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ARTICLE

Hope and Meaning: Phenomenology in the Thought of Leszek Kołakowski, Józef Tischner, and Václav Havel

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Using an intellectual-history lens, this article offers insights into the spread of phenomenology across Central Europe and its social–political significance in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly its impact on the formation of the Eastern European dissident movement and furnishing it with ideas. Specifically, the article explores the role that phenomenology played in defining one of the core concepts underlying Central European dissidence: the idea of hope. Tracing the story of three public intellectuals—Leszek Kołakowski, Józef Tischner, and Václav Havel—it suggests why the school founded by Edmund Husserl had been embraced by some and rejected by others, and how their particular interpretations of hope had been indebted to phenomenology.

Sociological accounts that trace the trajectory of the Polish Solidarity movement in the 1980s describe a crucial shift in public consciousness: the previously widespread sense of hopelessness and senselessness gradually gave way to purpose and meaning.[1] Within Polish dissidence opposing Communist rule, the Weberian concept of the *disenchanted world* gave way to the idea of the *embedded world*, one founded not only on materiality, but on spirituality as well.[2] The history of the dissident movement and the breakthrough of 1989 is, in fact, the history of hope, its renewal and exercise.[3] These social shifts were underpinned by an intellectual framework

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[1] Mirosława Marody, *Polacy '80: Wizje rzeczywistości dnia (nie)codziennego* (Warsaw, 2004) 110–26, esp. 19; Ireneusz Krzemiński, *Polacy: Jesień '80* (Warsaw, 2005).

[2] Ireneusz Krzemiński, "Świat zakorzeniony," *Aneks* 43 (1986), 91–119. Cf. Krzysztof Mazur, *Przekroczyć nowoczesność: Projekt polityczny ruchu społecznego "Solidarność"* (Krakow, 2017), 413–14. Francois Dubet, Alain Touraine, and Michel Wieviorka, *Solidarity: The Analysis of a Social Movement: Poland 1980–1981* (Cambridge, 1983).

[3] See the literature cited above and Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity, 1980–82* (New Haven and London, 2002). Cf. Elżbieta Ciżewska-Martyńska, "Aquinas and Józef Tischner on Hope: As Part of the Intellectual Legacy of the Polish Solidarity Movement," *History of European Ideas* 45/4 (2019), 585–602.

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that had been developed over the better part of a decade. Philosophers, writers, and theologians addressed questions of meaning and often, albeit not exclusively, expressed themselves using a phenomenological idiom. The important role that the phenomenological movement played in the formation of Eastern European dissidence has already been noted,[4] and while phenomenology's social and political potential is fast becoming an important area of investigation,[5] there is a growing need to discuss the theories of those phenomenologists (other than Karol Wojtyła and Jan Patočka) who lived east of the Iron Curtain. Finally, the field needs an understanding that would answer why phenomenology was attractive to some but not to others, and trace its performative nature in the formation of social movements. I shall address these problems by reflecting on the questions of meaning and hope, and analyzing these concepts as they emerge in the writings of phenomenologists, as well as the works of prominent philosopher Leszek Kołakowski (1927–2009), philosopher and priest Józef Tischner (1931–2000), and writer and politician Václav Havel (1936–2011).

I first briefly describe the historical and philosophical context of Kołakowski's, Tischner's, and Havel's young adulthood and their early intellectual lives. Then I comment on phenomenology's place in Central Europe and its focus on the question of hope. From there, I move on to discuss Kołakowski's, Tischner's, and Havel's interpretations of hope. In Kołakowski's case, I place particular emphasis on writings addressing Husserl's philosophy, and the challenges to dissidence published in the 1970s and the early 1980s. The first and by far the most influential of Kołakowski's essays—"Hope and Hopelessness," published in 1971—would be translated into many other languages.[6] As hope was a recurring theme in Tischner's writing, I drew on his entire body of work. For Havel, I focused primarily on his essays and addresses published before and after the Velvet Revolution.

Philosophy after World War II in Poland and Czechoslovakia and the formative years of Kołakowski, Tischner, and Havel

After World War II, Central and Eastern Europe fell under the influence of the Soviet Union. Marxists set themselves the goal of mastering intellectual life both in the resurgent universities and beyond. In Poland, fostering the spread of Marxism and Leninism was entrusted to Adam Schaff, who, having returned from Moscow, founded the Institute for Training Scientific Cadres (ITSC, Polish: Instytut Kształcenia Kadr Naukowych) at the Central Committee of the Polish

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[4] See, for example, Edward F. Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patočka* (Albany, 2002); Francesco Tava, *The Risk of Freedom: Ethics, Phenomenology, and Politics in Jan Patočka* (London and New York, 2016); Aviezer Tucker, *Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (Pittsburgh, 2000).

[5] Michael Gubser, *The Far Reaches: Phenomenology, Ethics, and Social Renewal in Central Europe* (Stanford, 2014); Andrzej Gniazdowski, *Antynomie radykalizmu: Fenomenologia polityczna w Niemczech 1914–1933* (Warsaw, 2015). Cf. Richard Velkley, "Edmund Husserl," in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago, 1987), 870–87.

[6] Leszek Kołakowski, "Tezy o nadziei i beznadziejności," *Kultura*, June 1971, 3–21; translated into English (as "Hope and Hopelessness"), German, French, Russian, Swedish, Italian, Hungarian, and Dutch.

United Workers' Party in 1950.[7] Among the zealous students at the institute was one Leszek Kołakowski, a postgraduate in his early twenties. Born into a socialist, religiously indifferent family, Kołakowski had no taste for the patriotic traditions of the Polish landed gentry.[8] The mission of the ITSC was the Sovietization of Polish humanities by rewriting and reinterpreting the history of philosophy in the spirit of Marxism and Leninism. For young people who survived the war, Marxism was the promise of a better world, built on a sense of moral integrity, and seemed an ideological counterweight to fascism.[9] It offered simple recipes of equality, brotherhood, and justice, and infused a sense of meaning into a world scarred by the savagery of war. The involvement of young intellectuals in the propagation of the ideology of Marxism–Leninism was intense, full of proselytizing fervor, and, for most of them, sooner or later brought equally profound disappointment and, ultimately, persecution.[10]

Marxism failed to dominate Polish universities, however, as its values were rejected by a vast part of both the academy and the public.[11] On the one hand, there were Catholic universities and seminaries, which focused on classical and Thomist philosophy, while on the other were neo-positivists and analytical philosophers from the Lviv–Warsaw school (who soon left the universities, due to their old age and harassment from Marxists); a third group coalesced around the phenomenologist Roman Ingarden.[12] The non-Marxist environment was heterogeneous and fraught with tension. Ingarden, who rightfully ought to be considered the father of Polish phenomenology, was a former student of Husserl's and a chief proponent, alongside Adolf Reinach and Edith Stein, of "realist" phenomenology. He also detested logical positivism, as the positivists shunned religion and had little regard for phenomenology. In a profoundly ironic twist, Ingarden would be expelled from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow in 1950, after being accused of idealism by fellow Marxist academics.[13] Where the majority of Polish professors proved highly reluctant to join the Communist Party ranks,

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[7] John Connelly, *Captive University* (Chapel Hill and London, 2000), 156–8. In 1953 ITCS was renamed the Institute of Social Sciences. Cf. also Radosław Kuliniak, Mariusz Pandura, and Łukasz Ratajczak, *Filozofia po ciemnej stronie mocy: Krucjaty marksistów i komunistów polskich przeciwko Lwowskiej Szkole Filozoficznej Kazimierza Twardowskiego*, vols. 1–3 (Kęty, 2018–21).

[8] Zbigniew Mentzel, *Kołakowski: Czytanie świata. Biografia* (Krakow, 2020).

[9] Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York, 1953). Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism, and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 2012).

[10] Balázs Trencsényi, Maciej Janowski, Monika Baár, Maria Falina, and Michal Kopeček, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, part II, *1968–2018*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 2018), 342–70; Marci Shore, *The Taste of Ashes: the Afterlife of Totalitarianism in Eastern Europe* (New York, 2013). On Kołakowski's case see Mentzel, *Kołakowski*; Hubert Czyżewski, *Kołakowski i poszukiwanie pewności* (Krakow, 2022), 17–73.

[11] Connelly, *Captive University*, 160.

[12] Kołakowski was involved in the fight against "the old professors." In 1950, together with Bronisław Baczko and Henryk Holland, he spearheaded the removal of Władysław Tatarkiewicz from the University of Warsaw, accusing him of mistreating Marxist students, an act which he would grow to be ashamed of and regret. Mentzel, *Kołakowski*, 99–106. Cf. Leszek Kołakowski, "Filozofia nieinterwencji: Głos w dyskusji nad radykalnym konwencjonalizmem," *Myśl Filozoficzna* 2 (1953), 335–73. Cf. Kuliniak, Pandura, and Ratajczak, *Filozofia po ciemnej stronie mocy.*

[13] On Roman Ingarden see Mariusz Pandura and Radosław Kuliniak, *"Jestem filozofem świata": Roman Witold Ingarden (1893–1970). Część druga: lata 1939–1970* (Kęty, 2020).

