Book Review of Girardi, L. (2023), *Europe, Phenomenology, and Politics in Husserl and Patočka*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield).

Introduction

Lorenzo Girardi's wide ranging and highly informative book, *Europe, Phenomenology, and Politics in Husserl and Patočka*, explains the origins and nature of Europe's contemporary "crisis", and conducts its own enquiry into the significance of the catastrophes that befell Europe in the twentieth century. It investigates the limitations of rationality in the political sphere, and is sympathetic to the insights of agonistic political theory.

Girardi ends the introduction to his book on the same note on which he concludes the book itself, namely by warning us not to forget about the unprecedented catastrophes that befell Europe in the twentieth century. The admonition is apposite, since the book's entire train of thought turns out to be, in a certain way, haunted by the hecatombs of the first and second world wars. It alludes not only to a peril associated with a fading of our collective memory, but also to a philosophical danger of failing to comprehend what it was that transpired in the first place, in the traumas that we now denote with terms like "The Great War" and "The Holocaust". Indeed, I suspect that many readers will be prompted in the course of this book to wonder if the term "war" itself is due a metaphysical clarification.

Edmund Husserl predeceased those whose lives were cut short by the Holocaust, but by the time of his death in 1938 he was, to say the least, more cognizant than most of the nature of the crisis that seemed to be engulfing Europe. Husserl thought Europe was in crisis on the grounds that a naturalistic conception of the world cannot account for or support humanity's existential needs. He saw rational discourse as a reliable path towards the reconciliation or convergence of opposing

views, and wanted conflicting nations to embark on a political journey from their respective cultural life-worlds to a more universal life-world.

Girardi elaborates an important counterpoint to Husserl's rationalist teleology, by introducing the thought of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. Girardi explores Patočka's concerns about Husserl's understanding of the root of Europe's crisis, and about Husserl's proposal to restore the ideal of reason in political philosophy. This turns out to be connected to potential philosophical problems that can arise when one tries to attribute a final or transcendent meaning to the world as a whole. This, in turn, is connected to phenomenological questions pertaining to how one attributes significance to experiences, and how one responds to situations of apparent meaninglessness. All of these considerations inform Patočka's concept of problematicity, which is really the central theme of the three final chapters. Girardi goes on to consider the implications of Patočka's notion of problematicity for the discussion about the future of politics in Europe, and how this discussion has been taken up by certain post-structuralist political thinkers. The interconnectedness of the topics of Patočka, problematicity, and politics will incline me to review the book's final three chapters as a unit, in place of the chapter by chapter approach that I shall adopt for the rest of the book. Toward the end of this book review I shall offer three discussion points that I hope readers will find constructive.

The Idea of Europe and the Ideal of Reason

The main discussion of the book opens by drawing attention to the centrality of rationality in Europe's sense of its own self-identity, and of its own relation to the rest of the world. The very notion of "Europe", as something other than simply a geographical designation, advanced when "Europe" began to replace "Christendom" in diplomatic language to signify a collection of cooperating coordinate sovereign

states with a shared heritage from Christendom. The distinguishing feature of this European civilisation was that it saw itself as based squarely and fundamentally on reason.

This European civilisation saw itself as superior to all others, and the capacity for reason was held to be constitutive of our humanity. Importantly, this involved seeing reason not only as a mode of enquiry but as a way of resolving disputes. According to the rationalist perspective, all fields of human life, including morality, and the organisation of society, were to be grounded in reason. Grounding everything in reason had the consequence that the world became "disenchanted", since in principle everything could be mastered by means of calculation.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century, there were concerns that rationalism was undermining community and social cohesion. Weber observed that for all of rationalism's successes, it didn't seem to have much success in answering questions about the ultimate meaning of human existence. In a rationalist discourse concerning how to organise society, there isn't typically much emphasis on accommodating a plurality of views. Sociologists like Ferdinand Tönnies regarded rationalist society as a complete inversion of community. Later in the twentieth century, the idea was put forward, by the Frankfurt School of critical theory amongst others, that rationalism contributed to, facilitated, or made possible the atrocities of the first and second world wars. Girardi points out that the extent of rationalism's responsibility for these horrors remains a matter of dispute.

