The Individual as Prime Mover in Czechoslovak History:

An Analysis of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk's, Edvard Beneš's, and Václav Havel's Visions for Czechoslovak Democracy

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Contents

Abstract (English)

This thesis explores Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk's, Edvard Beneš's, and Václav Havel's understanding of Czechoslovak democracy through the prism of their philosophies of history and the role of the individual in society. In the first chapter, I examine Masaryk's and Beneš's promotion of Czechoslovak myth-making, political philosophy, and diplomacy to illuminate what shaped their vision for Czechoslovak democracy. I argue that Beneš's understanding of morality was inherently humanistic and that it directly shaped his role as Czechoslovak president. Secondly, I contend that his view of democracy stemmed from his neo-Hegelian philosophy of history, which overlapped with that of his predecessor, Masaryk. In the second chapter, I analyze Havel's foundational principle for morality and society, namely "living in truth," and how his philosophy of history informed his ideal polity. First, I look at the relationship between identity and responsibility in his understanding of living in truth. That will help illustrate Havel's views on the ideal political leader and his or her role in society. An emphasis on individualism comes across in much of Havel's economics and politics. Then I address his foreign policy, since his individualism similarly illuminates the need for a foreign policy based on guaranteeing citizens human rights and promoting understanding and compromise in diplomacy. Finally, I assess the role the individual as prime mover in history plays in shaping these beliefs, and I put them in contrast to his predecessors.

Abstract (French)

Cette thèse explore la compréhension de la démocratie tchécoslovaque par Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš et Václav Havel à travers le prisme de leurs philosophies de l'histoire et du rôle de l'individu dans la société. Dans le premier chapitre, j'examine la promotion par Masaryk et Beneš du mythe tchécoslovaque, de la philosophie politique et de la diplomatie afin de mettre en lumière ce qui a façonné leur vision de la démocratie tchécoslovaque. Je soutiens que la conception de la moralité de Beneš était intrinsèquement humaniste et qu'elle a directement influencé son rôle de président tchécoslovaque. Deuxièmement, je soutiens que sa vision de la démocratie découle de sa philosophie néo-hégélienne de l'histoire, qui recoupe celle de son prédécesseur, Masaryk. Dans le deuxième chapitre, j'analyse le principe fondamental de Havel en matière de morale et de société, à savoir « vivre dans la vérité », et la manière dont sa philosophie de l'histoire a influencé son idéal politique. Tout d'abord, j'examine la relation entre l'identité et la responsabilité dans sa conception de la vie dans la vérité. Cela permettra d'illustrer le point de vue de Havel sur le dirigeant politique idéal et son rôle dans la société. L'accent mis sur l'individualisme se retrouve dans une grande partie de l'économie et de la politique de Havel, c'est pourquoi je consacrerai un peu d'énergie à leur discussion. J'aborde ensuite sa politique étrangère, car son individualisme met également en lumière la nécessité d'une politique étrangère fondée sur la garantie des droits de l'homme des citoyens et sur la promotion de la compréhension et du compromis dans la diplomatie. Enfin, j'évalue le rôle que joue l'individu en tant que moteur principal de l'histoire dans la formation de ces convictions et je les mets en contraste avec ses prédécesseurs.

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Introduction: On the Role of History and the Individual in Czechoslovakia

After the dissolution of Austria-Hungary in 1918 and the fall of Communism in 1989, liberal democracy emerged in Czechoslovakia as the political system that structured society.[1] In the 1990s, *laissez-faire* economics became a welcome alternative for many Czechoslovak citizens to the authoritarian conditions that characterized Gustav Husák's Czechoslovakia. For a brief period, neoliberal economics, and the corresponding belief that economic growth fosters liberal democracy, became "the end of history," as Francis Fukuyama famously wrote. In his book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Fukuyama argued that Nazism and Communism proved unsuccessful as political ideologies in the twentieth century. The third experiment, which he described as liberal democracy, emerged as the dominant alternative. With liberal democracy, Fukuyama argued that there would be fewer wars and more geopolitical stability. Some from central and eastern Europe remained skeptical. For example, Vladimir Tismăneanu wrote sharply in 2002 against the "neo-Hegelian" game of "ultimate liberal triumph" due to its apparent misjudgment of progress.[2] For some in Czechoslovakia who disagreed with Fukuyama's position, both the turbulence of Czechoslovak democracy in the interwar years and the populist demagoguery of the Czech and Slovak prime ministers, Václav Klaus and Vladimír Mečiar, appeared as inevitable outcomes of the egalitarian promises of democracy. Plato's prophecy about the demagogic inevitability in democracies in his *Republic* manifested itself in parts of central and eastern Europe in the interwar years, the 1990s, and beyond.[3]

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[1] In Czechoslovakia, liberal democracy existed, with many flaws, until the authoritarian Second Republic (1938–1939) and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992 into its successor states, the Czech and Slovak Republics, where it continued in separate states.

[2] As quoted by Robin Okey, *The Demise of Communist East Europe: 1989 in Context* (London: Arnold, 2004), 172. Notably, the notion of democracy being inevitable is not solely or necessarily Hegelian; Tocqueville argued a similar premise, as did many Europeans in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, in this thesis, for the sake of brevity, I refer to it mostly as "neo-Hegelian."

[3] Notably, the authoritarian Second Republic (1938–1939), the Czech and Slovak collaboration with Nazi forces, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (1948–1989), and the steady popularity of right-wing populists in Czechoslovakia's successor states all undermined the belief that democracy is an inevitability. After the fall of the

In this thesis, I analyze this neo-Hegelian philosophy of history through the prism of what the Czechoslovak presidents Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, and Václav Havel had to say about Czechoslovak democracy and the individual's role in it as the prime mover in history. I argue that it is best to understand Masaryk's and Beneš's views of Czechoslovak democracy through their emphasis on (1) its unique place in history and (2) the alleged inherent Czechoslovak "democratic spirit." Therefore, I devote space to understanding the Czech national myth and the propaganda efforts of Masaryk and Beneš. Havel's core principle for morality, namely "living in truth," influenced his philosophy of history and shaped his vision of the ideal Czechoslovak polity. I argue that the central component of each of their philosophies of history is humanistic individualism, which stresses personal responsibility with regard to cultivating democracy.[4] Since the First Czechoslovak Republic is also known as "Masaryk's Republic," and Masaryk's influence on it is indisputable, I briefly analyze Masaryk's contribution only as it relates to Beneš**'**s development of thought on democracy and its principles.

Masaryk and Beneš aligned with the neo-Hegelian notion that liberal democracy would prevail over competing political ideologies. In their framing, the "world revolution" of the First World War introduced a new era that would abandon authoritarianism. However, their philosophy of history did not imply apathy toward the role individuals played in upholding democracy. Masaryk and Beneš argued that democracy was a way of life. They believed that because of the inherent nature of individuals who love freedom, dictatorships would always be short-lived and democracy was inevitable. Their philosophy of history resembles what Hayden

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Soviet Union, the emergence of a strand of thought of the inevitability of democracy was further put into question with the difficulty of creating and sustaining independent institutions in the post-Communist countries as well as the formation of illiberal regimes and everything from soft-authoritarianism to organized crime and authoritarian strong-man leaders. Similarly, in the interwar years, after twenty years, democracy seemed doomed on much of the European continent. See Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 3–6.

[4] Humanism is present in all three of the Czechoslovak presidents' philosophy of history because of their emphasis on history's connections to personhood.

White called a Contextualist method of chronicling history. In contrast, Mechanists such as Tocqueville interpret history through general laws, similar to how the laws of physics govern nature. Mechanists then apply these laws to make their "configurations understandable as functions of those laws."[5] The institutions, laws, art form, and so forth are not as important as the species, class, and generic typifications.[6] As a result, White points out that Mechanists succumb to abstraction and reduction.[7] For Masaryk and Beneš, in line with Contextualists, "threads" in the historical account connect an event to the context. This helps them determine the "origins" of the event.[8] This is what White calls "the flow" that determines that some events are more important than others.[9] Masaryk and Beneš reject the Mechanist view of history in an attempt to make it into a rigorous science that is observable and objective.[10]

In contrast to Masaryk's and Beneš's view that liberal democracy was inevitable, Havel envisioned society transitioning to "post-democracy"—an era that moved beyond both authoritarianism and Western parliamentary democracies. Havel disagreed with the relatively optimistic picture that the political and economic structures of liberal democracies would guarantee international peace and domestic stability. Instead, he argued that social progress stemmed from individual deeds that were in accordance with "living in truth." Havel was skeptical of the inherent goodness of people and argued instead that human beings are prone to alienate themselves from their true selves. He insisted that a great moral and spiritual awakening was necessary to usher in this new era that would prevent the ultimate collapse of society. As

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[5] Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 17.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 19. For Masaryk, the most significant event of his lifetime was the First World War; similarly, both Masaryk and Beneš gave significant credit to the French Revolution in changing the status of democratic thought in Europe.
[10] This is evident throughout both Masaryk's *The Making of a State* and Beneš's *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, as I will discuss in the subsequent chapter.

early as the 1970s, Havel advocated a moral and spiritual revival of Czechoslovak society—a theme that persisted throughout his work and continued into his tenure as Czechoslovak president.[11] Masaryk and Beneš, as moralists, similarly prioritized the spiritual health of Czechoslovak society. Both fought against parts of Czechoslovak political apathy cultivated under Austria-Hungary. Havel similarly emphasized the importance of "living in truth" in response to the political apathy of Czechoslovaks under Communism.

Thesis Outline

The first chapter explores how humanist philosophy was central to Masaryk's and Beneš's understanding of human nature and the neo-Hegelian trajectory of history. I argue that without Masaryk's and Beneš's belief in individualism, their philosophies of history would not rely on inevitability. Beneš and Masaryk utilized Czechoslovak national myth-making and propaganda to justify Czechoslovak democracy to Western powers. That is why I analyze Beneš's and Masaryk's use of Czechoslovak national myth-making and propaganda, focusing on how these strategies were employed to promote statehood through lobbying and the Washington Declaration. Building on this foundation, I then examine their democratic visions, which are rooted in a celebration of the individual. This leads to an exploration of their neo-Hegelian philosophy of history, highlighting their belief in the inevitability of democracy. Finally, I assess how Beneš's emphasis on individualism shaped his foreign policy and identify instances where his statements diverged from historical events.

In the second chapter, I look at how Havel's understanding of personhood and individual responsibility shaped his philosophy of history. I examine Havel's foundational principle for

[11] Václav Havel, *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 51.

morality and society, namely "living in truth," and how his philosophy of history influenced his vision of an ideal Czechoslovak polity. First, I explore the connection between identity and responsibility within his concept of living in truth, which sheds light on Havel's views on the ideal political leader and his or her role in society. His emphasis on individualism is evident throughout his economic and political thought, warranting a dedicated discussion. I then address his foreign policy, as his focus on individualism highlights the need for a foreign policy centered on guaranteeing citizens human rights. Finally, I evaluate the influence of his philosophy of history on these beliefs, contrasting them with the views of his predecessors, Masaryk and Beneš.

My analysis shows how Masaryk and Beneš emphasized (1) a distinct historical trajectory for Czechoslovak democracy and (2) that individuals were the prime movers of history. Similarly, Havel's individualistic concept of "living in truth" deeply influenced both his philosophy of history and his vision of an ideal Czechoslovak state. I argue that their philosophies of history emphasize personal responsibility in fostering democracy. It is not an understatement to say that when politics is based on morality, as Masaryk illustrated to some extent for his two successors, it becomes possible, as individuals, to begin to move history.

1. The Individual as Prime Mover in Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk's & Edvard Beneš's Visions for Czechoslovak Democracy

> *It was my belief that the truth would prevail, but I did not expect it to prevail unaided.*
>
> —Edvard Beneš, Czechoslovak foreign minister and president

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Beneš were prominent figures in Czechoslovak history, playing pivotal roles as scholars, political mobilizers, and Czechoslovak presidents. As a result, scholars have done considerable research on Masaryk's and Beneš's understanding of Czechoslovak democracy, yet there has been minimal focus on how their philosophy of history relies on their understanding of the individual as history's prime mover. I argue that by examining Masaryk's and Beneš's philosophy of history, we can learn important insights into what shaped their vision for Czechoslovak democracy. First and foremost, I point out that Masaryk's and Beneš's views of democracy were influenced by their understanding of morality as an inherently humanistic concept, originating with the rights of the individual. In order to establish this, I take into account their writings on the *ethos* behind Czechoslovak national myth-making and propaganda to promote statehood through lobbying. Subsequently, I turn to a direct study of Masaryk's and Beneš's depictions of democracy, respectively.[1] The role of the individual in it helps in outlining their neo-Hegelian philosophy of history, which stressed that the development of democracy was inevitable. This added to the reasons why Czechoslovakian statehood was unique in central Europe, according to the two presidents. I then analyze how

[1] It is not entirely possible to establish the causal influence of Masaryk's vision for Czechoslovak democracy on Beneš; however, the areas of overlap between the two Czechoslovak presidents are important because they present an overarching theme for the vision of Czechoslovak democracy that Václav Havel believed in as well, which will be the primary focus of the subsequent chapter.

Beneš's emphasis on individualism translated to his foreign policy and how his pronouncements did not always add up to the historical record. In the conclusion to this thesis, I look at ways Czechoslovak myth-making fell short and consider brief criticisms of a national essence to Czechs and the inevitability of democracy.

The Democratic Project in the First Czechoslovak Republic

In Czech and Slovak public consciousness, and especially Czech, Slovak, and Czechoslovak myth-making, of which Masaryk and Beneš were among the chief architects, observers often emphasize Czechoslovakia in the interwar years as the sole democracy in the region surrounded by authoritarian and totalitarian elements. The term "myth-making" can be understood in the pejorative sense; however, here, as well as in some of the literature on the topic, it is not necessarily always meant in that sense. It is true that myths can undermine and obscure realistic and historical accounts, yet at the same time, nationalistic myth-making can also highlight the desired intention of a nation and, in that sense, illuminate rather than obscure the matter. At the very core of Czechoslovakia's myth-making and propaganda was the Czech modern national myth. Simplified, the Czech national myth that Masaryk and Beneš promoted was that under the Habsburgs, the Czechs, who were inherently democratic and tolerant, were repressed for 400 years, leading to the near annihilation of both the Czech language and Czech identity. Czech national consciousness was then awoken by those who would be known as the Awakeners. Ján Hus, Ján Žižka, the Union of the Czech Brethren, and the Battle of White Mountain were all embodiments of the fight against the imperialist Habsburg Austrians and Germans and the Catholic Church.[2] In particular, the Hussite movement of the early fifteenth

[2] Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1914–1948* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2009), 11.

century became a reference to the democratic spirit in Czechoslovakia, which was lost after the Battle on the White Mountain. Beneš argued that the strength of Czechoslovak democracy in the interwar years stemmed from this long struggle for liberty in the Czech lands particularly.[3]

Apart from the strength of this myth in establishing uniqueness in the Czech national identity – and partially Czechoslovak, since Beneš was a fervent Czechoslovakist who did not consider Czechs and Slovaks to be separate ethnicities – Masaryk and Beneš were also tireless organizers; in the literature, scholars argue that Czechoslovaks owed independence largely to them because of their consistent lobbying, especially with Western officials. They understood, and rightly so, that the Great Powers had to learn about the independence movement from Czechoslovaks. Above all, they had to establish that the democratic project of Czechoslovakia was in the interests of Western foreign powers. There was also the added benefit to Czechoslovak myth-making, namely that it was meant to curtail domestic political opposition threats, including Slovak nationalist secession groups, among which the Roman-Catholic bishop, Andrej Hlinka, would become a particular opponent.

