

Ideology as Metaphor, Narrative, and Performance in the Writings of Václav Havel

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Why bother with a ceaseless and in fact hopeless search for the truth when truth can be had readily, all at once, in the form of an ideology or a doctrine? Suddenly it is all so simple! (Václav Havel: Anatomy of a Reticence¹)



INTRODUCTION

While the role of conceptual metaphor in ideologies has received attention (Goatly 2007), the topic of metaphors for ideology remains unexplored. In this regard, the Czech writer and politician Václav Havel's metaphorization of ideology proves instructive.

From his pre-1989 essays to his post-1989 presidential speeches, Havel develops an account of ideology that eschews a standard dictionary definition (ideology as a set of political or economic beliefs) and relies heavily on elaboration via conceptual metaphor. The import of Havel's metaphorical treatment of ideology — in effect, his oeuvre-wide representation of ideology through a complex conceptual blend — has not been appreciated. Metaphors and blends are forms of appeal that prompt us to rethink the meaning of a given domain, and Havel exploits metaphor's creative potential in order to reconceptualize our understanding of ideology as a force in the modern world. Moreover and as we will see, metaphorization has affinities with the two other principal strategies that Havel uses to define the concept, that is, with narrative and performance.

Havel, in other words, does not present a critique of ideology as a political phenomenon (as a matter of one or another kind of -ism), but instead treats ideology as an existential phenomenon active in the modern world. Ideology is not so much a *what*, but more of a *how*, and political ideologies (various kinds of *whats*) are understood as secondary manifestations and particular realizations of ideology at the existential level.

1 Citations to Havel's writing will be made first to the English translation and then to the original Czech context. This citation is taken from Havel 1991, p. 301 and 1999/4, p. 535.

In this regard and as one way that a metaphorical/narrative/performative approach to ideology could be described, we might say that Havel views it as a *divergent* problem:

G. N. M. Tyrell has put forward the terms “divergent” and “convergent” to distinguish problems which cannot be solved by logical reasoning from those that can. Life is being kept going by divergent problems which have to be “lived” and are solved only in death [...] Divergent problems, as it were, force man to strain himself to a level above himself; they demand, and thus provoke the supply of, forces from a higher level, thus bringing love, beauty, goodness, and truth into our lives. It is only with the help of those higher forces that the opposites can be reconciled in the living situation [...] The true problems of living — in politics, economics, education, marriage, etc. — are always problems of overcoming or reconciling opposites. They are divergent problems and have no solution in the ordinary sense of the word. They demand of man not merely the employment of his reasoning powers but the commitment of his whole personality (Schumacher 1999, pp. 75–76).

As a divergent matter, ideology is not a technical problem to be solved as much as it is a way of being. Havel’s contribution, then, is not to explain ideology in rational, typological terms, but rather to understand it in terms of modern human identity.² His emphasis falls on what theorists have called the “non-discursive” elements of ideology, that is, those ways of being that underlie and support the ideology as a set of beliefs and that fuse ideology with identity (Guess 1981, p. 19).

In a similar move, Delia Popescu has argued that Havel’s “commentary on post-totalitarianism offers a way to understand what elements of modernity make us so vulnerable to ideological blinders” and that the “reason why Havel’s audience is broader than Eastern Europe is that he connects the woes of liberal democracy with the nightmares of post-totalitarianism” (Popescu 2012, p. 138). How, in other words, is the extreme form of ideologized identity under a totalitarian system related to modern human identity writ large, and how does an account of ideology that turns on metaphor, narrative, and performance — that is, an approach that merges ideology and identity — affect our understanding of its power?

METAPHORIZING, NARRATIVIZING, AND PERFORMING IDEOLOGY

Metaphor is Havel’s dominant strategy for attempting to understand ideology, and metaphorical analogies for ideology occur throughout Havel’s oeuvre, spanning time periods (the pre- and post-1989 writings) and genres.³ The most detailed treatment of ideology via metaphor is found, however, in Havel’s master essay *The Power of the*

2 For a discussion of the explaining/understanding opposition in Havel’s thinking, see Danaher 2015, chapter 2.

3 For sketch of Havel’s genres and an argument for an integrative, holistic reading of themes across both time-periods and genres, see Danaher 2015, chapter 1.

