

## A Wikipedia entry

A friend of mine emailed me: 'some of your Wikipedia entry is incorrect'. I replied: 'I do not think there is any Wikipedia entry concerning me. There is an entry concerning my father, an Interlingua enthusiast, whose name is the same as mine.' The friend replied: 'Yes, Julius, if you were born on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1938, the entry is about you.' She was right, and I was struck by one sentence in particular: 'He had earlier refused **military draft** and **had been sent to a psychiatric hospital for two years.**' This sentence is a curious mixture of super-correctness and fabrication, and I shall try to elucidate both. (The adverb 'earlier' refers to the preceding sentence: 'He began the philosophy seminars in his apartment in 1977.')

My refusing 'military draft' deserves only a brief observation. The country was Czechoslovakia, the year 1957. Whenever I have spoken about it, I always spoke about refusing military service (see e.g. Barbara Day's *The Velvet Philosophers*, The Claridge Press 1999, p. 19). Military draft was just a medical examination, to find out whether one was fit for military service, or not. Found fit, a man went home and waited for another month to be called to military service. The limits for a penalty for refusing the military draft was between three months and one year, for refusing to do military service was between one and five years. I knew nothing then of this distinction; when I refused to be medically examined my intention was to refuse military service.

The claim that I was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital for two years after refusing the military draft is worth exploring.

After refusing the medical examination, which was all that the draft consisted of, I was imprisoned for three months. Released, summoned to the military again, I asked for permission to leave the country, was refused, tried to escape illegally, was imprisoned again, this time for one year (actually for four years, but three years were pardoned by the general amnesty by the new president of the republic when he was elected). After I was released from prison, I worked in a forest for a year, was again drafted, got kidneys inflammation and after three months in a military hospital I was released from military service, and never drafted again.

In the military hospital I read a book entitled 'Alone against madness' (I am translating into English the Czech title; I do not know what was the original English one). The author's name was Ferguson, if I remember it well; his main psychiatric principle was: 'Drugs combined with love'. I was fascinated by his approach, and after being discharged from the military, I **worked for two years** in a psychiatric hospital as a nurse.

But what about my being 'sent to a psychiatric hospital'? This is a longer story, and it is far removed in time from my refusal of the military draft, which happened in

1958. In 1975, I approached several philosophers who had been ousted from their posts because of their involvement in the Prague Spring of 1968, the attempt to give socialism a human face. Professor Machovec was enthused by the idea, and we opened a philosophy seminar in Pařížská street in the flat of one of his former students. Václav Havel (the post-Velvet Revolution president) frequented the seminar. One day in December 1976, in the customary break after a lecture Václav Havel invited a few of us, singly, to an adjacent little room, gave us to read the text of Charter 77 and asked us to sign it. I signed.

Following the inauguration of Charter 77, the police asked Machovec to discontinue the seminar. I disagreed: 'let them come and do the discontinuing by force'. The police prevailed. I then visited a few friends and suggested opening a seminar on Plato for their children, who were barred from higher education because of their parents' involvement in the Prague Spring. I ran the seminar in my flat throughout the spring of 1977 without any interference from the police. In the autumn of that year, some leading signatories of Charter 77, without consulting me, transformed my seminar into the 'University of Jan Patočka', leaving the actual running of the seminar to Milan Machovec and me. We met in a bigger room than my flat could offer, the attendance was great, Machovec gave the talks, I opened the discussion. It was too much for the police. After a few meetings Machovec was again summoned to the police, and forced to close the seminar. I reopened the seminar in my flat in its original form, on Plato.

My seminars took place on Wednesdays, and after a few meetings I received a police summons for a Wednesday. The meaning was clear: I was to be detained at a police station each time I wanted to have a seminar. I therefore wrote to the Minister of Internal Affairs that I was disregarding the summons, for there was no legal ground for it, and that if the police took me into custody by force, I would hold a ten day protest hunger-strike. The ten day hunger-strike won great support among Charter 77 signatories. Young people organized a chain of two day hunger-strikes, staying in my flat. As a result, the police stopped summoning me, and after a year of a successful uninterrupted course I invited Oxford dons to my seminar. In the spring of 1979 Kathy Wilkes initiated the Oxford visits with a talk on Socrates.

