

PATOČKA, MYTH, AND LITERATURE: ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE POSSIBILITY OF PARADISE ON EARTH

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ABSTRACT

In a couple of different works, Jan Patočka discusses the possibility of building a new paradise on earth, relating it to myths of a primeval paradise as well as some works by Dostoevsky. In some of Patočka's writings, this possibility of a paradise on earth also appears, described as 'new love' or 'universal love'. Unlike the myths of a time before the Fall, the possibility of an earthly paradise would be true to the human condition of finitude, understanding, and freedom. However, what is – or is there – the possibility of heaven on earth? What are the differences between the original paradise and the promise of this one? What is 'love', or are there different loves?

Key words: Jan Patočka; myth; literature; paradise; love

PATOČKA, MYTHE ET LITTÉRATURE : ILLUSTRATIONS DE LA POSSIBILITE D'UN PARADIS SUR LA TERRE

Dans certains de ses textes, Jan Patočka réfléchit sur la possibilité d'établir un nouveau paradis sur terre, en établissant un lien entre cette idée et les mythes du paradis originel, ainsi qu'avec plusieurs textes de Dostoïevski. Cette idée d'un nouveau paradis terrestre est également décrite par Patočka comme un « amour nouveau » ou un « amour universel ». Contrairement aux mythes se référant aux temps immémoriaux d'avant la « chute », la possibilité d'un paradis sur terre serait fidèle à la condition humaine de finitude, à la compréhension et à la liberté. Que recouvre cette idée de paradis sur terre? Quelles sont les différences entre le paradis originel et la promesse de ce nouveau paradis? Qu'est-ce que « l'amour »? ou bien existe-t-il différentes sortes d'amour?

PATOČKA, MÝTUS A LITERATURA: ILUSTRACE MOŽNOSTI RÁJE NA ZEMI

V několika svých textech rozebírá Jan Patočka možnost vybudování nového ráje na zemi a vztahuje tuto myšlenku k mýtu o prvotním ráji a několika Dostojevského textům. Tato možnost nového ráje je Patočkou také popsána jak „nová láska“ nebo „univerzální láska“. Na rozdíl od mýtů o době před vyhnáním z ráje odpovídá možnost pozemského ráje situaci lidské konečnosti, svobody a lidské schopnosti porozumění. Co však znamená tato možnost nebe na zemi? Jaký je rozdíl mezi původním rájem a příslibem tohoto nového? Co je „láska“? Nebo existují různé lásky?

I

In two different works, Patočka refers to the myth of a time before the Fall. The myth of the Golden Age, originally ancient Greek, describes a time of harmony among all beings. Patočka discusses the Golden Age in his essay about Masaryk and the philosophy

of religion (in relation to Dostoevsky)¹, and in another essay, he mentions the myth of Genesis, and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden.² In each version of this myth of an original and harmonious time, there is, at least in Patočka's interpretation, a component that points to a future possibility of a different kind of paradise.

When discussing the myth of Genesis, Patočka is clear about this function of myth: the tree of knowledge stands as the symbol of the particular role and responsibility of man, that is, that he is, and even can be, responsible at all. The original couple is expelled from the Garden because they have tasted the fruit of the tree. At the same time, it is man's understanding of both himself and the world that brings man to the possibility of his proper being. The myth, then, serves both to provide an image of our present time – as having fallen out of our original harmony with the world –, and also to show our future 'most proper' possibility. Patočka writes:

Myth penetrates the mysteries of human life with profound and remarkable foresight. [...] Once we understand the intention of myth, we see that it doesn't only make transparent the present reality of man, but that it also has the position, the attitude, the opening to the future where our most proper possibility is opened.³

The second articulation of the ancient myth that appears in the Patočka works that I am discussing here again contains the possibility (it is always a possibility)⁴ of heaven on earth. Dostoevsky retells the myth of a primeval time in his short story *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, which Patočka discusses in his essay about Masaryk and the philosophy of religion.⁵ In Dostoevsky's story, we read the description of one man's (possibly dreamt) visit to a planet that is the living manifestation of the myth of the Golden Age:⁶ it is a planet on which all beings live in harmony with one another and in a communion of 'universal love'. We are told that all animals and humans there live together in peace, humans die happily and without fear, and it is as if the whole planet were in an embrace of fraternal love. Humans love each other and have children, but there is no jealousy, sensuality, or possessiveness. Dostoevsky writes: 'It was like being in love with each other but an all-embracing, universal feeling.'⁷

¹ Jan Patočka, 'Deux études sur Masaryk', in Jan Patočka, *La Crise du Sens*, vol. I, trans. Erika Abrams (Paris: Ousia, 1985).

