

There is a philosophical tradition, generically defined as “Mitteleuropean philosophy”, which is difficult to find in manuals. It is, therefore, a “forgotten tradition”. It is not a school since Mitteleuropean philosophy does not

Mitteleuropean philosophy a forgotten tradition

CULTURE 1

by Massimo Libardi

have the characteristics of a “school”. Of course there are authors like Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl and Kazimierz Twardowski who are considered its “fathers”, and some texts, such as *Logical Investigations by Husserl...*

Styles of thought can be identified with the major theoretical models of thought such as Empiricism, Marxism, Historicism, and not with precise philosophical theses and theories. Similar terms are the Kuhnian concept of *paradigm*, the *research programmes* proposed by Imre Lakatos, the *traditions of research* which Larry Laudan speaks about, the *styles of reasoning* of Ian Hacking. Concepts introduced to explain the growth of scientific knowledge and which have in common the fact that nobody “refers to one single theory, but rather to a *spectrum* or *family* of theories connected to each other”. These philosophers saw their work as the creation of a common research programme. Brentano in particular believed that philosophy could only be re-founded by adjusting its method to that of natural sciences. Brentano’s entire programme, developed in the second half of the eighteenth century, as an antithesis to the ruling German idealism, is contained *in nuce* in the seventh of his theses entitled “*vera philosophiae methodus nulla alia sine scientia naturalis est*”.

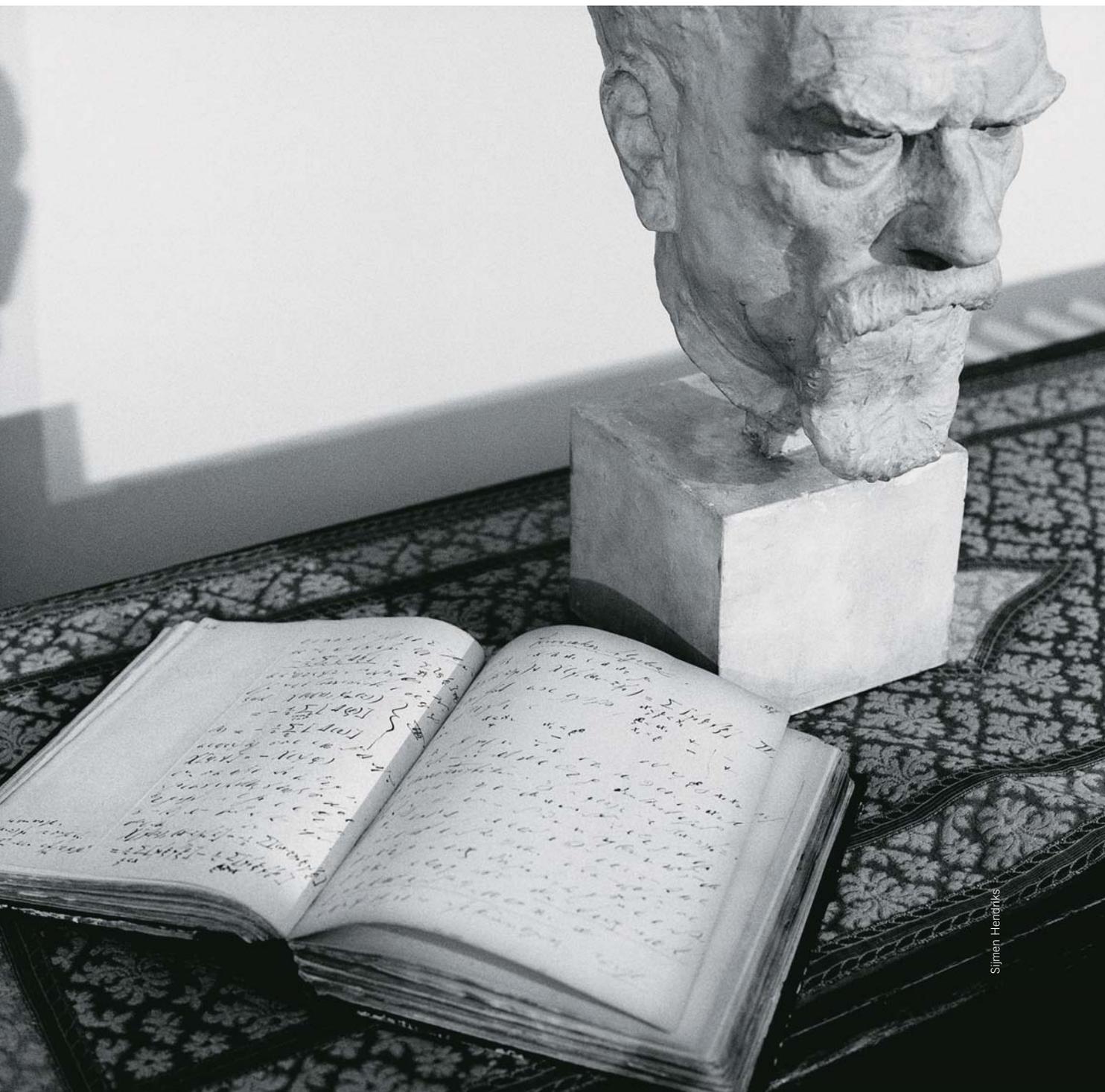
It is a “forgotten tradition”, that is, a homogeneous way to philosophize by

