

EXISTENTIALISM

The various philosophies (dating from about 1930) that have been referred to by the term Existentialism have in common an interpretation of human existence in the world that stresses its concreteness and its problematic character.

NATURE OF EXISTENTIALIST THOUGHT AND MANNER

According to Existentialism: (1) Existence is always particular and individual—always my existence, your existence, his existence. (2) Existence is primarily the problem of existence (of its mode of being); it is, therefore, also the investigation of the meaning of Being. (3) This investigation is continually faced with diverse possibilities, from among which the existent (man) must make a selection, to which he must then commit himself. (4) Because these possibilities are constituted by man's relationships with things and with other men, existence is always a being-in-the-world—, in a concrete and historically determinate situation that limits or conditions choice. Man is therefore called *Dasein* ("there being") because he is defined by the fact that he exists, or is in the world and inhabits it. With respect to the first point, that existence is particular, Existentialism is opposed to any doctrine that views man as the manifestation of an absolute or of an infinite substance. It is thus opposed to most forms of Idealism, such as those that stress Consciousness, Spirit, Reason, Idea, or Oversoul. Secondly, it is opposed to any doctrine that sees in man some given and complete reality that must be resolved into its elements in order to be known or contemplated. It is thus opposed to any form of objectivism or scientism since these stress the crass reality of external fact. Thirdly, Existentialism is opposed to any form of necessitarianism; for existence is constituted by possibilities from among which man may choose and through which he can project himself. And, finally, with respect to the fourth point, Existentialism is opposed to any solipsism (holding that I alone exist) or any epistemological Idealism (holding that the objects of knowledge are mental), because existence, which is the relationship with other beings, always extends beyond itself, toward the being of these entities; it is, so to speak, transcendence.

Starting from these bases, Existentialism can take diverse and contrasting directions. It can insist on the transcendence of Being with respect to existence, and, by holding this transcendence to be the origin or foundation of existence, it can thus assume a theistic form. On the other hand, it can hold that human existence, posing itself as a problem, projects itself with absolute freedom, creating itself by itself, thus assuming to itself the function of God. As such, Existentialism presents itself as a radical atheism. Or it may insist on the finitude of human existence—, on the limits inherent in its possibilities of projection and choice. As such, Existentialism presents itself as a humanism.

From 1940 on, with the diffusion of Existentialism through continental Europe, its directions have developed in terms of the diversity of the interests to which they are subject: the religious interest, the metaphysical (or nature of Being) interest, the moral and political interest. This diversity of interests is rooted, at least in part, in the diversity of sources on which Existentialism has drawn. One such source has been the subjectivism of the 4th-5th-century theologian, St. Augustine, who exhorted man not to go outside

himself in the quest for truth, for it is within him that truth abides. "If you find that you are by nature mutable," he wrote, "transcend yourself." Another source has been the Dionysian Romanticism of Nietzsche, who exalted life in its most irrational and cruel features and made this exaltation the proper task of the "higher man," who exists beyond good and evil. Still another source has been the nihilism of Dostoyevsky, who, in his novels, presented man as continually defeated as a result of his choices and as continually placed by them before the insoluble enigma of himself. As a consequence of the diversity of these sources, Existentialist doctrines have focussed on several aspects of existence.

They have focussed, first, on the problematic character of the human situation, through which man is continually confronted with diverse possibilities or alternatives, among which he may choose and on the basis of which he can project his life.

Second, the doctrines have focussed on the phenomena of this situation and especially on those that are negative or baffling, such as the concern or preoccupation that dominates man because of the dependence of all his possibilities upon his relationships with things and with other men; the dread of death or of the failure of his projects; the "shipwreck" upon insurmountable "limit situations" (death, the struggle and suffering inherent in every form of life, the situation in which everyone daily finds himself); the guilt inherent in the limitation of choices and in the responsibilities that derive from making them; the boredom from the repetition of situations; the absurdity of man's dangling between the infinity of his aspirations and the finitude of his possibilities.

Third, the doctrines have focussed on the intersubjectivity that is inherent in existence and is understood either as a personal relationship between two individuals, I and thou, such that the thou may be another man or God, or as an impersonal relationship between the anonymous mass and the individual self deprived of any authentic communication with others.

Fourth, Existentialism focusses on ontology, on some doctrine of the general meaning of Being, which can be approached in any of a number of ways: through the analysis of the temporal structure of existence; through the etymologies of the most common words - on the supposition that in ordinary language Being itself is disclosed, at least partly (and thus is also hidden); through the rational clarification of existence by which it is possible to catch a glimpse, through ciphers or symbols, of the Being of the world, of the soul, and of God; through existential psychoanalysis that makes conscious the fundamental "project" in which existence consists; or, finally, through the analysis of the fundamental modality to which all the aspects of existence conform - , through the analysis of possibility.

