

NOTES ON SOME TRENDS OF  
CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

About 1910 it became customary to call Bergsonism and all related tendencies 'new philosophy'. This term was designed not only to contrast an apparently revolutionary idea with the classical intellectualism of the Franco-German academic tradition and with the platitudes of a philosophy that affirmed and believed itself to be inspired by positive science; the concept of 'new philosophy' was meant, above all, to imply that, starting with Bergson, philosophy intended to change its position in regard to human experience. No longer an *explanation from afar* of the world and of consciousness, philosophy professed to be henceforth *one* with this experience; not satisfied to shed light on man and his life, it aspired to *become this life*, now at the stage of complete self-awareness. It seemed that this ambition constrained the philosopher to renounce philosophy's ideal—to be an exact science—since this ideal is not only inseparable from the idea of an impartial and detached spectator, but also from that of a reality so constituted as to be an object of pure vision. On the other hand, however, to abandon this ideal proved less acceptable than ever. The startling progress of positive science gave birth, or rather rebirth, to the illusion of a total explanation: how then could one admit that philosophy would

triumph over its secular uncertainties by drawing away from this brilliant example? The relative failure of Bergsonism is possibly due precisely to the fact that it never was willing to make any clear statement of choice in this matter.

It is true that—to limit our study to the nineteenth century—Bergson's ambition was not as 'new' as it seemed to his contemporaries. In altogether different perspectives, Hegel and Marx, even Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, attempted to realise the idea of it. For the identity of experience and its explanation were Hegel's great discovery, the very essence of Hegelian thought. However, Hegel refused to describe this identity as being itself merely a factual datum; implicitly real, it is also always to be realised explicitly. His dialectical and evolutionist conception of mind-experience allowed him—but at a very high price—to rise above the difficulty we have just mentioned: if man's and mankind's experience are identical with the explanation the philosopher supplies of them; if, inversely, the philosopher's thought is inseparable and, in a sense, indistinguishable from experience, this reciprocity, always virtual, is nevertheless clear in itself (*for itself*) only in absolute knowledge. Philosophy therefore does not cease to be a science; it is indeed the *only* science. Sciences, according to the usual meaning of the word, seem to speak of objects and of things that are not themselves (as the chemist is not his chemistry, as chemistry is a discourse *about* the bodies it studies) only because they are incomplete and do not reveal all their implications. Given *absolute* clarification, they will fuse with the perfect explanation of the Spirit, which is also the absolute presence of the Spirit before itself, therefore, the identity of experience and knowledge, absolute knowledge, philosophy. Philosophy is absolute science precisely because it provides a form of knowledge which suppresses the distance between itself and the object, *is* itself its object. The very opposite is true in the light of the difficulty we suggested. The identity of philosophy and of experience seems to bar us from speaking of a philosophical *science*, because this identity suppresses the distance from the object and because, in modern times, distance from the object has been thought of as the very essence of science; yet Hegel teaches us that any science distant from its object is a pseudo-science, a science still at odds with itself, which does not accomplish its purpose nor become what it claims to be except by triumphing over this distance. *True* knowledge refuses to distinguish between expression and content; that this distinction continues to exist in fact merely shows that we do not *fully* and *truly* know.

We are familiar with Kierkegaard's objections to this concept. We can say (I dare not write, we *must* say) that the Hegelian position is only tenable if we agree to a definition of man as a being *simply* on the way to universalisation. It is obvious that by identifying philosophy with human experience viewed in its totality, we try to force a different meaning on the term 'experience' as generally used; since, plainly, this identification does not apply to what we spontaneously call *our* experience. The change that the Hegelian concept demands consists in renouncing the individual. Unity of philosophy and experience is inseparable from the advent of universal man. According to Hegel, movement toward this advent constitutes the only possible meaning of history; its realisation therefore coincides with the end of history. But what is the exact meaning of these theses? Should we interpret the Hegelian universal in Kierkegaard's way, as a reduction to an impersonal reason, and therefore join the Danish philosopher in rejecting this universal? The renunciation of the individual, is it a victory over the chaotic dispersal of sensitivity or does it mean a complete denial of man's personal destiny? Perhaps Hegel was misunderstood on these questions; we can have no doubts, however, about the manner in which his successors understood him. Total renunciation of the individual, which was considered the principal fruit of his doctrine, for long discredited it, and this was aggravated by a complete misunderstanding of Hegel's philosophy of nature, which nineteenth-century science seemed to ruin irretrievably.