A Philosophical Sketch of the Contemporary Situation

Chapter 2 begins to explore some of the different currents in the ongoing contemporary debate concerning the philosophical direction that European political thought ought to be taking, and in particular how entangled with rationalism this

direction ought to be. One pole of the contemporary debate argues that Europe needs to revert and reconnect to its Christian heritage. This view gained ground after the fall of the Soviet Bloc, when there was a resurgence of Christianity in many Eastern European countries. This became an important part of their national identity. At a European level, this reinforces the centrality of Christianity to contemporary European identity. Today, sceptics of the EU project are often proposing a culturally Christian Europe. They regard reviving Europe's Christian heritage as a way of counteracting the disenchantment of the world that rationalism seemed to usher in, and re-enchant the world with some transcendent spiritual values. This position is not so much about completely rejecting rationality as keeping it in check and making space for a re-enchantment of the world. Girardi points out that Novalis (1772-1801) was a very early proponent of a version of this view, and that, more recently, Gianni Vattimo (2002) argues that European identity is inextricably enmeshed with Christianity.

A different pole of the contemporary debate argues that the way forward for Europe is to double down on rationalism. Proponents of this view argue that rationalism could have enabled us to rise above our small-minded human disputes over territory, natural resources, and cultural differences, and that if only Europe had been more rational, it would have avoided both world wars completely. In the rationalist's view, the world wars were not a case of rationalism taking Europe in the wrong direction, but instead a bursting forth of an incomprehensible and lethal irrationalism.

The cogency of the pro-rationalism pole of the debate is difficult to deny, but Girardi observes that the main drawback is that it now seems to be leading us toward a bureaucratic European Union devoid of human existential meaning. The idea that

rationalism was supposed to enable us to rise above our cultural differences seems to have been conflated with the view that it is improper to rate one culture more highly than another. This is to say that cultural relativism has acquired a strong foothold in political circles. This view informs the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We now run into the problem where there is a tension between respecting what we deem to be universal human rights and respecting a foreign culture.

A second drawback stems from the fact that, understandably, those backing the EU project like to use the Holocaust for symbolic purposes. Yet Eastern European countries, and the UK, for instance, tend to be less willing than Germany to accept culpability for the Holocaust. For such nations, Holocaust culpability is not part of their national identity. In the end, observers of the contemporary debate about the future of Europe need to be cognizant of the fact that those who wish Europe to revert to its Christian heritage are liable to hold up the Holocaust as an admonishment against the dangers of unchecked rationalism, whilst their opponents hold up the Holocaust as an admonishment against the dangers of *neglecting* rationalism.

Rational Politics, the Liberal Consensus, and the Agonistic Critique

Girardi observes that it seems to be a characteristic of a *purely* rational or "universalist" rationalist discourse concerning how to organise society that there isn't typically much emphasis on accommodating a plurality of views. After all, in a strictly rational society (if such a society were ever to exist) the function of reason would be to optimally redesign and reorganise society. This gives rise to concerns that this way of going about things is conducive toward totalitarianism.

Pluralist rationalism (as opposed to universalist rationalism) aims to address this concern by introducing a process of reconciliation between diverse attitudes and opinions. The two-fold aim of a pluralist rationalist society is mutual safety and

individual freedom. Under pluralist rationalism, the state is neutral with respect to worldview. Liberal democracy has much in common with pluralist rationalism, but is not completely neutral with respect to worldview. Sometimes democratic procedure restricts individual rights. This is the tension between democracy and liberalism. This leaves room for a wide variety of versions of liberal democracy, and Rawls and Habermas each develop their own.

One of the features of a liberal democracy is the requirement that there should be a general consensus across all citizens about democratic procedure. This is called the *liberal consensus*. In searching for the liberal consensus, Rawls and Habermas both want to strike the right balance between universalism and pluralism. Habermas doesn't want secularism to dominate public debate, and this means affording traditional worldviews the opportunity to participate in public political debate. Consonantly, people should have the right, in Habermas's view, to contribute to public debate in their own religious language. This means Habermas could be said to be a post-secularist, something that Rawls is not.

