

The Reception of Existentialism in the United States

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IT IS DIFFICULT to deal briefly with the reception of existentialism in the United States. The response to even one or two of the writers who are often lumped together as "existentialists" could easily be made the subject of a monograph, and to deal adequately with about ten writers in a single essay is impossible. Broad generalizations about "existentialism," on the other hand, are bound to be of very dubious value if it is not clear to whom precisely they apply. What is needed is a combination of generalizations with attention to the individual "existentialists."

I shall first attempt a sketch in very broad strokes of the influence of European on American philosophy before 1930. Next I shall ask what existentialism is, and offer first an ostensive, historical definition and then a more analytical answer that brings out what the so-called existentialists have in common. After that I shall briefly consider the reception of the major figures, one by one;¹ and in the end I

¹ Comprehensive bibliographies of their writings, including English translations, are included in the following volumes: *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (1967); *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (1957); and *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Paul Tillich*, ed. Walter Leibrcht (1959). William J. Richardson, S.J., *Heidegger* (1963), lists Heidegger's lectures and seminars, 1915-58, on pp. 663-71, his writings in order of publication, 1912-62, on pp. 675-78, and in order of composition, pp. 678-80, while English translations are listed on p. 688. The bibliography in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche* (3d rev. ed., 1968) includes Nietzsche's writings, collected editions, and translations, as well as studies of his thought by over one hundred writers.

In the following pages I shall not attempt any philosophical criticism, as I have done that elsewhere. Critical essays on Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Heidegger are included in my *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (1959; rev. ed., 1960), and critical discussions of Tillich in my *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (1958), secs. 50, 53, and 57 and *The Faith of a Heretic* (1961), secs. 32-34; the chapters on commitment and death also deal with Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus; and Sartre's attempt to offer an ethic is criticized in section 86. My estimate of "Buber's Religious Significance" is included in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*.

shall offer some systematic conclusions about the impact of existentialism in the United States.

I

Only three or four peoples have produced more than three or four truly original philosophers whose impact has been widely felt beyond the languages in which they wrote: the Greeks, the British, the Germans, and perhaps also the French. American philosophy may turn out to be comparable to Roman philosophy: mainly derivative. There is no Washington or Lincoln in American philosophy; unlike American history, American philosophy cannot boast of figures that can hold their own against the best men anywhere.

Philosophy is altogether unlike history or literature or sculpture; it is more like tragedy. All of Western philosophy has its origin in Greek philosophy, and all Western philosophers to this day share an international European tradition. Within this tradition, the British were the first in modern times who developed a distinctive strain of their own, beginning with Bacon and Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. When Hume died in 1776, no other people since the Greeks could point to such a subtradition. The other giants of modern philosophy were loners: Descartes, Spinoza (whose genius was not widely recognized until the end of the century), and Leibniz.

The French *philosophes*, of whom there were many, did not attain to the first rank, except for Voltaire and Rousseau (both died in 1778) who dwelt on the margins of philosophy in the rich border land of literature. Soon Rousseau became the second French philosopher to influence the course of European philosophy; like Spinoza, he was embraced by nascent German philosophy.

The influence of Greek and British philosophy on American philosophy does not need to be stressed. All modern European philosophy is based on that of the Greeks, and the British influence on American institutions, literature, and thought is obvious and not surprising, given a common language. But in 1781 German philosophy came into its own with the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and since the early nineteenth century the German impact on American philosophy has been immense. The pattern has remained remarkably constant down to our own time.

As soon as Kant's influence in Germany had given way to Hegel's, Kantianism arrived in England; when Hegel went into eclipse in Germany, Hegelianism came to dominate British philosophy; and both times it took a little longer for German thought to cross the

Atlantic Ocean. But eventually the influence on American thought was at least as great as it had ever been in England.

The reception of existentialism in the United States should be considered against this background and compared with the impact of other contemporary philosophies, such as logical positivism, phenomenology, and neo-Thomism. The spread of all four in the United States was helped by the arrival of refugees, but there is no reason for doubting that all four would have won some popularity in America even without any such assistance, allowing only for the usual time lag.

This is not to say that Nazi persecution made no difference at all to American philosophy. At the very least it changed the timeable by forcing positivism into eclipse in the thirties, while Heidegger was discredited in Germany in 1945 when the Nazi state collapsed. It might be supposed further that by expelling some philosophers who subsequently found a home in the United States, the process was speeded up, as it did not have to move by way of England. But this is more doubtful, although positivism was the last European philosophy that reached America via England.

The case of positivism was unusual in at least two ways. First, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) left his native Austria for England long before 1930, and at Cambridge he became a teacher of exceptional intensity and passion. Thus his influence was naturally felt in England long before it reached the United States. Secondly, Wittgenstein went to Cambridge because he felt some affinity for G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell; and the various philosophies that are sometimes collectively called positivism were in many ways congenial to the British tradition, all the way back to David Hume. Existentialism, on the other hand, was and is profoundly uncongenial to the British philosophers. That it did not come to the United States by way of England was not due to the direct migration of Central European philosophers to America. Existentialism never found a home in England. After World War II communication between the two continents was greatly speeded up, owing to technological advances; and it was only after 1945 that existentialism really impinged on the American consciousness.²

II

What is existentialism? The question can be answered in two ways: ostensibly, by naming the writers meant, or analytically, by char-

² Thus *Partisan Review* devoted its spring 1946 issue to "New French Writing" and in 1947 published William Barrett's "What is Existentialism?"

acterizing the movement and its tenets or characteristic tendencies. To begin with such an analysis is methodologically unsound; that way there is no guard against arbitrariness, and different analysts come up with different descriptions. Some writers who are generally identified as existentialists may turn out in the light of such analyses, not to be existentialists at all, while someone else whom the analyst happens to fancy — or dislike — becomes the paradigm. We ought to keep in mind in all such cases that the writers come first and the label afterwards, as part of an attempt to group some men together.

Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz are “the continental rationalists,” and it makes good sense to study them together, not because they shared the same philosophy but rather because Spinoza set himself the task of correcting what he considered Descartes’ errors; and Leibniz, although he found fault with both, tried to integrate their valid insights. Those who wish to devote a course, anthology, or study to these three men often find it useful to have a single label — and that is the primary meaning of “continental rationalism.” What the three continental rationalists have in common is a question that arises only after that.

The situation is precisely the same with British empiricism. Primarily, that means Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. But once a tradition has been identified, we can meaningfully ask whether John Stuart Mill or Bertrand Russell was a British empiricist, too. Nothing much depends on the answer: the question is one not of fact but of convenience, although it is interesting to point out what marginal figures have in common with the Big Three and to what extent they differ.

