

WALTER KAUFMANN'S NEW PIETY

From Shakespeare to Existentialism: Studies in Poetry, Religion and Philosophy, by Walter Kaufmann. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959. \$5.95.

Walter Kaufmann's new collection of essays is dedicated "To the millions murdered in the name of false beliefs by men who proscribed critical reason." One would expect from this that the book would present a plea for rationality and tolerance. And so it does.

Yet when Kaufmann speaks of "critical reason," he does not mean the swaggering, over-confident reason of the early Rationalists nor the self-contained analysis-with-blinders of the logicians, any more than he intends to praise the painstaking, inchworm criticism of German philologists. Neither does he attempt to cultivate the speciously neutral, unengaged common sense which seems to be the ideal of most contemporary reviewers. Kaufmann as scholar and critic is generally accurate and he is fair more times than not, but his interpretations are always personal. While it would be difficult to attach a label to him, he is not uncommitted. His philosophical temperament might be called non-theologically Jewish though he looks back nostalgically also to the Greeks and in particular to Socrates. He abhors obscurantism and hates Christianity with a passion hardly equaled since Nietzsche. His own writing he himself describes as "perilously close to existentialism." His purpose, whether as teacher or as author, is maieutic. "Being right matters less than making people think for themselves. And there is no better way of doing that than being provocative" (p. 32).

I should like to see more of this type of criticism. There is no man so honest and so stimulating as he who prizes objectivity most without limiting himself to it. Kaufmann makes us fully aware of his own aesthetic and philosophical criteria. If we mistake provocative evaluation for analysis, it is our own fault.

Admittedly there are dangers involved too. In the first place, some readers may disagree so violently with the critic's attitudes that they will distrust in advance even those interpretations which are most objective. Thus, for example, with regard to the essay on "The Young Hegel and Religion," the fact that Kaufmann himself is so opposed to Christianity and to all theology may predispose the Christian reader to doubt this contention that Hegel's "Early Theological Writings" were anti-theological and non-Christian. Yet as Kaufmann points out, it was not Hegel himself who entitled them "Theological," and there is nothing inherently improbable in the idea that Hegel in his youth was influenced by the religious skepticism of the late Enlightenment and tried to reinterpret Jesus as an entirely human exponent of Kantian ethics. The evidence which Kaufmann produces is to me, at least, convincing. Antagonizing readers is not, however, something which Kaufmann would avoid. It is his specific intent to shock and irritate so that the one who reads is forced to examine his own position from a different point of view. The more serious risk is on the side of the author. The personality

of the writer may be stimulating; it may easily become obtrusive. Once he admits that the subjective element is present in all evaluations, he meets the temptation to confuse personal preference with intellectual conviction. If the critic (as Kaufmann does) complements his own personal approach with consideration of the total personality of the literary figures whom he discusses, he may descend to venting an unbecoming irritation upon his subject as an individual or succumb to trying to prove a point by reference to biographical matters not pertinent to the work at hand. In my opinion Walter Kaufmann magnificently illustrates the strength of this critical approach but is unfortunately rich in examples of its weaknesses.

Of the twenty essays included in *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* only three are published here for the first time. The others have been extensively revised and provided with interconnective links. Kaufmann states that his *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, which appeared last year, grew out of these studies. There is nothing in them likely to surprise the reader of the *Critique*, but there is fuller analysis of some of the philosophers touched on more lightly in the earlier book. Especially interesting are the sections in which Kaufmann marks out more sharply his own human ideal and those chapters which formulate explicitly his concept of the proper functions and relations of poetry and philosophy.

The title is misleading. Kaufmann has revised and added to the essays in such a way that the ten men whom he has selected for discussion are treated in roughly chronological order and with a certain amount of cross references and comparison. But the book is not a history of ideas since Shakespeare or even—save in a very vague sense—what we might call the tracing of a chain of influence. It is certainly not a history of existentialism or anything approaching a real appraisal of it. Neither Shakespeare nor Goethe is discussed within the existentialist context—not that I suggest that they ought to be—there is no more than passing, incidental comment on any of the French existentialists, and I think there should be.