After the discussion of Rawls and Habermas, Girardi turns his attention to the topic of the agonistic critique of rationalist political theory. Proponents of the agonistic critique advance a battery of objections stemming from the suspicion that the idealised conceptions that rationalist political theory employs do not correspond to reality. They tend to argue that rationalist political theory has invented a fictional political model using idealised conceptions of discourse, discussants, citizens, consensus, deliberation, and the discursive environment. Agonists are concerned that rationalist political theory ignores the possibility that some problems may be irresolvable in principle. They typically believe that (a) there is an irreducible plurality of values; and (b) when values come into conflict, it is a mistake to assume

that the conflict can be resolved, or that it is necessarily possible to devise a comprehensive or overarching reconciliation procedure. They maintain that there is no political framework that can be devised *a priori*, that rationalist political theory marginalises people critical of the liberal consensus, and that it curtails the plurality of views.

Girardi proceeds to examine in more detail the respective positions of various agonistic thinkers, including Honig, Mouffe, Gray, and Connolly. In the course of this discussion, Girardi explores how they advocate resisting and disrupting the liberal consensus. Agonists like Gray and Connolly are proponents of a radical and ever-changing pluralism, which can involve a plurality of possible political frameworks. According to this kind of agonistic stance, illiberal views and illiberal political frameworks cannot be ruled out.

Husserl's Europe as a Philosophical Project

Girardi draws attention to the important distinction between Husserl's "idea" of Europe and his "absolute idea" of Europe. Husserl's "idea" of Europe is a conception of European culture. It is so broad that it can be taken to refer to Western civilisation in general, including the colonial expansion of the British Empire, and the migration of European peoples to North America. It excludes, however, itinerant peoples such as the Roma. This "idea" of Europe is formed eidetically based on what is given in concrete empirical instances. Every culture or civilisation will have an equivalent "idea" or "spiritual shape" of this kind.

By contrast, Husserl's "absolute idea" of Europe is not constituted eidetically on the basis of empirical instances. Instead, it is a self-standing ideal concept grounded in rationality itself. It is independent of, and in that sense transcends, actual

human experiences. According to Husserl, the "birthplace" of this "absolute idea" of Europe was Ancient Greece. It is the idea of a completely rational human civilisation.

When Husserl speaks of a European "crisis", he essentially means that Western civilisation has fallen short of, or fallen away from, its rational ideal, that is, its "absolute idea". More specifically, Husserl believes that we have become so enthralled by scientific discoveries and technological developments that our understanding of the true remit of rationality has become impoverished and truncated. In the first part of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl scrutinises and critiques the way many people, including some scientists, tend to think about the hard sciences. He says they "take for being what is actually method". By this he means that they think the idealised scientific world is the actual real world. Science has been so successful that one begins to think of the idealised mathematical world that the scientific method works with as the real world. The trouble is that we have forgotten that the sciences presuppose the world as we ordinarily experience it. Husserl observes that we still require philosophy to ground science, on pain of committing ourselves to the erroneous position of naturalism, which is the view that the only possible objects of knowledge are the objects of the natural sciences. Naturalism subtracts cultural properties from objects, and excludes all matters pertaining to value. Those caught up in naturalism overlook or ignore the fact that we still require philosophy to investigate the existential meaning of life and its value. Another way of looking at this is to realise that philosophy, for whatever reason, has failed to be a satisfactory foundation for the sciences. This amounts to a falling short of rationalism as a whole.

For Husserl, the fundamental distinction in political thought has to be between rationality and irrationality. Europe's failure to understand the remit of rationality has

led some citizens to seek existential meaning in irrational areas, such as ethno-nationalist politics, or develop an hostility to reason, and has led some European governments to pursue irrational foreign policies. Husserl believes that the catastrophe of the first world war revealed the irrationality, the "inner untruth, the meaninglessness" that had befallen European civilisation.

We have found, then, that philosophy itself is implicated in, and entangled with, the crisis that Husserl is describing. It is only when philosophers can understand the nature of the crisis that has engulfed them, and for which they are partly responsible, that they can begin to find a way out of it. The first step is to reassess what rationality really is, and what its remit is. Rationality should include what Girardi calls "existentially relevant questions". Once we have revised our understanding of rationality, we must then recommit ourselves to it.