The term *Existenzphilosophie* seems to have been introduced in 1929 by Fritz Heinemann, then a Privatdozent at the University of Frankfurt, in a book entitled *Neue Wege der Philosophie: Geist/Leben/Existenz: Eine Einführung in die Philosophie der Gegenwart* (New paths of philosophy: spirit/life/existence: an introduction to contemporary philosophy). The book begins with “A Postscript as a Preface” in which it is suggested that the antithesis of “spirit” and “life” is overcome by “existence” — the new principle of a number of new, existential philosophies: *das neue Prinzip einer Reihe von Philosophien, der Existenzphilosophien.*⁸

Around 1800, “the *Geistphilosophien* of European rationalism” gave way to “the principle of life in Herder, Hamann, and Jacobi,” while Goethe and Humboldt championed *Existenz*. Similarly, in the nineteenth century, “the rationalism of German idealism gave way to the

⁸ Heinemann, *Neue Wege*, p. xviii.

Lebensphilosophie of romanticism, and this in turn to the *Existenzphilosophie* of Marx, Feuerbach, and Kierkegaard.”

Finally, these three principles succeeded each other in the development of the phenomenological school, in which Edmund Husserl, according to Heinemann, represents *Geist*, Max Scheler *Leben*, and Martin Heidegger *Existenz*.⁴

Heinemann's book does not seem to have been widely read or discussed, but the term *Existenzphilosophie* stuck, and his use of it prevailed. The notion that it is in Kierkegaard that we find “the first beginnings of an *Existenzphilosophie* that fits thinking again into the inviolable unity of man, that makes philosophizing a communication of existence,”⁵ the suggestion that some earlier movements might also be called existential, and the point that the principle of existence was also championed by Karl Barth, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and several others⁶ — all this and much else, including the long appreciation of Heidegger and the passing references to Jaspers, has been repeated again and again by others after World War II, without any reference to Heinemann or any clear awareness of the time lag of which we spoke earlier.

Heinemann himself participated in the migration of the thirties, went to England, and eventually published *Existenzphilosophie Lebendig oder Tot?* (1954), as well as an expanded English version, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* (1958). Although both appeared in prestigious paperback series⁷ and called attention to the 1929 book, I cannot recall ever having seen that book discussed in the mushrooming literature on existentialism. Heinemann's stress on *Existenz* was clearly derived from Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927, *Being and Time*), in which that term had been invested with a new significance, suggested much earlier by Soren Kierkegaard, especially in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846). But neither Kierkegaard nor Heidegger had spoken of *Existenzphilosophie*, and Heinemann's use of that term was very casual; he did not call attention to it as a coinage. Perhaps the term had even been used orally by others before it turned up in Heinemann's book.

We find it next in Jaspers' little volume, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (1931), which appeared in a popular hardcover pocketbook series (*Sammlung Göschen*, vol. 1000) and reached a very large audience. In 1933, English, Spanish, and Japanese translations ap-

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xx.

⁷ Urban-Bücher in Stuttgart and Harper Torchbooks in New York.

peared, the first under the title *Man in the Modern Age*. The first French version appeared in Louvain in 1951 and in Paris in 1952; and in 1954 another Japanese translation appeared. The fifth of the six chapters was entitled "How Being Human is Comprehended Today," and was divided into two parts: "(1) Sciences of Man: Sociology — Psychology — Anthropology" and "(2) *Existenzphilosophie*." Rather oddly, the last-named section, comprising four pages, reported on *Existenzphilosophie* as if it were a well-known feature of the contemporary situation, but what Jaspers actually offered was a miniature summary of his own *Philosophie*, which appeared in three volumes the following year. Indeed, following the last page there was an announcement of this work, complete with the titles of the three volumes which coincided with the three phases of *Existenzphilosophie* as described in the summary.⁹ Jaspers gave credit to Kierkegaard, Schelling, and Nietzsche but did not mention Heidegger, and in effect gave the impression that the only contemporary philosophy that contributed to the comprehension of man was his own.

In his *Philosophie* (1932), *Existenz* is a key concept, and the second volume bears the title *Existenzerhellung* (Illumination of existence); but the term *Existenzphilosophie* occurs only a couple of times near the end of volume 3.⁹ It thus seems highly likely that Jaspers picked up this label from Heinemann, although he does not mention him and may have come by the word indirectly, without any awareness of Heinemann. He may even have thought it was his own coinage. At any rate, he henceforth appropriated the term for his philosophy, without, however, looking on his own philosophy as merely one among others. There is more than a suggestion that he shared the conviction classically formulated by Hegel "Philosophy is its age comprehended in thought."¹⁰

In Jaspers' three-volume *Philosophie* no other philosopher is referred to anywhere near so much as Kant and Hegel; Schelling and Kierkegaard are the runners-up, mentioned less than half as often; Nietzsche is cited a few times, Heidegger once, and no other living philosopher more than once. The footnote reference to Heidegger reads in full: "About being in the world and about *Dasein* and historicity M. Heidegger (*Sein und Zeit*, Halle 1927) has said things of significance."¹¹ In *Sein und Zeit*, Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919) was cited in three footnotes that were

¹⁰ *Philosophie des Rechts* (1821), pp. xxi-xxii.

⁹ P. 145.

¹¹ Pp. 215, 217.

almost equally insignificant.¹¹ Jaspers and Heidegger have never dealt with each other's ideas in print, although it is no secret that they were friends for a while before the Nazis came to power and that they have not been on speaking terms since then.

In his "Philosophical autobiography"¹² Jaspers discusses many minor figures and devotes a whole section to Heinrich Rickert, but one looks in vain for a single mention of Heidegger — or of Dilthey.

In 1935 Jaspers published a volume of five-lectures, *Vernunft und Existenz* (Reason and existence), of which one was devoted to "The historical significance of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche."¹³ The following year, he published a full-length interpretation of Nietzsche,¹⁴ and in 1938 a book consisting of three lectures, which he called *Existenzphilosophie*.

The term "existentialism" (or *Existentialismus*) was not yet in use at that time, and *Existenzphilosophie* brought to mind Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Jaspers. It was understood that Nietzsche was a precursor of twentieth-century *Existenzphilosophie*, though that label did not fit his philosophy. Not only Jaspers kept stressing Nietzsche's significance; Heidegger did, too, and eventually, after World War II, published several essays as well as a two-volume work on him.¹⁵ By that time, Jaspers had come more and more to prefer Kierkegaard to Nietzsche, although he had published much more about Nietzsche,¹⁷ while Heidegger openly disparaged Kierkegaard, whom he had cited with respect in *Sein und Zeit*, and proclaimed Nietzsche as a world-historical figure. (It is arguable that Heidegger owes as much to Kierkegaard as he does to Nietzsche — and that his originality is widely overestimated.)

It was further understood that *Existenzphilosophie* was not merely a name for the philosophies of Jaspers and Heidegger, which had roots in Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and the late Schelling (Jaspers' *Schelling* appeared in 1955), but that it signified a way of thinking

¹¹ I: 66n.

¹² In sections 49, 60, and 68.

¹³ In *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (1957), pp. 5–94.

¹⁴ English translation by William Earle in *Reason and Existenz* (1955), reprinted in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (1956).

¹⁵ English translation of *Nietzsche* by Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (1965).