² Jan Patočka, 'Méditation sur "Le monde naturel come problème philosophique"', in Jan Patočka, *Le Monde Naturel et le Mouvement de l'Existence Humaine*, trans. Erika Abrams (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988).

³ Patočka, 'Méditation sur "Le Monde Naturel comme Problème Philosophique"', 120. The English quotations are my translations from Erica Abrams's translation from the Czech to French. In each case, I provide the French in the footnotes: 'Le mythe pénètre les mystères de la vie humaine avec une profonde et remarquable clairvoyance. [...] Dès lors que nous comprenons l'intention du mythe, nous voyons qu'il ne rend pas seulement transparente la réalité présente de l'homme, mais qu'il contient également la position, l'attitude, l'ouverture à l'avenir où se déclôt notre possibilité la plus propre.'

⁴ This is an interesting point that is left here without being further explored: perhaps an essential aspect of 'paradise on earth' is that it must always remain a work in progress, unfulfilled, like the third (or proper) movement of existence.

⁵ Jan Patočka, 'Deux études sur Masaryk', in Jan Patočka, *La Crise du Sens*, vol. I, trans. Erika Abrams (Paris: Ousia, 1985), 95–216.

⁶ Patočka discusses Dostoevsky's story as an illustration of the myth of the Golden Age. In fact, the man in the short story lands in what he surmises to be the Greek Archipelago or continent.

⁷ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, trans. Constance Garnett (Adelaide: Univer-

We are, then, here again witnesses to the Fall, brought about by the same man who is in awe of the planet. Without really knowing how or why, he introduces lies and deceit into this perfect community. It starts slowly, he says, as if from a simple game of seduction, and brings it to progressive decay into hatred and war.

Like a vile trichina, like a germ of the plague infecting whole kingdoms, so I contaminated all this earth, so happy and sinless before my coming. They learnt to lie, grew fond of lying, and discovered the charm of falsehood. Oh, at first perhaps it began innocently, with a jest, coquetry, with amorous play, perhaps indeed with a germ, but that germ of falsity made its way into their hearts and pleased them. Then sensuality was soon begotten, sensuality begot jealousy, jealousy — cruelty [...].⁸

From cruelty comes war and eventually the destruction of the entire once so happy planet. Then, back on earth, or awake from a dream, this same man dedicates himself to making paradise on earth. He says he has seen the truth and will spend the rest of his days preaching it.

In each of these illustrations, what brings about the Fall is the same thing that is the seed of the possibility of a new, and different, type of paradise. In the myth of Genesis, it is by assuming the understanding specific to humankind, an understanding related to responsibility and one's own finitude (the same responsibility comes from eating of the tree of knowledge) that a new possibility of heaven on earth is announced. What brings about the Fall and the expulsion from paradise is precisely that which can also come to make heaven on earth possible – the perfectly true and authentic man, the one who has responsibility. It is, then, through recovery and reaffirmation – in a different form – of what can bring about the Fall that a new 'kingdom' is possible.

It is fair to say that the same happens (although perhaps less linearly) in Dostoevsky's illustration of the myth in *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*: it is the corrupting of the mythical Golden-Age planet which leads the one responsible for the Fall to want to build a new paradise on earth; and his decision is taken not only from a sense of guilt, as if he were merely trying to replace something he had broken. Here, the new paradise on earth is, as in the myth of Eden, built (or to be built) upon the Fall. It is, I believe, built on love for the Fall, on the faultiness or imperfection of men. Dostoevsky's ridiculous man has a vision and an urge to teach the possibility of heaven on earth not only because he saw the original paradise and wishes to recreate it; his newly understood love for humanity is founded – or so I wish to argue – on the Fall itself.