There is, in the fifth place, the therapeutic value of existential analysis that permits, on the one hand, the liberating of human existence from the beguilements or debasements to which it is subject in daily life and, on the other, the directing of human existence toward its authenticity; toward a relationship that is well grounded on itself, and with other men, with the world, and with God.

The various forms of Existentialism may also be distinguished on the basis of language, which is an indication of the cultural traditions to which they belong and which often explains the differences in terminology among the various authors. The principal representatives of German Existentialism are Martin

Heidegger and Karl Jaspers; those of French personalistic Existentialism are Gabriel Marcel and Jean-Paul Sartre; that of French Phenomenology is Maurice Merleau-Ponty; that of Spanish Existentialism is José Ortega y Gasset; that of Russian Idealistic Existentialism is Nikolay Berdyayev (who, however, lived half of his adult life in France); and that of Italian Existentialism is Nicola Abbagnano. The linguistic differences, however, are not decisive for a determination of philosophical affinities. For example, Marcel and Sartre are farther apart than Heidegger and Sartre; and there is greater affinity between Abbagnano and Merleau-Ponty than between Merleau-Ponty and Marcel.

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF EXISTENTIALISM

Many of the theses that Existentialists defend or illustrate in their analyses are drawn from the wider philosophical tradition.

Precursors of Existentialism -

The problem of what man is in himself can be discerned in the Socratic imperative "know thyself," as well as in the work of Montaigne and Pascal a religious philosopher and mathematician Montaigne had said: "If my mind could gain a foothold, I would not write essays, I would make decisions; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial." And Pascal had insisted on the precarious position of man situated between Being and Nothingness: "We burn with the desire to find solid ground and an ultimate sure foundation whereon to build a tower reaching to the Infinite. But our whole groundwork cracks, and the earth opens to abysses."

The stance of the internal tribunal – of man's withdrawal into his own spiritual interior – which reappears in some Existentialists (in Marcel and Sartre, for example) already belonged, as earlier noted, to St. Augustine. In early 19th century French philosophy, it was defended by a reformed Idéologue. Marie Maine De Biran, who wrote: "Even from infancy I remember that I marvelled at the sense of my existence. I was already led by instinct to look within myself in order to know how it was possible that I could be alive and be myself". From then on, this posture inspired a considerable part of French philosophy.

The theme of the irreducibility of existence to reason, common to many Existentialists, was also defended by a leading German Idealist, F.W.J. von Schelling, as he argued against Hegel in the last phase of his philosophy, and Schelling's polemic, in turn, inspired the scholar usually cited as the father of Existentialism, the religious Dane Soren Kierkegaard.

The requirement to know man in his particularity and, therefore, in terms of a procedure different from those used by science to obtain knowledge of natural objects was confronted by Wilhelm Dilthey, an expounder of historical reason, who viewed "understanding" as the procedure and thus as the proper method of the human sciences. Understanding, according to Dilthey, consists in the reliving and reproducing of the experience of others. Hence it is also a feeling together with others and a sympathetic participation in their emotions. Understanding, therefore, accomplishes a unity between the knowing object and the object known.

The immediate background and founding fathers -

The theses of Existentialism found a particular relevance during World War II, when Europe found itself threatened alternately by material and spiritual destruction. Under those circumstances of uncertainty, the optimism of Romantic inspiration, by which the destiny of man is infallibly guaranteed by an infinite force (such as Reason, the Absolute, or Mind) and propelled by it toward an ineluctable progress, appeared to be untenable. Existentialism was moved to insist on the instability and the risk of all human reality, to acknowledge that man is "thrown into the world"- , abandoned to a determinism that could render his initiatives impossible and to hold that his very freedom is conditioned and hampered by limitations that could at any moment render it empty. The negative aspects of existence, such as pain, frustration, sickness, and death-which 19thcentury optimism refused to take seriously because they do not touch the infinite principle that these optimists believed to be manifest in man - become for Existentialism the essential features of human reality.

The thinkers who, by virtue of the negative character of their philosophy, constituted the exception to 19thcentury Romanticism thus became the acknowledged masters of the Existentialists. Against Hegelian necessitarianism, Kierkegaard interpreted existence in terms of possibility: dread - which dominates existence through and through - is "the sentiment of the possible." It is the feeling of what can happen to a man even when he has made all of his calculations and taken every precaution. Despair, on the other hand, discovers in possibility its only remedy, for "If man remains without possibilities, it is as if he lacked air." Karl Marx, in holding that man is constituted essentially by the "relationships of work and production" that tie him to things and other men, had insisted on the alienating character that these relationships assume in capitalistic society, where private property transforms man from an end to a means, from a person to the instrument of an impersonal process that subjugates him without regard for his needs and his desires. Nietzsche had viewed the *amor fati* ("love of fate") as the "formula for man's greatness." Freedom consists in desiring what is and what has been and in choosing it and loving it as if nothing better could be desired.