Apart from the laborious lobbying, the Czechoslovak national project also relied on Masaryk's and Beneš's direct targeting of readers and listeners by their propaganda.[4] Beneš

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[3] One example of Beneš promoting this myth in his own words comes from his book, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*: "Already in 1415 they started with John Huss the first revolution for religious liberty and tolerance; in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries they made two political and religious revolutions against the Habsburg oppression; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, inspired by the ideas of French Revolution, they began their national democratic renaissance for the reconstruction of their independent national life. And since 1848 their political education had been quite consciously undertaken by the national political opposition, which aimed at liberating the nation and founding a democratic Czechoslovak state. But Czechoslovakia was, with its century-old political fight and popular revolutionary political experiences, actually the only exception in Central Europe. This explains to a considerable extent the vitality of Czechoslovak democracy throughout the twenty years since the war and also during the last great international crisis." See Edvard Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1939), 57.

[4] The use of propaganda was not a novel development, however, and could even be seen in the nineteenth century when Napoleon pioneered the strong-man rule image as well as in the First World War, which some consider the birthplace of modern propaganda. Opposing forces in the First World War would often use both word and image to encourage the home front to hold on, the military to keep fighting, and even enemy soldiers and civilians to surrender. See Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 4–5.

admitted to this himself when he wrote that, after 1915, "our work continued to be mainly propagandist," because at this time "this was the kind of work of which we stood most in need."[5] The development from propaganda to politics, Beneš explained, began in the first half of 1916.[6] This propagandist work was one of the core features of their work; "It was inseparable from the politico-diplomatic and military aspect of our movement," Beneš wrote.[7] The work was crucial to state-building for each of the Habsburg successor states, who paid journalists or newspapers across Europe, from London to Paris and Geneva to write positively about their intended policies.[8] Andrea Orzoff explains that both Masaryk and Beneš used newspapers to curtail the constraints of parliamentary politics and reach their electorates directly.[9] Both also appealed to the academics they knew in France, Italy, England, and Russia even though they were not politically influential. Beneš argued that they appealed to them because they were "skillful helpers" but also because the First World War awoke an interest in political affairs "among all classes of the people."[10] It was therefore necessary to "win their sympathies" through any channel and not reserve lobbying to ministers and other politicians.[11] In France, their propaganda was "the most systematic and comprehensive."[12] In Russia, the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 prevented more involvement because it put the Czechoslovak cause in the background.[13] In the United States of America, the problem was that it was neutral until 1917, so the "whole character" of the propaganda had to be different, according to Beneš.[14] Another problem was that

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[5] Edvard Beneš, *My War Memoirs*, trans. Paul Selver (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928), 103.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 104.
[8] Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 8.
[9] See Andrea Orzoff, "'The Literary Organ of Politics': Tomáš Masaryk and Political Journalism, 1925–1929," *Slavic Review* 63, no. 2 (2004): 275–300.
[10] Beneš, *My War Memoirs*, 108.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 112.
[13] Ibid., 116.
[14] Ibid., 117.

the executive branch of the U.S. knew very little about central European conditions.[15] Despite the substance, the methods of the propaganda there, Beneš explained, were very similar to the ones used elsewhere. These were primarily a supply of news to the press, personal relationships, memoranda, public lectures, and so forth.[16] Overall, when it came to the propaganda effort from 1914 to 1916, Beneš wrote that Czechoslovakia "impressed itself favourably upon Allied opinion."[17] Beneš argued that the central Europe of the interwar years could not have arisen without the "elemental movements" of the nations within central Europe, including Czechoslovakia.[18] In particular, he argued that sovereignty and complete autonomy were not possible under the "absolutism" of the Habsburg Monarchy.[19] "[D]emocratic forces" therefore came in opposition to absolutism and nationalistic oppression.[20] When reflecting on this entire period of negotiations for four years abroad, Beneš wrote that "there had been no respite and no moments without anxiety."[21] This strenuous effort stemmed from the ramifications of failure, which both Masaryk and Beneš thought could not be greater. In the words of Orzoff, "[T]he very existence of these states seemed predicated on it."[22]

The Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence, or the Washington Declaration (originally titled, *Prohlášení Nezávislosti Československého Národa Zatímní Vládou Československou*), was published on 18 October, 1918, ten days before the founding of the First Czechoslovak Republic on October 28, 1918.[23] The Washington Declaration itself was an

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[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 225.
[18] Edvard Beneš, "Central Europe after Ten Years," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 7, no. 20 (1929): 246.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Beneš, *My War Memoirs*, 487.
[22] Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 8.
[23] In the words of Rothschild, this was a remarkable achievement, and credit for it goes to a small, and initially scarcely representative, trio of Czech and Slovak exiles: "[Beneš, Masaryk, and Štefánik] succeeded during the war in persuading the leaders of the Allied Powers that the replacement of Austria-Hungary by a series of independent national states was not only inevitable but also desirable from the Allied and general European perspectives." See

ambitious and, in parts, propagandistic text whose purpose was also to appeal to Western audiences and as a result promised minority rights to non-Czechs and non-Slovaks as well. It chiefly proclaimed Czechoslovak national self-determination and governance by its people rather than rule from Vienna.[24] The Czech democrats in charge of forming the state out of the Austrian monarchy tied "national sovereignty" to "individual freedom," however, making the task of achieving democracy seem easier than the task of upholding it.[25] The Washington Declaration further proclaimed that gender, class, and religious affiliation would not have any impact on how the state treated individuals; it claimed that the nobility would be disbanded and their land distributed; it argued for the separation of church and state; and it claimed that women would be "placed on a level with men, politically, socially and culturally," among other things.[26] Some of these calls were not new.[27] For example, many in Europe advocated for diminishing the privileges of the nobility as well as the Church. However, as Melissa Feinberg argues, an end to class difference was indeed novel, and in large part stemmed from the fresh "socialist fervor" that swept the continent from the Russian Revolution of 1917, "bringing class issues to the forefront of European politics."[28]

Joseph Rothschild, *East-Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 76.

[24] Beneš viewed Austria-Hungary with understandable discontent, describing it as a disorganized "welter of nationalities." He thought it was a "reactionary, aristocratic-bureaucratic State," resembling that of Germany but without the administrative and financial order. Beneš wrote that Germany repelled him but that the "Habsburg Empire repelled me more." See Beneš, *My War Memoirs*, 18.

[25] Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 224.

[26] Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Milan Štefánik, and Edvard Beneš, *Washingtonská Deklarace* (Brno: Moravský Legionář, 1925).

[27] We could also argue, as Joseph Rothschild does, that what was unique in the First Czechoslovak Republic was the political organizing of the peasantry as well as the bourgeoisie; in Rothschild's words: "the existence of a disciplined proletariat and an organized peasantry side by side with the experienced bourgeoisie made for a more balanced society and a more integrated polity than existed among these neighbors." See Joseph Rothschild, *East-Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 76.

[28] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 29.

Beneš's and Masaryk's contribution to the independence of Czechoslovakia in the interwar years is made all the more evident when we see the intellectual groupings they mobilized. In order to promote and combat opposition to Czechoslovak myth-making, Masaryk and Beneš created what became known as "Castle Politics," referencing the Prague Castle, where Masaryk resided. "Castle Politics" was an informal conjoining of institutions and allies who promoted Czechoslovak myth-making to both domestic and international audiences. Many followed Masaryk's political activism and welcomed his place in the Castle. Among them were figures such as the journalist and editor-in-chief of the liberal-democratic journal *Přítomnost* ("Presence"), Ferdinand Peroutka (1895–1978); the writer and secretary of the Czechoslovak PEN Club, Karel Čapek (1890–1938); and František Langer (1888–1965).[29] They believed in the charisma of the president and the importance of his leadership. Orzoff explains, "These intellectuals, along with Masaryk and Beneš, helped craft the national myth later to become enshrined in—or confused with—the history of the First Republic."[30] As a result of these efforts, both Masaryk and Beneš became benevolent philosopher-king figures. Masaryk became a moral example and paternal figure to the people; while Beneš was seen as a seasoned diplomat, well-respected in the halls of presidential palaces in Western capitals.[31] For better or for worse, Czechoslovak myth-making both brought about the existence of the First Czechoslovak Republic and instilled various illusions about the Republic that permeated society well into the twenty-first century.[32]

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[29] One of Peroutka's seminal series of works was on the foundation and forming of the Czechoslovak state. See Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování Státu (1918–1922)*, vols. 1–4 (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 1998). Similarly, Čapek's support of Masaryk was particularly evident through the series of conversations (*Hovory*) he held with the president. See Karel Čapek, *Hovory s T. G. Masarykem* (Prague: Ústav T. G. Masaryka, Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2013).

[30] Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 8–9.

[31] Ibid., 12.

[32] I will discuss further shortcomings of the propagandistic image of Czechoslovak democracy as unique in the conclusion of this thesis.

Czechoslovak Democracy According to Masaryk

Notably, it is laborious to define democracy under Masaryk. As Feinberg argues, Masaryk certainly wrote about the term frequently, yet he failed to provide an exact definition throughout his corpus of work.[33] The vagueness itself allowed others from various political traditions to expand on his ideas and adopt his principles to legitimize their existence.[34] Before 1918, Czechs did not have to be specific about what they meant when discussing democracy.[35] After 1918, it became clear that there was no consensus on democracy within the Czech nation. Instead, Czech politics embodied many different variations of what democracy looked like. Some subscribed to a liberal state with a republican government; others argued for an egalitarian community of Czechoslovaks; still others claimed that it would be best to have a state involved chiefly in social justice and equality of economic opportunity; and so forth. Feinberg explains that the ambiguity over the meaning of democracy itself "could never be definitively resolved, for to do so might have shattered the political community that had constituted itself around the idea of Czech democracy."[36] As a result, the term remained contested and "debate over democracy became and remained a crucial element in Czech political life."[37]

That said, the crux of Masaryk's view is that democracy is a "way of life" or "regime of life" and "regime of work" rather than some final destination.[38] In his words, "[D]emocracy is a view of life, it is based on trust in people, in being human, in humanity."[39] To Masaryk,

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[33] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 15.
[34] Ibid., 15.
[35] Ibid., 7.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Světová Revoluce: za Války a ve Válce 1914–1918* (Praha: Masarykův Ústav AV ČR, 2005), 499.
[39] Čapek, *Hovory s T. G. Masarykem*, 208–210.

democracy is an idea that constantly develops and does not arrive at an endpoint.[40] In other words, Masaryk believed that democracy is more than a form of government or the constitutions that underpin it; "Democracy is not just a form of government and administration, but a view of life and the world."[41] The constant striving of the people to uphold democracy rather than a reliance on the institutions themselves is what underpins Masaryk's and Beneš's fundamental picture of democracy. In Masaryk's words, "New generations must be educated and brought up for democracy; institutions alone do not compose democratic constitutions. […] [D]emocracy is a constant effort for political education and the education of citizens in general."[42] Therefore, a democratic society was not merely one that guaranteed free elections or universal suffrage.[43] Of course, it was necessary to provide citizens the right to vote rather than reserving that right for the "aristocrats" and "caesar."[44] That did not mean that democracy would necessarily guarantee votes for democrats, however. For example, in 1913 he wrote, "[U]niversal suffrage does not guarantee democratic attitudes; a true democrat will not only be such in Parliament, but in the community, in a political party, in a circle of friends, in the family; he will feel and act democratically everywhere."[45] Therefore, a democratic society guaranteed respect for all people based on their shared humanity.[46] As Czechoslovak president, he said that democracy was best thought of as a "humanistic democracy, namely normatively, in an ethically oriented love of one's neighbour."[47] Masaryk's understanding of democracy in this way did not change particularly even before his time as the first Czechoslovak president. Even then Masaryk

[40] Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Ideály Humanitní: Problém Malého Národa; Demokratism v Politice.* 2. ed. (Praha: Melantrich, 1990), 128.
[41] Masaryk, *Světová Revoluce*, 376.
[42] Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *O Demokracii (Výbor ze spisů a projevů)* (Prague: Melantrich, 1991), pp. 48 and 102.
[43] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 15.
[44] Masaryk, *Ideály Humanitní*, 99.
[45] Masaryk, *O Demokracii* (Prague: Melantrich, 1991), pp. 48 and 108.
[46] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 15.
[47] Martin Šimsa, "Masarykův a Habermasův Pojem Demokracie," in *Demokracie, Veřejnost a Občanská Společnost*, ed. M. Hrubec, (Prague: Filosofa, 2004), 141.

advocated a democratization of society, which he defined as a community of equals.[48] This meant that education was highly important. Indeed, Masaryk firmly believed in the importance of active, educated citizens as a response to the Austrian monarchs, who instilled both apathy and anarchy among Czech subjects and nationalists. This emphasis on education was reiterated in his seminal work, *The Making of a State: Memories and Observations, 1914–1918*.[49] In it, he argued that it was the responsibility of the state to instill democratic values into the new generation.[50] He believed that schools were the basis of the state on which much of society, especially democratic sentiment, was built. This emphasis on education would then increase the likelihood of healthy democracies and engaged citizens. That is why Masaryk stressed individual responsibility and active involvement in political organizing in civil society groups, for example. For him, civil society was a code of civil behavior rather than organized activist groups.[51] Every individual mattered rather than the institutions themselves.

However, Masaryk was not as egalitarian as some make him out to be. For example, Masaryk advocated for trained professionals in political roles over the strict equality of all citizens and believed that the average individual should not be particularly involved in governing itself. The relationship between the governed and those who governed was upheld through discussion rather than egalitarian representation.[52] In practical terms, this meant that those who governed retained a relationship with their electorate through the press and elections rather than

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[48] Marie Neudorfl, "Masaryk's Understanding of Democracy Before 1914," *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* 708 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies, 1989), 10; Karel Čapek, *Masaryk on Thought and Life*, trans. M. and R. Weatherall (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), 190–91. Masaryk did not always agree with these principles, however, especially when it came to German minority rights.

[49] The title in the original Czech more aptly describes Masaryk's thinking on the precipice moment Europe found itself at the end of the First World War: *Světová Revoluce za války a ve válce 1914–1918*" ("World Revolution after the War and during the War 1914–1918")

[50] Masaryk, *Světová Revoluce*, 387.

[51] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 15.

[52] William Preston-Warren, *Masaryk's Democracy: A Philosophy of Scientific and Moral Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 34.

the direct involvement of citizens in political affairs. In other words, Masaryk advocated representational forms of government rather than direct democracy, which he considered utopic.[53] The people dictated the overall trajectory of the politicians by electing them, but the exact enforcement and adoption of laws were left to the politicians. It was up to the politicians to guarantee that they were always acting in the best interest of the collective. When the people did not know what was in their best interest, it was up to the political class to decide for them.[54] Therefore, in Masaryk's Republic, trust in the leaders was meant to guarantee the health of democracy, since democracy was a "state in which human beings do not use one another as a means to personal gain. Every man, woman, and child is recognized as something spiritually valuable."[55]

One of the reasons Masaryk was against complete egalitarianism is because of the fallibility of democracy. Not only was it improbable that governments and their citizens upheld democracies in the midst of increasing fascist allures in neighboring countries, but the world had not achieved "true democracy" in the first place. Indeed, Masaryk argued that "true democracy has not yet been attained and that all democracies are mere attempts at it, namely through representative indirect democracy."[56] For Masaryk, because democracy relied on individuals, it would never be without faults. As long as citizens had problems, democracy would have problems: "Democracy has its faults because citizens have their faults. Like master, like man."[57] Against this threat and even lesser threats, however, the only response could be more liberty, he thought. On the First Independence Day of the First Czechoslovak Republic, he said,

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[53] Masaryk, *Ideály Humanitní*, 101–2.
[54] Preston-Warren, *Masaryk's Democracy*, 34.
[55] Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Cesta Demokracie IV* (Prague: Ústav T. G. Masaryka, 1997), 364.
[56] Pehr, Michal. "Chvála a Kritika Prvorepublikové Demokracie." *Historie – Otázky – Problémy* 6, no. 1 (2014): 123.
[57] Čapek, *Hovory s T. G. Masarykem*, 209.

