

KIERKEGAARD, HEIDEGGER AND US MODERNS

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The contribution tackles certain themes in Kierkegaard's *oeuvre*, which exert more or less direct influence on Heidegger's phenomenology. The analysis is followed by a more general reflection on the tense relationship between religious thought and philosophy.

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In his foreword to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche says most tellingly:

The struggle against Plato or, to use a clear and “popular” idiom, the struggle against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia – since Christianity is Platonism for the “people” – has created a magnificent tension of spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known: with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals.

[...]

But we good Europeans and free, very free spirits – we still have it, the whole need of spirit and the whole tension of its bow! And perhaps the arrow too, the task, and – who knows? The goal...¹

Nietzsche here speaks not only of Plato, but also of Platonism for the people, which enables him, as is usually the case with him, to embrace the entire history of European culture with one simple gesture. Let us first provide some reasons for our initial claim that we shouldn't let go of this tension of the bow of spirit.

Firstly, there is no place here for the positivistic naivety, as exemplified, say, by Auguste Comte and his insight into three incompatible historical types of knowledge: a) theological or fictional, b) metaphysical or abstract, and c) scientific or positive, final and all-compelling period of humanity, which has finally managed to do away with the obscurantism of the first two periods. This *geistesgeschichtliche* naivety of Positivism can be challenged already by Nietzsche's compelling insight into the historical spiritual precondition, coming from antiquity, which still permeates modern sciences with what Nietzsche calls ascetic ideals.

¹ Nietzsche, F. : *Beyond Good and Evil*, Cambridge University Press: New York 2002, p. 4.

Secondly, this claim points to our distance from the postmodern approach, which basically betrays an indifference to the tradition of grand narratives, and with it an exhaustion, which brings it on the verge of profound boredom.

Thirdly, not letting go of this bow of spirit implies an acute openness to the European spiritual background, evincing a tense relationship of ancient Greek and Christian traditions. This also, and most importantly, betrays a *gratitude* for the tension of the bow as well as both traditions, which can be detected, contrary to commonly accepted views on Nietzsche, in Nietzsche himself. Whoever fails to see this simply doesn't belong to the good Europeans.

Fourthly, the openness mentioned cannot be understood as pure openness. In other words, the openness is in advance determined by and caught in these two traditions. This determination, however, is itself a necessary precondition for a possible new re-appropriation of the old.

The fifth consequence of this claim is the abolition of the bad metaphysical belief in the absoluteness of opposites: in our present context, the opposition of ancient Greece and Christianity.

And lastly, it goes without saying here that the thinkers who have matured and grown from the tense relationship between both traditions, can be deemed most compelling thinkers. Why? Exactly in that they (2002, 4) "create a magnificent tension of spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known."

With this tense bow of spirit we now step into the arena of the chosen topic: Kierkegaard, Heidegger and us moderns. To begin with, what are the elements in Heidegger, which can, beyond any doubt, be deemed inspired by Kierkegaard's thought?

Heidegger's *Being and Time* was rightfully seen by many a scholar as a re-appropriation of Aristotle² on the one side and early Christianity on the other³. Especially Part Two of *Being and Time*, which concentrates on the virtue of *phronesis*, practical comportment, represents a peculiar amalgam of both life facticities. If the goal of *Being and Time* is to formalize factual structures, making them ontologically neutral in relation to concrete factual realisations (the source of the famous and at times elusive distinction between the existential and existentiell), then it is not at all extraordinary that his work was (enthusiastically) accepted by theologians, protestant (Bultmann) and catholic (Rahner).

However, and moreover, this entanglement of both traditions is not simply something freely conjured up by Heidegger, but is, instead, *that which is revealed to us as*

² If we are to believe the excellent connoisseur of Aristotle and Heidegger, the Italian philosopher Franco Volpi, Heidegger's *Being and Time* is a philosophical translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. See F. Volpi, *Heidegger e Aristotele*, Daphne Editrice, Padova 1984. This unusual fact has been more than readily accepted and further elaborated by numerous interpreters of Heidegger. See G. Figal, *Heidegger zur Einführung*, Junius Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 1992; Kisiel, T., *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993.