Emergence as a movement -

Contemporary Existentialism reproduces these ideas and combines them in more or less coherent ways. Human existence is, for all the forms of Existentialism, the projection of the future on the basis of the possibilities that constitute it. For some Existentialists (the Germans Heidegger and Jaspers, for example), the existential possibilities, in as much as they are rooted in the past, merely lead every project for the future back to the past, so that only what has already been chosen can be chosen (Nietzsche's *amor fati*). For others (such as Sartre), the possibilities that are offered to existential choice are infinite and equivalent, such that the choice between them is indifferent; and for still others (Abbagnano and Merleau-Ponty), the existential possibilities are limited by the situation, but they neither determine the choice nor render it indifferent. The issue is one of individuating, in every concrete situation and by means of a specific inquiry, the real possibilities offered to man. For all the Existentialists, however, the choice among possibilities - ,

the projection of existence-implies risks, renunciation, and limitation. Among the risks, the most serious is man's descent into inauthenticity or into alienation, his degradation from a person into a thing. Against this risk, for the theological forms of Existentialism (as in Gabriel Marcel, a Socratic dramatist; Karl Barth, a Swiss Neoorthodoxist; Rudolf Bultmann, a biblical interpreter), there is the guarantee of the transcendent help from God, which in its turn is guaranteed by faith.

Existentialism, consequently, by insisting on the individuality and non repeatability of existence (following Kierkegaard and Nietzsche), is sometimes led to regard one's coexistence with other people (held to be, however, an ineluctable fact of the human situation) as a condemnation or alienation of man Marcel has said that all that exists in society beyond the individual is "expressible by a minus sign," and Sartre has affirmed in his major work *L'Être et le néant* (1943) that "the Other is the hidden death of my possibilities." For the other forms of Existentialism, however, a coexistence that is not anonymous (as that of a mob) but is grounded on personal communication conditions man's authentic existence.

Existentialism has had ramifications in various areas of contemporary culture. In literature, Franz Kafka, author of haunting novels, walking in Kierkegaard's footsteps, described human existence as the quest for a stable, secure, and radiant reality that continually eludes it (*Das Schloss*, 1926); or he described it as threatened by a guilty verdict about which it knows neither the reason nor the circumstances but against which it can do nothing - a verdict that ends with death (*Der Prozess*, 1925).

The theses of contemporary Existentialism were then diffused and popularized by the novels and plays of Sartre, by the writings of the French novelists and dramatists Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. In *L'Homme révolté* (1951), Camus described the "metaphysical rebellion" as "the movement by which a man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation." In art, the analogues of Existentialism may be considered to be Surrealism, Expressionism, and in general those schools that view the work of art not as the reflection of a reality external to man but as the free immediate expression of human reality.

Existentialism made its entrance into psychopathology through Karl Jaspers' *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1913), which was inspired by the need to understand (in Dilthey's sense) the world in which the mental patient lives, by means of a sympathetic participation in his experience. Later, Ludwig Binswanger, a Swiss psychiatrist of the Daseinsanalyse school, in one of his celebrated works, *Über Ideenflucht* (1933), inspired by Heidegger's thought, viewed the origin of mental illness as a failure in the existential possibilities that constitute human existence (*Dasein*). From Jaspers and Binswanger, the Existentialist current became diffused and variously stated in contemporary psychiatry.

In theology, Barth's *Römerbrief* (1919) started the "Kierkegaard revival," the emblem of which was expressed by Barth himself; it is "the relation of this God with this man; the relation on this man with this God-this is the only theme of the Bible and of philosophy." Within the bounds of this current, on the one hand, there was an insistence upon the absolute transcendence of God with respect to man, who could place himself in relationship with God only by denying himself and by abandoning himself to a gratuitously granted faith. On the other hand, there was the requirement to demythologize the religious content of faith,

particularly of the Christian faith, in order to allow the message of the eschatological event (of salvation) to emerge from among the existential possibilities of man.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN EXISTENTIALISM

The methods that the Existentialists employ in their interpretations have a presupposition in common: the immediacy of the relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted, between the interrogator and the interrogated, between the problem of being and Being itself. The two terms coincide in existence; for the man who poses the question "What is Being?" cannot but pose it to himself and cannot respond without starting from his own being. This common ground notwithstanding, each Existentialist thinker has defended and worked out his own method for the interpretation of existence. Heidegger, an Existentialist with ontological (nature of Being) concerns, availed himself of the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, founder of Phenomenology, which, as logos of the phenomenon, employs speech that manifests or discloses what it is that one is speaking about and that is true - in the etymological use of the Greek word *aletheia* (the sense of uncovering or manifesting what was hidden). The phenomenon is, from Heidegger's point of view, not mere appearance, but the manifestation or disclosure of Being in itself. Phenomenology is thus capable of disclosing the structure of Being and hence is an ontology of which the point of departure is the being of the one who poses the question about Being, namely man.