Considered as distinct from the realisation that Hegel attempted to give it, his ideal of the unity of philosophy and experience overcame this first defeat and lived on in the minds of certain thinkers. It was reborn in an entirely new form in the philosophy of Marx, and turned up, again in different form, in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. But these attempts, so unlike one another that it may be surprising to see them mentioned together, must also be considered as relative failures, and for reasons entirely different from those we pointed out in the case of Hegel. We want to indicate this briefly before going on to show how, in our view, contemporary philosophy, considered in its most original aspect, takes up the same problem with perhaps better luck.

We are familiar with the famous thesis that sums up the essential aim of Marx's effort: we must destroy philosophy before trying to realise it. Let us say that a thought of and by itself is merely an intellectual alibi and a more or less hypocritical way of accepting things as they are—even of making them worse, since the apathy of 'philosophers' in regard to the

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real trend of the world would invariably be interpreted, by those who want to impede the evolution of its course, as a confession of impotence, as an invitation to resignation or even a proof of the excellence of the established state of affairs. However, if we are to believe its verbal claims, philosophy's ambition and aim is the liberation of man. There is thus an ever widening chasm, or an irreconcilable contradiction between the concept philosophy has of itself and its effective reality. Philosophy claims that it works for the emancipation of men by reason but teaches that it is perhaps reasonable to accept slavery, however camouflaged by the 'absolute' freedom of the prisoner, ever capable of denying his chains in his innermost consciousness and of believing himself sovereign. The original meaning of Marx's doctrine is to establish a conception of reason that reconciles it with actual and total reality. Authentic reason can transform reality because it is always deeply inspired by it. Once again, philosophy—insofar as it promotes this transforming and revolutionary reason—becomes indistinguishable from experience. What Marx essentially denies, just as does Hegel, is the idea of a reflexion that creates a distance between itself and what it reflects, the idea of a reflexion that could not be merged absolutely in what the classics would call its 'object'. Yet the final and complete ontological reciprocity of existence and thought will no longer be defined as *absolute knowledge* but as *integral humanism*. And this is logical in a metaphysics (if I may use this word in connexion with this author) which no longer agrees that existence should have as its end self-awareness, but, more realistically, believes that the real carries its meaning within itself—even if this meaning is in a state of becoming and must be brought to its full flowering (and that is why we are dealing here with an evolutionist realism). The meaning of things and of man does not at all depend upon our awareness of them, yet this awareness can help bring it to fruition as well as postpone its advent.

Does subjectivity receive its due in this philosophy? There is good reason to fear it does not, and we must admit that the development of the doctrine—to say nothing of the rest—has not done anything to alleviate this fear. On this matter it would seem, as we shall see, that a certain contemporary Marxist concept can help to clarify the question by demonstrating how integration of the dialectical relationship between the subject and the object with total reality, how, indeed, the identification of this relationship with total reality, opens up, or rather fosters, an authentic possibility of development and of personal destiny.

The dangers that threaten Kierkegaard's effort are necessarily of quite

different kind, since it is inspired by an open reaction against Hegelian tradition. However, the idea of identifying philosophy and experience is, at least in regard to certain aspects of his work, as active in Kierkegaard as in Hegel or Marx. There is a shade of difference in Kierkegaard's direct conception of authentic human experience as being, either positively or negatively, an experience of *salvation*. In a certain sense we find the same tendency in Marx: history progresses, through the transformation and domination of nature, toward universal recognition of mankind, which coincides with the advent of humanism. But we can readily see that these affirmations imply a restrictive definition—implicit or explicit—of experience. They imply that we should ignore as *insignificant* or *mistaken* more or less extensive areas of what an uninformed conception would classify as history or experience. Hence the distrust and contempt of certain Marxists (who went further than Marx himself) for 'super-structures' or 'sentimental effusions'. Hence, on the other hand, Kierkegaard's impressive silence in regard to the totality of realities designated by our contemporaries under the general title of 'being-in-the-world', whether it pertain to the individual being-in-the-world, or, less easy to isolate, the inter-subjective being-in-the-world. From this point of view the Hegelian position has a great initial advantage: identifying human destiny with the *knowledge* of this destiny, it is not *a priori* condemned to drop anything away, to distinguish between the authentic and the unauthentic, between important reality and 'unreal' reality. Yet it is true that analogous difficulties crop up again, as we have already seen, as soon as the problem of the constitution of this absolute knowledge arises, as well as that of the subject (of the mind) which will be invested with it.

