

KIRÁLY V. ISTVÁN

THE FOUNDATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND
ATHEISM IN HEIDEGGER'S EARLY WORKS
– PROLEGOMENA TO AN EXISTENTIAL-
ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE –

The paper analyzes, from a perspective which is itself existential-ontological, the way in which in an early text of Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation)* [1922] – which had already outlined some determinative elements of the ideas expounded in *Being and Time* –, the meditation on the always living and current conditions and hermeneutical situation of philosophizing expanded in fact into an inquiry about the origins, grounds, essence and sense of philosophy as such. Meditation in and through which philosophy identifies itself and is founded on the one hand exactly as a mode of existence of the mortal “human *Dasein*” (*menschliches Dasein*), that is a factic mode of existence of this, philosophy, on the other hand, itself originates from and in man's factic life exactly with the aim of being the modality through which this being – namely ourselves – returns towards the problematization of his existential possibilities even by taking upon himself the burden and “weight” of radical interrogation. Which therefore goes and must go itself and resolutely – because if this entirely “without God” and consequently *a-theist* – to the historical and ontological roots of a *present* con-temporarized (*mitzeitigt*) both with the *past* and the *future* existential horizons of the assumed factic possibilities.

Király V. István

Associate Professor, Ph. D. at the Department of Philosophy, “Babes-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Author of the books: *Határ – Hallgatás – Titok* (1996); *Filozófia és Itt-Lét* (1999); *Fenomenologia existențială a secretului – Încercare de filosofie aplicată* (2001); *Moartea și experiența muririi – In(tro)spectie metafizică și filosofico-aplicativă* (2002), *Kérdő jelezés* (2004); *Halandóan lakozik szabadságában az ember* (2007). E-mail: philobib@bcucluj.ro

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„Die Sterblichen sind die Menschen.
Sie heissen Sterblichen, weil sie sterben können.
Sterben heisst: den Tod als Tod vermögen.
Die vernünftigen Lebewesen müssen erst
Sterblichen werden.”
Martin Heidegger¹

Any discussion about “foundation” is usually realized through direct or implicit reference to that which Leibniz formulated as the principle of the sufficient reason. Or, essentially this principle puts in motion – namely: brings to questioning – first of all and exactly the question: *Why?*

When we discuss, however, problems such as the question of the foundation of *philosophy*, from the beginning it seems to be decisive to try to clarify – but also to enforce – the conditions and hermeneutical

situation of such a meditation. And, first of all, we ought to specify and outline the fact that the existential-ontological perspective from which we have decided to prefigure the problem of the foundation of philosophy was not, of course, “chosen” accidentally from a vast group of indifferently convenient “possibilities”... and neither was this choice determined only by the author’s “professional” inclination and “specialization”, but it was actually put in motion by the sole motive that, on the one hand it *belongs* to... and on the other hand it *aims* exactly at that *horizon* and *domain*, to which the problem of the founding of philosophy itself belongs, and from which it wells in its turn in a completely organic and essential way.

Since these aspects also belong to the hermeneutical clarification of the *situation* and of the *motivations* in and from which the present inquiry is outlined and unfolds, it is surely necessary to present them in detail. For the fact that the ontological-existential perspective on the one hand belongs to, and, on the other hand, aims exactly at the horizon and domain to which the issue of the foundation of philosophy belongs also constitutes in fact the *motive* – likewise essential – for which, we, at least, are basically and in general *interested* in this “problem”. However, we would also like to specify from the beginning that we here use the term “interested” in its accepted basic and etymological sense. Since, as it is well known, the word “interested” originates – etymologically – from the Latin *inter esse*, which means exactly “to be inside and between” the elements of something... or to be between something which constitutes its common aim and affiliation right through the existence of that which is aimed at in its turn as being exactly “between”. To be therefore “*interested* in something” means in fact to be – more precisely: to be *situated* – inside and in the “cracks” that occur on the horizon of *that* something... and the explicit efforts made to understand and interpret this “something” are nothing else in fact than endeavours to understand, and also to realize precisely the *problematic* of this insideness and the problematic of this “being between”.

