

# What Is Existenz Philosophy?

HANNAH ARENDT

**A**S DISTINCT from existentialism, a French literary movement of the last decade, Existenz philosophy has at least a century-old history. It began with Schelling in his late period and with Kierkegaard, developed in Nietzsche along a great number of as yet unexhausted possibilities, determined the essential part of Bergson's thought and of the so-called life-philosophy (*Lebensphilosophie*), until finally in postwar Germany, with Scheler, Heidegger, and Jaspers, it reached a consciousness, as yet unsurpassed, of what really is at stake in modern philosophy.

The term "Existenz" indicates, first, nothing more than the being of man, independent of all qualities and capacities that can be psychologically investigated. Thus far, what Heidegger once rightly remarked of "life-philosophy," that the name was about as meaningful as the botany of plants, also holds for Existenz philosophy. Except that there is no accident that the word "Being" is replaced by the word "Existenz." In this terminological change one of the fundamental problems of modern philosophy is, in fact, concealed.

Hegel's philosophy, which with a completeness never attained before, had explained and organized into a weirdly coherent whole all natural and historical phenomena, was truly "the owl of Minerva, that takes flight only in the evening." This system, immediately after Hegel's death, appeared to be the last word in the whole of western philosophy, in so far as western philosophy—despite all its variety and apparent contradictions—since Parmenides had not dared to doubt that: *to gar auto esti noein te kai einai*, being and thought are identical. What came after Hegel was either derivative, or it was a rebellion of the philosophers against philosophy in general, rebellion against or doubt of this identity.

This derivative character is peculiar to all the so-called schools of modern philosophy. They all seek to re-establish the unity of thought and being; whether they aim at this harmony in making matter (the materialists) or mind (the Idealists) dominant, is indif-



ferent; indifferent also whether by playing with the notion of aspects they seek to establish a whole more spinozistic in character.

### *The Phenomenological Attempt at Reconstruction*

Among the derivative philosophical currents of the last hundred years the most modern and interesting are pragmatism and phenomenology. Phenomenology, above all, has exercised an influence on contemporary philosophy which is neither accidental nor due only to its method. Husserl sought to reestablish the ancient relation between Being and Thought, which had guaranteed man a home in this world, by a detour through the intentional structure of consciousness. Since every act of consciousness has by its very nature an object, I can at least be certain of one thing, namely that I "have" the object of my consciousness. Thereby the question of reality, altogether abstracted from the essence of things, can be "bracketed"; I have all Being as that which I am conscious of and as consciousness I am, in the manner of man, the Being of the world. (The *seen* tree, the tree as object of my consciousness, need not be the "real" tree, it is in any case the real object of my consciousness.)

The modern feeling of homelessness in the world has always ended up with things torn out of their functional context. A proof of this, scarcely to be overlooked, is modern literature and a good part of modern painting. However one may interpret this homelessness sociologically or psychologically, its philosophical basis lies in the fact that though the functional context of the world, in which also I myself am involved, can always justify and explain that there are, for example, tables and chairs generally, nevertheless it can never make me grasp conceptually that *this* table *is*. And it is the existence of *this* table, independent of tables in general, which evokes the philosophical shock.

Phenomenology appeared to master this problem, which is much more than merely theoretical. In its description of consciousness it grasped precisely these isolated things torn out of their functional context as the contents of arbitrary acts of consciousness and appeared to connect these up again with man through the "stream of consciousness." Indeed Husserl maintained that by this detour through consciousness and by starting from a complete grasp of all the factual contents of consciousness (a new *mathesis universalis*), he would be able to rebuild the world which had fallen to pieces.



Such a reconstruction of the world from consciousness would equal a second creation, since in this reconstruction its contingent character, which is at the same time its character as reality, would be removed from the world, which would thus no longer appear as something given to man but as something created by him.

In this fundamental claim of phenomenology lies the most properly permanent and most modern attempt to find a new foundation for humanism. Hofmannsthal's famous farewell letter to Stefan George, in which he espouses "the little things" against big words, since precisely in these small things the secret of reality lies hidden, is most intimately bound up with the feeling of life from which phenomenology has arisen. Husserl and Hofmannsthal are equally classicists, if classicism is the attempt—through an imitation, consistent to the end, of the classic, founded upon man's being at home in the world—to evoke magically a home again out of the world which has become alien. Husserl's "to the things themselves" is no less a magic formula than Hofmannsthal's "little things." If one could still achieve something with magic—in an age whose only good is that it has forsworn all magic—then one would surely have to begin with the littlest and apparently most modest things, with homely "little things," with homely words.

It was due to this magical homeliness that Husserl's analysis of consciousness (which Jaspers, since he inclined neither to magic nor to classicism, found unimportant for philosophy) decisively influenced both Heidegger and Scheler in their youth, although Husserl was able to contribute little of its concrete content to Existenz philosophy. Contrary to the widespread opinion that Husserl's influence was only methodologically important, the fact is that he freed modern philosophy, to which he himself did not properly belong, from the fetters of historicism. Following Hegel and under the influence of an extraordinarily intensified interest in history, philosophy threatened to degenerate into speculation as to whether the historical flux exhibited possible laws or not. Here it is not relevant whether such speculations were optimistically or pessimistically colored, whether they sought to reckon progress as unavoidable or decline as predestined. The essential thing was that in both cases Man, in Herder's words, was like the ant that only crawls on the wheel of destiny. Husserl's insistence on "the things themselves," which eliminates such empty speculation and goes on to separate the phenomenally given content of a process from its genesis, had a liberating influence in that Man himself, and not the historical or natural or biological or psychological flux into



which he is sucked, could once again become a theme of philosophy.