In a Patočkian perspective, we can see the three movements of existence articulated here. Patočka says as much when discussing the myth of the Garden of Eden in his "Přirozený svět" v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech' (translated by Erika Abrams as "Méditation sur "Le monde naturel comme problème philosophique" and published in *Le monde naturel et le mouvement de l'existence humaine*). The original paradise is a state of unreflective peace and belonging, a sort of happy fusion to an all encompassing envi-

sity of Adelaide), part IV, <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/d/dostoyevsky/d72dr/>> Accessed 4 January 2014.

⁸ Ibid., Pt V.

ronment, here corresponding to the first movement of existence.⁹ The Fall corresponds to the second movement of an expulsion from this place of comfort, which leads to a life of strife, competition, and struggle for power. The third movement as the creation of the new paradise could not then of course simply be a return to the original fusion state, a mere going back to some sort of uterine existential condition, with all its comforts and limitations. The third movement of existence incorporates the first two and realizes the proper movement as such. In a sense, it realizes the other two explicitly.

What this means is the paradises before and after the Fall must be different, and so too must the love empowering and animating each one be different. The Fall would be included as an intricate and assumed part of the third movement of realization, here corresponding to the establishment of heaven of earth; the Fall is present in the new paradise (as is the first movement in the form of the original paradise) since the third movement overcomes those first two movements; it assumes them, and, in owning up to them, it surmounts them.

Regarding the myth of the Garden of Eden, Patočka clearly affirms the need – if there is to be a possibility of a new revival myth – for coming to be in relation to understanding, death, and responsibility – that is, it is clear in this case that the Fall is necessary. Patočka writes: ‘the proper being is here confronted face to face in his mortality, the proper being that disdains escape and claims his responsibility, that is, his destiny.’¹⁰ The same is of course true in Dostoevsky’s version of the myth of the Golden Age. A Fall is required in order for the sprouting of a possibility of a new paradise on earth. What is perhaps not explicit is how this new paradise would differ from the original one before the Fall, and how the Fall itself would be the seed of this new sprouting. My questions here are: what is a paradise on earth and how could we possibly conceive it?

II

In his essay about Masaryk and the philosophy of religion, and in his discussion about Dostoevsky’s short story, Patočka asks, ‘What brought about the Fall?’ What was the event that could have caused such a terrible outcome or sequence of events? There is no single event; there is no one act that brings about the Fall. The Fall is brought about by the condition of humans as free beings. ‘The cause is the possibility of decline, of leaving the good path that even the happy ones have in them, as free beings.’¹¹ Freedom for man is freedom to choose the wrong path, to lie, to escape oneself. It is, as Patočka writes in another essay, ‘the freedom to choose damnation’: ‘The freedom that is peculiar to man, that distinguishes him even from angels, is the freedom to choose damnation.’¹² Dostoevsky’s utopian planet may be beautiful, but it is not human. The human condition

⁹ Patočka, ‘Méditation sur “Le Monde Naturel comme Problème Philosophique”’, 120.

¹⁰ Ibid., ‘l’être propre est ici affronté face à face dans sa mortalité, l’être propre qui dédaigne la fuit et se réclame de sa responsabilité, c’est à dire, de son destin.’

¹¹ Patočka, ‘Deux études sur Masaryk’, 69: ‘La cause, c’est la possibilité de fléchir, de quitter le bon chemin, que même les heureux recèlent en eux, en tant qu’êtres libres.’

¹² Jan Patočka, ‘Le sens du mythe du pacte avec le Diable’, in Jan Patočka, *L’Écrivain, son Objet*, trans. Erika Abrams (Paris: P.O.L. 1990), 132: ‘La liberté qui est le proper de l’homme, qui le distingue même des anges, est donc liberté pour la damnation.’

includes the capacity for truth and the capacity for untruth; the possibility truly to find oneself necessarily implies the possibility to lose oneself.