Barbara Day writes in *The Velvet Philosophers*: 'philosopher ... Roger Scruton ... arrived on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> September [1979, J.T.]... he spoke on Wittgenstein ... the next day he met Tomáš and Lenka [two of my students, J.T.] on the quiet, wooded Shooters' Island ... he also wondered ... the seminars were dominated by Tomin, and the young students were overshadowed by his powerful personality ... Scruton ... also thought how much more effective they could be if the teaching were freed from the influence of personality ... On a Friday early in October 1979 (shortly after Roger Scruton's visit) Tomin travelled to northern Bohemia to give a seminar in the village of Řepčice. On his arrival he found the village surrounded by police with dogs.

Refusing to get into a police car, he was picked up and put inside, and taken first to a police station and then the psychiatric hospital at Dolní Beřkovice [in fact Horní Beřkovice, J.T.]. Over the next days he insisted on the illegality of his detention ... It took her [that is Zdena, my first wife, J.T.] three days, trying one office after another, before a policeman softened and told her where to find Julius. At noon on the Tuesday morning she persuaded the doctors at Dolní Beřkovice to sign him into her care.' (pp. 44-46)

Let me give my account of the affair. The seminar was to take place somewhere in North Bohemia, I did not ask where; I did not like the invitation, but I did not see any valid reason for refusing it. A young man from the 'underground' came with his car on a Saturday afternoon to take me there. After leaving Prague we were stopped by secret police. I don't remember any dogs. I refused to enter the police car, the police had to carry me in. They drove me to a psychiatrist in a nearby town, and carried me up the stairs to his office. When the psychiatrist wanted to examine me, I told him: 'Have you ever examined anybody in such conditions as these, with two secret policemen standing right behind me, watching every step of yours and listening to every word of yours? Try to phone my telephone number; it is disconnected. Go to my flat on the third floor of an apartment house; there are two policemen in uniform standing or sitting in front of it, day and night; they will not let you in. The police uses you to get rid of me, for they cannot imprison me, there being no legal grounds for their doing so. If you cooperate with the police in this, you will set psychiatry in our country on a very slippery slope. This is why I am refusing to answer your questions.'

The psychiatrist signed the papers for my hospitalization, the secret policemen carried me down the stairs, drove me to the hospital in Horní Beřkovice, and carried me to the reception. By this time it was approaching midnight. The psychiatrist signed my reception, and the secret policemen carried me all the way up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the reception Pavilion. The nurse on duty asked me to get undressed. I refused, was given an injection of chlorpromazine, undressed, and dressed in clothes for the patients. In the night I crawled to the toilet like an animal on all fours. In the morning a patient who was assisting the staff told to me: 'Don't be afraid, you won't get any injection today. On Sunday there is no doctor here'. On Monday morning I was taken to the Consultant, a lady. She was looking out of the window and told the nurse: 'Give him an injection.' The nurse ordered: 'Pull your trousers down.' I said: 'I will not pull my trousers down, you must do it yourself.' Then I turned to the Consultant: 'Doctor, I cannot understand how you can order an injection without talking to me, and without even looking at me.' The doctor turned to the nurse: 'Leave it for now. We shall give him the injection after the visit.'

The visit took place in the main hall. The Consultant was followed by several doctors and nurses, went from patient to patient, looked at their medical dossiers, and

exchanged a few words with each. When they came to me, I asked the Consultant: 'Can you give me any reason for your holding me here?' She answered: 'We shall talk about it after the visit,' and then she fainted. The doctors who stood behind her were quick enough to catch her, and carried her out of the room.

After a while the 'assistant' patient came to me, the one I already mentioned: 'Don't you want to write a letter to your family?' I replied: 'No'. Then came the head nurse: 'Don't you want to write a letter to your family?' I replied: 'No'. Then I was taken to a junior doctor, who asked me: 'Don't you want to write a letter to your family?' I replied: 'No'. He asked: 'Why ?' I said: 'What you are doing here is unpardonable. Psychiatry in this country has never been misused in this way. With every day I stay here I do my best to stop this criminal misuse.'