Jaspers, an authority in psychopathology as well as in the philosophy of human existence, on the other hand, employed the method of the rational clarification of existence; he maintained that existence, as the quest for Being, is man's effort of rational self-understanding, or universalizing, of communicating - a method that presupposes that existence and reason are the two poles of man's being. Reason is possible existence; existence that, as Jaspers writes in his *Vernunft und Existenz* (1935) becomes "manifest to itself and as such real, if, with, through and by another existence, it arrives at itself." This activity, however, is never consummated; thus, when the impossibility of its achievement is recognized, it is changed into faith, into the recognition of transcendence as providing the only possibility of its final achievement.

According to Sartre, the foremost philosopher of mid-20th-century France, the method of philosophy is existential psychoanalysis; the analysis of the "fundamental project" in which man's existence consists. In contrast to Freudian psychoanalysis, which stops short at the irreducibility of the libido, or primitive psychic drive, existential psychoanalysis tries to determine the "original choice" through which man constructs his world and decides in a preliminary way upon particular choices (which, however, may place in crisis the primordial choice itself).

According to Marcel, a Christian Existentialist philosopher and dramatist, the method of philosophy depends upon a recognition of the mystery of Being (*Le Mystère de l'être* 1951), on the impossibility of discovering Being through objective or rational analyses or demonstrations. Philosophy should lead man up, however, to the point of making possible for him "the productive illumination of Revelation".

Finally, according to humanistic Existentialism, as represented by Abbagnano, the leading Italian Existentialist, and by Merleau-Ponty, a French Phenomenologist, the method of philosophy consists of the

analysis and the determination - by employing all available techniques including those of science - of the structures that constitute existence; of the relations that connect man with other beings and that figure, therefore, not only in the constitution of man but in the constitution of the other beings as well.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES IN EXISTENTIALISM

Fundamental concepts and contrasts -

Both the ontology and manner of human existence are of concern to Existentialism.

Ontic structure of human existence. The fundamental characteristic of Existentialist ontology is the primacy that that study of the nature of existence gives to the concept of possibility. This priority dominated the philosophy of Kierkegaard and also was amply utilized by Husserl, who had explicitly affirmed the ontological priority of possibility over reality. Possibility, however, is not understood by the Existentialists in the purely logical sense as absence of contradiction nor in the sense of traditional metaphysics as potentiality destined to become actuality but, rather, in the sense of ontic or objective possibility, which is the very structure of human existence; it is thus the specific modality of man's being.

Another way of expressing this thesis is the affirmation of Heidegger and Sartre that "existence precedes essence," which signifies that man does not have a nature that determines his modes of being and acting but that, rather, these modes are simply possibilities from which he may choose and on the basis of which he can project himself. In this sense, Heidegger has said that "*Dasein* is always its own possibility," and Sartre has written: "It is true that the possible is - so to speak - an option on being, and if it is true that the possible can come into the world only through a being which is its own possibility, this implies for human reality the necessity of being its being in the form of an option on its being."

As possibility, human existence is the anticipation, the expectation, the projection of the future. The future is its fundamental temporal dimension, to which the present and the past are subordinate and secondary; existence is always stretched out toward the future. As possibility, existence is also transcendence, being beyond, because all of its constitutive possibilities organize it beyond itself toward the other beings of the world and toward the world in its totality. To transcend thus means to move toward something that is not one's own existence; toward things and toward other men, with which man is related in every situation in which he finds himself.

Yet for some Existentialists, the being of these other entities has a modality that differs from the being of man's existence: their existence is not possible being but real or factual being. To existence, Heidegger contrasts the presence of the things in the world-a presence that assumes, as man takes notice of these things for his needs, the aspect of utilizability. But utilizability is not a simple quality of things; it is their very being. Analogously, Sartre distinguishes the for-itself - the mode of being of man's existence that he identifies, following Descartes and Husserl, with consciousness - from the in-itself, the being or reality of things that he identifies with their utilizability. According to Jaspers, over against the existence of the possible (man, *Dasein*) stands the world as the infinite horizon that encompasses within itself each possible existence and, therefore, cannot itself be encompassed by any one of them. This is a world that is a reality of

fact, at the origin of which there is a Being that is pure transcendence and that, therefore, never reveals itself.

