

Summary

This volume seeks to probe the meanings of Czech national identity. The author sets out from a definition of a *nation* as a community constituted by a choice of shared memories, of a common lived reality and of shared hopes and ideals. A *nation* in this sense is thus a distinctly philosophical reality, based on an interaction of thought and deed. However, given the vicissitudes of Czech history, no one evident meaning offers itself. It thus seems rather more accurate to speak of the *meanings* of Czech history.

Thus, after a brief glance at the late Middle Ages, the author turns his attention to the interplay of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, which in the period of early Czech rebirth in the nineteenth century takes the form of a confrontation of Austrian positivism with German idealism, both influencing Czech thought. Against that background the author traces the development of Czech philosophy and politics, with emphasis on the thought of T. G. Masaryk. Unlike most authors, this he interprets Masaryk's positivism in its conjunction with a moral point of view as a positive factor.

After the disintegration of the Austrian empire in the first World War the quest for a Czech national identity became emphatically a question of competing nationalisms. The new state was as multinational as old Austria, but the newly liberated Czechs longed for a nation state in which they would play the state-defining role. The Czechoslovak state sought to overcome the contradiction between a multinational population and a specifically Czech state by guaranteeing democracy and civil rights for all its citizens.

According to the author, the contradiction of the idea of a nation state and the reality of a multinational land led to the Munich tragedy in 1938. That in turn led to a shift of a significant part of Czech thought to a Fascist-leaning right and to the subsequent struggle for a democratic, socially just ideal of Czech identity in the spirit of Masaryk. Against this background, the author deals with the thought of Jan Patočka and of post-war thinkers generally, with a special attention to the thought of the Communist period, in which he sees the sources both of the idea of a democratic socialism and of the idea of a principled anti-Communism.

The author thinks it crucial to lead contemporary thought out of that blind alley of our past by recognising wholly new questions and possibilities, especially the global environmental threat and the possibilities of an Europe united in difference. Thus the meaning of Czech history is for him no one interpretation thereof but rather an ever ongoing *quest for the meaning of our national identity* to which this volume seeks to contribute.

The book appeared also in an English version: Kohák, E., *Hearth and Horizon. Cultural Identity and Global Humanity in Czech Philosophy*, Praha, Filosofia 2008 [www.kosmas.cz].