Next day, on Tuesday morning, I was taken to the Consultant's office. I asked her again what reasons she had for keeping me in the psychiatric hospital. She said she had no reasons for doing so and would discharge me at noon. As I was then waiting in the corridor to be discharged, suddenly I saw my wife coming. When she was asked to see the Consultant, I told her to refuse to sign papers that would make my discharge conditional on her taking me into her care. She promised me not to do so, and I trust her word that she did not.

Barbara Day continues: 'A month later Tomin was summoned to a Prague psychiatric hospital, where he went accompanied by Eva Kantůrková and the visiting antipodean Thomas Mautner. The bizarre and threatening nature of these encounters burned deeply into Tomin's memory, and the conviction that there was a conspiracy to certify him as 'psychopathic paranoia querulans' (as he remembers being described in a newspaper report of the time) and commit him to a psychiatric institution for life remained with him even after he left Czechoslovakia.' (p. 47)

In truth, the thought 'that there was a conspiracy to commit me to a psychiatric institution for life' has never crossed my mind. And yet, I believe that she made her claim on the basis of what I said to her. What did I tell her? She visited me in Oxford in 1997 and had a long discussion with me. I told her that I had reasons to believe that some Oxford dons had been informed of my planned hospitalization in a psychiatric hospital. What reasons did I give her for my thinking so?

In the autumn of 1979 my seminars were held on Wednesdays, at 7 pm, in the flat of one of my students. I was released from the hospital on Tuesday afternoon, and on the Wednesday that followed I felt tired. I had invited Dr Hejdánek to give a lecture in my seminar on that day: 'The seminar is in good hands', I thought, 'for once, I do not need to go there'. But in the end, I could not stay at home. The room in which the seminar took place was full of people I had never seen before. Hejdánek addressed me by asking: 'How come you are here?' I told him and all those in the room what had happened, and Hejdánek exclaimed: 'You think they

released you because of what you did in the hospital? They must have changed their dispositions in Moscow.’ The hostility expressed in his words and in the faces of most of those in the room was unmistakable. I left the room without another word. A few of my students left the room as well. I then learned that among others there were people present from Brno, the second biggest city in the Czech Republic, and that the discussion was about the way the contacts with Oxford were to be organized without me. The full meaning of Hejdánek’s ‘They must have changed their dispositions in Moscow’ was corroborated to me shortly after the Velvet Revolution. In Oxford, I heard on the BBC World Service. Professor John Erickson, a leading expert on the East European military and police, explain that the East European regimes collapsed so quickly and peacefully because the KGB realized in the late 1970s that Communism was untenable and began to cooperate with the CIA and MI6 on its dismantling.

As Barbara Day says correctly, a month after the attempt of the police to have me hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital, I was summoned to a psychiatric surgery in Prague. I queried the reasons for my being summoned, and in response I received a threatening letter: “If you don’t come voluntarily, you shall be brought in by force.” Two days before I was to go to the psychiatric surgery, Thomas Mautner from Australia gave a lecture in my seminar. I asked him to accompany me to the psychiatrist’s surgery. He agreed. Eva Kantůrková, a Czech writer, promised me to come as well. The next day, when we came to the surgery, I knocked on the doctor’s door, and when the doctor opened, I said: ‘May I introduce you to Mrs Kantůrková, a writer, and Professor Mautner from Australia? We want to know why you summoned me here.’ The doctor shut the door. Then the entrance door to the waiting room was shut. I told my friends: ‘They are now contacting the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but the Secret Police does not act in the limelight. We will give them twenty minutes, to fully realize that the police is not going to rescue them.’

After a lapse of twenty minutes, I knocked on the door of the Consultant. A lady again, but a different one; I later learned that she worked for the secret police. I introduced my friends and asked her to give us her reasons for summoning me to the surgery. She wanted to let only me into her office, but I held the door ajar, and beckoned my friends in. In her office, I pressed the point: why? I translated into English everything I said and everything she said. Finally she said: ‘The police complain that you are petitioning the government.’ I said ‘This is important. I must write what you just said.’ At that moment she shouted: ‘Out’. From then on I was never again interfered with by Czech psychiatrists.