Kierkegaard resolves these difficulties by volatilising them, if one can put it that way. Denying the system, he does not have to worry about making the exterior and the interior coincide. From the very first the interior is the only 'reality' for him. Never was a philosophical doctrine (if we can apply such a term to this 'Socratic' author) more determined to rest the anteriority of the subject entirely upon itself. Never was the idea of man's incarnation—although very poorly handled by pre-Hegelian classical philosophy—so superbly neglected. Doubtless it might surprise us to hear Kierkegaardian thought described as a radical 'interiorism' since Kierkegaard also links the subjectivity to the Other, absolute in itself. *To be* subject, according to him, is to refer to the Transcendent and to refer to it sinfully. For I can be *me*, *make myself me*, only by a will for separation, or a split with God, which is just what is wrong. There is really no

prereligious existence. There is no *me* in animality, which is torpor of the flesh; there is no *me* in aesthetic existence, which is immersion and dispersion in a momentary immediate (not to be confused with the instant); there is no *me* in ethical existence, which is conformity with the universal of the law. The *I* arises when it wills *itself*, that is, when it directs and assumes its solitude against every other, and hence, first of all, against the Other from which it springs. To be oneself is to choose against God. Strictly speaking it would be impossible to choose *for* God, because an option such as this, unless it arose from an affirmed and conscious selfhood, would not deserve to be called a choice. Thus a fundamental paradox arises; man discovers God by discovering *himself*, but he can only discover Him by defying Him, by sinning. This paradox can only be surmounted by the greater paradox of Faith. Faith saves us from reason, and in a sense, from ourselves.

We have recalled the Kierkegaardian theses solely in order to address ourselves to that part of them which is of interest from our point of view. Apparently certain of them contradict what we have said above. In founding subjectivity on relationship to the Transcendent, Kierkegaard seems to separate this subjectivity from itself and to re-establish this 'intentionality', this constitutive reference of the *me* to the other for which the most vital contemporary philosophy contends so incisively. But this is perhaps only an illusion. Above all, the meaning of the doctrine of intentionality is to avow and proclaim the incarnation of consciousness. The dialogue is not only a category of inter-subjectivity, it is installed in us, it is us. This is why the notion of behaviour more and more replaces that of consciousness. Rather than to divide man between an interiority in which he would lock himself as in a fortress, depending only on himself, and an exteriority where he is constantly constrained to appear, to act, to be with others, to concretise himself without ever feeling at home and himself; rather than to define man *simultaneously* as a prince and as an exile, it would be better to admit that our most intimate reality is neither merely an outside, nor merely an inside, that, to improve on Montaigne's phrase, there is no 'library' whence we might completely exclude our wife, our children, our friends and the world, or rather, that such a library has walls covered with books that speak of them, and without which there would be nothing; not even 'that secret savour that we get only from ourselves'. To exist, for man, is necessarily even though inadvertently, to reveal and to lead to fruition the meaning of things, and by this behaviour, revelatory at every moment, he establishes the sense of

his own life. Now this behaviour is only in part, and in accordance with a possibly subordinate modality, *thought about things*. First of all it is cohabitation, pattern, exchange, language. The nineteenth-century philosophical explanations of language demonstrate with blinding evidence the weakness of the dualism that contrasts in us pure consciousness with body-object. It has been said: they all consist, beyond their quarrels, in making of language a process in the third person without a subject that speaks. On the one hand language is an unfolding of mechanical and physiological phenomena, linked to the brain's tracks and proceeding by association (we do not know, in the end, whether this notion belongs to physics or psychology), but this concept ends by denying language as a manifestation of a subject at grips with the world and others, becoming itself in this work of expressing itself and the other; on the other hand, language is a totality of arbitrary signs, which themselves are physical or physiological, whose function is to *translate* externally a system of concepts, theoretically identical in every subject, not at all affected by this translation which it could easily dispense with if men were not plural, enclosed within themselves and obliged to communicate their thoughts to each other. The need to speak is therefore without relationship to the substance of what is said, to the being who speaks. The subject is never 'merged' in its language, and the dialogue is a simple exchange of thoughts that words transmit without penetrating, as you pay or contract a debt by a transmission of bank notes, coins, or instruments of credit whose individual reality is of no concern to the substance of the transaction. But how then are we to understand the true nature of language, which is to bring about, to incarnate, our encounter with things, and to make it exist by the intervention of a cultural world, already extant, that offers itself to us so that we may take it up and enrich it?

