

centuries, which merely let loose the destructive forces for ever active in the minds of the children of Adam, is an infinitely greater historical cataclysm than the most formidable upheavals of the crust of the earth or the economy of the nations.

Indocile to the object, to God, to being, the mind becomes also and to the same extent indocile to all human authority, a rebel against all tradition and spiritual continuity. It retires within its shell, shuts itself up in the incommunicability of the individual. And if you consider that *docibilitas*, the faculty of being taught, is an essential characteristic of the created mind—nay, rather of animal faculties themselves, inasmuch as they imitate and prepare the mind, so much so that Aristotle classifies animals according to that criterion, placing those that refuse to be taught on the lowest rung; if you also consider that such *docibilitas* is in our case the real root of social life—man being a political animal primarily because he needs other men to make progress in the work of the speculative and practical reason, which is his specific work—the inevitable conclusion is, on the one hand, that by losing its docility to human teaching and its docility also to the object, the mind in our time has proceeded in the direction of an absolutely brutal hardening and a progressive weakening of reason; and, on the other hand, that the most profound and at the same time most human bonds of social life must have simultaneously become by an unavoidable consequence gradually loosened and undone.

Three main symptoms of the disease afflicting the mind at the present day down to its very roots may be discerned at the point of evolution which speculation has reached since the great changes inaugurated by the Cartesian reform.

The mind imagines that it is giving proof of its own native strength by denying and rejecting as science first theology and then metaphysics; by abandoning any attempt to know the primary Cause and immaterial realities; by cultivating a more or less refined doubt which is an outrage both to the perception of the senses and the principles of reason, that is to say the very things on which all our knowledge depends. Such a presumptuous collapse of human knowledge may be described in one word: agnosticism.

The mind at the same time refuses to recognize the rights of primary Truth and repudiates the supernatural order, considering it impossible—and such a denial is a blow at all the interior life of grace. That may be described in a word as naturalism.

Lastly, the mind allows itself to be deceived by the mirage of a mythical conception of human nature, which attributes to that nature conditions peculiar to pure spirit, assumes that nature to be in each of us as perfect and complete as the angelic nature in the angel and therefore claims for us, as being in justice our due, along with complete domination over nature, the superior autonomy, the full self-sufficiency, the

autarchy appropriate to pure forms. That may be described as individualism, giving the word its full metaphysical meaning, although *angelism* would be a more accurate description; such a term is justified by historical no less than by doctrinal considerations, because the ideal origin and metaphysical type of modern individualism are to be found in the Cartesian confusion between substance of whatever sort and the angelic monad.

I say that these three great errors are the symptoms of a really radical disease, for they attack the very root, the triple root, rational, religious and moral, of our life.

They were, to begin with, singularly latent and dissimulated, in the state of pure spiritual intentions. They are before us today, sparkling, oppressive, ubiquitous. Everybody sees and feels them, because their sharp unsparring point has passed from the mind into the very flesh of humanity.

Let it be observed once more, it is the integrity of natural reason, the singleness of the eye of the mind, to adapt the expression in the Gospel, the fundamental rectitude of common sense which is outraged by such errors. What a strange fate has befallen rationalism! Men emancipated themselves from all control to conquer the universe and reduce all things to the level of reason. And in the end they come to abandon reality, no longer dare to make use of ideas to adhere to being, forbid themselves the knowledge of anything beyond the sensible fact and the phenomenon of consciousness, dissolve every object of speculation in a great fluid jelly called Becoming or Evolution, conceive themselves barbarous if they do not suspect every first principle and every rational demonstration of naïveté, substitute for the effort of speculation and logical discernment a sort of refined play of instinct, imagination, intuition, visceral emotions, have lost the courage to form a judgment.

### 3. *Existentialism*

#### JEAN-PAUL SARTRE: *Existentialism* \*

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905– ) is the acknowledged leader of the “atheistic” existentialists. He holds a Ph.D. and has taught school in three French cities. During World War II he spent nine months in a German prison camp. He has broadcast his existentialist philosophy in philosophical works, plays, and novels. The following selections are from a lecture delivered by Sartre in Paris in 1945.