Kaufmann's point of view and the unifying theme of the book—so far as there is one—are set forth most clearly in Chapter 1, "Shakespeare: Between Socrates and Existentialism" (one of the new essays) and in Chapter 12, "Nietzsche and Rilke." In the chapter on Shakespeare, Kaufmann picks up T. S. Eliot's statement (in *After Strange Gods*) that "the damage of a lifetime, and of having been

born in an unsettled society cannot be repaired at the moment of composition." Too many contemporary writers, claims Kaufmann, blame the age for their own lack of ability. With mingled self-pity and self-deception they persuade themselves that "our generation is unique in having lost the motherly protection of a firm religious faith." This leads to a falsification of history for which Christianity is responsible. The falsifications with which Kaufmann is concerned are not historical in the usual sense but pertain rather to our interpretive view of philosophers and other creative writers. Shakespeare is falsely labeled a Christian, Kaufmann says; Goethe in the last act of *Faust* is misinterpreted as providing Faust with a Christian redemption; Rilke is turned posthumously into a sentimental mystic. Nietzsche, whom nobody could redeem, is represented as a half-mad eccentric seeking to halt tradition and turn everything upside down. The truth is, Kaufmann argues, that Nietzsche (and Rilke) brought to a magnificent culmination a tradition which began with Socrates and Aristotle, was given new life in the work of Shakespeare, and kept alive by the men of the Enlightenment, by Goethe, and by the early efforts of Kant and Hegel, both of whom, alas, finally betrayed it.

As Kaufmann gradually makes clear what tradition he means, it merges in the form of an ideal human type. It is represented first by the inquiring, anti-authoritarian intelligence of Socrates (the Socrates of the *Apology*, not of the *Crito* or *Republic*). Further dimensions are added by Aristotle's "great-souled man," the product in epitome of the ethics of self-realization. That such was also the ideal of Shakespeare Kaufmann attempts to show by producing the ninety-fourth sonnet. Since he uses this as a recurrent motif and almost as a touchstone throughout the book, I will quote it in full.

They that have power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow:
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces
And husband nature's riches from expense,
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others, but stewards of their excellence.
The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die,
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

Kaufmann finds this sonnet profoundly unChristian. The man Shakespeare admires is the self-contained, self-sufficient man, one who lives and dies to himself and who helps humanity only by making of himself a monument of moral perfection which other men may contemplate. He is remarkably akin to Nietzsche's overman (Kaufmann prefers this translation of *Ubermensch*). The parallel is made explicit. In *Measure for Measure* (II, ii) we find the lines

O, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Nietzsche says, "Verily I have often laughed at the weaklings who thought themselves good because they had no claws." Shakespeare's "world-embracing tolerance that would punish no man" is combined with a contempt for most men. This is possible because the poet is "above resentment." As Aristotle has put it, the great-souled man has a just love of self; he is too proud to allow any meanness to dwell within him; hence he will not harm others with his base passions.

Shakespeare's pagan love of the proud man is combined and in part dependent on what Kaufmann calls a tragic world view. Relying chiefly on Macbeth's speech ("Life's but a walking shadow. . .") and Prospero's ("Our revels now are ended. . ."), he claims that Shakespeare rejected completely any belief in immortality. Consequently he cultivated "an ethic of character" in contrast with the Gospel's "ethic of otherworldly prudence." For this reason Shakespeare has a genuine sense of the tragic, and his characters are great-souled men. "His work stands as a monument of tradition that is frequently forgotten today, and it celebrates the riches of a world without God" (p. 20).

I agree with Kaufmann that Shakespeare is not Christian in any significant sense though I do not feel that Shakespearean criticism as a whole has been greatly distorted by the attempt to make him one. What strikes me as much more provocative is Kaufmann's discussion (in "Shakespeare and Goethe") of Shakespeare's concept of the tragic hero. Echoing an idea common in existentialist criticism, Kaufmann holds that the practice of providing full psychological motivation for dramatic *personae*, far from being the *sine qua non* of drama, may actually work to its detriment. To try to "explain" the heroism of Antigone or the self-destructive determination of Oedipus or the rebellion of Prometheus is to trivialize. Elemental

conflicts are made individual and quotidian. They are soiled with the dust of the too familiar. The heroes of the Biblical tales and of the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, because as persons they are less than the three dimensional creations of today's psychological writers, come before us as more than themselves. There is, says Kaufmann, something "numinous" about them.