This isolated and schematic example, that could be extended to all clearly human phenomena, shows the impossibility of interpreting the 'subject' by its interiority alone and the necessity for a philosophy of *intentional* consciousness.

On this question Kierkegaard's failure is flagrant. The relationship to Transcendence, to which he reduces the being of selfhood, does not extend through others, borrows nothing from the effort and the community of men, is not rooted, not sustained in a body that makes us a participant in the world, and therefore cannot, Kierkegaard never tires of repeating, acquiesce to any form of communication. And so we must ask ourselves if it truly wrests man from his solitude, if it is not merely a fiction of

subjectivity, born of the frustration of an impossible desire. We must ask ourselves above all whether this plumbing the depths of self, which in Kierkegaard's thinking represents all *true* wisdom and philosophy, is not in reality an adulteration and impoverishment of experience, and even, and this is a question that must be raised, under the guise of an exaltation of religious existence, its negation.

The difficulties Nietzsche's philosophy has to face are not basically so very different. There is no doubt that Nietzsche acknowledged identification of experience and of thought or philosophy as the ultimate and decisive meaning of his work. It is the absence of this intention that he denounces in his diatribes against the philosophies of professors who want to 'understand' the world and human nature in such a way as to impose a 'truth' that deprives the individual and authentic existence of any hope. These criticisms are less important than the 'authentic' concept of man and of philosophy which they disclose. The secret weakness of this philosophy resides in the constant and insurmountable ambiguities of Nietzschean naturalism, which moves from a conception of man as a being given in nature and part of nature to a description of this same being as source and author of his own 'value', or inversely.

As a moralist, Nietzsche believes that man sterilises himself—and that men level each other down—if he takes a transcendent, suprasensible value as the norm of his life and acts, a value not itself established by those acts and without roots in this terrestrial world, the only one accessible to our experience. Denial of the 'other world' is therefore supposed to place in our hands the means of making ourselves masters of our own life. The elimination of Platonism (from which Nietzsche does not distinguish Christianity) in the realm of moral philosophy as well as in that of speculative philosophy must bring us back to our true homeland from which Christianity, out of resentment, has exiled us. But what is this *true* homeland and how is value defined in it? It is here that the Nietzschean position reverses itself and where this derider of speculative truth very unfortunately makes himself its prisoner. Value, he tells us, is that which encourages the flowering of life, toward which every being yearns as toward his own fulfillment, that which permits him to attain his greatest development. A tremendous urge toward self-affirmation agitates and traverses all nature, to culminate in full awareness of itself in the existence of man, in the existence of superior men to whom everything must be subjected, that this urge may be freed and realised. But the notion of this continuity is merely borrowed from a form of knowledge, positive



science, which, rightly, returns man to a natural given totality (it matters little that this totality might be in a state of becoming) in regard to which any idea of value, understood in the sense of norm and of duty, remains a simple non-sense. A philosophy that claims to be founded on the experience that man has of himself and to contribute an integral explanation of this experience must absolutely forego any point of view from which man is seen from the exterior (as we would look at insects or the vegetable kingdom), and in particular any consideration of the human being as a biological reality. Because the ambiguity consists in the very thought that the experience we have of ourselves as carnal existence can become the object of biological science, and thus, that all we have to do is to refer to the latter to understand the former. Any philosophy that wants to provide an explanation of experience lived (we do not say, of simply subjective and interior experience) must, in the first place, explain itself in regard to its relationship with positive science. Because positive science is not an intemporal reality, a kind of absolute code of truth to which it would be possible to refer everywhere and always, *without the possibility and the legitimacy of this reference ever being questioned*. Science is the work of man, like philosophy and art but in a different manner than these. It is constituted by man only insofar as he accedes to a point of view methodically determined in function of ideals, necessities, actions which are in no way those of spontaneous and unforeseen experience. It is very important to remark here that if accession to this point of view itself defines the human subject as 'knowledgeable' or 'author of science', it presupposes a reform of spontaneous experience *from which point* it establishes itself and of which it gives a certain kind of explanation, *on a certain level and with certain perspectives (and not on all levels and according to all possible perspectives)*. Consequently, one is never justified in interpreting this spontaneous experience—which, however, the philosopher *must* discuss since it is at the basis of everything and since without it there would be nothing for the scholar, the artist or, for that matter, the man of action to say or do—in terms of scientific knowledge, and even less, in incorporating into it elements or 'realities' which spring from this knowledge. Concretely, there is a world of experience where the sun rises and sets. This world exists and has a meaning; it is also the world upon which we must inevitably lean on all occasions, even if we decide to devote our life to astronomy (an expression which is merely metaphorical since the astronomer continues to live in himself with us, no matter what he thinks as an astronomer). Therefore it is senseless and impertinent to declare that this world is *false*