This separation has become much more important than Husserl's positive philosophy, in which he seeks to make us tranquil about a fact over which modern philosophy cannot become tranquil—that man is compelled to assent to a Being which he has never created and to which he is essentially alien. With the transformation of alien Being into consciousness he seeks to make the world again human, as Hofmannsthal with the magic of little things sought to awaken in us again the old fondness for the world. But what this modern humanism, this good will towards the modest and homely, is always *wrecked* upon is the equally modern *hubris* which lies at its basis and which furtively (in Hofmannsthal) or openly and naively (in Husserl) hopes, in this inconspicuous way, to become what man cannot be, creator of the world and of himself.

In opposition to the arrogant modesty of Husserl the modern philosophy which is underivative seeks along many paths to come to terms with the fact that man is not the creator of the world. Towards this end it searches further and further in the direction where it shows its best inclinations, to place man in the position where Schelling, in a moment of self-misunderstanding, placed God—in the position of "Master of Being."

*Kant's Demolition of the Old World and Schelling's  
Cry for a New One*

The word "Existenz" in the modern sense appears, to my knowledge, for the first time in the later Schelling. Schelling knew exactly what he was rebelling against when over against "negative philosophy," against the philosophy of pure thought, he placed "positive philosophy," which proceeds from Existenz, which it has only as the pure "That."

He knew that with this the philosopher said goodbye to the "contemplative life"; knew that it is the I AM, "which has given the signal for the revolution" of pure thought, no longer able "to explain the contingency and actuality of things," is overcome by "final despair." All modern irrationalism, all the modern hostility to mind and reason, has its basis in this despair.

With the knowledge that the What can never explain the That, modern philosophy begins with a dreadful collision against bare reality. The more one empties Reality of all qualities, the more im-



mediately and nakedly appears the one thing that from now on is to be the only interesting one—*That* it is. Hence, this philosophy from its start glorifies contingency, since there Reality falls directly upon Man as altogether incalculable, unthinkable, and unforeseen. Hence the enumeration of the philosophical “extreme situations” (Jaspers), which means the situations in which Man is driven to philosophize, such as death, guilt, fate, chance, since in all these experiences Reality shows itself as something that cannot be evaded, cannot be resolved by thought. In these situations Man arrives at the consciousness that he is dependent—not upon some individual thing and not even upon some general character of Limitation,—but dependent on the fact that he *is*.

Therefore too, since essence obviously has nothing more to do with existence, modern philosophy turns away from the sciences, which investigate the *What* of things. As Kierkegaard would put it, the objective truth of science is indifferent since it is neutral to the question of Existenz, and the subjective truth of the “existing individual” is a paradox, since it can never be objective, never universally valid. Since Being and thought are no longer identical, since through thought I can no longer enter into the proper reality of things, since the nature of things has nothing to do with their reality, then science may be whatever it happens to be—in any case it no longer yields truth for man to possess, no truth that interests man. This turning away from science has often been misunderstood, especially because of Kierkegaard’s example, as an attitude stemming from Christianity. To this philosophy, passionately intent upon Reality, it’s no concern that, in view of another and truer world, occupation with the things of this world distracts one from salvation of the soul (as *curiositas* or *dispersio*). What this philosophy wishes is *this* world, *this* world completely, which has lost precisely only its character as Reality.

The unity of Being and thought presupposed the pre-established coincidence of essence and existence, that, namely, everything thinkable also exists and every existent, because it is knowable, must also be rational. This unity was destroyed by Kant, the true, if also clandestine, founder of the new philosophy: who has likewise remained till the present time its secret king. Kant’s proof of the antinomy-structure of Reason, and his analysis of synthetic propositions which proves that in every proposition in which something is asserted about Reality we go beyond the concept (the *essentia*) of a given thing—had already robbed man of the ancient security in Being. Even Christianity had not attacked this security, but only reinterpreted it within



"God's plan of salvation." Now, however, one could be sure neither of the meaning or Being of the Christian world, nor of the always present Being of the ancient Cosmos; and even the traditional definition of truth as *aequatio intellectus et rei* was no longer valid.

Already before Kant's revolutionising of the western conception of Being, Descartes had posed the question of Reality in a very modern sense, although he then gave an answer which was completely bound up with the traditional sense. The question whether Being, in general, *is*, is just as modern as the answer of the *cogito ergo sum* is useless; since this answer proves, as Nietzsche remarked, never the existence of the ego cogitans (the thinking ego), but at most the existence of the cogitare (the act of thought). In other words, the truly living "I" never arises from the I-think, but only an "I" as object of thought. We know this precisely from the time of Kant.

More depends than is commonly supposed in the history of secularization on Kant's destruction of the ancient unity of thought and Being. Kant's refutation of the ontological proof of God destroyed that rational belief in God which rested on the notion that what I can rationally conceive must also be; a notion which is not only older than Christianity, but probably also much more strongly rooted in European man since the Renaissance. This so-called atheising of the world—the knowledge, namely, that we cannot prove God through reason—touches the ancient philosophical concepts at least as much as the Christian religion. In this atheised world man can be interpreted in his "abandonment" or in his "individual autonomy." For every modern philosopher—and not only for Nietzsche—this interpretation becomes a touchstone of his philosophy.

Hegel was for us the last ancient philosopher, since he was the last to sneak past this question successfully. With Schelling modern philosophy begins, since he clearly explains that he is concerned with the individual who "wishes to have a providential God" who "is Master of Being,"—whereby Schelling really intends the real man, the "individual freed of everything universal"; since "it is not the universal in man that longs after happiness, but the individual." In this astonishing directness of the individual's claim for happiness (after Kant's contempt for the ancient will to be happy it was not at all so simple to admit it again) there lies more than the desperate wish to return to the security of a Providence. What Kant hadn't understood, when he destroyed the ancient conception of Being, was that he was at the same time putting in question the Reality of everything beyond the individual; that, indeed, he implied what Schelling now directly



says: "There exists nothing universal but only the individual, and the universal being exists only if it is the *absolute individual*."