Paradise on earth, if it is to be on earth, would then have to include this freedom; in short, it would have to include the ever-present possibility of the Fall. And in taking the three movements as an example, it will have to incorporate it explicitly, not only to include it (which the original paradise already does since there is a Fall), but also to assume it. The future paradise must own up to the human inclination towards its own decline. This is illustrated in Dostoevsky's ridiculous man's assuming responsibility when he tells us that he initially had thought of hiding the fact that he had been the one who caused the Fall of the happy planet: 'Do you know, at first I meant to conceal the fact that I corrupted them, but that was a mistake – that was my first mistake! But truth whispered to me that I was lying, and preserved me and corrected me.'¹³

There is then a notion of responsibility – if the Fall is brought about by human freedom, the positive 'turn' of that fault would be responsibility. Here responsibility is not for one singular action one would claim responsibility for, but rather responsibility for our freedom; because we are free, we are responsible for our actions, for who we are, and for the world we are in, for what it is and how it can turn out.

What is the positive aspect of paradise on earth? Dostoevsky writes:

Suppose that this paradise will never come to pass (that I understand), yet I shall go on preaching it. And yet how simple it is: in one day, in one hour everything could be arranged at once! The chief thing is to love others like yourself, that's the chief thing, and that's everything; nothing else is wanted – you will find out at once how to arrange it all.¹⁴

The answer, then, is love. More specifically, 'to love others as oneself'. What this means is unclear (at least for me). Nevertheless, Patočka seems to agree, and talks about a 'new love' or 'universal love' that would be, or would bring about, the community of earthly paradise. This is a specific view of love (or special type of love) different from the more private, romantic one. Patočka, in fact, offers a somewhat disconcerting description of it:

It is like in vital, biological love, except that the communion is now free, without borders, universal. Here, love is not sympathy, compassion; the destiny of the other which one shares is that of the same glory, a shared victory over egocentricity that overcomes itself. Biological love is a simple metaphor, incomplete and inconsequent, of that last and true love.¹⁵

In the original paradise, however, the community was bound by a universal love, by a connection with all other living beings, without possession or affirmation of gain by an

¹³ Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, Pt V.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jan Patočka, 'Le monde naturel et la phénoménologie', in Jan Patočka, *Le monde naturel et le mouvement de l'existence humaine*, trans. Erika Abrams (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 45: 'Il en va comme dans l'amour vital, biologique, si ce n'est que la communion est désormais libre, sans clôture, universelle. L'amour n'est pas ici sympathie, compassion; le destin de l'autre que l'on partage est celui d'une même gloire, d'une victoire commune sur l'égocentricité qui se dessaisit de soi. L'amour biologique est une simple métaphore, incomplète et inconséquence, de cet amour vrai et ultime.'

individual; in the possible future paradise on earth, therefore, if it is to be a manifestation of human freedom – and this includes an inclination to lie, to deceive, to desire – how will the love of the new paradise be different? The love that binds or animates the future paradise cannot be a return to a harmonious, conflict-free, all-embracing affection. It must, apparently, include and accept desire, want, treachery, jealousy, and so forth. In fact, the question arises of whether we would want to live in a community where there was no sensuality, no seduction, or no desire in the selfish, possessive, and passionate sense. It seems there must be a way to recover this, to rehabilitate it without annihilating it, to transform it without losing its fiery vitality.

There is a resonance of this appropriation and recovery of the negative in Patočka's description of the 'solidarity of the shaken' and the discussion of *Night and Day*. In that description, the discussion is turned towards the notion of meaning and truth. The solidarity of the shaken is the community of those who have understood that meaning is problematic, that it is historical and therefore our responsibility. There is an uncertainty and faultiness which must be accepted, and an ownership of the darkness in the world – 'The opening brings to the fore the necessary guilt of each of us'.¹⁶ If meaning is not established once and for all and depends on our understanding, then we are responsible for 'negative meaning' in the past and for the possibility that we may mishear and misstate it in the future.

The possibility of a paradise on earth would also own up to the freedom we *are*, which, as we have just seen, is bound to truth and meaning. The responsibility for this freedom is a responsibility for our place in the world as the ones capable of truth. As we are the ones capable of meaning and truth, we bear a relation to the world in which we are the ones responsible for the meaning the world has; we are, in a sense, responsible for what the world *is*. This, then, is a responsibility, in Dostoevsky's beautiful terms, 'for everything and everyone'.