and *illusory* in the name of astronomy, which, speaking of its own world, teaches the rotation of the earth around the sun. If the astronomer allows himself to make such an affirmation and begins to deny the reality of the spontaneous world, he contradicts himself, because the effort that he makes in trying to convince us—you and me who understand nothing of astronomy but encounter the astronomer on the street and buy his books—unfolds in the spontaneous world and only has meaning if this reality, which he professes to deny, is assumed. In other words, manuals of geology explain mountains, rivers, and forests, describe their formation—but, in the last analysis, I can only know what the author is telling me *about* if, *first, like him and with him*, we have agreed on calling mountain, river, forest that which we find by going to the ‘country’ or ‘to the mountains’. Doubtless this way of thinking also has its problems, and it is not so easy to understand what dimension of ontological explanation it continues to reserve for positive science, nor to indicate in just what manner—in any case limited—it can admit seeing the scientific world reverberating in turn on the world of spontaneous experience. For the moment we are satisfied merely to show that the simple transfer of the world of science to the spontaneous world is a meaningless speculation.

Now, it is precisely this process which vitiates the philosophy of Nietzsche and, later on, that of Bergson; which contradicts the claims made by these philosophers of identifying philosophy with the explanation of spontaneous human experience. It is this, too, that taints as ambiguous the notion of ‘value’ which is, as we know, central to Nietzsche’s philosophy.

These considerations, which could be applied with only slight modification to Bergson, tend merely to demonstrate what stumbling blocks the Existentialist phenomenology had to avoid when, following the thinkers we have just mentioned, it tried to conceive of philosophy as the explanation of integral human experience.

We should like to limit ourselves here to showing how Existentialism realises this aim, without taking into account, in order not to make this study too long, the numerous objections that could be raised from the outside and of which, for that matter, the non-phenomenologist philosophers have scarcely been sparing. Nor will we mention here the difficulties that the development and unity of the phenomenological movement raises. These difficulties are quite real; in the following we assume that they are partly resolved because it seems to us that, through the vicissitudes of its formation and the diversity of the origins and intentions of the authors that enriched it and made it what it is, there emerges a

universal meaning of Existentialist phenomenology. It is this meaning that we shall try to understand, believing—but here again we cannot attempt to justify entirely our statement—that it will be decisive for the entire philosophy of this era.

Classical philosophy until Hegel was dominated by the problem of knowledge. Asking *whether* man's knowledge *can* be true (and, secondarily, in which instances it can be known to be true), it posits thereby the principle of a split between man and reality and, inside of man himself, the principle of a split between his knowledge and his being. One cannot doubt, actually, that man is integrated with reality since any attempt to raise and formulate such a doubt at the start assumes this integration has taken place and is effective. Nor can one doubt, and for the same reasons, that man is, according to the observation of a contemporary who improves on an old formula, *lumen naturale*. Which means that man, from the sole fact of his apparition in reality, *illuminates it*, reveals in it a meaning (either because he has brought it to light in things, or because he imposes it on them). This capacity to reveal is not the privilege of knowledge (which is but one of its forms), nor is it a faculty that man exercises now and then: it takes place ceaselessly and of necessity because of the very fact of man's existence. To be revealing of the meaning of things and to exist in a human way are basically and strictly synonymous expressions. Human behaviour, regardless of the object or action to which it is applied, establishes or makes apparent a certain significance in the things that it refers to. This is true of our actions, even the most commonplace ones; it is no less true of the apparently least co-ordinated bodily movements: turn your head, lower your eyebrows, raise or lower your eyes, cover your face with your hands, throw out your torso—these are all ways of 'signifying' what occurs to you. All these gestures are of a nature to make things, and ourselves, speak. The meaning of our life is to say what is real, to make it be what it is. Analysis of this ultimate and distinctively ontological characteristic of our condition would reveal the assumption that we are necessarily and simultaneously in perfect proximity to and at a total distance from the real. In other words, man is by vocation a familiar of things, he is open to them, he is himself only when close to them. He has no being save in making himself interchangeable with them by his meditation, his action, his work. But he does not make himself interchangeable the way things do. They replace each other. Insertion of ourselves into the real transcends itself in the constitution of meaning and thus escapes from the real by giving itself up to it: for the meaning of things is not thing, and occupation

with a thing which consists in saying what it is or in doing it, is to go beyond it as a thing.