¹⁶ "Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'" in *Holzwege* (1950); "Wer ist Nietzsches Zarathustra?" in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954), English translation by Bernd Magnus in *Lectures and Addresses* (1967); and *Nietzsche*, 2 vols. (1961).

¹⁷ In addition to the works named, most notably a short book, *Nietzsche und das Christentum* (n.d. [1946]), English translation by E. B. Ashton, *Nietzsche and Christianity* (1961).

to which some other contemporary writers, including Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, were also close.

During the war, Jaspers was not allowed by the Nazis to teach or publish, and Heidegger published nothing except his collected *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (1944, Elucidations of Hölderlin's poetry). In 1945, when the Nazi state collapsed, Heidegger was temporarily discredited while Jaspers resumed his chair at Heidelberg and began to publish again; but at that point Jean-Paul Sartre, who called his own philosophy *existentialisme*, made existentialism the most widely discussed philosophy of our time. Even in Germany it was he who redirected attention to Heidegger; and in the United States and elsewhere the sudden interest in the so-called existentialists was created largely by Sartre's works.

We are now ready to give our first answer to the question, What is existentialism? When we speak of the continental rationalists or the British empiricists, we do not imply that the men concerned welcomed, or would have welcomed, this label. If this is firmly kept in mind, we may call Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre the Big Four existentialists. We shall have to deal briefly with the reception of all four and of Nietzsche, before we consider some other writers who have often been lumped with the existentialists, notably Tillich and Buber. But before we consider these men one at a time, we must attempt a nonostensive, analytical answer to the question of what existentialism is.

III

"Existentialism" is not merely a label that happens to have been applied to the philosophies of several men; it represents an attempt to call attention to the fact that they have something in common. To list affinities and get involved in the crisscross of family resemblances — these two share this feature, and one of them shares that trait with those two — would serve little purpose. Let us be bold and suggest a fundamental conviction common to all: philosophy should begin neither with axioms nor with doctrines, neither with ideas nor with sense impressions, but with experiences that involve the whole individual.

In his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919), Jaspers called them *Grenzsituationen* (border situations) and paid particular attention to four: struggle, death, accident (*Zufall*), and guilt. In his *Philosophie* (1932) he changed the sequence and substituted suffering for accident. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century,

Kierkegaard had written books on dread, fear and trembling, and the sickness unto death which is despair. Heidegger, in *Sein und Zeit* (1927), dealt at length with care (*Sorge*), dread, and attitudes toward one's own death. In Sartre's literature even more than in his philosophy, the experience of one's own impending violent death is again and again central, as it is also in both *The Stranger* and *The Plague* by Camus. Camus' third and last novel, *The Fall*, like Sartre's *Flies*, deals centrally with guilt feelings, and both works are very close to Nietzsche in their strong opposition to guilt feelings and in linking them with Christianity. The twentieth-century existentialists also stress our always being in situations, and Sartre, following Kierkegaard, the dread-full dizziness of freedom that typically accompanies crucial decisions. Martin Buber is most interested in genuine dialogue that involves the whole person. Buber calls this *Zwiesprache* or *Dialog*, Jaspers, *Kommunikation*. Buber also wrote a book on guilt and guilt feelings (*Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, 1958), and so (in 1912) did Tillich.¹¹

When we call these men existentialists we do not imply that they are all very fond of each other or that they share a common philosophy. What they have in common is a notion about how philosophers might fruitfully begin. This may seem little enough, especially if one keeps in mind how much these men disagree about ever so much else, but it is enough to distinguish them from the continental rationalists and the British empiricists, Kant and Hegel, Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, as well as positivists and analytical philosophers. Moreover, close family resemblances are never any warrant that those who look similar to outsiders are pleased to hear how much they look alike or get along well with each other. As we have seen, the continental rationalists defined their own contributions in terms of their differences, and the same is true of the British empiricists.

The notion that philosophy is, and ought to remain, closer to literature than to the sciences, and the active interest many of the existentialists have taken in literature are corollaries of their common starting point; for our "ultimate" experiences have long been a staple of great literature and especially of tragedy. The widespread assumption that the existentialists stay closer to real life and are less academic than other philosophers is belied by the scholasticism of so many existentialist tomes, but is due to their common starting point.

Sartre's passing suggestion in one of the most widely read lectures

¹¹ See n. 22 below.

of all time that there are two kinds of existentialists, Christian and atheist, has been parroted *ad nauseam*, but would be unhelpful even if he had not falsely classified Jaspers as a Catholic.¹⁹ You might as well say that there were three kinds of continental rationalists — Catholic (Descartes), Jewish (Spinoza), and Protestant (Leibniz); or two kinds — theist and atheist (or pantheist). And there were also three kinds of British empiricists: unitarian or deist (Locke), Christian or theist (Berkeley), and atheist or agnostic (Hume). And American pragmatism can be divided the same way: theist (Peirce), agnostic or believer in a finite god (James), and atheist (Dewey).

In other words, none of these convenient labels justifies the notion that those grouped together agreed on essentials or that they would have been happy to be lumped together. The opposite was true in every case, and existentialism is not singular in this respect. What is unusual is that historical self-consciousness has become so acute that men are labeled, pigeonholed, and all but embalmed while still alive and vigorous, and hence have ample opportunity to explicitly repudiate the ways in which others would classify them.

No sooner had Sartre called his philosophy *existentialisme* and a form of *humanisme* than Heidegger and Jaspers sought to dissociate themselves both from him and from each other; and eventually even Sartre grew tired of existentialism and pronounced it a parasitic growth on the margins of Marxism, which he proclaimed the philosophy of our age.²⁰

IV

Turning now to the reception of existentialism in the United States, let us consider the major writers, one at a time, before attempting some generalizations in the end. We shall begin with the two nineteenth-century thinkers.

Before World War II, Kierkegaard was not widely known in the United States, but David Swenson and Walter Lowrie had begun their translations of his books; and by 1945 most of them, including all the major works, were available in English along with two biographies by Lowrie, one long and one short. This tremendous labor had been independent both of the migrations prompted by

¹⁹ *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946). Philip Mairet's translation, originally entitled *Existentialism and Humanism*, is included, under the title *Existentialism is a Humanism*, in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (1956). See p. 289.

²⁰ *Search for a Method*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (1963), p. 8, "Question de méthode" is the prefatory essay in Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960).

the Nazis and of the sudden explosion of interest in existentialism after the war, which vastly increased the audience for this literature and in time led to some new translations from the Danish as well as a large secondary literature.

For almost a hundred years, Kierkegaard's books had had to wait to be translated into English. Untimely when they were written, they were not yet timely when they were first translated. In Germany translations had begun to appear before the end of the nineteenth century, but it was only after World War I that Kierkegaard became popular, as dread and despair became common concerns. Before the war one had not spoken of such things. Now one spoke of little else, and here was a writer who had devoted whole books to these extreme experiences. Jaspers and Karl Barth discovered him before the war was over, Heidegger and the general public a little later. But in the United States widespread interest in Kierkegaard, and in existentialism generally, was aroused only after World War II, by Jean-Paul Sartre. Thus American interest in Kierkegaard owes little or nothing to the migration from Central Europe.