After telling all this to Barbara Day, I said: ‘It could be expected that the mass media in the West, especially in Britain and in Australia, would be full of the story: Thomas Mautner, a philosopher, a hero, whose presence helped thwart an attempt of the Czechoslovak secret police to put a leading dissident into a psychiatric hospital. In

fact, as far as I know, not a word about it appeared in the mass media in the West.' I then showed her Nick Cohen's 'The Pub Philosopher' (*The Independent Magazine*, 18 November 1989), which opens with the words: 'The judgments passed by Oxford dons on Julius Tomin seem outrageously brutal. "I don't wish to sound East European," said one, "but perhaps he does need psychiatric help."... One professor ... added: "But you can disguise paranoia in the East. There are so many real conspiracies. There aren't the same excuses when you come to the West" ... It sounds scandalous until you hear Tomin happily accuse classical philosophers of conspiring to destroy him because he could expose their ignorance, or of collaborating with the Czech authorities. "They're getting more and more fraudulent, he said. "They all pretend to their students they can read and understand Ancient Greek, but none of them can.'

Nick Cohen knowingly misinterpreted what I told him in the course of our long discussion in an Oxford pub where he had invited me. I spent a lot of time explaining to him that Oxford classical philosophers must translate Greek texts into English in order to understand them. I told him I learned Ancient Greek from German, English, and French text books, in order to eliminate the interference of my mother tongue; I told him that when I read a Greek text, I understand it directly in Greek, without translating it, which no Oxford don can do.

Commenting on Cohen's article, I told Barbara Day that Oxford dons knew that I would not be silent about this, that they knew only too well that they could not face me in an open discussion on Plato, and that the only way out of their difficulty was to brand me as a man that needed psychiatric help. I then showed her a letter of November 17, 1994, which I had sent to the Editor of *The Independent*, in which I wrote: 'Five years ago on November 18, 1989, *The Independent Magazine* published an article entitled 'The Pub Philosopher'. Nick Cohen described me in it "as the pub philosopher, whose poverty forced him to earn a living by delivering lectures in a Swindon saloon bar." Is it a mere coincidence that since then I have not been allowed to lecture in the Swindon saloon bar, my three years contract with the publican having been broken without a word of explanation?' I told her that I received no reply from the Editor, but that Hester Lacey then wrote in *The Independent on Sunday* (March 19, 1995):

'Philosophy has not always been the people's choice, as landlord Noel Reilly discovered when he engaged the dissident Czech academic Dr Julius Tomin to deliver nine half-hour lectures in the British Beehive pub in Swindon in 1988. "His great interest was Plato, though he disagreed with his fellow philosophers about the chronological sequence of Plato's works," explained Reilly at the time. Unfortunately, Dr Tomin delivered only four lectures. "He was a nervous man. I think the hurly-burly of the public house upset him," said Reilly, whose attempts to turn his pub into a "place of culture" sadly ended in bankruptcy.'

I showed Barbara what Cohen wrote in his article on this subject:

'Noel Reilly, the landlord of the Beehive pub in Swindon, read of his plight and decided to pay him £5000 to deliver three lectures a year to the regulars. The talks are very popular. About 350 came to the last lecture at the Beehive.'

I told her that the lecture did indeed prove to be the last lecture: 'I talked on "The demise of Marxism", and in the discussion I was asked: "What is the future of Communism?" I replied: "Thatcherism. Privatisation. The moment you realise the beauty of selling something that is not yours, it is irresistible."

I then told her that I met Reilly in Oxford a few days after I read Lacey's article. I addressed him: 'How is the Beehive?' He replied: 'I am not in Swindon any more. I got a scholarship at Oxford University. I am studying English literature.'

Finally, I showed Barbara Day Polly Toynbee's 'Out of the East' (*The Guardian*, January 6, 1987), in which she wrote: 'Both Oxford and Cambridge had written to Julius [Tomin – J.T.] in Czechoslovakia when he was in a mental hospital praising his work and offering jobs any time he wanted.' *The Guardian* published my correction: 'I have never been offered any jobs by Oxford or Cambridge and to my knowledge no letter was written to me by Oxford or Cambridge during the time when I was in mental hospital. The whole affair lasted 60 hours, 24 of those falling on Sunday. There simply was no time for Oxford or Cambridge to write any letters.'

