HAVEL AND HABERMAS ON IDENTITY AND REVOLUTION

Martin J. Matuštík

A few months before the November 1989 collapse of „real existing socialism" in Central and Eastern Europe, Habermas reflected on the revolutionary ideas of 1789. How is one to think within plural and secular modernity about a radical democratic republic? He notes the paradox of post-traditional ethical self-realization and moral self-determination: social revolutions project contents and forms that in a finite way transcend the revolutionary action, but revolution shipwrecks before the project gets off the ground. He proposes that to overcome the "sorrow" and the "melancholy" of projected revolutionary possibility, one must form post-traditional identities in those life-forms which are nurtured by a "permanent and everyday-becoming revolution."[1]

In a key essay that comes to terms with the ideas and revolutions of November 1989, Habermas reiterates his proposal. But now he consoles the melancholy leftists who despair over the lost meaning of socialism. Has "socialism" become an empty phrase and "ritual oracle," to use Havel's characterizations?[2] Does it designate merely the deposed mafia of the Communist nomenclature? Why are some unorthodox and reformed Western Marxists in a disenchanted condition of hopelessness? Has the utopia of non-authoritarian life-forms and open identity-formation been lost?[3]

Habermas stipulates that a „non-communist leftist" translates the projected revolutionary possibility into a concrete, not concretistic, life-form based on the collective rational will-formation. This formal expression of a life-form means that a radical democratic republic provides that "placeless place" which cures revolutionary melancholy, and which complements and stabilizes post-traditional identity. Such a republic constitutes the sovereignty of the people (their patriotism and pledge of allegiance belong solely to the democratic constitution that allows for their rational will-formation) through its rationally motivated and fallible procedures.[4]

Havel doubts that radical self-choice can be replaced by the group choice, that the modern and post-modern crises of identity can be settled through social revolution alone. Havel picks up Levinas's motif of responsibility to the other in a view of "existential revolution": while participants can maintain and stabilize social revolution only through the retrieval of the vertical mode of their identity, self-appropriation does not rest in some private *interieur* but demands social responsibility. Havel would ask

Habermas if a permanent democratic revolution – apart from a permanent existential revolution – could heal that melancholy which results from the paradox of every revolutionary project.[5]

Some misreadings depict Havel's position as politically conservative, anti-democratic, elitist, and dogmatically religious. First, Havel resolves the crisis of identity neither by returning to pre-modern communitarian models nor by finding refuge in a post-modern oversight of the problem. Second, an existential revolution can be identified neither with a myth-eliciting conservative revolution nor with a liberal possessive individualism and decisionism. The "existential" in Havel is not opposed to the "social" and the "political." Third, mindful of Horkheimer's view that both theism and atheism have their tyrants and martyrs, we should seek an insight into Havel's concern with the vertical in its function as a critical "existential praxis." Hope lies neither in theism nor in atheism but in the dangerous memory of the victims of history, in an opposition to totalitarian power and to an ideology of empty words.[6]

To contrast Habermas's and Havel's beginnings: there is experience by the non-communist left of fighting against the Western drive to systemic totality. There is also Habermas's communicative reinterpretation of "socialism" that explains this experience. "Permanent democratic revolution" stands for a confrontation with the systemic colonization of the life world. It seems that Eastern and Central Europe has produced scarcely anything fresh in this regard, both because they lacked Western experience of the real existing capitalism and because their own struggles carry a particular bias against 'socialist revolution.'

There is the experience of dissent against „real existing socialism" and of resistance to totalitarian systems of power. There is also Havel's existential reinterpretation of vertical transcendence that explains this experience. "Existential revolution" stands for a historically specific case not covered by Habermas: how can one expose the totalitarian colonization of post-traditional identity at the level of its very formation? It seems that the non-communist left has had little to say on the possibility of "vertical transcendence" as a form of ideology critique, both because it lacked the communitarian experience of totality and because its own confrontation of fundamentalist religiosity and traditionalism carried a particular bias against existential identity.

Given the asymmetry of these experiences and the present need to bring them together, what would an unbiased dialogic reciprocity mean here? Because identity in crisis represents a key theme which enters both Havel's literary and political writings and his public life, I approach Havel and Habermas's ideas on November 1989 from the angle that relates post-traditional identity and revolution. I show two movements of revolution: (1) Habermas stabilizes post-traditional identity against its modern pathologies and its post-modern death in radical democracy. (2) Havel moves from responsible relation to others to socio-political dimensions of existential revolution.

1. Habermas's permanent democratic revolution

In the following, I comment on two aspects of Habermas's proposal of permanent democratic revolution: (i) his recent critique of Marx, and (ii) his reformulation of "socialist revolution."

(i) Habermas lists five problems in Marx that must be resolved if a critical social theory is to play a permanently revolutionary role in a radical democratic republic. First, Marx limits himself to the paradigm of the working social class. He generates a concept of praxis that is limited to industrial labour. Marx's conceptual and practical narrowness leads to a productivist bias. But is wage labor the sole emancipatory force of the collective will-formation? One explains by this force neither the ecology, peace, and feminist movements, nor the revolutionary role of students and theatre in Czechoslovakia prior to and during November of 1989.[7]

Second, Marx takes over from Hegel an holistic view of society. Hegel wants to reconcile the dirempted modernity in the ethical totality. While Marx critiques the conservative nature of Hegel's phenomenological achievement of the just life, he preserves his idealistic hope for a system-free life world. Habermas argues that society must be viewed under both systemic and social imperatives and their two sociological models of integration. Wanting a complex modern society wholly freed from media of economic exchange and administrative power is romanticism. But it is a non-solution to reduce the revolutionary resources of the life world to the functions of anonymous systems.[8]