Powerless (1978).⁴ Here we find over a dozen contexts in which Havel metaphorically defines the term, and many of these act as recurring motifs in the essay.

These metaphorical contexts include the following:

- (1) Ideology as *gloves*: “The post-totalitarian system touches people at every step, but it does so with its ideological gloves on [*v ideologických rukavičích*]” (Havel 1991a, p. 135 and 1999/4, p. 235).
- (2) Ideology as *bridge*: “It acts as a kind of bridge [*most*] between the regime and people, across which the regime approaches the people and the people approach the regime” (Havel 1991a, p. 134 and 1999/4, p. 234); “Ideology, in creating a bridge of excuses between the system and the individual, spans the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims” (Havel 1991a, p. 135 and 1999/4, p. 235); “If ideology was originally a bridge between the system and the individual as an individual, then the moment he steps on to this bridge, it becomes at the same time a bridge between the system and the individual as a component of the system” (Havel 1991a, p. 137 and 1999/4, p. 236).
- (3) Ideology as *low-rent home*: “To wandering humankind it offers an immediately available home: all one has to do is accept it, and suddenly everything becomes clear once more, life takes on new meaning, and all mysteries, unanswered questions, anxieties, and loneliness vanish. Of course, one pays dearly for this low-rent home [*levný domov*]” (Havel 1991a, pp. 129–130 and 1999/4, pp. 227–228).
- (4) Ideology as *secularized religion*: The post-totalitarian system differs from a dictatorship in part because it commands an “incomparably more precise, logically structured, generally comprehensible and, in essence, extremely flexible ideology that, in its elaborateness and completeness, is almost a secularized religion [*jakési sekularizované náboženství*]” (Havel 1991a, p. 129 and 1999/4, p. 227).
- (5) Ideology as *veil*: Ideology is a “veil [*závoj*] behind which human beings can hide their own fallen existence, their trivialization and their adaptation to the status quo” (Havel 1991a, pp. 133–134 and 1999/4, p. 232).
- (6) Ideology as *excuse* or *alibi*: “It is an excuse [*alibi*] that everyone can use, from the greengrocer, who conceals his fear of losing his job behind an alleged interest in the unification of the workers of the world, to the highest functionary, whose interest in staying in power can be cloaked in phrases about service to the working class. The primary excusatory [*alibistická*] function of ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with human order and the order of the universe” (Havel 1991a, p. 134 and 1999/4, pp. 232–233).⁵

4 The sections of the essay that focus on ideology are II–VII and XVII. It is interesting to note that in the original Czech many of these metaphors are made explicit as such given that Havel places them in quotation marks. The English translation has not preserved these special marks of emphasis.

5 Havel uses variants of the word *alibi* here, and later in the essay he returns to ideology-as-alibi in relation to the legal code (Havel 1999/4, pp. 296–297). Paul Wilson, Havel’s translator, renders the word here as “excuse”.

- (7) Ideology as a “world of appearances [svět zdání] trying to pass for reality” (Havel 1991a, p. 135 and 1999/4, p. 235) and as a “specious way [zdánlivý způsob] of relating to the world” (Havel 1991a, p. 133 and 1999/4, p. 232).
- (8) Ideology as a *game* or the *rules of the game*: “[T]he greengrocer declares his loyalty [...] in the only way the regime is capable of hearing; that is, by accepting the prescribed ritual, by accepting appearances as reality, by accepting the given rules of the game [pravidla hry]. In doing so, however, he has himself become a player [hráč] in the game [hra], thus making it possible for the game [hra] to go on, for it to exist in the first place” (Havel 1991a, p. 136 and 1999/4, p. 236).⁶
- (9) Ideology as “rather like a collection of traffic signals [dopravní předpisy] and directional signals [orientační tabule]” (Havel 1991a, p. 137 and 1999/4, p. 237).
- (10) Ideology as *glue*: “This [ideological] metaphysical order guarantees the inner coherence of the totalitarian power structure. It is the glue [tmel] holding it together, its binding principle, the instrument of its discipline. Without this glue [tmel] the structure as a totalitarian structure would vanish; it would disintegrate into individual atoms chaotically colliding with one another in their unregulated particular interests and inclinations” (Havel 1991a, p. 137 and 1999/4, p. 237).⁷
- (11) Ideology as *ritualization* that becomes more powerful than reality itself: Ideology “becomes reality itself, albeit a reality altogether self-contained [...] Increasingly, the virtuosity of the ritual [bravura rituálu] becomes more important than the reality hidden behind it. The significance of phenomena no longer drives from the phenomena themselves, but from their locus as concepts in the ideological context. Reality does not shape theory, but rather the reverse” (Havel 1991a, p. 138 and 1999/4, p. 238).