This lengthy narrative was turned by Barbara Day in her book into the words:

'The bizarre and threatening nature of these encounters burned deeply into Tomin's memory, and the conviction that there was a conspiracy to certify him as 'psychopathic paranoia querulans' (as he remembers being described in a newspaper report of the time) and commit him to a psychiatric institution for life remained with him even after he left Czechoslovakia.'

Let me now return to the Wikipedia entry. When my wife wanted to correct it, she discovered that the sentence 'He had refused military draft and **had been sent to a psychiatric hospital for two years**' was a quote from John Pilger's *Heroes* (2002). On whose information did John Pilger rely, when he wrote those words?

John Pilger was not the only one, who fell for the story. My wife found the following abstract from a Press Conference of the Czech Social-democratic Party, from 14. 8. 1998, on the Internet. A freelance journalist Jaromír Sedlák addressed the official spokesman of the Party Lubomír Rouček: "As you must have noticed, Czech Television speaks about Tomin on all its channels. You too lived in Great Britain and so you know that it is a man who was hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic – he allegedly had a fixed idea that he was Jan Hus – It's an unhappy man. He should never be allowed to appear on television." Lubomír Rouček replied: "Yes, I think that

Mr Tomin is an unhappy man, and as far as I know the legal requirements that regulate mass media abroad, no television there would publish any material about Tomin".

Note that Jaromír Sedlák speaks as if I was hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic in Britain, for he would not refer in this manner to a psychiatric hospitalization of any dissident by the Communist regime. And note how confidently he turns with his question to his fellow Czech emigrant of those days. Obviously, my 'psychiatric hospitalization' in Britain was a thing well 'known' in the Czech emigrant circles in Britain. How did it happen that such 'information' was spread and nurtured in Czech emigrant circles after my arrival in Oxford?

The television program in which I appeared, which those two men discussed, was about the hunger-strike I held in Oxford in August 1998 in protest against the appointment of Jan Kavan as the Czech Foreign Minister. When in Britain, Jan Kavan committed perjury: In a sworn Affidavit of 19 August 1982, in The High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division, Divisional Court, he denied that a van which he sent to Prague in April 1981 packed with books for Czech dissidents contained their names and addresses. In 1992, a list of Czech dissidents was discovered in the files of the Czechoslovak secret police and proved to be the list sent by Kavan in the van. Kavan may have played an important role in bringing about the cooperation between the Secret Services from the East and the West in the late 1970s, which contributed to the collapse of the Communist regimes, but he was not a man I wanted to see as the Czech Foreign Minister. Concerning him, see Barbara Day's *The Velvet Philosophers*:

'Jan Kavan and Julius Tomin represented two completely different approaches to the issue of how to behave within a totalitarian regime: on the one hand, an emphasis on secrecy and disguise; on the other, a determination to carry on 'as normal', to hold to one's rights even to the point of sacrificing what little space for freedom the regime might grant. In the early days of the Oxford philosophers' visits the contrasting personalities of Kavan and Tomin had a complex influence on the development of the British response to the situation in Czechoslovakia. In the 1970s and 1980s Jan Kavan was a key figure in relationships between the West – especially the British – and the Czechoslovak dissidents.' (pp. 29-30)

It was only after writing all this and thus getting it off my chest that I was struck by the way the Wikipedia entry ends:

'He travelled with his family to the UK in August 1980 after receiving permission to study abroad, with the help of Kathy Wilkes, the Oxford Philosopher. In May 1981 his Czech passport was removed by the Czech



Embassy in London, and he was told he and his wife no longer had Czech citizenship. As of 2011 he lives in Cam, Gloucestershire.'