\* From Jean-Paul Sartre: *Existentialism*, pp. 14–18, 21–2, 25–8, 34–5, 42–5, 60–1. Copyright 1947 by Philosophical Library, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Philosophical Library, Inc.

Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. Nowhere is it written that the Good exists, that we must be honest, that we must not lie; because the fact is we are on a plane where there are only men. Dostoevsky said, "If God didn't exist, everything would be possible." That is the very starting point of existentialism. Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and as a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to. He can't start making excuses for himself.

If existence really does precede essence, there is no explaining things away by reference to a fixed and given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom. On the other hand, if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct. So, in the bright realm of values, we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses.

That is the idea I shall try to convey when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. The existentialist does not believe in the power of passion. He will never agree that a sweeping passion is a ravaging torrent which fatally leads a man to certain acts and is therefore an excuse. He thinks that man is responsible for his passion.

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Forlornness implies that we ourselves choose our being. Forlornness and anguish go together.

As for despair, the term has a very simple meaning. It means that we shall confine ourselves to reckoning only with what depends upon our will, or on the ensemble of probabilities which make our action possible. When we want something, we always have to reckon with probabilities. I may be counting on the arrival of a friend. The friend is coming by rail or street-car; this supposes that the train will arrive on schedule, or that the street-car will not jump the track. I am left in the realm of possibility; but possibilities are to be reckoned with only to the point where my action comports with the ensemble of these possibilities, and no further. The moment the possibilities I am considering are not rigorously involved by my action, I ought to disengage myself from them, because no God, no scheme, can adapt the world and its possibilities to my will. When Descartes said, "Conquer yourself rather than the world," he meant essentially the same thing.

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Thus, I think we have answered a number of the charges concerning existentialism. You see that it can not be taken for a philosophy of quietism, since it defines man in terms of action; nor for a pessimistic descrip-

tion of man—there is no doctrine more optimistic, since man's destiny is within himself; nor for an attempt to discourage man from acting, since it tells him that the only hope is in his acting and that action is the only thing that enables a man to live. Consequently, we are dealing here with an ethics of action and involvement.

Nevertheless, on the basis of a few notions like these, we are still charged with immuring man in his private subjectivity. There again we're very much misunderstood. Subjectivity of the individual is indeed our point of departure, and this for strictly philosophic reasons. Not because we are bourgeois, but because we want a doctrine based on truth and not a lot of fine theories, full of hope but with no real basis. There can be no other truth to take off from than this: *I think; therefore, I exist.* . . .

Secondly, this theory is the only one which gives man dignity, the only one which does not reduce him to an object. The effect of all materialism is to treat all men, including the one philosophizing, as objects, that is, as an ensemble of determined reactions in no way distinguished from the ensemble of qualities and phenomena which constitute a table or a chair or a stone. We definitely wish to establish the human realm as an ensemble of values distinct from the material realm. But the subjectivity that we have thus arrived at, and which we have claimed to be truth, is not a strictly individual subjectivity, for we have demonstrated that one discovers in the *cogito* not only himself, but others as well. . . .

Hence, let us at once announce the discovery of a world which we shall call inter-subjectivity; this is the world in which man decides what he is and what others are.

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. . . existentialist humanism. Humanism, because we remind man that there is no law-maker other than himself, and that in his forlornness he will decide by himself; because we point out that man will fulfill himself as man, not in turning toward himself, but in seeking outside of himself a goal which is just this liberation, just this particular fulfillment.

From these few reflections it is evident that nothing is more unjust than the objections that have been raised against us. Existentialism is nothing else than an attempt to draw all the consequences of a coherent atheistic position. It isn't trying to plunge man into despair at all. But if one calls every attitude of unbelief despair, like the Christians, then the word is not being used in its original sense. Existentialism isn't so atheistic that it wears itself out showing that God doesn't exist. Rather, it declares that even if God did exist, that would change nothing. There you've got our point of view. Not that we believe that God exists, but we think that the problem of His existence is not the issue. In this sense existentialism is optimistic, a doctrine of action, and it is plain dishonesty

for Christians to make no distinction between their own despair and ours and then to call us despairing.