³ Heidegger writes before his *Being and Time*: »Factual life experience is historical. Christian religiosity lives temporality as such.» See *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2004, p. 55.

always already given in entanglement if we assume a proper openness to it. And this can be fruitfully demonstrated when we explicate Kierkegaard's existential restlessness together with Heidegger's ontological zeal.

Perhaps the most powerful thought revealing intimate close vicinity of Heidegger with Kierkegaard comes from a footnote in his *The Concept of Dread* (1973, 74): "Modern philosophy has not yet got any further in the apprehension of non-being, in spite of its pretense to be Christian. Greek philosophy and modern philosophy alike take the position that everything depends upon getting non-being to come into existence; for to do away with it and cause it to vanish seems to them too easy. The Christian view takes the position that non-being is everywhere present as the Nothing out of which all is created, as appearance and vanity, as sin, as sensuousness divorced from the spirit, as the temporal forgotten by eternity; wherefore the whole point is to do away with it and get being in its stead."

Even if we set aside the moral note of vanity and sinfulness, which in *Being and Time* fall victim to the process of formalisation and neutralisation anyway, the passage cited points to one of the major shifts the history of European spirit. And no doubt, Kierkegaard as well as Heidegger can be deemed its rightful heirs.

If it wasn't for Augustine's *creatio ex nihilo*, where he drastically cut into the spiritual matter with his Nothing, there would be no possibility of cultivating a relationship with Nothing, as found so compellingly explicated in, for example, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. However, the Nothing, out of which all is created, originally belongs neither to ancient Greeks nor, and perhaps counter to our expectations, Judeo-Christianity. Greeks, as is well known, had no word for the nothing, the ontologically closest phenomenon being the chaotic unformed matter of either (Plato's) *chora* or (Aristotle's) *prote hyle*; even Parmenides, who in his famous fragmentary poem speaks about the way of the non-being, grasps this phenomenality only through a negation of being, and as the unformed – and therefore not yet existing – muddle of matter. Peculiarly enough, in mathematics, Greeks had no knowledge of the numerical zero either! The Bible story of the genesis, likewise, betrays no mention of the Nothing, which is only later, with Augustine, *read into* the original Word of God. And as the closer reading of Augustine's *Confessions* shows, his interpretation of the original story is primarily a (critical) coming to grips with the ancient Greek understanding of the world. For Greeks, *chaos* might take least part in being, but – as exemplified in many a text – is primeval and has been there since even before the birth of gods, even as their "place" of birth (comp. Hesiod). For Augustine, on the contrary, the almightiness of God should compel us to state, in strong opposition to the Greek truth, that God must have created unformed matter as well – from out of Nothing, not from out of himself.

Clearly, the Christian dogma of the creation out of the Nothing cannot be considered to belong initially to Judeo-Christian cultural milieu, exactly because it was thought out *as a clear-cut critical response to ancient Greek philosophical truths*. As Claus Westermann, one of the most compelling researchers of the beginnings of *Genesis* story, puts it: "Both formulations, namely that God has created the world out of nothing, and that before

creation there existed unformed matter, can be found no sooner than at the point of time where Judaism appropriates Greek thought and Greek concepts.”⁴

One of the crucial points for our paper is that Kierkegaard’s passage quoted above is a clear echo of Augustine’s polemical tone and stance. And this brings us even closer to the possibility of grasping this peculiar cultural-historical *factum brutum* of European spiritual tradition. Had it not been for this extraordinary amalgam of Greek and Christian traditions, as obviously exemplified in Augustine and later in Kierkegaard with their emphasis on the *creation* out of nothing, there would also be no possibility later on for philosophically more and more compelling explications of *extinction* into nothing, as exemplified by, say, Nietzsche and Heidegger. To put it even more succinctly, without the Christian appropriation of Greek philosophy, there would be no ground laid for even the slightest possibility of modern atheism.