> It may be that republican liberty is here and there badly understood, and that it has its bad effects. But I am convinced that against liberty the only remedy is more liberty and true liberty.[58]

The Basis for Czechoslovak Democracy & Political Leadership According to Beneš

The overlap between Masaryk and Beneš shows where Beneš built on the work of his predecessor. So, here I will discuss Beneš's conception of humanism as a moral fundamental that underpinned his view on democracy as a whole. Subsequently, it will be possible to see Beneš's humanistic principles in his foreign policy as well. In order to understand how Beneš contributed to the literature on Czechoslovak democracy, it will be good to briefly touch on the term *lidskost* and the Czech tradition it follows. In the Czech tradition, the term "humanity" does not convey the same scope it does in the English language. Instead, a number of terms in Czech illustrate what the term "humanity" achieves in English. As David S. Danaher writes, *lidskost* is usually translated as "humanity," "humanness," or "humaneness"—which obscures the term.[59] *Lidstvo* directly refers to "humanity," whereas *lidství* and *lidskost* convey the notion of "humanness." These two terms mainly differ in terms of usage and tone: *lidství* is less common and tends to appear in more formal or literary contexts, whereas *lidskost* can be used in a negative form, suggesting that this word holds a unique status. As Danaher explains, the term implies the idea of "humanity" as something that can be incomplete or lacking, reflecting a failure to embody one's

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[58] As quoted by Otakar Odložilík, "Masaryk's Idea of Democracy," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1951): 1.

[59] David S. Danaher, "Revolution with a 'Human' Face: A Corpus Approach to the Semantics of Czech *lidskost*," in *Taming the Corpus: From Inflection and Lexis to Interpretation*, ed. Markéta Fidler and Václav Cvrček (Cham: Springer, 2018), 119.

true or complete "humanness."[60] Similarly, Masaryk and Beneš believed that it was possible to achieve an entirely humane ("lidský") democracy. Originally, however, Danaher explains that scholars associate the term *lidskost* with the Czech philosopher, educator, and theologian John Amos Comenius, who aimed to "humanize" education to cultivate a "new humanism" that combated the challenges of the early modern era.[61] Comenius' phrasing similarly influenced the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, who influenced the Czechoslovak dissident movement throughout the 1960s to the 1980s. In fact, the phrase "Socialism with a human face" of the Prague Spring and Velvet Revolution stems from this lineage and the humanistic legacy of both Comenius and Masaryk, who adopted the term *lidskost*.[62] In James Krapfl's words, "In no other modern revolution… has [this] idea been so elevated and consciously defended."[63]

Building on Masaryk's arguments and the humanistic legacy that preceded him, Beneš considered democracy to be first and foremost an ethical and spiritual system that is "truly human," suggesting that it is possible to aim for "humanness" ("lidskost"). Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to argue that there is something fundamental in the vision of Czechoslovak leaders for their country where they emphasized its people's humanity as a foundation of its democratic ethos.[64] For Beneš, that meant that democracy understands human pains and weaknesses; it knows that no social order is perfect and that an ideal society does not exist and is, in fact, "unattainable" due to "human weakness"; at the same time, it believes in the possibility of human improvement for the "moral ideal" in the struggle of the "strong, moral, perfect man"; democracy is therefore fundamentally optimistic and, despite its hardships, makes

[60] Ibid., 136.
[61] Ibid., 127–8.
[62] Ibid., 129.
[63] James Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989-1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 108.
[64] That is not to say they were unique in this, of course. Even if there were others who emphasized such claims, such as some deontologists prior to the time of writing here, it would still not mean that Beneš could not have borrowed from Masaryk in this reasoning.

life worthy of living.[65] He believed that the other important features of democracy included cooperation, love, discussion, and compromise. For example, he argued in a pamphlet titled "Podmínky Úspěšného Života" ("Conditions for a Successful Life") that love of work, social empathy, and understanding were also essential to participating in society to the best of our capabilities.[66] He further argued that conflicts must primarily be based on spiritual and moral strength, which takes precedence over physical coercion.[67]

Humanity as a basis for morality also comes across in Beneš's picture of ideal political leadership; he argues that the leader must be thoroughly educated in the matters of the country.[68] According to Beneš, this leader must "apply all his energies and abilities to the fullest in the pursuit of his official functions. … he must always be prepared for the attacks of his opponents and must steadily undertake by reason and logic to persuade the opposition."[69] This should exhaust the leaders, making them "grow old more rapidly."[70] The democratic leader must also go through a period of unpopularity and fall.[71] This all made Beneš believe that "to engage in politics without very hard intellectual work, without very great erudition, without very high comprehension of all divisions of science, is simply impossible."[72] Therefore, to Beneš, the true crisis of democracy stemmed from a crisis of leadership and a "crisis of men." In this, he once again built on the work of Masaryk, stressing that democracy relies on those who shape and uphold it and not solely on those in the institutions. That is why Beneš wrote,

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[65] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 305.
[66] Edvard Beneš, *Podmínky Úspěšného Života* (Praha: Vydavateľské Oddelení YMCA, 1938), 11.
[67] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 133.
[68] Ibid., 211.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 212–3.

> I have always held that when one talks of the crisis of democracy, this means above all, not the crisis of institutions, but the crisis of men, the crisis of democrats. It is a question of knowing whether in practical life the democrats were really democratic, whether they were politically capable, whether the democracies in question had leaders of adequate political and moral stature, worthy to bear the necessary responsibility.[73]

Beneš's emphasis on the importance of leaders who respect empiricism comes across throughout much of his work. This is because Beneš believed that politics requires a deep knowledge of the "science of man" in all of his "social manifestations, actions, and aspirations."[74] Therefore, a politician "should have an understanding of the scientific method and should be able to use the analytical capacities of reason."[75] To Beneš, leaders who are deeply versed in politics will take into account law, history, geology, economics, the study of populations, comparative religion, and a host of other fields in forming their opinion.[76] Politics "as a science" must take "what is constant" in society and make value judgments on what would be best for the populace as a whole.[77] It must do this objectively and if it is to do so it must study these fields "thoroughly" and "widely."[78]

Beneš borders on the esoteric when he stresses that a politician, or a statesman, must find an equilibrium between the analytical, rational observer and the artistic, imaginative, "element of feeling and intuition."[79] Earlier in his political career, he similarly stressed that all civilians ought

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[73] Edvard Beneš, Jan Blahoslav Kozák, and Oskar Kraus. "The Prague Congress of Philosophy." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 13, no. 38 (1935): 338.
[74] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 203.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 207–8.

to strive for a harmony of reason, emotions, and all spiritual dynamics of the person.[80] He did not spend too much effort describing what the artistic part of a politician's practice should look like. Instead, Beneš stressed that the rational observer should be above passions, claiming that a politician must also have a coherent epistemology, where one must balance the existing reality of the present with the possible reality of the future "in the spirit of some doctrine or philosophy of history and ethics."[81] In an epistemology for his philosophy of history, Beneš wrote that he became convinced by Masaryk's Positivism.[82] In particular, he was convinced by Masaryk's "objection to exaggerated nationalism, to demagogy, jingoism, and superficiality in all political, literary, and social questions, the objection to political and literary romanticizing."[83] Beneš cited Masaryk's books and influence in forming this belief.[84] Politics were therefore empirical and scientific to Beneš. Put simply, he believed in the possibility of objectivity. To Václav Havel, as I argue in the following chapter, there is an undefined metaphysical reality that transcends the empirical method seen in Masaryk's and Beneš's politics. In contrast to Havel, Beneš consistently applied his philosophy of history and scientific method to political problems.[85]

Beneš's Humanistic Philosophy Through Diplomacy

Beneš's view that humanity should be the basis for morality comes across in his diplomacy as well, especially with his emphasis on compromise. This diplomacy can be seen in his efforts to curtail the ideological divisions between East and West. He strongly advocated for cooperation with the Soviet Union. Already in 1927, Beneš argued that Czechoslovakia must

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[80] Beneš, *Podmínky Úspěšného Života*, 11.
[81] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 207–8.
[82] Masaryk's positivist stance was unique in that, as a rationalist would, he anchored his ethics in a "rational theism" that is a departure from a classical positivist view. See Ján Svoboda, "Ethics in Masaryk's Classification of the Sciences." *Human Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2022): 348–357.
[83] Beneš, *My War Memoirs*, 20.
[84] Ibid., 21.
[85] Ibid.

solve its foreign relations with Russia and with Poland, not interfere in Polish-Russian relations, but to settle the relations "without prejudice, dispassionately and without prepossession."[86] With Soviet Russia specifically, the policy was one of "non-intervention," meaning "non-intervention on both sides."[87] Beneš's desired cooperation is also evident from one of his memoirs, titled *Paměti: Od Mnichova k Nové Válce a k Novému Vítězství* ("Memoirs: from Munich to a New War and a New Victory"). In it, he wrote that he never agreed with isolating the Soviet Union. This is echoed throughout much of his work. He stressed that, together with Masaryk, he "categorically rejected any policy of intervention against the Soviet Union."[88] They believed that the Soviet Union was instrumental to an equilibrium and real peace in the politics of Europe and, indeed, the world.[89] Beneš asked that the dynamic would be reciprocal, including when it came to Soviet propaganda.[90] He added that he was firmly against war but that Czechoslovakia would be ready to defend itself if there would be danger from the East.[91]

Of course, as a seasoned diplomat, Beneš's pronouncements and visions did not always line up with the historical account. Beneš certainly was not as close to the Soviet Union as he could have been, often balancing a pro-Western image with favorability from the Soviet Union. We could, for example, consider that Czechoslovakia was very late to officially recognize the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik coup against the Provisional Government in November 1917. It was only on 9 June 1934—importantly, a year and a half after Hitler entered the Reichstag, that Czechoslovakia extended de jure recognition to the Soviet Union—"a dozen years after Germany had recognized the Bolsheviks; a decade after Great Britain, France, Austria, Greece, Denmark,

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[86] Edvard Beneš, *The Foreign Policy of Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Gazette de Prague, 1927), 26.
[87] Ibid., 28.
[88] Edvard Beneš, *Paměti: Od Mnichova k Nové Válce a k Novému Vítězství* (Orbis: Praha, 1947), 9. There is notable historical inconsistency here since the Czechoslovak Legions intervened against the Soviet Union from 1918 to 1920.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Beneš. *The Foreign Policy of Czechoslovakia*, 28.
[91] Ibid., 30.

Italy, Norway, and Sweden had followed suit; and a year after the United States had joined them."[92] The National Democrats at the time criticized the move, with one of their leaders, Karel Kramár, in *Národní Listy* ("National Letters"), a major Czechoslovak newspaper, stating that "the nation will pay dearly for the recognition of the Bolsheviks."[93]

Despite some opposition, Beneš did not mind bringing the Soviets closer to Europe but primarily under the condition that it be done together as a European bloc, particularly with the French, who held a key strategic interest for Beneš.[94] This was also for personal reasons since he was an adamant Francophile, spending many years in Paris both as a student and diplomat. The French-led alliances were a component of Masaryk's and Beneš's belief that Europe owed a democratic philosophical lineage to the French because of the French Revolution itself. Beneš's Francophilia began in the early 1900s. In particular, he was interested in its "tradition of the great revolution"; "the broad perspectives of its national history"; "its love for liberty of thought"; "the fullness of its cultural life"; "the abundance of its philosophical, scientific, literary, and artistic culture"; "its traditional humanitarian, universal, and cosmopolitan tendency."[95] In the mentioned lecture series held in Chicago, published as *Democracy Today and Tomorrow* in 1939, he wrote similarly about England. He writes that he was impressed by its "inner strength"; "harmony and order"; "development towards political and constitutional liberty"; "economic advance"; and its "endeavour in its national culture to form a harmonious human individuality."[96] Prior to this positive depiction, and most likely for political reasons since the Czechoslovak government was in exile in London at the time of writing, Beneš primarily wrote negatively of England, especially because of his time in its capital earlier in his life. In a

[92] Lukes, Igor, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler: The Diplomacy of Edvard Beneš in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 37.
[93] Ibid., 38.
[94] Ibid., 39.
[95] Beneš, *My War Memoirs*, 17.
[96] Ibid., 18.

pamphlet titled “Londýn a Sociální Poměry v Anglii” (“London and the Social Conditions in England”), he wrote that London, despite being the greatest and richest city in the world, was full of “sleepiness, sickness, vice, immorality, wretchedness driven to the highest degree, all these things [...] confuse you utterly.”[97] In contrast, in Paris, “you see a people who want something out of life, who, with all their materialism, want to be higher, want to be higher and want to be active, alive, not satisfied with injustice; they want equality, freedom, happiness, and a cheerful, healthy life.”[98] This Francophilia may have blinded Beneš, making him rely on the Franco-British alliance at the time of the Munich Conference in 1938.

Nonetheless, Beneš brought the Soviets closer to Europe with Czechoslovakia’s recognition of the Soviet Union primarily because it also united the European bloc and, most importantly, brought closer the French, who was a key strategic ally to Czechoslovakia in the case that Hitler acted on his supportive rhetoric of Sudeten Germans.[99] In fact, it was official Czechoslovak policy to deal with the Soviets up until this point via Paris. It was only in the final days of the Czechoslovak-German crisis in 1938 that Beneš would approach the Soviet Union directly.[100]

Beneš’s diplomacy reveals his conception of democracy, which also, at times and when it suited him, emphasized the need for understanding, compromise, and impartiality.

Masaryk’s & Beneš’s Philosophies of History

Apart from the emphasis on humanism evident throughout Masaryk’s and Beneš’s writings on Czechoslovak democracy and foreign policy, their vision for Czechoslovak democracy was also unique due to their philosophy of history. Along with Masaryk, Beneš

[97] Edvard Beneš, “Londýn a Sociální Poměry v Anglii,” *Právo Lidu* (Praha: Orbis Praha, 1943), 5.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler*, 39.
[100] Ibid.

opposed the idea that history was directionless. For Masaryk, European history was on a necessary path from absolutism to democracy. The emphasis that this process is global, a "world revolution," rather than a localized effort by Czechoslovaks, ultimately legitimized the project. The framing of it as a moral project as well as a historical inevitability further contributed to its sympathy abroad from the Great Powers. For some, the transition may have been opportunistic due to the dissolution of Austria-Hungary. To Masaryk, however, this transition was not only inevitable but a part of a larger, intrinsically ethical, understanding of the inevitability of democracy. It was not simply that Czechs were following the trend of neighboring people groups, but rather that this was the core of Czech identity, only shattered by Austrian tutelage. In Beneš's view, after the First World War, there was no choice but to combat German militarism by granting small European nations within Austria-Hungary "real constitutionalism and a free democratic regime" first in Germany, and then over the former Habsburg monarchy.[101] It was imperative that Poland and the Slavonic nations of the Habsburg empire be liberated and that a "new arrangement" be given from Austria-Hungary to the Balkans.[102] Beneš further agreed that history had consistent cycles that were inherently predictable.[103] Specific events influenced the trajectory of democracy, especially since the Enlightenment.[104] For example, Beneš gave enormous credit to the development of democracy and the principles it upheld during the period of the American and French Revolutions which to him was the opening path to modern European

[101] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 28.
[102] Ibid.
[103] In his words, "Applying the inevitable law of social evolution according to which moral, political, and social upheaval will provoke by its inner, inherent forces of reaction and by the necessary reaction of the hostile forces in other countries being constantly menaced by the revolutionary dictatorships, inevitable changes in Europe do approach. Europe will pass through a period of new, great difficulties, of new sufferings and vast upheavals. The present Europe, politically, intellectually, morally, is condemned. Dictatorships with all their weaknesses, exaggerations, mistakes, failures, violences, cynicism, and barbarism will inevitably come to their collapse." See Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 200.
[104] Prior to the Enlightenment (in particular French and American Revolutions), he believed that democracy stemmed from the struggle of the medieval period with a suppression of individualism and an emphasis on collectivism, in particular by appealing to the divine rights of the Church and god.

democracy.[105] He thought that the French Revolution itself was largely inspired by the development of parliamentarianism and constitutionalism in England.[106] The French Revolution "gave vivid actualisation to spiritual, intellectual, and religious freedom and to the whole principle of toleration and free discussion."[107] He described this philosophy as "rationalist, equalitarian, universalist, and humanistic."[108] It was the foundation of society toward the end of the nineteenth century, particularly in France and England, the Scandinavian states, Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland.[109] He credited all these developments to the beginning of "modern democratic thinking."[110] Therefore, the Declaration of Rights in both the French and American revolutions was a triumph of society, rationalism, science, research, and the philosophical method against "the old medieval scholastic philosophy, Catholic theology and religious intolerance."[111] This old classification, primarily present in feudal societies, relied on the divine rights of gods and kings, and, more specifically, of kings who ruled on behalf of the Judeo-Christian god. The king was the sole source of authority and was responsible for his actions only to God.[112] Natural rights disappeared since "all political power was derived from God."[113] Similarly, Masaryk argued that political absolutism stemmed from Church absolutism. In *The Making of the State*, he argued "the theory of the monarchs and state absolutism is nothing but the kibitzing of the theoreticians of clerical absolutism and dictatorship"[114]

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[105] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 6. Masaryk similarly thought that the roots of European democracy stem from the French Revolution. See Masaryk, *Ideály Humanitní*, 128.
[106] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 6. Apart from the French and American revolutions, Beneš also credits the revolutions of 1848 with helping the democratic cause, and it also exists as a by-product of the fourth estate. This is because the revolution of 1848 in Europe was a culmination of "a period of romantic struggle for social freedom." By participating in the 1848 revolutions, citizens established their political presence and existence through their "first organized appearance." See Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 12.
[107] Ibid., 7.
[108] Ibid., 9.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 7.
[112] Ibid., 4.
[113] Ibid., 5.
[114] Masaryk, *The Making of a State*, 573.