Similarly, the religious forms of Existentialism insist on transcendence, considering it to be the property of the Being that is beyond the existential possibilities and that can enter among them solely under the form of mystery (Marcel) and of the extra temporal revelation of faith (Barth, Jaspers). Marcel, in this regard, has contrasted Being, which is a mystery, with having, which is the condition of man in the world; that is to say, man has objects before him that are foreign to his subjectivity. He tries to organize them and discover the bond that ties them together so as to control and use them.

In all of these doctrines, there is the dominating theme of the contrast between the modality proper to existence, which is possibility, and the modality proper to Being, which is reality or facticity. As a result of this contrast, existence (as possibility) appears as the nothingness of Being, as the negation of every reality of fact. In a brief but famous essay, *Was ist Metaphysik?* (1929), Heidegger affirmed that "Human existence cannot have a relationship with being unless it remains in the midst of nothingness." Rudolf Carnap, a semanticist and leading Logical Positivist, in an equally famous essay, *Oberwindung der Metaphysik durch die logische Analyse der Sprache* (1931), criticized this hypostatization (or making real) of Nothingness as one of the grosser fallacies of metaphysics. In truth, Nothingness is, for the Existentialists, possible existence, as the negation of the reality of fact. Sartre has written: "The possible is the something which the For-itself lacks in order to be itself"; it is what the subject lacks in order to be an object; thus it does not exist except as a lacking.

This is also true of value, which is such insofar as it does not exist. For even when value occurs or is perceived in certain acts, it lies beyond them and constitutes the limit or the goal toward which they aim. Analogously, knowledge, in which the object (the in-itself) presents itself to consciousness (the for-itself), is a relationship of nullification, because the object cannot be offered to consciousness except as that which is not consciousness. Furthermore, another existence is such insofar as it is not mine; thus this negation is "the constitutive structure of the being-of-others."

But this reduction of existence to Nothingness can lead in two directions: it can lead to insisting on the lack of meaning - , on the absurdity of existence and of every possible project - as it does in Sartre, in Camus, and in atheistic Existentialism; or it can lead toward the quest for a more direct relationship of existence with Being, beyond the constitutive possibilities of existence, so that Being reveals itself, at least partly, in existence-through language or through faith or through some mystical form of religiousness, as happens in the later phase of Heidegger's thought, in Jaspers, and in all of the forms of theological Existentialism.

Manner and style of human existence. Existentialism is never a solipsism in the proper sense of the term (that I alone exist), because every existential possibility relates man to things and to other men. Sometimes it is presented as humanism in the sense that it places human destiny in the hands of men themselves. But this version is rejected by all of the currents of the movement that, starting with Heidegger, insist on the priority and the initiative of Being with regard to human existence. The opposition between these two points of view depends on how the different Existentialists solve the problem of freedom.

Man always finds himself in a situation in which his constitutive possibilities are rooted. For Heidegger and Jaspers, this situation determines the choice that he makes among these possibilities; for Sartre, conversely, the situation is determined by the choice. Existentialism fluctuates in this way between the concept of a destiny in which, like Nietzsche's *amor fati*, man accepts what has already been chosen and the concept of a radical freedom whereby the choices are offered to man in an absolute indifference. From the first point of view, every project of life falls back on or is reduced to the situation from which it starts; thus the possibility of being, of acting, of willing, of choosing is really, as Jaspers points out in his *Philosophie* (1932), the impossibility of being, acting, willing, and choosing in a manner different from the way things are; from the factual conditions of the situation. From the second point of view, the fundamental project, which is the primordial choice, has no conditions; as Sartre says: "Since I am free, I project my total possible, but I thereby posit that I am free and that I can always nihilate this first project and make it past." From the first, or deterministic, point of view, the past determines the future and assimilates it to itself; from the second, or libertarian, point of view, the meaning of the past depends upon the present project. In the latter instance, freedom is a kind of damnation: as Sartre affirms: "We said that freedom is not free not to be free and that it is not free not to exist."

A choice, however, is offered to man even from the destinarian point of view: that between understanding and not understanding one's own nothingness. According to Heidegger, a man achieves what he calls "authentic existence" when he understands the impossibility of all of the possibilities of existence - the impossibility of which the sign or term is death. Jaspers affirms, in his turn, that the only choice offered to man is that between accepting or rejecting the situation with which he is identified. The rejection of it, however, is a betrayal that plunges him back into the situation itself.

Existentialist ontology thus fluctuates between Being and Nothingness and concludes by regarding Nothingness as the only possible revelation of Being. In the atheistic version, it is man, as Sartre affirms, who "strives to be God" and consumes himself vainly in the effort. In the cosmological or theological version, it is Being that intervenes, in a way that is more or less mysterious or hidden, to redeem man from Nothingness.

Problems of Existentialist philosophy -

The key problems for Existentialism are those of man himself, of his situation in the world, and of his more ultimate significance.