Sovietization swept across Czech lands relatively fast.[14] Between 1950 and 1951, most philosophical seminars in Czechoslovakia were turned into departments of Marxism–Leninism and, like many other non-Marxist philosophers, the phenomenologist Jan Patočka, one of Husserl's last students, found himself banned from teaching.[15]

While Kołakowski was exploring Marxism, Józef Tischner was preparing for priesthood. Born in the highlands of Podhale to a family of teachers, Tischner graduated from high school in 1949 and enrolled at the Jagiellonian University to study law, but entered the seminary a year later.[16] In his last year of seminary training, he attended lectures in social ethics given by the future pope, Reverend Dr Karol Wojtyła, who was a proponent of phenomenology.[17] Before Tischner was ordained in 1955, the Communist state cracked down on the church, placing Primate Stefan Wyszyński in custody and shuttering theology departments at state universities. Stalin's death in 1953 began a period called the Thaw, which culminated in Poland in October 1956. The repressive policies of the state were loosened, and opportunities emerged to express criticism and doubts. Exposing the theoretical and practical absurdities of the Stalinist system first opened the way to revisionism and reform, and eventually to its rejection. Roman Ingarden was rehired by the Jagiellonian University, and Leszek Kołakowski also revised his attitude toward Marxism.[18]

In *Światopogląd i życie codzienne* (Ideology and Everyday Life),[19] Kołakowski wrote that the worldview dictated by official ideology had to be replaced by new, individual meaning, one not provided by any established institution or system of thought, but chosen voluntarily. Kołakowski still identified with the left, but this time he did it on his own terms. He did not want to be a spokesman for the party apparatus. In his 1959 essay "Kapłan i błazen" (The Priest and the Jester), Kołakowski discussed the theological legacy in philosophy, which he saw in the belief that human values could be fully realized in this world. He argued that lay eschatology and theodicy were one of many contemporary philosophies, Marxism chief among them, that often found expression in the hope that every fact and every event had a hidden meaning, and thus contributed to a greater happiness of humanity. He called the adherents of such philosophies priests and contrasted them against jesters, who would question any possibility of grounding philosophy in the Absolute, reject philosophical systems, and undermine the prevailing opinions of a given society. At the time, Kołakowski obviously placed himself with the jesters, the disillusioned Marxists and the revisionists, or simply among Enlightenment philosophers, as he believed that the position allowed the perspective of "goodness without indulgence, courage without fanaticism, intelligence without discouragement, and hope without blindness."[20] To reduce his role to that of a jester, however, would not suffice to fully describe his philosophical engagement through the decades. In 1964, Kołakowski published the essay "Etyka bez kodeksu" (Ethics without a Code), where he advocated abandoning normative systems (e.g. Marxism), and embracing individual choice of values instead. While the essay was warmly received by Adam Michnik and other young revisionists, Józef Tischner and the milieu around Roman Ingarden did not hold back their critique. Phenomenologists and axiologists may have rejected Marxism, but were staunch believers in objectivity and the absolutist character of values.[21]

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[14] Connelly, *Captive University*, 144–5.

[15] Ibid., 131–2.

[16] Wojciech Bonowicz, *Tischner* (Krakow, 2001).

[17] Wojtyła based much of his own philosophical thought on concepts developed by Max Scheler: understanding the person as the concrete unity of acts of different types and nature, as well as his concepts of solidarity and shame. Cf. Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays* (Washington, 2021); Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco, 1993).

[18] Pandura and Kuliniak, *"Jestem filozofem świata"*. On Kołakowski see Mentzel, *Kołakowski*. It was also the time when, drawing inspiration from Luciene Goldmann, Kołakowski formed an intellectual milieu, along with Bronisław Baczko, Andrzej Walicki, Krzysztof Pomian, and Jerzy Szacki, that would come to be known as the Warsaw school of the history of ideas (1956–68). Cf. Ryszard Sitek, *Warszawska szkoła historii idei* (Warsaw, 2000).

[19] Leszek Kołakowski, *Światopogląd i życie codzienne* (Warsaw, 1957).

The decade after Stalin's death marked a time of ethical renewal for Eastern European intelligentsia and the abandonment of Communist ideals; it also saw the beginnings of a discrete dissident movement in Poland and Hungary.[22] Poland's former revisionist circles, inspired partially by Kołakowski's thought, looked for meaning and values outside the great philosophical systems. The history of the Polish dissident movement is marked by the workers' protests of 1956 in Poznań, in 1970 on the coast, and in 1976 in Ursus and Radom; by the nationwide strikes of 1980 that resulted in the establishment of the party-independent trade union, Solidarity; and by the student protests of 1968, which prompted an anti-Semitic reaction from the government and the forced emigration of people critical of the system, including Kołakowski.

The situation was different in Czechoslovakia, where there was no Thaw period, and hope for political change was brought only by Alexander Dubček, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, who called for "socialism with a human face" in January 1968.[23] By that time, Václav Havel, struggling to get a formal education as the son of a wealthy and well-connected businessman, had already managed to publish some of his early dramas and essays.[24] In June 1967, Havel protested censorship at a congress of Czechoslovak writers, and next year got involved with the events of the Prague Spring, which soon made him one of the most prominent dissidents in Czechoslovakia and abroad. The attempt to liberalize the Communist system drew a violent reaction from Warsaw Pact countries, which sent troops into Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Attempts at reform were abandoned, and a period of "normalization" followed. The next concerted effort from the opponents of the regime would come only nine years later, when the Charter 77 was drafted.[25]

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[20] Leszek Kołakowski, "Kapłan i błazen," in Kołakowski, *Nasza wesoła Apokalipsa: Wybór najważniejszych esejów* (Krakow, 2010), 49–82, at 82.

[21] Adam Michnik, Józef Tischner, and Jacek Żakowski, *Między panem a plebanem* (Warsaw, 2019), 195–96.

[22] Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, 123–60. Trencsényi *et al.*, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*.

[23] Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed* (New Heaven, 2009), 211–42.

[24] These and other biographical details come from Aleksander Kaczorowski, *Havel: Zemsta bezsilnych* (Wołowiec 2014). Cf. Michael Zantovsky, *Havel: A Life* (New York, 2015).

[25] Heimann, *Czechoslovakia*, 243–306. Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, the Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge, MA, 2012),

In sum, most of the ideas that the Polish and Czech dissidents drew on to explain and legitimize their activism came from three main intellectual currents: Marxist theory (of the orthodox, revisionist, or reformist variety), Thomism and/or personalism, and the phenomenological and existentialist movements.[26] These ideas were often presented in some unorthodox manner: Marxism mixed with Christianity,[27] personalism with phenomenology,[28] and phenomenology with Hegelianism or existentialism.[29] Why had phenomenology played a role in the formation of dissident circles? It was a respected non-Marxist philosophy, well established in Central Europe through Husserl and his students. Studying phenomenology enabled those isolated behind the Iron Curtain to maintain a dialogue with contemporary Western philosophy—as was the case with Józef Tischner. Furthermore, Polish Thomists acknowledged and built on the achievements of "realist" phenomenologists like Max Scheler, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Edith Stein, and Roman Ingarden.[30] Phenomenology also offered an idiom for and methods of refocusing on the human experience, naming the current crisis, and overcoming it.[31] Last but not least, the small circle of Czech dissidents enjoyed personal ties to the literati, who were marked not only by Patočka's and Belohradsky's ideas, but also by Patočka's personality.[32] The phenomenological strands present in the works of the three protagonists of this article ought to be viewed mostly as rooted in the thought of Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, and their students and readers, including Jan Patočka and Roman Ingarden, as well as the product of an intellectual dialogue with philosophers inspired by phenomenology, such as Gabriel Marcel and Paul Ricoeur.

Phenomenology and the question of hope

Although phenomenologists have analyzed the question of hope, using the methodology proposed by the movement's fathers to do so, they have done so only sparingly. Husserl himself argued that individuals could perceive values through emotions (*Wertfühlen*, *Wertnehmungen*). This implied that hope, itself defined as an emotion, could be conceived as one of the ways of experiencing the meaning of the world.[33] According to Scheler, the human person lives in a world of objective values and recognizes them through feeling.[34] An object has a value for a human being before this value is perceived or known. Values form a hierarchy (pleasure, utility, vitality, culture, and holiness as the highest value). Higher values give meaning to lower values. It is a tragedy and drama to prioritize lower values over higher ones.[35] Scheler did not write explicitly about hope but it could be said that hope is an affective reaction stemming from grasping the value of a person or of an object. Gabriel Marcel and Paul Ricoeur, two philosophers whose work was influenced by phenomenology, also discussed hope through the lens of tragedy, albeit in contrast to fear and despair.[36] Kołakowski and Tischner were both familiar with Husserl's work, and it made a profound impact on the latter's own philosophical interventions. While Tischner and Havel seemed more closely aligned with Marcel and Ricoeur, a closer look at the structure of Tischner's arguments reveals how clearly influenced it was by Husserl's and Scheler's reflections on values and their rationality vis-à-vis the rationality of perception and sensations.

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[26] Trencsényi *et al.*, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*. Gubser, *The Far Reaches*.

[27] Jacek Kuroń, *Opozycja: pisma polityczne 1969–1989* (Warsaw, 2010); Adam Michnik, *The Church and the Left* (1977) (Chicago, 1993); Vaclav Benda, *Noční kádrovy dotazník a jiné boje: Texty z let 1977–1989* (Praha, 2009).

[28] Cf. Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*.

[29] Józef Tischner, *Spowiedź rewolucjonisty* (Krakow, 2016).

[30] Kazmierz Mikucki CR, *Tomizm w Polsce po II wojnie światowej* (Kraków 2015), 290.

[31] Gubser, *The Far Reaches*, 177.

[32] Ibid., 174–82. Cf. Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age*; Tucker, *Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence*.

[33] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* (The Hague, 1977); Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology: Lectures, Summer Semester, 1925* (The Hague, 1977), 140–43.

[34] Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Values* (Evanston, 1973)

"Hope is a mystery," Marcel asserted,[37] describing it elsewhere as "the arm of the disarmed."[38] Reflecting on hope's mysterious ability to manifest objects and the meaningfulness of the world, Marcel wrote, "In hoping, I do not create in the strict sense of the word, but appeal to the existence of a certain creative power in the world, or rather to the actual resources at the disposal of this creative power."[39] Commenting on Marcel's reflection, Klaus Held argued that Marcel's way of thinking could be traced to Husserl's *epoché*, and said that phenomenologists distinguished between hope as feeling and hope as mood.[40] The former involves our intentional references to horizons of events, is motivated by a basic belief in the continued existence of the world and the positive realization of at least some of the anticipated events, and is accompanied by the experience of personal power. Those horizons enable us to experience the world and its events as meaningful. Ultimately, hope as feeling could be described as "hope for" something.

Hope as mood, on the other hand, is absolute hope manifest, Held argued, while Husserl would say that this hope reveals itself in its source character. It transcends the horizons of events and may endure without fulfillment, resisting disappointment, when necessary, and expecting the unexpected. It relies on the belief in the continued existence of the world, but does not depend on our personal capabilities or power. Because it requires patience and flexibility, Held asserted, absolute hope cannot be confused with either stoic apathy or Camusian revolt, and described the mood of hope as something beyond personal power, pointing to how different theologies have conceived absolute hope as a matter of either grace or enlightenment. While he refrained from stating how different people experience hope, Held insisted that if hope were to be understood as virtue, it surely would have to combine a feeling and a mood, and the mood could be neither apathy nor rage.[41] Absolute hope, therefore, could be characterized as an attitude or disposition that enables any particular "hoping for."

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[35] Max Scheler, "On the Tragic," *Cross Currents* 4 (1954), 178–91. Tischner presented Scheler as a great philosopher of emotions that allow human beings to grasp values, and as a philosopher who sees a person as a dramatic being. Józef Tischner, *Filozofia człowieka: Wykłady* (Kraków 2019), 370, 376.

