with the structure of being.
2. As the teaching about the life of the philosopher in the community and in history, that is, as the teaching about the state, in which the care of the soul is both possible and is the centre of all state life and also the axis of historical occurrence.
3. As the teaching about the soul as the principle of individual life that is exposed to the fundamental experience and test of individual human existence, that is, death and the question of its meaning”. (Patočka, 2002, p. 180)

Each dimension is, for Patočka, a technical fulfilment of the new potential of existence which arose after the shaking into history. The ‘structure of being’ concerns the relationship of existence to manifestation, “the problem of the manifestation of the world”⁵⁴, which is crystallised in the attitude of wonder and humility in the human encounter with all-that-is and unmanifested being. The first dimension of COS, therefore, is this confrontation with problematicity and the decentring of (my) existence in the world. The second dimension relates to the innovation of the *polis* in a shared context of historical existence. A disposition of openness and wonder becomes an existential demand of historical, problematised existence and therefore a society which inhibits such a life undermines COS. COS is a communal concern “because in the end, no one will escape this situation”⁵⁵. The third dimension originates from the individual experience of historical existence, where the precarity and indeterminacy of my relation to the world emphasise personal finitude – death – and thereby demands a cultivation of existential responsibility in my own relation to existence.

In considering this crisis’s origins, and our contemporary relation to crisis, Patočka turned to the Greeks in order to understand what had been lost, and whether the existential conditions of pre-crisis experience could be regained. For him, the rediscovery of COS would resolve the crisis by reframing the contemporary problem of meaning or its absence, and this

⁵⁴Girardi, 2020, p.198

⁵⁵Patočka, 2002, p. 135

is achieved via the problematisation of meaning itself. The objective-scientific paradigm of metrics, verification and dominance would be overturned by COS and a renewed emphasis on wonder, humility and questioning⁵⁶.

Of course, an ethos of questioning is easily elided into the practice of answering - and it is in this elision that the crisis has sprung from the misapplication of COS:

Today we live from this care and concern for the soul, but in a certain sense, in decline... The objective side of the care of the soul has become so immensely hypertrophied, and has become so especially attached to its practical application, that [the] fundamental side, of *forming the self*, has been forgotten.

(Patočka, 2002, p. 97)

The 'objective' side of COS is seen in the explanatory and material success of objective-scientific discourse. The burden of historical existence has been subverted by the trivial certainties upheld as the achievements of this hegemonic schema. The crisis is the culmination of the degradation of this ethos of questioning, of abandoning unknowable reality in favour of its reconstructed imitation delimited precisely by the human capacity to construct it.

In considering how Patočka applies COS in opposition to the crisis, I contend that we should understand 'Solidarity of the Shaken' (SOS) as a communal project of upholding the possibilities unearthed by COS, in order to systematically recover the possibilities foreclosed to existence in crisis: "...stressing the responsibility of humans with regard to the appearing of Being, Patočka seeks to ensure for human beings the possibility of taking part in the overcoming of the crisis"⁵⁷. The notion recalls once more the point of transition from a previous epoch, for 'the shaken' were originally those who were shaken from pre-history into history. But SOS is a contemporary call to contemporary human beings enduring the crisis.

⁵⁶"The care of the soul takes place through *questioning thinking at all*". (Patočka, 2002, p. 91)

⁵⁷Ritter, 2017, p. 393

This raises an ambiguity as to whether the crisis is a new shaking which has created a new population of ‘the shaken’, or whether Patočka is calling on contemporaries to open themselves to that original experience of shaking. I think Patočka intends the latter, and so once more he is relying on a historical retrieval – a retrieval of the conditions which I argue iatrogenically provoked the crisis at the outset.

The shaking into historical existence instantiates an understanding of life in its problematicity and finitude: “...man always is essentially in a hopeless situation. Man is a being committed to an adventure, which, in a certain sense, cannot end well. We are a ship that necessarily will be shipwrecked”⁵⁸. It is only in reconciliation with this stark realisation that COS can be pursued. In identifying the burden of this proposition Patočka recognises the instinctual temptation to remain complicit in our own trivialisation. The burden of historical existence tempts us to withdraw from life’s problematicity. The iatrogenic engendering of the crisis traffics precisely in the compulsion to reject this burden, to avoid our precarity and finitude, to shelter in trivial existents at the expense of obscuring existence.

I have now shown how Patočka looked back to the Ancient Greeks - to the time of the first attempts to make sense of existence after it had been shaken from its sheltered, unproblematic experience of reality - for inspiration in conceiving a response to the crisis as we experience it today. He discerned a systematic reconceptualisation of human existence and its relation to reality in that time, and named his discovery Care of the Soul. This he thought of as the inheritance of Ancient Greece taken on by Europe, and in Europe’s collapse he identified the necessity of preserving COS on its own terms.

I then argued that Patočka conceived of SOS as a collective, social application of COS in defiance of the existential conditions engendered by the crisis. I have exposed an ambiguity in Patočka’s description of the eponymous ‘shaken’ who are simultaneously held

⁵⁸Patočka, 2002, pp. 2-3

to be the people who were first shaken into history and confronted with reality in its problematicity as well as contemporary crisis-endurers who are on the threshold of losing historical existence and retreating into a de-problematised experience of reality. What this points to is a pattern in Patočka's resolution of the crisis: hunting for lost conditions of human experience in the past, even though he has connivingly argued for the contingency of such conditions. In order to forestall the ascendancy of crisis via the loss of historical existence, Patočka would revive the lost experience of those first shaken into historical existence.

I have already indicated my objection to this pattern, that the subordination of historical existence can no more be undone in favour of preceding conditions than the inauguration of historical existence can be. The burden of our tragic, bound-to-be-shipwrecked experience of historical existence could not have been relinquished on the basis of pre-history's attractively sheltered and unproblematic experience of reality. Neither can the lost conditions of historical existence simply be conjured and reconstructed in opposition to the life-negating impact of the crisis. This would not only contradict the iatrogenic model of crisis I have advanced; it would also undermine Patočka's own account of the rise of historical existence out of pre-history.