This rejection of the old classification is following in the tradition of Enlightenment philosophers who drew on a new classification, introduced largely by Renaissance humanists, who recognized the importance of the individual and what many called the "dignity of man."[115] In contrast to the Christian view, largely influenced by Augustine of Hippo and the Nicene Creed, of humans as fallen creatures unable to redeem themselves, humanists saw themselves as self-creating agents, free to transform themselves and the world through their actions. It was in line with this principal belief in self-creation that Beneš saw the role of individuals and Czechoslovak democracy.

From this "new classification," based on the Enlightenment and the English and French Revolutions, it follows that Beneš believed democracy was a system that prized the rights of the individual above all, as opposed to totalitarian systems, where leaders argued that conformity and individual sacrifice for the collective were necessary driving forces of social development. Therefore, Beneš believed that it was best to think of the development of democracy as a long struggle for the rights of the individual for the good of the collective. Democracy is therefore, in effect, a strong deontological reaction against cruel utilitarianism seen throughout history. This Kantian deontological basis is what led Beneš to believe that democracy was the only system that would be able to solve "justly" and "rightly" the "eternal problem in human society," namely fair and just relations between individuals and the collective.[116] The political development of human society, then, is one long evolution to an ultimate form of democracy. This perpetual movement toward higher degrees of democracy is interrupted by periods of anarchy or

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[115] He lists the philosophers he thought were consequential to these developments. He thought that the French Revolution then was a manifestation of the work of philosophers from "Thomas Aquinas, through the Renaissance and Reformation, Machiavelli, Sir Thomas More, Bacon, Descartes, Pascal, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Locke and Hume, Thomas Paine, Hamilton, Adams and Jefferson, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant and Fichte up to recent times." See Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 6.
[116] Ibid, 141.

absolutism, but ultimately "a better kind of democracy" emerges from the fray.[117] Authoritarian systems are incapable of establishing the necessary, well-balanced equilibrium since it is contrary to the ethos that makes it popular in the first place. This strong utilitarianism was seen in the Habsburg empire, he thought, which Beneš described as Machiavellian. Beneš argued that politicians who identify with the state of power must do so by Machiavellian methods, which, "however moral or ruthless, are permissible."[118] This was the "guiding principle of pre-war Austria-Hungary towards its nationalities."[119] It could also be seen from how the Habsburg empire conducted the war, in Beneš's view. The use of poison gas, bombing of towns, and infringement on Belgian neutrality by Germany all signified that "the end justifies the means."[120]

Therefore, it was from this "new classification" of the importance of the individual that the philosophical underpinnings for human rights began to develop. The development of human rights in conjunction with the emergence of industrialization and modern capitalism led to the growth of the "fourth estate," which he defined as a period where "the workman and the small peasant" began to "demand a share in the new social order for the most numerous class of all."[121] With the fourth estate came the working class's organizing into trade unions and political parties.[122] The working class adopted the "old idea" of class differentiation which was revived by the first socialist thinkers during the French Revolution and of the English working-class movement.[123] This movement in the late 19th century, according to Beneš, was a "time of struggle for scientific, class-conscious, Marxist socialism."[124]

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[117] Ibid.
[118] Beneš, *My War Memoirs*, 489.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 11.
[122] Ibid., 13.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

As a result of this added class struggle, political parties began to include conservative, liberal, peasant, and working-class individuals. These started to appear in most European states. Beneš divided them into conservative, liberal, and socialist parties.[125] With political representation, the working class started to demand better living and working conditions, which for Beneš was the last struggle for democracy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Then a new question arose: how to transform the "*political* liberal democracy" into a "*social* and *democratic* democracy."[126] This transformation was made more prescient by the First World War and, in particular, the Russian Revolution.[127] However, with this culmination of war and the need for political representation among an increasing range of strata in society, also came the most important dilemma of his time, between "totalitarian fascist and national socialist authoritarianism on one side, and Marxist socialism and communism on the other side."[128] Along with the development of the fourth estate, small European nations were finally given the opportunity to achieve independence from their imperial powers.[129] Therefore, Beneš believed that the First World War was "a gain for humanity morally and politically and an undoubted moral and political progress in the history of civilization."[130] He reiterated the same in his mentioned memoir on the First World War. Among the positive developments listed were the removal of the last feudal regimes, the consolidation of executive power by legislative bodies, and the foundation of better forms of representation.[131] Responses to these achievements,

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[125] Ibid., 14.
[126] Ibid., 15.
[127] Ibid., 16.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 17. Here Beneš establishes an incorrect picture of the nature of empire and the end of empire after the First World War. Instead of portraying the events as ending and a necessary victory for democracy, the truth was that European powers did not necessarily give up their imperial conquest after the Second World War. The Dutch continued a war, for example. The Soviet Union continued expansion into Europe. The Second World War was replaced with another war, we call the "Cold War." That imperial struggle continued. Beneš, however, could not have known as he passed away in 1948.
[130] Ibid., 52.
[131] Beneš, *My War Memoirs*, 493.

according to Beneš, included Fascism, which "human experience […] over thousands of years" showed is inferior to democracy.[132] All in all, the First World War was a fight of democracy against absolutism, for Beneš, and thus became the "culmination of European development during the last century in the struggle for the independence of subjugated nations."[133] This came as a result of the direct involvement of tens of millions of citizens and could thus "jointly control" the State for the first time.[134] Therefore, Beneš attributed the democratic transition in Czechoslovakia to localized efforts rather than to any overarching institutional failures of Austria-Hungary and an "indisputable sign of progress."[135]

For Beneš, at this juncture, Europe was at a time of "great regeneration," and "intellectual transition" where citizens reevaluated previously accepted "values and actions."[136] In this, he once again overlapped with his predecessor, Masaryk, who argued that the First World War was the site of the "world revolution," to once again borrow from the title of his mentioned work in Czech translated to English. This historical development, Beneš claimed, was an enormous evolution to the "freedom of the human personality."[137] The negative response toward democracy in the interwar years was natural and a progression of history, for Beneš. In his view, many states were not prepared for democracy because of internal conditions. On the contrary, the postwar difficulties guaranteed that in different sections, such as public life, political, economic, financial, and even in matters of nationality, there would be room for autocrats to take advantage.[138] Where democracy failed there were signs of illness "in the organism of the state

[132] Ibid. Beneš further wrote that "humanitarian philosophy is the basis of modern democracy." Beneš, *My War Memoirs*, 494.
[133] Ibid. 494.
[134] Ibid., 495.
[135] Beneš, "Central Europe after Ten Years," 246–7.
[136] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 188.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., 190.

and nation."[139] The dictatorships that arose out of this demand for solutions, although ill-advised, were an "expression of crisis," resulting in the states becoming more "abnormal" and "ill" than they already were.[140] Beneš also attributed the democratic transformation to the U.S.'s involvement in the First World War. He wrote that the U.S.' involvement meant that European nations were more willing to accept "this new democratic ideology," making it "the very foundation of their war aims and of the whole of their policy."[141] Therefore, he established the importance of a transatlantic alliance and the health of U.S. democracy.[142]

What Distinguished Czechoslovakia from other Struggling Democracies in Europe

Beneš thought that Czechoslovakia was unique in its capacity to become democratic and thus better prepared for the turbulence of the interwar years than other European states. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that it was difficult to shake off the shackles of the authoritarian monarchy because of its traditions, institutions, administration, and education, along with the more fundamental customs, manners, and methods of "their old political life."[143] Havel would lament similar conditions in *Toward a Civil Society*, where he wrote that the shackles of Communism made him depressed and disillusioned with the population he helped lead through the transition. For Beneš, in contrast, very few central European states had any experience with parliamentary government; many achieved universal suffrage only after the First World War; illiteracy was widespread; and political education was often nearly nonexistent.[144] The "postwar

[139] Ibid., 192.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., 35.
[142] Writing in 1927, Beneš already thought that Czechoslovakia would not be able to develop substantially without U.S. assistance. See Beneš, *The Foreign Policy of Czechoslovakia*, 8. However, the U.S. isolated itself after the First World War which some scholars attribute to the further abandonment of Czechoslovakia in the interwar years, culminating with the Munich Agreement in 1938. See Rothschild, *East‑Central Europe between the Two World Wars*, 78.
[143] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 54.
[144] Ibid., 55–6.

democracies" were "disordered" and "undisciplined," they went from extreme to extreme, from "right to left" and "left to right."[145] This tendency to go from extreme to extreme is what led them to reactionary tendencies. If they succumbed to the threat of Communism, in response, they would bounce back to right extremism, and so forth.[146]

Beneš argued that four overarching factors contributed to the fall of democracy in Europe and the failure of international order. The first was the rise of Communism, the "danger which postwar bourgeoisie saw in communism for quite comprehensible reasons," and "the struggle of communism in the first postwar years against middle-class political democracy."[147] Secondly, Fascism, which was an inherently "antidemocratic philosophy" and the "direct enemy and negation of democracy."[148] For its victory, it used two political factors: (1) nationalism and (2) the fear of Communism.[149] The third contributor to the fall of democracy in the interwar years was the deficiencies and weakness of individual democracies, which, according to Beneš, were "impossible to avoid."[150] These included "excesses of the party system"; "the slowness" of democratic methods and leadership; and "the partiality, corruption, and incapacity of bureaucracy"—all of which were subject to the mediocrity, deficiencies, and errors of the democratic leaders.[151] In other words, the democracies were "unsuccessful, imperfect, badly guided," and "blundering."[152] The authoritarian regimes took advantage of the partisanship of the political parties.[153] Because of the ineptitude of these parties, authoritarian propagandists claimed that politics was corrupted by the number of political parties and the costs associated with

[145] Granted, Beneš is vague here when it comes to his depiction of what "postwar democracies" he's referring to. See Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 58.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 60.
[148] Ibid., 60–1.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., 75.
[153] Ibid.

funding and promoting them.[154] It was their view that these parties were partisan and therefore primarily voted for bills drafted only by them, plundering the state of resources in the meantime.[155] Beneš admitted that young democracies showed these defects more often than old democracies. We saw this from Germany and small central European democracies, and less so in the British, Scandinavian, and Swiss democracies, he wrote.[156] However, this criticism, he believed, was "unjust," because it generalized due to individual cases of defect and failure.[157] Another problem with democracies Beneš brought up was the slowness of state administration; in authoritarian regimes, civil and military administration can be swift.[158] The fourth contributor was the mistakes in the foreign policy of the Western European states after the war, both in the League of Nations and in the individual policy of Western nations.[159] The democracies also believed in pacifism and disarmament, in contrast to the authoritarian regimes, which understood that they must win the army for themselves.[160] In the interwar years, democracies taught their citizens and those who opposed them about the importance of diplomacy and compromise, while the authoritarian regimes militarized their people through fear of imagined or real "foreign danger," all the while keeping their populations in a "fever of nationalist passion."[161] Prior to 1938, Beneš wrote that he agreed with aspects of pacifism, however, and even argued that, in theory, each soldier should be a pacifist.[162] Despite that, he believed that complete disarmament would be a mistake because the generation at the time was strongly influenced by the

[154] Ibid., 76.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., 77.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid., 79.
[159] Ibid., 60–1.
[160] Ibid., 86.
[161] Ibid., 87.
[162] Edvard Beneš, *Demokratická Armáda, Pacifism, a Zahraničná Politika* (Prague: Svaz čs. Důstojnictva, 1936), 44.

experiences of the First World War.[163] It is because of this that Beneš thought that the ideology of "postwar pacifism" ("poválečného pacifizmu") was so prescient and fervent.[164] The principles of pacifism included that war-time killing was inhumane, opposing the age-old commandment to "not kill," referencing the Bible.[165] Confucius, Jesus, and modern individualism all upheld the principle, Beneš wrote.[166] However, pacifism, according to Beneš, respected the right to defend one's country.[167]

Democracies could have done much more to change this trajectory, according to Beneš. First, they could have adopted an augmentation of powers, creating several new functions of the state.[168] He expected this in the fields of economics, finance, and communications, over which the state would have more control.[169] He argued that the executive power in the U.S. could be used as an example.[170] Second, he argued that future democracies would have to amend the present democratic party and voting systems.[171] According to Beneš, these systems were crippled by independence on one side and corruption on the other. To combat this crippling, Beneš believed that there had to be greater harmony between "the organs of democracy," such as the press, public opinion, elected corporations, and leaders, which Beneš believed were "necessary instruments of every democracy."[172] He predicted that, if these were not aligned with the "real interests of the state and nation," the "inevitable and final collapse of the democratic system will come."[173] Beneš did not dive deeply into the details of his concerns about these sectors, however,

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[163] Ibid., 46.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., 52.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid., 60.
[168] Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, 214–5.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid., 215.
[172] Ibid., 215–6.
[173] Ibid.

because “that would be a very long study,” but he hoped he would “have the opportunity in the future to return to this question.”[174] Third, Beneš believed that the establishment of the mentioned “fourth state” would be of the highest importance in future democracies.[175] He believed that socialism and Communism had made it clear in the twentieth century that liberal democracies must take the fourth estate into their equation of consolidating healthy democracies.[176] Communists and socialists, as well as the fascists and national socialists, understood that they must address the woes and interests of the people in their platforms; “Sometimes sincerely, sometimes only apparently, they accepted practically the program of socialism, collectivism, or even of communism.”[177] Fourth, future liberal democracies would have to grapple with the question of nationalism. Beneš believed that it was best to reject the racialism of nationalism, as a misguided “exaggeration,” as was the case with the violent components of revolutionary thinking, and as clear, “outspoken barbarism.”[178] The Nazi Party in Germany deified the nation and nationalism; “racial feeling” was brought to a paroxysm.[179] Beneš believed that many would reject this “bestiality” in the future because of its apparent connection to the Third Reich as well as its clear exaggeration of healthy components of nationalism.[180] Fifth, Beneš believed that this new system could be protected by a new and “effective” League of Nations.[181] The period of struggle and suffering in Europe seen in the first half of the 20th century would be replaced, Beneš argued, with an international policy “more peaceful, more moderate and more acceptable to all nations.”[182] As Beneš argued elsewhere, this

[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid., 216.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid., 217.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid., 217–8.
[182] Ibid.

would be best achieved with a federative reorganization.[183] Beneš stressed that there was "no other possibility if we wish to avoid a repetition of war and a crisis in Europe similar to what we have today, every ten or twenty years."[184] The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, with its Article Five security guarantees to member states, is itself an improvement of the limited protective measures provided by the League of Nations. The European Union further functions as a post-historical institution that creates commonalities among the nations in Europe and overseas cooperation, making trade and association simple. Beneš outlined that European nations ought to solve the "present international chaos" among states and that it is not feasible for these states "every ten or twenty years" to go through a world war.[185] Beneš thus envisioned a "kind of United States of Europe" that is "the only solution" that can save Europe from "complete and final collapse and moral and material ruin."[186] Havel proposed a similar vision, which I will get to in the following chapter.