Havel does not long for a system-free life world. First, one may apply Habermas's sociological distinction to the events of 1989 and find in them the life world struggle of autonomous public spheres – parallel *polis* – against their being colonized by a totally administered society. Second, one can depict these societies as laboratories that anticipate some of the conflicts with anonymous functionalist reason in Western democracies. Third, one may find in the events of 1989 a falsification of the "dialectic of enlightenment," on the one hand, and the postmodern thesis about the ubiquity of power and one-dimensionality on the other. Havel does not exchange the Stalinist utopia of paradise on earth for a postmodern anti-utopia which cannot maintain and stabilize November revolutions. Rather than designing either positive or negative material utopias or longing to transform the poetry of those revolutionary days into a postmodern carnival, Havel is concerned with the concrete other and with the life world as the source of both the absurd and the meaningful.[9]

Third, while Marx concretizes Hegel's phenomenological healing of the social whole, his analysis of social conflicts is concretistic. Marx depicts the social macrosubject and the class struggle as the sources of social reproduction. He corrects Hegel's idealism but preserves the Hegelian communitarianism: Marx privileges a particular class within an historical form of life.[10]

Marx's concretism can interpret properly neither the late capitalist societies nor the changes within the Communist regimes. Habermas rejects

both the communitarian standpoint of the totality and of a privileged – premodern, modern, postmodern – life-form. The historical experience of totalitarianism provides the main argument not only against the communitarian versions of socialism but also against stylizing existential revolution in terms of neo-Hegelian and neo-Aristotelian revivals. It is a mistake to read Havel's opposition to real existing socialism either as a conservative or a liberal move. Some take Havel's earlier term "anti-political politics" (today bringing moral concerns into diplomacy) as a return to pre-modern life-forms; others want to co-opt him for a liberal individualist agenda or line him up with post-modernism; leftists are offended by his concern for vertical transcendence and find in it a dogmatic religious ploy; and still others legitimate by Havel's concern their own authoritarian religiosity. All of these interpretations substitute concretism for an existential concretion. But Havel's existential praxis and Habermas's concrete communicative transcendence meet one another. Habermas and Havel, in different fashions, depict the concretely operative formal properties of that life-form which allows for a formation of post-traditional, non-authoritarian, and open identities.[11]

Fourth, Marx holds a functionalist understanding of the state. The state is a vulgar democracy based on the instrumental rationality of its institutions. From this position comes his desire for a system-free life-form and for the dissolution of the state as such. In this move, Marx fails to articulate how the system-free life world is institutionalized beyond the stage in which the proletariat is the dictator.[12]

Perhaps Marx was too much of a liberal who trusted the forces of the economy at the expense of working out the transformation of the public sphere. When Havel writes about "post-democracy", he has in mind the moral vacuum in both the totalitarian and the liberal parliamentary societies. He finds in the dissident groups, like Charta 77, the futurological experience of "inter-existential" communication that has been freed up from the "weight of emptied traditions." Havel's post-traditional experience suggests that the way of responsibility to the other is the necessary condition of the possibility of an existentially reconstituted democracy. There is no contradiction between the position of powerless dissent and Havel's Presidency in a parliamentary democracy that draws on this earlier experience.[13]

Fifth, in spite of concretizing Hegel's dialectic, Marx remains within non-fallibilist Hegelianism. Marx only transports the *telos* of consciousness and being into historical evolution. Therein lie the hidden origins of dogmatic Marxism: "socialism" is described in terms of a concrete *Sittlichkeit.* Habermas finds in the lack of fallible consciousness not a necessary but a possible receptivity of Marxism to the Stalinist *Führer* principle of the Party. Habermas redefines socialism under the formal conditions of reaching an understanding.[14]

Existential revolution is a corrective to the Marx-Leninist revolutionary ethic. Both Havel and Habermas are aware of the fallible character of revolutionary projects, but Havel attends also to a vulnerability of revolution to deception by the totality within. Havel provides in a vertical mode of

identity the necessary check on the colonization of the life-world in the very identity-formation. Thus, he would judge Habermas's democratic revolution insufficiently concrete.

(ii) Habermas's „socialism" learns from the above critiques of Marx. He does not mean by socialism a romantic resolution of the riddle of history. Socialism is not a limit concept or a privatist regulative idea. Nor is it a concretistic notion that idealizes the past or the future. "In this *concretistic reading* socialism is no longer a goal, it was never realistically [such a] goal."[15]

Habermas shifts from social macro-subject (class, self, people) to intersubjectivity. This "placeless place" is Habermas's permanent democratic revolution based on anonymous sovereignty of the people. Democratic revolution is *permanent:* it does not stop with a particular form of life. It is *democratic* because its place lies in institutional life and cultural public spaces. It is *a revolution* because practical and political questions are not solved ontologically. A revolution that is not driven metaphysically admits also of Havel's existential sense.[16]

What then, is socialist in Habermas's non-substantially projected revolutionary possibility? Habermas retrieves the meaning of this term under a normative expectation of solidarities found concretely in the life world and applied to complex modern societies and systemic relations. In experiences of the concrete other, there is a possibility of concrete solidarity; normatively, there is an expectation of the structures of reciprocal and dialogic recognition. A radically democratic orientation is set against the demoralized public spheres; it moralizes them and their conflicts, and it generalizes interests under the moral point of view.[17]

Havel might still ask Habermas: how does this reformulation of socialist revolution as a permanent and projected possibility console the melancholy revolutionary leftist, since she has no vertical axis that functions as a corrective to the shipwrecking utopia? Permanence and the fallible projection of possibilities do not form that temporal mode of existence which can maintain and stabilize post-traditional identity in complex societies. Havel might object that Habermas's communication turn is a necessary structural but insufficient model condition of the possibility of the ideal communication community. Only an existential mode can sustain structures of democratic revolution.

Havel might find the existential impulse in Habermas's radical and permanent democratic revolution a kin of post-democracy. While he might prefer not to use the word "socialism," since it has lost all semantic meaning, he would not be opposed to what Habermas means by this word.