In brief: in a problem such as the foundation of philosophy we theme nothing that is “exterior” to us or to philosophy, and consequently nothing alien to our being, on the contrary, we theme our own existence exactly as *philosophizing* and exactly *because we exist* philosophizing. The decisive and essential motive because of which I *am* or we *are*/can be really *interested* in the problem of philosophy and its foundation is therefore that “I myself” at least know myself to be a thinker and I am concerned with being a thinker, and, because of this I – simply – would like, as far as it is possible, to understand this thing and its significations. I would like to specify – however and again – that the expression “as far as possible” must be taken in its original sense, for it is meant to communicate precisely the fact that we should attempt to conceive, understand and outline the cause of the foundation of philosophy exactly as a *possibility* which belongs to us and to our world.

Consequently, if we discuss here the question of the foundation of philosophy, this must mean – in fact and mainly – the question and the clarification of the question: *Why does one – why do I also “do” – philosophy?* Namely: *Why do people essentially do philosophy?* Or, more precisely: *Why does man philosophize?*

In the course of this inquiry it must be very clear (for us) from the beginning and it must also be assumed expressly that, on the one hand, by formulating and asking effectively and clearly this question, we raise at the same time – and somehow automatically – a series of other questions, and, on the other hand, the exigency of the “sufficiency” of reasons as the principle of sufficient reason also requires from us implicitly the effort of not leaving these – apparently collateral – questions in the obscure zone of presuppositions, but of asking them and formulating them – that is: asking them – as explicitly as possible. Or, the first of these questions which usually remain and, moreover, are left unclarified when the questions regarding philosophy and its foundations are asked, is for sure the question: *Who does actually philosophize?* Then – together with this – the question: *To whom and how does in fact philosophy “belong”?*

Therefore we can state that, though it seems to be evident that only the clarification of these questions – namely: *Why does one philosophize?* and *Who is the one who philosophizes?* – could also lead us to realize and outline *What is and could philosophy be?* and *What would be its “object” and its task, vocation?* etc. (questions connected therefore as organically as possible to the foundations and, consequently, to the essence of philosophy). Philosophizing itself is however usually regarded as being rather the agitation and secretion of a kind of weightless, schematic “spirit of truth”, so “lofty”, “refined” and “distilled”, that it becomes indeed perfectly “colourless”, “odourless” and really without any “taste”... And/or a kind of “universal” (indifferently professional, professorial and university) “science of the universal”... Or, on the contrary, the mechanical performing of some circumscribed disciplinary and “terminological” “investigations”, in the case of which it is no longer necessary to clarify on every occasion the problem of bases and of foundation.

The – inevitably brief – analysis that follows will therefore focus exactly on these questions. And in this undertaking they will use the chances of a clarifying dialogue with an early Heideggerian text, which – without necessarily being less known to the “public” and to the specialists in question – is however less present and “weighed” not only in the studies dedicated to his philosophy, but also in the inquiries regarding the bases and the foundation of philosophy.

We are referring to a short text entitled *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* having the subtitle *Indications of the Hermeneutical Situation*.² This was written by Martin Heidegger in the year 1922 with the aim of endorsing his simultaneous candidature for two posts of “extraordinary professor”, one at the University of Göttingen, the other at

the University of Marburg. He was rejected by the former university – mainly on account of the spirit of his investigations not being in conformity with the tradition of the respective university –, but accepted at Marburg due mainly to the positive reviews about this text by the renowned Paul Natorp and Nicolai Hartmann.³

We must specify that in the Heideggerian text – *expressis verbis* – there is nothing about “foundation”. It speaks, however, extremely condensed, but also amply about PHILOSOPHY, about its essence, sense and specificity. And on this occasion – in the confluence of thoughts – an exceptionally powerful, radical and articulated meditation is outlined in the text also about the “foundation” of philosophy.

