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## 2. On Concrete Philosophy

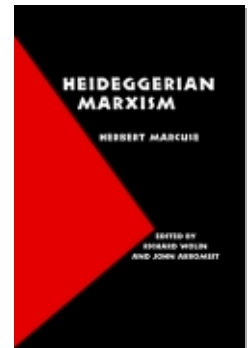
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## On Concrete Philosophy

We begin our investigation with a consideration of philosophizing as the human activity in which philosophy constitutes itself.<sup>1</sup> Philosophizing, if one takes the meaning of this word seriously, is a mode of human existence. Human existence is in all its modes subject to the question of its *meaning* [*Sinn*]. It is the distinguishing characteristic of human existence that it is not realized through its mere being, that it “confronts” its possibilities in a very specific way, that it must first seize these possibilities and, in this seizing, live in the shadow of the question concerning its “to what end” [*Wozu*]. (All conceptions of this “to what end” as the sphere of the *purpose* that transcends human existence, for the sake of which it would exist, will be avoided here and elsewhere. Even when bracketing any thought of purpose, one can still speak of a “to what end,” namely when the “to what end” of existence is grounded in its own being.) This “to what end” in its relationship to human existence is what we mean here by meaning.

Nor can the meaning of philosophizing, with regard to the original understanding of philosophizing, be conceived as the realization of a purpose transcendent to it. All genuine philosophizing has found its meaning in itself and grasped it through itself. Authentic philosophical effort aims at knowledge as the becoming visible of truth. The meaning of philosophizing can be designated provisionally as *the making visible of truth*.

Among the many determinations of truth we first consider that of *validity* [*Geltung*]. Truth *is* not validity, it does not “exhaust” itself in its validity, but validity belongs to the essence of truth. “Invalid” [*Ungültige*] truths, truths that are not valid [*gelten*], do not exist. But what is the meaning of validity? There “is” validity only in relation to human existence. The laws of nature are not valid for a nature that operates in accordance with them, but rather for the humans who understand nature. It is not valid for iron that the magnet

attracts it, but rather for the person who observes the iron and the magnet. To say that certain conditions have validity means that I—to the extent that I am concerned with these conditions—must know of them, must be familiar with them, must act accordingly, must adjust myself to them. This “I” is absolutely essential; it points in every case to human existence. Validity does not mean that the valid conditions *are* only for human existence, but it does mean that they can be meaningfully spoken of as *true* only for human existence. The conditions expressed by the laws of nature are not true for nature—for nature they simply *are*—but only for man. A valid set of conditions can be independent of all human existence as far as its *being* is concerned, but validity, as truth, “is” only for man.<sup>2</sup>

If truth is thus related to human existence through validity, this relation receives its existential significance through a phenomenon that is often overlooked: *appropriation* [*die Aneignung*]. Truth demands by its very nature—however independent from all human existence the being of its conditions may be—an appropriation through human existence. Truths are not sought out and secured, not grasped through the labor of knowing then to be tucked away somewhere and preserved *in abstracto*; rather, in the knowledge of truth lies the demand for its appropriation.<sup>3</sup> Knowledge is an appropriation only for the one who knows primordially, for the one who discovers and achieves mastery over what is known for and in his person, “as if it were the first time.” For every individual who fails to repeat this process of original discovery with his entire person, knowledge becomes mere familiarity, truth becomes accepting-as-true. Every genuine truth must be known [*gewußt*] and possessed, and knowing [*Wissen*] and possessing are not temporary acts of human consciousness that appear and then disappear again; rather, they belong to the existing of human Dasein itself, they are a function of existence. Appropriation in no way constitutes the *being* of truth (the true conditions), but it does constitute the *purpose* [*Sinn*] of truth. The “to what end” of truth is realized only in appropriation.

If its appropriation through human Dasein necessarily belongs to the meaning of truth, and if this appropriation is realized as knowing and possessing in the existing of Dasein itself, then truth must also have an impact in this existing. The existing of human Dasein is, however, at every instant a form of relating to the world: action and reaction. Truth must thus intervene in this actual sphere of existing: Dasein must, in its form of relating, be able to orient itself toward the truth.