I will close my discussion of SOS in the following section with a comment on the challenge of integrating this framework of existential reclamation into Patočka's wider thought on history and phenomenology. In doing so, I will pick up on the motif of Europe which I raised above. Indeed, I have already briefly sketched the rise and collapse of Europe in the earlier discussion of COS, how Europe had gained and then lost COS as a bequest of the Greeks. I claim that this awareness of the loss of Europe should, alongside an appreciation of the iatrogenic origins of crisis, inform our understanding of the loss of historical existence itself, which would thereby undermine the plausibility of SOS as a

resolution to the crisis. The final section of this chapter will further develop this claim through an analogous examination of the collapse of Europe.

Section 3.2: Why Europe's collapse prefigures the failure of Patočka's Solution

Before proceeding to the discussion of Europe and its place in the discourse of crisis, some preliminary comments on alternative approaches to Europe and the crisis will help me set the table for a more precise discussion of the scope of the crisis I want to engage with in this paper. A central assertion of my thesis is that Husserl's analysis was of a profound crisis of meaning, and that Patočka's contributions demonstrate that this crisis emanates from a corruption of the previous conditions of human existence which made the pursuit of meaningful life possible and intelligible. My own contribution is to demonstrate that this crisis remains unresolved, that is, that the crisis is more profoundly dominant over human existence than even in Husserl and Patočka's lifetimes. As I alluded to in my introduction, therefore, despite the unwieldiness of the topic, I consider it essential to resist attempts to localise Husserl's crisis to a given historic period, from which we are separate, by relativising his (or Patočka's) historic circumstances; or to restrict the scope of analysis to a given set of sub-disciplinary problems which can later be resolved with conceptual clarification.

In other words, I insist that the scope of this crisis goes beyond Husserl's objections to the scientific method, or Patočka's struggles in communist Czechoslovakia and efforts to reform the political settlement of his time. In affirming this scope, I must object to tropes in the secondary literature of crisis which would obscure the greater significance of the crisis as elaborated by Husserl and Patočka. This is an essential premise of the conclusion I am working towards, that only in the restless acknowledgement of our contemporary reality in crisis, in recognising our own participation and complicity in our approach to this unresolved crisis, can we open new possibilities of exploring the boundaries and potentialities delimited

by crisis. To proceed otherwise is to allow the crisis to remain not only unresolved, but unidentifiable and unchallengeable in its domination.

Therefore, in presenting the collapse of Europe and arguing that this prefigures the failures of Patočka's attempts to resolve the crisis, I will engage with those secondary interpretations which I find to be unsatisfactory in their explications and responses to the crisis, so that the sharper contours of the crisis and its dominance better come in to view. I will chart the collapse of Europe and how Patočka relates that collapse to the engendering of crisis, and refute attempts to deny or marginalise this collapse and its relation to crisis; I will subvert the apparent chauvinism of the pivotal role he assigns to Europe; and I will claim that while the loss of Europe does not equate to the loss of historical existence, it nonetheless constitutes a germane precedent for the loss of the prerequisites Patočka relied on in his method of resolving crisis.

Patočka's insistence that all of humanity before the innovations of Ancient Greece existed in a non- or pre-historical state of spiritual decadence provokes the suspicion that a certain parochialism or chauvinism underlies his analysis. Furthermore, both he and Husserl seem to allow for 'European humanity' to stand in for the universal modern experience of crisis today. This 'singularity' of Europe is a complex problem when interpreting Patočka, based not least on his confounding contention that historical existence is both less *natural* and more *true* than non- (and pre-)historical existence which, when expressed culturally, leads to an unpalatable exclusionism.

Identifying a 'key flaw' in Patočka's approach, Ritter objects to this apparent Eurocentrism:

Although one might conceive the global era as revealing the non-reducible plurality of historical substances, Patočka does not see non-European societies as really historical. They are not cultures with alternative histories but rather ahistorical cultures. (2017, p. 394)

Even Patočka could admit by his own time the whole world was participating in history, but only because of the steady march of globalisation, which is nothing more than the *Europeanisation* of the globe. And as the world became more European, it became more susceptible to the crisis which underpinned this European expansion. Before adjudicating on Ritter's objection, I will briefly fill in the gaps in Patočka's historical account of Europe's origins in Ancient Greece and its collapse in the face of crisis already in his lifetime.

Medieval (Christian) Europe had coalesced around the ancient Greek inheritance, by way of the Roman legacy, but the chain of reinterpretation eventually obscured the original impulse to pursue COS:

The great turning point in the life of Western Europe appears to be the sixteenth century. From that time on another motif comes to the fore... Not a *care for the soul*, the care to *be*, but rather the care to *have*, care for the external world and its conquest, becomes the dominant concern. (Patočka, 1996c, p. 83)

This great turning point is the most direct antecedent of the contemporary crisis, perverting the experience of – and relation to – the world and enabling the displacement of meaning from existence. It elucidates the characteristically European paradox of material dominance and success coinciding with - or, more precisely, engendering - mass destruction, nihilism and life-negation.

Once this Greek inheritance had been perverted, the historically contingent opportunity Europe had to sustain the conditions of historical existence had been undermined. Patočka asserted that this “concern, or care about *dominating the world*... more than anything else contains the germ of what has taken place before our very own eyes: *Europe has disappeared*, probably forever”⁵⁹. Europe disappeared, destroyed itself, precisely because of its success in pursuing this alternative concern to dominate the world (epistemologically, as well as politically). Exploitative ‘rational domination’ has ascended to prevail not only in the

⁵⁹Patočka, 2002, p. 89

relation of existence to the world, but over existence itself. In subjugating the world and non-European peoples, Europe subjugated its own humanity.