Nietzsche was well known but little understood in the United States since at least 1900, and unreliable translations of all of his works appeared before World War I. Many writers paid tribute to him, but when George Allen Morgan, Jr., published *What Nietzsche Means* in 1941, hardly any American philosophers were as yet taking Nietzsche seriously; and Morgan, who did, promptly left academic life, went into the Department of State, and ceased publishing philosophical books or articles.

Nietzsche's reception in the United States does owe something to the expulsion of the Jews from Germany. In 1950 the first edition of my *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* appeared. I had left Germany in 1939, studied at Williams College and Harvard University, and started teaching at Princeton in 1947. In 1954 I published new translations of four of Nietzsche's books, as well as selections from his other works, his notes, and his letters (*The Portable Nietzsche*), and in 1966-67 translations with commentaries of five more books (collected in one Modern Library Giant, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, in 1968) and also of *The Will to Power*. In 1968, a third, revised and greatly expanded, edition of my *Nietzsche* appeared. In the late forties some American academicians were still astonished that a young man should be working on a book on Nietzsche, and the incredulous remark "I thought Nietzsche was dead as a doornail" voiced a common

feeling. Twenty years later the same remark would only suggest that the speaker was wholly out of touch with the American scene.

I presented Nietzsche neither as an existentialist nor in the perspective of existentialism. While Nietzsche is now often studied as a precursor of existentialism, he has been linked even more often with other movements and currents; and earlier generations associated him with Darwin and evolutionary ethics, with Freud and psychoanalysis, with Schopenhauer or Spengler, Shaw or Gide, or Mussolini and Hitler; and in the mid-sixties the "death of God" theologians drew inspiration from him while some philosophers began to claim him as a precursor of analytic philosophy. It seems safe to predict that interest in Nietzsche will outlast the fashionable concern with existentialism. To what extent the fact that large numbers of young American philosophers have begun to read Nietzsche will affect American philosophy, it is too early to say. The effect on American theologians, on the other hand, is palpable and would have distressed Nietzsche.

V

American interest in Jaspers and Heidegger is largely due to Sartre although — indeed in part because — neither of them admires Sartre. In the United States, as elsewhere, it was not the philosophical community that discovered Sartre. *The Flies* and *No Exit, Nausea*, his short stories, and his later plays and novels won a large audience before *Being and Nothingness* appeared in English, and they are still incomparably more widely read than any of his philosophical essays. Only his lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* is anywhere near so well known. But from the start of his international popularity it was common knowledge that Sartre was also a philosopher and that his *Being and Nothingness* owed something to Heidegger's *Being and Time*; also that the concern with nothingness could be traced back to Heidegger, and that Heidegger and Jaspers were full-fledged professors of philosophy who taught at old universities and did not spend much of their time in cafés or on fiction. Thus one read Sartre's literary works and his famous lecture but for the most part not *Being and Nothingness*, and one talked knowingly of Heidegger, often by way of suggesting that his *Being and Time*, which one had not read either, was of course incomparably more profound than Sartre's philosophy.

Even if it was not the professional philosophers that started these rumors, they had to reckon with them; and gradually the demand for English translations of Heidegger mounted. As enough translations

became available, many departments of philosophy introduced courses in which they were studied.

With the exception of Descartes, French philosophers of note have tended not to be "pure" philosophers. Few are the philosophy courses at American colleges and universities in which Montaigne, Montesquieu, or Voltaire are discussed at all, and Comte and Bergson fare little better. Rousseau and Sartre are studied, but not by themselves. Rousseau may be linked with other social contract theorists; Sartre is lumped with Heidegger and other "existentialists" or — the new wave of the late sixties — with phenomenology. The refugee phenomenologists had never succeeded in creating any wide interest in phenomenology, but Sartre has.

Interest in Jaspers is not at all keen among American philosophers; there is a little but not much more of it at theological seminaries. That his three-volume *Philosophie* of 1932 had not yet appeared in English thirty-five years later, any more than his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919) and his *Von der Wahrheit* (1947, *On truth*), is surely due to this fact, not the other way around. All this is the more remarkable when one considers that not one avowed Heidegger disciple emigrated to the United States, while Jaspers' most famous student, Hannah Arendt, made her home in the United States and acquired considerable influence. Yet her labors on behalf of Jaspers have not won for him the recognition Heidegger enjoys even among many philosophers who feel uncomfortable about his Nazi past.

The major translators of Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre are not immigrants; nor have studies by refugees helped notably to acclimatize these three writers. Although many students have approached the subject by way of my own *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956), which includes a long introduction as well as essays by Jaspers and Heidegger that had not been done into English before, I have never published any study of Sartre, and my essays on Jaspers and Heidegger are sharply critical.

Of course, several studies of Sartre and of existentialism generally have been contributed by American scholars born in Europe, but they were published to meet an existing demand that none of them affected significantly. And *Being and Nothingness* was translated by Hazel Barnes (1956), *Being and Time* by Edward Robinson and John MacQuarrie (1962), the first two born in the United States, the last in Scotland.

In the sum, the American reception of Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre owes little to the migrations set in motion by the Nazis. We may add

that the differences between the reactions to Jaspers and to Heidegger parallel their reception in their native land. There, too, Jaspers' many popular books reach a wider audience than any of Heidegger's volumes, while professional philosophers have manifested far more interest in Heidegger, especially in *Sein und Zeit*. Ever since that book first appeared in 1927, Heidegger has attracted a much larger following and elicited far more discussion among professors and professors-to-be than Jaspers ever did. There are several reasons for this.

The first involves the personalities of the two men. Philosophers hesitate to touch upon such points because it seems indelicate and they are taught that *ad hominem* arguments are fallacious, but historians cannot always avoid personalities, seeing how often influence and success depend on them. To understand the different receptions with which Jaspers' and Heidegger's philosophies have met from the start, we must discuss their personalities, if only briefly. The basis for my juxtaposition is threefold: the printed record, which includes their writings and some essays about them; conversations with scholars who studied under them; and my personal impressions during the years 1946 to 1956. The picture that emerges from these sources is remarkably consistent.

Heidegger, a short man vibrant with energy and a demonic touch, may put one in mind of Napoleon. There was something electric about him, and he generated a sense of excitement. Whether in conversation — "under four eyes," as the Germans say — or in a huge auditorium, lecturing to thousands, he created the expectation that something of the first importance was at stake and on the verge of discovery. When he entered the lecture hall, the atmosphere was charged, and though his large audience soon got lost and many people went literally to sleep, he always managed to regain their attention before he concluded with some intimation that, although everything was dark now, next time a great revelation was to be expected. And most of the audience always blamed itself for its failure to understand what he had said, and came back. Some professors who were his students before 1933 and felt appalled by his quick embrace of Nazism still felt a quarter of a century later that he was the greatest teacher they had ever had, especially in seminars.