Husserl's Reestablishment of the Ideal of Reason

Husserl believes that, in response to Europe's "crisis", there are a number of pressing reasons for exploring the "life-world", which is constituted in one's pre-scientific experience of the world. One of these reasons is the overcoming of naturalism, and the provision of a proper epistemological foundation for the sciences. Another reason is to investigate what Girardi calls "existentially relevant questions", which includes enquiry into moral values. The life-world can disclose to us things that we pre-theoretically intuit to be morally right. An example of this is that when a group of people live in proximity to one another, we often find it morally appropriate to come together in a community of love, in which individuals are valued and loved in all of their uniqueness and particularity. Phenomenologically, it is an intrinsic property of moral values that they transcend time and space: they are applicable at all times and in all places. This brings us to the idea that an important reason to

investigate the life-world is to uncover a universal sense of the world. Finding a world valid for everyone is relevant to the field of reconciliation between conflicting parties and nations. Indeed, chapter 5's main concern is the problem of finding a universal life-world.

One and the same perceptual object may be understood to be amenable to being apprehended in separate acts located across a set of perspectival and temporal positions. The set of perspectival and temporal positions may be said to form an intentional horizon, and this is sometimes referred to as the object's internal horizon. Yet in addition to an internal horizon, perceptual objects are also found to be embedded within an external horizon. Husserl describes the external horizon as "the openness of the world as an indeterminate horizon against which things can become determinate." The internal and external horizons are both regulative principles ordering experience.

Every life-world partially "fills in" the indeterminate external horizon. The external horizon is pre-given and implicit in every life-world. Husserl calls this universal horizon the world in general. The world in general is the world in its universal sense. We find that objects belonging to the world in its universal sense are not only given horizonally (internally and externally) but also carry the sense "experienceable by everyone", or "meant for all".

It is important to note that in the life-world, perceptual objects belong to a wider cultural world of values that exceeds them. The life-world is always already embedded in one's culture. So there is in this sense a plurality of life-worlds across the population of the world, since there is a plurality of cultures. Or to put it another way, the life-world of someone aware of the existence of other cultures is a plurality of cultural worlds.

This would seem to raise the aspiration of finding a universal culture. It is to this end that Husserl tries to find an account of the life-world that is consistent with rationality, and hence valid for everyone. Husserl seeks the rationalisation of culture, but not its deletion. This leads Husserl to consider the possibility that perhaps philosophy could take certain traditional beliefs and somehow restate them philosophically. We might cautiously draw some encouragement from the observation that there is already some commonality discernible between the various life-worlds. One reason for this is common biological needs across all humans. Another reason is sharing the same planet.

In the course of chapter 5, also Girardi raises some doubts about the prospects for Husserl's rationalist teleology, and mentions a number of possible objections to it, including the agonistic critique.

Patočka, Problematicity, and Politics

Patočka's relation to Husserl is a complex one, and ultimately ambivalent. Whilst Patočka agrees with Husserl that the life-world and the scientific interpretation of the world very often seem to be at odds with each other, he is doubtful on the question of whether such conflict can always be resolved. Husserl finds grounds for believing in the possibility of the resolution of such conflict in what he sees as the intrinsically teleological structure of experience. However, Patočka argues that there is no absolute grounding for the meaning of the objects that appear to us. The world as a whole is implicit in the meaning of the objects that appear to us, but it doesn't make sense to ascribe a final meaning to the world as a whole. The world as a whole doesn't have a meaning, but instead should be understood to be the horizon of all meaning.

Patočka's criticism of Husserl suggests that we ought to look more carefully at the phenomenology of the life-world and how we go about attributing meaning to the objects we encounter there. Patočka thinks Husserl makes the mistake of striving for a philosophy that will be capable of deciding, or eventually converging upon, the final meaning of the world. By contrast, Patočka thinks the world as a whole has significance but not a final meaning. In fact, he maintains that significance precludes the possibility of a final meaning. So we must distinguish between significance and signification. The act of intuiting significance, for Patočka, means grasping the potential for a system of possible significations. Interestingly, this leads Patočka to the view that instances of apparent meaninglessness can have significance, on the grounds that they might harbour the possibility of finding meanings.