This therefore is the special role assigned to Europe in Patočka's account of the crisis: the bearer and, ultimately, the squanderer and perverter of the responsibility to uphold the burden of historical existence. Yet what might go some way to alleviate the concerns of chauvinism or parochialism is his insistence on the European *collapse* as the root of this universal crisis:

More than Eurocentric, Patočka's reflection on Europe appears to be "Eurocentrifugal", insofar as the only way to detect Europe's very centre is gazing at this fundamental emptiness, opened by the terrible setbacks of its social and political projects. (Tava, 2016, p. 246)

A 'Eurocentrifugal' analysis, made tangible in the focus on the humanitarian catastrophes of the past centuries, positions Europe as the source of the crisis, but not the primary concern in adequately addressing its contemporary manifestation. What is exceptional about Europe is its unique culpability in engendering the crisis, rather than its essentially historical character.

While not as concerned as Ritter with the objection of Eurocentrism, Evink pushes resists this characterisation of European collapse, and its role in engendering crisis. Commenting on Patočka's "very dark portrayal"⁶⁰ of Europe, he embraces a notion of a "post-European phase"⁶¹ of COS, even if there remains a place for 'Europe' in the discourse of "European politicians and philosophers"⁶². By way of example, he devotes an extended discussion to the prosecutorial activities of international criminal courts based in Europe and Africa⁶³. Here is where I contend the literature on crisis too often misses the mark on the question of its significance and scope. I deal with the failure of COS in the final chapter, but I have already advanced far enough in my argument to show that the Eurocentrifugal phase of

⁶⁰Evink, 2020, p.219

⁶¹Evink, 2020, p.223

⁶²Evink, 2020, p.223

⁶³Evink, 2020, p.222

the crisis is not one where uniquely European “openness and insight”⁶⁴ reign globally. Instead, in the material activities of exploration, colonisation and subjugation which accompanied the export and imposition of a particular hegemonic mathematical-scientific reconceptualisation of reality, Europe has universalised the conditions of crisis.

Yet, beyond my disagreement with Evink’s characterisation of ‘post-Europe’, I find more troubling the tendency to reduce the significance of Patočka’s analysis to a discussion of particular political institutions, or where he elsewhere hopes Patočka’s analysis can be “affirmatively elaborated”⁶⁵ in discussions of religious fundamentalism or democracy. This is the same objection I maintain to using COS to guide political dissidence or shape political manifestos⁶⁶, even when the argument is advanced in support of Patočka’s own political activities as part of his *Charta 77* involvement⁶⁷. My objection is not that these applications of Patočka’s thoughts are factual misinterpretations, but rather they miss the bigger picture, they obscure the context and weight of European collapse and its role in engendering crisis that Patočka describes. Patočka’s description of European collapse ought to draw our attention to this (European) legacy of our unresolved (global) crisis, and how this has shaped and delimited our existential possibilities. Just as Ullmann⁶⁸ claimed above that the inadequacies of the Transcendental Reduction would falsify Husserl’s genuine discovery of the phenomenological domain; I insist that such banal and reductive political misapplications of Patočka’s discussion of Europe and crisis marginalise and thereby obscure the genuine and urgent significance of his analysis of our existential situation.

At this stage, I have shown that European collapse shaped Patočka’s engagement with crisis and argued that in its disappearance he identified the subversion of COS towards a

⁶⁴Evink, 2020, p.222

⁶⁵Evink, 2011, p.70

⁶⁶Girardi, 2020, pp.200-201

⁶⁷Kohak, 1985, p. 138

⁶⁸Ullmann, 2011, p.76

concern with dominating and *having*. The crisis has outlasted its European origins and Patočka formulated his resolution with an awareness that Europe was already lost. Patočka's response to crisis is not an attempt to resurrect Europe qua Europe, but I think it is important to linger on the precedent of the loss of Europe in considering the unfolding of crisis.

To clarify once more: I am not claiming that the collapse of Europe necessarily entails the failure of COS or SOS. Indeed, it was the collapse of Europe and the resulting apogee of crisis which prompted Patočka to formulate COS as the legacy which had survived the collapse of the *polis* and which he hoped could be sustained despite the loss of Europe too. Likewise, SOS was an urgent, somewhat desperate, notion of uniting in the wake of European collapse in resistance to the crisis. Instead, what I am claiming is that the loss of pre-problematic existence, the subordination of pre-history, the collapse of Europe are identifiable analogous precedents which establish the in-principle susceptibility of meaning and historical existence to loss in human experience too.

Therefore, it is an unpersuasive approach for Patočka to claim that because the conditions for COS and SOS once existed in human experience, they can be re-gained and re-constructed to resolve the crisis as we experience it today. It is in this sense that the collapse of Europe prefigures the failure of his resolution. He had already proclaimed that the loss of pre-history meant there could be no return to the pre-problematic; he had already explained that the collapse of Europe demanded a confrontation with the crisis in Europe's absence - his project was not aimed at resurrection.

Therefore, to the extent that the life-negating impact of crisis has debased the prerequisite conditions of COS and SOS, namely historical existence and the possibility of meaning, why should we accept that these conditions should prove exceptions to the precedents of existential loss he had already accounted for in the development of the crisis he hoped to resolve? It is as though, having come to terms with his 'history-as-revolution' model

(in Derrida's terms, above), he conceives of SOS as a counter-revolutionary instrument aimed at undoing the losses crisis brought about. I contend that we cannot accept that expectation, so having established that the conditions of COS and SOS are in-principle susceptible to loss, I will use the final chapter of this paper to argue that they are in fact lost, and so, like Husserl's, Patočka's purported resolution to the crisis is a failure.

Yet I will be reliant to a large extent on the account of crisis and the framework of existential loss and gain advanced by Patočka himself, and in fact I will be building on the implication of his own analysis that were that the crisis inadequately resisted while the conditions upon which resistance could be mounted remained, then those conditions would eventually be lost and the crisis would come to hegemonically dominate human experience⁶⁹. Therefore, despite his failure, or rather because of his failure, I must acknowledge the success of Patočka's analysis and affirm him once more as its most perceptive critic. Husserl and Patočka opened new possibilities of understanding our crisis and, in refuting their solutions, I am insisting we carry forward and develop this understanding to open our new possibilities from within the crisis.