To return to the European case in the interwar years and the linear historical necessity of democracy according to Beneš, it was not only important to cultivate access to freedom of the press, freedom of education, protection of minority rights, and so forth, domestically, it was also important to have democratic institutions that oversee the provision of democracy in individual states, existing as a separate entity. Thus, for Beneš, the overarching project of the League of Nations was a good one. It failed to deliver on promises, however. In fact, Beneš argues that since 1932 the Covenant of the League of Nations was systematically undermined and violated in its "most fundamental articles."[187] It was thus obsolete. Authoritarian states in the interwar years repeatedly violated the sovereignty of neighboring states in their internal affairs and daily

[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid., 201.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., 194.

politics; the leaders in particular made it abundantly clear that it was never in their intention to adhere to the principles laid out in the Covenant of the League of Nations. In the words of Beneš,

> [T]heir leaders continued to make public speeches, declarations, and manifestations which have been revealed as a lie, a public treachery, and a misleading of their own peoples and of foreign governments; they have hundreds of times given their word, and they have hundreds of times broken it; they have made every kind of pledge, and they have respected none; they have solemnly signed new treaties; and they have violated them all.[188]

The authoritarian reaction to democratic principles, from the respect for human rights to the growing self-determination of small newly-formed nations was also to Beneš a necessary development on the path to higher forms of democracy. The principles of world order at the time, such as the self-determination of countries, were taken advantage of by authoritarian powers who used the post-First World War struggle of chaos, unrest, and discontent to their advantage.[189] The authoritarian reaction takes this principle of self-determination to the extreme and "most absurd consequences" by increasing postwar nationalism and hate.[190] This is what Beneš believed ultimately led to the Munich Agreement in 1938. Despite this, the higher form of democracy would be final: "The present fight for this freedom will therefore be finished again with a great and, I am convinced, a decisive victory for freedom and democracy in Europe."[191] In all of this,

[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid., 38.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid., 43.

Beneš stressed that "Democracy cannot die. Freedom cannot die."[192] Beneš's final words in *Democracy Today and Tomorrow* ring true today and for the foreseeable future:

> The fight will continue; it cannot be stopped and it is already the fundamental condition of its final triumph. I do not, therefore, fear for the future of democracy. Neither do I fear a so-called catastrophe to Europe, through war or revolution. […] That is the ideal of democracy. This ideal is something so high, so valuable, and so dignified that it is worth believing and living. It is worth being a democrat.[193]

[192] Ibid., 218.
[193] Ibid., 219–20.

2. The Individual's Solution to the Crisis of Modernity According to Václav Havel

In this chapter, I analyze one of Havel's foundational principles for morality and society, namely "living in truth," and how his philosophy of history informed his ideal polity. First, I look at the relationship between identity and responsibility in his understanding of living in truth, which will help illustrate Havel's views on the ideal political leader and his or her role in society. His emphasis on individualism comes across in much of Havel's economics and politics, which is why I devote some energy to discussing them. Then I address his foreign policy since his individualism similarly illuminates the need for a foreign policy based on guaranteeing citizens human rights and promoting understanding and compromise in diplomacy. Finally, I assess the role his philosophy of history plays in shaping these beliefs and put them in contrast to his predecessors, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, which will help reveal his analysis of the dawn of the new age.

When it comes to the selection of sources, I have avoided the majority of Havel's dramatic work with the exception of a few that help illuminate Havel's greengrocer story touches on personal responsibility in fostering democracy.[1] An analysis of Havel's plays would help illustrate Havel's political thought in parts.[2] Havel emphasized the interrelationship of form and meaning.[3] Therefore, the fact that I am not focusing on Havel's plays here does not mean they are irrelevant to his political philosophy or ideal polity. It is possible to glean important insights into how Havel imagined the world through his career as a playwright. Indeed, David S. Danaher

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[1] Notably, Havel's greengrocer story has considerable controversy over its meaning. As a result, here I borrow from the interpretation of leading scholars in order to form my own reading.

[2] The primary themes in Havel's essays relate to human identity in the modern age and the relationship between identity and our acts while alive. The sub-themes include language and language as a source of miscommunication, and other topics like the discourse of dissidentism, reflections on truth and responsibility, and more. In all of this, Havel does not write simply for the aesthetic quality of art and its intrinsic value. For Havel, art serves the purpose of engaging with the world. See David S. Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 30.

[3] Ibid., 14.

writes that Havel's plays "teach us something about truth in a way that other genres (e.g., essays) cannot."[4] In his plays, we see truth reconceptualized as a process (a how) more than a datum (a what).[5] The "weirdness" we see from Havel shatters our expectations of reality and truth in the first place.[6] Danaher argues that "The explaining/understanding opposition runs throughout Havel's works and is a conceptual tool that can help us make sense not only of Havel's broader intellectual and political project but also, like the mosaic principle, of ourselves."[7] However, avoiding Havel's dramatic work allows for a more structured research method that does not lose the core of Havel's political thought. The focus of this chapter, then, is primarily on his published work where he comments on the trajectory of Czechoslovakia and his ideals for Czechoslovak democracy, a selection of Havel's most prominent speeches that have been widely published and disseminated, and a curated selection of letters that illuminate the subject matter.[8]

Many have discussed Havel's political philosophy to the extent that some have called him "one of the major political thinkers of the last half-century."[9] Scholars have discussed his geopolitics, postmodern philosophy, policies as a politician, political ethics, contributions to democratic thought, and more.[10] The novel contribution here is setting an analysis of Havel's

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] The difficulty of summarizing the entirety of Havel's thought is especially difficult due to the fact that prior to 1989, Havel's primary position was not simply that of a dissident but rather a playwright, with the primary genre Havel operated in being theater. Havel wrote nearly twenty plays, starting in the 1960s when he operated from Prague's small-form Divadlo Na zábradlí ("Theater on the Balustrade"). However, through the normalization period of Husak's regime, Havel's plays were banned. That did not prevent Havel from continuing his work throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Because of the banning, these plays were usually seen in small, private, or semi-public settings. Havel would not continue his work as a playwright during his presidency, however. He wrote his final play *Leaving* several years after the last term of his Czech presidency. See Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 29–30.
[9] Jacques Rupnik, "In Praise of Václav Havel," *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 3 (2010): 136.
[10] On Havel's geopolitics: See Petr Drulák, "Between Geopolitics and Anti-Geopolitics: Czech Political Thought," *Geopolitics* 11, no. 3 (2006): 420–38; Ondřej Ditrych, Nikola Hynek, Vladimír Handl and Vít Střítecký, "Understanding Havel?" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 46, no. 3 (2013): 407–17. On his postmodernism: See Dean C. Hammer, "Václav Havel's Construction of a Democratic Discourse – Politics in a Postmodern Age," *Philosophy Today* 39, no. 2 (1995): 119–30.; Peter Augustine Lawler, "Havel's Postmodern View of Man in the Cosmos," *Perspectives on Political Science* 26, no. 1 (1997): 27–34. On his policies as politician: See Martin Potůček, "Havel Versus Klaus: Public Policy Making in the Czech Republic," *Journal of Comparative Policy*

foundation for morality and philosophy of history in direct contrast to Masaryk and Beneš's conception in the previous chapter. The focus here is on Havel's goal for Czechoslovakia rather than its successor states, the Czech and Slovak Republics because Havel could not have predicted the Czechoslovakian dissolution prior to 1992. Very few did. In fact, Havel was opposed to the separation of Czech and Slovak lands prior to what became known as the Velvet Divorce.

The Private-Public Dichotomy & Living in Truth

The various genres in which Havel wrote are manifestations of "living in truth." It is important to start here, as this was one of the overarching principles that guided Havel's moral and spiritual understanding of Czechoslovakia from his time as a dissident to his tenure as Czechoslovakian and Czech president. Havel believed that this principle is fundamental to what it is to be human. Without it, he thought that human beings alienated themselves from their true nature.

The tacit acceptance or even indifference of Czechoslovak citizens living in totalitarianism is a part of the spectrum of what Havel considers the opposite of living in truth. Specifically, in his seminal essay titled *The Power of the Powerless*, he called the Czechoslovak socialist system a "post-totalitarian system."[11] This "post-totalitarian system" demands

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Analysis: Research and Practice 1, no. 2 (1999): 163–76. On his political ethics: See Petra Gümplová, "Rethinking Resistance with Václav Havel," *Constellations* 21, no. 3 (2014): 401. On his contributions to democratic thought: See Jindřich Fibich, "Vize Václava Havla o Demokracii a Demokratismu," *Mezinárodní vztahy* 32, no. 4 (1997): 67–75.

[11] However, in the second half of the 1980s, as Jiří Suk and Kristina Andělová note, Havel abandoned the phrase "post-totalitarianism" altogether and instead used "totalitarian" to describe Husák's late normalization regime. See Jiří Suk, and Kristina Andělová, "The Power of the Powerless and Further Havelian Paradoxes in the Stream of Time," *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no. 2 (2018): 219. Furthermore, Czechoslovak society was not the only example of "post-totalitarianism," as I will discuss at more length below. As Danaher explains, Havel also believed that the West had post-totalitarian systems, "Post-totalitarian regimes are, in other words, grotesquely exaggerated forms of the late twentieth-century consumer-industrial society that has been perfected in the West." See Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 142.

uniformity, conformity, and discipline.[12] It creates the illusion of being in harmony with the order of the universe.[13] Life instead requires improbability and novelty; the post-totalitarian system forces life into "probable states," thus ostracizing people from the fundamentals of life.[14] This is what Havel called the "blind automatism which drives the system."[15] He reiterated the same in one of his most-known plays, "The Beggar's Opera," which serves as a metaphor for the decay of the soul under Communism. Similarly, in the final play of the Vanek trilogy, titled "Protest," Havel offered a sharp critique of how accommodating oneself to an oppressive system and avoiding personal risk can lead to becoming the oppressor rather than the oppressed. In the semi-autobiographical play, the protagonist Ferdinand Vaněk, Havel's alter ego, has just been released from prison and is invited to the home of his old friend, Stanek, a former idealist who began working for state television. Stanek brags about his living space, garden, and life, seeking some moral concession for abandoning the dissident movement from Vaněk. Vaněk remains detached and noncommittal. As the play unfolds, Stanek reveals the true reason for inviting Vaněk: his daughter's fiancé, a musician critical of the regime, has been arrested. Despite his government connections, Stanek cannot secure the man's release. Vaněk, already prepared with a petition, offers it for Stanek to sign. Though initially ready, Stanek hesitates and then refuses, claiming that signing would harm Vaněk's reputation by appearing coercive. Soon after, news arrives that the musician has been freed, and Stanek asserts that submitting the petition would have provoked the government. In his view, opposition figures like Vaněk can do more harm than good. The title's irony lies in the fact that Stanek's real "protest" is not against injustice but in his refusal to sign the petition. The metaphor serves well in encapsulating Havel's

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[12] Václav Havel, *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965–1990*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 135.
[13] Ibid., 134.
[14] Ibid., 135.
[15] Ibid.

multilayered problem with a person's identity and that all of the aspects of a person, whether in the household, political life, or work, are connected since "[a]ll the circles of our home, indeed our whole natural world, are an inalienable part of us, and an inseparable element of our human identity."[16]

Around the time of writing these plays, Havel also wrote the mentioned essay *The Power of the Powerless* where he explains the theoretical component of this system characterized in the mentioned plays. In it, he used the example of a greengrocer, who places a sign in his window that reads "Workers of the World unite!" The purpose of the essay was to denounce "the existing climate of fear, selfishness, bribery, careerism, and indifference to the common good."[17] It was also to diagnose Western representative democracies and present viable alternatives.[18] In sum, the "basic theme" of the essay, as Jiří Suk and Kristina Andělová put it, was to "resist the apparatus and dictatorship of power" and to "reconfigure one's existence."[19] Havel elaborated on the greengrocer's motives in placing the sign in his window and its connotations:

> I think it can safely be assumed that the overwhelming majority of shopkeepers never think about the slogans they put in their windows, nor do they use them to express their real opinions. That poster was delivered to our greengrocer from the enterprise headquarters along with the onions and carrots. He put them all into the window simply because it has been done that way for years, because everyone

[16] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 31.
[17] Aurelian Craiutu and Stefan Kolev, "Political Thought in Central and Eastern Europe: The Open Society, its Friends, and Enemies," *European Journal of Political Theory* 21, no. 4 (2021): 4.
[18] Marián Sekerák, "Havel's Idea of Post-Democracy in a Comparative Perspective," *History of European Ideas* (2023): 7.
[19] Suk, and Andělová, "The Power of the Powerless and Further Havelian Paradoxes in the Stream of Time," 217.

> does it, and because that is the way it has to be. If he were to refuse, there could be trouble.[20]

The greengrocer lives in a world with a set of ritualistic practices that let him live unbothered in the social world. As a result, the greengrocer bears some moral blame and responsibility for the totalitarianism around him. Individuals are therefore co-creators of the "post-totalitarian system." In fact, in Havel's first speech as president of Czechoslovakia, he said that every citizen was responsible for being "co-creators of the totalitarian system."[21] That is not to say that there is not a hierarchy of blame, however. Nonetheless, everyone is to blame to some extent. For Havel, taking responsibility allows us to live freely. Because of the tacit and outright adoption of the social structure, the greengrocer determines his own belonging in society. The greengrocer's actions in his job, namely placing carrots and onions, and the social duties, such as placing the placard, are a representation of the identity of the greengrocer in this society that relies on his participation. That belonging, however, for Havel, is fundamentally fragmented.[22]

The slogan itself is not meant to persuade anyone. It's not even meant to be noticed, since similar slogans existed across the country. The purpose and meaning of the slogan is to remind people of what everyone was participating in.[23] It tells them that they will be excluded and ostracized if they fail to participate in the theatrics and, perhaps more importantly, that when the beliefs in the system are broken, the entire system itself collapses.[24] The imagery is therefore both defeatist and apocalyptic. The apocalyptic imagery contributes to people's unwillingness to

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[20] Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," trans. Paul Wilson, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 32, no. 2 (2018): 359.
[21] Václav Havel, "New Year's Address to the Nation," in *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).
[22] Daniel Brennan, *The Political Thought of Václav Havel: Philosophical Influences and Contemporary Applications* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 32.
[23] Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," 384.
[24] Ibid.

challenge the system because questioning it would tacitly suggest that the one who doubts would be willing to bring damnation on the collective. Therefore, the adoption of the slogan boils down to fear. It can be the result of direct penalization, the kind that he himself faced while in prison, or, perhaps worse, social ostracization. Or it can be fear of the collapse of the system as a whole.