With this position, which resulted immediately from Kant, the absolute and rationally conceivable kingdom of Ideas and universal values was at one stroke lopped off; and Man was placed in the middle of a world where he could no longer rely on anything, neither on his Reason, which clearly could not arrive at a knowledge of Being, nor on the Ideals of his Reason, whose existence was not provable, nor on the universal, since this existed only as he himself.

From now on the word "existing" is used always in opposition to that which is only thought of, only contemplated; as the concrete in opposition to the mere abstract; as the individual in contrast to the mere universal. Which means nothing more nor less than that philosophy, which since Plato has thought only in concepts, has now become mistrustful of the concept itself. Henceforth, philosophers never get rid of their bad conscience, so to speak, in the pursuit of philosophy.

✓ Kant's destruction of the ancient conception of Being had as its purpose the establishing of the *autonomy* of man, what he himself called the dignity of man. He is the first philosopher who wishes to understand Man according to his own law, and who frees man from the universal context of Being, in which Man would be a thing among things (even if as *res cogitans* he is opposed to *res extensa*). In Lessing's sense, Man's coming of age is here established in thought, and it is no accident that this philosophic clarification of Man's coming of age coincides with the French Revolution. Kant is truly *the* philosopher of the French Revolution. As it was decisive for the development of the nineteenth century that nothing be quicker demolished than the new revolutionary concept of the *citoyen*, so was it decisive for the development of post-Kantian philosophy that nothing be quicker demolished than this new concept of Man, here for the first time developed in germ. Neither was an accident.

Kant's destruction of the ancient conception of Being accomplished only half the job. He destroyed the old identity of Being and thought and with it the notion of the pre-established harmony between Man and the world. What he did not destroy, but implicitly held on to, was the concept, equally old and intimately associated, of Being as the given, to whose laws Man is in all cases subject. Man could suffer this notion only so long as he had, in the feeling of his security in Being and his belonging to the world, at least the certainty that he could know Being and the course of the



World. On it rested the ancient world's and the whole western world's conception of fate up to the nineteenth century (which means till the appearance of the novel); without this pride, tragedy as well as western philosophy would have been impossible. Likewise, Christianity had never denied that Man has an insight into God's plan of salvation; whether this insight be due to his own godlike reason or to God's revelation, is indifferent. In any case, he remained initiated into the secrets of the cosmos and the course of the world.

What holds for Kant's destruction of the ancient notion of Being, holds in stronger measure for his new concept of Man's freedom—a concept in which, oddly enough, the modern lack of freedom is indicated. According to Kant, Man has the possibility of determining his own actions out of the freedom of the good will; these actions themselves, however, fall under the causality of nature, a sphere essentially alien to Man. As soon as human action leaves subjectivity, which is freedom, it enters the objective sphere, which is causality, and loses its character as freedom. Man, free in himself, is hopelessly surrendered to the course of nature alien to him, a fate contrary to him, destructive of his freedom. Herein is expressed the contradictory structure of his human reality, so far as this plays its rôle in the world. While Kant made Man the master and measure of Man, at the same time he lowered him to a slave of Being. Every new philosopher since Schelling has protested against this devaluation. Modern philosophy is still occupied with this reduction of Man, who has just come of age. It is as if Man had never before risen so high and fallen so low.

Since Kant, every philosophy maintains an element of defiance, on the one hand, and an open or concealed concept of fate, on the other hand. Even Marx—who nevertheless, as he himself explained, wished no longer to interpret the world but to change it, and therefore stood on the crest of a new concept of Being and the World, in which Being and the World are no longer recognized as only given, but as a possible product of Man—quickly fled back to the old security when he agreed with Hegel that freedom is insight into necessity. Nietzsche's *amor fati*, Heidegger's Resoluteness, Camus's Defiance which would risk living despite the absurdity of the human condition, which consists in the homelessness of Man in the world,—are nothing else but this effort to save themselves by a return to security. The hero's gesture has not accidentally become *the* pose of philosophy since Nietzsche; it requires heroism to live in the world as Kant left it. Recent philosophers with their modern pose of the hero show only too plainly that they could follow Kant to the end in



many directions, but not a step beyond him, if in fact they have not fallen, consistently and desperately, a few steps behind him. For they all, with the one great exception of Jaspers, have given up at some point Kant's basic conception of freedom and dignity. When Schelling desired to "have" the "real Master of Being," he wished again to participate in the movement of the world, from which, since Kant, the free man had been excluded. Schelling flees again to a philosophic God, precisely because he accepts from Kant "the fact of decline," without, however, making use of Kant's extraordinary calmness in simply coming to terms with it. For Kant's tranquillity, which seems so imposing to us, is in the end due only to the fact that he was strongly rooted in the tradition that philosophy is essentially identical with contemplation—a tradition which Kant himself unconsciously destroyed. Schelling's "positive philosophy" seeks refuge in God, in order that he "may oppose the fact of *defection*," in order that he may bring Man—who, as soon as he found freedom, lost his Reality—to a Reality.