Man and human relationships. Existentialist anthropology is strictly connected with its ontology. The traditional distinction between soul and body is completely eliminated; thus the body is a lived-through experience that is an integral part of man's existence in its relationship with the world. According to Sartre, "In each project of the for-itself, in each perception the body is there; it is the immediate Past in so far as it still touches on the Present which flees it. "As such, however, the body is not reduced to a datum of consciousness, to subjective representation. Consciousness, according to Sartre, is constant openness toward the world, a transcendent relationship with other beings and thereby with the in-itself. Consciousness is existence itself, or, as Jaspers says, it is "the manifestation of being." In order to avoid any subjectivistic

equivocation, Heidegger went so far as to renounce the use of the term consciousness, preferring the term *Dasein*, which is more appropriate for designating human reality in its totality. For the same reasons, the traditional opposition between subject and object, or between the self and the nonself, loses all sense. *Dasein* is always particular and individual. It is always a self; but it is also always a project of the world that includes the self, determining or conditioning its modes of being.

All of these modes of being thus arise, as Heidegger shows in his masterpiece *Sein und Zeit* (1927), from the relationship between the self and the world. Heidegger has regarded concern (in the Latin sense of the term) to be the fundamental aspect of this relationship, insofar as it is man's concern to obtain the things that are necessary for him and even to transform them with his work as well as to exchange them so as to make them more suitable to his needs. Concern demonstrates that man is "thrown into the world," into the midst of other beings, so that in order to project himself he must exist among them and utilize them. Being thrown means, for man, being abandoned to the whirling flow of things in the world and to their determinism.

This happens inevitably, according to Heidegger, in inauthentic existence - day-to-day - and anonymous existence in which all behaviour is reduced to the same level, made "official," conventional, and insignificant. Chatter, idle curiosity, and equivocation are the characteristics of this existence, in which "One says this" and "One does that" reign undisputed. Anonymous existence amounts to a simple "being together" with others, not a true coexistence, which is obtained only through the acceptance of a common destiny (see below).

All of the Existentialists are in agreement on the difficulty of communication; of well-grounded intersubjective relationships. Jaspers has perhaps been the one to insist most on the relationship between truth and communication. Truths are and can be different from existence. But if fanaticism and dogmatism (which absolutize an historical truth) are avoided on the one hand while relativism and skepticism (which affirm the equivalence of all truths) are avoided on the other, then the only other way is a constant confrontation between the different truths through an always more extended and deepened intersubjective communication.

Sartre, however, denies that there is authentic communication. According to him, consciousness is not only the nullification of things but also the nullification of the other person as other. To look at another person is to make of him a thing. This is the profound meaning of the myth of Medusa. Sexuality itself, which Sartre holds to be an essential aspect of existence, fluctuates between sadism and masochism, in which either the other person or one self is merely a thing. On this basis, the intersubjective relationship is obviously impossible.

The human situation in the world. Heidegger has pointed to the foundation of the intersubjective relationship in dread. When a man decides to escape from the banality of anonymous existence - which hides the nothingness of existence, or the nonreality of its possibilities, behind the mask of daily concerns - his understanding of this nothingness leads him to choose the only unconditioned and insurmountable possibility that belongs to him: death. The possibility of death, unlike the possibilities that relate him to other things and

to other men, isolates him. It is a certain possibility, not through its apodictic evidence but because it continuously weighs upon existence. To understand this possibility means to decide for it, to acknowledge "the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all" and to live for death. The emotive tonality that accompanies this understanding is dread, through which man feels himself to be "face to face with the 'nothing' of the possible impossibility of (his) existence."

But neither the understanding of death nor its emotive accompaniment opens up a specific task for man, a way to transform his own situation in the World. They enable him only to perceive the common destiny to which all men are subject; and they offer to him, therefore, the possibility of remaining faithful to this destiny and of freely accepting the necessity that all men share in common. In this fidelity consists the historicity of existence, which is the repetition of tradition, the return to the possibilities from which existence had earlier been constituted, the wanting for the future what has been in the past. And in this historicity participate not only man but all of the things of the world, in their utilizability and instrumentality, and even the totality of Nature as the locus of history.

Dread, therefore, is not fear in the face of a specific danger. It is rather the emotive understanding of the nullity of the possible, or, as Jaspers says, of the possibility of Nothingness. It has, therefore, a therapeutic function in that it leads human existence to its authenticity. From the fall into factuality into which every project plunges him, man can save himself only by projecting not to project; either by abandoning himself decisively to the situation in which he finds himself or by being indifferent to any possible project - with regard to which Sartre says, "Thus it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations."