It is important to stress that at almost no point does Havel provide (or operate with) a standard dictionary definition of ideology, a definition that any reader of *The Power of the Powerless* almost certainly brings, unconsciously and automatically, to a reading of the text.⁸ Indeed, Havel works to undermine just such a conventional understanding of ideology as a system of beliefs about politics or economics by redefining it in metaphorical terms.

Many of these metaphorical redefinitions contain additional entailments: in other words, questions about their meaning arise given the experiential source domain that Havel uses as a metaphorical vehicle. More or less concrete source domains in the

6 Later in the essay when the grocer refuses to put up the sign in his shop window, Havel writes: “By breaking the rules of the game, he has disrupted the game as such. He has exposed it as a mere game” (Havel 1991a, p. 147 and 1999/4, p. 248).

7 Wilson obviously chooses a different kind of binding agent to render Czech *tmel*, which means “putty” (or a kind of sealing cement). This is likely because *tmel* is also used in the metaphorical fixed phrase *tmel národní jednoty* (“the bond of national unity”), and English “glue” can be used in a similar meaning (e.g., “the glue holding us all together”).

8 Google kindly informs us that an “ideology” is “a system of ideas and ideals, especially one that forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy”. Standard definitions, expressed in propositional form, are more or less the same for both English “ideology” and Czech *ideologie*.

examples above are touching (ideology as *gloves*); hiding (as *veil*); movement through space (as *bridge* and as *traffic/directional signals*); shelter (as *home*); performed spirituality (as *religion*); interpersonal relationships (as *excuse* or *ritual*); jurisprudence (as *alibi*); reality (as *a world of appearances*); human play (as *game*); and construction (as *glue*). Each metaphor acts as an appeal to the reader to think through its possible entailments based upon the reader's concrete experience of the source domain; each metaphorical mapping, in other words, invites the reader to reflect on the meaning of ideology as a kind of lived-through experience in the world. If, for example, the system touches us at every step with ideological gloves, then we may ask ourselves what material the gloves are made of? Latex might be the first thought that comes to mind, in which case we might forgive victims of the system for adjusting their behavior in order to avoid such creepily intrusive groping. But not all gloves are latex; gloves made from silk, for example, might provide a welcome vehicle for a caressing massage.⁹ The other metaphorical mappings that Havel uses to define ideology act, each in its own way, as provocative appeals to understand the phenomenon in terms of everyday human experience.

Metaphorization of ideology is not limited to Havel's master essay. Other pre-1989 essays introduce additional metaphors as, for example, the following three found in *Anatomy of a Reticence* (1985): ideology as "the tragic story of what might be called a 'mental short circuit' [krátké spojení mysli]"¹⁰ (Havel 1991a, p. 301 and 1999/4, p. 535); as a mechanism that can "utterly transform man from a 'being in question' [bytí v otázce] into an 'existing answer' [jakési jsoucno odpovědi]" (Havel 1991a, p. 301-301 and 1999/4, p. 535); and as a "set of pulleys [nějaký kladkostroj] freeing us from physical effort" (Havel 1991a, p. 302 and 1999/4, p. 536). Here we note additional experiential source domains: electricity, factory production, and mechanics.