Of course, such a phenomenological and hermeneutical investigation does not lay the bases, and, evidently, it does not discuss the “foundation” of philosophy by presenting it as some “original” or “primordial science” (*Urwissenschaft*) which is to be recovered, and out of which originate and then historically ramify the different scientific and existential disciplines and/or domains. Neither is this inquiry aimed at the philosophicality of the inner (epistemological) conditions of formal and/or thematic derivation – from “axiomatic” principles or bases –, ensuring the “coherence” of the theories from within some realizations or “cognitive disciplines”, in this case: of philosophy. No. The well founded and “founding”, original and fundamental character of philosophy here originates from and resides exactly in the essence of that which is identified and named its “object”, and – closely connected with this – mainly from and in its sense and signification of being *express activity* and *assuming*. Activity and assuming in which – and through which – philosophy itself is actually founded.

In other words, philosophy is founded and it lays foundations itself exactly in and through the fact that it is recognized, revealed and clarified as being – itself – *a mode of existence of the Dasein*. More precisely, a mode of existence of the being named yet in these texts *man*. Philosophy no longer recognizes and identifies itself as being simply a “theory” – either of something which otherwise would be “non”-theoretical, or in the sense of an instrument specialized in reaching some specific cognitive objects and objectives (may they be outlined or, on the contrary, stratospheric and ideal) –, but “only” as “one” of the different modes in and through which man *realizes and leads its existence factually and effectively in and through time*. Since it is exactly man who philosophizes and it is exactly man who exists – therefore: is – philosophizing. And only the being which exists philosophizing, only that *can* in general depict existence as existence, that is, his existence; the existence and the being as being a *problem... open to the possible*. Only man can – and even must – therefore problematize himself as a being with respect to his character and relation of being... that is, as a being which is bound to and oriented towards the other beings, namely the world.

Philosophy is consequently exactly *that mode of existence* of the being named yet in these texts “man” – *human Dasein (menschliches Dasein)* – in and through which he problematizes his being precisely with regard to the unsurpassable problem and problematicity of the fact that he himself is and that – thus – he *must* and *has to be*. Therefore as being something-someone for whom the being and beingness is a problem, an undertaking, a task, a risk and a possibility dwelling exactly in his existence. Shortly: philosophy is one of man's not only *essential* but also *exclusive* possibilities and needs. Omniscient beings – among other things – do not philosophize, as do not philosophize the beings which – without existing – only “are”... On the contrary, the constitutive and insurmountable stupidity of “all-knowing” (omniscience) consists exactly in the fact that, if such a thing “could know everything”..., he could never know that he “knows” at all. Because to know one must exactly *be aware of his ignorance*, an experience acquired solely in the quest for truth and in its hardships. In a single word the awareness of ignorance we call of course: *question*, respectively *inquiry*. And such things as question and inquiry are not given to the “omniscient” at all and on principle. Since he (already) necessarily knows “*ab ovo*” always everything... Otherwise he could not be called “omniscient”. It is the same with the “immortal” too: this “does not die”, but “meanwhile” neither does he live a single moment at all. This therefore can also dispel the delusion that the immortals – the immortal gods – could somehow recognize, become aware of/get to know their (own) immortality precisely by means of human mortality.⁴ For if these gods, besides their immortality, are also omniscient, they could not recognize these “characteristics” – in spite of any comparison –, unless their own immortality became a question, or/respectively questionable for them. That is, if they are not really omniscient. But, of course, it would still remain incomprehensible where from and how could originate-arise any kind of questions in this immortal.

Consequently, it is clear from the beginning, that what we call here “the foundation” of philosophy and philosophy as “foundation”, are not and cannot be in any case some “epistemology” or some “logic” of philosophy, and in the least a purely preparatory propedeutics or some “meta-theory” of it, but only *the effectiveness of interrogation, the quest – andt also of the articulation – regarding its essence, senses, the effectiveness of its “weight” and “pressure”*. Because of this in these texts Heidegger calls this effectiveness exactly “facticity” or “factual life”.

Far therefore from being pure “theory”, philosophy is – as man's mode of being – a mode of being of *factual life*. More precisely, philosophy is exactly *that mode of being of factual life*, in and through which factual life *itself returns* towards itself – problematizing, opening, surpassing and transcending itself permanently. And more exactly: through which factual life is *made* – by means of assumption and effort – to return explicitly and disclosingly towards itself.