The moral of the story translates to Havel's problem with not living in accordance with truth more broadly. The fundamental illustration of Havel's greengrocer story is that in order to live in accordance with truth an individual must realize that our private and public lives are connected. When there is opposition to seemingly inconsequential actions, such as placing the placard in the window, we start living in harmony with truth which creates ripple effects in society. In other words, the illustration shows the relationship between identity and responsibility, as Barbara J. Falk argues.[25] Totalitarianism, in contrast, discards any personal responsibility, thus creating impure human conditions, as human beings are meant to bear responsibility in their everyday lives. Similarly, Daniel Brennan explains that "totalitarian governments in the twentieth century pushed a view of collective responsibility rather than individual responsibility for events."[26] In Havel's words, the post-totalitarian system makes everyone an instrument of "mutual totality," creating the "autototality of society."[27] It is through this group identity to the collective, according to Havel, that we not only lose ourselves but also shun any need for restoring conditions to the collective that would be better for the individual. Therefore, the moral imperative of action "is revealed through private discourse as much as through public discourse."[28]

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[25] Barbara J. Falk, "The Power of the Powerless and Václav Havel's 'Responsibilityism,' " *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no. 2 (2018): 330.
[26] Brennan, "Considering the Public Private-Dichotomy," 258.
[27] Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," 365.
[28] Brennan, "Considering the Public Private-Dichotomy," 258.

Another way to understand Havel's understanding of individuals and the role responsibility plans in their relationship to the state, is through his conception of *kruhy* ("circles") or *vrstvy* ("layers") of "home" (*domov*), which he borrowed from Jan Patočka. The terms *kruhy* and *vrstvy*, for Havel, aimed to illustrate an image for how modern individuals are simultaneously parts of various layers of society. This is what can lead to their sense of increased responsibility in society. Havel explored this idea of "circles" in *Summer Meditations* where he wrote that these circles are concentric.[29] For Havel, a person's identity must remain consistent across the different societal layers they inhabit, avoiding fragmentation. This means that the moral values that guide a person in their workplace or political life should align with those they hold in their personal life, such as with family and friends. In Havel's words:

> All the circles of our home [všechny vrstvy našeho domova], indeed our whole natural world, are an inalienable part of us, and an inseparable element of our human identity. Deprived of all the aspects of his home, man would be deprived of himself, of his humanity.[30]

The "circles" concept also directly impacts our understanding of Havel's idea of "living in truth." Havel's notion of "living in truth" similarly has a social dimension. Ultimately, the "circles" concept offers a way to bridge the gap between individual and societal responsibility. Havel's emphasis on personal responsibility is, by extension, a call for collective responsibility.[31] This is why Havel's recommendations for moral political leadership, which I will get to shortly,

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[29] Havel extrapolates the term here: Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 30.
[30] Ibid., 31.
[31] See, Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel,* 182–7.

as well as personal responsibility, apply more broadly beyond the borders of the context of Czechoslovakia. Specifically, when Havel writes of *domov* ("home"), he is referring to a global dimension as well, as Irena Vaňková explains:

> *Domov* thereby becomes associated with a number of paradoxes or reconceptualizations: it is our most personal space, but at the same time it has a global dimension; it is experientially concrete (it can refer to a specific home, even a "pseudo-home" like a prison cell) while simultaneously having transcendent dimensions.[32]

Domov thereby encompasses care for one's home, community, city, nation, and ultimately, the entire world, for Havel.[33] In particular, Havel contrasts *domov* with *bydliště* ("residence") in *Disturbing the Peace*:

> For example, it's important that man have a home [domov] on this earth, not just a residence or dwelling place [bydliště]; it's important that his world have an order, a culture, a style; it's important the landscape be respected and cultivated with sensitivity, even at the expense of growth in productivity; it's important that the secret inventiveness of nature, its infinite variety, the inscrutable complexity of its interconnections, be honored; it's important that cities and streets have their own face, their own atmosphere, their own style; it's important that human life not be reduced to stereotypes of production and consumption, but that it be open to all

[32] Irena Vaňková. "Home, Homeland: Domov." In *Václav Havel's Meanings: His Key Words and Their Legacy*, ed. by David S. Danaher and Kieran Williams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024), 92.
[33] Ibid., 91.

> possibilities; it's important that people not be a herd, manipulated and standardized by the choice of consumer goods and consumer television culture, whether this culture is offered to them by three giant competing capitalist networks or a single giant noncompetitive socialist network. It is important, in short, that the superficial variety of one system, or the repulsive grayness of the other, not hide the same deep emptiness of life devoid of meaning.[34]

From this moral foundation of responsibility, to which we will return shortly, Havel established the importance of "human leaders," building on the humanistic framing of the political philosophy of his predecessors, Masaryk and Beneš.

Humanity in Political Leadership According to Havel

Havel's emphasis on living in truth overlaps with Masaryk's and Beneš's foundation for morality. Their argument that humanity must be at the center of both morality and political leadership comes across in Havel's writing as well. Havel similarly aimed to cultivate what he called "higher responsibility" to his country and the people living in it.[35] This was the moral origin of Havel's politics and indeed his idea of what "genuine politics" ought to look like.[36] His ambition to better organize society is the first factor that brings people into politics, according to Havel. The second is the ambition for "self-affirmation."[37] Political power allows people to directly shape the country according to their ideals and values in an ideal setting. Third, people desire to be in positions of power because of the many personal benefits that come from the

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[34] Václav Havel, and Karel Hvížďala, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvížďala*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 15–16.
[35] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 1.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Václav Havel, *Toward a Civil Society*, trans. Paul Wilson (Prague: Lidové Noviny Publishing House, 1994), 134.

positions.[38] Despite some of these natural motivations, Havel remained overtly skeptical of those who would adamantly aspire to public office. With the great realization of one's identity in positions of power also comes the danger that it will "rob" us of our true identity, according to Havel.[39] Therefore, politics should primarily be a job for modest people; it is not a job for "dirty business" and those who would suggest as much are "lying to us."[40] At the time, Havel wrote that he did not know if he fit this description; he only knew that he should be president "because I have accepted this office."[41]

Upon his visit to Asahi Hall in Tokyo, Japan, on April 23, 1992, Havel reflected on the place of the intellectual in political affairs, who he wrote "should be the guardian and the bearer of spiritual qualities" in practical politics.[42] In opposition to the totalitarian system under Communism, where administrators diligently obeyed the will of the center, the primary force opposing them were the "rebellious writers, artists, scholars and scientists."[43] As a result, when Communism fell, Czechoslovakia did not have many professional democratic politicians to position into power, and in this "initial phase" many dissidents who, according to Havel, were mostly "rebellious, liberal-minded, independent intellectuals" came to power.[44] This was evident in neighboring countries as well, he wrote. The president of Bulgaria was a philosopher; the vice president was a poet; in Hungary, the president was a writer and the prime minister a historian; the president of Lithuania was a pianist; in Poland, surrounding the leader of the workers' revolt was a group of intellectuals who belonged to the former opposition; in Czechoslovakia, the

[38] Ibid., 134–5.
[39] Ibid., 138.
[40] Ibid., 139.
[41] Ibid., 140.
[42] Ibid., 195.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 196.

president was a playwright; the situation was similar in other post-Communist countries as well.[45]

There are benefits to the intellectual in political life, but Havel acknowledged the disadvantages as well. In particular, where the intellectual should make simple arguments for voters to follow, they are instead inclined to complex thought and analysis; when they ought to explain in unambiguous language why they are best fit for office, they doubt their qualifications; they hesitate, refuse quarrels, and are quick to judge their motives.[46] This all puts them at a disadvantage over those who lust for power. Besides these disadvantages, there is also the issue that politicians must be executive officers first and foremost; intellectuals, in contrast, have rarely supervised or employed those around them.[47] This could mean they work themselves to exhaustion with "rather meager and almost invisible" output.[48] For Beneš, this "exhaustion" was a necessary prerequisite to political leadership.[49] Havel portrayed it as a disadvantage. There is also a tendency for intellectuals to be sensitive and therefore take this all to heart, distressing them further.[50] Here, we could presume that Havel speaks largely from experience.

Havel then writes that we do not need to choose between these two categories, with a seasoned politician on one side and a sensitive, creative intellectual on the other. What if this is not a "dilemma" but rather a "historic challenge"?[51] He thought that it could be destiny that thrust Czechoslovaks unexpectedly into this predicament.[52] He continued, "When I look around the world today I feel strongly that contemporary politics needs a new impulse, one that would

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 197-8.
[47] Ibid., 198.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Edvard Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1939), 211.
[50] Havel, *Toward a Civil Society*, 198.
[51] Ibid., 201.
[52] Ibid.

add a badly needed spiritual dimension. Perhaps this impulse will come from some place other than the post-Communist countries. Yet it seems to me that come it must."[53]

Along with this concern for the place of the intellectual in political affairs, Havel, as a moralist in line with Masaryk and Beneš, focused on the spiritual health of Czechoslovak society. This focus was already evident under Husák's regime when he wrote a letter to Husák, published in April 1975. Havel already in the 1970s asked about the "moral and spiritual revival" of Czechoslovak society.[54] Therefore, Havel's chief consideration was not with the statistical measures of how the economy was functioning and whether Socialism was proving to be the best economic and political system. Instead, he worried about the inner workings of "man," or the "human dimension of life."[55] Under Husák's regime, it was fear of consequences that led people to participate in society despite their knowledge that life was inauthentic.[56] The fear, more precisely, was "anxiety about what is being, or might be, threatened."[57] It is because of this fear that there was tacit acceptance of Husák's regime.[58] Havel was puzzled by this because it suggested that people lost hope for the future.[59] In his words, "Despair leads to apathy, apathy to conformity, conformity to routine performance—which is then quoted as evidence of 'mass political involvement.' "[60]

For Havel, it was the great challenge of wealth inequality, anthropogenic climate change, nuclear arsenals, ethnic and social unrest, and more, that established the importance of "human consciousness and self-knowledge, of man's relationship to himself and to the world."[61] He

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Havel, *Open Letters*, 51.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 52.
[57] Ibid., 53.
[58] Ibid., 56.
[59] Ibid., 57.
[60] Ibid., 58.
[61] Havel, *Toward a Civil Society*, 202.

believed that change for the better could come through the way "the modern man looked at himself."[62] He asked, "And how else should [change] begin but by changing the very spirit and ethos of politics?"[63] The point here is that Havel believed that the realm of politics should be "widely humanized and its intellectual and spiritual dimension cultivated."[64] Politics should not be a field where solely specialized people thrive, but a place where people feel a "heightened sense of responsibility" and a "heightened understanding for the mysterious complexity of Being."[65] To reiterate from the previous chapter, Masaryk and Beneš also put great moral responsibility on their political leaders; they believed that democracy had to be cultivated by individuals who upheld the democratic system and mobilized its people.

Havel's Ideal Czechoslovak Economy & Decentralized Politics

To reiterate, Havel believed that without "living in truth," it was not possible to have a desirable society. Everything else was built on this foundational principle. The political apathy seen in Communist Czechoslovakia created economic apathy as well, for Havel. Therefore, the same liberal positions he advocated for there also applied to the ideal economic system for Czechoslovakia.[66] Havel's ideal economy was one where there was a "maximum possible plurality" of a wide array of decentralized and "preferably small" enterprises that took into account different local traditions, altogether resisting the command system pressure to

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 203.
[65] Ibid., 203–4.
[66] To borrow from Brennan, we can best describe Havel as a liberal. Some will take immediate issue with this because of Havel's repeated claims that he did not hold particular political allegiance to any political ideology. It is for this reason that Brennan calls Havel's liberalism "agnostic." Brennan, in defining Havel's liberalism, borrows Will Kymlicka's definition, as "the organizing of social institutions in order to promote individual liberty and equality." See Brennan, *The Political Thought of Václav Havel*, 130.; and Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, 2nd Ed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56.

nationalize and centralize the economy.[67] This makes sense in response to the centralized, inefficient bureaucracy seen in Czechoslovakia under Communism. In *Summer Meditations*, he expanded on this notion that *the only* economic system that works is a market economy where "everything belongs to someone," making someone "responsible for everything."[68] The market economy resembles a "natural economy" because it reflects life itself.[69] Life is infinitely complicated, so a central intelligence cannot plan it accurately. Acknowledging his belief in the free market, at the same time, Havel argued that he rejected dogmatism connected to it, thus referencing Thatcherism and Reaganism, which his opposition, Václav Klaus, openly celebrated. He wrote, "Right-wing dogmatism, with its sour-faced intolerance and fanatical faith in general precepts, bothers me as much as left-wing prejudices, illusions, and utopias."[70] Brennan explains this emphasis on free enterprise, "[F]or Havel, the role of social institutions is not to prescribe behavior but to protect the individual liberty and equality of all citizens by promoting an agonistic political discourse that best enables individuals to realize their own version of the good life."[71] Therefore, the moral foundation of Havel's polity was not one of fairness, but "authentic living, and enabling individuals to express their freedom publicly."[72]

In conjunction with decentralized economics, Havel believed in decentralized state politics with local municipalities taking most of the focus of citizens. This decentralized nature of politics meant that citizens of the country would be elected "without party affiliation."[73] This was because of the danger of "excessive influence" parties and partisanship can have over

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[67] Václav Havel *Disturbing the Peace,* 13–6.
[68] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 62.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 66.
[71] Brennan, *The Political Thought of Václav Havel*, 130.
[72] This is why Brennan believes it is best to call Havel's ideal polity an "agnostic liberal democracy." See Brennan, *The Political Thought of Václav Havel*, 145.
[73] Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 13–6.; 16–7.

politics.[74] In conversations with democratic leaders from other countries, he wrote that they all "warn them" of the dangers of an "overemphasis on party politics."[75] In Havel's view, parties should not be a direct component of the elections; instead, political parties should "provide those who participate in power—having been elected—with an intellectual base, with ideas, with opportunities to hone their opinions."[76] Writing in 1991, he said that, ideally, Czechoslovakia would still have two large parties with several small parties in the twenty-first century and that political life would be more harmonious as a result.[77] He imagined that Czechoslovakia would be a "highly decentralized state with confident local governments. People's primary interest would be in local elections rather than the parliamentary ones."[78] The judiciary would be independent with the full trust of its people.[79] He advocated a majority system over proportional representation.[80] However, he admitted that he would be satisfied with a combination of these two systems.[81]

Havel's view on the importance of decentralized economics and politics comes from his celebration of individualism and liberalism. For Havel, preventing citizens from the ability to act prevents the progress of history, whether it is in economics or politics. This radical individualism was already seen in *The Power of the Powerless* but is echoed throughout his political leanings and political philosophy as well.

Havel's Foreign Policy

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[74] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 53.
[75] Ibid., 53–4.
[76] Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 13–6.; 16–7.
[77] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 102.
[78] Ibid., 103.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 56.
[81] Ibid.

This humanistic individualism as a basis for his morality was also reflected in Havel's foreign policy. Havel believed that Czechoslovak foreign policy had to promote human rights and the rule of law even in the face of the realities of realpolitik.[82] At times, he had to sacrifice this idealistic stance because of interventionism, which put him at odds with his idealism. Regardless, his foreign policy reflected his broader understanding of living in truth, especially in the parallel between identity and responsibility, as Falk outlined above. Havel sought to create a foreign policy based on these underlying principles.