However, since Patočka merely implied, rather than examined in its actuality, the disappearance of the conditions of historical existence which would allow for a resistance to crisis, I will introduce a third analyst of this theme in the final chapter to develop my case against the plausibility of Patočka's resolution. Debord's notion of 'spectacle' drew upon quite different philosophical influences than Husserl and Patočka in their discussion of crisis, but I will argue that Debord's discussion of the contemporary spectator directly refutes the plausibility of COS or SOS resolving the crisis.

In this final section of chapter 3, I have discussed the motif of Europe in Patočka's discussion of crisis and contended that its collapse can be seen as prefiguring the collapse of

⁶⁹Patočka, 1996d, p. 116-118

the conditions upon which Patočka's resolution to the crisis would have depended. I have shown where previous engagements with the literature on Europe and crisis in this tradition have fallen short by failing to recognise the scope and urgency of these themes. This will lead me in the final chapter to introduce the contributions of a thinker from outside this tradition in order to develop my argument that the crisis remains unresolved.

In chapter 3 I have introduced Patočka's two conceptual innovations conceived explicitly in response to the crisis: Care of the Soul and Solidarity of the Shaken. I have uncovered a pattern in Patočka's search for a response to the crisis by recovering lost conditions of human experience from the past. I have argued that this pattern is incongruent with his previous discussion of the origin of historical existence and crisis itself. I have used Chapter 3 to explicate not only the aims but the preconditions of COS and SOS, and then to establish that a resolution to the crisis which relies on recreating such preconditions after they have been subordinated, debased and lost, just as other existential characteristics of previous epochs had been, is a resolution about which we must be hesitant. The analysis of crisis on which this resolution is based, namely Patočka's historical account of gain and loss, is the very analysis which undermines the coherence of this resolution. My iatrogenic account of the crisis as a reaction against precisely those conditions Patočka would wish to retrieve provides more reason to reject his approach.

What I want to do in my final chapter is discuss and make explicit the extent to which those preconditions for COS and SOS have been lost to human existence. Although he allowed for the possibility, Patočka did not discuss in detail the mechanisms and consequences of the crisis dominating human experience in such a way as to erode meaning and historical experience as human possibilities. Therefore, to conduct such an explicit investigation, I will turn to Debord's theory of spectacle and the spectator.

Having introduced the broad outline of Debord's theory and argued for its relevance to the theme of crisis, I will show how the mechanisms of spectacle undermine each of Patočka's three dimensions of COS and ultimately demonstrate the inadequacy of Patočka's resolution. Picking up once more on Patočka's theme of gain and loss, and his warnings of the potential influence of crisis, I will conclude my paper with a consideration of the crisis not as an interruption to, but a successor of, historical existence and how we might build on the contributions of Husserl, Patočka and Debord in order to relate to the crisis in its dominance and perhaps anticipate its own future subordination in human existence.

Chapter 4: Irresolvable Crisis: Loss of Historical Existence

My introduction to this paper affirmed my aim of showing that failure-to-resolve is rather the point of the philosophical tradition of crisis, and this failure bears out the success of the critiques of Husserl, Patočka and Debord. By ‘rather the point’, I mean to say Husserl and Patočka both presented projects for humanity to accomplish in order to overcome crisis, with the implicit and explicit consequence of failure being the acceleration of the dominance of crisis. Chapters 1 and 3 began the work of showing how Husserl and Patočka’s resolutions to the crisis failed. For Patočka, this project was the preservation of historical existence – as discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 will confirm that this project has failed, and that in this failure we can recognise the veracity of Patočka’s analysis of the potential dominance of crisis.

That is, I will argue that Patočka’s resolution to the crisis has failed, but in a manner distinct from Husserl’s. Unlike with Husserl, I do not claim that Patočka’s resolution was fundamentally conceptually implausible but rather that the moment of its potential efficaciousness has been and gone. Moreover, this failure affirms the model of crisis which Husserl and Patočka proposed, with a long tail reaching back to the Greek *polis* yet resolutely growing to the point of dominance in modernity; it corresponds with Debord’s Marxist-inflected historical sketch of the origins of the spectacle; and it correlates with my iatrogenic analysis of crisis as a growing reaction against the once-dominant conditions of a previous existential situation. Thus, I insist on the necessity of preserving the urgent relevance of the uncovering of crisis, and resist calls to maintain “optics of distance”⁷⁰ when interpreting their analysis today. Our crisis is their crisis; that their resolutions failed does not diminish the relevance of their discovery.

⁷⁰Dodd, 2020, p.285

This therefore, is how the failed resolutions bear out the success of the original critiques; we are no longer able to overcome crisis for precisely the reasons Husserl and Patočka (and Debord) intimated: the dominance of crisis has debased and delimited our existence so as to make a resolution inconceivable and unaccomplishable. Adapting to the experience of crisis has precluded an understanding of the world that would make its resolution coherent, just as coming to know the world in its precarity and problematization precluded a return to the shelter of non-historicity for our predecessors. Our potential to overcome crisis has been lost.

Chapter 4 begins by sketching Debord's theory of spectacle and arguing for its relevance and necessity to the theme of crisis under discussion in this paper. The following section deals with the failure of Patočka's project of preserving historical existence by methodically demonstrating how each dimension of COS is thwarted by the mechanisms of spectacle. I will then broaden out this discussion of the failure of COS to make explicit that which Husserl and Patočka could only speculatively intimate: the crisis has come to dominate human existence so definitively that it delimits and negates all possibilities of historical existence.

Section 4.1 Spectacle, or the experience of crisis today

In this section, I will introduce Debord's analysis of spectacle and show how the concept overlaps with and enhances the discussion of crisis in this paper. Specifically, spectacle adds a material dimension lacking in the phenomenological account of crisis given thus far, and this material analysis emphasises the dynamic, growing character of crisis which makes the mechanisms of its dominance more identifiable. Debord is also more effective at emphasising what we have to lose – what we have been losing, what we have lost – as a result of the dominance of crisis and the receding of previous conditions of existence.