methods and concepts which, however, as a unitary phenomenon, has been erased from the history of philosophy. It laboriously re-emerged towards the end of the sixties within the analytical field, thanks to the works of Rudolf Haller and the seminars in Manchester held by Kevin Mulligan, Barry Smith and Peter Simons, who over the following decades would be joined by many other academics and research programmes. Various factors have contributed to concealing this tradition from manuals and the cultural scene. Some were historical, such as the end of the geographical and political unity of the large Danubian Empire, and the events surrounding its collapse. After 1918, the centres of that tradition, Vienna, Prague, L’viv, Warsaw, Cernovitz and Graz, belonged to different states. Many of its exponents were forced to emigrate and the rich fabric of exchanges, contacts, relationships was torn forever. The outbreak of the Second World War marked its

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definitive end, since, with the Nazi occupation, many of its exponents were forced to emigrate, were suspended from teaching or simply interned for being Jewish. The latter was especially the destiny of many representatives of the Polish school of logic, the School of L'viv-Warsaw, one of the components of the Mitteleuropean philosophy. In addition, the particular disciplines (from logic to the psychology of form, to linguistics) that this tradition gave life to were isolated from their philosophical

context; attention to their specific results obscured the philosophical imprinting. Another reason for this neglect was the low impact that philosophy has always had in the Dual monarchy and its loss of substance in the German area or in countries whose leaders had emigrated after the *Anschluss*, a phenomenon that involved the exponents of the Society of Vienna, the Polish school of logic and the *Gestalt* psychologists. Unlike Germany, where philosophy was a kind of secular State religion, in Austria it was one



of the weakest links of culture from an institutional and educational point of view. There has never been an 'official' philosophy here comparable with, firstly, Kantian philosophy, followed by Hegelian. Austrian culture ignored the idea of a historical binder, of a mission to be accomplished, which, on the contrary in the Germanic world was represented by *Addresses to the German Nation* by Fichte, and Hegelian philosophy. Catholic Austria has always been free from the metaphysical idealism of Protestant Germany. The idealist philosophy of history and historicism have never taken root in Austria. In universities and in teaching a return to pre-critical doctrine, and to Leibniz in particular, was promoted. From this milieu, Austrian philosophy derives a special interest for the study of logic and language in general, attested by thinkers such as Bernhard Bolzano, a professor in Prague, and Franz Brentano.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the German philosophers who most influenced Austrian culture. Especially when read as a precursor of the criticism of the fundamentals, anticipator of Ernst Mach, the analytical Nietzsche, dissolver of the concepts of metaphysics. And it is exactly under the combined influx of Nietzsche and Mach that Austrian literature has provided us with one of the most radical confutations of the substantiality of one's ego, in Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*.