Let us recall here Heidegger’s words from the inaugural lecture at the University of Freiburg “What Is Metaphysics” in 1929: Only on the ground of the original revelation of the nothing can human existence approach and penetrate beings. But since existence in its essence relates itself to beings – those which it is not and that which it is – it emerges as such existence in each case from the nothing already revealed. *Dasein* means: being held out into the nothing.

Arguably, this emphasis on the crucial importance of the Nothing allowed Heidegger to decidedly distance himself from the metaphysics of beings and the science of beings. However, we should voice strongest reservations about his claim that, although Christian dogma succeeds to (1998, 94) “bestow on the nothing a transformed significance”, it ultimately fails in that in it (ibid.) “the questions of Being and of the nothing as such are not posed.” What we are obliged to do here is look askance at his claim at least in the sense that Christianity as a whole does not overlap fully with dogmatics. And if anything, this pertains to Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard 1980, 25-26): “Reflection never snares so un-faillingly as when it fashions its snare out of nothing, and reflection is never so much itself as when it is—nothing. It requires extraordinary reflection, or, more correctly, it requires great faith to be able to endure reflection upon nothing – that is, infinite reflection.”

The difference between the two thinkers, as stated by Heidegger, of course cannot and should not be done away with, especially as the difference between the existentiell and existential understanding of this relationship with the Nothing.⁵ Whereas the existentiell understanding implies the starting point in the life facticity of God-man and faith in him, which calls for the living-out of god-like factual existence *by way of implementing the conceptual repertoire*, Heidegger’s existential understanding, likewise starting from the facticity, does not call for any practical living-out of the same type of existence, because the factual truth has undergone the process of formalisation and neutralisation. The “only” thing desired is free (and repeated) appropriation of *Dasein* as a whole – this being

⁴ Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1976, p. 152.

⁵ Compare M. Heidegger, *Die Metaphysik der deutschen Idealismus*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M. 2006, pp. 26-35.

a peculiar type of existence called *homo philosophicus*. In other words, the only implementation possible is that of persevering in the free variations of conceptual structuredness of the essence of being (of man, world etc.) All these differences notwithstanding, however, much of what both thinkers think actually, and quite stunningly, does overlap.

To put it roughly, the cultivation of the relationship with the Nothing is the condition of the possibility of fostering the grounding attunement of anxiety. We are all familiar with Heidegger's compelling analysis of the distinguished nature of anxiety in his *Being and Time* and elsewhere. Anxiety is, and this should go without saying, no stranger to Kierkegaard either. Not only in general: the similarities go into the very details:

a) Anxiety as essentially different from fear (1973: 38): »One almost never sees the concept dread dealt with in psychology, and I must therefore call attention to the fact that it is different from fear and similar concepts which refer to something definite, whereas dread is freedom's reality as possibility for possibility.»⁶

b) Anxiety as being anxious in the face of Dasein's own self: Anxiety, as opposed to fear, does not have any distinct object; rather, this grounding attunement opens up *possibilities* of genuine existence; the human being is facing itself in its own (1973: 38) "freedom's reality as possibility for possibility".

c) Flight from anxiety as the issue of authenticity/ inauthenticity (1973: 40): "Man cannot flee from dread, for he loves it; really he does not love it, for he flees from it."

d) Anxiety of the nothing as the open possibility of freedom (1973: 59-60): "Dread is constantly to be understood as oriented towards freedom."

e) Exclusivity of anxiety: Many an author has rightfully reproached Heidegger for his exclusive attention to anxiety in his *Being and Time* (Bollnow, Arendt, Held). This more or less troublesome issue is again less fruitfully graspable if we fail to take into account what Kierkegaard has to say about it (1973: 140): "He who truly was brought up by possibility has comprehended the dreadful as well as the smiling. When such a person, therefore, goes out from the school of possibility, and knows more thoroughly than a child knows the alphabet that he can demand of life absolutely nothing, and that terror, perdition, annihilation, dwell next door to every man." And another, even more telling passage from *Sickness unto Death* (1980: 25): "But to be unaware of being defined as spirit is precisely what despair is. Even that which, humanly speaking, is utterly beautiful and lovable—a womanly youthfulness that is perfect peace and harmony and joy – is nevertheless despair. To be sure, it is happiness, but happiness is not a qualification of spirit, and deep, deep within the most secret hiding place of happiness there dwells also anxiety, which is despair."