Or, this turn and return take place, naturally and each time, in a “living present” (*lebendige Gegenwart*), from which – starting therefore from its problematic – they are *historical, that is situated*. Because of this, the first act of foundation must be to bring to surface and make this same situating function effectively. Therefore: hermeneutics. For this reason the text we are speaking about here has the subtitle: *Indications of the Hermeneutical Situation (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation)*. Since: “in accordance with its beingness (*Seinscharakter*), the philosophical research itself is something that no ‘era’ (“*Zeit*”) ... can borrow from another; philosophical research is at the same time also something that – if it has understood itself and if it has understood its sense and the capacities of its performances which reside in the human *Dasein* – can never have the pretence of taking over from the next generations the weight and pressure of the care (*Bekümmern*) of radical interrogation. This weight cannot be and must not be taken over.”⁵ With the specification that the term “radical” is used here consequently in its basic sense, that of: *going to the roots*.

It is therefore clear that the philosophical research is identified here as something like *assumption*, namely the assumption on each *actual* and *factual* occasion – consequently being *in actu* – of the weight and pressure of the care of radical interrogation. Philosophy is therefore something which is never only “continued” or “ended”, but it is rather reborn – *it is therefore brought to a new and repeated rebirth* – in each age through and in function of the assumption of some existential challenges, original, present and historical alike – namely assuming the pressure of the burden of radical interrogation –, which aim in a particular way and in act at each age and each *actual* generation apart.

And the *beingness* of philosophy is organized exactly in the fact that it is itself a *mode of being* of the human *Dasein*, a mode of being of the situated human presence. Namely, philosophy is precisely that mode of being of man which has as its object – necessarily and first of all – exactly *this* being as a being and the facticity of his life (*faktisches Leben*). Object examined-investigated and problematized by the philosophy thus understood and outlined even with respect to *its character of being and existence*.

Philosophy is not therefore placed or introduced from the outside – or in any other artificial way – into the being, and because of this neither does the being and the problem of being “enter” from the outside and artificially into philosophy, but rather and only through the existence of man. That is, through the existence of the one who philosophizes. As Heidegger himself said “...the philosophical research itself gives and constitutes (*ausmacht*) a determined ‘how’ of factual life, and, as such, it already *con-temporarizes (mitzeitigt)* this and itself also with the each time concrete being of life – therefore not as some ulterior application...”⁶

Before proceeding, we must however point out and specify the circumstance that in the term “facticity” and “factual” life – though it evidently derives from the Latin *factum* – Heidegger takes into account,

however, on the one hand its older significations, and, on the other those preserved and lived mostly in Vulgar Latin. But, in these senses and significations *factum* does not mean something “given” or “deeds” (in a, let us say, positivistic sense), but exactly the *deed* seen in the effectiveness of its realization, namely as *real act*. What is therefore essential in “facticity” is precisely the *dynamism of the act*, which is brought to the outlining of its *effectiveness* exactly in its actuality. Thus – according also to an observation of Gadamer – Heidegger conceived and used the term “facticity” exactly as a “counter-concept” (*Gegenbegriff*), namely as something which is right counter- that which in German idealism was named “consciousness”, “self-consciousness” or in Husserl’s works, “the transcendental ego”.⁷

Only that factual life is focalized and articulated first of all by *care* and *taking care*. And exactly in this dynamism of careful human preoccupations the *world* is constituted both as a surrounding world, the world common with the others and as one’s own world.

Due to care and taking care life is and feels *heavy*. Consequently, life too always factually strives, on the one hand, to get absorbed in the directions and the objects of its cares, and on the other hand and at the same time, to lighten the oppressive weight of its cares. And these, together, constitute that which Heidegger called the *declining* tendency of factual life. We should like to specify that “decline” here has of course a strictly ontological sense, and as such it is only the tendency of life to shun itself – lighten itself. It is not a decline compared to some “golden ages” or to some former paradisiacal states and the decline is not something that happens only occasionally or which would be characteristic only to a certain age. On the contrary: the decline originates from the constitutive character, for man’s factual life, of the fact that it is structured by care. The care man takes first of all of the being-object and which, at the same time, urges man always towards the lightening of its pressure. Decline is therefore an ontological, intentional-factual “how” of life.⁸

As it is in fact philosophy too. Defined in this way, the essence and factual task of philosophy can *only* be to constitute itself in an – also factual – counter-tendency against the tendency of decline equally factual, characteristic to factual life. If therefore factual life tends to lighten..., then – seriously speaking – the factual-effective task of philosophy cannot be to elaborate some programmes which would lead to ideal and utopian states,⁹ but, first of all, it is to *give weight* to the already lightened “things”. That is, to show, to draw attention to their weight and complexity.