Yet another metaphorical conceptualization for ideology, which occurs in a range of texts and has a number of variants and extensions, is that of enclosure. In his 2006 political memoir, Havel writes that the struggle for an "open" society is equivalent to a "struggle against the enclosure inside doctrines, ideologies, and prejudices [proti uzavřenosti člověka do doktríny, ideologie, předsudků]" (Havel 2007, p. 135 and 2006, p. 98). One variant of the basic enclosure metaphor that Havel uses is that of attempting to enclose life's "mysterious diversity" in an "ideological cage [klec]" (*Victoria University of Wellington*, 1995). Ideological "binding" is another variant of the same basic metaphor.¹¹

9 Indeed, "ideological massaging" is, if not already a conventional phrasing, most certainly one that Havel resorts to on a number of occasions. See, for example, his 1993 speech at George Washington University (http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/index_uk.html), in which he speaks of the "decades of ideological massaging" that took place in the post-totalitarian context. Since the speeches are available online, further citations of Havel's post-1989 presidential speech will be made by reference to the title of the speech and the year it was given.

10 This phrase immediately precedes the epigraph to this article.

11 See, for example, a passage in *Summer Meditations* where Havel writes about being both "bound [svazován]" and "blinkerred" by ideology (Havel 1993, p. 71 and 1999/6, pp. 458-459). The English translation neglects to render the binding metaphor.

Two extensions of the enclosure metaphor are ideological petrification (of one kind or another) and ideology's association with (intellectual and spiritual) death. An example of the former is this passage from *Disturbing the Peace*: "My rejection of the word 'socialism' derives from my traditional antipathy to overly fixed (and therefore semantically empty) categories, empty ideological phrases and incantations that petrify thought [*tuhne myšlení*] in a hermetic structure of static concepts" (Havel and 1991b, p. 9 and 1999/4, pp. 12–13). One example of the latter, which occurs alongside a petrification metaphor, is Havel's question from a 1999 presidential address, in which he asks how we can "recognize the moment when a set of living ideas degenerates [*umírá*] into an ideology? How can we recognize when principles, opinions and hopes begin to petrify [*začínají kamenět*] into a rigid mass of dogma, precepts and conceptual stereotypes?" (*Address in Acceptance of Open Society Prize, 1999*).¹²

These examples do not exhaust Havel's metaphors for ideology, but they suffice to demonstrate that Havel intentionally avoids a propositional definition and opts instead for a metaphorical one. In essence, Havel characterizes ideology via a complex, oeuvre-wide metaphorical blend with human identity as the target space.¹³ The complexity of the metaphorical blend derives from the many different source domains involved. While the various individual metaphors are not systematically relatable to one another, they do provide, collectively speaking, a coherent conceptualization: the different metaphorical entailments highlight various facets of the phenomenon of ideology as a lived-through human experience that distorts, in one way or another, one's identity. Put another way, they are human-scale metaphorical conceptualizations whose source domains evoke various existential contours in everyday life.

To the extent that Havel's metaphors for ideology prove contradictory, we might see this less as a failure on Havel's part to convey a coherent metaphorical definition of the concept and more as a necessary strategy to map out the full existential richness of its meaning. James Underhill has made a similar point in writing about networks of conventional metaphors for another concept entirely, asserting that the various metaphorical conceptualizations related to "love":

[...] do not encapsulate a phenomenon or truth of objective reality, they form the focal points or organizing principles around which a supra-subjective meaning is generated [...] Contradictory metaphors strengthen the concept which we know as "love" by highlighting certain of its aspects or facets while downplaying others [...] Metaphoric models always highlight and hide aspects of experience, and what emerges as a complex and contradictory whole reflects all the more accurately and all the more penetratingly the reality of our love and loving (Underhill 2012, p. 79).

12 The English translation softens the death metaphor. The Czech version of the speech is titled *Převzetí ceny Středoevropské univerzity Open Society*.

13 For an introduction to the theory of conceptual blending, see Fauconnier 2001 as well as Fauconnier and Turner 1998 and 2003. Danaher 2015 (chapter 2) offers an account of Havel's theatrical style from the perspective of blending theory.