[36] Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope* (Chicago, 1951); Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth* (Evanston, 1965); Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York, 1967); Ricoeur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 44 (1970), 55–69.

[37] Gabriel Marcel, "Sketch of a Phenomenology and a Metaphysics of Hope," in Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 29–67, at 35.

[38] Gabriel Marcel, *Thou Shall Not Die* (South Bend, 2009), 54.

[39] Marcel, "Sketch of a Phenomenology," 52.

[40] Klaus Held, "Idee einer Phänomenologie der Hoffnung," in Dieter Lohmar and Dirk Fonfara, eds., *Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven der Phänomenologie: Neue Felder der Kooperation: Cognitive Science, Neurowissenschaften, Psychologie, Soziologie, Politikwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* (Dordrecht 2006), 126–42. I am indebted to Andrzej Gniazdowski for sharing his translation with me.

Though not strictly a phenomenologist, Ricoeur still popularized many phenomenological ideas.[42] As Gabriel Marcel had done and Tischner would do later, Ricoeur used metaphorical language to describe hope. Hope is about the "not yet," the "much more," the "beyond," and the "in spite of," he wrote, and he considered hope to be a response to the dreadful and the tragic that drew on the symbolic resources of myth.[43] Ricoeur was interested in the intersection of philosophy and theology, and how they approached questions of transcendence and hope.[44] Seeking to address, phenomenologically and hermeneutically, the interpretations offered by philosophy and religion, Ricoeur maintained that while philosophy placed limits on thinking, theology could go further. What Ricoeur expressed through the phrases *intellectus spei* (understanding of hope) and *spero, ut intelligam* (I hope in order to understand) could arguably point "to a structural change within philosophical discourse," meaning keeping this discourse open by giving up on the idea of reaching "absolute knowledge" in the Hegelian sense.[45] Where theology is focused on eschatology, on a tension between promise and fulfillment, Ricoeur repeats, after Moltmann,[46] that philosophy is, instead, concerned with the present, as evinced by its propensity, after Immanuel Kant, to call hope "regeneration."[47] The limitations of human thought described by Kant do not make people incapable of hoping. "[T]he authentic rationality of hope can be grasped nowhere else than at the end of … 'absurd logic'," Ricoeur claimed, using Kierkegaard's expression.[48] He also meditated on Kierkegaard's framing of hope as a "passion of the possible" and the ambivalence of the possible.[49] "[T]he logic of hope is a logic of increase and of superabundance," Ricoeur explained, a superabundance "of meaning as opposed to the abundance of senselessness, of failure, and of destruction."[50] The "irrationality" of hope prompts the emergence of a new rationality. Rebecca K. Huskey, meanwhile, argues that Ricoeur's idea of genuine hope requiring action resonates with Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope*.[51]

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[41] Ibid., 142.

[42] Ricoeur's endorsement played a crucial role in the popularization of Jan Patočka's thought in the West. Cf. Ricoeur's introduction to Patočka's *Heretical Essays*.

[43] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*. Cf. Amy Daughton, "Hope and Tragedy: Insights from Religion in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11/3 (2019), 135–56, at 141.

[44] Daughton, "Hope and Tragedy," 138. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems."

[45] Ricoeur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems," 55, cf. 59, 69.

[46] Ibid., 56–7. Paul Ricoeur, "Freedom in the Light of Hope," trans. Robert Sweeney, in Don Idhe ed., *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston, 1974) 401–24.

[47] Ricoeur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems," 68.

[48] Ibid., 57.

[49] Ricoeur, "Freedom in the Light of Hope."

[50] Ricoeur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems," 58.

[51] Rebecca K. Huskey, *Paul Ricoeur on Hope* (New York, 2009), 31–6.

In later sections, I will follow the traces of Husserl's, Scheler's, Marcel's, and Ricoeur's approaches to the question of hope in the writings of the authors who are the subject of this article. Just because the intellectual trajectories of Kołakowski, Tischner, and Havel sat well within the bounds of Marxism, Thomism, existentialism, and phenomenology, that does not mean that their biographies were uneventful or devoid of intellectual conversions. Kołakowski and Tischner experienced a form of the latter: Kołakowski gave up Marxism, while Tischner moved from Thomism to phenomenology. Havel, meanwhile, remained within the realms of Heideggerian existentialism and phenomenology throughout his entire life, even if he was not exactly an orthodox adherent of either. How did they shape their understanding of hope, its nature, and its function?

Leszek Kołakowski's path out of hopelessness

Kołakowski wrote little about hope. The idea or the virtue of hope rarely figured as the subject of his essays, lectures, or philosophical disquisitions. Typically, appeals to hope seemed to serve a purely rhetorical function in his writing, and only from notes in the margins and brief remarks made in interviews could one infer what Leszek Kołakowski might have thought of the nature of hope. He argued, ironically, that because logicians thought of ways to refrain from making unjustified statements, in the social realm logic could conceivably be the enemy of hope. The history of philosophy described how different people had tried thinking about the world, and how they failed in most cases; ethics, meanwhile, nurtured discouragement and despair, describing the abyss separating the world and suggestions for its improvement.[52] To him, hope and optimism resulted from a sense of purpose that could not be valid philosophically, but could not be brushed aside either. Hope presents itself in Kołakowski's writings as a matter of decision, a choice that is necessary, but not exactly well grounded. This interpretation of hope could be traced back to Kołakowski's critique of grand philosophical systems, ramping up since the mid-1950s and voiced explicitly ten years later, and his studies of seventeenth-century Dutch religious sects (1965).[53] Yet even these brief comments of his had a significant social and eventually also political import, as they became the ideological platform for the Polish dissidence movement.[54]

By 1968, already disillusioned with Marxism and suspicious of normative systems, Kołakowski was considered something of an intellectual father figure by Adam Michnik's milieu of young dissidents.[55] Two years earlier, on the tenth anniversary of the Polish October, Kołakowski delivered a harsh critique of the government at the University of Warsaw's Faculty of History meeting, which led to his expulsion from the Polish United Workers' Party and left him in considerable trouble at the university.[56] It was at that time that he began to write *The Presence of Myth*,[57] which would later come to be considered a watershed in his work, even though it would be blocked from publication in Poland. Drawing on the work of Mircea Eliade, Kołakowski argues in the book that humankind had an indelible need to experience the world as meaningful, a need that could not be satisfied by either the natural sciences or philosophical systems, including phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, or positivism.[58] The answer to this need could be found in myth, or what Eliade saw as stories entrenched in culture that explained the workings of the world and communicated established values. On the other hand, humanity could not simply analyze the validity of its cognition, its rationality. Rather, humanity is compelled to choose: it could either embrace a radically rational attitude, which would sooner or later drive it to despair, or accept the role of myth in culture, and thus consent to the culture's values defining the meaning of life for individuals and societies alike. Kołakowski draws a line between rationality (or epistemology in general) and morality, and argues that their coexistence is inevitable and impossible at the same time, their conflict being exactly what makes culture vivid.[59]

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[52] Leszek Kołakowski and Zbigniew Mentzel, *Czas ciekawy, czas niespokojny*, 2 vols. (Krakow, 2008), 1: 198.

[53] Leszek Kołakowski, *Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna: Studia nad chrześcijaństwem bezwyznaniowym XVII wieku* (Warsaw, 2009).

[54] Wiesław Chudoba, *Leszek Kołakowski: Kronika życia i dzieła* (Warsaw, 2014), 262.

[55] Marci Shore, "In Search of Meaning after Marxism: The Komandosi, March 1968, and the Ideas That Followed," in Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet, eds., *Warsaw: The Jewish Metropolis* (Boston, 2015), 590–612.

Expelled from the university over the student strikes in March 1968 and declared an enemy by the regime's officials, Kołakowski decided to accept an invitation to McGill University in Canada, and left for what would later turn out to be the rest of his life.[60] Around that time, he also began to write a critical history of Marxism, which would eventually be published between 1976 and 1978.[61] Abandoning his former intellectual position took many of his foreign friends, unaware of the long process unfolding inside him, by surprise.[62] Earlier, in 1971, he had argued against the notion, quite popular back home, that the Communist system was impossible to reform and that the faith of peoples living under it was doomed. Rather than offer easy comforts, Kołakowski dedicated to them his essay "Hope and Hopelessness," a sober examination of the regime's political, economic, and social landscape published in Polish in the Paris-based émigré magazine *Kultura*. The spirit of despair and hopelessness that gripped the nation in the wake of the events of March 1968 was, in his view, first and foremost a mental state, a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy that prevented the people from taking action. Real political and social change was impossible without a fundamental change in public consciousness.[63] Kołakowski penned the essay for Polish intellectuals whom he believed were infected either with "the ideology of defeatism" or with sociological analyses arguing inaction,[64] and for émigré Poles incapable of abandoning romantic and/or revolutionary, all-or-nothing thinking.[65] Contending that neither was the regime a monolith nor were the people defenseless, Kołakowski asserted that while the power of the Party was apparent, the inner contradictions of the regime should have long been exploited to bring about gradual political change. Kołakowski believed that the change that he was anticipating would mean the emergence of a true socialist society. However, the state that he was in fact describing was actually more reminiscent of a Western liberal democracy.[66] "To what extent a movement for the establishment of such society is possible depends to a considerable degree, though of course not completely, on the extent to which society believes that it is possible … Thus, in the countries of socialist despotism, those who inspire hope are also the inspirers of a movement which could make this hope real," he optimistically wrote.[67] One consequence of that position, however, was turning everyone's mind into a battlefield.[68] In the final paragraphs, alongside calling for resistance against the regime, Kołakowski declared that "the instruments of pressure are available and are at nearly everybody's disposal. They consist in drawing obvious conclusions from the simplest precepts—those which forbid silence in the face of knavery, servile subservience to those in authority, accepting alms with humility or other similar attitudes."[69] Drawing on political and social arguments to lay the foundation for hope, he acknowledged that in the end there were moral forces that might successfully undermine the regime. The essay no longer bore the impatience that marked Kołakowski's earlier works.[70] The Kołakowski who wrote it was no longer a revolutionary or a jester. His ideas now hewed closer to the concept of "evolutionism" formulated by Juliusz Mieroszewski and Jerzy Giedroyc.[71] Kołakowski's former dedication to Marxism, his comfortable position at Oxford, and his reserve toward the Catholic Church rendered him somewhat suspect in the eyes of fellow Poles. Some even found the publication of "Hope and Hopelessness" in the Paris *Kultura* "inappropriate."[72] And yet his diagnoses proved correct, and his call was eventually heard not only by émigrés, but in his homeland as well. The former revisionists, naturally, drew the most inspiration from his writing.[73] As early as 1976, Adam Michnik wrote "Nowy ewolucjonizm" (The New Evolutionism), wherein he too advocated for gradual social change.[74]

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[56] Chudoba, *Leszek Kołakowski*, 214–24.