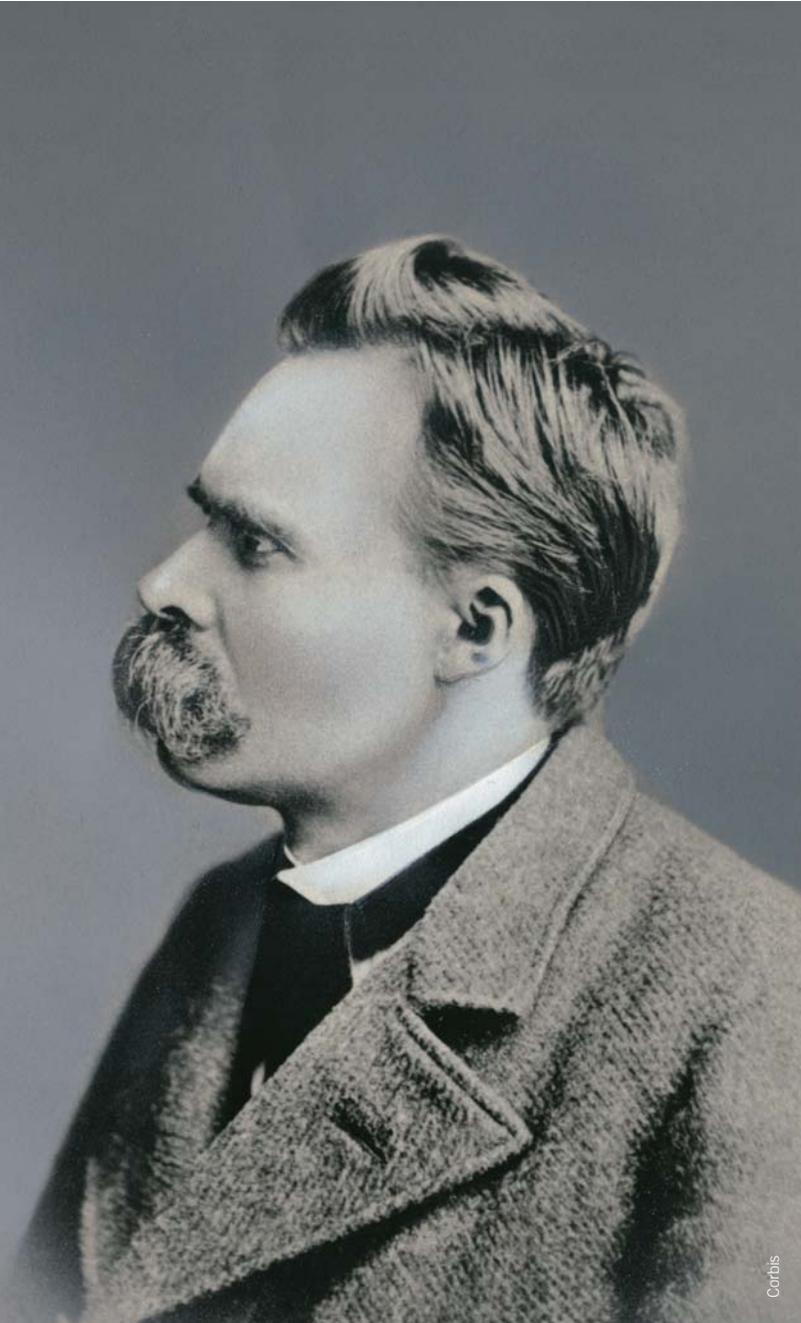
Analytical and continental

Just as decisive to explain this oblivion are theoretical reasons. The recent history of philosophy has been rebuilt along the lines of the two traditions dominating the second half of the twentieth century: analytical philosophy and hermeneutics, traditions which were presented in opposition to each other. One of the dates when this opposition started is 1958, with Jean Wahl, an important figure of the philosophical world and one of the main representatives of the *Hegel-renaissance*, in the opening speech of the annual Centre Culturel International de Cerisy-la-Salle, identifying the two streams of thought dominating the twentieth century with "analytical" and "continental"