While the standard dictionary definition of ideology may be straightforward and easy to convey in a few declarative sentences, the identity space that is the target of Havel's metaphorical definition of the term is not.

The metaphors for ideology that run throughout Havel's prose writings raise the question of how Havel represents the same concept in his plays. I would argue that it is primarily through an appreciation of the metaphorical definition of ideology found in Havel's prose writings that we are able to understand most fully the role it plays in his theatrical works. If the true meaning of ideology can be reduced to its standard propositional form, then Havel's plays make no sense because they depict ideology as performance and they warn against the dangers of becoming performatively "trapped" in ideologized forms of being. As Popescu has written:

[Havel's] plays do not only illustrate his political theory, but lay out the dynamics of the loss of individual identity in the post-totalitarian system. Nowhere is the interaction between ideological lingo and individual identity more artfully represented than in Havel's theatrical work. Havel's characters enact a tale of pseudo-ideological rhetoric, loss of authenticity, and 'evasive thinking.' In other words, the plays act as a roadmap of sorts to what Havel sees as the loss of responsibility and they add a considerable degree of detail to the argument as it is put forth in Havel's essays (Popescu 2012, p. 63).

Ideology understood performatively is consistent with Havel's metaphorization — indeed, the experiential source domains themselves suggest their own kind of performativity — and both are compatible with the additional narrativizing strategy for representing ideology that Havel offers us in *The Power of the Powerless* through the story of the greengrocer and his sign.¹⁴

IMPLICATIONS OF HAVEL'S APPROACH

For Havel, then, people are not passive sites for ideology-as-ism, but rather they enact it, live it, and perform it, and this is Havel's attempt not so much to rationally explain ideology but rather to understand it in human terms.¹⁵ One implication of Havel's metaphorical, narrative, and performative approach to ideology is that it shifts our conceptual focus from result to process. Ideology in Havel becomes less

14 Havel's theatrical representation of ideology is even more complex given that many of the dramatic techniques that Havel is known for (e.g., circularity of language and plot that ensnares and seemingly paralyzes the characters) relate to the metaphorical characterizations of ideology found in the prose works. Individual elements in his Havel's plays also serve to embody ideology in various non-discursive ways. For an insightful discussion of the artificial language ptydepe (from Havel's *The Memorandum*) and its relation to ideology, see Popescu 2012, pp. 67–70.

15 It could be argued that this is similar to the way that Hannah Arendt sought to understand — and not merely explain — totalitarianism. For a discussion, see Danaher 2015, chapter 2 and Bergen 1998, pp. 28–29.

a matter of *what* and much more a matter of *how*, less a question of political dogma than a manner of relating self to world. Havel uncouples ideology from politics and from its standard dictionary definition to refocus on ideologization as an inauthentic form of human existence.

In this respect, Havel asks us to consider how the *content* of ideological thinking is distinct from the *structure* of thought that lies behind it. Havel focuses not on the former (the particular ideas involved in a given -ism), but on the latter. It is easy for us to mistake the one for the other, to metonymically substitute the ideas themselves for the way of thinking or being that serves to frame them, but to do so, Havel warns, would be a mistake. It would lead us to the false conclusion that the danger of ideologization has ended with the collapse of one particular ideological form. We may recall here the dramatic statement in Havel's 1984 essay *Politics and Conscience*:

Let me repeat: totalitarian power is a great reminder to contemporary civilization. Perhaps somewhere there may be some generals who think it would be best to dispatch such systems from the face of the earth and then all would be well. But that is no different from an ugly woman trying to get rid of her ugliness by smashing the mirror that reminds her of it (Havel 1991a, pp. 260–261 and 1999/4, p. 432).

This is an assertion that cannot be understood in terms of ideology if we limit the scope of ideology's meaning to one sociopolitical -ism.