[57] The book was published first in Israel in 1971, and then a year later by the Literary Institute in Paris.

[58] Leszek Kołakowski, *Obecność mitu* (The Presence of Myth) (Warszawa 2005), 31.

[59] Ibid., 199.

[60] Piotr Osęka, *Marzec '68* (Krakow, 2008). Kołakowski spent most of his life abroad as a fellow of All Souls College at Oxford. He was also a visiting professor at the University of Chicago, Yale University, the University of California–Berkeley, the University of New Haven, and McGill University. In the 1990s and the 2000s he collaborated with Krzysztof Michalski's Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna.

[61] Chudoba, *Leszek Kołakowski*, 230–40. Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (New York and London 2005).

[62] Cf. Edward P. Thompson, "An Open Letter to Leszek Kołakowski (1973)," in Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 2008), 303–402; and Kołakowski's response in Leszek Kołakowski, *My Correct Views on Everything* (South Bend, 2010).

[63] Cf. Dariusz Gawin, *Wielki zwrot: Ewolucja lewicy i odrodzenie idei społeczeństwa obywatelskiego 1956–1976* (Krakow, 2013), 310; Mentzel, *Kołakowski*, 283–6.

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[64] Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, "Konflikty społeczne we wschodnioeuropejskim systemie politycznym," *Aneks* 4 (1974), 17–53; cited in Mentzel, *Kołakowski*, 284–6.

[65] Mentzel, *Kołakowski*, 283–4.

[66] Cf. Sławomir Mrożek, "Słowo," *Kultura* 7–8 (1971), 107–11; cited in Mentzel, *Kołakowski*, 287.

[67] Leszek Kołakowski, "Hope and Hopelessness," *Survey: A Journal of East and West Studies* 17/3 (1971), 37–52, at 51.

[68] Cf. Gawin, *Wielki zwrot*, 316.

[69] Kołakowski, "Hope and Hopelessness," 52.

[70] Gawin notices it still in *Kapłan i błazen*. See Gawin, *Wielki zwrot*, 90.

[71] Trencsényi *et al.*, *A History of Modern Political Thought*, 85.

[72] Mentzel, *Kołakowski*, 283.

[73] Marcin Król, *Czego nas uczy Leszek Kołakowski* (Warsaw, 2010), 123–41.

[74] Adam Michnik, "Nowy ewolucjonizm," in Michnik, *Szanse Polskiej Demokracji: Artykuły i Eseje* (London, 1984), 77–87.

Kołakowski spoke of a communal hope, the hope of Eastern European peoples for national independence and democracy, but he did not reflect on it on either an individual, an existential, or a philosophical level. Neither did the essay carry any references to transcendence. Yet it could be read from the perspective of the tension between radical empiricism, its apparent certitude and explanatory power on the one hand, and meaning-generating culture on the other, as it was described, for example, in *The Presence of Myth*. The fall of the authoritarian regime was not simply a matter of "empirical data." Practically understood, hope was a matter of national survival, and to have hope, in Kołakowski's view, a nation, just like an individual, had to find its own existence valuable.[75] National and personal hopes both built themselves on efforts to retrieve meaning from existence. Hope required truthfulness, and the ability to call things what they are.[76] Words had to have meaning, Kołakowski warned elsewhere, and argued that it was the duty of intellectuals to preserve the truthfulness of language.[77] Interestingly enough, Kołakowski did not insist on *finding* meaning. Mere *searching* for it was, in his view, enough to hope, because looking for meaning was an expression of care, a turning away from desperation and indifference.

Did phenomenology play any role in formulating Kołakowski's understanding of hope? The answer can be affirmative but the influence was only indirect. His reflection on phenomenology could be discussed as a special example of his attitude toward philosophical systems in general. Kołakowski understood hope the way he did not because he thought Husserl was right, but because he thought Husserl was in many aspects wrong. Phenomenology, one of the most important philosophical currents of the twentieth century, was, in Kołakowski's view, just another example of a system making an unrealistic, eschatological promise.[78] Presenting itself as a "true science," it attempted to bring meaning to the world.[79] In his writing, Kołakowski referred neither to Scheler nor to any other phenomenologist apart from Husserl, even though he met Marcel, Ricoeur, and Levinas at various conferences.[80] He exchanged letters with Ingarden and wrote an entry on him for the *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*.[81] Reflecting on Husserl's philosophy was for Kołakowski a step further in clarifying his skeptically culturalist position initiated in the *The Presence of Myth*: human beings need values and find themselves in a world where values are in a way given, but cannot prove to themselves the rational, philosophical validity of values. Their validity and "obviousness" stem from culture, namely from the need for *sacrum*. Viewed through such a lens, phenomenology was in itself a kind of a philosophical myth, an expression of human hope for finding meaning.

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[75] Cf. the 1973 essay "Sprawa polska" (The Polish Question), where he wrote, "there is little utility in discussing how that [the belief that the existence of a given nation is a value in itself] can be grounded, because we already know that there is no other way to do that than to acknowledge that it is impossible to live without, that our existence—as mankind, as nations, as individuals—comes implicit with that belief." Leszek Kołakowski, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony?* (Warsaw, 2006), 301, cf. 302, 304.

[76] Ibid., 302.

[77] Cf. Kołakowski's 1975 essay "O nas samych" (About Ourselves) in ibid. It would be interesting here to compare the public responsibilities of intellectuals and Husserl's reflection on constituting the social realm through acts of speech (cf., for example, Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*), but unfortunately that exceeds the scope of this article. Marcel also conceived hope as detachment from determinism (Marcel, "Sketch of a Phenomenology," 41). Cf. also Kołakowski and Mentzel, *Czas ciekawy, czas niespokojny*, 2: 18.

[78] Kołakowski considered the two-volume history of the phenomenological movement written by Herbert Spiegelberg (1960) a very good textbook. He wrote, "at last we have a lecture on phenomenology written without flair!" Leszek Kołakowski, "Fenomenologia, której można się nauczyć" (Phenomenology That Can Be Learned)" (1962), in Kołakowski, *Pochwała niekonsekwencji: Pisma rozproszone sprzed 1968*, vol. 3 (London, 2002), 71–8, at 71.

[79] Cf. Kołakowski, *Obecność mitu*. Cf. Gubser, *The Far* Reaches, 213.

[80] Chudoba, *Leszek Kołakowski*, 141, 175–6, 337, 401.

At one point, Kołakowski found himself, as he put it in a lecture at Yale in 1975, "negatively dependent on Husserl."[82] He might have been referring to the 1950s, when showing the superiority of Marxism required demonstrating phenomenology's errors, or to his own articles and seminars, in which, after describing phenomenology's premises and challenges, he claimed it to be "a fiction, explained only as the product of a mystified consciousness."[83] Yet still he viewed phenomenology as the greatest and most serious of all twentieth-century attempts to identify the fundamental sources of cognition, and praised Husserl for foregrounding the unpleasant dilemma: either consistent empiricism with its relativistic and skeptical consequences that would ruin culture sooner or later, or transcendental dogmatism which was nothing else than arbitrary decision.[84] It was a dilemma Kołakowski tried to solve himself, and in looking for the answer he could not help but relate to Husserl's philosophy. His main charge against the author of *The Crisis of European Sciences* was that any philosophical project predicated on subjectivity must end in subjectivity, thus leaving moral conflicts essentially irresolvable, and that the notion of Truth, understood as absolute certitude, is unreachable without grounding it in a kind of Transcendence.[85] While Kołakowski did not agree on that, he declared that he believed that "whoever consistently rejects the transcendentalist idea is bound to reject not only the 'absolute truth' but truth *tout court*, not only the certitude as something already gained but the certitude as a hope as well."[86] As we can see, Kołakowski identifies simple, everyday, "practical" truth with hope. Kołakowski found the dilemma between empiricism and transcendentalism ultimately irresolvable.

Eventually, Kołakowski would side with the preservation of culture, even though he was aware that its premises were not rationally granted.[87] Husserl's search for certitude was, in the end, the search for meaning, and that meaning—in Kołakowski's view—had religious rather than intellectual roots.[88] As Kołakowski situated religion in the sphere of the irrational and the mythological, the meaning Kołakowski would personally embrace was secular, albeit somehow rooted in the infinite, in "an illusion of immortality," as he said in his book on Spinoza.[89] Recognizing the presence of the *sacrum* within a culture does not imply belief in God, Kołakowski insisted.[90] Referring directly to Christianity, Kołakowski pointed elsewhere at its paradoxical structure: although omnipotent, God cannot stay the consequences of human good and evil, not to mention suspend the very notion of good and evil. God's justice leaves no room for hope, because it is irrational to hope. And yet God, merciful and loving, may forgive evil, thus making hope possible. Hope in God's forgiveness, therefore, stems from an irrational act of faith.[91] Here Kołakowski seems to have followed the Augustinian *credo ut intelligam* and Blaise Pascal's intuitions.[92]

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[81] Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford and New York, 1995).

[82] Leszek Kołakowski, *Husserl and the Search for Certitude* (New Haven, 1975), 4.

[83] Leszek Kołakowski, "Husserl: Filozofia doświadczenia rozumiejącego," in Leszek Kołakowski and Krzysztof Pomian, eds., *Filozofia i socjologia XX wieku*, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1965), 1: 273–98, at 293.

[84] Kołakowski, *Husserl and the Search for Certitude*, 85.

[85] Ibid., 28–9. Cf. Leszek Kołakowski, *Metaphysical Horror* (Oxford 1988). Cf. Czyżewski, *Kołakowski i poszukiwanie pewności*, 166.

[86] Kołakowski, *Husserl and the Search for Certitude*, 28–9.

[87] Ibid., 84–5.

[88] Ibid., 84.

Where Leszek Kołakowski wrote and spoke of hope only sparingly and Václav Havel explored it in his speeches, interviews, and essays, Józef Tischner, the first chaplain of the Solidarity movement, made hope the very center of his philosophy and reflected on it regularly, going so far as to call his first book, a collection of essays, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei* (The World of Human Hope).[93] Kołakowski's idea of phenomenology was formed mainly by the author of *Cartesian Meditations*. Tischner, meanwhile, drew on many authors from the phenomenological movement. Although his definitions of hope remained vague, there were clues that helped situate it in the context of twentieth-century philosophy and theology. The spectrum of his inquiries was remarkably broad.