Every truth<sup>4</sup> has the existential significance that man can, through its appropriation, exist in a true fashion. That which is being considered here must initially, as long as it is still a question of preliminary, general determinations, be understood very broadly. Even mathematical knowledge can, in all cases in which it has the original character of truth, bring man into a “true” relationship with the world. The mathematical truths of the Greek world, for example, had this existential character: it is palpably evident in the Pythagorean texts and still resonates clearly in some of the Platonic dialogues.

Let us return now to our starting point. If the meaning of philosophizing is the making visible of truth, and if this truth has a fundamentally existential character, then not only is philosophizing a mode of human existing, but philosophy itself is, according to its very meaning, existential. One can delineate the domain of philosophy however one likes, but in its search for truth, philosophy is always concerned with human existence. Authentic philosophizing refuses to remain at the stage of knowledge; rather, in driving this knowledge on to truth it strives for the concrete appropriation of that truth through human Dasein. Care [*Sorge*] for human existence and its truth makes philosophy a “practical science” in the deepest sense, and it also leads philosophy—and this is the crucial point—into the concrete distress [*Bedrängnis*] of human existence. The interconnections sketched out here appear to us to ground the philosophical necessity of asking the following questions: Must not authentic philosophizing prove itself by demonstrating that the appropriation of its truths is of the utmost existential necessity? Is the question of the “fruitfulness” of philosophy perhaps not as “unphilosophical” as it is made out to be? Do philosophical problems and truths also have a “history,” not in the merely factual sense that they take shape in “history,” but also in the sense that they, historical in their essence, are bound to concrete historical existence and are meaningful and true only from the perspective of and for this existence. By the same token, do philosophical problems and truths also have a specific time, a place and an hour? Is it not possible that concrete human existence in its mode of Dasein and its historical activity has already appropriated for itself truths that have not yet been discovered by philosophical inquiry, such that the task of philosophy would be the emancipation of these truths through the interpretation of concrete existence? On the other hand, does not care for the very concrete possibilities of appropriation of its truths belong to the domain of philosophy? Is it not also the task of philosophy to prepare the ground for its truths and, if necessary, to fight in the sphere of historical existence for this preparation?

Let us summarize the meaning of the questions posed above: does not a necessary philosophical beginning come about when philosophy is once again seen from the standpoint of concrete human existence and is interrogated with concrete human existence as its end?

We believe that an abstract-universal treatment of these questions conceals the crucial, truly urgent significance of the problem, and that only a discussion in the sphere of the most extreme concretion can achieve the necessary clarity. Not the general but rather the concrete necessity of philosophy is at stake. The intrinsic value of authentic philosophizing—this needs to be emphasized once again—is not called into question by this discussion, but is rather presupposed by it. Before the question of the concrete necessity of philosophy can be posed with regard to the current existential situation, however, the general situation in which philosophizing encounters human Dasein must be outlined. We must limit ourselves in this context to only the most necessary preliminary suggestions.

Human existence, the subject of philosophy, always stands in a particular historical situation. The subjects and objects addressed by philosophy are not abstract, “interchangeable” ones; each individual exists in a particular framework of activity (in which he maintains and shapes his existence), in a particular social situation (through which his everyday environment is defined), in a particular state of the community of the people, which has in its turn evolved on the basis of particular natural and historical conditions. From birth onward each individual is delivered up to his historical situation: the possibilities of his existence are prescribed through it. And the objects that “stand over against” Dasein, the things with which it is occupied and with which it fills a life-space, the natural world in which it lives, the structures and forms in which it runs its course—these are not fixed, “unequivocal,” independent quantities that manifest themselves in the same way in any given historical situation. Whenever and wherever they appear, they have already been grasped and changed by a concrete existence, have likewise become “history,” handed down from one generation to another, shaped according to the necessities of the respective existence.