If, however, the declining tendency consists really of shunning and lightening one’s own factual everyday life, then this tendency of shunning and lightening can be identified first of all exactly in its usual attitude and relationship towards *death*. For death is something that, on the one hand, is a threat to life as such, but, at the same time, it is, on the other hand, also a *how* of life. Death is not “beyond” life, for human life is permanently, each time and factually finite, namely mortal. At the same time, nothing

“burdens” life more, than the weight and pressure of death. Therefore, nothing urges more to lighten its pressure, than death.

Related to and against this tendency the responsible philosophical research must consequently unfold. It has therefore to ensure the human *Dasein* its death as being a certitude which is just before it, that is, before us. Therefore, without some metaphysics of immortality and without the metaphysics of what would be “after death”. For all these are in fact only attempts to lighten the weight of death’s pressure and, as such, they are omissions with respect to the task and “object” of philosophy which are, as we have seen, the human *Dasein* and his factual life.¹⁰

By this, namely the effective – and not “only theoretical” or only “mental” – existential ensuring of death as certitude, therefore, as a certain and foreseen future for every living man and generation, death ensures however – and in fact – exactly *view* and *visibility* both for the present and the past of life. In fact and essentially, it organizes and constitutes therefore the *temporality* of factual life, temporality as such. Being exactly the “mortal” quality, namely the quality to be *con-temporary with death and, thus, with the “holding” and “possession” of death*.

And *historicity*, more precisely the basic sense of historicity – namely: *historicality* – as such, can be determined only starting from this temporality. History as history and the *historicality* of the human *Dasein* – living, (as at his time, the *Dasein* of the already dead, but also of the yet unborn) – originates therefore from his/their *finitude*, consequently from his/their character of being *mortal*. History as history and *historicality* originate therefore in fact from death. That is, from the *future*, neither from the past, nor from the present. The certain future of the living human *Dasein*’s death is therefore that, which gives in fact weight to his life and which consequently gives weight both to the past and present of the *Dasein*. It gives therefore weight to the factual life of the human *Dasein* as such. The immortals consequently can neither have history, since, properly, neither can have history the beings which – though “they are in time” – do not exist, only are.

Nevertheless, – if we really try to penetrate it with our thoughts – we can also realize the fact that the “term”, which, who knows why, always occurs when “death” is discussed... namely the term “death-lessness”, refers necessarily to something, which – in conformity with “its definition” contained implicitly in its formulation – is in fact *intangible* – that is un-touchable – precisely as regards the aliveness of his life. Surely, it is not therefore useless to attempt a mental exercise and to try to penetrate the “depths” of this “term”. Because only he, who has lived, can be “dead”. In this sense the dead one’s *lack of life*, the lack of life of death belongs in fact to its connection with and to life, as being exactly *its loss*. Similarly, only he, who has lived, and he, who, consequently lives ceaselessly and eternally, can be “undying”. For this is what we, mortals call... “deathless”, and we call it thus exactly because we think of it as something – which being alive

– is devoid of death, and, as such, is without death... Such a thing would be thus something whose living being – that is, whose life – is unconditioned and intangible. On the one hand, it depends on nothing, and on the other hand, it can be touched by nothing. The immortals' living being has therefore no connection and no contact with either nothing and – consequently – with the Nothing.

For this reason, all that is immortal is necessarily and ceaselessly in a way in which the *How* of his eternally living being can be, in general and to himself, only totally and ceaselessly *indifferent*. Consequently, though he can be *whenever he wishes* “sometimes” “so” and “sometimes” “different”, all these can only be for him eventualities without any weight or pressure. Weight and pressure which would really have repercussion on his ever living being, for his (ever living) life does not depend on and is not – and cannot be – touched by them in any way or form. In other words, for something that would really be immortal, no such touch-eventuality can have – itself – character of being. The immortal's ceaseless aliveness can be therefore neither endangered, nor touched by anything and, because of this, not even he himself can endanger his aliveness. Consequently, for he himself can only be indifferent *How* he is... that is, *How* he is of whom we, mortals think – imagining – that we refer to with the term “immortal” and “immortality”.