There are some misunderstandings of why Havel does not wish to use the "s" word. Today "this word which [once] led to the zeal of the masses is nothing more than a thoroughly deceptive cipher." The word has become an ideological symbol standing for the good as opposed to the evil empire: "To criticize this or another cow is not difficult, but to criticize that cow which proclaims itself for decades as holy is more difficult: one is imputed a feeling that one does not critique only the cow but the very divine principle which has made it sacred." Havel proposes to avoid such sacred words, not the

questions of solidarity and justice. He thinks that it would be better to speak concretely about economy, decision-making processes, ownership of enterprises, power-structures, dogmatism, etc. and leave the 's' word out of it. If someone wants to use this word, "let him first clearly say what he means and with what economic and political system he links this word."[18]

Havel speaks of existential revolution not because he barkens back to either myth or a bourgeois life-form. He designates himself twice as "left-leaning." To exilic anti-communist pamphlets that call dissidents "bolshevik-green gangs," Havel replies: "I do not know if I am left or right, but I admit that face to face with this branch of right-wing spirituality, I am rapidly becoming left-leaning". In his radio address, he says again that face to face with the millionaire estates on the island of Bahamas and the slums in Nicaragua, he is becoming left-leaning. Both remarks show that although himself from a millionaire family, after years of suffering in the regime that made him pay both for his class origins and his activism, Havel has not shielded himself from experience.[19]

Havel refuses to answer the interviewer's questions that try to box him in: one should say exactly what one means and not hide behind such words as "socialism," "capitalism," "people," and "peace." Havel finds this labelling to be an ideological concern. Insofar as Habermas restores an existential meaning to the revolutionary project, Havel shares his attitude. When Havel argues that 'socialism' became an empty phrase, he appeals to his definite experience of the disenchantment of socialism:

> I was always for democracy and I have considered myself for a long time a socialist. . . I realized that this word no longer means anything and that it can only confuse, not disclose my views. . . . My divorce from this word arose from my traditional disgust with too inflexible (and therefore semantically rather empty) categories, ideological phrases and oracles, by which thinking becomes a structure of static terms which one cannot breath, and the more suffocating thinking is, the more distant it is from life. . . . [E]ven though I did not change my political views, I stopped presenting myself as a socialist. Also in times when I considered myself a socialist, I did not identify with some concrete political and economic doctrine, theory or ideology, with some wholesome project of the better world order. Socialism was for me rather a human, moral, and affective category. There were times when those who called themselves socialists were on the side of the oppressed and downcast, not on the side of the masters, and resisted illegitimate advantages and inherited privileges, exploitation of the powerless, social injustice and immoral barriers which condemned humans to servitude. I was such an 'affective' and 'moral' socialist – and I remain so until today only with that difference that I do not use that word of designate my posture."[0]

The leftist offence at Havel misses what is here at stake.

Habermas gives the „s" word a new semantic, *viz.*, communicative, grounding. The place for the non-communist leftist is the radical democratic will-formation. The only "eye of the needle" for the way of socialism leads now through the radical-reformist self-critique of capitalist identity. This

socialism passes into something else not with the revolutions in 1989 but with the change of capitalist identity.[21]

I sum up Habermas's conclusion on the backdrop of his analysis of the six interpretive meanings of revolution is 1989. He depicts them in two symmetrical relations: the first group is positively oriented towards socialism, the second negatively. In the first one, he critiques the Stalinist, Leninist, and reform-communist readings. The Stalinist has no resources to evaluate the destruction of its secret service system. The Leninist designates 1989 as a "conservative revolution" that sets back the Communist orthodoxy. The reformed-communist continues Dubcek's "socialism with a human face" of 1968 but is unable to revolutionize a state socialism into democratic one before its shipwreck. The alternative of the socialist-market economy and the fallibilist reform-communism is by-passed by the events of 1989.[22]

In the second group, first, the postmodernist co-opts 1989 for the good news that proclaims the end of all revolutions and of modern rationality, but he overlooks how modern revolutionary ideas and classical schemes strip the totalitarian regimes of power. In place of the claimed *posthistoire,* 1989 revives the sovereignty of the people, human rights, and democratic institutions. Second, the anti-communist finds in 1989 the end-point of 1917 but then falsely generalizes the Cold War era onto the whole epoch. Third, the liberal depicts 1989 as the end of the last totalitarian domination, the end of ideology, and a return to law, market, and pluralism. The liberal interpretation, while more accurate than others, overlooks its own unwillingness to move towards a radical democracy. Against the first group and the anti-communist, Habermas raises his critique of Marx. In the second group, Habermas rejects the postmodern and corrects the liberal moves. His radical democratic reading of socialism is to cure the resulting leftist melancholy *skepsis*.[23]

2. Havel's existential revolution

When in his 1987 Copenhagen lecture Habermas translates Kierkegaard's existential either/or, characteristic of self-choice, into a public choice of post-national identity, he could not have anticipated that two years later many Germans would choose themselves not post-traditionally but rather in a renewed nation-state. Habermas's description of November 89 as *die nachholende or rückspulende Revolution* does not pick up Havel's projected possibility. Habermas's stylization of the events of 1989 as a regression to "old national symbols" and to traditions of the era between the two world wars – and to a desire to catch up with Western bourgeois revolutions – expresses sentiments of many people in the East, especially the former DDR, but is misleading as an explanation of Havel's reflections on revolution and identity. Habermas neglects to place existential revolution among six interpretative portraits of 1989 and interpolates his own solution from this narrow horizontal account. Neither these six groups nor Habermas's proposal include Havel's vertical confrontation of totality in the very

identity-formation. Habermas's oversight expresses a general bias prevailing even among the sophisticated non-communist leftists.[24]

In my rebuttal, I suggest that Havel replies to the crisis of identity neither in a communitarian nor postmodern fashion, that existential revolution neither reverts to myth nor adopts liberal individualism or decisionism, and that a vertical resistance to totality draws hope neither from theism nor atheism but from the dangerous memory of suffering and an existential mode of living in truth. I develop these points by discussing how existential revolution, by fostering non-authoritarian and open identity-formation, provides the sufficient modal conditions for the structural possibility of democratic revolution. I do not turn to Havel as an heroic ideal, since both he and the 'velvet revolution" might fail, but rather to the counter-factual projection in the ideal of 1989 which qualifies Habermas' reformulation of the ideas of 1789.