Ideological ways of thinking, Havel argues, permeate modern life; it represents a way of thinking that not only distorts the meaningfulness of the specific question being considered, but also undermines (or short-circuits) the very process of meaning-making. For Havel, it is not a question of getting rid of one specific ideological -ism, no matter how reviled it may be, in order to herald the “end of ideology” once and for all. Havel instead provides us with tools to diagnose ideologized ways of being in others and, perhaps even more importantly, in ourselves, and this may put us in a better position actually to do something about it. It is through this expanded existential sense of ideology that we might more fully understand Havel's assertion in *The Power of the Powerless* that manifestations of ideology make up something like the “panorama of everyday life [*panorama každodennosti*]” (Havel 1991a, p. 141 and 1999/4, p. 242).

A diagnostic approach to ideology as modern-day existential disease is eminently compatible with Havel's rhetorical representations of ideology via metaphor, narrative, and performance. Each of these rhetorical strategies suggests that knowledge is a kind of simulation.¹⁶ Ideology understood as a conceptual blend, for example, invites us to process or “run” that metaphorical blend, that is, to simulate the meaning of the rhetorical figure in the terms suggested by the various experiential source domains that serve as vehicles for the blend. The import of Havel's understanding therefore lies in how we ourselves change as we engage in various forms of cognitive simulation.¹⁷ We diagnose ideology in others and in ourselves by “running” the blend,

16 That meaning may indeed be a kind of “embodied simulation” is hypothesized by neuroscientists on the basis of experimental research (Bergen 2012).

17 It is useful here to recall that George Orwell, in his book *1984*, excludes the possibility of metaphor from the totalitarian language of Newspeak. Metaphor (along with creative nar-

by putting ourselves in the greengrocer's shoes, and by becoming engaged witnesses to a performance of one of Havel's plays. These metaphorical, narrative, and performative spaces thus become, in Havel's case, therapeutic spaces, and by engaging in them, we potentially gain a measure of control over those aspects of real life that these imaginative spaces enact in a compressed form.

If ideologization of being is a spiritual disease that afflicts modern society, then is it a treatable malady? Havel offers us the tools to diagnose symptoms of the disease, but does he give us a cure? He does not provide a cure in the sense that modern Western medicine would understand the word: a miracle drug or surgical procedure that would eliminate, once and for all, the root problem. Instead, he suggests that ideologization, which is a fundamentally existential and spiritual problem, needs to be treated existentially and spiritually.¹⁸ Havel's treatment plan is oriented toward the cultivation of individual personal responsibility for diagnosing the symptoms of ideology and taking corrective action, and this personal responsibility is then extended into broader interpersonal "circles of home" (i.e., into the sociopolitical sphere).

Although I will not present an exhaustive discussion of Havel's suggested treatment for ideologization, I will note that it contains at least the following components: the cultivation of intellectual and spiritual doubt as well as a certain "restlessness [*neklid*]" of being, both of which are by nature anti-ideological to the extent that they preserve space for reflection and keep us from becoming automatized "beings in answer"¹⁹; a distrust of language and in particular of official linguistic codes; a need to remain grounded in concrete cases and a wariness with regard to (over)generalization, which implies that fighting ideologization is mostly a matter of personal "small-scale work";²⁰ transcendence of narrow self-interest and belief in the possibility of disinterested participation in promotion of the common good²¹; "dissent" as a non-ideological form of engagement in which an individual is prepared to "vouch

rative and performance) open the door to liberating forms of thought, to reshaping identity in ways that may challenge our adaptation to existing systems.

- 18 For a discussion of translation challenges with regard to the English word "spiritual" and its Czech translation equivalent *duchovní* in the context of Havel's thought, see Danaher 2010a and Danaher 2015, chapter 4. Note also that the cultivation of the "spiritual" is itself a kind of antidote to ideology given that ideologized being represents a degenerate form of self-transcendence. See, for example, the contrast that Havel draws in *Summer Meditations* between an "ideological state" and a "spiritual [*duchovní*] state" (Havel 1999/6, p. 544; this part of *Summer Meditations* was left out of the English translation).
- 19 For a discussion of *neklid* as a key word in Havel's thought, see Danaher 2010b and Danaher 2015. Popescu has described Havel's insistence on restlessness as cognitive "open-endedness" that mitigates against "programmatically thinking" (Popescu 2012, p. 12).
- 20 As Popescu writes: "Rejecting ideology in small, everyday actions is the first step... toward the 'apolitical attitude'" (Popescu 2012, p. 112). In this regard, we might also say that cultivation of basic human decency or *lidskost* (another Havel key word discussed in Danaher 2010a) acts as an antidote to grand ideological gestures and crusades.
- 21 Ralston Saul argues that the cultivation of disinterested participation serves as "protection against our seemingly unconscious desire to take refuge in ideology", but that modern society itself is unfortunately structured "on the self-destructive basis of self-interest" (Ralston Saul 1997, p. 35).

