

for a voyage we shall never make. But suppose we *could!* We might achieve greater familiarity. But this, I think, is a matter of degree, a question of more or less. And even there, confronting the long perished items in the past, we would have to proceed in the same way as before, feeling: "What is it *like* . . . ?" "What *sort* of thing is it?" And the zone of otherness, however reduced, would remain obdurate and there.

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REMARKS ON THE ELEVENTH INTERNATIONAL
CONGRESS OF PHILOSOPHY¹

THIS Congress was held at Brussels August 20–26, 1953. Some three hundred students of philosophy submitted papers, now printed in fourteen volumes of *Proceedings*. Not all these writers were present at the Congress, nor did all who were read their papers publicly. Connected with the Congress was an International Symposium on Logic. Its proceedings were published in a fifteenth supplementary volume on logic.

My intention is not to make a detailed report on the Congress itself, but rather to discuss three pertinent questions: (1) Was the Congress representative of present-day philosophy? (2) Were any new—that is, hitherto unknown or uncommon—views presented at the meetings? (3) Did the Congress accomplish its objective of providing an intellectual meeting-ground for fruitful discussion between representatives of different schools or opinions in contemporary philosophy? This third point seems to me crucial.

(1) Although the number of participants was large—hundreds of persons took part—only a relatively small group, some thirty-eight persons, arrived from the United States, probably because of the distance and the cost of travel. A number of British philosophers were present, but there was a marked preponderance of Continental philosophers, and among them a marked over-representation of Catholic philosophy and of the non-lay or clerical element. This was quite natural, since the Congress was organized in Belgium by the University of Brussels—the official host—jointly

¹ These reflections on the present state of philosophy are in no sense intended to be a "report" upon the Eleventh International Congress. Their author, as a graduate of the University of Vienna and long established as an American philosopher, has been in an excellent position to appraise the international scene. THE EDITORS.

with the Catholic University of Louvain, probably the most important center of Catholic studies in the world. There was also a relatively strong group of some sixty symbolic logicians who had, in addition to the ordinary meetings on logic, a supplementary outlet in the Symposium on Logic. However, symbolic logic was not in evidence in the plenary sessions which set the tone of the whole proceedings, although Professor F. Gonseth of Zurich provided at least a personal link between the logicians of the Symposium and the plenary meetings. It was remarked that American pragmatism was not conspicuous, but it should be said that Professor Herbert W. Schneider read a paper at one session. At the plenary meetings two speakers from the English and American groups were heard: Professors A. C. Ewing and Richard P. McKeon. The absence of the top echelon of contemporary philosophers, like Russell, Carnap, Heidegger, Jaspers, or Maritain, was noticeable. But this lack was made up for by the attendance of their numerous supporters. Even so, full representation was not achieved, since the philosophers of the "Diamat"² countries were completely absent. Representation was therefore limited in a territorial as well as in an ideological sense.

(2) Novel views were scarcely presented, but even had they been they would have been submerged by the mass of familiar material.

(3) Fruitful discussion was as usual hampered by those habitual speakers who made repeated efforts not so much to discuss as to propound their personal brands of opinion. More serious was the deep cleavage between Anglo-American philosophy on the one side and Continental philosophy on the other. Intellectually if not socially this rift seemed in no sense smaller than that between the "Diamat" absentees and the others. It appears, in fact, that present-day philosophy is torn apart into three groups very loosely connected, and no discussion between any two of them takes place. The Continentals do their philosophizing by themselves without any reference to or interest in the Anglo-American group, and vice versa; the two groups move in parallels that never meet. The history of philosophy can show few examples of such a cleavage since philosophy became an international enterprise in the West. There is no real discussion between these two groups, and at the Congress there was none.

There is of course a linguistic barrier to inter-group discussion in all meetings of this kind. Members of a given linguistic group are prone to gather around a speaker of their own group, partly as a matter of courtesy, partly because they are more familiar with

² Dialectical Materialism.

what he has to say and understand him better. Thus French or German philosophers, for instance, listen more readily to French or German speakers. This language barrier tends naturally to isolate many of the participants from other linguistic groups, so that the "international" meeting breaks up into different national sets. This obstacle would not in itself be decisive, however, since many, especially of the younger generation, understand French and English, or German and English, etc. A much more serious impediment to inter-group understanding is the fact that the whole philosophical idiom of the Continental philosophers—as against the merely linguistic medium—is totally different from the Anglo-American terminology. This hurdle seems hardly surmountable. These are two different universes of discourse. A similar situation might arise if an historian should apply the concepts of chemistry to his discipline. The Continental philosophers, steeped in the idiom of phenomenology and its existentialist stepchild, use as a matter of course an array of notions which arouse bewilderment and incredulity among the English-speaking philosophers.