_Austrian philosophy has always shown a special interest for the study of logic and language in general, attested by thinkers such as Brentano (above), and was influenced by Nietzsche (facing page)

philosophy. Wahl opposes a "scientific" philosophy, a descendent of neo-positivism, to a "humanistic" philosophy that includes existentialism and phenomenology. In reality, this contrast had developed a long time before and dates back to Brentano, with the review of the *Introduction to the science of the spirit* by Wilhelm Dilthey, which saw light in 1883. Here the Austrian philosopher denounces the "obscurity" of Dilthey's arguments, the lack of "logic acumen", and the many "errors" found in the paper. It is a



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conscious expression of the contraposition between two different philosophical methods: Dilthey's literary and suggestive, the other logical and rigorous.

A close analysis though reveals that the caesura between analytical philosophy and phenomenology, perhaps the main division of philosophy in the twentieth century, is the result of a radicalization of reciprocal partialities, given the same cultural background, which is identifiable with "Mitteleuropean philosophy". So the accentuation of these partialities has ended up erasing the common background.

Soul and exactness

The tradition Dilthey founded then hybridises itself with Husserl's

phenomenology and the analytical aspect strongly influenced by writers such as Robert Musil or Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz. The first graduated in philosophy with Carl Stumpf, presenting a thesis on Mach, the second, an artist and philosopher, crammed his work with lengthy analyses of works by Rudolf Carnap and Moritz Schlick.

Franz Kafka too dealt with Mach, to whom the pre-eminence of the descriptive present in his works until 1912 is due. From 1902 to 1906 the writer took part in meetings at the Café Louvre, also attended by Brentanians from Prague, and Anton Marty's lessons. The tension towards reconciling science and literature, strict analysis and sympathetic sentimental intensity, exactness and soul, is one of the peculiar features of the Mitteleuropean culture. The importance and originality of this culture, developed in Austria towards the end of the nineteenth century, consist in the "complementarities of scientific spirit and metaphysical tension, empirical analysis and the search for the absolute". The writers, "fed with analytical spirit", continue "to pose questions around supreme issues, but pose them in scientifically precise, severe and sceptical terms".

The geographical area of diffusion of this tradition coincides with the states of the Hapsburg Monarchy, hence the name "Mitteleuropean philosophy". Austrian, Bohemian, Moravian, Swiss, Polish and Hungarian thinkers and philosophers were part of it. The *Wissenschaftslehre*, published in 1837 by the Bohemian philosopher Bernhard Bolzano, can be considered its first text, although its start coincided with Brentano's arrival in Vienna in 1874, while its end began with the outbreak of the War in 1939.

The puzzle of Brentanism

Brentano's role in this tradition is fundamental: his importance is due, as well as to specific contributions, to his work as the founder of what would be called the "the school of Brentano". The sense of having a mission to accomplish was deeply rooted in him, almost making him a visionary, the spokesman of a new truth, thus exercising a strong influence on his followers. These days the reconstruction of the



Brentanism puzzle enables us to outline an incredibly wide philosophical continent. Of the many philosophers who were his students, six in particular are known for having opened new fields of research: Marty, Stumpf, Husserl, Twardowski, Alexius Meinong and Christian von Ehrenfels. So Marty and his disciple Karl Bühler developed a detailed theory of language, which influenced Adolf Reinach, one of the representatives of phenomenology in Munich. Stumpf, one of the fathers of *Gestalt Theory*, founded the Berlin School, which had among its representatives Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Köhler. The work of Meinong is at the origin of the Graz School, influencing among others Stephan Witasek, Alois Höfler and Vittorio Benussi, and his Theory of Objects had an important role in the development of Bertrand Russell's Theory of Description. Christian von Ehrenfels with his work of 1913 *On the Gestalt Qualities* introduced the concept of *Gestalt*. Husserl was the founder of phenomenology, which represented a reference point for all of the Mitteleuropean philosophy, while Twardowski was the master of Tadeusz Kotarbinski and can be considered the father of the School of L'viv-Warsaw. The figure of Twardowski is significant not