The pivotal point of that conclusion - the conclusion most widely held among the Existentialists and the one in fact often identified with Existentialism - is the antithesis between possibility and reality. On the one hand, existence is interpreted in terms of possibilities that are not purely logical possibilities or manifestations of a man's ignorance of what exists but are, rather, effective, or ontic, possibilities that constitute man as such; on the other hand, contrasted to possibilities in this sense is a reality, for - itself, a World, a transcendence that is a factual presence, insurmountable and oppressive, with respect to which possibility is a pure Nothingness. The contradiction to which this antithesis leads becomes clear when the same reality is interpreted in terms of Possibility: when the being of things, for example, is reduced to their possibility of being utilized; when the being of other men is reduced to the possibility of anonymous or personal relationships that the individual can have with them; and when the being of transcendence, or of God, is reduced to the possibility of the relationship, although ineffable and mysterious, between transcendence, or God, and man.

It has been said that a coherent Existentialism should avoid the constant mortal leap between Being and Nothingness; should not confuse the problematic character of existence with the fall into factuality; should not confuse the finitude of possibilities with resignation to the situation, choice with determinism; freedom conditioned by the limits of the situation with the acknowledgment of the omnipresent necessity of the Whole. In this inquiry, it is held,

Existentialism could well benefit from a more attentive consideration of science, which it has viewed until now only as a preparatory, imperfect, and objectifying knowledge in comparison with the authentic understanding of Being, which it considers to be a more fundamental mode of the being of man in the world. Science, it is submitted, offers today the example of an extensive and coherent use of the concept of the possible in the key notions that it employs, especially in those branches that are interdisciplinary - among them such notions as indeterminacy, chance, probability, field, model, project, structure, and conditionality. Some steps in this direction have been taken by Abbagnano and by Merleau-Ponty. According to the latter, considerations of probability are rooted in the being of man, inasmuch as he is situated in the world and invested with the ambiguity of his events. Merleau-Ponty has written in his *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945): "Our freedom does not destroy our situation, but is engaged with it. The situation in which we live is open. This implies both that it appeals to modes of privileged resolution and that it is of itself powerless to obtain one of them". From this point of view, there is always a certain freedom in situations, although its degree varies from situation to situation.

Significance of Being and transcendence. Among the thinkers most frequently mentioned here, the concept of the necessity of Being prevails as the basis of their metaphysical or theological orientations. Heidegger has come more and more to insist on the massive presence of Being in the face of human existence, by attributing to Being all initiative and to man only the possibility of abandoning himself to Being and to the things that are the modes of the language of Being. For Heidegger, Being is interpreted better through the etymology of those words that designate the most common things of daily life than through the analysis of existential possibilities. Jaspers has seen the revelation of transcendence in ciphers - i.e., in persons, doctrines, or poems - all of which can be interpreted as symbols of existential situations and above all of limit situations, the insurmountability of which, in provoking the total "shipwreck" of human possibilities, makes man feel the presence of absolute transcendence. In a less philosophically elaborate form, Being has been understood as mystery by Marcel; as the perfect actuality that guarantees the existential possibilities by Louis Lavelle, a leader of the French "philosophie de l'esprit"; and as the absolute value that man encounters in his own spiritual intimacy by René Le Senne, also of "the philosophie de l'esprit".

Problems of Existentialist theology -

Existentialism has a theological dimension. Though Heidegger rejects the label of atheist, he also denies to the Being of which he speaks the essential qualifications of divinity, inasmuch as it is not the ultimate cause and the Good. But Jaspers, in his last writings, emphasized more and more the religious character of faith in transcendence. Faith is the way to withdraw from the world and to resume contact with the Being that is beyond the world. Faith is life itself, in that it returns to the encompassing Whole and allows itself to be guided and fulfilled by it. Jaspers has even developed a theology of history. He speaks of an axial age, which he places between the 8th and 2nd centuries before Christ, the age in which

the great religions and the great philosophers of the Orient arose - Confucius and Lao-tzu, the Upanishads, Buddha, Zoroaster, the great prophets of Israel - and in Greece the age of Homer and of classical philosophy as well as Thucydides and Archimedes. In this age, for the first time, man became aware of Being in general, of himself, and of his limits. The age in which man now lives, that of science and technology, is perhaps the beginning of a new axial age that is the authentic destiny of man but a destiny that is far off and unimaginable.

For Bultmann the theologian of the demythologization of Christianity, inauthentic existence is tied to the past, to fact, to the world, while authentic existence is open to the future, to the nonfact, to the nonworld; *i.e.*, to the end of the and to God. Thus, authentic existence is not the self-projection of man in the world but, rather, the self-projection of man in the love of and obedience to God. But this self-projection is no longer the work of human freedom; it is the saving event that enters miraculously through faith into the future possibilities of man. In these theological speculations and in others that are comparable, the common presupposition of the Existentialists is recognized *i.e.*, the gap between human existence and Being. There is either an acknowledgment of that gap, with existence assuming the role of the demonic (the alternative that Sartre and others have all illustrated above all in their literary works), or an acknowledgment of the hidden participation of human existence in Being through a gratuitous initiative on the part of Being.