Havel's foreign policy derived from four core principles. The first principle was in support of European "unification."[83] He wrote that since the fall of the Soviet Union and its support for its Warsaw Pact satellite states in central and eastern Europe, "for the first time in history," Europe had a chance to "evolve into a single large society based on the principle of 'unity in diversity.' "[84] He argued that this is not only in the European interest but also in global interest, since "Europe [had] dragged the rest of the world into deadly conflicts."[85] Havel echoed this need for closer ties with Czechoslovakia's neighbors in his speech at the International Prize of Charles the Great, in Aachen on May 9, 1991, where he said "our countries should do everything in their power to move closer to those organizations."[86] For Havel, as early as 1991 it was abundantly clear that the future of Czechoslovakia was as a fully-fledged member of the Council of Europe. At the Council of Europe Summit in Vienna on October 8, 1993, he urged member states to move past the "old Herderian idea of the nation-state" toward a supranational

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[82] Havel's idealism and calls for human rights became a signature of Czech foreign policy and also greatly contributed to Havel's popularity abroad. In fact, in his first six months as president in 1990, he traveled to Canada, the U.S., Germany, France, and Britain, among other countries. He appeared on television with Margaret Thatcher, François Mitterrand, George W. Bush, and other prominent world leaders. See Rob McRae, *Resistance and Revolution: Václav Havel's Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 248.
[83] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 83.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., 126–7.

community where nationalities can realize national autonomy within a broad civil society.[87] It is no understatement to say that Havel was a firm believer in the supranational community and international organizations, in what he called the "architecture of planetary coexistence."[88] Organizations from the European Union to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and others, should contribute to everything from regional defense to the global political metaculture and regional cooperation.[89]

The second principle relied on spiritual, intellectual, and political values that in the decades prior were primarily seen in the democratic countries of Western Europe. These values were "political and economic plurality, parliamentary democracy, respect for civil rights and freedoms, the decentralization of local administration and municipal government, and all that these things imply."[90]

The third principle was closer alliances with North America because of the deep ties the two continents had with each other. Havel believed that closer alliances between these two could be the "main stabilizing factors on a global scale."[91] Elsewhere, he stressed the connection "the civilization of Europe" and North America had with each other because pan-European integration was impossible to imagine without "this Atlantic dimension," which he compared to the relationship between the United States and Canada.[92] This is what ultimately led Havel to be sympathetic to the NATO military intervention against Serbia to end the massacres and expulsions in Bosnia and Herzegovina in former Yugoslavia. In this, he was not exempt from

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[87] Ibid., 242.
[88] Ibid., 289.
[89] In particular, he lists the European Union, the Association of South-East Asian Nations, APEC, The Organization of American States, The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Free Trade Agreement, The North American Free Trade Association, NATO, and others. See Havel, *Toward a Civil Society*, 289.
[90] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 83.
[91] Ibid., 84.
[92] Havel, *Toward a Civil Society*, 128.

many who viewed the geopolitical landscape after 1991 as one on an upward trajectory where NATO, with the U.S. at the helm, was incapable of defeat. He was also supportive of U.S. President Bill Clinton's bombing campaigns in the Middle East and U.S. President George W. Bush's full-scale invasion of Iraq in 2003.[93]

Lastly, Havel argued that Czechoslovak foreign policy must also take into consideration nations that belonged to the Soviet Union. In this, he, once again, echoed the foreign policy of Beneš. Havel wrote that "their journey to democracy must be supported."[94] He argued that it was in the interest "of the whole world that these countries become democratic."[95] Elsewhere, he similarly argued that European order itself is unimaginable without the inclusion of the post-Soviet republics, which at the time of writing comprised a sixth of the world's landmass.[96] In contrast with this need to expand relations with both East and West, Havel also acknowledged the common enemy found in the "communist world" in opposition to "the West."[97] At a speech in Davos on February 4, 1992, he said that this common threat kept the West "united both politically and in terms of security arrangements. Against its will, it also helped the West strengthen, cultivate, and develop its time-tested principles and values, such as a civil society, parliamentary democracy, market economy, and the concept of human and civil rights."[98] Confronted by the expansionist Communist totalitarianism, the West reinvoked its commitment to "freedom, truth, democracy, broader cooperation and growing prosperity."[99] Therefore, "the communist world was instrumental in the West's own self-affirmation."[100]

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[93] Havel, "The Council of Europe," in *The Art of the Impossible*, 41.
[94] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 84.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Havel, *Toward a Civil Society*, 128.
[97] Ibid., 175.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

In all of this, Havel argued that Czechoslovak foreign policy should be based on the "idea of human rights as understood by modern humanity."[101] To Havel, "modern humanity" believed in "Freedom of the individual, equality, the universality of civil rights."[102] He argued that human rights are "universal" and "indivisible," meaning that if they are "denied to anyone in the world" they are denied "indirectly, to all people."[103] "This is why we cannot remain silent in the face of evil or violence; silence merely encourages them."[104] This empathy stems from Havel's belief that "one is 'responsible for the whole world.' "[105] Therefore, foreign policy should not stem from "selfish, inconsiderate, mindlessly pragmatic foreign policy" in order to "promote the interests of our own country unscrupulously, to the detriments of everyone else."[106] Instead, Havel argued that Czechoslovak foreign policy should "be a policy that sees our own interests as an essential part of the common interest, one that encourages us at all times to become involved, even when there is no immediate benefit to be had from it."[107] The spiritual emphasis Havel placed on his foreign policy is also apparent from a speech Havel gave at the Federal Assembly in 1990, which functioned as the Czechoslovak Parliament at the time:

> I understand democracy as a form of state existence, as a way of self-organization of society, as a form of human coexistence. This form […] did not arise from and is not the result of a random whim of history and a random social morphology, but it is the result of the history of the human spirit and its self-formation, mirroring values developed by the human spirit. Thus, we are not going to build a truly

[101] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 98.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 99.
[107] Ibid.

> democratic state if we understand democracy as a mere set of systemic measures, formal rules of the game, or mere organizational tricks.[108]

A Philosophy of History: The Individual's Solution to The Crisis of Modernity

Havel's argument that taking individual responsibility was key to giving human existence meaning reveals both his solution and the problem with the neo-Hegelian argument that liberal democracy was inevitable. This was in line with Patočka's view that history opens "a space not for life's necessities, but for rising above them," and that history was "the scene of the internal struggle of man for genuineness and authenticity."[109] As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Havel disagreed with the thesis that liberal democracy emerged victorious in the twentieth century. He argued that Czechoslovakia and, with it, modernity, had instead moved to a "techno-scientific entity" rather than the "pluralistic and mysterious moral agent" seen in liberal democracies.[110] Indeed, Havel accepted that, after the Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovak society freed itself, "but in some ways it behaves worse than when it was in chains."[111] Technically, for Havel, society could only *truly* free itself if it lived unequivocally in line with truth where citizens can cultivate a renewed sense of responsibility. A liberal democracy allows that possibility but does not guarantee it. Masaryk and Beneš used a similar line of reasoning but emphasized that there was something intrinsic in Czechoslovaks that destined them to remain democrats. Havel was more skeptical and advocated in line with the Christian doctrine of total depravity, that society is riddled with injustices that will remain without a spiritual and moral awakening of society. Indeed, when Havel looked around at Czechoslovak society, writing in the

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[108] Václav Havel, *Projevy* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1990), 153.
[109] Jan Patočka, *Evropa a Doba Poevropská* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1992), 98.
[110] Brennan, *The Political Thought of Václav Havel*, 146.
[111] Havel, *Summer Meditations*, 2.

early 1990s, prior to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992, he wrote of the dangerous symptoms in Czechoslovakia:

> [H]atred among nationalities, suspicion, racism, even signs of Fascism; politicking, an unrestrained, unheeding struggle for purely particular interests, unadulterated ambition, fanaticism of every conceivable kind, new and unprecedented varieties of robbery, the rise of different mafias; and a prevailing lack of tolerance, understanding, taste, moderation, and reason.[112]

Goodwill, Havel wrote, was " slumbering within our society."[113] To Havel, this was also intrinsic within Czechoslovak society. In his New Year's Address on January 1, 1990, in Prague, Havel said that Czechoslovakia was "not flourishing."[114] He defined some of the difficulties at hand, such as the failure of industry, the exploitation of workers, the obsolete economy that wastes energy, failure in the education system, and pollution in the soil, rivers, and forests.[115] Worst of all, however, was the "moral environment," where under the previous regime Czechoslovaks learned "not to believe in anything."[116] As mentioned before, he blamed this contaminated moral environment not chiefly on the totalitarian regime but instead on all Czechoslovaks: "We had all become used to the totalitarian system and accepted it as an unchangeable fact and thus helped to perpetuate it. […] We are all also its co-creators."[117] In his second New Year's Address, on January 1, 1991, in Prague, he reiterated that problems still

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., 3.
[114] Ibid., 13.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., 14.
[117] Ibid.

abound.[118] The freedoms Czechoslovaks celebrated after the Velvet Revolution gave way to "the depth of moral decline in our souls."[119] With the shackles of totalitarianism gone and the joy that came from independence also came the nervous "burden of freedom."[120] Havel appealed to Czechoslovak citizens to continue down the path of their efforts, whether that was down the unpredictable path of private enterprise or to students and young people who have endless horizons in front of them.[121]

For Havel, Czechoslovak society, after the fall of Communism, was entering a new and undefined period in global history. In his words, "It will probably be something else, something new, but I do not know exactly what."[122] The exact nature of it was unclear to Havel, but he called it a "post-democratic" system.[123] He pointed out toward the end of his tenure as president of Czechoslovakia that the world faced "a point of culmination" and argued about the great "challenge for the third millennium," which Havel believed was to "rehabilitate" a human dimension of citizenship and politics.[124] As Suk and Andělová put it, the "two Havelian paradoxes," namely "the power of the powerless" and "antipolitical politics," morphed into an "amalgam of moral renewal, from which a qualitatively different politics was to arise."[125] In 1999, he wrote that with the end of the Modern Age ("novověk"), there was "something" crumbling, "decaying and exhausting itself"; at the same time, "something else, still indistinct, [was] arising from the rubble."[126] He called the philosophy of this indistinct new age

[118] Ibid., 116.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., 124.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," 407.
[124] Havel, *Toward a Civil Society*, 234.
[125] Suk, and Andělová, "The Power of the Powerless and Further Havelian Paradoxes in the Stream of Time," 220.
[126] Václav Havel, "The Search for Meaning in a Global Civilization," *English Academy Review* 16, no. 1 (1999): 3.

postmodernism, "where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain."[127] For Havel, the Age of Science and Reason led to various positive developments, but it failed to provide citizens with a sense of meaning: "Man as an observer is becoming completely alienated from himself as a being."[128] Havel dreaded the possibility of humanity as an "accidental anomaly" because he believed it could denigrate legitimate arguments for human rights and freedoms.[129] Therefore, Havel appealed to "higher, mysterious entities whom it is not advisable to blaspheme."[130] He further claimed that only those who submitted to the "authority of the universal order and of creation" could value themselves and their neighbors.[131] Havel was not entirely coherent here as to why we ought to give these higher entities credit for what he believed were archetypal behavioral mechanisms that help us live in accordance with our true selves. As many moral philosophers have argued, there are indeed many reasons to behave morally that do not rely on metaphysical beings, including materialistic, Darwinian reasons. However, Havel rejected both *a priori* ethics and Darwinian explanations as possible solutions to the void of meaning he saw in society. Instead, he believed that it was best to face the void by taking responsibility, thus once more rooting society in the individual. Therefore, for Havel, acting politically as individuals was

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[127] Ibid., 4. In my view, Havel does not provide enough argumentative proof here for why moving beyond reason discards moral accountability and probabilistic certainty. It is indeed possible to make sense of the world, and our relation to other beings while alive, while believing that situated truths have more epistemological weight than universalizable metaphysical truths.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid., 5.

[130] Ibid., 6.

[131] Ibid., 6–7. Of course, if this proposition was true, it might be possible to present empirical evidence that suggests that secular societies are more immoral than religious societies. Sociologists have shown the opposite, however. For example, Phil Zukerman observed that societies with the lowest rates of belief in a god are more prosperous, free, equal, democratic, conscious of women's rights and human rights, have a higher life expectancy, lower crime rates, and higher educational attainment (with the exceptions of China, Vietnam, and Russia). These include Sweden, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Japan, Canada, Norway, Finland, China, New Zealand, South Korea, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, Hungary, Great Britain, Australia, and Belgium. See Phil Zuckerman, *Living the Secular Life*: *New Answers to Old Questions* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 46. Needless to say, there are many reasons for this positive trajectory that go beyond simple explanations. Blaming "belief in god" would be an oversimplification of multifaceted explanations. Regardless, Havel's notion that only a person who "submits to the authority of the universal order" can behave morally is difficult to defend empirically. Even if humanity was "accidental," it does not mean that either suffering, as utilitarians would argue, or generalizable principles, as deontologists would argue, are not important moral catalysts for behavior in society.

and is an appropriate response to the challenges modernity creates in societies. Indeed, Tony Judt believed Havel's dissent was effective because of his ability to connect it to the rights of the individual.[132] The solution was "not about depoliticizing politics per se, but rather to expand the political by infusing civil society with authenticity and responsibility."[133] This is what led Falk to write, "If Havel can be said to have been categorically against something, it is anything that obscures or obstructs individual responsibility."[134] Havel echoed this emphasis on individual responsibility in his second presidential address on New Year's, in the often-quoted statement from Jan Amos Komenský, "People, your government has returned to you," and he stressed that now "It is up to you, people, to show that the return of the government into your own hands was not in vain."[135]

So, why was "liberal democracy" not the end of history, according to Havel? In order to answer this question, it is first important to reiterate that Havel did not believe that the best solution to the crisis of modernity was to establish the West as victorious over the East.[136] Indeed, Havel believed that "Western democracy in its current form does not provide a solution to humanity's existential crisis."[137] Paradoxically, "because ideological manipulation in the West is "infinitely more gentle and refined" than its counterpart in the East, the crisis is more hidden, more elusive, and therefore more difficult to confront."[138] For Havel, "classical parliamentary

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[132] Tony Judt, "The Dilemmas of Dissidence: The Politics of Opposition in East-Central Europe," *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 2, no. 2 (1988): 192.
[133] Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2003), 256.
[134] Falk, "The Power of the Powerless and Václav Havel's 'Responsibilityism,' " 329.
[135] Ibid.
[136] To make this argument, I borrow primarily from Danaher, who was the first to argue for this point in *Reading Václav Havel*.
[137] Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 142.
[138] Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 142.

democracy" kept "failing in one way or another."[139] His criticism of that system was significant in the already mentioned influential essay, *The Power of the Powerless*:

> It would appear that the traditional parliamentary democracies can offer no fundamental opposition to the automatism of technological civilization and the industrial-consumer society, for they, too, are being dragged helplessly along by it. People are manipulated in ways that are infinitely more subtle and refined than the brutal methods used in the post-totalitarian societies. But this static complex of rigid, conceptually sloppy, and politically pragmatic mass political parties run by professional apparatuses and releasing the citizen from all forms of concrete and personal responsibility; and those complex focuses of capital accumulation engaged in secret manipulations and expansion; the omnipresent dictatorship of consumption, production, advertising, commerce, consumer culture, and all that flood of information: all of it, so often analyzed and described, can only with great difficulty be imagined as the source of humanity's rediscovery of itself.[140]

Similarly, in "Thriller," Havel wrote:

> I am unwilling to believe that this whole [modern] civilization is no more than a blind alley of history and a fatal error of the human spirit. More probably it represents a necessary phase that man and humanity must go through, one that

[139] Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," 406–407.
[140] Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," 404.

> man – if he survives – will ultimately, and on some higher level (unthinkable, of course, without the present phase), transcend.[141]

Parliamentary democracy itself was nothing more than a "transition phase in anticipation of a deeper 'existential' revolution to come."[142] He therefore believed that thinking about classical parliamentary democracy as the end-point as Masaryk and Beneš argued would be unwise, especially at a time when "the difficult birth of some other system, a more democratic one, has just begun."[143] In Havel's essay "Politics and Conscience," he similarly considered the "spiritual framework of modern civilization" and "the source of its present crisis."[144] He argued that both the East and West had to look out for the alienating nature of ideology:

> That task is one of resisting vigilantly, thoughtfully, and attentively, but at the same time with total dedication, at every step and everywhere, the irrational momentum of anonymous, impersonal, and inhuman power – the power of ideologies, systems, apparat, bureaucracy, artificial languages, and political slogans. We must resist its complex and wholly alienating pressure, whether it takes the form of consumption, advertising, repression, technology or cliché – all of which are the blood brothers of fanaticism and the well-spring of totalitarian thought.[145]

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[141] Havel, *Open Letters*, 286.
[142] Paul Wilson, "The Power of the Powerless Revisited," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 32, no. 2 (2018): 237.
[143] Marek Junek, *Svobodně! Radio Svobodná Evropa 1951–2011: 60 let RFE* (Prague: Radioservis, 2011), 216.
[144] Václav Havel, *Open Letters*, 254.
[145] Václav Havel, *Open Letters*, 267.