Józef Tischner's art of hoping

Preparing himself for priesthood, Tischner, although deeply concerned, did not engage in public affairs, understanding his vocation as a means of service.[94] Following his ordination, he continued his philosophical studies in Warsaw, later moving to Krakow in 1957 and focusing on Husserl's philosophy. In 1963, he defended his doctoral dissertation, supervised by Roman Ingarden at the Jagiellonian University, which paved the way for his becoming an academic teacher. In the early 1970s, following his return from a scholarship at the University of Louvain, Józef Tischner began to take an active part in Polish Catholic intellectual life. He abandoned Thomism in favor of phenomenology and existentialism in what amounted to something of an intellectual scandal, in the wake of which his Catholic orthodoxy came into question.[95] He became a valued lecturer, and, with time, a participant in independent intellectual initiatives. In the late 1970s, the network of dissident initiatives gradually became dense with the support of socially active lay Catholics. As the head chaplain of the Polish Solidarity movement, which numbered over nine million Poles, he published *The Spirit of Solidarity*, a collection of sermons and short essays later translated into eight languages and published over thirty times in Poland and abroad, by official publishers and underground outlets. The ethics of solidarity appeared to him as his biggest phenomenologically driven philosophizing adventure. He believed that it could only be described with the help of phenomenological methodologies.[96]

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[89] Cf. Kołakowski's comments on Spinoza in Leszek Kołakowski, *Jednostka i nieskończoność: Wolność i antynomie wolności w filozofii Spinozy* (Warsaw, 1958), 622–3.

[90] Kołakowski and Mentzel, *Czas ciekawy, czas niespokojny*, 1: 228–9.

[91] Kołakowski, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony?*.

[92] Leszek Kołakowski, *Bóg nam nic nie jest dłużny: Krótka uwaga o religii Pascala i o duchu jansenizmu* (Krakow, 2001), Cf. Cornel West, "On Leszek Kołakowski's *Religion,*" in West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids and Trenton, 1993), 216–21.

[93] Józef Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei: wybór szkiców filozoficznych, 1966–1975* (Krakow, 1994).

[94] These and following biographical details come from Wojciech Bonowicz, *Tischner* (Krakow, 2001).

[95] Józef Tischner, "Schyłek chrześcijaństwa tomistycznego," in Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości* (Krakow, 2011), 223–48. Cf. Ciżewska-Martyńska, "Aquinas and Józef Tischner on Hope," 6–7.

In 1982, together with Krzysztof Michalski, Tischner founded the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, a hub for intellectuals from both East and West. It was also Michalski who introduced Tischner to Kołakowski. Unlike Kołakowski, Tischner did not see any dogmatism in Husserl, Scheller, or Levinas, and argued instead that Kołakowski simply failed to recognize the special status of phenomenology's "rationalism," on account of his excessively positivist framing thereof.[97] Tischner also pointed out that, informed by Mircea Eliade, Kołakowski's understanding of the *sacrum* could not serve as a universal lens through which to view religion. Kołakowski's *sacrum* was about fear and delight, attraction and repulsion, rather than about truthseeking, good, evil, responsibility or strengthening bonds between individuals, Tischner argued.[98] Still, the two agreed that values could be in conflict and that there could be tension between different hopes.

Tischner claimed to have been shaped by Husserl's ideas, despite their "dullness and overbearing tedium,"[99] and believed he owed Husserl two things. One was "[w]hat medieval metaphysics called light, and what we today call meaning. The theory of meaning is merely an attempt to glimpse the light," he wrote.[100] The other, meanwhile, was the "fundamental belief in the importance of reason" that he shared with the German philosopher: "Husserl's premise was that the European mind had to be revived, rationalized, made more reasonable. It was under this Husserlian spell that I encountered Heidegger's writings."[101] In studying Heidegger, Tischner focused on the question of authenticity and inauthenticity.[102]

Husserl's influence on Tischner's work waned in the wake of the birth of the Polish Solidarity movement.[103] Husserl's concepts of meaning, essence, horizon, and the world turned out to be a ladder that Tischner climbed to formulate his own philosophy of drama.[104] He became a benevolent critic of Husserl, and between 1978 and 1983 he read mostly Hegel and Kierkegaard.[105] Still, he dedicated half of his book *Myślenie według wartości* (Thinking with Values) to Husserl,

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[96] Józef Tischner and T. Szyma, "Pracujemy w sercu kultury: Rozmowa z księdzem profesorem Józefem Tischnerem," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 25 (1981), 3. Cf. Mazur, *Przekroczyć nowoczesność*, 415.

[97] Cf. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 42.

[98] Józef Tischner, "Kołakowski i Kartezjusz," in Tischner, *Obecność: Rozmowy o dziedzictwie, rozmowy o teraźniejszości, rozmowy o życiu i życiorysach* (London, 1987), 83–90, at 88–9.

[99] Michnik, Tischner, and Żakowski, *Między panem a plebanem*, 257.

[100] Ibid., 257.

[101] Ibid., 258.

[102] Ibid., 261.

[103] Adam Workowski, "Tischner i Husserl: Dzieje fascynacji," in Zbigniew Stawrowski, ed., *Józef Tischner: Polska filozofia wolności a myśl europejska* (Kraków 2022), 13–26.

[104] Ibid., 24. Józef Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu* (Paris, 1990).

[105] Workowski, "Tischner i Husserl," 17. Cf. Józef Tischner, "Między pytaniem a odpowiedzią, czyli u źródeł obiektywizmu," *Studia Filozoficzne* 5/6 (1983), 115–25.

Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Levinas, and Paul Ricoeur, as he did many other addresses.[106] He also commented on and incorporated their ideas in his essays, typically without citing them directly.[107] Like Scheler, he focused on ethics. Michael Gubser sees traces of Husserl's influence on Tischner in the latter's understanding of the "mutuality of conscience and responsibility, the solidarity of mission directed at the good, the primordial sociality of ethical pursuit."[108] Scheler's ideas, meanwhile, echoed in Tischner's "hope for a renewed solidarity through Christian love, the call for reorientation to absolute values, and the elevation of ethical-cum-cultural community," and objections to senseless work.[109] It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Schelerian idea of bonds of solidarity also resonated in Tischner's idea of the nature of hope.

Hope had appeared as a subject in Tischner's essays and sermons already in the early 1970s, following his return to Poland, and it remained a key issue for him until his death in 2000. Tischner held that modernity mired mankind in a profound crisis of hope, and while in the 1970s his philosophy and his resulting approach to the question of hope could be considered "therapeutical" and axiological, as he focused on the human condition,[110] in the 1980s he shifted his focus to public affairs, and the social and political significance of hope. He believed that the task of the philosopher was "to understand and to give names,"[111] but, like Havel, Tischner did not seek to *explain* the world in the first place. Putting aside his intellectual ambitions, Tischner observed, "From what you can think about, you must necessarily choose what you *need* to think about."[112] While he saw himself as a vanguard, bringing contemporary philosophy to Poland,[113] at the same time he would elaborate a novel philosophy centering the individual—the philosophy of life—which, he believed, could be a unique Polish contribution to the body of European philosophy. The novel philosophy was supposed to be rooted in extraordinary sensitivity to the human condition, and in testimonies of people like Father Maximilian Kolbe, who volunteered to the take place of a fellow Auschwitz inmate sentenced to death, or Antoni Kępiński, a psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, who, in Tischner's opinion, "knew more about the human person than Freud, Heidegger, and Levinas."[114] Wishing to foster dialogue between contemporary philosophy and

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[106] For Tischner's lectures on them see e.g. Józef Tischner, *Etyka a historia: Wykłady* (Krakow, 2008); and Tischner, *Filozofia poznania: Wykłady* (Kraków 2021).

[107] Cf. Józef Tischner, *The Spirit of Solidarity* (London, 1984).

[108] Gubser, *The Far Reaches*, 222.

[109] Ibid., 222. Cf. Max Scheler, *Arbeit und Ethik*, in Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, *Frühe Schriften* (Bern and Munich, 1971), 161–96. On Scheler's idea of solidarity see Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*. Cf. Karol Wojtyła on solidarity in *Person and Act*. Tischner was inspired by Scheler's personalistic ethics and framed his own understanding of the crisis of modernity in ethical and anthropological terms. He did not discuss it in civilizational terms. He did not refer to Scheler's political views. When commenting on a relation between phenomenology and sociology, he referred to Husserl, not to Scheler. Cf. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 74–92.

[110] Tomasz Ponikło, *Tischner: Nadzieja na miarę próby. Ostatnie słowa* (Krakow, 2020), 35.

[111] Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 9.

[112] Ibid., original emphasis.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid., 8. Cf. Anna Karoń-Ostrowska and Józef Tischner, *Spotkanie: Z ks. Józefem Tischnerem rozmawia Anna Karoń-Ostrowska* (Krakow, 2003), 77–80.

Christianity, Tischner chose against juxtaposing the "hopes of this world" with "Christian hope." Instead, he sought "a formula for meaning that would allow any individual engaged with the changing world to find themselves reflected in the hope that shall reveal to them a different engagement and a different world."[115] In this endeavor, phenomenology was in the first place a method, rather than a worldview, since Tischner's writing was a reaction to social affairs and not a political agenda.[116] Tischner's commentary certainly deepened the understanding of the events of the 1980s, but did the "homespun philosophy and social ethics actually grow into a fully fledged social philosophy" as had happened with Augustine and Hegel, thus making Tischner's dreams reality?[117] Well, perhaps not, but his works certainly lent phenomenological ideas a great deal of gravitas.