Enough has been said about similarities between Heidegger's and Kierkegaard's anxiety. Certain other parallels need to be addressed as well, for us to be able to show how deeply intertwined the two thinkers are:

⁶ For Heidegger's concept *die Angst*, usually rendered in English as "anxiety", the translation referred to opted for the English word "dread".

– **Higher than actuality stands possibility:** In various passages, Heidegger again and again emphasises the importance of possibility as standing higher than actuality. It is really difficult not to recognize this as a genuinely Kierkegaardian trait (1973: 141): “If the individual cheats the possibility by which he is to be educated, he never reaches faith; his faith remains the shrewdness of finitude, as his school was that of finitude. But men cheat possibility in every way – if they did not, one has only to stick one’s head out of the window, and one would see enough for possibility to begin its exercises forthwith.”

– **Formal Indication:** Heidegger’s methodological approach, explicated in numerous passages, was employed directly against Hegel’s dialectics of the superficial play with concepts in a seeming universality devoid of all individuality. Even on the most superficial level, we can hardly fail to notice the methodological similarities between him and Kierkegaard. More concretely, however, Heidegger’s concept of the existentials could well serve as the most obvious illustration of the method mentioned. Existentials are conceptual determinations of *Dasein*, inextricably explicated from *Dasein*’s relation to its own being. Formal indication as *the* phenomenological method saw its detailed explication in the introductory chapters of the GA 60 *Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Most likely, however, he was pretty much inspired in this respect by Kierkegaard himself. Consider for example the following passage (1973: 45):

Now sin is precisely that transcendence, that *discrimen rerum*, by which sin enters into the individual as an individual. In no other way does sin enter the world, and never has it entered otherwise. When the individual then is foolish enough to inquire about sin as about something irrelevant to him, he speaks as a fool; for either he does not know in the least what the question is about and cannot possibly learn to know it, or else he knows it and understands it, and knows too that no science can explain it.

Is not sin understood here existentially, *i.e.* as an existential? It cannot be understood unless explained from its relationship with the individuality of the individual (1973: 46): “How sin came into the world every man understands by himself alone; if he would learn it from another, he *eo ipso* misunderstands it.” And another ironic *intermezzo* (*ibid.*): “Only let the congregation join in the search [for the sin], or at least include these profound seekers in their pious intercessions; they will find the place as surely as he who hunts for the burning tow finds it when he takes no heed that it is burning his own hand.” And yes, there are many concepts in Kierkegaard which well suit this category: faith, despair, anxiety, hope...⁷

⁷ In this respect, Kierkegaard’s criticism of Hegel’s philosophy cannot and should not be done away with too easily. On this see Jon Stewart, “Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel and *Quellenforschung*: Some Methodological Considerations”, *Filozofia*, 68, 2013 No. 1, p. 18: “[...] many scholars interpreted Kierkegaard not in terms of his own time and place but in terms of what they themselves were familiar with or interested in. Thus, Kierkegaard research was generally confined to understanding him as a part of the existentialist movement [...]. In this manner he was removed from his original time and context and thrust into later movements that were topical at the time the research took place. Needless to say, this resulted in a number of distortions of his thought [...].”

The passion of rejection of such distortion-prone scholars manifested here actually only betrays the

– **Care as the basic existiale, or the very Being of *Dasein*:** Consider the following most telling passage (1980: 5-6): “All Christian knowing, however rigorous its form, ought to be concerned, but this concern is precisely the upbuilding. Concern constitutes the relation to life, to the actuality of the personality, and therefore earnestness from the Christian point of view; the loftiness of indifferent knowledge is, from the Christian point of view, a long way from being more earnest – Christianly, it is a witticism, an affectation.”