If one intends to be serious about the philosophical concern for Dasein, then philosophy must not view this conditioning of Dasein through the historical situation as mere facticity, as historical “perspective,” as temporal coincidence, or as the realization of an “essential content” [*Wesensgehalt*] (that is itself extra- or supratemporal), but rather as the authentic fate of Dasein, as the concrete

fullness of existence itself. Dasein does not “make” history as its product, it does not live in history as if history were its more or less coincidental space or element; rather, the concrete existing of Dasein “is” happening [*Geschehen*] that is understood as “history” [*Geschichte*].<sup>5</sup> To regard the ontological historicity<sup>6</sup> of Dasein as mere facticity or something like it would not only mean overlooking the actual life-sphere of Dasein at the very outset of the philosophical undertaking, but would also contravene the findings of phenomenology, which alone may serve to guide it. Let us observe for a moment the situation in the phenomenological reduction. When consciousness is extracted from its natural comportment toward the real world, when every judgment about this world is bracketed out, every transcendent “positing” avoided, then an entirely new area becomes available for study: the flow of consciousness with the fullness of its experiences on the one hand, and the objects, experienced by this consciousness as intentionalities, on the other. Here all talk of historicity has suddenly become meaningless, because reality is essentially [*wesentlich*] happening and history (in the sense of transcendent positing). It is entirely possible to restrict philosophy to this area. A wealth of knowledge can be acquired regarding the nature of consciousness, the construction of its acts, the connections among its experiences, the constitution of its objects, and all of this knowledge, if it has been attained with the requisite phenomenological exactitude, must have “supratemporal” validity. But in laying claim to the only field that could provide such knowledge, phenomenology has also made evident the only way in which phenomenological philosophizing is still possible outside of the reduction. The necessary correlate of the phenomenological reduction is the *becoming-historical of philosophy*. At the precise moment when the brackets of the reduction fall away, Dasein and its world in its historical concretion are found standing in front of us.

Let us consider an example. I observe the factory building standing across from me. In the phenomenological reduction I grasp it in its givenness as an object of perception. I exclude all transcendent positing and can now study the constitution of this intentional object in perception, the sequence of the acts through which it is constructed, the laws governing the relations among them, the levels of evidence through which it appears, etc. I can, on the basis of the object of perception “factory building,” illustrate the essential laws of the givenness of a thing [*Dinggegebenheit*], as well as the givenness of color, extension, and the like. And now I let the reduction fall away but continue in the execution of the phenomenological method: to allow the “object itself,” as

it stands before me in total concretion, to be seen and to speak. What I now have is the complex “factory building” in the (more or less abundant) fullness of its concrete meaning: location of economic activity, in which something is “produced,” temporary residence of “x” number of workers, property of “y” corporation, modern or obsolete, small or large. The factory appears as integrated into a particular economic system, as one of the elements that results from a long technical development, as the object of bitter conflicts of interest. These are all facts that reveal themselves to me upon closer consideration of the object factory, facts that extend over an ever larger area, but that have their common “location” in the “historicity” of the object factory and the entwining of its meaning [*Sinnverbundenheit*] with historical human existence.

The historical reality that reveals itself when philosophy addresses Dasein is just as little a facticity, coincidental to a particular Dasein, from which one could abstract, as it is an independent, pure world of things, which could be cognitively detached from contemporaneous existence without damaging its truth. It becomes clear in this context why the ontological historicity of Dasein must also assume decisive significance for the methodology of the “social sciences.” Social arrangements, economic orders, and political formations together constitute the happening of Dasein and must be viewed from the perspective of this existence [*Existenz*]. If they are investigated from the outset as “things,” with an eye toward their structure, their relationships, and the laws of their development, the observations (most likely undertaken with the model of the natural sciences as their mistaken ideal) that result will be such that the meaning of these constructs cannot even appear. For in and with these constructs a particular Dasein exists in such a way that the very possibility of its “reification” is only given at a specific historical stage of the “fragmentation” of Dasein.<sup>7</sup> It is similarly unacceptable to divide historical reality into a collection of discrete layers or spheres, such that, for example, economic and political and social and artistic and scientific activity are dealt with as self-sufficient, independent “modes of existing.” Such a separation may be necessary for the modern scientific establishment, and it may also be objectively necessary for individual empirical investigations—but every investigation that aims at the essence of such constructs must be borne, even at the level of method, by an awareness of the indissoluble unity of historical existence. There are no “economic subjects,” “legal subjects,” etc., but only individuals or communities, which, as historical unities existing in their respective situations, engage in economic activity, administer and receive justice, pursue the arts and sciences,

and so forth. (From this perspective Max Weber's concept of an "ideal type" also requires a correction. If the movements of historical reality are viewed as "deviations" from an ideal type, then one faces the obvious danger that it is precisely these concrete "deviations" that constitute historical occurrence).