In his second Sunday radio reflection, Havel asks what happens when after a long time one moves from prison to freedom. His question is a repetition of his own journey, but now focused on the national exodus from totality. In the prison everything is clear, because here meaning and the hope of freedom are delimited by the daily routine. After leaving the prison, one lacks this context. The paradox of the world "without the prison walls" is the seeming loss of identity.[25]

Havel voices the absurd, Kafkaesque anxiety of freedom; he self-ironizes that power into which he was brought on the wings of revolution:

> It is the greatest paradox, but I must confess it: if I am a better President than some other would be in my place, it is so because somewhere in my relation to my work I discover ongoing doubts about myself and the right to exercise my function. I am a person who would not be at all surprised, if someone, in the middle of my activities as a President, would bring me before an obscure tribunal. . . if I would now hear the word, "wake up!" and I would find myself in my prison cell . . .[26]

He develops this theme face-to-face with Waldheim at the opening of the Salzburg music festival. Different fanaticisms and nationalisms in Central Europe originate from the renewed crisis of individual and group identities. "Anxiety of small souls about themselves and the world has led many times to violence, brutality, and fanatical hatred." But a fresh lie about our past and future cannot save us from a repressed lie. One cannot make an exception for oneself and somehow drift through history, even though this is the most common temptation of Central European anxieties. "We are like the prisoners who got used to the prison and, released under the sky and into desired freedom, do not know how they should deal with this freedom, and are in doubt because they alone must decide." This "social-existential situation" is the anxiety of the victorious Sisyphus who has succeeded in rolling the stone onto the mountaintop and leaving it there, says Havel.[27] In the paradox of exile in totality and the exodus to freedom, which is always a paradox of identity-formation, Havel raises his key political question: if the modern totality differs from the classical dictatorship by

permeating every identity from within and without, and so makes us at the same time responsible and without responsibility, how can one escape from its prison? The how-question implies that a vertically understood critical theory and practice must find that mode of human identity-formation which provides a check on power within and power in one's relation to the other. Havel does not ask merely about the type of prison or about structures to be built upon our deliverance. He searches for an enabling confrontation of anxiety, for the manner of resisting totality by living in truth with our past and future no matter where we are. He is inspired by the philosophy and courage of the Czech phenomenologist and co-founder of "Charta 77" Jan Patočka, and an existential, not postmodern, reading of Emmanuel Levinas. I focus on the latter, less clear and unexplored influence of Levinas.[28]

In prison, Havel records three stages on a journey to freedom. In the first, he agrees with Levinas about the primordial responsibility to the other that shapes our identity. In the second, he argues that one must take an existential responsibility for that responsibility into which one is thrown, but he interprets the "existential" socially, politically, and dramatically. In the third, he finds out that the horizontally conceived responsibility that takes itself too seriously shipwrecks. The journey through the stages is a repetition of ever more radically formed identity with fluid ego-boundaries and non-authoritarian autonomy: moral identity in crisis becomes an unrepressed and open way.[29]

Let me sum up those features of Levinas's position that are found in Havel. In place of an exclusive entry into inwardness, Levinas begins in a vertical transformation of horizontally conceived intersubjectivity. "Vertically" means that identity is shaped ethically, not egologically. The ethical is the naked openness of the face to the nakedness of the other. Levinas critiques the horizontal moral point of view – be it Buber's existential or Habermas's communicative ethics – based on the notion of dialogic symmetry. My existence is subjected to the other, hence the essential asymmetry; the other is above me, not reciprocally next to me, hence verticality. My "I" is where the face of the other is met. I am constituted in responsibility to the other. I am thrown into the world asymmetrically because I am always severed from my private ownership of myself. Asymmetry and verticality ground ethics.[30]

Vertically appropriated freedom is permanently uneasy because its identity carries the demand of the other, not my personal will to exist. Identity is an ongoing life in exile; freedom is a permanently dangerous memory of exodus. In my desire to exist, I am always a refugee from my ego; I am vertically robbed of my projected possession of identity. Every horizontal project of an ideal community necessarily experiences exile and exodus, and this might explain that leftist melancholy which Habermas hopes to heal with a permanent democratic revolution. Levinas's vertical ethics is suspicious towards totalitarian ambitions of liberal egological freedom; towards historical projection of the ego on revolutionary identity; towards conservative nostalgia for the ego of a nation, party, totem, or the church; and towards the postmodern thesis about the end of humanism and the ubiquity of power-asymmetries.

Levinas comes from the Judaic, socially-ethical inspiration. He does not reject Athens but situates his phenomenology between Jerusalem and Auschwitz. Just as Habermas's horizontal communicative ethics and Havel's vertical resistance to totality, so also Levinas's vertical ethics shows that the question about being in the world does not have meaning apart from the ethical priority of the other. Underailed, undecentered identity forgets its permanent exile, and so also its ethical mandate of exodus. This twice forgetful identity in the end divinizes the totality of itself or projects its own unrealized possibility, its philosophical and activist melancholy, on the intentionality of some *Führer*. To make this critique, Levinas need not leave philosophy and go emphatically postmodern. Rather, and this is the sense retrieved in Havel, he translates into the vertical language of ethics in exile and exodus both intentional phenomenology and the question about the meaning of being.