By way of a preface, Debord did not intend for the concept of ‘spectacle’ to be a response to or continuation of the phenomenological theme of crisis, nor have subsequent phenomenological analyses yet incorporated the contributions of Debord (inasmuch as Husserl’s crisis itself remains a concern). It is my task in this final chapter to show that our understanding of crisis and the failure of previous attempts to resolve it would, however, be incomplete without accounting for the mechanisms of the spectacular mediation of existence identified by Debord. Only by including a discussion of spectacle can we grasp the experience of crisis today, the failure and obsolescence of previous attempts to resolve it and, perhaps, anticipate a new understanding of crisis in its ascendancy over human existence.

However, I must admit that this paper cannot do justice to Debord’s total analysis in *Society of the Spectacle*. The purpose of introducing Debord at this stage is to critique Patočka’s resolution and to develop a deeper understanding of the crisis’s dominance, mostly within its originally phenomenological framework. Therefore, much of the grounding which would adequately contextualise the origin and progression of Debord’s own thought within the post-Marxian framework of Situationism is alas outside the remit of this paper. For example, not enough attention will be paid in this section to Debord’s analysis of class conflict, industrial production and capital in order to adequately thematise Debord’s own proposed response to the spectacle, which is a network of Revolutionary Workers’ Councils (RWCs)⁷¹. This is also because a motif of this final chapter is the crisis’s irresolvability and how this confirms the critiques under discussion. I regard Debord as an essential contributor to this theme not least because in his final writings he was himself most explicitly aware of

⁷¹Debord’s RWCs were, like COS, aimed at preventing the total dominance of spectacle (or crisis) and reversing its creeping ascendancy. I am marshalling the critical contributions of Debord in an effort to prove that this dominance is already total, however. Therefore, a discussion of the doomed prospects of RWCs would merely constitute a repetitious distraction to the argument at hand. If I succeed in showing that Patočka’s COS has been rendered obsolete by the totality of the spectacle’s dominance, then this obsolescence applies correspondingly to the early Debord’s system of RWCs.

the solidifying dominance of spectacle within his lifetime, notwithstanding his intricate political and strategic oppositional efforts⁷².

The ‘essence’ of the spectacle, for Debord, is “the impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life”⁷³. The spectacle infiltrates all social reality, thwarting and corrupting human existence: “As the autonomous movement of non-life, the spectacle parasitises, drains, and in the end completely phagocytises material life”⁷⁴. The spectacle is the sum of all productive, consumptive and intellectual activity and, as such, this surging movement of negation characterises modern existence.

The spectacle is “both the outcome and the goal” of this autonomous movement of non-life: “It is not something added to the real world, not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality”⁷⁵. The dominance of the spectacle is the dominance of a hegemonic inauthenticity which separates human existence from the possibility of meaningful experience.

For Patočka, it is in the confrontation and relativisation of reality as it is given in its concealment that existence can inhabit the world problematically (and therefore historically); that is, in awareness of its potentiality and indeterminacy. But in the Society of the Spectacle, reality itself is mediated: “reality erupts within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and underpinning of society as it exists”⁷⁶. Spectacular reality becomes irretrievably alienated from the problematicity of existence. The environment of the spectator is artificially reproduced and displaces the potential to relate to the inexplicable whole on which Patočka insists. The spectacular command of existence itself directs and incorporates an ever-deeper permeation of all reality.

⁷² Jappe, 1999, p.123

⁷³ Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 151

⁷⁴ de Bloois, 2017, p. 166

⁷⁵ Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 13

⁷⁶ Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 14

Similarly to both Patočka and Husserl, Debord highlights the rupture in human understanding which came about in the early modern period concomitantly with “the production of commodities, the founding and expansion of the towns, the commercial discovery of the planet...”⁷⁷. These economic and scientific developments harnessed discovery and knowledge in an extraordinarily productive and definitive manner.

The productive force of this manner culminates in the expansive momentum of the spectacle: “...man is more and more, and ever more powerfully, the producer of every detail of his world. The closer his life comes to being his own creation, the more drastically is he cut off from that life”⁷⁸. In commodity production and industrial-technological dominance, the spectacle reproduces itself and evermore mediates the experience of the spectator⁷⁹. It is in this sense that the development of the spectacle heralds its own entrenchment and the mobilisation of the forces of life-negation.

The spectacular reconstruction of reality was achieved by the reproduction of spectacle in place of reality through the production and reification of commodities. The abstract idealisation which Husserl and Patočka critiqued in objective-scientific discourse is here augmented by a superabundant productive artifice:

The spectacle is heir to all the weakness of the project of Western philosophy... Indeed the spectacle reposes on an incessant deployment of the very technical rationality to which that philosophical tradition gave rise. (Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 17)

Debord notes how in the productive application of the theoretical idealisation already identified in Husserl and Patočka, the world becomes the man-made world, the flat, artificial, quantified world of the spectacle: “commodities are now all that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity”⁸⁰.

⁷⁷Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 101

⁷⁸Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 24

⁷⁹Hartle, 2017, p.30

⁸⁰Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 29

Commodity subsumes reality, as the spectacle comes to dictate the experience of the spectator: “The real consumer thus becomes a consumer of illusion. The commodity is this illusion, which is in fact real, and the spectacle is its most general form”⁸¹. The spectator need never stray from spectacularly reproduced artifice. I contend that beneath the Marxist jargon, we can identify in the operation of ‘commodities’ Patočka’s concern of existents’ obscuration of existence. ‘The world of the commodity’ is the same world stripped of wonder and problematicity and instead driven by domination and the productive application of objective-scientific discourse which characterised the crisis for Patočka.