_The outbreak of the Second World War marked the end of the School of L'viv-Warsaw, one of the components of the European philosophy. Many of its exponents were forced to emigrate, were suspended from teaching or interned.

so much for the originality of his views but for the work of organizer and trainer of new generations of academics. After establishing himself in L'viv, Twardowski, as Kotarbinski wrote, "stopped producing theories and focused on training minds". As a matter of fact, Twardowski was a teacher most of his life; he considered teaching as his main duty and was extremely successful despite expecting full and constant commitment from his student, hard and intense work. All six of these genial disciples of Brentano were unorthodox pupils. Among the "orthodox" ones Oskar Kraus, Alfred Kastil and Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand must be remembered. All of them, orthodox and unorthodox, right- or left-wing, have greatly contributed to the scientific debates of their time, in the most diverse fields.

The Mitteleuropean tradition

The Mitteleuropean tradition can therefore be defined as a sequence of philosophies that present different solutions



_About 100,000 people attended the 2006 edition of the Philosophy Festival of Modena, Carpi and Sassuolo. The theme of the 2007 edition, to be held from 14 to 16 September, is “Knowledge”.

but have traits in common. These traits can be identified in a style and a common methodology and in the uniqueness of the issues dealt with. The common methodology is identifiable in the clarity of style, the tendency to use formal instruments in philosophy, the empirical attention to detail, the refusal of foundational systems and knowledge, and finally in realistic attitudes. The interlacing of ontology and aesthetics belongs to the thematic aspects; so too the interest for metaphysics and values; the attention for the linguistic component; and the consideration for the connection between cognitive processes and the objects experienced in them.

The importance of the “empirical viewpoint”, to use one of Brentano’s expressions, translates into the attention for the problems of the methodology of sciences, which can in turn be found in the School of L’viv-Warsaw and in the first circle of Vienna. The refusal of the systems implies that a problem can be faced more than once, with various solutions being

proposed. The concept of time and the notion of intentionality are just an example. This tradition, as well as giving place to a multitude of theories that are still at the centre of philosophical debate, in particular concerning artificial intelligence, and have hybridized a large production of Mitteleuropean literature, has had a determining influence on the philosophy of dissent. The medium for this transition is the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, increasingly popular on the European scene, not only for his highly ethic-political standing, but also for his philosophical work. Patočka, “Socrates of Prague”, one of the first spokesmen of Charter 77 who died in 1977 due to brutal interrogations by the police, is actually one of the leading characters of the “phenomenological movement”.

In his youth, Patočka was one of Husserl’s last students in Freiburg and one of the most active members of the Philosophical Circle of Prague. In this role, he organized the famous Husserl conference in Prague in 1935, which represented the first nucleus of *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*.