For Levinas, meanings, such as „God" and „religion," do not entertain dogmatic theology but remain a philosophical hermeneutic of ethics in exile and exodus. The wholly other that calls me from myself is not that face with which I am directly confronted. Face to face, I am awakened with the question of responsibility. I do not have a reply to this question, I do not know who asks. In the question – neither decisively theistic nor atheistic – there is a relation, which precedes the beginning of my relation, is a possibility of my relation, but does not allow me to own this relation. Holding my identity open to this question exercises a form of ideology-critique: the relation between identity and the other which does not create totality Levinas calls religion.[31] Vertical ethics destroys the natural political positions which we have taken on in the world and prepares us for that meaning, which is otherwise than being.[32]

Levinas offers that non-authoritarian and receptive model of identity which fulfills the conditions raised in Havel's key political question: vertical decentralization of the subject does not lead to its postmodern death by asymmetries of power but rather to an identity as a critique of totality. Existence oriented to the wholly other prevents one's will from gravitating to itself repressively or to the other oppressively.

Havel interprets Levinas's primordial responsibility existentially: not every will to exist is egological and totalitarian. Only horizontally delimited ethics and the moral point of view are vulnerable in this sense. The problem is the lack of responsibility not towards the other but towards oneself, towards one's relation to the other. Without an identity which is neither melancholy nor terroristic, it is of little help that I am primordially thrown into the world as a responsibility to the other.

Havel's existential mode problematizes Habermas's beginnings: how am I to participate in discourse? How can the moral appeal to the symmetry conditions of discourse and its force of the better argument be sustained against an entanglement of even the rational democratic will-formation in the disabling forms of power? Would every post-traditional identity allow for actual moral discourses? What type of ideally concrete identity is presupposed by the idealized participant in the moral discourse?

Havel not only rejects the concept of the collective guilt,[33] but also depicts the nuance between the mode of existential revolution and the necessity of creating democratic structures. In his radio dialogue with the nation, he explains his concept of the "second revolution". He means neither the French Revolution that moved from the storming of Bastille to the execution of the king to the universal terror, nor the Bolshevik revolution that gave birth to Trotsky's notion of permanent revolution. He means a need to complement ongoing democratic structures with the elimination of the new economic mafia made up from the deposed Communist nomenclature. The "second revolution" should remove through local elections the hidden Communist Party monopoly in business enterprises and determine to whom, in the state where all own all and nobody nothing, which property is to belong. Still, he confronts the present post-revolutionary melancholy and anxiety in Czechoslovakia by appealing not to the collective but to the individual self-choice. That Czechoslovakia can remember the Soviet August invasion of 1968 for the first time in truth is important not nostalgically but decisively: because the Soviet tanks did not come in November 1989, the outcome of November 1989 events depends on autonomous self-choice, and not outside force, concludes Havel.

Havel undergoes such a decisive moment when he takes on responsibility for his responsibility: in the passivity of prison, he confronts the passivity of some of his activist friends: "If all is lost or not depends upon whether I am lost or not. . . ." Responsibility for responsibility is an existential, not simply ascribed role. "I agree with Levinas, one cannot preach responsibility, one can only bear it. Thus, one cannot begin anywhere else but with oneself. It sounds comical, but it is so: I must begin."[35]

An existential appropriation of Levinas explains why Havel does not go postmodern and why he differs from Milan Kundera. He objects to Kundera's "a priori skeptical attitude towards the civic acts which are without hope for an immediate success" and which appear to be arrogant gestures. In his *Unbearable Lightness of Being,* through the main character, Tomas, Kundera voices his own position from the years after 1968 when Tomas explains why it does not help the political prisoners if he signs the petition for their release. Kundera ironizes self-importance of the authors of such petitions: they believe that "the defeat of the just thing will shine lightning on the whole misery of the world and the whole glory of the author's character." Havel places different accents on solidarity with victims than Kundera's postmodern death of the subject and the author. Havel's self-irony does not replace responsibility to the concrete other. In an early support of the imprisoned, Havel fostered a civic process towards that existential praxis which gave rise to "Charta 77" and to the "velvet revolution" of 1989. He agrees today that moral acts, even in diplomacy, might offend because they seem "exhibitionistic . . . gestures of the shipwrecked." Such risky acts offer some ground for Kundera's laughter. But Kundera "programmatically refuses to see . . . the hopeful" side of the absurd: "It seems to me as if he were a bit the prisoner of his own skepticism which does not allow him to admit that sometimes it makes sense to behave courageously as a citizen.

That it makes sense even though one can look comic." Havel's pathos, by being existential, offends equally a fanatic activist and a postmodern skeptic.[36]

Havel always interprets the „existential" as a co-terminus with the social, political, and dramatic: he joins the social in Levinas with a radical self-choice. This double reflection rejects the decisionism and monologism ascribed to the existentialism of the Sartrean confession. One must differentiate political decisionism from what Havel calls existential revolution. The shorthand for Havel's model might read as follows: self-appropriation implies ethico-moral intersubjectivity.