We do in fact find striking confirmation of the methodological reorientation suggested here in modern social science as well. Max Weber provides an example, if not in his treatises on the theory of science, then certainly in the execution of his concrete studies, especially on the sociology of religion and in *Economy and Society*. He is deeply committed to a consistently holistic view of all the forces and spaces that historically circumscribe Dasein and to examining these forces and spaces from the standpoint of individual existence. And out of Max Weber's circle came Gottl-Otilienfeld, with whom the reorientation in social scientific research first achieved full awareness of its methodological implications. His entire struggle is directed against the old approach of national economy, which "thinks in goods" alone, takes facts as data, and, devoid of all historical conscience for the existential character of the economy, lives in pure reification. His draft of a "General Theory of Economics" attempts to return to an understanding of "economics as life," to grasp economic structures as "elements of human communal life." (We cannot pursue here the extent to which even his forward-looking definition of the economy as "a shaping of human communal life in the spirit of a lasting harmonization of needs and their fulfillment" recreates the risk of the elements of the economy being viewed from the position of an abstract "economic subject.")

Having sketched out a general approach, we will now attempt to concretize the question of the existential significance of philosophy in terms of the present situation of Dasein: in the current historical situation, can one demonstrate that a particular mode of philosophizing is "necessitated" by the present form of existence, and which mode of philosophizing is it that proves to be necessary?

With this formulation of the question a problem immediately arises. Is it even permissible to speak of a particular historical situation as a "unity"? And, by the same token, of *a single* present existence and *a single* necessity? Or does the inquiry, precisely in its concrete form, rather run up against a multiplicity of present existences with a multiplicity of necessities in a multiplicity of historical situations? So that the formulation given above ends up leading to an abstraction that either ignores or does violence to concrete existence? When a particular historical situation is addressed, it is already viewed as something differentiable and differentiated and its specific difference in the flow of histor-



ical occurrence is accentuated. Decisive here is the visible line of demarcation from what has been: a concretely demonstrable state of economic and social development, which can be differentiated from the previous state in its *structure*. This difference is to be demonstrated first on the basis of the “material content” of the situation under consideration:<sup>8</sup> the mode in which the Dasein in question produces and reproduces, the structure of social stratification that corresponds to this mode, and the forms of social being. Numerous variations among individual classes, peoples, countries, etc. may become apparent in the process—but they are all merely variations within a unity that provides their foundation, different positions and developments within the same economic and social being. And only as far as the unified structure of this being extends can one speak of a unified situation.

To such a unified situation, however, there must also correspond a “unified” human existence. All individuals, all “communities” of a certain epoch, however different they may be, are united by the essential fact that they occupy the same historical situation. To be sure, there are as many modes of existing as there are individuals, and thus also just as many existential possibilities and necessities. But the individuals are by no means the ultimate unities on which the analysis of historical existence must rely. To begin this investigation with them would be to veer off arbitrarily when one is only halfway to the intended object (concrete historical existence). What appears under phenomenological scrutiny as a historical unity are “higher unities”: “communities” or “societies” in their respective life-spaces (an attempt to clarify these concepts will be undertaken later). Thus, if the question concerning the type of philosophizing necessary for a concrete historical existence is posed here, it must aim at an existence that can be addressed as a unity for the reason that and insofar as the historical situation “in which it is based” demonstrates a unified structure in the sense suggested above. A specific type of philosophizing would then be necessary for concrete existence when this existence finds itself in a state of existential distress [*Not*] (that is to say, distress that concerns and takes hold of it as existence), a type of philosophizing that could help ameliorate this distress. It will be necessary to return later to the reasons why philosophizing is restricted here to the role of contributing, of helping.