The majesty of passion here portrayed is scarcely touched by psychological analysis, the relevance of which almost invites comparison with chemical analyses of paintings; they reveal something about the artist's medium, not his meaning (p. 34).

The characters of pre-Euripidean drama, whether derived from religious tradition or from history (e.g., Aeschylus' *Persians*), move less on the level of psychology than of myth. According to Kaufmann, Shakespeare invites comparison with the Greek tragedians even though he was much more concerned with the psychology of his protagonists and limited himself to easily recognizable human motives in the case of minor characters. The great creations (*Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Iago*) still retain something of mythical stature. Sufficient motivation is provided to justify the plot and make it credible; it does not explain the hero. One may take *Othello* as a study of jealousy, to be sure, and *Iago* as an exemplification of resentment. But they are more than this. *Iago's* disappointment at not being made lieutenant and his probably unjust suspicions that his wife had been *Othello's* mistress set his evil intentions in motion. They do not throw light on the evil which is already in the man. If Shakespeare had tried to explain it by references to *Iago's* childhood, earlier frustrations, and the like, *Iago* might be more real as a human being, but the awesome immensity of his villainy would be lost, the dramatic effect diluted. If we want to explore the infinite complexities of men and women, let us examine our acquaintances and ourselves; if we seek scientific explanations for man's conduct, we can try at least to find it in psychology textbooks. We may even discover some of both in comedies and in novels. The purpose of tragedy is quite different.

In his discussion of "Shakespeare versus Goethe," Kaufmann points out that Goethe thought of Shakespeare as "a being of a higher order to whom I look up" (p. 33). One of the basic differences between the two, Kaufmann claims, is that Goethe created heroes as human as we are. *Faust* and even *Mephistopheles* are so much like us that we recognize ourselves in them. They may be in their own way as "meaningful" as Shakespeare's characters. But they

have lost the “numinous” quality; they are appealing but without tragic stature. And the result is that *Faust* is not a tragedy. Kaufmann is undoubtedly right in saying that Goethe found both Faust and Mephistopheles dwelling as “two souls in his breast” and that many of the rest of us are aware of a perpetual inner dialogue between aspiring romantic and scoffing, analytic critic. I am not sure that Goethe’s creations are thereby rendered less “superhuman” than Shakespeare’s. I personally find that Faust forbids any easy empathy fully as much as Lear. It is true, however, that we come gradually to know and to understand Faust through Goethe’s gradual revelatory analysis whereas we experience Lear *absolutely*—as one lives a passion.

Kaufmann discusses another psychological approach to literature and character portrayal in his discussion of Kierkegaard. He says,

Kierkegaard’s prose never permits us to lose ourselves in a story or an argument: we are constantly confronted with the author’s individuality—and are made to think about our own.

His psychology is a vortex psychology that draws us into self-reflection against our will and never permits us to rest content with impersonal results (p. 186).

Kaufmann is speaking here of something more than the unique quality of an individual, highly subjective writer. Even in Kierkegaard’s near-novels where he might be expected to draw upon conventional psychological delineation, he does not do so. He projects certain of his own passions and attitudes, presents them as if they were living embodiments of total outlooks on life, without ever letting us forget that they are nevertheless aspects of himself. As a result we do not confront arguments, whose validity we might weigh on long tested scales. Kierkegaard looks only inward, and his passionate intensity makes us feel so keenly the urgent reality of his commitment that we can only yield or wrench ourselves away completely. It is his world or ours; there is no middle ground.