Taking therefore more seriously the task of thinking: one can think with the terms “immortal” and “immortality” of no (other) quality, as being *his constant* quality, therefore as being an actual quality in an equally ceaseless way. On the contrary: one can associate with the immortal and immortality ceaselessly and eternally any kind of “qualities” and at any time. Therefore, only in the eventual way and only devoid of any *reflexive* “ontological” and existential weight. Consequently: any striving, for example, for “good” or for “justice” etc. of anything which would be really immortal – and all the more some ontological and qualitative constant of such an aspiration – can be only something devoid of sense and meaning. That is, in Aristotelian terminology: a kind of “goat-stag”.

In any case, something like this is always and totally situated hither of any “good” and “evil”, any “just” and “unjust”... *In this way, in fact, he cannot even “reach” them, therefore, he cannot even attain to be at least in contact with them.*¹¹ *Consequently, something like this can in no way and never go “beyond good and evil”. That is: far from being able to “establish” the ethics and legal systems of justice etc., it cannot even “criticize” them.* Therefore, domains, problems and efforts such as ethics, deontology, jurisprudence etc. as well have a role, a sense and weight only for those beings for whom, due to their existence, the *How* of this being and the *How* of this existence must always and really have weight, sense and signification. In other words, who are mortal and who die.

Death, dying is therefore something which – though in most of the cases not a theme – starting however from the core of existence, is the

source of and articulates in fact – and exactly with respect to their weight and ontological and historical senses – any ethics, any deontology, any legal system, any scientific or... philosophical theory. Domains for which therefore it is not at all useless to realize this, mainly when they judge from above exactly death, therefore in fact exactly their source, origin and precisely their foundation.

The historicity of history is, however, structured and outlined both by the declining tendency and the existential efforts to counteract this. And these efforts are – in their turn – as factual as the decline. Their possibility therefore also resides in the factual possibilities of the human *Dasein*. But, Heidegger names here the ensemble of these possibilities of authenticity: *existence*. Which cannot be outlined and distinguished because of this unless through and as the consequence of the *factual destruction* of the declining states which are however always the dominant states of facticity.

Consequently, with respect to these dominant states “negation has primacy over affirmation”.¹² Negation, however, means exactly to open facticity to the possibilities of (its) existence, namely the possibilities of authenticity in the given, concrete hermeneutical-historical situating, this being the critique of the present and – by this – the critique of tradition and of history. For this reason philosophy can never be something “popular”. Therefore it can never enjoy “popularity”, for it usually asserts itself *against* popular, common and liked things and “places”. Philosophy is however constrained to act destructively not only against these popular dominances, but also against its own traditions, which too get in the present to the way of decline. Because of this the foundation of philosophy and philosophizing as foundation means each time the destructive, decided and negating feature too of this tradition.

To “make philosophy”, to philosophize is only possible on the basis and after a *decision*. Only through this decision can in fact the object of philosophy be obtained and assimilated, the object that concerns existence evidently and fundamentally. Existence stands, therefore, now – defied and defiant – both before its own traditions and possibilities. Or, from the point of view of tradition, the philosophy of the present situation moves – in general – on the one hand in Greek conceptuality (which itself has gone through the most varied interpretations in the course of time), and, on the other hand, in Christian idealness.¹³ They therefore determine together – from the perspective of the problem of facticity – also the current dominant interpretation of life (*Lebensauslegung*).