Havel's dramatic work makes this point when it communicates to the viewer that she carries the resolution to her crisis of identity. Havel's plays invariably remind us of our dilemma: "The only resolve [and] the only hope which have sense are those which we find ourselves, in us, and on our own." Drama communicates socially the '"untransferable act of one's own existential awakening." There is a continuity between Havel's dramas and his civic posture: "Even the most difficult truth, if pronounced publicly and before all, becomes something emancipatory . . ."[37]

A continuity lies in the complementarity between absurdity and hope. An experience of the absurd awakens a search for meaning. This inner desire for meaning that shapes one's identity is the very source of hope. Hope is a mode of one's identity. Hope provides a capacity to take responsibility for one's responsibility. Havel finds the Czech and Slovak specificum in an attitude between irony and self-irony, on the one hand, and the sense for the absurd and black humour on the other. These dimensions allow both for existential concretion and distance from oneself. They empower one to take on tasks that seem unbearable. The capacity for the absurd and laughter in the midst of revolutionary zeal or serious diplomatic effort testifies to the finitude of human acts, of every revolution: "If one . . . is not to melt in one's own seriousness, and so become comic to all, one must have, even though one were engaged in the most important thing . . . , a healthy consciousness of one's human laughability and smallness." A social revolution is in an "existential" mode when it grows from a realization of its own temporality and limit. "[O]nly this consciousness can breath possible greatness. The contours of real meaning can be grasped only from the bottom of the absurd." One can understand here how an earnest non-utopian utopia of a moral act can be engaged together with the sense of the absurd without the temptation of traditionalism, the lyrical-romantic revolutionary melancholy or postmodern skepsis.[38]

Havel's intense prison experience of the absurd and of hope does not mark a conversion to a religion. "I did not become 'participating Catholic': I do not attend regularly the Church, I have not 'institutionally' confessed since my childhood, I do not pray, and when I am in the Church, I do not cross myself." When Havel speaks of vertical transcendence, he refers to the non-utopian utopia – the radical other "something" that gives meaning to one's acts in the world. "[T]he event called the world has a deeper meaning." When he speaks of "faith", this does not carry a confessional pledge of allegiance:

> I believe that . . . the universe and life [are] not "accidental." I believe, that nothing disappears without a trace, and still less our actions, by which I explain my conviction that it makes sense to strive for something in life, to strive for more than what comes visibly back or what pays off. In thus defined faith can be placed many people, and it would not be responsible to call them all, automatically, believing Christians.[39]

An existential reading of Levinas was, together with Patočka's phenomenologically articulated human rights, an inspiration of the civic manifesto "Charta 77". Both prepared Havel for creating in November 1989 the Civic Forum and for giving a personal style to his Presidency.

Havel dramatizes the conflict between words about responsibility and irresponsible action. He does so indirectly through a disclosure of self-deception and through a critique of ideology within himself. For his reason his dramas and political performances are equally autobiographical and universal, even though none of the dramatic characters or political dramatizations preaches Havel's direct position and none of them offers a universal cook-book for a successful revolution. Levinas's thesis that one is responsible for the world is critical towards totality in the existential and dramatic senses given to it by Havel.[40]

For Havel, human life demands social-political and dramatic-existential responsibility. Vertical identity maintains a revolutionary mode that confronts totality within and, thus, it is a corrective to a social revolution based on horizontal identity. This corrective can be specified in the following theorem: vertical identity without ongoing democratic structures lacks a public sphere for drama and communication by words; permanent democracy without an existential mode is blind and impotent to form those identities that can be a counterweight to totality. The condition of the possibility of the ideal communication community lies in its "inter-existentiality" – a life-form shaped by a mode of permanent revolution against lie, deception, and self-deception.[41]

In the third stage of his journey Havel meets the limits of his horizontal moral will. Radical self-choice can become an imperceptibly self-deceptive intimate prison. Will to freedom can either prevent one from leaving this prison within or become the terror of moralizing universalism. This discovery is Havel's main reason for self-irony towards himself as a President and a leader of the revolution. He hesitates to pledge allegiance to this church or that national or political movement but clings to living at risk. He raises no sacred symbols – family, flag, market, and faith – in place of the disenchanted promise of Communism. He communicates the paradox of identity without fanaticism and terror.

Havel defines the fanatic as the person

> who, without having a clue, exchanged the love of God for the love of some one religion; the love of truth for the love of an ideology, doctrine or sect which promised him to guarantee their validity; and the love of people for the love of a project which he considers . . . to be a real service to the people. Fanaticism thus covers up the existential nakedness . . . Fanaticism makes life easier for

> the price of its hopeless destruction. The fanatic's tragedy is that the beautiful and highly authentic longing . . . to take on the pains of the whole world imperceptibly changed into the creator of this suffering: into an organizer of the concentration camps, into inquisition, into genocides and executions.[42]

Verticality is neither resignation (it would not be a possibility) nor fanaticism (it would not be a paradox of identity as an activity and a way). The postmodern ethic of anarchy resigns self-responsibility and, thus, cannot claim to be receptive to the other. Fanaticism disregards the permanent nakedness of its own traditionalism and, thus, cannot prevent its communitarian will from violating the other. Fanaticism, not existential revolution, creates from its given responsibility in the world a fetish. The fanatic escapes identity afraid of living in exile and exodus. The "real responsibility, and so real identity," lies in one's "dramatic self-confrontation" of oneself as a possibility.[43]

To conclude: Havel and Habermas represent two complementary, not exclusive, alternatives beyond the communitarian-liberal controversy and post-modern deconstructions of identity and revolution. Their complementarity lies in the relation of the horizontal and the vertical. "Existential revolution" is not a decisionist, monological withdrawal into a bourgeois *interieur.* Havel builds upon modern plurality, an intersubjective context for self-appropriation, and post-traditional resources of identity-formation. He articulates vertical transcendence non-dualistically, i.e., on this side of the world and identity-formation, within the horizontal. The existential implies the democratic: permanent risk and fallibilism cure the revolutionary melancholy and terror.

A critique of Habermas's project from Havel's perspective is the following: identity of the moral will to discourse shipwrecks without the vertical corrective that confronts totality within. Horizontal permanence of a revolution that does not attend to the mode of its revolutionary project cannot heal the consequent temptation of every revolution: the activist's anxiety in the face of freedom, right and left fanaticism, and postmodern skepsis or abdication of responsibility. Without an existential mode, dialogic reciprocity of the democratic will-formation cannot protect its will against self-deception, thus, against another Gulag and Auschwitz.