– **The existiale of guilt:** Being constantly, and ontologically, guilty without any guilt, as one of the basic existential traits of *Dasein*, is Kierkegaard’s own perspective (1973: 95-96): “As the immediate genius had fate, so he [the religious genius] has guilt as the figure which follows him. [...] turning towards himself he discovers guilt. The greater the genius, the more profoundly he discovers guilt. That to the spirit-less this is foolishness, is to me a joy and a glad token.”

– **Authenticity:** the last sentence quoted above relates to the next important topic of *Being and Time*, namely that of authenticity and the falling of the They. In this respect, Kierkegaard’s elaboration on the religious genius comes in handy (ibid.): “The genius is not ‘as people mostly are,’ and he is not content with that. This is not due to disdain of men, but it is because he is primitively concerned with himself, while all other men and their explanations are no help to him.”

– **Hermeneutics of facticity:** Quite aptly and rewardingly in this respect, Heidegger in his *Ontologie, Hermeneutik der Faktizität* quotes Kierkegaard (: 13): “Life can be interpreted only after it has been lived, just as Christ did not begin to explain the Scriptures and show how they taught of him until after he was resurrected (Kierkegaard, journal, 4-15, 1838).”

Enough has been said about the intertwining of Heidegger’s and Kierkegaard’s thought. The time is ripe to ask ourselves why Kierkegaard, despite his enormous influence on the thinker of being, received such poor explicit attention of Heidegger, quite unlike, for example, Aristotle. A possible answer to this question can be surmised from Heidegger himself. In his *Metaphysics of German Idealism* (Freiburg lecture from 1941), Heidegger says (1991: 19): “Kierkegaard is a religious thinker, and therefore neither a theologian nor a Christian philosopher (misapprehension). **Kierkegaard is more theological than any conceivable Christian theologian, and more non-philosophical than any conceivable metaphysician.**”

In his short, yet highly telling Tübingen lecture (from 1927) “Phenomenology and Theology” Heidegger says in a more general vein (1998: 50) “The positive science of

vast difference between --- two different philosophical passions (again, rewardingly, with Nietzsche’s help): the passion of an antiquarian historical approach, and the passion of the monumental historical approach. Had the author been consumed by the latter passion, as is the case with us, he would have inescapably recognized the necessity of “distorting” (better appropriating) a thinker for one’s own time, one’s own topicality, one’s own historical moment, *because this is the only way the history of the spirit can be a, one, living history, with us as part of it*. Of course, what one should ultimately be looking for is the golden mean between the two approaches. In this respect, the article addressed rightfully deserves our full attention.

faith does not need philosophy for the founding and primary disclosure of its *positum*, Christianness, which founds itself in its own manner.” And a bit further on (1980: 53): “This peculiar relationship [of phenomenology and theology] does not exclude but rather includes the fact that faith, as a specific possibility of existence, is in its innermost core the mortal enemy of the form of existence that is an essential part of philosophy and that is factually ever-changing ... Faith is so absolutely the mortal enemy that philosophy does not even begin to want in any way to do battle with it.” The contrast between philosophy and theology reaches its towering peak in the passage where Heidegger recalls St. Paul’s words on wisdom as foolishness (ibid.): “This *existentiell opposition* between faithfulness and the free appropriation of one’s whole Dasein is not first brought about by the sciences of theology and philosophy but is prior to them. [...] Accordingly, there is no such thing as a Christian philosophy; that is an absolute ‘square circle.’ On the other hand, there is likewise no such thing as a neo-Kantian, or axiological, or phenomenological theology.”

This should, of course, not be read in a newspaper fashion, which brings shocking news. Immediately following this passage, we find a reminder about the (1980: 54) “scientific good sense” for the common topic, which evades all issues of dominance or pre-eminence. The reason for Heidegger’s scarce mention of this highly original thinker, as admitted by Heidegger himself, obviously lies in the specific nature of Kierkegaard’s thought, which is too religious to be a metaphysical theologian. In a marked contrast to the Danish genius stands Aristotle, as the first great beginning of Western metaphysical philosophy.