Therefore, Havel believed that in order to create a "spiritual framework of modern civilization and the source of its present crisis," Czechoslovaks had to fundamentally reconsider the "East/West relationship."[146] As Danaher explains, Havel believed that the underlying thought under capitalism is "fundamentally the same" as it was under Communism in that they interpret all aspects of life through simplistic frameworks that prioritize "economic being" and that only those in positions of authority are "the only owners of the truth."[147] Delia Popescu echoed this, stating that Havel's criticisms of consumerism, bureaucracy, and mass parties aimed to bridge the Eastern and Western perspectives, offering an account of power that can apply across political ideologies; "post-democracy is not a fixed political system, but rather the expression of a protean political life that morphs with the moving plurality of lived experience."[148] Therefore, many incorrectly see Havel as a crusader against Communism. In reality, his position is more nuanced and changes over the course of his career as a dissident.[149] This is an under-discussed component of Havel's thought and it helps us understand his philosophy of history. Danaher explains that only a handful of scholars have "both taken Havel seriously on this point and explored the implications of the reframing for the post-1989 world."[150] Havel's reframing of the "conventional Cold War dichotomy" was that the twentieth century marks the start of a transitional period in human history, shifting from the Modern Age, characterized by a reliance on reason and science, to a new era that was still emerging and lacked a clear definition. Humanity was in the process of

[146] Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 139.
[147] Ibid., 146.
[148] Delia Popescu, "Eastern European Political Thought as a Conceptual Tool.," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory*, eds. Leigh K. Jenco, Megan C. Thomas, and Murad Idris (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 690.
[149] Danaher, *Reading Vaclav Havel*, 138.
[150] Danaher explains that scholars such as Jiří Suk have discussed "Havel's reframing" but often limit its interpretation to a historical account with no space for "critical discussion." Similarly, Judt wrote "somewhat glibly" about Havel's East/West analysis. See Danaher, *Reading Vaclav Havel*, 146.

redefining itself and seeking a novel understanding of its identity.[151] In *Disturbing the Peace*, Havel wrote about the modern civilization crisis as he saw it:

> The West and the East, though different in so many ways, are going through a single, common crisis. Reflecting on that crisis should be the starting point for every attempt to think through a better alternative. Where does the cause of the crisis lie? Václav Bělohradský puts it very nicely when he writes about this late period as one of conflict between an impersonal, anonymous, irresponsible, and uncontrollable juggernaut of power (the power of "megamachinery"), and the elemental and original interests of man as a concrete individual [...] I'm persuaded that this conflict – and the increasingly hypertropic impersonal power itself – is directly related to the spiritual condition of modern civilization. The condition is characterized by loss: the loss of metaphysical certainties, of an experience of the transcendental, of any superpersonal moral authority, and of any kind of higher horizon.[152]

The moral realism evident here reveals that much of Havel's moral foundation lies in the possibility of "metaphysical certainties" and "superpersonal moral authority." However, Havel himself would disagree with what Danaher calls the "artificial opposition" between objectivity and subjectivity or science and humanism; instead, he believed in a place where moral realist positions can exist in conjunction with a celebration of situated truths.[153] For Havel, humanity

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[151] Ibid.
[152] Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 10–11.
[153] Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 162. The weakness in Havel's argument is that he does not devote too much attention to extrapolating the implications of this argument. As a result, many Western scholars overlook these claims for the importance of a metaphysical basis for moral truths.

could not depend on science and rationality to offer a technical solution to our problems because their true source is existential or spiritual, rooted in our understanding and mythology; in the words of Danaher, its roots are in "*understanding* and *mythos*."[154] Citizens could not be solely empirical because they were "spiritually restless" and "disconnected" from their true selves.[155] However, Havel thought this era was necessary on its path from liberal democracy to its higher level of transcendence. Without transcendence, "the only real alternative" was extinction.[156] Havel reiterated this to Rob McRae when he said that if democracy was to survive and expand itself successfully, it had to "rediscover and renew its own transcendental origins."[157] In reality, this meant believing and prioritizing the "nonmaterial order" and the "only possible source of man's respect for himself and others."[158] It is through this respect for others that we would be able to see our collective humanity, according to Havel. He believed that this would allow for democracies to be an arena for "tolerance" and "creative dialogue."[159] This is "the main challenge" of our New Order and the key to a "radical renewal of our sense of responsibility."[160]

Havel admitted, however, that even the failures of representative democracies are better than the alternative. This might have had more to do with his sudden transformation from dissident oppositionist to president, however. In 1995, as president, Havel clearly delineated between Western consumerism and the "artificial authority of a dictator":

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[154] Ibid., 150.
[155] Ibid., 151.
[156] Havel, "The Search for Meaning in a Global Civilization," 7. Another point of weakness here is if, in fact, extinction was inevitable, then it would have been worth defining what transcendence was. Since Havel relied on his audience to answer this question in talks, leaving the answer open-ended and undefined, he fails to provide the relative weight to the apocalyptic statement itself. Perhaps it is also because of this that some scholars do not take the imagery, and its implications seriously.
[157] Rob McRae, *Resistance and Revolution: Václav Havel's Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 327.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.

> However, even a decaying or diminishing democratic authority is a thousand times better than the thoroughly artificial authority of a dictator imposed through violence or brainwashing. Democracy is an open system, and thus it is capable of improvement. Among other things, freedom provides room for responsibility. If that room is not sufficiently used, the fault does not lie with democracy, but it does present democracy with a challenge.[161]

Havel never provided concrete answers here as to how society can transition well into this spiritual transformation. Instead, he "shifts the burden" onto his audience.[162] One might object to Havel, however, that because of the fact he is not specific in where these metaphysical truths stem from, they fail to provide a meaningful essence of Being. It matters for the moral realist where our moral values stem from, whether that is from "heaven, or from nature, or from our own hearts."[163] For Havel, benevolent acts exist as archetypal features of living in accordance with truth; they represent "basic commandments of [an] archetypal spirituality in harmony with what even an unreligious person, without knowing exactly why, may consider proper and meaningful."[164] The humanistic element is that this all stems from individual responsibility. Havel, therefore, asked the modern person to glance into the undefined age and smile with contentment because of this existential responsibility. As Judt said before, this reframing of responsibility as an inherently individualistic concept ultimately gives meaning to citizens and, as James Krapfl writes, can alleviate the morally nullifying void of "boredom."[165] For Havel, the

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[161] Václav Havel, "Address by Václav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, National Press Club, Canberra, Australia," March 29, 1995.
[162] Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 171.
[163] Havel's words as quoted by Danaher from his 1995 Harvard University address. See Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 170.
[164] As quoted by Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 170.
[165] James Krapfl, "Boredom, Apocalypse, and Beyond: Reading Havel through Patočka," in *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no. 2 (2018): 278–84.

spiritual transformation stemmed from a change in "human consciousness" and "the very humanness of modern man":

> It seems to me that if the world is to change for the better it must start with a change in human consciousness, in the very humanness of modern man. Man must in some way come to his senses. He must extricate himself from this terrible involvement in both the obvious and the hidden mechanisms of totality, from consumption to repression, from advertising to manipulation through television. He must rebel against his role as a helpless cog in the gigantic and enormous machinery hurtling God knows where. He must discover again, within himself, a deeper sense of responsibility toward the world, which means responsibility toward something higher than himself.[166]

Therefore, in a fundamental sense, "man" and the personal relationship any individual has toward the responsibility he or she bears, is the fundamental solution to the void Havel notices in the modern age. However, the problem is that this responsibility cannot be found without a moral transformation of society. As Marian Sekerák explains, "A politically responsible citizen in [Havel's] model is unimaginable without some kind of moral transformation of society that must precede the creation of a political alternative."[167] This is what Havel called "the 'human order,' which no political order can replace."[168] Havel elaborated:

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[166] Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 11.
[167] Marián Sekerák, "Havel's Idea of Post-Democracy in a Comparative Perspective." *History of European Ideas* 1–31 (2023): 13. Danaher similarly writes that Havel advocated "for an existential or spiritual revolution that will return mankind to its proper place in the world and thereby cultivate a renewed sense of responsibility towards the world." See Danaher, *Reading Václav Havel*, 147.
[168] Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," 405.

> [I]t can only develop *via facti* as a process deriving directly from life, from a new atmosphere and a new spirit […]. It would be presumptuous, however, to try to foresee the structural expressions of this new spirit without that spirit actually being present and without knowing its concrete physiognomy.[169]

By 1989, more than ten years after the publication of his essay *Power of the Powerless*, in an interview for Radio Free Europe, he still admitted that "it is definitely not conceivable to return to the past and the kind of normal parliamentary democracy that works in the West."[170] However, to Havel, the Velvet Revolution showed the "enormous human, moral and spiritual potential, and the civic culture that slumbered in our society under the enforced mask of apathy."[171] Havel remained hopeful in the face of this because human beings, he believed, were able to move beyond the external world toward "something superior," namely the "humanistic" and "democratic" traditions passed from generation to generation.[172] He credited this lineage to Masaryk, who, he said, "based his politics on morality."[173] Politics, based on this conception, could be "the art of the impossible," in particular "the art of improving ourselves and the world."[174] Therefore, he defined the republic he dreamt of in the following words:

> I dream of a republic independent, free, and democratic, of a republic economically prosperous and yet socially just; in short, of a humane republic that

[169] Ibid., 407.
[170] Junek, *Svobodně!*, 216.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Havel, *Toward a Civil Society*, 16.
[173] Ibid., 18.
[174] Ibid.

> serves the individual will serve it in turn. Of a republic of well-rounded people, because without such people it is impossible to solve any of our problems – human, economic, ecological, social, or political.[175]

Democracy then to Havel is not fixed, but open. It does not exist in a neo-Hegelian progression as Masaryk and Beneš argued. It must be fought for with checks and balances, but above all the rich spiritual dimension that comes from a vibrant civil society and an engaged populace that values its freedom.

The same humanist individualism Havel relied on in shaping his politics, economics, and political philosophy, also shaped his understanding of history. So, in some ways, this was both Havel's strength and weakness. The strength is that his individualism can apply widely and coherently to many political and philosophical problems. The weakness is that his analysis of post-democracy is (1) vaguely defined and (2) relies on individuals to reach a moral and spiritual awakening that depends on metaphysical structures that are difficult to defend empirically. I will discuss overlaps and further inconsistencies in the conclusion section that follows.

[175] Ibid., 21.

Conclusion: **The Individual as Prime Mover in History**

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Beneš chose to create a national framing that (1) revised Czechoslovakia's role in history and (2) fabulated the inherent nature of Czechs and Czechoslovaks. Nonetheless, their retelling of Czechoslovak democracy as a "way of life" and "truly human" shows how individualism shaped their political philosophies. Without taking responsibility, the two Czechoslovak presidents argued that democracy is impossible to maintain. While Masaryk and Beneš viewed European history as a necessary progression from absolutism to democracy, Havel's political vision was less linear and focused more on the importance of a moral and spiritual awakening. Therefore, Masaryk and Beneš embodied the neo-Hegelian picture of Fukuyama's "end of history" much more than Havel's skepticism seen in the previous chapter. Beneš argued that a dictatorship was "always a temporary regime," with history testifying to this "sociological fact."[1] Even if authoritarian regimes become successful and popular, they would fall to the inevitability of disgust toward their "antidemocratic measures and experiments."[2] This inevitability of demise came primarily from the prescient need in society for individual freedom, freedom of the press and public opinion, freedom in education, church and religious life, including culture, science, and the arts, and "of every kind of minority."[3] Not providing citizens access and freedom with regard to the mentioned issues, including ones that are not mentioned, results in the inevitability of "internal demoralisation," "social dissolution," "open hatred," and "bitterness" that would spiral into open rebellion against the authoritarian or totalitarian regime in question.[4] Therefore, when considering what the next stage of societal evolution would be in 1939, Beneš wrote that

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[1] Edvard Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1939), 190.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 191.
[4] Ibid.

> [E]ither a war or a series of revolutions in Europe will inevitably accelerate this process of the creation of a new synthesis of the future democratic system in Europe, and this passage from the one stage to the other will not be without profound and violent conflicts and extraordinarily difficult moral and political crises.[5]

This new period that Beneš described—which, he thought, would come in a future with democratic systems in Europe—largely came to be true, but not until a much more distant future than Beneš expected. With the exception of Hungary, European Union countries, as of writing, are liberal democracies. That is, they have democratic institutions including a free press and judiciary, citizens vote for representatives, and so forth. However, creeping forms of soft authoritarianism have also been on the rise. Therefore, while it is possible to argue that history has a certain direction, more empirical evidence would be needed to support Masaryk's and Beneš's views on history's inevitable trajectory and the Czech "democratic spirit." A similar point of contention arises when discussing Havel's understanding of post-democracy. Critics can suggest that all three accounts of the path of history rely on metaphysical claims that supersede empiricism completely.

Of course, the metaphysical nature of Beneš's claims did not mean that Beneš was naive about the prospects of democracy after the Second World War. In fact, Beneš believed that the conditions in what he calls the "fight between democracy and dictatorships" would continue to get worse.[6] Nonetheless, he left his *Democracy Today and Tomorrow* on a positive note, stating

[5] Ibid., 214.
[6] Ibid., 200.

that the "uncertain," "unsound," and "abnormal" situation could not "last for long."[7] As mentioned above, the solution was an evolution that brought a longer period of order and "tranquility out of the present chaos."[8]

As I argued in the second chapter of this thesis, Havel viewed the next era differently from Beneš; however, he similarly emphasized that, accompanied by a moral and spiritual awakening, there would be a more peaceful world order. Havel's principle of living in truth informed his philosophy of history. For example, he credited "life," "thought," and "human dignity" for overthrowing Communism in Czechoslovakia.[9] Of course, this depiction was not entirely historically accurate or descriptive. "Thought" and "human dignity," or adjacent principles of living in truth, themselves did not overthrow Communism in Czechoslovakia.[10] And they could not overthrow the selfish opportunism of Czech and Slovak politicians in the 1990s in Czechoslovakia's successor states. This framing alone does not serve well when coming to conclusions on how Czechoslovakia freed itself from Communism's "chains," in Havel's words.[11] Nonetheless, this reasoning illustrates how Havel thought the individual was the prime mover in history. History, then, to Havel, as with Masaryk and Beneš, was a living process which human beings directly influenced by their actions. It was from this that citizens bore the responsibility to act in accordance with truth. This foundation led Havel to encourage individuals to face injustice, maintain their dignity, and build a more moral society.[12] For the three

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 5.
[10] Moreover, it may be more accurate to say that Communism collapsed in Czechoslovakia.
[11] It is also unfair to judge Havel as a historian, since his background was largely in literary work. For a playwright, life, though, and human dignity signified a larger metaphysical understanding of what is good in society. For historians, this might signify an oversimplification. Therefore, his lyrical imagery might not be a hindrance to truth, but a part of the larger picture.
[12] Notably, this was not only applicable to the case in Czechoslovakia. In many of Havel's speeches explored in this thesis, Havel speaks to an international audience. Therefore, Havel's recommendations for moral political leadership, an engaged population, active civil society, etc. are applicable more broadly.

Czechoslovak presidents, human beings were not mere recipients of history, but the ones who directly shaped it and were culpable for its trajectory.

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