Tischner offered many definitions of hope, most of them rooted in metaphor and inspired by Marcel, whom he met in 1968 in Vienna. Describing hope as a basic human experience and a basic value,[118] Tischner also called it "an act of trusteeship" toward God and fellow individuals;[119] a bond between people, as well as between people and God;[120] a sparkle; and an act of participation in the human community.[121] In his view, hope could only be understood through the lens of the idea of good.[122]

Hope and hoping comprise an integral, fundamental part of the human condition, and different philosophical currents have, throughout history, tried to describe and elucidate it. Some of these attempts Tischner found counterproductive, because instead of teaching people how to hope—how to relate with others, seek meaning, and assume responsibility—they instead bound people to the material world and made them dream about an unrealistic future.[123] Among these philosophies, which Tischner came to call "terraistic," from the Latin *terra*, or earth, was Marxism—in 1981 Tischner wrote, "Marxism performs a drastic surgery on human hopes … The ethical horizon of Marxism is earthbound, 'terraistic,' while the hope of socialization is a 'terraistic' one. It understands human beings exclusively as creatures capable of operating with rational force, i.e., labor, and due to this proficiency, able to feel ever more deeply 'at home' on earth."[124] Tischner had the same misgivings toward Marxism that Marcel and Havel had toward technocratic civilization. Their critique stemmed from the same phenomenological and existential premises, joined—in the case of Tischner—by certain religious positions. While rightly pointing out the issues related to labor and exploitation, Marxism was founded on an "anthropological error," because it failed to acknowledge the liberty and dignity of every human being.[125] Discussing Polish Marxism, Tischner noticed Kołakowski's attachment to the idea of dignity, but was skeptical whether Kołakowski would be able to see dignity in workers and farmers who happened to be Catholic.[126]

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[115] Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 7.

[116] Tischner, *The Spirit of Solidarity*.

[117] Józef Tischner, "Myślenie o ethosie społecznym," in Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 496–509, at 509.

[118] Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 5.

[119] Ibid., 6, 99–116, 333–52; Tischner, *The Spirit of Solidarity*; Józef Tischner, *Wiara ze słuchania: Kazania starosądeckie 1980–1992* (Krakow, 2009), 134–8. Cf. Ponikło, *Tischner: Nadzieja na miarę próby*, 5.

[120] Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 343–9.

[121] Józef Tischner, *Nadzieja mimo wszystko* (Krakow, 2020), 7.

[122] Cf. Wojciech Zalewski, "Zagadnienie nadziei w myśli Józefa Tischnera," *Kwartalnik filozoficzny* 46/3 (2018), 103–15, at 104.

[123] Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 68. Józef Tischner, "Rozważania na progu jutra," in Kazimierz Bukowski, ed., *Filozofia chrześcijańska w dialogu* (Krakow, 1983), 170–84, at 171–2. Ciżewska-Martyńska, "Aquinas and Józef Tischner on Hope."

[124] Józef Tischner, *Marxism and Christianity: The Quarrel and the Dialogue in Poland* (Washington, DC, 1987), 70.

Tragedy and transcendence

Tischner called his own philosophy "the philosophy of drama" or agathology (from the Greek *agathos*, or "good").[127] Recognizing one's own dignity, an individual finds in themselves a certain value, Tischner argued. Discovering value in oneself opens up the possibility of discovering values in others and the outside world, providing the basis for hope.[128] While values present in abundance in the world should be recognized and respected, they are too often denied and downplayed, a fact that makes the human condition all the more tragic.[129] Citing Scheler, Tischner, however, viewed hope as a response to that tragedy.[130]

This prompted Tischner to address metaphysical questions in an unorthodox manner, discussing them from not only philosophical, but also religious and psychological, angles. In the drama of the constant tension between good and evil, between hope and despair, the good of a given person and those that surround them is at stake, as is their possible communion with God. Following Levinas, Tischner argued that meeting the Other places a person in the realm of transcendence, because seeing the face of the Other inevitably begets the question of what is good for that person and what is their most fundamental hope.[131]

Growth and heroism

Hope, an experience universal to all mankind, must itself undergo a process of maturation, must be put on trial,[132] Tischner wrote, adding that hopes untried were but mere dreams,[133] while hopes not moored in reality were immature.[134] This maturation of hope was supposedly tied to the psychological maturation of an individual, and their resultant ability to see how the individual's own hopes are tied to the hopes of others, to care for the hopes one is entrusted with by their children, spouses, and fellow citizens.[135] Christian faith was to help in this process. For Tischner, whether small or big, earthbound or supernatural, all hope was interconnected.[136] And maturing *within hope* meant transcending oneself for the sake of the other, a process that may have led to acts of personal heroism.[137] In the social realm, hopes must pass a test of logic and factuality; they cannot be inherently contradictory, and must be formed taking into account what must be done, what may be done, and what should be done, leaving room for history to unfold.[138] Tischner, like Havel, rejected revolutionary thinking.

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[125] Krzysztof Michalski, "Tischner i Kołakowski", in Michalski, *Eseje o Bogu i śmierci* (Warsaw, 2014), 111–23 at 114. Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 13.

[126] Michalski, "Tischner i Kołakowski," 111, 118, 121. When writing *Marxism and Christianity*, Tischner did not know Kołakowski personally. Their future encounter, orchestrated by Michalski, could have been one of the reasons why Tischner decided against republishing the book during his lifetime.

[127] Before presenting his "agathology," Tischner developed the concept of the "axiological I" in polemic with Husserl's "transcendental I." Cf. Tischner, "Między pytaniem a odpowiedzią", Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu*. Cf. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*.

[128] Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 6.

[129] Cf. Scheler, "On the Tragic." Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 533.

[130] Józef Tischner, "Wiązania nadziei," in Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 333–52, at 337–8. Tischner cited *On the Tragic*.

[131] Józef Tischner, "Etyka wartości i nadziei," in Jan A. Kłoczowski, Józef Tischner, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Józef Paściak, eds., *Wobec wartości* (Poznań, 1984), 55–149.

[132] Józef Tischner, "Praca nad nadzieją bliźniego," in Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 99–116, at 106. Cf. Ponikło, *Tischner: Nadzieja na miarę próby*.

Hope as engagement

For Tischner, hope was, by nature, interpersonal and social, as it "fed" itself on encounters with other people.[139] Existentially speaking, it is a person who hopes, rather than societies or nations, but Tischner still noticed that certain hopes were collective: hopes for social and political change, for a more just society, or for less suffering. These social hopes are not defined by *who* is hoping, but by what people are hoping *for*. It was the proliferation of the dissident movement in Central Europe and the birth of the Polish Solidarity movement that prompted him to formulate his thoughts on this matter. Reflecting on them, Tischner drew inspiration from Hegel, St Augustine, and Martin Heidegger, and maintained a line of dialogue with Marxism.[140]

Tischner also pointed at the role that social ethos played in forming social hopes, choosing between them, and understanding their meaning. Choosing between hopes is dramatic, as it often entails sacrificing one hope for the sake of another. Following Ricoeur, Tischner found hopes to be naturally directed toward the future, which in itself might prompt utopian thinking, he argued. Whereas utopias are inevitable in social life—seeing as they are based on values important to a given community and thus help discern and recognize these values, alongside broadening communal self-understanding—they also downplay the power of evil, which is why they ought to be confronted with logic and fact.[141] Hope is the foundation of any involvement in public matters, and of any activism.[142] Furthermore, hope expresses itself in human labor, which Tischner also saw as a form of dialogue.[143]

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[133] Tischner, "Praca nad nadzieją bliźniego," 113–14.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Cf. Marcel, "Sketch of a Phenomenology," 41.

[136] Józef Tischner, "Wiązania nadziei," in Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 333–52. Cf. Ricoeur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems." Cf. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*.

[137] Tischner, "Wiązania nadziei," 333–52; Tischner, "Praca nad nadzieją bliźniego," 106–10.

[138] Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Notre Dame, 2019).

[139] Marcel also associated hope with the communion (Marcel, "Sketch of a Phenomenology," 58). In his view, hope aimed at "reunion, at recollection, at reconciliation" (ibid., 53). Earlier, he wrote, "we shall have to ask ourselves if 'I place my hope in you' is not really the most authentic form of 'I hope'" (ibid., 41). Cf. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*.

[140] Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 5–10; Tischner, *Marxism and Christianity*; Tischner, *The Spirit of Solidarity*; Tischner, "Myślenie o ethosie społecznym," 496–509.

[141] Ibid., 501–3.

Václav Havel in a quest for meaning

When Dubček's reforms were abandoned, the new Communist leader, Gustáv Husák, steered the regime back onto the pre-Prague Spring course, beginning the over-twenty-year-long period of "normalization." At the time, Havel penned and signed protest letters (including an open letter to Husák), wrote plays, founded an underground publishing house, and worked as a laborer.[144] Czechoslovak society slid into apathy. The situation was partly changed by the creation of Charter 77, the nucleus of a social movement that was intended to protect basic civil rights and was formed in response to the repressions suffered by the band the Plastic People of the Universe.[145] In January 1977, the Charter's declaration was signed by 242 intellectuals, including Jan Patočka and Václav Havel, who were the Charter's spokesmen (together with Jiry Hajek). The signatories worked closely with the Polish Workers' Defense Committee, established in 1976, and later the Solidarity movement.[146] In 1978 Havel was one of the cofounders of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted (VONS) and wrote his famous essay "The Power of the Powerless." Because of his involvement with the Charter, Havel would be repeatedly detained by the Communist authorities over the following years. The Czech dissident movement was formed primarily by intellectuals and had a markedly different character than Poland's Solidarity, which was a universal movement, marked by Catholicism, uniting various intellectual and political circles, eager to formulate social and political programs, and drawing on national traditions.[147] In Czechoslovakia, the Catholic Church—just like nearly every religion—was practically expelled from the public sphere and persecuted.

Václav Havel's intellectual trajectory was not as bumpy as Kołakowski's, and not as meandering as Tischner's. Intellectually, Havel remained in the circle of phenomenology and existentialism, and politically within the sphere of broadly understood social democracy. His writing was heavily influenced by the ideas of Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Jan Belohradsky, and Jan Patočka, but he was also a highly original author in his own right.[148] When Leszek Kołakowski mentioned living in truth and respecting one's own dignity as a means toward democracy and national independence, he seemed embarrassed and confounded, and felt obliged to stress that "it was not a fantasy."[149] Havel had no such concerns. Being a writer, he was not afraid of pathos, not burdened by the court jester's hat, and expressed himself decisively and thoughtfully. Havel called for a moral "existential revolution" instead of a political one. In "The Power of the Powerless" he considered living in truth the primary force underpinning his antipolitics: a weapon against the state corrupted by ideology and—echoing Kołakowski—the mendacious language of the Communist Party. The sense of powerlessness and hopelessness that swept him after the Prague Spring proved the importance of finding meaning in every circumstance. As he stated in one of his addresses, on 26 July 1990,

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[142] Ibid., 503–4.

[143] Tischner, *The Spirit of Solidarity*.

[144] Zantovsky, *Havel: A Life*.

[145] Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*. Cf. Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge, 2011).

[146] Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*. The Charter was dissolved in 1992 after the fall of the Soviet Bloc. The original declaration was signed by nearly 2,500 people, many of whom took an active part in the Velvet Revolution, and were later involved in political and social activities.