Living in truth

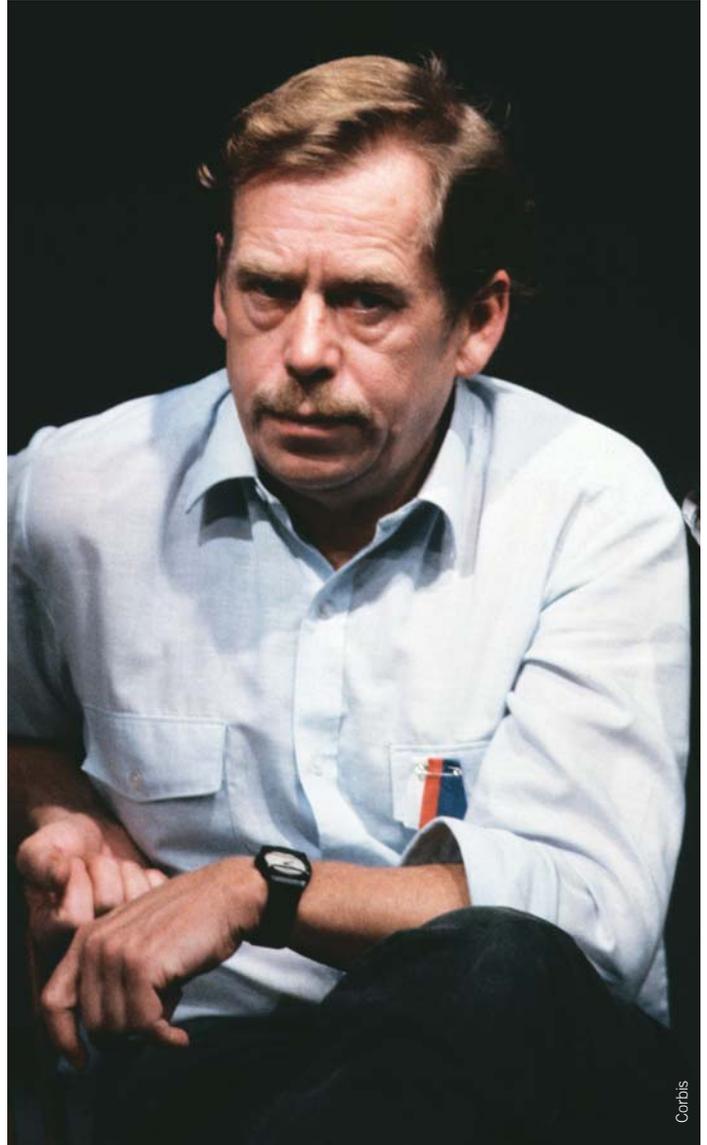
One year after his death, Vaclav Havel, in his *The Power of the Powerless*, took over. Patočka had defined the history of Europe, the Europe from which these states had been “sequestered”, like ‘largely, at least until the 16th century, the story of attempts to care for the soul’. With this expression he intended “an aspiration that aims to incarnate the eternal in time and in one’s self. At the same time, it is an aspiration meant to resist the hurricane of time and all the dangers, when the care for the soul puts man at risk”.

In his essay, Havel shows how in central eastern European countries the communist system traps man in “a network of hypocrisy and lies”: reality is erased, the world reduced to appearance, language crystallized. Power itself “is a prisoner to its own lies and must therefore continue with its falsehood about the past, the present and the future”. In the concrete reality individuals “are not forced to believe in these mystifications but must

behave as if they do... They must not accept the lies but just live with them and in them. This ratifies the system, consolidates it, makes it, *is it*".

In these regimes the line of conflict "basically resides in *every man*, because everyone in their own way is victim and support". Rebellion means leaving a life of lies behind, rejecting the ritual, finding one's own smothered dignity, making an attempt at "*life in truth*". The "*life in truth*" does not only have an "existential (man regains an identity), noetical (revealing reality the way it is) and moral dimension (it is an example); but also a clear *political dimension*".

These words evoke the Socrates of Patocka: Socrates is the philosopher who acts inside the community, and in his figure, "always present in the entire subsequent spiritual history", at least "a shred of existential honesty, a fragment of reasoning, a morsel of problematicity" can be found also "in its worst distortion and lowest commonplace".



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An Appointment in Trento

The Centre for the Study of Eastern European History has organised an international conference, "The Forgotten Tradition", to be held in the autumn of 2007 that intends to provide an outline of trends in Mitteleuropean philosophy.

The conference will be divided into three sessions. The first aims to reconstruct the cultural context that gave origin to successive developments in this field. It will deal with that tradition, often defined as "Austrian philosophy" or "Austrian-Polish" or "Mitteleuropean", that preceded the distinction between 'analytical and continental' philosophies which became characteristic of the twentieth century. The second session will examine the results that this tradition of research has achieved in the areas of logic and formal ontology. Particular attention will be paid to the L'viv-Warsaw School and to Kurt Gödel, who was certainly the major logician of the twentieth century.

Finally, the third session will explore the role played by many Mitteleuropean intellectuals, almost all of whom had a phenomenological background, in opposing totalitarian regimes. This opposition was based on the definition of an attitude founded on 'living the truth', which involves an ethic of responsibility and freedom.

The conference, under the scientific direction of Massimo Libardi, will also feature papers by Francesco Coniglione, Franca D'Agostini, Kevin Mulligan, Avizier Tucker, Achille Varzi and Jan Wolenski.