If we now follow the guidance of scientific good sense, we should attempt to dig deeper into the relationship between Heidegger and Kierkegaard as well as, more generally, between philosophy and theology. Admittedly, the best approach to this highly elusive topic is that of the hermeneutics of facticity, where factual life experience, according to Heidegger, is considered to be *the* topos of opening the way into philosophy, or theology. The world of factual life experience is not an entirety of objects, but rather a lived world, formally conceived as our nearest environment-world. It embraces not only material things, but also ideal objects, sciences, arts, and of course also religion and theology.

Our modern nearest environment, which might point in the direction of an intimate relationship between philosophy and theology, can be illustrated by a metaphor, introduced by the great Nietzsche. It might well prove fruitful in our attempt at articulating the truth growing out of our new facticity of the nearest environment. Metaphorically, it speaks the (man of the) land and the (man of the) sea; philosophically, this betrays the age-old oppositions of the One and the Many, the absolute and the relative, the eternal and temporal. And the crucial element, holding together the pairs in opposition, is implicitly already there, patiently awaiting our readiness and articulation (2001: 59-60):

Our amazement. – It is a profound and fundamental good fortune that scientific discoveries stand up under examination and furnish the basis, again and again, for further discoveries. After all, this could be otherwise. Indeed, we are so convinced of the uncertainty and fantasies of our judgments and of the eternal change of all human laws and concepts that we are really amazed how well the results of science stand up. Formerly,

nothing was known of this fickleness of everything human; the mores of morality sustained the faith that all of man's inner life was attached to iron necessity with eternal clamps. Perhaps people then experienced a similarly voluptuous amazement when they listened to fairy tales. The miraculous gave a great deal of pleasure to those who at times grew tired of the rule and of eternity. To lose firm ground for once! To float! To err! To be mad! That was part of the paradise and the debauchery of bygone ages, while our bliss is like that of a man who has suffered shipwreck, climbed ashore, and now stands with both feet on the firm old earth — amazed that it does not waver.

As in so many cases, Nietzsche's genius equips us with most palpable, and rewarding, insights; this time with an insight into the fundamental difference between the pre-modern and modern truth of European society. If the pre-modern paradigm rested on the man transfixed by the eternally fixed horizon and the firmness of the ground, every now and then wanting to lose the ground and throw himself into the mesmerizing wavering of the fathomless depths of the sea, the modern paradigm, in a marked contrast, is shouldered by the shipwrecked man desperately wanting to climb ashore, stand with both feet on the firm old earth in amazement that the ground does not waver.

Nietzsche's genius is particularly rewarding here in that his insight also lays bare *the mutual irreparable interrelatedness* of both worlds, of eternity, amazed by the wavering finitude, and finitude, completely amazed at the unshaken and unshakable ultimate ground. And the reason for his compelling insight into *both* traditions may very well be that he grew in and was marked so passionately by both the eternalistic and nihilistic approach to life.

For our present purpose, we may ask ourselves: where exactly do the Christian and modern philosophical thought meet most unexpectedly, even though one leads to existential free variation of the meaning of being and the other one into a free (choice-based) reappropriation of factual, best possible existence, namely that of Christ. What is the most peculiar junction point that links the sea and the sea shore of European existence and truth? And the answer is: nothing. After Augustine, God is intimately related to the Nothing and so is the Christian man. After Augustine, the world of ideas is intimately related to the Nothing (and no longer solely to the uncreated and imperishable unformed matter) and so is the philosophical man. From out of nothing come both religious freedom and decision for the givenness of the eternal, and the philosophical freedom of variation as the playing out of possible truths of being.

To return to our specific topic: Heidegger's distinguished attunement of anxiety is most obviously taken over from Kierkegaard, although undergoing drastic change in that, in Heidegger, anxiety gets free from the Christian lived facticity through the process of formalisation: thus, anxiety is the general attunement of *Dasein*, explicating its formal structure, bereft of all specific content. We could therefore say that Heidegger remains in the grips of Kierkegaardian Christian theology exactly by freeing himself from Christian lived facticity, through the very process of formalisation. This insight, however, proves a real obstacle for the "orthodox" reading of Heidegger *by Heidegger himself*, which stresses his own deliberation for the ancient Greek factual origin of philosophy as the only possi-

ble root of all genuine philosophising. As we more or less managed to show in our detailed comparison between Heidegger and Kierkegaard, Heidegger's own emphasis on the exclusively Greek "right of philosophising" turns out to be misleading. The same, of course, goes for any attempt at establishing the exclusive pre-eminence of the Christian tradition.