Kaufmann for one is quite able to tear himself away from the Kierkegaardian vortex. What appeals to him far more is the “new piety” of Nietzsche and Rilke. As Kaufmann points out, Nietzsche, while he anticipated many of the insights of Freud, was not interested in psychological analysis for its own sake. Holding that “every morality is a recipe for a certain type of man, an explication of a vision of what man might be,” he describes for us a vision of his own (p. 199). Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche does not attempt any sort of logical persuasion. The demand which he exerts upon us is more like

that of the work of art. Kaufmann effectively illustrates this point by bringing in for parallel consideration one of Rilke's most remarkable poems, "Archaic Torso of Apollo." In Kaufmann's translation this begins

We did not know his high, unheard of head
where his eyes' apples ripened.

After an exquisite description of the statue, Rilke concludes,

Else would this stone, disfigured and too small,
stand mute under the shoulders' lucid fall
and not gleam like a great cat's skin, and not
burst out of all its contours, bright
as a great star: there is no spot
that does not see you. You must change your life.

The only adequate response to great art, to monuments from the past, to Shakespeare's heroes, to vortex psychologists like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is to see in them "a challenge and a promise," to "change your life."

The idea contained in Rilke's sonnet is basic both to the Nietzschean morality, which Kaufmann greatly admires, and to Kaufmann's own view of the proper function of art. As he interprets Nietzsche and Rilke (his demonstration of the similarity of their outlooks is particularly excellent), what they both want "is a new honesty, and the sin against the spirit is for them the essentially insincere escape into traditional values and clichés. . . . Honesty is the new piety" (p. 206). The overman says, No, only to resentment. He says, Yes, to all genuine experience and is willing to change with it. He disdains security. For him "the terribleness and bliss of life are as a single face that merely looks this way or that depending on his distance from it or his mood." He will not use his giant's strength "like a giant" but will impose upon his life his own discipline and order. His honesty will neither allow him to neglect the truth which reason reveals nor pretend that he understands when reason is silent. Kaufmann summarizes,

There is no meaning outside, but Rilke and Nietzsche proclaim that a certain kind of life is its own reward, that a certain mode of experience makes life infinitely worth while, and that "the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: *to live* dangerously!" (p. 218)

The new piety is not reverence for God or for tradition. It is fidelity to the human condition.

There is the same emphasis on change in Kaufmann's aesthetics. Objecting to the idea that the artist imitates life or that he points to eternal verities beyond the flux of things, Kaufmann declares that "art is the eternal image of the moving" (p. 237). The poet in particular "records individual experiences in their unmitigated subjectivity and thus expands our subjectivity and cracks our horizons." It is not his function to present us with a thought or even, as Eliot has put it, with "the emotional equivalent of thought." "What he can teach even the philosophers is the meaning of thoughts" (p. 234). By creating for us new life which is more than brute reality and yet fully as real as it is, the artist makes us realize not only the inadequacy of our traditional way of thinking but the impossibility of confining life within any one system or subjecting existences finally to any fixed criteria. Kaufmann would define the ultimate effect of all significant art in the words of Erich Heller concerning Rilke:

The unnameable is christened and the unsayable uttered. It is a world in which the order of correspondences is violently disturbed. We can no longer be sure that we love the lovable and abhor the detestable. Good does no good and evil no harm (p. 221).

In the introduction to his anthology, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Walter Kaufmann concluded by saying: "But if the feat of Socrates is really to be repeated and philosophy is to have a future outside the academies, there will have to be philosophers who think in the tension between analysis and existentialism."¹ In his *Critique* he presented positivism and existentialism still more emphatically as a Scylla and Charybdis and praised Wittgenstein as being the one modern philosopher to fuse "the existential pathos and the analytic carefulness of Socrates."² Obviously Kaufmann himself is trying to follow this middle path. In *From Existentialism to Shakespeare*, taken as a whole, the critical approach is indeed between existentialism and its opposite, which I suppose would be not positivism in the usual sense of the analysis of non-emotive propositions, but rather the ideal of unbiased, impersonal scholarship. Yet in reading the individual essays, I feel that Kaufmann has not so much maintained a balance between the two extremes as alternated between them.

¹ *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 51.