The reason why Schelling is usually overlooked in discussions of Existenz philosophy is that no philosopher has taken his path towards the solution of Kant's difficulties concerning subjective freedom and objective necessity. Instead of a "positive philosophy" they sought (with the exception of Nietzsche) to reinterpret Man, in order that he might enter again into this world that robs him of value; his failure was to belong to his Being and not merely to be his fate, was to be due not to a nature hostile to him, because it was completely determined by causal law, but was already to be traced in his own nature. Hence Kant's concepts of human freedom and dignity, as well as of humanity, as the regulative principle of all political action, were abandoned and there arose that distinctive melancholy which, since Kierkegaard, has been the hallmark of all except the most superficial philosophy. It always appeared more attractive to be subjected to "decline" as an inner law of human Existenz, rather than to meet one's fall through the alien, causally organized world. The first of these philosophers is Kierkegaard.

### *The Birth of the Self: Kierkegaard*

Modern Existenz philosophy begins with Kierkegaard. There are no Existenz philosophers on whom his influence would not be traceable. Kierkegaard himself sets out consciously from a critique of



Hegel (and, one might add, the unmentioned influence of Schelling, whose later philosophy he knew from lectures). To the Hegelian system, which pretended to grasp and explain the "whole," he opposed the "single person," the individual man, for whom neither place nor meaning was left in the Whole directed by the World-Mind. In other words, Kierkegaard starts from the forlornness of the individual in the completely explained world. The individual finds himself in permanent contradiction to this explained world, since his "Existenz," namely the pure factual character of his existing in all its contingency (that, precisely, I am *I* and no one else, and that, precisely, I *am* rather than am not), can be neither foreseen by reason nor resolved into something purely thinkable.

But this Existenz, which I am continually but momentarily, and which I cannot grasp by Reason, is the only thing of which I can be unquestionably certain. Thus, man's task is to "become subjective," a consciously existing being, who perpetually realizes the paradoxical implications of his life in the world. All essential questions of philosophy—as, say, the immortality of the soul, human freedom, the unity of the world, which means all the questions whose contradictory structure Kant had shown in his antinomies of pure Reason—are to be grasped only as "subjective truths," not to be known as objective truths. The example of an "existing" philosopher is Socrates with his "If there is immortality." "Was he thus a doubter?" Kierkegaard begins one of the greatest interpretations in all his works which are so rich in interpretations. "Not at all. On this 'if' he stakes his whole life, he dares to die—the Socratic uncertainty was thus the expression of the fact that the eternal truth is related to an existing individual, and hence must remain a paradox to him so long as he exists."

Thus the universal, with which philosophy has so long been occupied in the task of pure knowledge, is to be brought into a real relation with Man. This relation can only be paradoxical insofar as Man is always an individual. In the paradox the individual can grasp the universal, make it the content of his Existenz, and thereby lead that paradoxical life, which Kierkegaard reports about himself. In the paradoxical life Man seeks to realize the contradiction that "the universal is staked as the individual" if it is to become at all real and meaningful for Man. Kierkegaard therefore interprets such a life later in the category of "exception,"—an exception, namely, from the universal average everyday human existence; an exception on which man decides only because God has called him to it in order to establish an example of how the paradox of man's life in the world is posed.



In the exception man realizes the universal structure of human reality. It is characteristic of all of Existenz philosophy, that by "existential" it fundamentally understands what Kierkegaard had presented in the category of the Exception. The existential attitude turns about the realizing (in opposition to that which is only contemplated) of the most universal structures of life.

The passion to become subjective flares up in Kierkegaard with the realized anxiety before death as the event in which I alone am guaranteed as an individual, separated from average everyday life. The thought of death becomes an action, since in it man makes himself subjective, withdraws from the world and from everyday life with other men. Psychologically, this inner technique of reflection has simply as its basis the supposition that with the thought that I shall no longer be, my interest in what is must also be extinguished. On this presupposition rests not only modern "Inwardness," but also the fanatical resoluteness, which enters likewise in Kierkegaard, to seize earnestly the moment,—since only in the moment is Existenz, namely Reality, guaranteed.

This new earnestness towards life, which recoils from death, did not at all imply necessarily a Yea to life or to the human reality of man as such. In fact, only Nietzsche and, following him, Jaspers, have made such a Yea the groundwork of their philosophy; and this is also the reason why a positive way leads from their philosophical investigations to philosophy. Kierkegaard, and Heidegger after him, have always interpreted death as the peculiar "objection" against the Being of Man, as proof of his nothingness—in which, possibly, Heidegger's analysis of death and the character of human life bound up with it surpasses that of Kierkegaard in cogency and precision. The new French school, especially Camus and Sartre, if they have not thought out Heidegger's results to the end, have at least perceived what the end is, and have consequently arrived at a philosophy, which has scarcely a place for the anxiety before death, since it is so full of nausea towards life,—as it were, overcome by the sheer *That* of Being. "Quelle saleté, quelle saleté," Sartre cries out (in *La Nausée*), as he discovers that he cannot think the Nothing, since everything, absolutely everything "exists," has reality.

It is clear that Kierkegaard's peculiar inner activity, his "becoming subjective," immediately leads us out of philosophy. It goes with philosophy only in so far as philosophic grounds for the philosopher's revolt against philosophy must be found. Similarly, though at the



directly opposite pole, lies the case of Marx, who likewise explained philosophically that man can change the world and hence should cease to interpret it. Common to both was the fact that they immediately wished to arrive at activity and did not get the idea of beginning philosophy on a new basis after they had once begun to doubt the prerogatives of contemplation and to despair of the possibility of a purely contemplative knowledge. The result was that Kierkegaard took refuge in psychology in the description of inner activity, Marx in political science in the description of external activity. With the difference, to be sure, that Marx again accepted the certainty of Hegelian philosophy, which his "turning it on its head" changed less than he supposed. It was not so decisive for philosophy that Hegel's principle of mind was replaced by Marx's principle of matter, as that the unity of man and the world was restored in a doctrinaire, purely hypothetical manner—hence, one not convincing to modern man.