Spectacular reality is a de-problematised, mathematical reproduction: “The commodity form is... exclusively quantitative in nature: the quantitative is what it develops, and it can only develop within the quantitative”⁸². The spectacle relies on the material reproduction of the same abstract-mathematical logic which Husserl identified as the philosophical progenitor of the crisis. The spectacle delimits reality, which the spectator can only know as spectacular unreality, so that a non-mediated relation to reality becomes unattainable:

The commodity's mechanical accumulation unleashes a limitless artificiality in face of which all living desire is disarmed. The cumulative power of this autonomous realm of artifice necessarily everywhere entails a *falsification of life*. (Debord, 1967 (1995), pp. 44-45)

This grand falsification leaves the spectator alienated and bereft in an experience of the world entirely mediated by a life-negating artifice. I contend that this description of ‘mechanical accumulation’ is a useful compliment to the historical processes indicated by Husserl and Patočka. Accumulation better captures the growth and anticipates the dominance of crisis over human experience, with the material emphasis indicating the depth of mediation of human experience.

⁸¹Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 32

⁸²Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 26-27

The ‘reciprocal alienation’ generated in the interaction between spectacle and reality leaves the spectator estranged and detached from her own existence. Patočka allowed that alienation is itself embedded in life’s problematization: “Reflective grasping is, after all, always an alienation. But alienation in reflection is probably necessary for grasping that most primordial structure of givenness”⁸³. To confront reality from the standpoint of problematic existence is alienating.

But, in crisis, this alienation-in-reflection is subverted by spectacular trivialisation and superabundant artifice, which “alienate[s] humans from themselves... submerging them in in the everyday alternative which is not so much toil as boredom, or in cheap substitutes and ultimately in orgiastic brutality”⁸⁴. Patočka’s characterisation evocatively conveys spectacular experience. With the loss of life’s problematization and mystery, and the agency and responsibility of historical existence, humans are submerged into their own systemic negation of historical existence.

In this section I have introduced the concept of spectacle and argued for its necessity in adequately understanding the experience of crisis today. I have showed how the spectacle mediates human experience through evermore dominant mechanisms of technological alienation and the artificial reproduction of reality. I have showed how these mechanisms instantiate the very concerns Patočka raised about the de-problematization and negation of historical existence.

I have further given specific examples of how Debord advanced thematic concerns of Husserl and Patočka, for example in terms of the productive application of the theoretical developments in (early) modern Europe, and how this materially reproduces the spectacle’s dominance. On this basis, I contend it is justifiable and necessary to understand ‘spectacle’ as

⁸³Patočka, 1998, p. 106

⁸⁴Patočka, 1996d, p. 117

encompassing the same developments in human existence as ‘crisis’, in the context of this paper. Having used this section to demonstrate how these critiques are complementary, I will use the next section to argue that this bolstered understanding of the spectacle’s dominance undermines and precludes the plausibility of COS as a method of resolving the crisis.

Section 4.2 The Failure of Care of the Soul

In this section, I will show how introducing Debord’s critique of the spectacle allows for a methodical refutation of the viability of COS, and that this refutation indicates the wider conclusion of this paper: the crisis has passed the point of resolution.

As I earlier discussed, Patočka warned that the ‘objective’ side of COS had become ‘immensely atrophied’ in Europe’s newfound care to ‘have’, dominate and conquer, rather than in the care to ‘be’. Debord identified the same perversion, but noted a further advance which has come to characterise spectacular existence:

An earlier stage...entailed an obvious downgrading of ‘being’ into ‘having’ that left its stamp on all human endeavour. The present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy, entails a generalized shift from ‘having’ to ‘appearing’...

(Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 16)

Debord emphasises the ongoing, progressive advancement of the spectacle, so that, particularly through the production of an artificial environment, existence becomes increasingly mediated by spectacular representation. This mediation acts to separate the spectator from the experience of existence’s potentiality, the experience upon which COS depends. By mapping these stages of ‘being’ to ‘having’ to ‘appearing’ onto the historical advance of crisis Patočka described, we see that we have reached beyond even the merely atrophied COS to an obsolescent COS made incoherent by the delimiting domination of the spectacle (crisis) over human existence.

I earlier examined the tripartite structure of COS. The first dimension was the impetus to relate to being itself, in recognition of the irresolvable problematicity of historical existence. However, this is an unheedable call for the spectator whose entire universe of relations is mediated through spectacle. Husserl and Patočka have already showed us that the model of reality to which we relate in crisis is a (mathematically reconstructed) abstraction. Debord shows how this abstraction has been converted into an all-encompassing reproduction of reality, which constitutes the world of the spectator:

The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: "Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear". The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances. (Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 15)

The spectacle is the reification and dominance of 'appearance', where the relation to 'unmanifested existence' or the openness to the world in its concealment is in principle incoherent.

There can be no 'structure of being' to which the spectator relates. There is only being which appears, and this appearance constitutes the total spectacular representation of being. The spectacle delimits the reality of the spectator, so there can be no existence beyond its confines to which the spectator can relate. This instantiates the spectacularly denatured and de-problematized reproduction of reality which prevents the spectator from uncovering the problematicity of existence, in the specific dimension of the concealment of and openness to the world.

Of course, Patočka specifically formulated COS as a response to this corruption of historical existence, which he himself had identified. Therefore, the devotee of COS may respond that the further degradation of 'being' from 'having' to 'appearing' merely reinforces his analysis. What that defence misses is the active, accumulative effect of the spectacle on the spectator:

[T]he more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires... [T]he individual's own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him.

(Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 23)

The spectacle's advance has irrevocably altered the basis on which resistance can be offered. The spectator's 'passive acceptance' of the conditions of the spectacle is reinforced by the mediation of the spectator's impulses and activities.

Here we see concretely how and why the spectator shrinks to the consolation of everyday trivialities and distractions. The spectator is alienated in her own existence and separated from reality beyond the appearance of the spectacle; reality merely is the appearance of the spectacle⁸⁵. COS was necessarily premised upon the recovery of some form of historical existence, and failed to account for the social production of spectators for whom historical existence was as unobtainable and non-sensical as non-historical existence would have been for the Ancient Greeks. It is in this sense that the spectacle perverts the impetus to relate to 'being-as-a-whole', and therefore fatally undermines the first dimension of COS.