This brings us to Patočka's concept of problematicity. Problematicity refers to an absolute indeterminacy in the meaning of an event or an experience. Patočka's concepts of significance and problematicity can therefore be regarded as two sides of the same coin. Problematicity is always in relation to a fundamental moment of significance. Events and experiences that strike us as significant always seem to refuse a final meaning. We experience problematicity when we run up against the limits of meaning. The experience of problematicity subverts the sense of the world passed down by tradition, myth, ideology, and religion. Patočka thinks religions tend to make the mistake of bestowing a signification on certain instances of significance. According to Patočka, problematicity has always been part of human experience. The history of mankind is one of shaking the certitude of a pre-given meaning. Every life-world is intrinsically problematical. The disenchanted scientific world that rationalism ushers in is problematical, because there is a loss of transcendent meaning. In general, Patočka wants to postulate a problematical relationship, or an incongruence, between

the empirical and the ideal. Patočka thinks we have in the end to regard problematicity as an objective insight, that is, that problematicity is to be regarded as a structural characteristic of human existence and the world in general. It is to be thought of as a feature of the world, not a deficiency in our understanding of it. Patočka's account of problematicity renders his philosophy incompatible with both Husserlian phenomenology and Christianity. It precludes a rationalist teleology toward a unitary universal life-world.

Understanding Patočka's concept of problematicity is one thing, but understanding its phenomenology is another. It makes sense to suppose that if one wished to explore the phenomenology of problematicity, then it would become most salient in situations involving a pronounced or unequivocal incongruence between the empirical and the ideal. This explains why Patočka finds encounters with meaninglessness to be particularly illuminating of the phenomenology of problematicity. Patočka wants to suggest that in the encounter with an instance of meaninglessness, one can be moved to bring meaning into the encounter oneself, by sacrificing oneself in some sense. One decides spontaneously to put oneself on the line, so to speak, without concern for, or clear knowledge of, the consequences for oneself or for others. Patočka's "sacrifice" is an existential refusal of nihilism. It manages to eschew or stave off the Nietzschean response to the problem of nihilism, according to which the only way to produce meaning is through force, strength, and power. In Patočka's sacrifice, then, we seem to have an experience of transcendence without a metaphysical positing of that transcendence. Patočka calls this Negative Platonism. It seems to be about demonstrating how strongly you are choosing to commit yourself to certain values. One experiences an absolute freedom in doing so.

This idea of discovering a meaning to life that reaches beyond one's own survival, the satisfaction of one's own appetites, and the mere perpetuation of human life is consonant with the Ancient Greek philosophical project of the "care for the soul", which Patočka himself seeks to adopt and incorporate into his own philosophy. Patočka thinks freedom is crucial to the care of the soul. One chooses, in a free act of the will, a project or a cause whose scope transcends the immediate parameters of one's own life. Adopting such a project places one in a position to live a free, responsible, and thoughtful life in which one's thoughts and actions should be in harmony with the project. Instead of constantly reacting to circumstances, one begins to think and act meaningfully and coherently in the world. In the confrontation with instances of apparent meaninglessness, Patočka's notions of sacrifice and the care of the soul offer a way of escaping what he sees as an excessive reliance on rationality, and is conducive toward an existentially responsible shaping of one's life. It is a path toward a deepening of the soul.

Committing to a cause that you have chosen for yourself motivates you to enquire, research, and work things out for yourself, instead of relying on pre-given answers that have been passed down by religion or tradition. This is why, for Patočka, the care of the soul is fundamental to politics. Part of Patočka's politics is aimed at forging new forms of community outside of the traditional community. Such communities should always comprise diverse views and opinions. They prioritise debate, dissidence, and dialogue over the survival of the community. Patočka sees a parallel between a society's dissidents and Plato's "guardian class". They demonstrate model characteristics for everyone else: public spirited, community minded, ascetic, sincere, admonishing, speaking inconvenient truths, self-sacrificing. Because of their integrity, they are well suited to running stable institutions for a society. We find,

then, that Patočka's political philosophy takes its inspiration from Plato's notions of the care of the soul, and the just state.

Patočka's ambivalent relation to Husserl therefore turns out to be highly relevant to the contemporary debate surrounding the theory of the state and the question of finding the right architecture for a pluralist political framework. The philosophical rationale behind such an architecture is multi-faceted. Firstly, just as the *polis* of Ancient Greece provided a framework for dissent and debate, Patočka desires a respectful political space in which conflicting views can be aired, scrutinised, and reflected upon. Patočka, together with other agonistic political thinkers who have taken up his thought, want to find ways of incorporating dissidence and problematicity into our political institutions. Yet Patočka also wants his philosophy to inform a constructive politics – a politics that is capable of effectuating change, as well as facilitating dissent and debate. The framework and space for such debate and discussion is what Patočka calls the sphere of the political. For Patočka, the sphere of the political is distinct from politics. The sphere of the political is essentially indeterminate with respect to ideology, because it is grounded in the concept of problematicity. Such a political sphere will be more likely to forestall tendencies toward totalitarianism, and make twentieth century atrocities such as the Holocaust less likely to recur.

