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Existenzforschung

EXISTENCE AND EXISTENTS

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The World

1. INTENTIONS

To take up an instant through effort does not of itself found the relationship between the I and the world.

The most striking difference concerns the very fact that in the world we are dealing with objects. Whereas in taking up an instant we are committing ourselves irreparably to existing in a pure event which does not relate to any substantive, any thing, in the world for the vicissitudes of the activity of being (the *verb* being) substantives bearing adjectives, beings endowed with values offered to our intentions, are substituted. To be in the world is to be attached to things. Theophile Gautier's line "I am one of those for whom the external world exists" expresses that joyous appetite for things which constitutes being in the world.

The concept of intention conveys this relationship quite exactly. But it must be taken not in the neutralized and

disincarnate sense in which it figures in medieval philosophy and in Husserl, but in its ordinary meaning, with the sting of desire that animates it. Desire and not care — except the care for the immediate.

The care for existing, this extension into ontology, is absent from intention. In desiring I am not concerned with being but am absorbed with the desirable, with an object that will completely slake my desire. I am terribly sincere. No ulterior references, indicating a relationship of the desirable with the adventure of existence, with bare existence, take form behind the desirable qua desirable. Of course we do not live in order to eat, but it is not really true to say that we eat in order to live; we eat because we are hungry. Desire has no further intentions behind it, which would be like thoughts; it is a good will; all the rest belongs to the level of biology. The desirable is a terminus, an end.

To be sure, *unconsciously* desire presupposes more than its object and can go beyond the desirable; to be sure, *implicitly* we have always understood the meaning of the word “to be” in its bare being, since our objects do exist. But has the fact that all that is unconscious and implicit been fully appreciated? Since the *discovery of the unconscious* — and this contradiction in terms is evidence of a considerable intellectual upheaval — philosophy has been conceiving of the unconscious as another consciousness, failing to recognize the ontological function of the unconscious and its specific relationship with conscious clarity, with sincerity, which separates itself from the obscurity, depth and ambiguity of the unconscious. The unconscious is interpreted in terms of consciousness, or the reverse. The unconscious appears as a possibility, a germ, or as something repressed. In fact, the implicitness referred to in speaking of implicit cognition no longer presents the structure of cognition; the essential event

of the world, which is intention and light, no longer means anything here. Consciousness is precisely a sincerity. In taking being-in-the-world as an intention one is above all affirming — and the history of our civilization and our philosophy confirms this — that the world is the field of a consciousness, and the peculiar structure that characterizes consciousness governs and gives meaning to all the infiltrations of the unconscious in the world. It is “before” the world comes about that the unconscious plays its role.

Western philosophy and civilization never gets out of “numbers and beings,” remaining conditioned by the secular world. Even love is conceived as the attraction of the desirable, and the “young man,” and the “beautiful girl” only pretexts. The *orekton* of book 10 of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is the supreme being, immobile, loved but never loving, terminus. The problem of the Good is formulated as a problem of ends.

The couple “being and value” is in fact not at all an antithesis. The reality of a thing is indeed constituted by its finality. As the end of an intention, a thing is a goal, a limit, an ultimate. Qua value, end of a desire, an object is a being, the terminus of a movement, the beginning of an impassive state, a calm rest in oneself. It derives its being *in itself* from a movement, which we think of as opposed to it, but which in its unequivocal sincerity confirms it and gives it its significance. *Existing*, in the whole of Western idealism, refers to this intentional movement from inwardness to the exterior. A being is what is thought about, seen, acted on, willed, felt — an object. Consequently, existence in the world always has a center; it is never anonymous. The notion of the soul, of an enclosed inwardness, is constitutive of the existence of the world. Realism no more avoids it than idealism seeks to. The world is what is given to us. This expression is admirably precise: the given does not to be sure come from us, but we

do receive it. It already has a side by which it is the terminus of an intention.