Jaspers, very tall and pale, tried to keep students and colleagues at a distance; having a hole in one lung, he had to guard against catching cold. His life was spent largely at his desk, writing, not in seminars or in discussion. His aristocratic reserve appealed to many who like to

listen to one or two lecture courses in philosophy, not to many professors-to-be.

Jaspers' second handicap was much less important but still deserves mention. Between 1923 and 1931 he published nothing, and his major philosophic work, his three-volume *Philosophie*, appeared less than a year before the Nazis came to power. Had this effort appeared five years earlier, the year *Sein und Zeit* was published, it would obviously have had more time to gain a hearing before World War II. But this point was not crucial.

The third point was much more decisive. Jaspers was more interested in *philosophieren*, philosophizing — or as one now says, in *doing* philosophy — than he was in offering doctrines; but unlike Wittgenstein, of whom the same could be said, Jaspers neither taught nor even seemed to teach a method. He was not primarily a teacher, he did not *desire* disciples, and he did not offer what professional students of philosophy, hoping to become professors, were looking for. His books do not lend themselves as well to endless discussions in seminars as does *Sein und Zeit*. Jaspers' works have the hortatory quality of Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's, but without their literary grace, passion, and wit.

Heidegger's fame depends almost entirely on *Sein und Zeit* which, though long-winded and repetitious, is much less so than Jaspers' three-volume magnum opus, not to speak of *Von der Wahrheit* (1947; xxiii plus 1,103 pages). A hostile critic might say that Heidegger's forbidding jargon strikes many philosophers as an uncomfortable challenge and that, having figured out how many pages that at first reading made little sense could be interpreted, one can then teach a seminar. But there is more to it than that, and it is noteworthy that Sartre, who never had the least liking for Nazism, discovered Heidegger after 1933 and was fascinated by his thought, while Jaspers, from whom Sartre also accepted important ideas, never appealed much to him, although Jaspers, devoted to his Jewish wife, never became a Nazi.

Sartre lacks the professorial bearing of both men and plainly does not desire disciples. Though he owes much to both, he is in many ways closer to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. His versatility, his restless brilliance, and his literary gifts exert a fascination that few writers can match. Both the popular image of, and the wide interest in, existentialism are inseparable from these qualities. The spell Sartre has cast over generations of American students, beginning right after the war, has created an almost unique interest that courses in philosophy, re-

ligion, literature departments, and humanities have been designed to satisfy or to exploit. Jaspers and Heidegger have been among the major beneficiaries. But this is not merely an American phenomenon.

Even in Germany it was the French who permitted Heidegger to teach again at Freiburg, after he had first been retired in 1945. And the Germans, having little to boast of at that time, even culturally, were persuaded by Sartre that at least they had a great philosopher of international repute. Jaspers' decision in 1948 to leave Heidelberg, where he had resumed teaching in 1945, to accept a call to Basel certainly did not increase his influence in postwar Germany; nor did he acquire any influence in Switzerland.

That Sartre's impact in the United States has been so much greater than either Jaspers' or Heidegger's is less a function of his philosophy than of his literature. His lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946) along with his two plays, *No Exit* and *The Flies* and some awareness of his major philosophic work, *Being and Nothingness* — all three published during the war in occupied Paris — hit the American consciousness and much of the rest of the world all at once; and while *Being and Nothingness* alone might not have attracted very much more attention than the tomes of the German existentialists, the knowledge that there was a philosophy behind the plays, the novels, and the short stories unquestionably added a great deal to their attraction. That existentialism elicits greater interest in the United States than any previous philosophic movement is almost entirely due to Jean-Paul Sartre.

VI

Several other writers have often been called existentialists. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, Rilke and Kafka, though dead before anyone had ever heard of "existentialism" or *Existenzphilosophie*, profoundly influenced Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre;²¹ but judicious writers are agreed that these four men, like Nietzsche, ought not to be called existentialists.

²¹ Kafka may not have influenced Jaspers and Heidegger; his influence on Camus was formative.

The central section on death in *Sein und Zeit* is plainly inspired by Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch* (1886). For Tolstoy's concern with self-deception, one of the major themes of Sartre's philosophy and fiction, see Walter Kaufmann, *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus* (1961, rev. ed., 1964), pp. 2-8.

Dostoevsky, like Nietzsche, exerted a decisive influence on the whole climate of thought, especially after World War I.

Of Rilke's *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910, The notes of M.L.B.) one feels reminded especially by Sartre's *La Nausée* (1938, Nausea). See also Heidegger's essay on Rilke in *Holzwege* (1952).

Given our account of existentialism, we can readily see why this should be so. These men, being novelists or poets, were not especially concerned with the proper starting point for philosophy. They were profoundly concerned with extreme situations, but so were Shakespeare and the Greek tragic poets, Heinrich von Kleist and Georg Büchner, the Buddha and the prophets. These experiences have always been close to the heart of religion and of tragic literature, and to call dozens of poets and religious figures of all ages existentialists would be exceedingly unhelpful.

In any case, these four writers do not owe their richly deserved fame in the English-speaking world to refugees. Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's works had been translated and their reputations were secure long before 1930. Rilke was the greatest German poet since Goethe's death. And Kafka was one of the most original novelists of all time.

Kafka was a Jew, and it might be supposed that his vast reputation and influence in the United States did owe something to the exodus of Jews from Germany. He died in 1924, and his unfinished novel, *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*) was published by his friend, Max Brod, the following year, although Kafka had asked him to destroy the manuscript. In 1926 Brod published *Das Schloss* (*The Castle*), and in 1927 *Amerika*, both also against the author's express desire and unfinished. When the Nazis came to power, Brod, long a Zionist, went to Palestine. His editorial labors on his friend's behalf continued, and he also wrote a biography of Kafka. Other refugees did their share, but it does not appear that the expulsion of so many intellectuals from Central Europe made any decisive difference to Kafka's reception abroad. Willa and Edwin Muir, who were not refugees, translated *The Castle* in 1930, *The Trial* in 1937, and *Amerika* in 1938; and as Kafka's visions turned into reality, his fame spread.

The most important way in which the Nazi regime promoted existentialism and the literature associated with it was not by compelling many people to emigrate but rather by killing so many more. As fear and trembling, dread and despair, and the vivid anticipation of one's own death ceased to be primarily literary experiences and, like the absurd visions of Kafka, turned into the stuff of everyday life, the originally untimely Kafka and Kierkegaard became popular along with Jaspers and Heidegger, Sartre and Camus, who were fashionable from the first; and Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Nietzsche, whose fame was long established, suddenly appeared in a new light.