² *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 40.

Particularly in the Hegel chapters he attempts a purely objective, external appraisal of the merits and defects of the philosopher, and he succeeds remarkably well. In "The Hegel Myth and its Method" he launches an old-style devastating attack on a critic of Hegel, Karl Popper, with occasional invectives bestowed on other misguided interpreters. His points are fairly made; they are over-supplied, if anything, with appropriate citations from the text. Although Kaufmann's criticism here is just a little reminiscent of the kind of thing done by new Ph.D.'s (it is significant that this is one of the earlier essays), it is nevertheless well done. In the process there emerges what might be called the scholarly credo of the analytic Kaufmann. This is not really new, rather a reaffirmation of the need to be impartial, to go to the original text and to read all of an author's work, to refrain from forcing the thought of another into a form external to it. In this connection Kaufmann condemns especially the use of "quilt quotations."

This device, used by other writers, too, has not received the criticism it deserves. Sentences are picked from various contexts, often even out of different books, enclosed by a single set of quotation marks, and separated only by three dots, which are generally taken to indicate no more than the omission of a few words. Plainly, this device can be used to impute to an author a view he never held (p. 91).

This fault and the one closely akin to it, the habit of lifting a sentence out of context and discussing it without the qualifications which originally surrounded it, are grievous sins indeed. Is Kaufmann himself free of them? Not entirely. I have not in these essays detected any gross example of the quilt quotation though Kaufmann recognizes the necessity of the occasional three dots as every critic must. But in a recent article of his there is an example as glaring as any he finds in Popper. In "The Faith of a Heretic," which appeared in the February issue of *Harper's Magazine*, Kaufmann bolsters up his own this-worldly position with a quilt quotation from Plato's *Apology*. After a series of short sentences and dots, he concludes with the words,

If you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him that is undisturbed even by dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. . . . Eternity is then only a single night.

That is all. Yet what Socrates actually said was that death is either of two things, an unconscious nothingness or the departure of the soul to another realm. That the latter alternative was the one he favored is at least extremely probable when we consider that Plato represents

Socrates in several of the dialogues as arguing for the soul's immortality.

Kaufmann's approach is never more consciously rational than when dealing with existentialists whom he does not like; understandably enough, these are also the occasions when he shows himself least able to live up to his own criteria of objectivity. He is never more brilliant nor less reliable than in the chapter called "Heidegger's Castle." He begins with a startling image.

'Language is the house of Being,' says Heidegger; but in truth his language is the house in which *he* hides, and his Gothic terminology is like a row of towers that frightens us away while it gives him a feeling of security. His philosophy is like a castle that, though certainly not beautiful, stands out from a generally dull landscape and catches the eye (p. 302).

Kaufmann goes on to show that Heidegger covers up lack of genuine philosophical insight with obfuscating philological games; that he deliberately promotes the myth of his own greatness by the literary device of creating suspense so that he seems to be always on the verge of announcing a great discovery which he has actually never made; that he has arbitrarily selected new authorities to whom he tries to subject himself and the rest of the world and that these authorities are simply his own mistranslated and misinterpreted versions of the early Greek philosophers; that Heidegger is a publicity seeker who is at least in part responsible for the low estate of all of contemporary German philosophy and the low standard of scholarship in German universities.

Being no follower of Heidegger's, I am willing to grant that at least too much of this is true. But it is not the whole story. One would never realize from this essay, for instance, that Heidegger has developed a highly original view of man's relation to time and to the world about him, concepts at least provocative enough to have been in part adopted by the new movement in psychology circles, existential analysis. And Kaufmann certainly underemphasizes Heidegger's plea for authenticity and individuality though he attaches great value to both as they are manifested in the writings of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Moreover a man with such high standards of fair play as Kaufmann usually maintains should not condescend to the false display of impartiality which we find in the paragraph purporting to say that there are, after all, two sides to the picture. Kaufmann starts out by seeming to pay tribute to Heidegger, then twists the praise into the most damning of all his condemnations.