Since Kierkegaard held fast to his despair with philosophy, he has become so much the more important for the later development of philosophy. Philosophy has taken over from him all its new concrete contents. These are, essentially, the following: *Death* as guarantee of the *principium individuationis*, since death, as the most common of occurrences, nevertheless strikes me unavoidably alone. *Contingency* as guarantee of reality as only given, which overwhelms and persuades me precisely through its incalculability and irreducibility to thought. *Guilt* as the category of all human activity, which is wrecked not upon the world but upon itself, insofar as I always take responsibilities upon myself which I cannot overlook, and am compelled through my decisions themselves to neglect other activity. Guilt is thus the mode and the manner in which I myself become real, plunge into reality.

In full explicitness these new contents of philosophy appear for the first time in Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* as "Extreme situations" (*Grenzsituationen*), in which Man is placed because of the contradictory structure of his human reality and which give him his proper impulse to philosophize. Jaspers himself seeks to found a new kind of philosophy on the basis of these situations, and he adds to the content he has taken over from Kierkegaard something further, which he now calls struggle, now love, but which later becomes, in his theory of communication, the new form of philosophic intelligence. As opposed to Jaspers, Heidegger seeks with the new content to revive Systematic Philosophy in the completely traditional sense.



*The Self as All and Nothing: Heidegger*

Heidegger's attempt, despite and against Kant, to re-establish an ontology led to a far-reaching alteration of the traditional philosophical terminology. For this reason Heidegger always appears on first glance more revolutionary than Jaspers, and this terminological appearance has very much interfered with the correct estimate of his philosophy. He says explicitly that he wishes to found an ontology, and he can have nothing else in mind than to undo the destruction, begun with Kant, of the ancient concept of Being. One cannot escape taking this seriously even if one should arrive at the knowledge that on the basis of this content, which arises from the revolt against philosophy, no ontology in the traditional sense can be re-established.\* Heidegger has not really established his ontology, since the second volume of *Sein und Zeit* has never appeared. To the question concerning the meaning of Being he has given the provisional answer, in itself unintelligible, that the meaning of Being is temporality. With this he implied, and with his analysis of human reality (i.e., of the Being of Man), which is conditioned by death, he established that the meaning of Being is nothingness. Thus Heidegger's attempt to find a new foundation for metaphysics ends consistently not with the second promised volume, which was to determine the meaning of Being generally on the basis of the analysis of human Being, but with a small brochure *What is Metaphysics?*, in which it is quite consistently shown, despite all tricks and sophistries of speech, that Being in the Heideggerian sense is the Nothing.

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\* Another question worth discussing is whether Heidegger's philosophy has not generally been taken too seriously, simply because it deals with the most serious things. In any case, Heidegger has done everything to warn us that we should take him seriously. As is well known, he entered the Nazi Party in a very sensational way in 1933—an act which made him stand out pretty much by himself among colleagues of the same calibre. Further, in his capacity as Rector of Freiburg University, he forbade Husserl, his teacher and friend, whose lecture chair he had inherited, to enter the faculty, because Husserl was a Jew. Finally, it has been rumored that he has placed himself at the disposal of the French occupational authorities for the re-education of the German people.

In view of the real comedy of this development, and of the no less real low level of political thought in German universities, one is naturally inclined not to bother with the whole story. On the other hand, there is the point that this whole mode of behavior has exact parallels in German Romanticism, so that one can scarcely believe the coincidence is accidental. Heidegger is, in fact, the last (we hope) romantic—as it were, a tremendously gifted Friedrich Schlegel or Adam Mueller, whose complete irresponsibility was attributed partly to the delusion of genius, partly to desperation.



The peculiar fascination, which the thought of the Nothing has exercised on modern philosophy, is not simply characteristic of Nihilism. If we look at the problem of the Nothing in our context of a philosophy revolting against philosophy as pure contemplation, then we see it as an effort to become "Master of Being" and thereby to question philosophically in such a manner that we progress immediately to the deed; thus the thought that Being is really the Nothing has a tremendous advantage. Basing himself on this, Man can imagine himself, can relate himself to Being that is given, no less than the Creator before the creation of the world, which, as we know, was created out of nothing. In the characterizing of Being as Nothing there is, finally, the attempt to get away from the definition of Being as the given, and to transform the activities of Man from being godlike to being divine. This is also the real reason why in Heidegger the Nothing suddenly becomes active and begins to "nothing." The Nothing tries, so to speak, to reduce to nothing the given-ness of Being, and to put itself in Being's place. If Being, which I have not created, is the occasion of a nature which I am not and do not know, then perhaps the Nothing is the really free domain of Man. Since I am not a world-creating being, perhaps my nature is to be a world-destroying being. (These conclusions are now quite freely and clearly developed in Camus and Sartre.) This, in any case, is the philosophical basis for modern Nihilism, its origin in the old ontology; the attempt to stretch the new questions and content to the old framework here takes its revenge.

But whatever the point of departure of Heidegger's attempt, its great advantage was that it took up directly the questions which Kant had interrupted and which nobody after him had broached. Amid the ruins of the ancient pre-established harmony of Being and thought, of essence and existence, of the existing being and the What of the existing being conceivable through reason,—Heidegger maintains that he has found a being, in whom essence and existence are immediately identical, and this is Man. His essence is his existence. "The substance of Man is not mind . . . but Existenz." Man has no substance, the important thing is *that he is*; one cannot ask after Man's What as after the What of a thing, but only after his Who. Man as the identity of Existenz and essence appeared to give a new key to the question concerning Being in general. One need only recall that for traditional metaphysics God was the being in whom essence and existence coincided, in whom thought and activity were identical, and who was therefore interpreted as the otherworldly



ground for all this world's Being,—in order to understand how seductive this scheme was. It was, in fact, the attempt to make Man directly the "Master of Being."