An intention is not merely headed for an object: the object is at our disposal. In this, desire or appetite differs radically from ever restless need. The Platonic theory of negative pleasures, preceded by a lack, fails to recognize the promise of the desirable which desire itself bears within itself like a joy. This is a joy that is not due to the "quality" or "psychological character" of this or that desire, nor to its degree of intensity, nor to the charm of the slight excitement which accompanies it — but to the fact that the world is given. The world offers the bountifulness of terrestrial nourishment to our intentions — including those of Rabelais; the world where youth is happy and restless with desire is the world itself. It takes form not in an additional quality inhering in objects, but in a destination inscribed in its revelation, in the revelation itself, in the light. Objects are destined for me; they are for me. Desire as a relationship with the world involves both a distance between me and the desirable, and consequently a time ahead of me, and also a possession of the desirable which is prior to the desire. This position of the desirable, before and after the desire, is the fact that it is given. And the fact of being given is the world.

The events that break with the world, such as the encounter with the other, can be in it and be included in it by the process of civilization, by which everything and everyone is given to us, with no equivocation.

In the world the other is indeed not treated like a thing, but is never separated from things. Not only is he approached and given in his social situation, not only is respect for a person shown through respect for his rights and his prerogatives, not only do institutions, like the arrangements which make things accessible to us, put us into relationship with persons,

collectivities, history and the supernatural, but in the world the other is an object already through his clothing.

Those we encounter are clothed beings. Man is a being that has already taken some elementary pains about his appearance. He looked at himself in a mirror and saw himself. He has washed, wiped away the night and the traces of its instinctual permanence from his face; he is clean and abstract. Life in society is decent. The most delicate social relationships are carried on in the forms of propriety; they safeguard the appearances, cover over all ambiguities with a cloak of sincerity and make them mundane. What does not enter into the forms is banished from the world. Scandal takes cover in the night, in private buildings, in one's home — places which enjoy a sort of extraterritoriality in the world.

The bare nudity of a body, which we may encounter, does not affect the universality of clothing. In it nudity loses its significance. For recruiting examiners human beings are treated like so much human material; they are clothed with a *form*. Beauty, perfect form, is form *par excellence*; the statues of antiquity are never really naked.

Form is that by which a being is turned toward the sun, that by which it has a face, through which it gives itself, by which it comes forward. It conceals the nudity in which an undressed being withdraws from the world, and *is* as though its existence were elsewhere, had an "underside," as though it were surprised during the time of "a bare breast glimpsed between gown and gown." This is why the relationship with nudity is the true experience of the otherness of the other — were the term experience not impossible where it is a question of a relationship which goes beyond the world. Social life in the world does not have that disturbing character that a being feels before another being, before alterity. It does involve angers, indignations, hatreds, attachments and loves

focused on the qualities and the substance of another, but the basic timidity that affects one before the very otherness of the other is taken to be unhealthy and is banished from the world. One has to find something to say to one's companion, exchange an idea, around which, as around a third term, social life necessarily starts.

Social life in the world is communication or communion. To have a falling out with someone is to find that one has nothing in common. It is through participation in something in common, in an idea, a common interest, a work, a meal, in "a third man" that contact is made. Persons are not simply in front of one another; they are along with each other around something. A neighbor is an accomplice. Though it is the term of a relationship; the ego loses nothing of its *ipseity* in this relationship. That is why civilization as a relationship between human beings has stayed with the forms of decency and has never been able to go beyond individualism: the individual remains fully *me*.

All the concrete relations between human beings in the world get their character of *reality* from a third term. They are a communion. When these relations begin to circulate from person to person directly, we begin to feel that these persons are inconsistent; they turn into phantasms. When we say of someone that he has character or a nature of his own, that he "is a man," flesh and blood, this relationship with something consistent is what we are talking about. Health, the sincere movement of the desiring toward the desirable, that good will that knows exactly what it wants, gauges the reality and the concreteness of a human being. When the I is the seat of this good will, when thoughts and acts are not the masks of an I that is incapable of laying itself bare, then a critic upon finishing a novel declares: here are real persons. Otherwise, he is entitled to reproach the

novelist for remaining an ideology. Then the doctor — whose language the critic is ready to borrow, for health and sickness do describe the relationship of an intention with its term — will have the last word. He will say that Prince Hamlet is deranged, and will not analyze the personage any further, for one is not obliged to rave along with the mad.