A critique of Havel's dramatic irresolution of existential revolution from Habermas's perspective of fallible but concrete democratic structures raises a question which cuts across the asymmetrical experiences of the East and the West: how is one to envision that vertical identity which would maintain and stabilize open and non-authoritarian, autonomous and responsible forms of life?[44]

NOTES

1. VV: Jürgen Habermas, „Volkssouveränität als Verfahren: Ein normativer Begriff von Öffentlichkeit," *Merkur* 43/6 (June 1989) 465, 475-76; also in Forum für Philosophie, *Die Ideen von 1789* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989) 47-67. Cf. VN: Jürgen Habermas,

Vorwort zur Neuauflage (1990)," *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Leipzig: Reclam-Verlag, 1990).

2. DRS: Václav Havel, *Do ruzných stran* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 1990) 51, 67, 202-204.

3. NR: Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution: Kleine politische Schriften VII* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990) 177-204. Cf. Helmut Dubiel, "LinkeTrauerarbeit," *Merkur* 44/6 (June 1990): 482-91 and Claus Offe, "Bindung, Fessel, Bremse," in Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe und Albrecht Wellmer, eds., *Zwischenbetrachtungen: Im Prozeß der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989). Cf. my "Jürgen Habermas at 60," *Philosophy and Social Criticism,* 16/1 (1991): 61-80.

4. Habermas, NR 177 ff. The term, 'non-communist leftist' comes from Maurice Merleau-Ponty (cf. the last chapter of *Adventures of the Dialectic,* trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

5. On "existential revolution", which applies also to the November 89 "velvet-revolution" in Czechoslovakia, cf. VWL: Václav Havel, *Versuch, in der Wahrheit zu leben,* trans. Gabriel Laub [*Moc bezmocnych,* 1978 in: *Olidskou identitu* (Praha: Rozmluvy, 1990)] (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1990) chs. 20-21; BO: Havel, *Briefe an Olga: Betrachtungen aus dem Gefängnis,* trans. Joachim Bruss [*Dopisy Olze,* 1983 publ. in: Praha: Atlantis, 1990] (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1990) letter 143; DV: Havel, *Dálkový výslech: rozhovor s Karlem Hvížďálou* [*Longdistance Interrogation: A Conversation with Karel Huížďála*] (Praha: Melantrich, 1989) 15. On themes from Emmanuel Lévinas, cf. Havel, BO letters 129-45 and part 2 below.

6. Cf. Max Horkheirner, *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 7 (Frankfurt a/M: S. Fischer Verlag, 1985) 182-86, 429-34 and essay "Theism-Atheism" and Havel, BO letter 139. Havel depicts the source of ideologies in the gap between words and acts, not as Habermas, in the rationality differential between the sacred and the profane. (Cf. n. 40 below.)

7. Habermas, NR 189. Three groupings were decisive in Czechoslovakia: students, actors and writers, and workers.

8. Habermas, NR 189 f and TCA: *The Theory of Communicative Action,* two vols, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, Vol. 1, 1984; Vol. 2, 1987)/*Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, Band 1, 1981, Band 2, 1985) vol. 2 develops this at length.

9. Cf. Havel, "Politika a svědomí" [Politics and conscience] in DRS 41-59; Václav Benda, "Paralelní *Polis,*" and Petr Uhl, "Alternativni společenství jako revoluční avantgarda" [Alternative community as a revolutionary avantgard], *Charta 77: 1977-1989. Od morální k demokratické revoluci* [From moral to democratic revolution] (Bratislava: ARCHA, 1990), 43-51 and 81-88. On the reference to November 89 as "carneval," cf. Havel, (Salzburg speech, 26 July 1990).

10. Habermas, NR 190.

11. Cf. James de Candole, "Vaclav Havel as a Conservative Thinker," *The Salisbury Review* (December 1988). On 'anti-political politics' as existential, Havel, VWL chs. 19-20, as opposed to fundamentalism, ch. 18 and opposed to fanaticism and fetishism, Havel, BO, letter 141; Havel, DRS 58 f; also Havel's speech upon receiving an honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, "Kafka and My Presidency" in: *P. Projevy [speeches]* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1990) 100-103 (26 April 1990) and the Salzburg speech. Czechoslovak foreign minister Jiří Dientsbier shares with Havel a notion of "moral diplomacy without tricks" (PBS Television, 20 Feb 1990). NC: Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate,* ed. and trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, intro. Richard Wolin (Cambridge MIT P, 1989), "Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity: The Federal Republic's Orientation to the West" 249-67 and NR 205 ff.

12. Habermas, NR 190.

13. On 'post-democracy', cf. Havel, VWL chaps. 21-22; on 'inter-existential' communication community, Havel, **BO,** letters 142-143. Cf. also Havel's Jerusalem and Salzburg speeches.

14. Habermas, NR 191.

15. Habermas, NR 191-95.

16. Habermas, NR 195 f.

17. Habermas, NR 197-202.

18. Havel, "Šifra socialismus" [Cipher Socialism] (June 1988), DRS 202-04.

19. Havel, DV 147 and "Hovory v Lánech" (Czechoslovak Radio Broadcast, 19 Aug 1990).

20. Havel, DV 12-13. Havel situates himself in the generation of Beatles, the America of the 60's, protest and civil rights movements, their music and art (Havel, DV 23 f).

21. Habermas, NR 202 f.

22. Habermas, NR 181-84.

23. Habermas, NR 184-87. Cf. my "Post/Moderní pokoušnení," *TVAR,* 36 (Praha, 8 Nov 1990) 1, 4-5.

24. Habermas, NR 179 ff; NC 249-67 and n. 5 above.

25. Havel, "Hovory v Lánech" (Czechoslovak Radio, 18 March 1990). Havel appeals to M. Foucault's analysis of the prison as the place that does not punish the crime but destroys human identity. He admits here that the differences between the Communist totality and the destruction of identity in the Western Panopticon approximate one another. This explains why the post-prison nihilism has a character of post-modern condition (DRS 15).