The Being of Man Heidegger calls *Existenz* or *Dasein*. Through establishing this terminology, he gets away from using the expression "Man." This is not arbitrary terminology, its purpose is to resolve Man into a series of modes of Being which are phenomenologically demonstrable. Hence he discards all those characteristics of Man which Kant had provisionally sketched as freedom, human dignity, and Reason; and which arise from the spontaneity of Man and hence are not phenomenologically demonstrable, since, being spontaneous, they are more than mere functions of Being, and since in them Man intends more than himself. Heidegger's ontological approach hides a rigid functionalism in which Man appears only as a conglomerate of modes of Being, which is in principle arbitrary, since no concept of Man determines the modes of his Being.

The "Self" has entered in place of Man: "With the expression Self we answer the question concerning the Who of human reality." For human reality (the Being of Man) is singled out by the fact that "in its very Being it is concerned with its Being." This self-reflexive character of human reality can be "existentially" grasped; which is all that remains of Man's power and freedom.

This grasping of one's own *Existenz* is, according to Heidegger, the act of philosophising itself: "philosophical questioning must be existentially seized as a possibility inherent in the Being of existing human reality." Philosophy is the exceptional existential possibility of human reality—which is, in the end, only a reformulation of Aristotle's *Bios Theoretikos*, of the contemplative life as the highest possibility for man. This is all the more intensified by the fact that in Heidegger's philosophy Man is made a kind of *summum ens*, the "Master of Being," insofar as existence and essence are identical in him. After Man was discovered as the being for whom he had so long taken God, it appears that such a being is also, in fact, powerless, and that there is no "Master of Being." The only things that remain are anarchical modes of Being.

Human reality is thus characterized by the fact not that it simply is, but that its very Being is to put its own Being at stake. This fundamental structure is "Care," which lies at the basis of all our everyday carefulness in the world. Carefulness, taking care, has truly a self-reflexive character; it is only apparently directed towards the object with which it is occupied.



The Being, for which human reality is care-ridden, is "Existenz," which, perpetually threatened by death, is condemned in the end to extinction. Human reality stands continuously in relation to Existenz thus menaced; and from this point of view all attitudes are to be understood, and the analysis of Man coherently made. The structures of Man's Existenz, namely the structures of his That, Heidegger calls *existential*, and their structural interrelatedness *existentiality*. The individual possibility of grasping these existential structures and thereby of *existing* in an explicit sense, Heidegger calls *existentiele*. In this concept of the existential, the question, never put to rest since Schelling and Kierkegaard, how the universal can *be*, comes out into the open, together with the answer which had already been given by Kierkegaard.

Seen from the point of view of Nietzsche, who had always nobly tried to make Man a real "Master of Being," Heidegger's philosophy is the first absolutely and uncompromisingly this-worldly philosophy. Man's Being is characterized as Being-in-the-world, and what is at stake for this Being in the world is, finally, nothing else than to maintain himself in the world. Precisely this is not given him; hence the fundamental character of Being-in-the-world is uneasiness in the double meaning of homelessness and fearfulness. In anxiety, which is fundamentally anxiety before death, the not-being-at-home in the world becomes explicit. "Being-in-the-world appears in the existentiell mode of not-being-at-home." This is uneasiness.

Human reality would be truly itself only if it could withdraw from this Being-in-the-world to itself; which it essentially never can do, hence is always essentially a decline, a falling away, from itself. "Human reality always falls away from itself as a real unity—declines into the 'world'." Only in the realization of death, which will take him away from the world, has Man the certainty of being himself.

By bringing back reality to the Self without the detour through Man, the question concerning the meaning of Being has fundamentally been given up, and replaced by the question, obviously more basic to this philosophy, concerning the meaning of the Self. But this question appears, in fact, unanswerable, since a Self taken in its absolute isolation is meaningless; if not isolated, on the other hand, it becomes (sunk to the everyday life of the public individual) no longer a Self. Heidegger arrives at this ideal of the Self as a consequence of his making Man what God was in the earlier ontology. Such a highest being is, in fact, possible only as a unique individual being who knows



no equals. What, consequently, appears as "Fall" in Heidegger, are all those modes of human existence which rest on the fact that Man lives together in the world with his fellows. To put it historically, Heidegger's Self is an ideal which has been working mischief in German philosophy and literature since Romanticism. In Heidegger this arrogant passion to will to be a Self has contradicted itself; for never before was it so clear as in his philosophy that this is probably the one being which Man cannot be.

Within the framework of this philosophy the Self "falls" in the following way: as Being-in-the-world Man has not made himself, but has been "thrown" into this his Being. He seeks to escape from the condition of being thrown through the "project" which always anticipates death as his most extreme possibility. But "in the structure of being-thrown (*Geworfenheit*) as in the project there lies essentially a Nothingness": Man has not contrived to bring himself to be and he usually does not contrive to escape from being. (Suicide plays no role in Heidegger; Camus, in maintaining "*Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c'est le suicide,*" is the first to draw from this position a consequence which is contrary to Heidegger, since the latter does not leave Man even the freedom of suicide.) In other words, the character of Man's Being is essentially determined by what he is *not*, his nothingness. The only thing the Self can do to become a Self is to take upon itself "resolutely" this factual character of its Being, so that in its Existenz it "is the void (*nichtige*) ground of its nothingness."

In the "resoluteness" to become what Man on the basis of his nothingness cannot be, namely a Self, Man recognizes that "human reality *as such* is guilty." The Being of Man is such that, perpetually falling to the world, it perpetually hears the "Cry of conscience from the ground of its Being." Existentially, living means therefore: "The Will-to-have-conscience resolves to be guilty."