What characterizes, then, being in the world is the sincerity of intentions — the self-sufficiency of the world and contentment. The world is profane and secular. Since Aristotle we conceive of the world as a phenomenon of form cloaking a content completely. The points of an object which make up the illuminated surface are laid out in ordered perspectives and open up for us the way to the object, putting a limit to the risks and fancies. All the unfathomable mystery of a thing shows itself to us and is open to our grasp. By virtue of its forms the world is stable and made up of solids. Objects can be defined by their finitude: form is just this way of coming to an end [*finir*] where the finite [*le fini*] is the definite and is already exposed to being apprehended.

There is then a regrettable confusion in contemporary philosophy when it situated within the world the events which it has the incontestable merit of having discovered and designated by the purely negative term of the unconscious, and when it denounced as a hypocrisy, a fall, as “bourgeois” and evasion of the essential, behavior in the world, whose secular nature and contentment are simply counterparts of the very destiny of the world. It is one thing to ask what the place of the world in the ontological adventure is, and another thing to look for that adventure within the world itself.

Husserl's phenomenological reduction, the famous *epochè*, will here become meaningful for us again. Its significance lies in the separation it indicates between the destiny of man in the world, where there are always objects given as being

and works to be done, and the possible suspension of this "thesis of the natural attitude" which begins a reflection that is genuinely philosophical, in which the meaning of the "natural attitude" itself — that is, of the world — can be discovered. It is not by being in the world that we can say what the world is.

In the effort to separate the notion of the world from the notion of a sum of objects, we certainly see one of the most profound discoveries of Heideggerian philosophy. But in order to describe being-in-the-world, this German philosopher has appealed to an ontological finality, to which he subordinates objects in the world. Seeing objects as "material" — in the sense that we speak of "war material" — he has included them in the care for existing, which for him is the very putting of the ontological problem. But he has thereby failed to recognize the essentially secular nature of being in the world and the sincerity of intentions.

Not everything that is given in the world is a tool. Food is supplies for logistics officers; houses and shelters are a "base." For a soldier his bread, jacket and bed are not "material"; they do not exist "for . . .," but are ends. The statement "a house is an implement for inhabiting" is clearly false, and in any case does not account for the exceptional place that home plays in the life of a man belonging to sedentary civilization, the sovereignty it gives the so-called plain man. To say that clothing exists for covering oneself up is not to see how clothing frees man from the humbleness of his naked state. And still less does food fit into the category of "material."

Let us take some time to look at the example of food; it is significant for us because of the place it occupies in everyday life, but especially because of the relationship between desire and its satisfaction which it represents, and which constitutes what is typical of life in the world. What characterizes

this relationship is a complete correspondence between desire and its satisfaction. Desire knows perfectly well what it wants. And food makes possible the full realization of its intention. At some moment everything is consummated. Compare eating with loving, which occurs beyond economic activity and the world. For what characterizes love is an essential and insatiable hunger. To shake hands with a friend is to express one's friendship for him, but it is to convey that friendship as something inexpressible, and indeed as something unfulfilled, a permanent desire. *The very positivity of love lies in its negativity.* The burning bush that feeds the flames is not consumed. The trouble one feels before the beloved does not only precede what we call, in economic terms, possession, but is felt in the possession too. In the random agitation of caresses there is the admission that access is impossible, violence fails, possession is refused. There is also the ridiculous and tragic simulation of devouring in kissing and love-bites. It is as though one had made a mistake about the nature of one's desire and had confused it with hunger which aims at something, but which one later found out was a hunger for nothing. The *other* is precisely this objectless dimension. Voluptuousness is the pursuit of an ever richer promise; it is made up of an ever growing hunger which pulls away from every being. There is no goal, no end in view. Voluptuousness launches forth into an unlimited, empty, vertiginous future. It consumes pure time which no *object* fills or even stakes out. "Satisfaction" is not a remaining in the beyond, but a return to oneself, in a univocal and present world. There is nothing comparable in this fall with satiety, whatever we may say when we put what is involved in love in economic categories, along with appetites and needs. But eating, by contrast, is peaceful and simple; it fully realizes its sincere intention: "The man who is eating is the most just of men."