Whatever the divisions and dissensions among those who practiced it in the past, the philosophic quest used always to be a cognitive enterprise: it was rational thinking about things or about thought. But at the present time Continental philosophy, despite a whole apparatus of profundity and a highly artificial verbal structure, is at bottom largely an emotional *Stimmungphilosophie*, the exhibition of a mood totally alien to the more sober thinkers of the Atlantic sphere. Yet this sort of philosophy dominates unchallenged most German and many other Continental universities, reaching out to the Spanish-speaking countries of both hemispheres. What is advanced here as "metaphysics" or "ontology," with the claim to ultimate validity, often strikes the outside observer as at best a type of philosophical psychology. The conceptual meagerness of the product is most glaringly apparent if we try to state it in other and more rigid Indo-European tongues. Stripped of its pretentious verbal vestments, the exposition often dissolves into the trivial.

But instead of talking in generalities, it is perhaps advisable to summarize an address on Continental philosophy—excellent and revealing of its kind—by Father Johannes B. Lotz, delivered at a plenary session, and entitled "The Ontic versus the Ontological as the Basic Tension in Contemporary Philosophy."³ In the printed text of this statement Father Lotz identifies himself clearly

³ "Ontisch-Ontologisch als Grundspannung des Philosophierens, besonders heute," *Proceedings*, Vol. III, *Métaphysique et Ontologie*, pp. 57-63.

with the ideas of Heidegger, giving first an outline of Hegel and Jaspers, criticizing them, and then heaping full praise on Heidegger's thought and paraphrasing it. The value of Father Lotz's exposition lies in the fact that he gives a clear summary—a sort of bird's-eye view—of Heidegger's philosophy—of his *Fundamentalontologie*.

The "ontic" here is what is otherwise called the "particular" and the "empirical," and as such is familiar enough. In this speculation it is contrasted with the "ontological." We are told that among these "ontic" things man is especially elect, because in him alone the "ontic" becomes "ontological." It is in man that the "ontic" thing exhibits the hidden "Being" which exists in the ontic; the ontic thus appears as the "concrete," a concretion of Being. Being is thereby revealed as the ground of the ontic. Since "ground" in Greek is "*logos*," Being is the Logos of "*to on*," and therefore this act of grounding (*Rückführung*) of the ontic in Being as its ground is called "onto-logical."

This tension between the ontic and the ontological appears in extreme form in modern positivism, which acknowledges only the ontic. In positivism ontological investigation is rejected as meaningless (*nichtig*). Positivism rejects "Being" as an empty abstraction, and relegates the science dealing with these problems to the realm of the pseudo-sciences that deal with pseudo-problems. But, says Father Lotz, ontological investigation *has been recognized today* (emphasis mine) as the essence of philosophy. But positivism is so fascinated by the characteristics of the ontic that it loses all sense of anything that is not ontically determined and cannot be conceived in empirical-mathematical fashion. However, real ontological or philosophical thought cannot be captured by empirical-mathematical methods, and similarly Being cannot be reached by merely ontic determinations. In Hegel's idealism the ontic is foreshortened and swallowed up by the ontological, since in it only Being viewed as the Absolute Idea is really real. Hegel's philosophy is a philosophy of essence, because in it existence is only a function of essence ("essence" is here replaced by the novel term "*So-sein*").

As against all this there is Jaspers, with his philosophy of existence foreshadowed by Kierkegaard. In contradistinction to Hegel he tries to preserve the ontic, especially insofar as man is concerned, since man alone deserves the predicate "*Existenz*." But the ontic can only be saved by the ontological. Man rises to "existence" (*Existenz*) and then envisages transcendence or Absolute Being.

These two one-sided philosophies of essence and of existence are transcended in the “*Fundamentalontologie*” of Heidegger, says Father Lotz, which heals the cleavage between essence and existence by turning to Being. Being appears in the world of humans as “*Da-sein*” (a “being here”), which should be clearly distinguished from “*Dasein*,” i.e., existence pure and simple, and which is therefore not opposed to essence (“*So-sein*”). The essence of man consists in his “*Da-sein*.” Being (*Sein*) appears only in “*Da-sein*,” and an interpretation of “*Da-sein*” leads to “*Sein*” (Being). Existential analysis has nothing to do with “ontic facticity” (the world of ontic or empirical facts), but deals exclusively with the ontological structure of “*Da-sein*,” “*Da-sein*” is called “*Ek-sistenz*” insofar as man as a “*Seiendes*” always “rises up” into “*Sein*.” Either he stands in the middle of it, or “*Sein*” “clarifies itself” (*lichtet sich*) in him.

Father Lotz said a few words at the end of his address—not printed in the proceedings—about a possible further development of Heidegger’s thought. This led in the ensuing discussion to a question about Heidegger’s position concerning God or Deity. Heidegger (like Sartre, who had no support at the Congress), is an atheist, while Father Lotz as a Christian and a Jesuit must be committed to the Nicene creed, and cannot possibly share any atheistic views. Father Lotz tried to defend Heidegger against the charge of atheism, maintaining that he has said only that at the present stage of his philosophizing there is still no room for God; this does not mean, said Father Lotz, that Heidegger has rejected the notion. He only holds it temporarily in abeyance—not as a matter of principle—and might well consider God later on. All this is doubtless very comforting, but is of course not printed in the text of the *Proceedings*.