That Heidegger is, for all his faults, one of the most interesting philosophers of our time, there can be no doubt. What stands between him and greatness is neither the opaqueness of his style, of which it is easy to make fun, nor his temporary acceptance of Nazism, of which it is easy to make too much, but his lack of vision. After everything has been said, he really does not have very much to say (p. 326).

If Kaufmann really believes that Heidegger has little to say and says it badly and that he is not quite trustworthy beside, let him state the judgment and abide by it without paying lip service to neutrality by calling the philosopher "interesting." Or else let him show us how it is that all these faults can reside in Heidegger and at the same time allow him (as Kaufmann implies) just to miss greatness.

If we could simply let this pass as "vortex" criticism, all would be well. To see Heidegger through Kaufmann's lenses is indeed an experience that jolts us and demands a reappraisal of one or the other and perhaps of ourselves. But I doubt that Kaufmann would be content to let it go at that in this instance. In "Heidegger's Castle" he tries to be least the existentialist and most the critical rationalist. His really basic criticism is pure positivism. Heidegger poses as the fundamental question, "Why is there any being at all and not rather nothing?" Kaufmann comments,

No previous age could have answered this question; and if a future generation should be able to answer it to its own satisfaction, it won't be because Being has revealed itself but because the intellectual conscience has gone to sleep (p. 308).

Probably true. But Kaufmann's assumption here that one should not raise questions which cannot be answered, that it is pure stupidity for Heidegger to have done so and that his work is thereby invalidated—such a position is by no means impregnable, nor is it consistent with Kaufmann's outlook elsewhere. More generally he recognizes that questions and the struggle to answer them may be valuable and illuminating whether answers are possible or not. It is for their refusal to ask the significant questions as well as for their separation of thought and emotion that he criticizes the positivists.

Another dubious point comes up apropos of Heidegger's use of the word "Being." With what strikes me as genuine insight, Kaufmann points out that many of Heidegger's puzzling statements about Being become clearer if we realize that he often uses the word where theologians would say "God." So far so good. But he then goes on to state that Heidegger uses "Being" rather than "God" in order to arouse "associations with estrangement from God, without

committing Heidegger to any particular belief." The implication is that this is deliberate evasion. Yet is it not entirely possible that Heidegger may have avoided the word "God" deliberately so that traditional attitudes would not get mixed up with his own concept?

Kaufmann is similarly anti-existentialist in his two essays on Toynbee, whom he damns as the existentialist historian par excellence. In some ways these are my favorite chapters. Kaufmann is marvelous as he undermines one distortion after another in Toynbee's history of the Jews. His attempt to show that Toynbee slips on alternatively the roles of historian, theologian, and poet and that he is in fact none of the three is done with finesse and humor; the result (for Toynbee) is catastrophic. The introductory statement that Toynbee perfectly exemplifies the kind of associative, non-scientific thought which Heidegger feels is philosophy's salvation invites exhilarating reflection whether it is fair to both men or not. Yet Kaufmann becomes as trivial as Toynbee when he counts the number of times the historian lists index references to himself and members of his family. There was no need to suggest that Toynbee's divorce was responsible for his concluding that Catholicism was too exclusive (p. 378). Such pettiness is unworthy of Kaufmann. These and other such emotional pronouncements smack rather of the "man of resentment," and this Kaufmann emphatically is not.

The existentialist side of Kaufmann is best blended with the analytic in the Nietzsche and Rilke essays, probably because Kaufmann, though by no means an apostle of Nietzsche's, obviously feels a profound sense of sympathy with him and admires Rilke for apparently sharing the overman morality. In his earlier work Kaufmann placed both men in the existentialist tradition. In the new volume he is more interested in contrasting them with the kind of existentialism represented by Heidegger.

The only "pure" existentialist for whom Kaufmann has real admiration, though without agreeing with him, is Kierkegaard. In the essay entitled simply "Kierkegaard" he shows by something of a *tour de force* that he can, if he likes, be himself completely the existentialist critic. Borrowing Kierkegaard's own technique, Kaufmann writes not one critical appraisal but two, one by "Brother Brash," which is an attack in the name of clear, logical thinking; the other by "Brother Brief," which makes us feel the passion and grandeur of Kierkegaard as an individual and which urges us to understand this "vortex psychology" and not be afraid to accept its challenge. In this chapter Kaufmann may be said to have proved to Kierke-

gaard that there is at least one professor who is not "Judas Number One."