The striking thing about this ending is not what it says, but what it does not say. It does not say a word about the scholarly controversy between me and the contemporary Platonic scholars. The two 'Selected articles' which the entry appends, have been selected in tune with the omission: 'Inside the Security State', *New Statesman*, 1980; 'Socratic Midwifery', *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No 1, 1987. The entry does not mention the 'Pursuit of Philosophy' (*History of Political Thought*, Vol. V, Issue 3, 1984) in which I describe in detail my discussion with Dr Anthony Kenny, the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, which took place in April 1980 in my seminar in Prague, with which my seminar ended and which gave rise to my ensuing controversy with Platonic scholars. It does not mention my article 'Dating of the *Phaedrus* and the Interpretation of Plato' (*Antichthon*, Vol. 22, 1988), in which the controversy between me and contemporary Platonic scholarship was for the first time aired in the scholarly press. It does not mention 'A preliminary to the Study of Plato' (*Symbolae Osloenses*, Vol LXVII, 1992) in which I show that the work of Plato's contemporary Alcidas strongly corroborates the ancient dating of the *Phaedrus* as Plato's first dialogue. It does not mention 'Plato's First Dialogue' (*Ancient Philosophy*, 17, 1997), in which I adduce further evidence in support of my dating of the *Phaedrus*. It does not mention 'Plato's Disappointment with his Phaedran Characters' (*The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2000) in which I show that there is a strong internal evidence in Plato's dialogues in support of my dating of the *Phaedrus*. It does not mention 'Joining the Beginning to the End' (*The Republic and the Laws of Plato*, Proceedings of the First Symposium Platonicum Pragense, OIKOYMENH, Prague 1998), in which I show that throughout the *Laws*, his last great work, Plato reflects on the *Phaedrus* as his great beginning, which embodies his discovery of the truth at the beginning of his long life devoted to philosophy.

In 2000 I sent an article on 'An Ancient Dispute on Philosophy and Rhetoric' to *Ancient Philosophy*. The Editor refused to publish the article, but sent me the referee's report, which recommended its publishing. The referee wrote:

'The article is very problematic. I've tried to read it as objectively as possible (though I think I can see who the author is [*Ancient Philosophy* does not inform its referees of who the author is of the article that is to be judged, J.T.]). As such, it may give the impression of being a well-argued whole. I find it provocatively interesting ... So: take it or leave it. If I were you, I would take it, and so take the risk of being stamped as a "Tominist" (however compensating this by accepting very traditionalist papers too). The Editor justified his rejection as follows: 'much of the argument depends upon your contention that the *Phaedrus* is Plato's first dialogue, or at least a very early dialogue written even before Socrates' trial. You argued earlier for this dating of the *Phaedrus* but it seems too disputable a foundation for this paper.'

After this rejection, I decided to stop sending the results of my research for publication in academic journals before presenting it to Oxford students and academics, thus exposing it to open criticism, and defending my views in an open discussion. For many years I have tried to obtain this permission by sending my papers to Oxford classicists and philosophers – in vain. Two years ago, I therefore decided to stand in front of Balliol with a poster: 'A philosopher from Prague appeals to Oxford Academics: LET US DISCUSS PLATO'. I informed a wide range of Oxford academics about my protest, hoping that they would exercise influence on Oxford classicists and classical philosophers: 'If Tomin is wrong, prove him wrong. Open academic discussion is the principle to which Oxford University adheres.' So far, Oxford academics disappointed my expectations. Gregory Wildgoose, a chemist from St John's College replied to me: 'You are a mere irrelevancy, a random and slightly irritating retard on the fringe of what is otherwise a very respectable subject. – Julius, I know a good doctor who might be able to help you.'

I have never been afraid of a conspiracy to certify me as 'psychopathic paranoia querulans' and commit me to a psychiatric institution for life, but what I have been afraid of is that Oxford philosophers and classicists have the power to make me certified as a 'psychopathic paranoia querulans' in the minds of Oxford dons and in the minds of the broader public, and that they are bent on doing so, for only thus can they justify their refusal to accept my challenge LET US DISCUSS PLATO, with which they have been confronted for thirty one years, ever since I arrived at Oxford in 1980. Their refusal to accept my challenge does no good to them, it does no good to classics and classical philosophy they teach, and it does no good to their students.