The most essential characteristic of this Self is its absolute egoism, its radical separation from all its fellows. The anticipation of death as existential was introduced to achieve this; for in death Man realizes the absolute *principium individuationis*. Death alone tears him from the context of his fellows, within which he becomes a public person and is hindered from being a Self. Death may indeed be the end of human reality; at the same time it is the guarantee that nothing matters but myself. With the experience of death as nothingness I have the chance of devoting myself exclusively to being a Self, and once and for all freeing myself from the surrounding world.

explains  
his  
conscience



In this absolute isolation, the Self emerges as the concept really contrary to Man. If, namely, since Kant the nature of Man consisted in the fact that every individual man represents humanity; and if since the French Revolution and the rationalizing of human law it belonged to the concept of Man that in every single individual humanity can be debased or exalted; then the Self is the concept of Man according to which he can exist independently of humanity and need represent no one but himself—his own nothingness. As the Categorical Imperative in Kant asserted that every action must assume responsibility for all humanity, so the experience of guilty nothingness would precisely eliminate the presence of humanity in every man. The Self as conscience has put itself in place of humanity, and the Being of the Self in place of the Being of Man.

Heidegger has therefore attempted in later lectures to bring in, by way of afterthought, such mythologizing confusions as Folk and Earth as a social foundation for his isolated Selves. It is evident that such conceptions can lead one only out of philosophy into some naturalistic superstition. If it is not part of the concept of Man that he inhabits the world with his fellows, then there remains only a mechanical reconciliation by which the atomised Self is given a substratum essentially discordant with its own concept. This can only serve to organize the Selves engaged in willing themselves into an Over-self, in order to make a transition from the fundamental guilt, grasped through resoluteness, to action.

#### *Indications of Human Existenz: Jaspers*

From an historical point of view, it would have been more correct to have begun the discussion of contemporary Existenz philosophy with Jaspers. The *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, first printed in 1919, is undoubtedly the first book of the new "school." On the other hand, there was not only the external circumstance that Jaspers' big *Philosophie* (in three volumes) appeared some five years after *Sein und Zeit*, but also, more significantly, the fact that Jaspers' philosophy is not really closed and is at the same time more modern. By modern we mean no more than that it immediately yields more clues for contemporary philosophical thinking. There are such clues, naturally, also in Heidegger; but they have the peculiarity that they can lead either only to clues for polemic or to the occasion of a radicalization of Heidegger's project—as in contemporary French



philosophy. In other words, either Heidegger has said his last word on the condition of contemporary philosophy or he will have to break with his own philosophy. While Jaspers belongs without any such break to contemporary philosophy, and will develop and decisively intervene in its discussion.

Jaspers achieved his break with the traditional philosophy in his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, where he represents and relativizes all philosophical systems as mythologizing structures, in which Man, seeking protection, flees before the real questions of his Existenz. A Weltanschauung which pretends to have grasped the meaning of Being, systems as "formulated doctrines of the Whole," are for Jaspers only shells which "drain the experience of extreme situations" and confer a peace of mind which is fundamentally unphilosophical. From these extreme situations he seeks to project a new type of philosophizing, in which he invokes Kierkegaard and Nietzsche; this new philosophizing will, above all, teach nothing; it will be, rather, a "perpetual shaking up, a perpetual *appeal* (my italics) to the powers of life in oneself and others." In this manner Jaspers places himself in the revolt, fundamental to the new philosophy, of the philosophers against philosophy. He seeks to dissolve philosophy in philosophizing and to find ways in which philosophical "results" can be so communicated that they lose their character as results.

One of the principal problems of this philosophy becomes therefore the question of communicability generally. Communication is the extraordinary form of philosophic intelligence; at the same time it goes along with philosophizing, in which there is no question of results but of the "Illumination of Existenz." The affinity of this method to the Socratic maieutic is evident; except that what Socrates calls maieutic, Jaspers calls appeal. This difference in stress is again no accident. Jaspers searches, in fact, with the Socratic method, but by removing its pedagogical character. In Jaspers, as in Socrates, there does not exist *the* philosopher, who (since Aristotle) has led an Existenz singled out from other men. Nor with him does the Socratic priority of the questioner exist; for in communication the philosopher moves among his fellows, to whom he appeals as they in turn can appeal to him. Thereby philosophy has left the sphere of the sciences and specializations, the philosopher has deprived himself of every specialized prerogative.

In so far as Jaspers communicates "results," he puts them in the form of "playful metaphysics," in the form of a perpetually experimenting, never fixed representation of definite movements of



thought, which have at the same time the character of proposals that men can be brought to work with—namely, to philosophize with.

Existenz is for Jaspers no form of Being, but a form of human freedom and indeed the form in which "Man as possibility of his spontaneity turns against his mere Being-a-result." Man's Being as such and as given is not Existenz, but "Man is in his human reality possible Existenz." Thus the word "Existenz" expresses the meaning that only in so far as Man moves in the freedom that rests upon his own spontaneity and is "directed in communication to the freedom of others," is there Reality for him.

Thus the question concerning the That of reality, which cannot be resolved into thought, acquires a new meaning without losing its character as real. The That of Being as the given—whether as the reality of the world, as the incalculability of one's fellow men, or the fact that I have not created myself—becomes the backdrop against which man's freedom emerges, becomes at the same time the stuff which kindles it. That I cannot resolve the real to the object of thought becomes the triumph of possible freedom. In this context the question concerning the meaning of Being can be so suspended that the answer to it runs: "Being is such that this human reality is possible."