[147] Dubet, Touraine, and Wieviorka, *Solidarity: The Analysis of a Social Movement*, Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park, 1994), Maryjane Osa, *Solidarity and Contention: Networks of Polish Opposition* (Minneapolis, 2003).

[148] Gubser, *The Far Reaches*; Tucker, *Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence*.

> feeling empty and losing touch with the meaning of life are in essence only a challenge to seek new things to fill one's life, a new meaning for one's existence and one's work. Isn't it the moment of most profound doubt that gives birth to new certainties? Perhaps hopelessness is the very soil that nourishes human hope; perhaps one could never find sense in life without first experiencing its absurdity.[150]

Havel held little in the way of philosophical ambitions. He used phenomenological and existential terms without precision, driven rather by their metaphorical language and performative potential than their scholarly accuracy. His critique of the technological society resembled Husserl's critique of the ambition of modern sciences and their impact on human matters.[151] Just like Husserl and Patočka, Havel believed that science and technology could not provide answers to any important questions, and thus could not be the source of meaning in human life. Mankind must then look for meaning elsewhere, in the pre-political and pre-technological world of human values, which the individual gets to know by intuition, and in encounters with real people "here and now."[152] Havel shared Patočka's contempt for contemporary technological civilization, which leaves no room for metaphysical concerns.[153] He repeated after the author of *Plato and Europe*—and very much in accordance with Kołakowski's reasoning—that only the sacred is capable of endowing life with meaning.[154] It is important to note here that the sacred he wrote about did not have a strictly religious character. Mired in boredom and unable to live without at least some sense of meaning, mankind attempts to satisfy its metaphysical needs and achieve transcendence through violence and consumption.[155] Neither, however, can provide it with what it wants, which must inevitably lead to cataclysm. Still, in 1978 he argued that the crisis that the Eastern European societies were facing was just another incarnation of the crisis imposed on the modern world by technological thinking. In Eastern Europe, that crisis took the form of totalitarianism driven by Marxist ideology, whereas in Western Europe it was consumerism. Comfort offered by mechanization and material stability was not what the people really longed for, Havel wrote.[156] In his eyes, making one's own life meaningful was more important than living in comfort and security. Consequently, he dismissed utilitarian interpretations of happiness. Such a point of departure naturally implied a rejection of any form of ideologically driven thinking and any form of violence. Patočka's cure involved scrutiny of one's soul; that is, the constant examination of oneself and one's responses to the world.[157] Speaking in this respect of "existential revolution,"[158] Havel dreamt of a moral renaissance of society, necessarily entailing a radical renewal of the bond between human beings—which the "existential revolution" was a means to achieve. He considered all "earthly" goals secondary to the most fundamental objective: caring for one's own soul, and leaving no room for seeing hope as a mere tactic or a means to some end—an approach he remained remarkably consistent in.

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[149] Kołakowski, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony?*, 304.

[150] Václav Havel, "The Salzburg Festival," in Havel, *The Art of the Impossible: Politics and Morality in Practice* (New York, 1998), 48–54, at 54.

[151] Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York, 1965).

[152] This notion resonates with Marcel's understanding of hope as "not interested in the *how*," and his assertion that "this fact shows how fundamentally untechnical it is, for technical thought, by definition, never separates the consideration of ends and means." Marcel, "Sketch of a Phenomenology," 51, original emphasis.

[153] Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago, 1996).

[154] Ibid., 98–9. Cf. James Krapfl, "Boredom, Apocalypse, and Beyond: Reading Havel through Patočka," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 32/2 (2018), 280, DOI 10.1177/0888325417752251.

[155] Cf. Václav Havel, "The Academy of Humanities and Political Sciences," in Havel, *The Art of the Impossible*, 103–8, at 106; Patočka, *Heretical Essays*; Cf. Krapfl, "Boredom, Apocalypse, and Beyond", 280–81.

The recurring question "Is there any meaning to our efforts, and if so, what is it?" could not be answered by drawing on any given theory or on the outside world, Havel asserted in a letter to his wife, Olga,[159] adding that it could only be found within, in one's "faith in the general meaning of things, in one's hope."[160] The claim carried echoes of Marcel and Held's concepts of "absolute hope." What is the source of this meaning and hope, as Havel conceives them, and what is their horizon? Is it "the experience of God"?[161] While Havel did not consider himself a good Christian, did not follow any "global religion," and did not call for a renaissance of either religiosity or piety, he still acknowledged that he had an "intimately omnipresent" partner who was his "conscience," "hope," "freedom," and "the mystery of the world."[162] Havel's reflection on hope takes place within the terrain demarcated by his conversation with this inner partner.

Below, we will turn to questions stemming from this dialogue: the perspective of death and transcendence, hope's relationship with religion, politics, and the right and wrong modes of hoping. In Havel's essays from the 1970s and 1980s hope often remains unnamed, even if it is obvious that Havel writes in hope of an existential revolution first, and of social and political change second. Since the 1990s, Havel had been addressing hope directly.

In 1995, when he launched the Future of Hope Conference in Hiroshima, Havel declared that "hope is usually hope *in* something or *for* something."[163] It is

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[156] Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," *East European Politics and Societies* 32/2 (2018), 353–408.

[157] Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Petr Lom (Stanford, 2002).

[158] Havel, "The Power of the Powerless."

[159] Václav Havel, *Listy do Olgi* (Warsaw and Wrocław, 1993), 19, letter dated 7 Aug. 1980 (n. 41).

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid. Cf. Václav Havel, "The Future of Hope Conference," in Havel, *The Art of the Impossible*, 236–43, at 242. Cf. Ricoeur, "Freedom in the Light of Hope."

[163] Havel, "The Future of Hope Conference," 237, original emphasis.

> above all a state of mind, and … as such either we have it or we don't, quite independently of the state of affairs immediately around us. Hope is simply an existential phenomenon which has nothing to do with predicting the future … [It] is related to the very feeling that life has meaning, and as long as we feel that it does, we have a reason to live.[164]

Whereas Kołakowski would agree that hope is "a state of mind," an attitude taken toward this or that event, issue, or challenge, Havel went further. For him it was "an existential phenomenon," not a mere response to challenge, but one of mankind's universal experiences, and a distinctly human trait. Which is why hope "does not come from the outside … [it] is not something to be found in external indications simply when a course of action may turn out well."[165] And where Kołakowski would look—at least to some extent—for pragmatic reasons for hope, such as "internal contradictions of the regime" or "the presence of the intelligentsia," Havel would instead stress that "hope does not draw its life-giving sap from its specific object. It works the other way around: hope enlivens its object, infuses it with life, illuminates it."[166] Both Kołakowski and Havel would emphasize the transformative power of hope and its role in bringing about change, but for Kołakowski hope was a matter of decision, a means to an end, whereas for Havel not only did it transform reality, but also it would first and the foremost simply make reality "unfold," thus enabling the individual to make reality known. Drawing on Heideggerian language, Havel explained, "the primary origin of hope is … metaphysical … [A]lways most profound, is humanity's experience with its own Being and with the Being of the world."[167] This observation brought Havel to the subject of death.

Death and transcendence

Havel, of course, was aware that many factors contributed to understanding hope as a state of mind—genetics, culture, psychology, lifestyle, and so on—but, as mentioned above, the most important among them was "humanity's experience with its own Being and with the Being of the world."[168] This experience must inevitably lead to questions of death and transcendence, because "nearly all the essential things we strive for … clearly transcend the horizon of our own lives," he argued.[169] Treating death as the end of everything deprives life of any meaning. Consequently, Havel saw as archetypical the belief that one's life is not a mere coincidence. Awareness of death is "key to the fulfillment of human life in the best sense of the word," he wrote.[170] The case for embedding hope in transcendence comes to the foreground in Havel's work and comprises much of Tischner's entire philosophy. "Without the experience of the transcendental, neither hope nor human responsibility has any meaning," Havel would assert.[171] Transcendence went under different names in his writing, many of them of Heideggerian provenance, including "the infinite and the eternal, recognized or surmised," "the great and mysterious order of Being," "the memory of Being," and "the miracle of Being,"[172] and clearly implied some mutual relationship between hope and religion. Havel was interested in religion in as far as it brought people a sense of responsibility and transcendence, and helped them "grasp and articulate anew humanity's essential, fundamental spiritual experience."[173] Because of its universality, Havel believed that the experience could help establish common ground between different peoples. In 1995 he said that "if humanity has any hope of a decent future, it lies in the awakening of a universal sense of responsibility, the kind of responsibility unrepresented in the world of transient and temporal earthly interests," later adding, "As you can see, I, too, have pinned my hope on something specific—the undeniable, and undeniably universal, roots of humanity's awareness of itself."[174]

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[164] Ibid., 236–7. Cf. Held's idea of the hopeful mood.

[165] Havel, "The Future of Hope Conference," 236.

[166] Ibid., 237.

[167] Ibid., 238.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid., 240.

Politics and the art of hoping

The problem of responsibility and the possibility of metaphysical awareness that emerged in the closing lines of the previous paragraph bring us closer to the challenges of politics. Havel defined politics as "the art of impossible, namely, the art of improving ourselves and the world."[175] In the political realm, hope came not from governments or parliaments, but from "participation and therefore responsible action from us all."[176] Kołakowski called on dissidents to change their way of thinking and engage in intellectual pursuits, while Havel and Tischner argued that active involvement in public affairs was often the outcome of leading a hopeful existence. Not only did Havel broaden the group of individuals that could get into politics; he also listed the many potential avenues for this involvement. Furthermore, rather than limit himself to just intellectuals as Kołakowski did, Havel extended his call to the whole of the body politic.

In 1992, summarizing his experiences with totalitarianism and the first years of his presidential term, Havel noted that under the regime, people "did not and indeed could not lose the need for hope, because without hope a meaningful life is impossible. So they waited for Godot."[177] Godot, the protagonist of Becket's famous play, embodies universal salvation, the perfect resolution of all of mankind's problems and challenges, the salvation that comes from outside and not from within, "an illusion," "the product of our helplessness, a patch over a hole in the spirit," "a form of self-deception and therefore a waste of time."[178] Communism was supposed to bring this kind of salvation but failed to deliver on that promise, hence Havel's distinction between "good" and "bad" waiting. The latter was the eponymous "waiting for Godot," at its core "a desperate impatience" underpinned by a feeling that the world changes too slowly and in the "wrong" direction.[179] His diagnosis conceived it as an emanation of the greater problem of "the destructive impatience of the contemporary technocratic civilization," which he saw as stemming from "a vain belief in the primacy of reason"[180] and assuming erroneously "that the world is nothing but a crossword puzzle to be solved, that there is only one correct way—the so-called objective way—to solve it, and that it is entirely up to me whether I succeed or not," he contended.[181] The impatient person considers themselves master of reality and believes that time belongs to them, whereas a prudent, patient person understands that the world has its own mysterious way of Being, its own meandering.[182]

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[171] Ibid.