Furthermore, Patočka wants to find a middle way between rationalism and relativism. Pluralism cannot be allowed to become pure relativism, on the grounds that activity within the *polis* must be subject to certain norms of conduct and procedure. On the other hand, Patočka also wants to avoid pure rationalism, because he believes pure rationalism can lead to a kind of intellectual *cul-de-sac* that neglects the care of the soul. One of the attributes of a just state is that it is possible for the one

who cares for his soul to flourish. This is connected to a concern of Patočka's that liberal democracies can be conducive to a kind of moral vacuity, and don't sufficiently nurture human freedom.

Part of the task lies in navigating the inherent tension between freedom, as Patočka conceives it, and the state's institutions. A step in the right direction has been taken by some liberal democracies to the extent that they have a separation of powers between different institutions. They separate powers between the government of the day, the law-makers, the judiciary, law enforcement, and so on. This is what is meant when it is said that democracy is an institutionalisation of conflict, and that a healthy democracy will have an absolute indeterminacy at its foundation. Additionally, state institutions can have an important role in protecting certain basic freedoms, such as those of petition, association, publication, assembly, and speech. Subject to certain conditions, a healthy liberal democracy will actively encourage the expression of a diversity of views.

The desire to forestall relativism raises the question of whether there should be hurdles or entry criteria to the sphere of the political. The successful operation of Patočka's political framework would not depend upon the possibility of a reconciliation between conflicting parties, but merely a mutual recognition of the essentially problematic nature of human existence. All parties should subscribe to a shared view of problematicity. Conflicting parties find themselves sharing a space of significance. One "prays for the enemy", or at least tolerates him as a valid participant in the debate. This kind of tolerance is known as agonistic respect. Patočka calls it the "solidarity of the shaken".

Patočka himself is pessimistic about the prospects for a widespread spiritual conversion to his doctrine of problematicity. It would require a transformation of

political culture, a collective conversion to a new "civil religion". But a new civil religion of problematicity, Patočka believes, would give modern human existence a meaning that it currently lacks.

Discussion Point 1 – Two Kinds of Optimism

One of this book's key topics is reconciliation. This could mean reconciling the worldviews of two different cultures, reconciling two warring nations, or reconciling the agendas of two political parties. In this context there are two relevant senses of the term "optimism" (and similarly "pessimism") in relation to the prospects for such a reconciliation. In some places, it is clear which sense Girardi has in mind, but in other places it is not always entirely clear.

Firstly, there is a teleological sense. For instance, one might believe that it belongs to the nature of rational discourse to arrive, sooner or later, at an agreement. Husserl believes that Western culture has an inborn teleology, a striving toward rationality and a life of reflective self-responsibility. When Girardi refers to "optimistic rationalism", I infer that he is using "optimistic" in this teleological sense.

Secondly, there is a practical sense. For instance, one might believe, purely on the basis of what one knows about the world, human nature, and our political realities, that there are grounds for hope in relation to the prospects for reconciliation in certain areas. As Girardi points out, in this practical sense, Husserl himself is not entirely optimistic about our prospects. Husserl acknowledges that often history seems to be resisting and frustrating his goal. This is why Husserl describes his infinite task as "a struggle between awakened reason and the powers of historical reality."

Two examples of where it is not entirely clear which sense is being used are: "Overall, however, Patočka is certainly less optimistic about Europe's trajectory and the capacities of reason than Husserl was." [94]; and "Although the possibility of a

positive appropriation of problematicity is indicated here, Patočka is also pessimistic of the possibility of such a metanoia on a grand scale." [122].

Discussion Point 2 – Habermas's shift to post-secularism

Towards the end of chapter 5, Girardi points out some commonality and complementarity between Husserl's and Habermas's political philosophies, in that they both exhibit a faith in the process of reconciliation between different views. Girardi points out that Habermas "[...] attempt[s] a purely procedural approach to reconciliation", and has "a faith in the rational transformation of particular views with an eye on their reconciliation" [89]. Girardi indicates that, according to Habermas, "all relevant views can meaningfully by reconciled with each other" [90]. Girardi argues that it is debatable whether Husserl's and Habermas's optimism with respect to the possibility of reconciliation between diverse views is justified, and that we need to consider the possibility that some views are not amenable to a process of rational reconciliation.