The historical situation in which “contemporary” existence finds itself, and in view of which this investigation was begun, is determined in its structure through the structure of capitalist society at the stage of high capitalism (organized capitalism, imperialism). These concepts, which are intended to outline

the situation, are by no means meant to refer to merely political or scientific circumstances; rather they seek to address the existential determinations of the present Dasein. In capitalist society, a particular mode of human existing, one that belongs only to that society, has become reality. The economic system has drawn all areas of life into the process of reification, which has detached forms of life and unities of meaning [*Sinneseinheiten*], previously bound up with the concrete individual, from any form of individual personality, and has created a force [*Gewalt*] that operates between and above individuals. Having been established, this force now subsumes all forms and values of the individual and the community under itself. The modes of being-with-one-another [*Miteinandersein*] are emptied of any essential content and are regulated from without according to “foreign” laws: fellow humans are primarily economic subjects and/or objects, professional colleagues, citizens, members of the same “society”; the essential relationships of friendship and love, any authentic form of human community is restricted to the small sphere of life that remains separate from general occupation [*Geschäftigkeit*]. At the same time as this situation drives individualism to the fore (which in no way contradicts a pronounced collectivism of the economy!), the individual is also separated from his “activity,” which is “assigned” to him and is carried out without any possibility that it could actually lead to personal fulfillment.

The world in which this Dasein lives is also evolving to an ever greater degree into a “business” [*Betrieb*]. The things encountered in it are viewed from the outset as “goods,” as things that one must use, but not in the sense of using them to meet the needs of Dasein. Instead, they are used to occupy or to fill an otherwise aimless existence, until they actually do become “necessities.” In this way more and more existences are consumed simply in order to keep the “business” operational. The form of existence of all classes has hollowed itself out in such a way that it becomes necessary to place existence itself on a new foundation.

These remarks were not intended to depict the worldview and the “position” of capitalist society at the stage of high capitalism. The aim was merely to indicate that the crisis of capitalism is a crisis of existence, which has truly been shaken to its foundation. And even this is not yet the crucial aspect of the present situation for our purposes. It is rather this: science [*Wissenschaft*]<sup>9</sup> in this situation is in a position to understand this crisis, its causes, and its resolution—or perpetuation. The foundations of contemporary existence, its historical contours, the general conditions that have led to this existence, and

the historical consequences that accompany it have all become accessible to science. In these circumstances philosophy is burdened by existence with the enormous task of making this knowledge [*Wissen*] concrete, of presenting the necessity of its truths to this threatened existence. Whenever Dasein has found itself in an existential crisis, all genuine philosophy has understood its truths as existential and has seen its task as demonstrating, through the communication of those truths, its necessity for contemporaneous Dasein. We will attempt to clarify what this means.

Present existence is not only universally connected to all Dasein contemporaneous with it, but is also determined at its very roots by a universal historical inheritance. As this universal web of connections that originated in the economic structure of society has become more dense, two developments have occurred. On the one hand, the existentially binding truths of each society and its specific elements (status groups, classes, peoples) have become more differentiated, in their historical particularity. On the other hand, the “universally valid” truths have dissipated into abstractions [*abstrakte Sachverhalten*]. If we add to this the existential distress of contemporary Dasein mentioned above, which is determined by the structure of capitalist society, then it becomes clear that for this Dasein not a single truth can be established in existential concretion as absolutely binding and necessary. The responsibility of philosophy and its duty to dedicate itself to this existence only grows in these circumstances. To be sure, philosophy can continue to occupy itself with establishing essential laws for ethical behavior or being, for the world of values and its construction, and so forth. But if the problems thus “solved” are then lived through in their existential concretion, it will become clear that contemporary Dasein lacks entirely the possibility of maintaining and realizing these laws in its existence. It is easy to dismiss this problematic by saying that this Dasein is simply “not genuine” and not in truth, and thus it is not the task of philosophy to be concerned with it. Precisely this, however, is the goal: that philosophical investigation once again directs its attention toward the *possibilities of appropriation* of truth that are available to a given Dasein. If this Dasein is in a situation whose historical structure (the concrete way in which Dasein maintains and shapes itself socially) makes the appropriation of such truths impossible, then it is the task of philosophy to seek out Dasein and to attempt take it *out of this situation* and “bring it into truth.” An example: in the intoxication of power that has accompanied advancements in technology and rationalization in contemporary society, it has been overlooked that the *personal* power of humans over nature and “things”