Only this tradition and interpretation are essentially devoid exactly of the *certitude* of death. That is, exactly the quality of death as death, as dying and as such the quality of death as certitude. In complete accord with and even by virtue of these directions and tendencies – however paradoxically and dismayingly, perhaps – almost all the occidental traditions – the metaphysical tradition, the religious tradition, the tradition of common

beliefs and opinions etc. – in their dominant aspects have been operating in fact for thousands of years with a “concept” of death which does not refer to dying as such, but, on the contrary it hides – or at least *evades* – it. Beginning with Plato – his texts from *Phaidon* and *Criton* – and continued by Epicurus... not to mention the Christian tradition... but also the tradition of those who criticized Christianity – thinkers of the size of Schopenhauer or Nietzsche – and up to E. Lévinas or J. Derrida... the western metaphysical tradition – with the maybe sole exception of Martin Heidegger – thinks of death constantly without dying... That is, on the one hand even as immortality and deathlessness, or, on the other hand, evading constantly the express-explicit thought of *dying*.

It is therefore all the more necessary the decision on the basis of which philosophy can really become a force capable of radical effectiveness in the movements against the tendencies of decline. Briefly: capable of *emancipation* related to this tradition and capable to become at the same time “able” to liberate and open the human *Dasein* towards the possibilities of authenticity of (its) existence.

In other words – as Heidegger textually declared – it is necessary that this philosophy should become and should be decidedly and fundamentally *atheist* (*grundsätzlich atheistisch ist*).¹⁴ Namely: to become a philosophy, which has decided to gain and to assume its object and senses not determined by ideological exigencies and “visions about the world”, neither continuing mechanically its own traditions, but starting from its own contemporarized factual *possibilities*.

Therefore the fundamental and necessary atheism of philosophy did not mean for the young Heidegger an ideological inclusion in some other movement or trend (e.g. “materialism”), but we encounter here a completely constitutive element. (And which, for this reason, is much more radical than any “usual” movement, tendency of “denying God”.) Instead this is the founding affirmation of the fact that, in general, any philosophy which understands itself seriously and honestly, with this understanding has also to understand the circumstance that philosophy as such and philosophizing in general is and means already implicitly some kind of “raising one’s hand against God” (*Handaufhebung gegen Gott ist*) as well.¹⁵ Only thus can philosophy ensure its critical autonomy, which is necessary to existential criticism through which on the one hand tradition is destroyed, and, on the other hand existence is opened. And only thus can philosophy avoid becoming – by yielding to the allure of ease – a simple and already usual “metaphysical calmative”, through which man takes refuge in a “soothing” world (*beruhigende Welt*).¹⁶

And to really avoid these traditional and already much too usual pitfalls and allures, philosophy must unfold, construct and reconstruct itself only on the basis of its real, factual-effective and radical sources and possibilities. And in this existential reconstruction, the human *Dasein* –

which therefore philosophizes – can only rely on the facticity of its own radical interrogations... and not at all on some God.

It is therefore clear that “atheism” – term used here in its basic and constitutive sense, namely *a-theos*, meaning “without God”, and not the “rough” denial of God – is essentially and fundamentally connected to the issue we are discussing, namely the foundation of philosophy. For by atheism philosophy does not simply “gain” some “autonomy” – let us say from the church or religion – wished for or only dreamt at occasionally, but in fact *it is founded*. That is, through its atheism, philosophy acquires, as against the dominant tradition, not only his own object, but essentially it obtains itself as decision, as opening and as radical questioning and investigating happening.

For this reason Heidegger asked himself here, whether: “Is not even the idea of some philosophy of religion, moreover if its considerations are realized without taking into consideration man’s facticity, a pure nonsense?” (*Ob nicht schon die Idee einer Religionsphilosophie, und gar wenn sie ihre Rechnung ohne die Faktizität des Menschen macht, ei purer Widersinn ist?*)¹⁷ But why would even the “idea” of a philosophy of religion be a “pure nonsense”? Of course, first of all because if “religion” would be let us say the “object” of such a philosophy, then with this a philosophy outlines in this way would miss from the beginning its true, fundamental and founding “object”. Namely, the comprehensive facticity of the human *Dasein*. Secondly, if – as it is usual as a rule – by “philosophy of religion” it is understood or meant in fact some kind of “religious philosophy”, then through this so-called “philosophy”, philosophy misses in fact exactly its tasks and senses. For – by virtue of its bases – the sense and task of philosophy is and can be only to outline, take care of and ask the *radical questions*. Which – moreover – it is realized exactly in order to “burden things” and exactly through the exercising of the primacy of negation. And any “religious philosophy” – through its name itself – only narrows the openness of questioning, since it either “knows” already from the beginning the believed and “religious” answers to his “questions”, or, together with this, it refrains – if it does not forbid – from the start from asking some (let us say *a-theistic*) types and direction of questions.