The case of Camus may seem different because for a while he was Sartre's friend, before their political differences estranged them; and,

like Sartre, he tried to write philosophy as well as plays, novels, short stories, and journalism. But his philosophical efforts were so feeble that it makes more sense to see him as a literary figure whose reputation depends on his three novels and, to a lesser extent, on his plays and short stories. His *Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* have been highly successful with American undergraduates but have been almost wholly ignored by philosophers. For good measure, Camus disdained the label of existentialism (this in itself would not be decisive); and his American reception owes nothing to the mid-century migrations.

VII

It might be argued that Paul Tillich and Martin Buber, who were above all religious writers, should be left out of account here; but we shall consider both. Tillich's case is relevant and instructive because in 1933 he left Germany for the United States; because after the war he often called himself an existentialist; and because he saw himself, and others came to see him, as a philosopher-theologian who to some extent transformed both disciplines by infusing existentialist ideas into them.

While Sartre moved from existentialism to Marxism, Tillich traveled in the opposite direction, from Marxism to existentialism. He had been a Christian socialist in Germany in the 1920's and, far from trying to recant his Marxist past when the Nazis came to power, accepted an invitation to teach at Union Theological Seminary in New York although he was unable as yet to speak English. He had the vitality to begin a new life at the age of forty-six, soon lectured in English, then began to write in English, and eventually, after World War II, became incomparably more influential in the New World than he had ever been in the Old. As existentialism became popular, Tillich, by now in his sixties, identified with it — he liked to say that he was an existentialist when he asked questions and a theologian when he gave answers — and he quickly became the most widely acclaimed Protestant theologian in the United States, far outstripping his only rival, Reinhold Niebuhr. (The competition in this field is not as keen as in nuclear physics.)

An admirer might say that quality gains recognition, even if it takes time, while a cynic might suggest that Tillich offered the latest intellectual fashions and Christianity, too. There is a good deal of truth in both points. Most theologians pour new wine into old skins, and that Tillich's impact became so much greater than that of the others

was due partly to the quality of what he had to offer, though it also owed something to the unusual vigor and charm of his personality.

His frequent use in the 1950's of the term "existentialism" was unquestionably opportune and shrewd, but Tillich's ideas were not improvised to meet a new demand. His dissertations had been on Schelling;²² Nietzsche's influence on Tillich had been formative; and Tillich's interest in Freud long antedated Sartre's. He was a contemporary of Jaspers and Heidegger, between them in age, shaped by similar reading and experiences — an authentic exemplar of that German philosophical tradition to which a new generation was suddenly seeking an indirect approach by way of Sartre. Unlike all the others, Tillich was in the United States, writing and teaching and preaching in English, and available for lectures and symposia.

Even so, his popularity also exemplified the time lag of which we have spoken. For Tillich's thought always remained closer in essentials to Schelling than to Sartre, and what he brought to Union Theological Seminary and then, after his retirement, even more obviously to Harvard, and eventually, during his last years, to the University of Chicago, was not so much a new wave as the final ripple of German idealism and romanticism.

At the University of Berlin, the old Schelling had replaced Hegel in 1841, ten years after Hegel's death. The king of Prussia had called him there expressly to root out "the dragon seed of the Hegelian pantheism."²³ Schelling in his last years characterized Hegel's philosophy along with his own early efforts as merely negative philosophy and demanded a new positive philosophy. Hegel was, first according to Schelling and then also in the writings of Kierkegaard, who heard the old Schelling lecture in Berlin, a mere conceptmonger, while what truly mattered was genuine existence and eternal happiness. In the later nineteenth century, Protestant theology became more modest. While Hegelianism lost its hold on German philosophy it found a new home not only in British and American philosophy but also in German Protestant theology. What had struck king Frederick William IV as "pantheism" now passed for liberalism. And the revival of philosophical interest in Hegel was spearheaded by the fine

²² *Die religionsgeschichtliche Konstruktion in Schellings positiver Philosophie* (The construction of the history of religion in Schelling's positive philosophy) . . . : *Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der philosophischen Doktorwürde* . . . Breslau (1910) and *Mystik und Schuldbewusstsein in Schellings philosophischer Entwicklung* (Mysticism and the consciousness of guilt in Schelling's philosophical development): *Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Lizentiatenwürde der hochwürdigen theologischen Fakultät Halle-Wittenberg, in Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*, 16:1 (1912).

new editions of his *Encyclopädie* (1905) and *Phänomenologie* (1907) that were produced by Georg Lasson, a Protestant pastor whose father, Adolf Lasson (originally, Ahron Lazarussohn), had championed Hegel's philosophy at the University of Berlin. The revival of Hegel in Germany also owed a great deal to Wilhelm Dilthey's study of the young Hegel (1906); and Dilthey's own "philosophy of life" and his concern with *Weltanschauungen* left their mark on German existentialism.²³

While in many ways close to the old Schelling, Tillich was far from merely trying to bring back a system that was a hundred years old, and even further from Schelling's pathetic resentment against his erstwhile friend Hegel, whose fame had long exceeded his own; nor was Tillich up in arms against the dragon seed of pantheism. He had himself come out of that liberal Protestantism which was permeated by Hegelianism; he had been a student when Dilthey's *Jugendgeschichte Hegels* appeared in 1906, followed the next year by the first publication of *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* — his early, really rather antitheological, fragments on Christianity, written during the last decade of the eighteenth century. And Tillich liked to say that Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud had been the greatest Protestants of the past hundred years.

Philosophical idealism in America had had a definitely Protestant tinge, and the many theologians and the few philosophers who still looked back nostalgically to Josiah Royce and idealism were not ready to take the leap to Barth or Kierkegaard. Tillich met their needs perfectly. He did not propose a renaissance of idealism; he combined Schelling and Hegel with the most modern movements, spoke approvingly of everything that was *avant garde*, and, while acclaimed as an existentialist like Kierkegaard, excelled in the art of obviating any either-or.

Only a few years earlier, being *au courant* with Kierkegaard had meant being neo-orthodox, contemptuous of liberalism, and exposed to the charge of fundamentalism. Tillich was liberalism incarnate.

A mere two years after his death, any appraisal of the extent of Tillich's influence on American Protestant theology must be hedged with doubt, but it seems safe to say that his influence will be confined

²³ See Kaufmann, *Hegel* (1965), secs. 68 and 70.

²⁴ See, e.g., Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*; Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 46-47, 205n., 209-10, 249n., 376-77, 385n., and 397-404; and Buber's occasional references to Dilthey as "my teacher" (once even as "my master") — but see also Buber's protest in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. Paul Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (1967), p. 702.

to theology. His *Systematic Theology* has little competition. No other American theologian of comparable *niveau* has written a systematic theology in this century. Hence Tillich's may well continue to be studied in seminaries. And some of his many short and relatively popular books will, no doubt, continue to find readers. As far as new directions in Protestant theology are concerned, the much publicized death-of-God theology may be seen as an attempt to push beyond Tillich. While he unquestionably paved the way for it, he is obviously not responsible for the fact that it is more notable for the headlines it has produced than it is for thoughtful or substantial writings.