We become aware of Being by a process of thought which proceeds from "the illusory world of the thinkable" to the limits of Reality, which is no longer to be grasped as pure object of thought or pure possibility. This bringing oneself in thought to the limits of the thinkable Jaspers calls *transcending*; and his "playful metaphysics" is an ordered enumeration of such movements of thought which transcend, overstep themselves. The decisive thing for these movements is that Man as "master of his thoughts" is more than anyone of these movements of thought, so that philosophizing itself does not become a highest existential mode of Man's Being, but rather a preparation for the reality both of myself and the world. "Brought into suspense by passing beyond all knowledge of the world which would fix Being, philosophizing sounds the appeal to my freedom and creates the space for an unconditioned deed that would invoke transcendence." This "deed" arising out of extreme situations appears in the world through communication with others, who as my fellows and through the appeal to our common reason guaranteed the universal; through activity it carries out the freedom of Man in the world and becomes thereby "a seed, though perishing, of the creation of a world."

In Jaspers, thinking has the function of leading Man to determi-



nate experience, in which thought itself (though not the thinking man) fails. In the foundering of thought (and not of the man) Man,—who is more than thought, because more real and more free—experiences what Jaspers calls “the cipher of transcendence.” That transcendence is experienced as a cipher only in foundering, is itself a sign of Existenz, which “is aware not only that as human reality it has not created itself and that as human reality it is helplessly surrendered to inevitable destruction, but also that even as freedom it is not indebted to itself alone.” That transcendence is experienced in failure is a sign of the limitation of human Existenz.

Jaspers’ “failure” is not to be confused with what Heidegger called “Fall” or “Decline”; which latter Jaspers himself calls “Slipping away” (*Abgleiten*). In Jaspers this latter is described in many ways, is psychologically explicable, but is not (as in Heidegger) a structurally necessary Fall from one’s authentic Being as a man. Jaspers holds that in philosophy every ontology claiming it can say what Being really is, is a Slipping-away into the absolutizing of particular categories of Being. The existentiell meaning of such Slipping-away would be that such a philosophy robs Man of a freedom which can persist only so long as Man does not know what Being really is.

Expressed formally, Being is transcendence and as such a “reality without transformation into possibility”; something which I can’t represent to myself as not being—which, in principle, I can do for every individual thing that is. Through the fact that my thinking fails on the That of Reality, the “weight of Reality” first becomes felt. In this measure the failure of thought is the condition for Existenz, which as free always seeks to transcend the merely given world; the condition, namely, for the fact that Existenz, encountering this “weight of Reality” inserts itself into it and belongs to it in the only way in which Man can belong to it—in that he chooses it.

In this failure Man experiences the fact that he can neither know nor create Being and that thus he is not God. In this experience he realizes the limitation of his Existenz, the limits of which he tries to trace in philosophizing. In the failing transcendence of all limits he experiences Reality given to him as the cipher of a Being which he himself is not.

The task of philosophy is to free Man from “the illusory world of the pure object of thought” and “let him find his way home to Reality.” Philosophic thought can never cancel the fact that Reality cannot be resolved into the thinkable; its job is rather “to aggravate . . . this unthinkability.” This is all the more urgent in that the



“reality of the thinker precedes his thought” and his real freedom alone decides what he thinks and what not.

The real content of Jaspers' philosophy is not to be summarized in the form of a report, since this content lies essentially in the ways and movements of his philosophizing. In this fashion Jaspers has come to all the fundamental problems of contemporary philosophy, without answering or settling any of them in a conclusive way. He has singled out for modern philosophy the ways it must travel if it is not to get stuck in the blind alley of a positivistic or nihilistic fanaticism.

The most important among these ways appear to be the following: Being as such is not knowable, it is to be experienced only as something “surrounding” us. Thus the very ancient search for an ontology is liquidated—a search which looked for Being in the existant, so to speak, as if for a magical all-pervasive substance, which makes present everything that is, and which appears in language in the little word “is.” With the liberation of this world from the ghost of Being and the illusion of being able to understand it, there disappeared the necessity of having to explain it monistically from one principle—namely, from this all-pervasive substance. Instead of which, the “discordance of Being” (where this Being does not mean the Being of ontologies) can be admitted; and the modern feeling of alienation in the world can be taken into account, as well as the modern will to create a human world which can be a home within a world which is no longer a home. It is as if with this concept of Being as that which “surrounds” us in fluid contour there were traced an island, on which Man, unmenaced by the dark Unknowable, that in traditional philosophy pervades every existant like an additional quality—can freely rule and choose.

The limits of this island of human freedom are traced out in the “extreme situations,” in which man experiences the limitations which immediately become the conditions of his freedom and the ground of his activity. Proceeding from them, he can “illuminate” his Existenz, trace out what he can and cannot do; and thereby from mere “Being as a result” pass to “Existenz”—which, in Jaspers, is only another, and more explicit, word for being a man.

Existenz itself is never essentially isolated; it exists only in communication and in the knowledge of the Existenz of others. One's fellow men are not (as in Heidegger) an element which, though structurally necessary, nevertheless destroys Existenz; but, on the contrary, Existenz can develop only in the togetherness of men in the common given world. In the concept of communication there lies



embedded, though not fully developed, a new concept of humanity as the condition for man's Existenz. In any case, men move together within this "surrounding" Being; and they hunt neither the phantom of the Self nor do they live in the arrogant illusion that they can be Being generally.

Through the essentially human movement of transcendence through thought, and of the failure of thought bound up with this, we at least arrive at the conclusion that Man, as "Master of his thoughts," not only is more than any of his thoughts (and this would probably be the fundamental condition for a new definition of human dignity), but that from the first man's nature is to be more than himself and to will more than himself. With this, Existenz philosophy has left the period of its egoism.