26. Havel, "Kafka and My Presidency," in p. 102.

27. For the text, cf. Havel, (Praha: Lidová demokracie, 27 July 1990), and *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* no 171 (July 27, 1990). Cf. two Jewish writers who analyze Havel's performance in Salzburg, A. M. Rosenthal, "Hero Havel Should Stop and Think," *International Herald Tribune* (July 30, 1990) and Robert B. Goldmann, "Havel's Message Deserves Hearing," *International Herald Tribune* (August 15, 1990). Rosenthal takes an offence at Havel's appearance with K. Waldheim who has falsified his Nazi past; Goldman points out that politicians have made it too easy for themselves by simply making a no longer meaningful gesture of non-appearance. Havel acted with a vertical type of ostracism against Waldheim, that is, not by being absent but by making known the absence of truth and the presence of a lie. Paradoxically, Havel seems to be a victorious Sisyphus, i.e., that intellectual about whose success something remains suspicious (Havel, DV 144 f). This also explains the autobiographical theme of the above address. Cf. "Havel über die Anatomie des Hasses: Eine Konferenz der Stiftung Elie Wiesel in Oslo," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (3 Sept. 1990).

28. Through Patočka, Havel turns to moral and political implications of phenomenology; through reflections on Levinas's vertical ethics rather than Sartre's decisionist politics, Havel articulates social-existential concerns. Other philosophical influence is Václav Bělohradský, *Krize eschatologie neosobnosti* [The Crisis of the Eschatology of Non-personality] (London: Rozmluvy, 1983). Cf. Jan Patoëka, *Ausgewählte Schriften,* ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec, trans. Eliška and Ralph Melville (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 1987-). Cf. my "Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Sympathy," *Auslegung.* 17/1 (1991) 41-65 and "Merleau-Ponty, On Taking the Attitude of the Other," *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology,* 22/1 (1991) 44_52.

29. Havel, BO, letters 122-44. The three stages are marked by Havel in his letters by numbers 1-3 (cf. letters 131-36, 138-39). One might contrast these stages with Adorno and contemporary feminism.

30. Emmanuel Lévinas, „Dialogue with E. Lévinas," in Richard A. Cohen, ed., *Face to Face with Lévinas* (Albany: SUNY P, 1986) 26 f, 23 f, 31. Cf. Lévinas, „Humanism and Anarchy," and "No Identity," in *Collected Philosophical Papers of Emmanuel Lévinas,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dodrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987) 127-40 and 141-52.

31. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969) 40.

32. Lévinas, „Dialogue" 21.

33. Cf. Havel's welcoming speech for Richard von Weizsäcker, the President of BRD, on the anniversary of Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia (Prague, March 15, 1990) in: P 79-86.

34. Havel, "Hovory v Lánech" (Czechoslovak Radio, 19 August 1980).

35. Havel, BO, letter 142.

36. Havel, DV 149-53 also 101-103.

37. Havel, DV 172-74. Not all inscenations of Havel's dramas respect this insight. One of the best understood interpretations of Havel's dramatic work is the performance of *Largo*

Desolato in his *alma mater* theater N A zábradlí, directed by Jan Grossman (Praha opening on 9 April 1990).

38. Havel, DV 101-103.

39. Havel, DV 163 f. A Czech activist priest, Rev. Václav Malý, in his public talk (Bonn, 7 March 1990) explained Havel's prison experience: while there Havel found friendship with imprisoned priests, took part in secret liturgies, and grew tolerant of the Christian churches, he kept his autonomy from a specific church affiliation. Before offended, one should dramatically interpret why Havel took part in the *Te Deum* after his first election to the Presidency (the Communist Klement Gottwald also attended *Te Deum* in 1948 and then started the hunt on the Church by imprisoning all religious in Czechoslovakia in the concentration monasteries) and why he called Pope's visit in April 90 a "miracle" (by allowing to speak publicly about the reformer Jan Hus, the Communist liquidation of churches, the nationalist conflicts, etc. the painful Czechoslovak history began to heal).

40. Havel, *Slovo o slovu* [Word about Word], in *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 1989* (Frankfurt a/M: Buchhändler-Vereinigung, 1989) and BO, letters 142 and 122.

41. Havel, BO, letters 143 and 142., VWL, chs. 20-22.

42. Havel, BO letter 141.

43. Havel, BO letter 141.

44. My critical questions to Havel and Habermas reflect a concern variously raised in connection with my topic by K. Günther, A. Honneth, S. Benhabib, D. Cornell, and others: how is the concrete other maintained within the anonymous structures of radical democracy, and how is the ideal of communicative ethics qualified by a post-traditional, existential ethic of the concrete other? My questions assume the possibility of answering the typical discourse-theoretical objections raised during my earlier presentation (Frankfurt a/M: Habermas's Colloquium, 22 Oct 1990): Habermas identified the vertical with prayer and, thus, he found my reading of Havel and Lévinas too theological. J. Bohman worried that while ‚existential revolution' could be used descriptively, it is dangerous to speak of it normatively. M. Low-Beer found it difficult to discourse within Lévinas's metaphysics. Habermas's point is best answered by Kierkegaard's nuanced distinction between immanent (A) and transcendent-Christian (B) religiosity. Neither (A) nor (B) assume the traditionalist authority of the sacred but require self-appropriation. Havel's posture (A), while oriented to the wholly other, stands for existential passion; its communication depends neither on the domains of a/theism nor on the posture of prayer. Bohman's objection mistakenly blurs the Sartrean ungrounded choice of values with Havel's self-choice within the community of the shaken. But we cannot judge the irresolution of the existential drama from a monological and decisionist stance of propaganda or catechism. Low-Beer's difficulty should be cured by Havel's existentially communicative action which informs his reading of Lévinas.