for [zaručit]” truth as a function of her or his identity.²² These largely personal prescriptions find their parallel in the interpersonal sphere in the form of free public debate and a vibrant democratic discourse. One thing is certain: it is not possible to “cure” ideology by substituting one ideological form for another, by exchanging *pty-depe* for *chorukor* (see Popescu 2012, p. 137).

By now it should be clear that there is another wide-reaching implication of Havel’s treatment of ideology as an existential-level phenomenon: it is an account of the concept that encompasses both East and West, both the pre-1989 (post-)totalitarian world and the post-1989 world of the here and now. Ideology was not defeated by the Cold War. In fact there is good reason to believe that the West (and the contemporary post-1989 world) may be more addicted to ideology, and less aware of that fact, than the East ever was. As Havel writes, given that ideological manipulation in the West is “infinitely more gentle and refined” than its counterpart in the East, the crisis in the West is more hidden, more elusive, and therefore more difficult to confront (Havel 1991a, p. 208 and 1999/4, p. 322).²³ Havel’s East/West hypothesis with regard to ideology is an implication that contemporary commentators on Havel have, for whatever reason, usually failed to take seriously, and this despite the centrality of this thread in Havel’s thinking.²⁴

Indeed, Havel is insistent about ideology’s reach beyond the post-totalitarian, arguing in *The Power of the Powerless* that there “is obviously something in [modern] human beings which responds to this [ideological] system, something they reflect and accommodate, something within them which paralyzes every effort of their better selves to revolt (Havel 1991a, p. 144 and 1999/4, p. 245). In later writings, Havel critiques ideological ways of being in the post-1989 context in terms similar to Ralston Saul’s aggressive critique of modern-day ideological corporatism (Ralston Saul 1997). Conceptualizing ideology via metaphor, narrative, and performance allows Havel to mediate between forms of ideologization in the highly politicized societies of the totalitarian East and in the nations of the democratic West as well as to preserve the relevance of that treatment beyond the fateful year of 1989. Ideology, Havel argues, takes on existential contours common to all individuals living in a modern consumer-industrial society

22 For an extended discussion of Havelian truth as a “vouching-for,” see Williams 2015.

23 This leads Popescu (2012, pp. 135ff) to suggest that, for Havel, the West is Dorian Gray while the East was Dorian Gray’s picture.

24 For a general discussion of this thread in Havel’s thought, see Danaher 2015, chapter 3. Of the scholars who have taken the East/West thread seriously, Goldfarb (1991 and 2006), Isaac (1998), and Popescu (2012) represent the best examples. Popescu, for example, explicitly states that Havel’s writings have two audiences, East and West, and that the “stream that runs under both post-totalitarianism and Western liberal democracy is modernity” (Popescu 2012, p. 62); this is, according to Popescu, the main source of Havel’s continued relevance (ibid., p. 138). Barbara Falk has acknowledged Havel’s contributions in this regard by writing that the “failure of the Western European imagination is that it cannot see post-totalitarianism for what it in fact is [...] It is much more ideologically convenient to cast East Europe as the anti-democratic ‘other’, the opposite of its achievement rather than a logical extension of its excesses” (Falk 2003, pp. 227–228), but she does not explore the implications of them. Pontuso (2004) largely assumes the general validity of Havel’s reframing without making an explicit argument in support of it.

(of one kind or another) and becomes associated not with one particular sociopolitical and historical context but rather with the modern human condition.