The second dimension of COS is the socio-political context of a shared recognition of the predicament of historical existence. Here we might also reintroduce Solidarity of the Shaken, which is the communal experience of the degradation of existence in this crisis, and the collective determination to resist its conditions. In both cases, there is the necessity of mutual understanding and a shared resolution to proceed in the face of problematcity. Once more, Debord's analysis provides reason to doubt the feasibility of this approach.

We have already seen how the spectacle acts to alienate the spectator, and this is no less the case in the social realm as mediated by the spectacle:

⁸⁵Dasgupta, 2017, 96

Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very centre that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness.

(Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 22)

Just as the spectacle reconstructs the spectator's material environment with a superabundance of reproduced artifice, and just as it alienates the spectator in her self-relation and self-understanding, it also enforces a social alienation through what Debord calls the "breakdown in the faculty of encounter"⁸⁶. This is because the social world of the spectator is delimited by pseudo-communication which can only be facilitated by spectacular mediation: "social agents are reduced to executors of a pre-given reality"⁸⁷.

This was a problem Debord⁸⁸, alongside his critics⁸⁹, identified and acknowledged as a contradiction precisely in his own writings on the spectacle: What could his own publication be other than just another spectacular reproduction which ultimately contributed to the all-encompassing spectacle? In fact, this contradiction elucidates the whole problem of this final chapter. That we can only describe and critique this crisis from within this crisis and not beyond or outside of this crisis is the realisation upon which Debord finally landed but eluded Husserl and Patočka. Debord evinces the keenest anticipation of the domination of crisis about which Husserl and Patočka could only speculatively warn. This contradiction must extend to this very paper. My argument that the spectacle has come to delimit human existence can only be the spectacular product of a spectator, spectacularly communicating with other spectators. Nevertheless, this tension exposes the failures of previous approaches to crisis by situating us within it as its product, and not antecedent to, nor outside of, it. This perhaps creates a new opportunity for reinterpreting our experience of crisis and orientating ourselves towards a future of and beyond crisis.

⁸⁶Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 22

⁸⁷Hartle, 2017, p.30

⁸⁸Debord, 1988 (1991), p. 4

⁸⁹Kaplan, 2012, p. 458

The third dimension of COS is the relation each individual has to their own death, the existential integration of their indeterminacy and finitude. The primary spectacular impediment to a relation to death is the same isolated alienation which also governs the spectator's existential and social separation: "Immobilized at the distorted centre of the movement of its world, the consciousness of the spectator can have no sense of an individual life moving toward self-realisation, or toward death"⁹⁰. Through the total immersion of the individual into the unreality of the spectacle, the spectator experiences a temporal paralysis. Far from confronting the question of death's meaning from the principle of individual finitude, the prospect of death undermines the spectator's sense of life as the continuation of the everyday, coinciding with Patočka's insight that the 'day' governs life with the unarticulated threat of death. The question of death's meaning and the precarity of the human situation would open human experience up to the wondrousness of existence, yet the spectacular delimitation of experience instantiates Patočka's precise concern that the trivial everyday precludes a reckoning with life's problematicity, and therefore leaves the crisis of meaning unaddressable.

Supplementing Husserl's and Patočka's analyses of the crisis with Debord's description of the Society of the Spectacle has shown COS to be an obsolescent approach to resolving the crisis as we experience it today. But the cumulative effect of understanding the individual difficulties of pursuing each component of COS for the spectator has been to reveal an even more pernicious effect of the spectacle. We can now understand that the primary reason to doubt COS as a mechanism of overcoming crisis is not the difficulty of the prospect, but the incomprehensibility of the formulation to the spectator:

[There is] the vague feeling that there has been a rapid invasion which has forced people to lead their lives in an entirely different way... but this is experienced rather like some inexplicable change in the

⁹⁰Debord, 1967 (1995), p. 116

climate, or in some other natural equilibrium, a change faced with which ignorance knows only that it has nothing to say. (Debord, 1988 (1991), p. 3)

The more the spectacle advances, the less obtrusive are its mechanisms. The ascendancy of crisis is marked by the diminished ability to articulate or even identify its influence. The contradiction of Patočka's call for the reinvigoration of historical existence against crisis is that the conditions under which such a call could have been heard have been debased by crisis.

Husserl's original description of the crisis was amorphous, and it was inadequately thematised by his contemporaries, but he could at least identify a 'burning need for an understanding of the spirit, which announces itself everywhere'. But as I have shown, the spectacle has quieted this need, sublimating its expression into a private alienation modulated by trivial consolations. Our existential conditions have transformed from this 'burning need' to the "eclipse of the very experience of the exigency of meaning itself"⁹¹ – a more insidious consequence of the trivialisation of existence. This surrender of historical existence does not so much undermine as confirm Patočka's analysis, whose explication of COS always suggested that its necessary conditions were in retreat and could suffer the same collapse as that other element of the Greek inheritance: Europe. In coming to understand how those necessary conditions have been fatally undermined by the growing influence of spectacle, we can see that that collapse is now complete.

In this section I have used Debord's analysis of spectacle to show that COS fails in each of its three dimensions to resolve the crisis as we experience it today. I have argued that COS failed to account for the ways in which crisis was progressively delimiting the possibilities of human existence such that the requirements of COS placed incoherent and untenable demands on we who have already had to adapt to reality as delimited by crisis.

⁹¹Dodd, 2020, p.274

Patočka's resolution of crisis was conceived by, and plausible to, only those readers whose conditions of existence had not already been moulded by crisis itself. COS was therefore already obsolescent to those readers, like us, who could only relate to the crisis from within. There may have been a moment where COS would have made a timely intervention to the growing dominance of crisis, before the collapse of Europe perhaps, or before crisis came to dominate human existence itself, but that moment has passed. In the penultimate short section following, I will reconsider crisis from this new standpoint, as a product and inhabitant of a crisis which I accept constrains my own imaginative and communicative possibilities to understand and criticise it.