In this bird’s-eye view of Continental philosophy, the power of presentation appears in Father Lotz at its best, and his subject at its worst. We see the evil of positivism, Hegel engulfed in the one basic error, Jaspers to some degree in the other; Heidegger appears as the *summus philosophus*, the great synthesis. We find the quibbling about being as a participle, a verb, and a noun; we find accidental etymological facts (*Da-sein*, con-crete) as sources of wisdom, grammar as a source of metaphysics, etc. There is of course at the bottom of this argument a desire to carve out an autonomous realm for philosophy independent of and superior to empirical science. But the fact remains that philosophy preceded science and led to it. Some varieties of positivism would carry this development to what seems the logical conclusion: philosophy would then eliminate itself or limit itself to logic. But the Conti-

mental reaction to this tendency merely defies common sense. There may be still another possibility: the preservation of philosophy as basic research on thought and on things.

I should like to know what an English or an American thinker—supposing that he is no positivist but an idealist, or an incorrigible practitioner of metaphysics—would make out of this example of contemporary German metaphysics and ontology. I suspect the reaction would be utter bewilderment. What is worse, he would probably not even go to the bother of refuting it, let alone of discussing it. And it should not be forgotten that the statements of “existential philosophy” are not propositions. Far from having so low a status, they are “decisions.” It is rather surprising that the political and social upheavals that have transformed or deformed the Western part of the Continent in the last thirty years have had not the slightest influence on this type of “reasoning.” It continues serenely as if nothing at all had happened. It is a *Stimmungsphilosophie*, but neither the British nor the Americans share this mood. How can they understand it? To find a common language for discussion on this level between England and America on the one hand and the Continent on the other will prove extremely difficult.

Another characteristic of Continental philosophizing—insofar as it is not totally immersed in phenomenology and its upshot, existentialism—is the degree to which it retains the historical categories of the philosophies of the past. It must strike Americans as almost archeological. One would say that the maintainers of these distinctions and the expounders of these problems were still living in the 1850’s, instead of in the 1950’s. This aspect is complementary to the rapturous but seemingly sterile existentialist contemplation of one’s own navel, and to the so-called “*Wesenschau*.” The procedure has a strong flavor of Orientalism, despite its Western origin; it seems closer to Hindu contemplation than to rational analysis. These Oriental features of contemporary Continental philosophy seem to have escaped general attention. It is a strange and striking fact—and incidentally, as a matter of record, Heidegger rejects Socratic and post-Socratic philosophy as an aberration.

The difficulty of communication is great, since British and American thinkers presumably still prefer to view philosophy as a cognitive enterprise rather than as a mystical intuition, mixed with delusions of superior wisdom, absolute necessity, and mystic “decisions.” They might also ask the indiscreet question, whether such ontological speculations as the example presented have added one iota to our knowledge of “Being.” They might grant the

thesis that the ontic becomes the ontological in man, and still ask, what is the significance of this discovery?

What is currently believed is also shown indirectly by what is deemed worthy of refutation. The philosopher of science F. Gonseth of Zurich made an address in a plenary session on "The Problem of Method in Philosophy."⁴ Here an incredibly laborious apparatus of analogy was devoted to the refutation—if his almost timid and hesitant, roundabout way could be called a rebuttal—of the following theses obviously current among philosophers: (1) that philosophy proceeds from necessity to necessity; (2) that philosophical truths are unconditional; (3) that mental materials (ideas, notions, concepts) have in themselves a "distinct and well-rounded reality" (whatever that means). Nothing shows more glaringly that Continental philosophy is in the clutches of an absurd dogmatism. Certainly this lecture could never have been given in this country.

The in-breeding of Continental philosophy is astonishing. The airplane does not bridge intellectual distance. To the proponents of Continental philosophy the English-speaking countries seem to dwell in deep shadows from which neither name nor quotation emerges in their writings. They do not need them. How should these dwellers in outer darkness listen to this contemporary Continental wisdom? Such is the true situation of present-day philosophy, and no silver lining is apparent on the horizon. Can Congresses remedy it? Unfortunately the British and American philosophers stand fast in their apparent dislike of speculation and of all controversies over principle. They are tempted by a misplaced impulse toward intellectual "tolerance" to slur over distinctions and differences of view. This attitude was apparent in the papers read at the plenary sessions by Professors McKeon and Ewing, which in my judgment showed a lack of clarity, precision, and determination in thought.

But if Continentals and Anglo-Americans are intellectually not on speaking terms but rather uttering soliloquies in a vacuum, there does seem to exist intellectual intercourse at the two ends of the philosophical spectrum: between symbolic logicians, and to some extent between certain segments of Catholic philosophy. However, the symbolic logicians form on the Continent a special sect closely linked with the mathematicians and other heretics. Let us hope against hope that the present schism is only temporary.

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⁴"Le problème de la méthode en philosophie," *Proceedings*, Vol. I, pp. 64-72.