Kierkegaard had earlier distinguished three stages of existence between which there is neither development nor continuity but gaps and jumps: the aesthetic stage is the one in which one lives for the pleasure of the moment; the ethical stage is the one based on the stability and continuity of life in work and in matrimony; and the religious stage is the one characterized by faith, which is always a "dreadful certainty"- *i.e.*, a dread that becomes certain of a hidden relationship with God.

The ethical and religious stages correspond roughly to what Heidegger and Jaspers call, respectively, the inauthenticity and the authenticity of existence. Art is not as a rule recognized by contemporary Existentialists as an autonomous stage; it is almost always for them an essential manifestation of existence itself. For Jaspers, it is a mode of reading in nature, in history, and in men the cipher of transcendence; *i.e.*, the negative symbol in which transcendence is revealed. According to Camus, it is an aspect of man's revolt against the world. The artist tries to remake the sketch of the world that is before him and to give it the style-that is to say, the coherence and unity-that it lacks. For this purpose, he selects the elements of the world and freely combines them in order to create a value that escapes man continuously but that the artist perceives and tries to salvage from the flux of history.

From this point of view, art would be a way of reshaping the world beyond its factual forms, in order that it might show their negative and troublesome characteristics. The directions of contemporary art that have deliberately forsaken the imitation of reality find their justification in this point of view.

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL PROJECTIONS OF EXISTENTIALISM

The metaphysical or theological dimension of Existentialism does not leave man with nothing to do. Once

the nullity of the existential possibilities is recognized, man cannot but resign himself to Being, which, in one of its new manifestations in the world or beyond it, conducts him to a new epoch. Even someone like José Ortega y Gasset, the leading Spanish Existentialist and writer, who, in examining the social aspects of existence, has characterized the present epoch by the advent of the masses and the socialization of man, has halted at the recognition of the crisis and the total uncertainty that dominates the future of man (*La Rebelion de las masas*, 1929).

On the other hand, humanistic Existentialism has recognized the positive and the to some-degree determining function that man may have in history. It has insisted, as in Merleau-Ponty, on man's duty to assume the responsibility of an effective action for the transformation of society and, in general, of the world that he inhabits.

Along this line of assuming responsibility, Existentialism has moved toward Marxism, with which it shares the diagnoses of existence as the primordial and in eradicable relationship of man with nature and with society. In the *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960), Sartre attempted a synthesis between Existentialism and Marxism by modifying the notion of "project" that he defended in *L'Être et le néant* and by utilizing the notion of dialectic as understood by Marx. The project of which existence consists is not the result of an arbitrary choice (as Sartre had previously maintained); it is, instead, that of a conditioning by the objective possibilities that Sartre identifies (as does Marx) with "the material conditions of existence." The project remains, however, that of the particular individual of a unique consciousness - but of a consciousness that tries to become totalized; i.e., to enter into relationship with others so as to constitute, with others, human groups that are more and more comprehensive. In this manner it tends toward a complete and definitive totalization without appeals. Dialectical reason would be precisely such a process of growing totalization; and it becomes, moreover, the true protagonist of history and becomes that with which the interior freedom of any individuals who participate in history is identified.

From the defense of the freedom of the individual, Sartre has thus moved to the defense of the absolute dialectical necessity of history despite its being interiorized and lived by individuals. An historical project of human life that tries to remove the characteristics of inauthenticity or of alienation from existence - a project that may bring Existentialism and Marxism dose together - thus ends by losing, in this form, its risky and problematic character and the awareness of the conditions and the modalities of its realization. These features are also lost in the "transcendental project" of a new society elaborated by one of the leaders of the New Left, the German-born American Herbert Marcuse. While insisting on the requirement that the "transcendental project" be "in accord with the real possibilities open at the attained level of the material and intellectual culture," Marcuse entrusts its realization to an impersonal and contemplative Reason, which cannot but invite the "great refusal" of contemporary society.

Having developed in different and contrasting directions, Existentialism has furnished philosophy and the whole of contemporary culture with conceptual tools, of which the nature and techniques of employment have still not been clarified as, for example, terms like "problematicity," "chance," "condition," "choice," "freedom," and "project." Although these tools can be employed usefully for the interpretation of

existence - *i.e.*, to orient philosophical inquiry in the fields of epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, education, and politics - it is nonetheless indispensable that the pivot on which they turn, "possibility," be granted its own ontological status that does not reduce it either to Nothingness or to Being. It is indispensable, moreover, that a positive datum be perceived in possibility, a datum that is verifiable with appropriate techniques and that, while not offering infallible guarantees, allows man to project and to act in the world with calculated risks and with a prudent trust.

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