Section 4.3: Existence in Crisis

In this chapter so far, I have sought to explicate and affirm the account of crisis given by Patočka by refuting his resolution of crisis. Having already established that Patočka's preference for retrieval of lost conditions sat uneasily with his wider critique, I made the case in the preceding section that his failure to resolve the crisis with COS lay less with his misconceived approach than with the adaptive, advancing character of crisis itself. Husserl and Patočka had both insightfully accounted for radical shifts in the conditions of human existence in history, and both allowed for the growing prominence and corruptive influence of this crisis over human existence, yet somehow neither had fully engaged with the growing likelihood of the crisis establishing itself irreversibly beyond the reach of the most well thought-out philosophical responses to its development.

I do not claim that Debord did explicitly engage with the dominant crisis as a *fait accompli*, but even more than the warnings of Husserl and Patočka, Debord's portrayal of spectacle has allowed for an understanding of crisis which emanates from within its constraints. I contend that this is a necessary understanding not because of the undesirability of a Husserlian epoché or Patočka's COS, or even Debord's RWCs, but because their failure

to resolve this crisis, by way of frustration, assimilation and irrelevance rather than oppositional defeat, illustrates how the crisis has already delimited the reality of human existence such that crisis and existence can now only be adequately thematised in their entwinement, and no longer in their separability or opposition.

By way of analogy, or precedent, I return once more to Patočka's philosophical historiography which held that natural, non-historic existence was ontologically inaccessible to the already historicised experience of existence. Even as Patočka could speculate on the experience of non-historical peoples, he affirmed the irreversible arrival of historical existence once discovered and established. For historical peoples, notwithstanding the burden of problematicity and the appeal of sheltered meaning, there was no productive route towards the *status quo ante*. Not that the preceding conditions simply vanished; the relations of these conditions are those of debasement, opposition and subordination without complete disintegration. So, to return to now, our preceding conditions of historical existence are present in their subordination, I can relate to them in their absence, but existence in crisis has succeeded historical existence as the dominant condition of human experience. The iatrogenic model indicates those conditions are sedimented as the subordinated provocation of this crisis in the first place. And yet, a backwards orientation towards the *status quo ante* would be invalidated by that model which proceeds on the basis of revolution.

It is for this reason that I affirm a new necessary starting point for analysing crisis: from within, as its product. This new starting point is inspired and justified by the new possibilities and genuine discoveries advanced by Husserl, Patočka and Debord in their development of the theme of crisis. Their contributions are indispensable to an adequate understanding of our contemporary reality. The problem of meaning is now clarified as an anachronistic yearning for an experience which contradicts our reality of human existence in

crisis. The task becomes thinking through new forms of meaning and existence which accord to our reality of crisis.

An adapted version of the old task remains too: thinking through the end of crisis. But the former paradigm of reversal and reconstruction of the *status quo ante* must be abandoned. The iatrogenic model indicates that, like previous historical-existential epochs, the crisis itself has the subordinated origins of its own counter-movement within it, so that there is no reason to ascribe it a permanence which previous epochs lacked. Rejecting the notion of undoing or resolving crisis, we may yet anticipate a coming set of existential conditions which sees its influence subordinated. What has been lost are meaning and existence as they were once experienced, but that need not mean that post-crisis meanings and conditions of existence won't provoke an eventual reaction against crisis, likely quite different to that imagined by its original theorists. We must approach the crisis's dominance not in denial or certainty, but with an open, questioning disposition in order to recognise and explore the possibilities and boundaries delimited by crisis, and its undetermined future.

Conclusion

The final chapter of this paper demonstrated that crisis now dominates human existence, and this domination has closed the era of historical existence. I argued that in identifying this dominance I affirm those elements of Patočka's analysis of crisis which aimed at making readers aware of the growing prominence of crisis, but this affirmation came at the expense of my refutation of his purported solution to crisis.

I began Chapter 4 by showing that spectacle and crisis are complementary critical frameworks identifying the same subversion of historical existence. Specifically, I argued that spectacle emphasised the productive reconstruction of reality which materialised the theoretical concerns of Husserl and Patočka. I also contended that in the figure of the

spectator we could explicitly see the progressive impact of crisis shaping human existence directly.

In the following section I showed how the mechanisms of spectacle made COS an impossible prospect for the spectator. The first and third dimensions of COS fail because of the alienated situation of the spectator which separates her from problematicity and finitude. The second dimension failed because of the spectacular mediation of imagination and communication, which I further allowed constrains even the possibilities of this paper.

I then argued that this constraintment demonstrates the necessity of a new approach to crisis, starting from within and not beyond, acknowledging the centrality of crisis in existence. I concluded by arguing for a resituated relationship to the crisis founded on the essential insights of Husserl, Patočka and Debord, but confronting the reality of the ascendancy of crisis and refusing any comforting retreat to a historical reconstruction of our situation as we might wish it to be. From here, we may begin the work of assessing meaning and existence in crisis, and surveying what may be left, what we may even have gained, after the loss of historical existence.

In this paper I set myself the aim of proving three claims: that Husserl's own solution to his crisis failed; that Patočka's development of his theme of crisis constituted both an improved critique and a failed resolution, distinct from Husserl's; and that expanding the discourse of crisis to include Debord's notion of spectacle reveals that failure-to-resolve is rather the point of the philosophical tradition of crisis, and this failure bears out the success of the critiques of Husserl, Patočka and Debord.

Chapter 1 proved the first claim by identifying Husserl's implausible exception of subjectivity to the epoché; Chapter 2 demonstrated part of the second claim by showing how the paradigm of problematicity expanded the scope of crisis beyond Husserl's narrower concern with science; Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated the other part of the second claim by

showing how the progression of crisis has made Patočka's response obsolescent, notwithstanding the relevance of his critique; and Chapter 4 and my conclusion demonstrated the final claim by emphasising how the failures of purported solutions to the crisis have forced us to reckon with the power of their critiques in order to take up a new relation to crisis – a new position within crisis – so we may begin to formulate a critical understanding of crisis in its dominance over human existence.

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