### KARL JASPERS: *Way to Wisdom* \*

Since 1950 Karl Jaspers, whom F. H. Heinemann called "the originator of the [existentialist] movement," has preferred not to be called a "philosopher of existence." Nevertheless, he still adheres to one of the fundamental tenets of Existentialism, namely that truth is (at least in part) subjectivity: that truth arises, not from the calm contemplation of the world as an object, but from intense personal experience in "ultimate situations" which force man to ask ultimate questions about himself—and to choose. It should be noted that Jaspers is not an "atheist" but a "transcendental" existentialist who seeks "essence" or being "beyond the world." Jaspers (1883–1969) was appointed professor of philosophy at Heidelberg in 1921 but lost his professorship during the Nazi regime. He returned to Heidelberg after the war.

AND now let us take a look at our human state. We are always in situations. Situations change, opportunities arise. If they are missed they never return. I myself can work to change the situation. But there are situations which remain essentially the same even if their momentary aspect changes and their shattering force is obscured: I must die, I must suffer, I must struggle, I am subject to chance, I involve myself inexorably in guilt. We call these fundamental situations of our existence ultimate situations. That is to say, they are situations which we cannot evade or change. Along with wonder and doubt, awareness of these ultimate situations is the most profound source of philosophy. In our day-to-day lives we often evade them, by closing our eyes and living as if they did not exist. We forget that we must die, forget our guilt, and forget that we are at the mercy of chance. We face only concrete situations and master them to our profit, we react to them by planning and acting in the world, under the impulsion of our practical interests. But to ultimate situations we react either by obfuscation or, if we really apprehend them, by despair and rebirth: we become ourselves by a change in our consciousness of being. . . .

The ultimate situations—death, chance, guilt, and the uncertainty of the world—confront me with the reality of failure. What do I do in the face of this absolute failure, which if I am honest I cannot fail to recognize?

The advice of the Stoic, to withdraw to our own freedom in the independence of the mind, is not adequate. The Stoic's perception of man's weakness was not radical enough. He failed to see that the mind in itself

\* Karl Jaspers: *Way to Wisdom*, pp. 19–20, 22–3, 121. Copyright 1951 by Yale University Press. Reprinted by permission of Yale University Press.

is empty, dependent on what is put into it, and he failed to consider the possibility of madness. The Stoic leaves us without consolation; the independent mind is barren, lacking all content. He leaves us without hope, because his doctrine affords us no opportunity of inner transformation, no fulfilment through self-conquest in love, no hopeful expectation of the possible.

And yet the Stoics' striving is toward true philosophy. Their thought, because its source is in ultimate situations, expresses the basic drive to find a revelation of true being in human failure.

Crucial for man is his attitude toward failure: whether it remains hidden from him and overwhelms him only objectively at the end or whether he perceives it unobscured as the constant limit of his existence; whether he snatches at fantastic solutions and consolations or faces it honestly, in silence before the unfathomable. The way in which man approaches his failure determines what he will become.

In ultimate situations man either perceives nothingness or senses true being in spite of and above all ephemeral worldly existence. Even despair, by the very fact that it is possible in the world, points beyond the world.

Or, differently formulated, man seeks redemption. Redemption is offered by the great, universal religions of redemption. They are characterized by an objective guarantee of the truth and reality of redemption. Their road leads to an act of individual conversion. This philosophy cannot provide. And yet all philosophy is a transcending of the world, analogous to redemption. . . .

The desire to lead a philosophical life springs from the darkness in which the individual finds himself, from his sense of forlornness when he stares without love into the void, from his self-forgetfulness when he feels that he is being consumed by the busy-ness of the world, when he suddenly wakes up in terror and asks himself: What am I, what am I failing to do, what should I do?

That self-forgetfulness has been aggravated by the machine age. With its time clocks, its jobs, whether absorbing or purely mechanical, which less and less fulfil man as man, it may even lead man to feel that he is part of the machine, interchangeably shunted in here and there, and when left free, to feel that he is nothing and can do nothing with himself. And just as he begins to recover himself, the colossus of this world draws him back again into the all-consuming machinery of empty labour and empty leisure.

But man as such inclines to self-forgetfulness. He must snatch himself out of it if he is not to lose himself to the world, to habits, to thoughtless banalities, to the beaten track.

Philosophy is the decision to awaken our primal source, to find our way back to ourselves, and to help ourselves by inner action.