[172] Ibid., 239, 241.

[173] Ibid., 242.

[174] Ibid., 242–3.

[175] Václav Havel, "New Year's Address to the Nation," in Havel, *The Art of the Impossible*, 142–51, at 148.

[176] Ibid., 5.

[177] Havel, "The Academy of Humanities and Political Sciences," 103.

[178] Ibid., 103–4.

The "good" waiting, in turn, is patience, predicated on the faith that "a seed once sown would one day take root and send forth a shoot."[183] These two types of waiting, two types of hoping, are present, to some extent, in all human lives. As we could see, "good" waiting involves some initial effort put into shaping reality, stems from humility rather than fear, and is full of suspense.[184] In fact, it is more than just waiting: "It is life. Life as the joyous involvement in the miracle of Being."[185] Tischner, meanwhile, called it "real hope" or "mature hope." Havel's distinction between "good" and "bad" waiting clearly echoed Marcel's idea of hope and Held's cautions against adopting Stoic and Camusian attitudes toward the world. Because a good politician knows how to wait with respect to the inner order of the world, their actions "cannot derive from impersonal analysis; they must come out of a personal point of view, which cannot be based on a sense of superiority but must spring from humility," Havel argued.[186] Hopeful politics, therefore, cannot be technocratic. The world deserves not only to be explained, but also, even more importantly, to be comprehended.[187] Patrick J. Deneen described Havel's position as "hope without optimism," and characterized it as "a fundamental mistrust in the belief that humans have the ability to solve political and moral problems, but that the appeal to a transcendent source—through hope—can serve as a guiding standard, as well as an encouragement to action, but at the same time a source of humility and caution in that attempt."[188]

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[179] Ibid., 105.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid.

[182] Ibid., 106.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Cf. Marcel on humility, timidity, and chastity in the true character of hope in Marcel, "Sketch of a Phenomenology," 35.

[185] Havel, "The Academy of Humanities and Political Sciences," 108.

[186] Ibid., 106.

[187] Ibid., 107.

[188] Patrick J. Deneen, "The Politics of Hope and Optimism: Rorty, Havel, and the Democratic Faith of John Dewey," *Social Research* 66/2 (1999), 577–609, at 578. Deneen also criticizes Rorty's misunderstanding of Havel's idea of hope, rightly pointing out that Havel did acknowledge the existence of transcendence, but was skeptical when it came to the human ability to comprehend it wholly. Cf. Richard Rorty, "The End of Leninism, Havel, and Social Hope," in Rorty, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1998), 228–44.

Meaning and hope

The sense of an inauthenticity of the world—all mired in deception and meaningless language—was an experience that both Polish and Czech dissidents sought to overcome by drawing on contemporary philosophy, including phenomenology, to a considerable extent. The appeal of phenomenology came from the questions it asked (like "How does the world show itself to us as it is?") and the methodologies it used for the purposes of inquiry. Dissidents unofficially subscribed to the phenomenologists' motto, *Zurück zu den Sachen selbst* (Back to the things themselves). It can also be said that they practiced their own version of *époché*: in order to reach an authentic human experience, they had to bracket all officially imposed definitions. They had to bracket the ideologies imposed by the Communist state, but also the ideologies of consumerism and constant technological progress. They had to, in a sense, cleanse the natural world of the pollution coming from the smokestack.[189] As it trickled down into widely published essays, its language grew attractive even to nonphilosophers and social activists, as it allowed the description of the pursuit and experience of meaning. "Philosophy, Husserl, Heidegger—these were not my interests. What I needed, however, were the thoughts of Father Tischner as part of my experience, as part of my everyday life," Adam Michnik said.[190]

Hope is prophetic, Marcel wrote.[191] The history of Leszek Kołakowski, Józef Tischner, and Václav Havel's involvement in public affairs shows the importance of hope: as a means to establishing a more just political order, and as a fundamental human phenomenon that could not be reduced down to a mere positive outlook on the world. Their interpretation of the relationship between "natural" and transcendental hopes, the rational status of meaning, the art of waiting, the critique of technocratic civilization, and the intelligibility of hope resonated well with all the ways the question of hope and hoping was dissected by phenomenologists and those under their influence. Kołakowski, Tischner and Havel reflected on hope mostly with a practical intention: to overcome the sense of helplessness and open new avenues of social and political improvement.

All three philosophers noticed the essential connection between meaning and hope, from which hope's performative power to bring about its objects stems. To value something is to take action in relation to it.[192] Agreeing on that, they would also search for sources of meaning in different *loci*. For Kołakowski, meaning came from culture, from its myths, from the *sacrum*, from mankind's decisions to value something and thus make it last. These decisions could not be explained rationally, or philosophically as Kołakowski saw it, but still could not be abandoned, he argued. For Tischner and Havel, meanwhile, both of them careful readers of phenomenologists and of Martin Heidegger, meaning was rooted in transcendence and values, which "unfold" themselves through emotions, which is why they believed that meaning could be provided neither by any transient, earthly, "terraistic" ideology or philosophy, nor by any technologically oriented culture or politics. For Tischner and Havel, meaning could not come solely from calculation, but had to be rooted in transcendence. To be operative, meaning had to be valid independently of any current circumstances.

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[189] Václav Havel, "Politics and Conscience," in Jan Vladislav, ed., *Václav Havel or Living in Truth* (London, 1986), 136–57.

[190] Michnik, Tischner, and Żakowski, *Między panem a plebanem*, 263.

[191] Marcel, "Sketch of a Phenomenology," 53.

[192] Cf. Esteban Marín Avíla's comment in his "Hope and Trust as Conditions for Rational Actions in Society: A Phenomenological Approach," *Husserl Studies* 37 (2021), 229–47, at 233.

Kołakowski, Tischner, and Havel all straddled the intersection of philosophy and theology. Where Kołakowski noticed religion's impact on culture, Havel and Tischner spoke rather of a natural religious disposition that they believed inherent to human beings. Here is an important distinction between Kołakowski on one side and Tischner and Havel on the other, which is also telling in terms of their reception of phenomenology. To Kołakowski, the sacred, itself a source of meaning, was irrational and impossible to grasp, a *misterium tremendum* and *misterium fascinosum*. By referring to the Augustinian *credo, ut intelligam*, Kołakowski acknowledged the voluntary and irrational character of the act.[193] Like Fyodor Dostoyevski, he also pondered the question "If there were no God …"[194] For Havel and Tischner, transcendence (and the world) was rational, even if not entirely comprehensible. Interestingly, Tischner used the phrase *spes querens intellectum*—a paraphrase of the scholastic formula of *fides querens intellectum*—rather than Ricoeur's *spero, ut intelligam*, even though he acknowledged that modern philosophy is Augustinian.[195] In this way, he stressed the concurrent character of hoping and thinking, and expressed his belief that acts of hoping are acts of fidelity and responsibility. While Tischner agreed with Ricoeur that starting any philosophical enterprise with the question of hope could very well change the whole "structure of a philosophical system," that change likely meant something different to Tischner than to Ricoeur. Further consideration of the sources of meaning and their character would probably require explaining in detail the differences between Protestant and Catholic theology, as well as Kołakowski and Tischner's attitude toward Marxism and positivism, which extend beyond the scope of this article.

Kołakowski, self-admittedly "negatively addicted to Husserl," failed to find a solid foundation of certitude, but was confident in the exceptional role of the intelligentsia—the writers, the philosophers, the journalists, the activists, and the public intellectuals—whose task was to "carry the word." Intellectuals were to act using words, building a capital of hope and serving as agents of change. For Tischner and Havel, hoping—conceived as an existential phenomenon—was democratic: everybody could experience and was experiencing hope and despair, and everybody sought meaning. Kołakowski likely understood hope similarly to Baruch Spinoza: as a kind of emotion that is, to a considerable extent, irrational, always connected to doubt and fear, and a matter of imagination.[196] This imperfect hope Spinoza wished to replace with its more perfect version, hope reshaped by reason, a product of self-reflection and self-awareness. Like Spinoza, Kołakowski hoped for the rise of a secular, pluralistic, democratic, and liberal society, and found hope necessary, even though philosophically discreditable.[197] In the end Kołakowski, Tischner, and Havel all arrived at the same conclusion. They championed living in dignity, abandoning meaningless ideological language, refusing to cooperate with a lie, and being faithful to one another.

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[193] Tischner, *Obecność*, 89.

[194] Leszek Kołakowski, *Jeśli Boga nie ma …* (Krakow, 2010).

[195] Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 338.

[196] Kołakowski dedicated his doctoral dissertation and his first book, *Jednostka i nieskończoność: Wolność i antynomie wolności w filozofii Spinozy*, to the author of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Spinoza defined hope as "nothing else but an inconstant pleasure, arising from the image of a thing future or past, whereof we do not yet know the issue." Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, part III, prop. XVI; Cf. part III, *Definitions of the Emotions*, para. XII; part III, props. 50, 59.

The role phenomenology played in this process was different for each of the three subjects of this article. Phenomenology was unattractive to disillusioned Marxists like Kołakowski, who were in a way "blind" to Husserlian rationality of values, but still helped them dissect issues related to human cognition, meaning, and the foundations of ethics. It also enabled engagement with those who remained reticent toward Marxism. For Tischner and Havel, meanwhile, phenomenology provided the intellectual instruments and universal idiom to describe the social and political crisis in Eastern Europe and the human condition in general. With it, Tischner was able to build a bridge linking not only modern philosophy and theology, but also people with different religious and political beliefs.

To what extent did their dissident writings on hope cross the border between the East and the West? To what extent did they remain mired in the vernacular rather than attend the necessary clarity? These are still open questions. Havel's essays would likely score highest here, but the vast majority of Tischner's essays are still untranslated, which tilts the scales in Havel's favor. One thing is clear, however: their essays, plays, speeches, and religious and non-religious quasi-sermons have surely proven the importance of the phenomenological movement in Central Europe—as a positive and negative point of departure—and its potential in dealing with, naming, and sustaining human hope.

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[197] On Spinoza and democracy cf. Alan Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion, and Political Theory* (New York, 2009), 99.

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