My concern here is that this particular discussion in chapter 5 doesn't distinguish between Habermas's earlier and later work. We have already learned in chapter 3 that "[i]n his later work, [Habermas] is no longer as committed to the secularisation thesis as he was in his earlier work" [39], and that in his later work Habermas sees liberal democracy as "a rationalisation, of communicative practices already present in more traditional worldviews, even if he no longer believes that these traditional worldviews can fully be replaced" [39]. Girardi also suggests in chapter 3 that when Habermas says he will not impose the condition of reflexivity on the worldviews of others, he comes close to "problematic relativism" [39].

Discussion Point 3 – The Holocaust

The Holocaust is pertinent to this book in a number of ways. Firstly, references to the Holocaust have an admonitory function. They serve to remind participants in the discussion about Europe's political future of the imperative to avert a recurrence of something like the atrocities of the second world war. Indeed, the book's closing sentence warns about the importance of not forgetting about them.

Secondly, the book is also concerned with enquiring into the complex web of causation behind the Holocaust. Girardi rightly points out that the extent of rationalism's causal role behind the Holocaust remains a matter of controversy. [13] Yet the Holocaust would not have been possible without either advances in military and industrial technology, or systematic planning. So rationalism is certainly implicated in the web of causation, and Girardi is inclined to endorse Zygmunt Bauman's idea of a "structural connection between the Holocaust and modernity" [19]. My observation about the phrase "structural connection" is that it could be taken to imply that modernity was somehow always going to entail something like the Holocaust. Perhaps such an implicit claim requires more justification than Girardi provides.

Thirdly, considerations about the web of causation behind the Holocaust lead on to questions about culpability. The egregious nature of the immorality of the Holocaust leads Girardi to believe that European civilisation itself bears some culpability for even making it possible. [150] It seems to me that laying a portion of blame at the door of European civilisation itself raises the following potential problem. What is to be said in this regard to Eastern European countries, for example, who tend to be less willing than Germany to accept culpability for the Holocaust? For them, Holocaust culpability is not part of their national identity. [26]

Fourthly, Girardi is also interested in how the Holocaust has affected our understanding of the broad sweep of European history, and the extent to which the Holocaust has dispelled a "Grand Narrative" of European cultural progress. There is no escaping the force of the observation that it would be a very strange "Grand Narrative" indeed that led up to something like the Holocaust. Yet Girardi also recognises that, after the Holocaust, the "Grand Narrative" did not disappear completely from the way historians thought about European history. [170]

As I reflect on the various ways in which the Holocaust haunts Girardi's book, I find myself wondering if it might have been fitting for him to have said more about Patočka's account of war contained in the sixth of his *Heretical Essays*. It is relevant to the question of causation, and, by implication, to the question of culpability, and provides an original metaphysical perspective on how we might understand the hecatombs of the first and second world wars.

Conclusion

As its title indicates, *Europe, Phenomenology, and Politics in Husserl and Patočka* is broad in scope, and covers a lot of historical and philosophical ground. What stood out for me was the way it raised and explored the question of the limitations of rationality, and the unsettling possibility that the worthy aspiration to eliminate conflict and hostility in world affairs could turn out to be metaphysically mistaken and futile. In that respect, I found the chapters engaging with the thought of Jan Patočka particularly valuable. In those chapters I was impressed by Girardi's elucidation of the ways in which Patočka's philosophy is informed by subtle echoes and motifs from Christianity, such as the ideas of sacrifice and praying for the enemy.

In addition to becoming acquainted with the philosophy of Jan Patočka, and agonistic political thought more generally, there are many other good reasons for

studying this book. Some readers will be seeking to find out more about the diverse roots of European culture. Other readers will be aiming to improve their understanding of the philosophical motivations behind rationalist pluralism and liberal democracy. Yet others will be interested in Edmund Husserl's account of Europe's "crisis", and how his concerns about Europe motivate his phenomenological project. Girardi's fascinating book is a thorough enquiry into the main currents that inform the contemporary debate about the direction of European politics. It is an absorbing read from start to finish, and contains a treasure trove of insights for anybody interested in the intersection between philosophy and politics.