What is chiefly disappointing in *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* is the lack of any real discussion of the French existentialists. Gabriel Marcel is not even mentioned. Simone de Beauvoir's name occurs in two sentences by way of illustrating what Jaspers may or may not have meant by "ambiguity." Sartre and Camus come in together for significant comment on one page, and what Kaufmann says there he should be ashamed of. The passage occurs in the discussion "Philosophy versus Poetry." Kaufmann has already made two points well: First, great poetry is not necessarily linked with a *true* vision of reality—in the sense of objective, scientific truth. Second, poetic language and myth may be a trap for the philosopher; they may seduce the reader into accepting when he ought to question; what is still more serious, they may (as with Plato and Nietzsche) lead the philosopher himself astray, intoxicate him with his own creations so that he himself no longer distinguishes dream from vision and vision from reality. On the other hand, Kaufmann claims, it is entirely legitimate simply to combine the two *genres* (poetry and philosophy) as Plato and Nietzsche did. Now comes the shock. Sartre and Camus have joined philosophy and poetry but in a new way. "Instead of fusing philosophy and poetry in the same work, they have fashioned stories, plays, and novels—and then, in their philosophical works, expounded the ideas that had been implicit in their literary pieces" (p. 225). Kaufmann goes on to say that so long as we treat Sartre's and Camus' philosophical writings as mere expositions of their fiction, they "can claim more authority than any of the exegeses theologians offer us of Scriptures that they have not written themselves." But if we take their theories as having more general application, "we find that their generalizations are often untenable."

Everything is wrong with this pronouncement. What possible justification can there be for the idea that Camus and Sartre first had some sort of artistic inspiration, created a plot and characters, and then sat down to explain these to the world and to themselves? Let us not quibble as to whether the literary works did or did not in each case actually precede the philosophical in time. Is it even conceivable that *Being and Nothingness*, for instance, can be dismissed as a prosaic commentary on the behavior of Sartre's fictional creations? And those 722 pages of close reasoning, whose abstract complexity Kaufmann has elsewhere bemoaned—are they a succession of

generalizations? Kaufmann asserts that the attempt to squeeze out of *The Stranger* a philosophy of the absurd is unsound. Is this what Camus did? Is not *The Stranger* rather the embodiment of one of many attitudes discussed by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*? In any case if these "generalizations" are untenable, the burden of the proof rests with Kaufmann.

What particularly bothers me about this deficiency in Kaufmann is that I believe he actually has a great deal more in common with the humanistic existentialists than he has up till now recognized. They have all rejected belief in God and in any higher meaning. They too make man wholly responsible and forbid him to throw the blame for his failure onto the age in which he lives. Like Kaufmann, they stress the importance of living creatively, acknowledging that one chooses one's own values. They insist that man's thought and emotion cannot be separated, that the total individual is what counts. Camus' absurd man says "Yes" to life and to experience. None of them denies that man should pursue reason so far as it seems adequate to lead them. Kaufmann's rationalism does not go beyond this. Finally, it seems to me that existentialist literature, if seen in the right perspective, does exactly what Kaufmann thinks art should do. It shows us the "concrete meaning of thoughts." But because it has been subjected to the philosophical vision of its creators, it is less likely to become the "sweet, deadly poison." Existentialists demand more of their art than Kaufmann asks of poetry; they ask that it also be true. Hence like the torso of Apollo, the existentialist work asks us to change our life and offers us sharply outlined visions of possibility.

In all fairness we must say that so does the book of Walter Kaufmann. It frequently enlightens, sometimes exasperates, but it never soothes one to rest with the comfortable assertion that all points of view can be reconciled without our deciding among them. In demanding that we choose and that the choice be a responsible one, Kaufmann is existentialist in the most important sense.