Our present facticity – and the same goes already for Kierkegaard and Heidegger, let alone Nietzsche – turns out to be neither ancient Greek nor Christian. Instead, it is a complex intertwining, a hybrid tree of knowledge and life, the meeting point of the man of the land and shipwrecked man of the sea at the intersection of the absolute and relative as the common passage, under which gapes the Nothing; the Nothing as our *common* heritage. And this environment-world took root not so very recently. It is high time that we start thinking toward basic contours of the human, interpersonal factual environment-world, which is no longer solely created (with Reason) or an outcome of the play of coincidences. The factual environment-world, embracing people, ideal objects, sciences, arts, religion and theology, has no doubt taken specific ideal worlds of philosophy and religion into the fundamentality of everyday existence. Its basic pattern has been knitted with the invisible thread of both the Greek and Christian ideal worlds. In order to adequately hint at the basic contours of this environment world, and be directed onto an adequate path of philosophy, we need to start, not from human singularity, but from the irreducible interpersonality. Still further, we should not start, as might well be expected, from some kind of initial duality, but from the givenness of the third.

For brevity's sake, we shall only hint at this compelling possibility. How can the interpersonal, as the irreducible fundamental ground of this new environment-world be most immediately illustrated? Imagine two people meeting in the street, acquaintances, if not friends, the first one belonging to the tradition of the shipwrecked world of the fathomless sea, the other one to the tradition of the world of iron necessity and firmness of the ground. Then the crucial question pops up out of nowhere: "And how are your kids doing?"

Undoubtedly, the question is quintessential here: for the world at stake here is interpersonal in a stronger sense; not as one's relationship with the other, but as the relationship with the ultimate and most cherished other of the other. We should be interpretatively most harshly honest here: isn't the child of the other something which escapes ever so patently obviously the otherwise all-inspiring attention of both Kierkegaard and Heidegger? Both the attention of the thinker of the knighthood of faith, who cares for but proving his own faithfulness to God, in absolutely blissful disregard of what his son might be experiencing, as well as the attention of the thinker of authentic existence of, indeed his very ownmost, being towards death, in totally resolute disregard of what Klaus Held so poignantly articulated as the generative time, or next-generational time?

Now how can we, clearly against both, in many ways unsurpassable thinkers, think toward the basic structure of this primordial world of the infant? Could we not perhaps say that the caring question about the wellbeing of the child, raised above, arises from out of Nothing? In the strictest possible and purposely ambivalent sense of: nothing can come between us when we, interpersonally, open ourselves to the futurity of the child. Is there a

person who would dare exclude the child, indeed *any* child, from the common world? We can see most clearly it is none other but the Nothing of calculative reason, its very collapse, which comes to the fore here. Our attentive relationship to the child of the other, which usually starts with congratulations, no matter which specific ideal world the parent belongs to or cherishes, comes all by itself and gratis. It is there gratuitously – the word of course used approvingly –, done without any reason, good or bad, and thus all the more gratifyingly, provoking gratitude beyond any economy of exchange.

This criticism, directed against both rewarding thinkers, can be articulated in an even more sharp-edged manner, and directed against all of us moderns. And with this our treatise comes to its final conclusion. Could it be that because we are so inadequately unserious, constantly engaging in an improper conduct towards the dying, we are likewise extremely immature for a proper comportment toward the gracious event of the child? The comportment needed for the child to be able to feel kingly in this world? Is not our present time, which calls for a sweeping change, the time of the man suffering from the *middle-age* crisis? On the one side, he doesn't want to hear anything about his nearing old age, let alone about dying, and on the other side he is so seriously and unrelentingly immersed in himself that he is unable to see the child in the other and in himself. And is not our present time in this sense – if I am allowed to venture this seemingly grave anachronism – actually the darkest possible *Middle Age*?

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