The problem is, however, to understand why, at a certain moment in the history of thought and of the experience that humanity has of itself, man, disowning this familiarity in regard to the reality in which he lives, has set himself up as separate consciousness, as pure interiority which fashions spectacles and images of an outside which he basically perhaps knows nothing about. The question is: why has the inhabitant of the world (that is, he who forms and transforms it by denoting it) cast himself in the role of a 'connoisseur' who has broken his ties with what he knows? To speak more metaphorically, why does contact pretend to change itself into pure vision and to forget itself, to deny itself as contact?

This transfiguration is itself a sudden metamorphosis in the history of experience. And we can see—we mention this in passing—how the interpretation of experience, lived first and then philosophical, itself becomes an effective movement of experience: just as in a disappointed woman Bovaryism, springing at first from the distance that she assumes in regard to her life and to her 'attitude' *about* it, soon becomes an effective element of her conduct.

The answer is sought by some in Platonism, by others in the medieval concept of the world, or in the development of positive scientific knowledge in the form it assumed after the Renaissance. A more careful study would probably convince us that all these elements have played the same kind of role. But this occurred because, less attentive to the *presence* of things, to this concrete plenitude which, at every moment, is such that 'there is' something real and that 'we are there' with it and in it, man addressed himself more toward that which, *by this presence*, is proffered us. Thus he fixed in *object* (*ob-ject*) what he began to call the 'contents' of experience and, confronted with this reality-picture, with this world-spectacle, he erected himself into subject-vision, without weight or roots, interiority, the more pure, inaccessible and indefinable since it flings away from itself, in the colours or features of the pictures it looks at, everything that might qualify it in any manner. Co-existence and familiarity are superseded by spectacle and image which, in turn, prepare the way for domination. For this subject which *is nothing*, which is never implied in the process, seeks consistency for itself; it could find it only in the real to which it belongs, but since this reality of the present flesh has become a spectacle to watch, the subject will be able to confer upon itself an appearance of being only in the domination and total organisation of what it watches. To

put it concretely: for rationalism, and for modern man who is both its author and product, the human being is himself only in the constitution of science. Without its own resistance, deprived of any 'coefficient of adversity' (unless in the form of a provisional irrational that the modern philosopher and scholar only mention in order immediately to undertake to negate it), the reality-picture is no more than the subject's means of asserting itself in the exercise of omnipotence, which, however, remains in a sense unreal.

We cannot doubt that this is really the spirit of classical philosophy and of modern science, at least in part (we will come back to this). Such a state of affairs opens up perspectives and prescribed tasks to a 'new' philosophy that wants to be truly identified with an explanation of actual human experience. We can understand, for example, its desire to proceed with a 'destruction of classical ontology', if we understand by that an attempt to demonstrate systematically that classical positions are not obvious, that they are not the expressions of a 'natural' metaphysic of reality, an explanation of the original experience that man has of the world and of his presence in it. Existentialist phenomenology, the incarnation of this new philosophy, will try, on the contrary, to bring to light the hidden options, the significant attitudes that the classics assumed, without always knowing it distinctly, in regard to original experience and which led them, during the historical period that is ending, into a way of living and understanding reality that they try to make acceptable as the only possible and true one.