In sum, Tillich took existentialism away from Barth and the neo-orthodox and used its popular appeal to liberalize American Protestantism and to animate it with more interest in German philosophy — including Nietzsche — as well as doubts about God. Incidentally he proved that all this can command the widest popular interest and even, as long as it is fused with homage to Christ, the covers of the slickest news magazines. This lesson was not lost.

VIII

Martin Buber left Germany for Jerusalem in 1938. His *Ich und Du* (1923) appeared in English in 1937 and in French the following year. *I and Thou* was translated by Ronald Gregor Smith and published in Edinburgh. With the exception of *Jewish Mysticism and the Legends of the Baal-Shem*, which appeared in London and Toronto in 1931, it was until 1945 the only one of Buber's many books available in English. Considering the migration of so many Jews from Central Europe, this is a remarkable fact; for among the German-speaking Jews who fled from the Nazi terror Buber's prestige was immense. But when the war ended, interest in his ideas was still largely confined to Christian theologians who considered *I and Thou* a seminal work.

Buber had long been a Zionist, and it was thus no mere accident that he went to the Hebrew University; and he would never have wished to teach at a theological seminary. But if he had taught in the United States, beginning in 1933 or 1938, and learned to write and publish in English — as he did learn to write and publish in Hebrew — his impact would surely have been far greater than it has been in fact. Whether this would have made any very great difference to long-range currents of thought is another question. By the time he died in 1965 — the same year Tillich died — most of his books were available in American paperbacks.

Tillich is the only influential American writer who is regularly classified as, and who frequently labeled himself, an existentialist; and Buber's belated arrival in the United States coincided with the arrival of existentialism, and was understood in this context. Tillich is the only so-called existentialist whose reception was facilitated by his immigration, and it is instructive to juxtapose Tillich and Buber.

Buber's acceptance was also facilitated by his many visits to the United States after World War II; but these cannot be accounted part of the large-scale migrations from Central Europe. Rudolf Bultmann weathered the war in Germany, as a Protestant theologian, and also visited the United States after the war, although, lacking Buber's charisma, his personal appearances had relatively little to do with the spread of interest in his program of demythologizing the New Testament. But if he had taught here for a quarter century, or if Karl Barth, who went to Basel after the Nazis came to power, had done so, there would unquestionably be large numbers of American preachers and professors now who could be classified as their disciples. It is different with Buber.

In spite of his charisma, Buber did not develop disciples any more than he developed doctrines. If one accepted the notion that existentialism, unlike other philosophies, sticks to experience instead of becoming preoccupied with concepts and doctrines — that the existentialists deal with existence, while other philosophers deal with essences — then the men we have discussed are not really existentialists, excepting only Buber.

This may be a reduction to the absurd of the popular notion of existentialism, and it shows that our earlier suggestion that it is only the common starting point in our extreme experiences that sets off the existentialists is more judicious. Yet our account of the reception of existentialism would be grossly misleading if we ignored one of the most crucial facts. The insistence that philosophy is, or ought to be, closer to literature than to science and that we must begin with our most intense experiences has been the bait that has led thousands to swallow some new scholasticism that differs from one fisher of men to another. Not only do the concepts and the doctrines furnish meat for seminars and the backbone of solid respectability, the jargon is part of the bait. The neophyte knows that once he has mastered that, he is "in," he belongs, and he has a spiritual home. This is the central irony of existentialism: the jargon of anguish, solitude, and authenticity allays anguish, liberates from solitude, and facilitates inauthenticity. One sneers at the anonymous "one," chatters about mere

"chatter," is curious about the latest diatribes against "curiosity," and feels superior.

Buber never fitted into this pattern. He did not only begin with experience, he stayed with it. His greatest achievements were literary — notably his collection of *Tales of the Hasidim*,²⁵ his translation of the Hebrew Bible into German,²⁶ and his novel²⁷ — and his own prose always remained literary and never degenerated into jargon. His rhapsodic *Ich und Du* is no exception, although English-speaking theologians soon derived from it "a Thou," "a Thou-relationship," and a few other phrases one could juggle somewhat like Sartre's *en-soi* and *pour-soi*. Buber's stance did not only forestall disciples, it also went so much against the grain of organized religion in America, and of the universities as well, that, his prestige notwithstanding, his approach was little understood or appreciated. What he offered was neither theology nor philosophy, and least of all fundamentalism or revivalism. It was a highly literate and somewhat literary experience of religion as a dialogue.

The single person who did the most to popularize Buber in America was Maurice Friedman, born in Oklahoma, who wrote a book and innumerable articles on Buber while also translating him tirelessly. The migration from Central Europe affected Buber's reception scarcely at all, and when he died his personal prestige was ever so much greater than his actual influence. No doubt he has begun to reach single individuals here and there; but whether his books will give either American Judaism or American philosophy new directions remains to be seen.

IX

Existentialism developed in at least three stages: Danish, German, and French. The first stage was represented by a single writer who rightly saw himself as an exception. He bucked the currents of the early Victorian era and projected his own extraordinary sensibility in a highly original and eccentric series of books. He deliberately remained outside every establishment — church, state, and university — countered

²⁵ 2 vols., translated by Olga Marx, 1947-48. *Die Erzählungen der Chassidim* (1950), Manesse-Bibliothek der Weltliteratur, is the definitive edition of the original.

²⁶ Definitive edition in 4 vols., *Die Schrift*, 1954, 1955, 1958, 1962. The enterprise was undertaken jointly with Franz Rosenzweig, in the 1920's, and the books of the Bible appeared one at a time.

²⁷ *Gog and Magog* (1949); English translation by Ludwig Lewisohn, *For the Sake of Heaven* (1945).

a favorable notice in the press by declaring his contempt for the journal in which it had appeared, and added that in that publication he would prefer to be pilloried — which he promptly was.

The second stage is represented by two German professors. Both began to publish over half a century after Kierkegaard's death, rose to the top of their profession, and attracted some notice, but no more than several of their colleagues who did philosophy in a different key; for example, Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Ernst Cassirer, and Rudolf Carnap.

Then Jean-Paul Sartre captured the imagination of the Western world with his version of existentialism. His plays and fiction were unusually philosophical, his academic philosophic volumes were enlivened by a wealth of vivid unacademic examples, his political and critical journalism was tireless, and his autobiography a masterpiece. He did not only get himself read all over the world; he also created international interest in German existentialism; and he led large numbers to study Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as forerunners of existentialism, and Camus, Buber, and Tillich as existentialists. Initially, it was fashionable to see him as a mere journalist without genuine depth or genius. What a few saw soon was so plain twenty years after the end of the war that he was named winner of the Nobel Prize for literature although he had let it be known that he would not accept the prize — a gesture that shows how much closer he is in some ways to Kierkegaard than to the German existentialists. He wears the mantle of Voltaire and Rousseau, and the subtitle of Iris Murdoch's *Sartre* (1953) may show how he does have ties to both: *Romantic Rationalist*.