Patočka describes 'universal responsibility' in one of his essays about the myth of Faust:

The feeling of universal responsibility is therefore not a mystical union, fusion, the identity of all in universal sympathy. It is a feeling of solidarity in the participation in truth and in what makes it possible: human destiny. What does that responsibility in the universal sense mean? Nothing other than this: to submit to judgement and therefore to the true and universal law and community; to want to be judged, knowing one is an accomplice in all evil; to want to bear and pay for one's own share in that universal inequity without fleeing from it into the private sphere, in the aesthetic or pleasurable attitude – to want to participate in universal justice as the only circumstances in which the soul as such can exist, the soul as a being whose being is a development that rises away from decline.¹⁷

¹⁶ Patočka, 'Deux études sur Masaryk', 214–15: 'L'ouverture fait entrer en ligne de compte la culpabilité nécessaire de chacun entre nous.'

¹⁷ Patočka, 'Le sens du mythe du pacte avec le Diable', 140: 'Le sentiment de responsabilité universelle n'est donc pas l'union mystique, la fusion, l'identification de tous dans une sympathie universelle. C'est un sentiment de solidarité dans la participation à la vérité et à ce qui la rend possible: au destin humain. Que signifie cette responsabilité au sens universel ? Rien d'autre que ceci : se soumettre au jugement et, partant, à la loi et à la communauté vraie et universelle ; vouloir être jugé en sachant qu'on est complice de tout mal; vouloir porter et payer sa part de l'iniquité universelle, sans la fuir dans la sphère privée, dans l'attitude esthétique ou ludique – vouloir prendre part à la justice universelle

It is this notion of 'being responsible for everything and everyone' which appears in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, and is presented as the 'new love'. This new love, here reaffirmed as different from a mystical fusion or universal sympathy, is then associated to an understanding and acceptance of responsibility for, in Patočka's words, 'truth and that which makes it possible: human destiny'. Truth and meaning are the destiny of human beings, in the sense that it is human beings who have a sense of truth, who have a relationship to meaning. This universal love, then, is the care for being in a relation to truth; it is that very relationship.

In this way, we would think of love as the opening of the understanding that we *are* in relation to the world – when taken up in universal responsibility, in the commitment to being responsible for everything and everyone, love is the attitude, the opening of meaning from which things appear. In his essay on Masaryk and the philosophy of religion, Patočka writes: 'Being is not what we love, but *that by which we love, that which gives to love, on the basis of which we let things be what they are [...]*'¹⁸ Love is a commitment to the world; it is our assuming of responsibility for our connection to all things, for our understanding that we are the relationship to their manifestation and meaning. Patočka describes it as 'benevolent rapture', of letting things appear as they are, as themselves and not always in relation to us. Universal love does not include the negative in the sense of the instances of the particularity of faulty beings – in the sense that we would love others as we love ourselves because we recognize their faults as similar to our own, in a sympathetic connection. Rather, it includes the negative in the sense that the negative is an intrinsic part of what allows us to be capable of truth. It is a love that supports the human propensity towards the Fall, which recognizes in it the possibility for change, seeing that it is absolutely necessary for potentially approaching a tender dedication to the world. There would be no love, in this sense, without understanding – which becomes a loving understanding – for our great responsibility. It is of course that same love arising from a sense of being responsible for the truth and meaning in the world which would create paradise on earth.

In this way, it is our turning towards our freedom and responsibility, and owning up to them which could bring about heaven on earth. As we read in *The Brothers Karamazov*: 'life is paradise, and we are all in paradise, but we won't see it; if we would, we should have heaven on earth the next day.'¹⁹

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comme à la seule situation dans laquelle l'âme comme telle puisse exister, l'âme en tant qu'étant dont l'être est un essor qui relève hors de la déchéance.'

¹⁸ Patočka, 'Deux études sur Masaryk', 168. Italics in the original.

¹⁹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Black Garnett (Raleigh, NC: Hayes Barton Press, 2007), 269.

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