On the positive side, Existentialist phenomenology assumes the task of working out by itself an 'unforeseen' description and interpretation of this original experience, as well as a 'constitution' of the fundamental possibilities that offer themselves on the basis of this experience, for the edification of history and human culture, that is to say, for the development of the relations that man maintains with the world, with others, himself, and Transcendence. Certainly we are aware of the fact that the idea of an 'unforeseen' description evokes objections everywhere which our own thesis apparently only reinforces. Let us say—without starting an argument that has no place here—that by 'unforeseen description or interpretation' we mean recourse to a detached objectivity, which has no meaning *in regard to the original experience itself*, since it defines, as we have already said, just one particular way of developing objectivity, which consists in a certain manner of drawing away from it and of changing it. An unforeseen interpretation would be one that outlines, from the

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interior, the structure of this original experience and the fundamental patterns that it brings forward. The difficulty, a considerable but not an insurmountable one, resides in the fact that this description would be itself already the execution of a pattern, and so our effort runs the risk of assuming circular or indeed spiral form. The answer, the substance of which we can only indicate here, would have to take into account that the logic of the understanding, which is based upon original experience but cannot be the basis for it, is uniquely unable to conceive of a middle way between a philosophy absolutely *voraussetzungslos*, that is, which presumes absolutely nothing, and, on the other hand, a purely circular philosophy in the sense above explained. The essential is to be aware of the exact nature of reflexion. That which has been reflected on is not simply identical with that which has not been reflected on, nor is it simply its counterpart. So we come to realise that an explanation of original experience might be both its extension (its effective development in a certain way) and an investigation of it (which would provide us with the means of clarifying all its implications, of perceiving possibilities that have not been realised but that are available to us).

Facts prove that phenomenology has made strides in this direction and that it has attacked, with remarkable success, problems that our theoretical meditation has just now defined and exposed. Husserl's last philosophy, the work of Heidegger, Fink, of Merleau-Ponty, of Ricoeur, of Sartre (at least in its most important aspects), and in more special domains, the work of many others, provide, in spite of, or perhaps because of, their differences and even their disagreements, more than a beginning of the realisation of this hope. The restricted framework of this article makes it impossible to expose the concrete results of all this work. It seems more important, by way of introducing phenomenology, to try to understand its meaning and the place it occupies in the movement of the history of philosophy.

In conclusion, it is perhaps not without interest to go back and discuss a little more fully, for the sake of clarity, certain statements, shocking perhaps at first, uttered by a certain phenomenology on the significance it concedes to classical thought, to positive science and to the civilisation that was their offspring.

We have said that according to that interpretation, modern thought, by its desire to constitute man as pure subject in contrast to pure object, had actually drawn away from original experience, the better to guarantee his domination of it. Thus it builds a world of which we tend to become

the absolute masters, but at the price of a progressive deracination. This would appear to be a hopeless condemnation of all of modern civilisation, which seems to establish a concept and a way of life that is radically unauthentic. Let us try to understand these theses better since they are certainly inadmissible in this summary form.

We cannot deny that the way of co-existence characteristic of original experience is very different from that defined by the attitude of the classical thinker, of the positive scientist, or even of the man who studies the world in order to transform it by technical means. We might even say that these latter attitudes are *not* strictly attitudes of co-existence, but, in very different ways, attitudes of distance and contrast. Yet they are legitimate and have a significance. And this is true for two excellent reasons. Even if we allow that the ultimate meaning of human experience resides in the explanation, pushed ever farther, of original experience, we are forced to see that, in the first place, this explanation is possible beyond a certain limit only by and after the *long way round* of scientific knowledge, only by and after the *detour* of the material mastery of the world; in the second place, scientific knowledge constitutes a *true* explanation of reality in a certain dimension that we will determine. Before developing these two points, we would sum up our general thesis in these terms: scientific knowledge (in the positive sense) and a technical, pragmatic attitude are a negation of the mission and of the meaning that man must achieve in his life *only* if they profess to offer him the only possible access to reality, only if they pretend to reveal to him, exhaustively and authentically, this reality.

Now let us take up again the problems we mentioned above. In the first place, if original experience establishes us in the absolute proximity of things and of others, if it promises their total revelation, we still cannot say that it realises it absolutely. It awaits something more, viz., explanation. But, provisionally and in the beginning, this explanation cannot progress in original experience itself without encountering obstacles that are, at first, insurmountable. For original co-existence, although it reveals, also oppresses. It is true that we lose things when we no longer feel their weight, but it is also true that the heaviness that weighs on us beclouds our sight and constrains us. It is true that we only discover others in the gratitude of love and friendship, but it is also true that this gratitude supposes a real freedom in regard to our surroundings, a freedom which original experience does not afford, or in any case, does not afford for every one. Concretely: it means that it is vain to speak of the authenticity of original

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experience as long as the proximity of the real retains the form of slavery and struggle for life. There is a way of being in contact with reality which is just that of the least qualified common labourer, an absolute solidarity with others which is that of the prisoner toward his companions in jail and in misery. These experiences are surely modes of being immediately present to an essential dimension of reality; in this sense they are revealing, but the revelation they bring does not go beyond the experiences themselves; they do not open any avenue, and this is why it is not possible to interpret them. Because we are bounded by what they reveal to us, they make it impossible to become ourselves and, therefore, to be acknowledged. For the constitution of our own being is linked, as we have said, to the progressive unveiling of reality, it is one side of the dialogue that we maintain with things and with others. That is why one dimension of reality that remains closed to any other dimension cannot, by revealing itself to us, contribute to the creation of our own existence.