CONCLUSION

Arguably the closest Havel comes in *The Power of the Powerless* to defining ideology in propositional form is when he writes the following: “Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world [that] offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them” (Havel 1991a, p. 133 and 1999/4, p. 232). Yet even this is a non-standard definition that is framed explicitly in terms of human identity.

For the most part, in *The Power of the Powerless* and elsewhere, Havel exploits the creative potential inherent in metaphor, narrative, and performance in order to radically reconceptualize our understanding of ideology as a force in the modern world. His treatment of ideology as a divergent problem — as a dilemma that demands, in our attempt to resolve it, not merely our reasoning powers but the commitment of our whole personality (Schumacher 1999, p. 76) — frames ideology as a lived-through human experience in the world. He embodies ideology in a way that liberates its meaning from the constraints of abstraction, and it is worth noting in this regard that the non-discursive elements of ideology that Havel profiles — those very elements of meaning that fuse ideology and identity — cannot be “false” in any direct sense. They are instead those aspects of meaning that are less amenable to rational control and perhaps even more difficult to easily “correct” through experience.

Havel’s approach takes, to borrow the words of the cognitive philosopher Mark Johnson, the skeleton of a conventional definition that he then endows with the “emotional flesh and blood of real human meaning” (Johnson 2007, p. 53). Ideology thereby becomes a concept with pre-reflective “experiential rootedness” (Johnson 2007, p. 26). This proves incidental neither to ideology itself nor to its role in political discourse, but rather lies at the very core of its meaning.

I will conclude by noting that it is only by appreciating Havel’s existential treatment of ideology that we can also understand his emphasis on the pre-political, cultural realm as the space in which authentic political change must first emerge. Havel proposes a psychocultural model of ideology, and this kind of model “is a useful alternative to dissolving the concept of culture altogether into vague notions of power or discourse” (Shore 1996, p. 45). In this view, an ideological system is not so much a “manifestation of a particular political line [*konkrétní politická linie*] followed by a particular government [*konkrétní vláda*]” as it is “something radically different: [...] a complex, profound and long-term violation [*znásilnění*] of society, or rather the self-violation [*sebeznásilnění*] of society (Havel 1991a, p. 180 and 1999/4, pp. 288–289).²⁵ The problem is then not fundamentally with politics but with life itself. Adequately confronting the true power of ideology in the modern world requires an understanding of its psychocultural rootedness.

25 At least in the United States, we still tend to see ideological totalitarianism as a “big government” issue and not an existential one (Nunberg 2007, p. 135).

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RESUMÉ / RÉSUMÉ

Ideologie jako metafora, narativ a performance v tvorbě Václava Havla

Od esejů z období komunistického režimu až po prezidentské proslovy po roce 1989 rozvíjí Václav Havel určitou koncepci ideologie, která obchází standardní slovníkovou definici ideologie jakožto systém politických či ekonomických názorů a je skoro výlučně rozvíjena pomocí metafor, narativů a performance. Význam Havlova chápání ideologie doposud nebyl zhodnocen. Metafory, příběhy a představení jsou apelem sui generis, který nás nutí nově promyslet smysl určité domény. Článek zkoumá, jak Havel využívá tvůrčí potenciál těchto apelativních forem s cílem radikálně nově pochopit ideologii jakožto sílu moderním světě.

Ideology as Metaphor, Narrative, and Performance in the Writings of Václav Havel

From his pre-1989 essays to his post-1989 presidential speeches, V. Havel develops an account of ideology that avoids a standard dictionary definition (ideology as a system of political or economic beliefs) and relies almost exclusively on elaboration via metaphor, narrative, and performance. The import of Havel's treatment of ideology has not been appreciated. Metaphors, stories, and performances are special forms of appeal that prompt us to rethink the meaning of a given domain. This paper explores how Havel exploits the creative potential of these forms of appeal in order to radically reconceptualize our understanding of ideology as a force in the modern world.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA / KEY WORDS

Václav Havel; ideologie; metafora; narativ; performance; apel / Václav Havel; ideology; metaphor; narrative; performance; appeal