Indeed, we may speak of a fourth stage in the development of existentialism. After the arrival of Sartre, a number of other writers who had not called themselves existentialists or been so labeled before 1945 became identified with this label and triumphed *in hoc signo*. We can also distinguish four levels in the *reception* of existentialism. The first is the stage of fashion, chatter, and journalism. This phase is not over yet, either in the United States or in Europe, although in France and Germany anthropology and sociology have begun to replace existentialism, also at the second level, which is that of research, seminars, and scholasticism. In the United States, the second phase, unlike the first, has not yet reached its high point, although it is well along its way. By the time it reaches its climax, existentialism will probably be in eclipse in the countries of its origin.

The third phase eludes easy observation and remains a subject for conjecture, but in the case of existentialism we must also ask to what

extent the writers mentioned have had the impact they explicitly desired, changing the quality of men's lives. This level cannot be inferred from the first two. On the contrary, insofar as the journalistic and the scholastic reception permit any inference about it, they give the impression that there has been very little of this and that both the popular and the academic approach have, each in its own way, pulled the fangs of existentialism and made it innocuous. This, of course, does not preclude that here and there an individual's life may have been changed by reading one or another of these writers. I have no doubt even so that on this level the impact of Jaspers and Heidegger, Sartre, Tillich, and Buber is not remotely comparable to that of Tolstoy, Nietzsche, and Kafka.

This may seem no more than a surmise, but an examination of the fourth and final level bears it out. What has been the impact of the writers whom we have considered on those individuals who have in turn become influential writers? Nietzsche's influence on all the writers we have been considering, excepting only the three who belonged to an earlier generation, is as obvious as his impact on Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse, André Gide and André Malraux, Shaw and Yeats and O'Neill, Freud and Adler and Jung, Stefan George and Gottfried Benn, Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann, and any number of others. That this became evident only after his death is irrelevant, considering that he died early. His impact on these men was plain as soon as they had read him, and he had left a decisive mark on world literature and philosophy well before he would have been eighty. When we ask about the impact of existentialism in the United States in *this* sense, we find that as yet there is no evidence that the writers here discussed have changed the quality of American philosophy or poetry, drama or fiction, or our intellectual life. Nor are there signs as yet that many American philosophers have been persuaded that our extreme experiences furnish a fruitful starting point for philosophical reflection. Insofar as such experiences are mentioned at all, the question discussed is usually what Heidegger may have meant when he said this or that. In our philosophical community, existentialism is acquiring some respectability only in its scholastic form.

There is one exception. One idea that is widely associated with existentialism is making some headway among professional philosophers: *engagement*. In the civil rights movement and the protests against the Vietnam war, many professors of philosophy have followed Sartre's lead in committing themselves publicly. Unlike Sartre, however, they do this, as it were, after hours, without claiming any close

connection between such activities and their philosophies. Moreover, it might be questioned whether *engagement* is really a part of existentialism or merely a notion that Sartre, with his experience of the resistance during World War II, has championed all along. To be sure, *engagement* was never that central in Heidegger's philosophy, and his brief flirtation with political commitment is humiliating to recall.²² But not only has the later Jaspers written several books in

²² See above all Heidegger's *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität* (1933).

which he adopts stands on questions of the day, but Sartre's message and the popular image of existentialism were from the beginning associated with *engagement*. Here, if anywhere, the impact of existentialism on American intellectuals is striking. Or is this a case of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*? Is there after all no causal link?

I cannot prove here that there is a link, but I believe there is. In support of this surmise one might adduce these points. The impetus for commitment has come largely from students and younger faculty, as well as some of the younger clergy — the generation that grew up reading Sartre. Then, Sartre's protests against the Algerian war have left a deep impression on American intellectuals and persuaded many that an intellectual minority can have an influence on stopping what is felt to be an unjust and immoral war. Finally, Sartre's protests against the Vietnam war have helped to rouse the conscience of large numbers of Americans. But this impact of existentialism on the American conscience owes little to the migration of intellectuals during the Nazi period, even though some refugees have greatly welcomed this development.

X

The most surprising result of our study is surely that the migration of so many Central European intellectuals to the United States has had so little impact on the spread of existentialism in America. Almost all of the major translations were done by native English speakers, and few refugees published pioneering studies of the so-called existentialists. Only Nietzsche's influence was decisively advanced by an immigrant, but then Nietzsche was not really an existentialist. Sartre and Camus, Kierkegaard, Buber and Heidegger, owe little or nothing to the migration; and although Jaspers' favorite student has gained some influence in her own right, few American philosophers are particularly interested in him.

Only Tillich's impact on the American scene is almost wholly due

to the migrations set in motion by the Nazis. Had he stayed in the Old World, writing his later works in German, Swedish, or Hebrew, Americans would hardly speak of "ultimate concern" and "being-itself." Clearly, intellectual fashions would be different. And had Karl Barth come here instead of Tillich, it is even possible that the history of Protestant theology in the United States would have proceeded differently. American theology is even more derivative than is American philosophy.

The main reason why existentialism has not had more effect on American philosophy is that some other Central European philosophers have been so much more influential: to some extent, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, and C. G. Hempel; to an even far greater extent Ludwig Wittgenstein. For this there are many reasons.

The first three came to the United States and taught and wrote in English. Their ideas were highly teachable and discussable, admirably precise, and congenial to students brought up on a high regard for the exact sciences. Teaching at different universities, they all attracted excellent students who then became teachers and attracted students of their own. Wittgenstein also taught in English and showed his students a highly contagious way of doing philosophy that, while not so scientific, did fit in with contemporary tendencies not only at his own Cambridge but also at Oxford.

Since World War I, competence in foreign languages has been a rarity among American graduate students in philosophy, and many of the most promising young philosophers have had difficulty in satisfying such requirements as showing the ability to translate one printed page of German philosophy in an hour, with a dictionary. Few indeed know German well enough to be able to read untranslated books by Hegel, Dilthey, Heidegger, or Jaspers. The best students and young professors, given a chance to spend a year abroad on some fellowship, have for the most part gone to England, both because there are more bright philosophers at Oxford than at any other European university and because they did not have sufficient competence in any foreign language. As a result, ties between British and American philosophy have been very greatly strengthened, and most of the best British philosophers have also been invited to American universities — once, twice, three times, or permanently — while few continental European philosophers have taught at American institutions.

It would be an egregious error to think of contemporary American philosophers as merely an offshoot of British philosophy. Besides the Central Europeans mentioned above, there is also Sir Karl Popper,

born in Vienna, who turns out disciples at the London School of Economics. But it would be entirely fair to say that philosophy nowadays is wholly tied to our universities, that professors are trained in graduate schools, and that our graduate programs are built around the general examinations which, at least in most of the best departments, stress logic, theory of knowledge, the philosophy of science, meta-ethics, and the way philosophy is done in our journals, à la Oxford. Those who have no stomach for all this tend to go into other fields, such as literature or religion. The Nazis kept Heidegger and drove out the positivists; but in the United States "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."

In the latest issue of

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