This situation is characteristic of all forms of original experience insofar as it has not first effaced itself—but not forever—in favour of an experience that assures us a mastery of things. To be sure, there have always been poets, but they never have been understood by every one, and without wishing to impose this opinion, it is permissible to believe that they have not liberated man and that they were able to be poets thanks to the involuntary sacrifice of many other men.

It therefore seems clear that if we assign to humanity, to all men, the task of glorifying the original reality of things by discovering and defining it, we may hope to see it undertake this task—as humanity—only if, beforehand, it has forged, with the aid of science and technology, the means of being entirely free.

The introduction of a scientific idea and method, effective only in the modern sense, entails, undeniably, an absolute withdrawal from original experience. We have given the reason for this. But, and this is the crucial point, it is not necessary to consider this withdrawal a definitive one. Instruments of domination and of liberation, science and technology must be dominated in turn to accomplish their true mission (or, so far as science is concerned, this part of its mission, since there is still another part which we shall discuss). This new victory will be won through conversion to original experience, through the restoration of a relationship of co-existence with things and with others, but which, this time liberated from the obstacles that impeded its progressive development, will be open to an unlimited explanation and unfolding.



This is one reason to believe that scientific knowledge, if it detaches us from what is *truly* real, is nonetheless of immense help in the conquest of this authentic reality.

But there is another reason, at least as serious. We must reject the idea of a scientific conventionalism as well as that of a science that emphasises technique alone. Science is also and mainly, although in a limited way, a valid ontal explanation of reality. To a certain extent, science is an interpretation of original reality placed in such a way that no explanation and unfolding of felt life can refer to it.

We have often repeated that original experience is encounter and co-existence. Thus defined, it naturally transcends any contrast between the subject and the object. But it is no less obvious that a subjective and an objective pole remain discernible despite this unity, certainly not as separate realities, but at any rate as dimensions that can be distinguished abstractly. In this context it is legitimate to speak of a real-in-self, of a subject purely for-self. This real-in-self is not unknowable, and even less so is the subject purely for-self. Surely they do not exist merely as such, since our existence is co-existence (although personal co-existence) but they reveal and announce their presence in original experience itself. We may therefore say that they can suggest themselves as a theme for science and speculative psychology respectively. Overlooking the problems (actually extremely difficult) that the methods and language of such a knowledge would raise, we can, nonetheless, try to understand its import. These forms of knowledge strive to explain to us, each in its own domain, an abstract dimension of experienced reality. They refer to the real without being simply revelation of *the* real.

These very summary observations have been written in the hope of showing that the apparently negative attitude toward science and scientific knowledge fostered by a certain phenomenological tendency cannot correspond to the real intentions of the movement. These intentions must not be to build a concrete philosophy (an expression that is literally contradictory) but rather a philosophy that is identified with the explanation of experience. However, as we have tried to prove, the term experience is itself very equivocal. If to exist means to co-exist originally with others and with things, the explicit expansion of this co-existence, which is for each of us *our* being, is, however, only possible by a transformation of original experience, a transformation that assumes the aspect of a detour and then of a return.

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The meaning of these turns about and of the contents that direct them must be stated by a philosophy which will have to make use of many languages according to the stage of development to which it refers. It seems to us that the differences that are apparent—and perhaps very marked—in the interior of phenomenology itself—and which provide matter for superficial arguments against it—thus have their *raison d'être*. Just so, the effort that tends to unite these differences into a single intention, that tends to see in phenomenology the pursuit and the realisation of an ambition older than itself, also has its *raison d'être*: to identify philosophy with the explanation of human experience in its entirety. If this is true, if these theses, as we believe, have a basis, it would not be too foolhardy, perhaps, to believe that phenomenology will seem a decisive turning point in the history of philosophy and a form of thought which must leave its imprint on all contemporary philosophy.

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