Philosophy is founded and identifies itself therefore as being in itself a factual mode of existence of the human *Dasein*, which, “originating” exactly from his factual life... also returns to the facticity and “vitality” of this life. For this reason and consequently, philosophy lays in fact its own foundations. Thus Kant’s words, according to which philosophy alone can – and even must – lay its own foundations, prove to be true and acquire a new contour and a new weight. And this is never a purely theoretical-epistemic happening, since – as we have seen – self-foundation of philosophy takes place only starting from and in its being-like and factual affiliation – as a mode of being – to factual life itself. As being therefore itself a relationship of being, in which the being itself “grows” and is

enriched, turning towards itself in the form and in the mode of radical interrogation which must be assumed, performed and effectuated each time in an actual, existential-historic and factual way.

*

Anyhow: this early Heideggerian text outlines the foundation of philosophy exactly by placing it into the soil of its equally factual, historical and existential origins and senses. Placing it therefore exactly *into freedom* and exactly into what Kant named in his time “the autonomy and interests proper to philosophy”. Consequently, the foundation of philosophy also meant for Heidegger – already in 1922 – implicitly its opening towards the meditation on the essence of the foundation and through this towards the ceaseless re-interrogation of the world, of the transcendence and of freedom.

Or all these would become – in the year 1929 – the express themes of the study *On the Essence of the Ground*, in which therefore “the ground” and “foundation” were already interrogated expressly and – of course – radically.

(Translated by Ágnes Korondi)

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Notes

¹ “The mortals are the men. They are called mortals, since they *can* die. To die means to *make possible death as death*. Rational beings must first *become* mortals.” Martin Heidegger, “Das Ding,” in Martin Heidegger, *Das Ding und Die Sprache – A dolog és A nyelv* (Hungarian-German bilingual edition, Sárvár: Sylvester János Könyvtár, 2000, 41. (Italics are mine, I.K.V.)

² Martin Heidegger, “Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation) – Fenomenológiai Aristotelés-Interpretációk (A hermeneutikai szituáció jelzésére)” [Hungarian-German bilingual edition], *Existentia*, 1996–97.

³ Interestingly – maybe even oddly – the copy of the text has been preserved and found in Göttingen (where Heidegger's presentation was refused), but the scholars studying Heidegger's work “knew” about its existence from a letter in which the young philosopher “informed” Paul Natorp about the evolution of his investigations regarding Aristotle. The text *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* was published for the first time only in 1989 in the *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften*, Band 6/1989, with a preface by Hans-Georg Gadamer entitled – not too adequately in our opinion – *Heideggers „theologische” Jugendschrift*. Since then – as in the edition used by us – this title has figured as a kind of “subtitle” of the text. However, Gadamer's quite evident intention, when giving this title to his preface, must have been to “facilitate” the approach of a larger public often ruled by theological and religious prejudices and even aversion towards Martin Heidegger's thinking.

⁴ Françoise Dastur, *Moartea – Eseu despre finitudine* (Death – Essays on Finitude), (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 19.

⁵ Heidegger, 6.

⁶ Heidegger, 8.

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heidegger și grecii* (Heidegger and the Greeks), (Cluj: Apostrof, 1999), 10.

⁸ Heidegger, 12.

⁹ Heidegger, 12.

¹⁰ “Die hier bezeichnete rein konstitutiv ontologische Problematik des Seinscharakters des Todes hat nichts zu tun mit einer Mataphysik der Unsterblichkeit und des >>Wasdann?<<.” Heidegger, 18.

¹¹ Nietzsche's critic of Kant takes of course all these aspects fully in consideration.

¹² Heidegger, 18.

¹³ Heidegger, 22.

¹⁴ Heidegger, 18.

¹⁵ Heidegger, 18.

¹⁶ Heidegger, 18.

¹⁷ Heidegger, 18.