has not increased, but decreased! Just as humans as “economic subjects and objects” find themselves in thrall to a commodity economy that has become a self-sufficient “entity,” rather than in a situation where their industry is an appropriate mode of their existing, so it is that their tools—machines, means of transportation, electricity, light, power—have become for them so large and burdensome that, seen from the perspective of the individual, those people who use these tools must increasingly adapt their existences to suit them, must enter into their service. Indeed, it becomes clear that ever more lives are being consumed in order to keep them “functioning”!

This is just one aspect of the fact that in capitalist society all personal values have been lost or have been put into the service of technological and rational “objectivity.” If philosophizing is to have any possibility of being existentially necessary for such a Dasein, it must attempt to bring this Dasein into a situation in which it can grasp and maintain the truths of its essential laws. Knowledge of the historical possibilities of contemporary Dasein must be achieved: this must include both a comprehension of its origins and a demarcation of the range of its transformations. After supplying a precise analysis of present existence, philosophy has the task of investigating which of these possibilities ensures a “true mode of existence.” It must carefully observe every movement of existence: it must drive forward those that represent a movement toward truth and hinder those that lead to fallen modes of existence.

In this way the noblest desideratum of all philosophizing—the unity of theory and praxis—can become reality. With this we believe to have pointed to the location in which philosophy can become necessary for present Dasein. We will now attempt to characterize the direction and the task of such philosophizing. It is the process of *philosophy becoming concrete*, whose most important stages shall be sketched out in the following discussion.

This philosophizing is directed toward the specific Dasein contemporaneous with it. Its task is to bring this Dasein into the truth of existing. Now in order to even be able to approach Dasein, in order to be able to take hold of it in its existence, concrete philosophy must *become historical*, it must insert itself into the concrete historical situation. The becoming historical of philosophy means, firstly, that concrete philosophy has to investigate contemporaneous Dasein in its historical situation, with an eye toward which possibilities for the appropriation of truths are available to this Dasein, which truths it can realize, and which are necessary to it. Investigate should not be understood here in the sense of an opportunistic philosophy of utility that places itself, as

a scientific discipline, in the service of contingent [*faktischen*] Dasein, allows itself to be used by it—the truths of philosophy are not grounded in facticity, even though they must in each case also be realized by contingent Dasein. Concrete philosophy knows that truths can never be taken in abstract form and arbitrarily grafted on to any Dasein; rather, they must be grasped out of the midst of the existing Dasein and maintained in existence. For this reason, concrete philosophy incorporates into its “teaching” the entire concrete situation of contemporaneous Dasein in the complete determinateness of the social structure. Only when it knows how Dasein thus determined suffers and acts, what its real difficulties are, which modes of existing and which paths for change are prescribed to it by the situation, only then can it bring Dasein into truth, become for it an existential necessity. But is not such an analysis of contemporaneous Dasein in terms of its historical situation the task of the actual historical sciences: history, sociology, economics? Certainly, concrete philosophy will make extensive use of the material provided by these sciences, will find it necessary to effect a radical break with the long practice of isolating itself from these sciences. Yet despite all of this, one must not forget that the method of philosophical analysis is the phenomenological method, and that a particular method also corresponds to a particular object domain. The object of concrete philosophy is contemporaneous Dasein qua existing, human Dasein in the mode of its existing. In the case of history, the focus is the contingent political situation of this Dasein, in the case of economics, the contingent mode of its economic activity, in the case of sociology, the contingent mode of its social being, or, in each case, the focus is the respective *theory* of these contingent modes as historical formations (political, economic, social structures), but not *existence itself*. In concrete philosophy, the focus is *Dasein* in the concrete fullness of its *existence*, which includes all of these contingent modes—precisely as modes in which Dasein exists. The authentic philosophical character of this analysis further reveals itself in the fact that the deconstruction [*Destruktion*] of contemporaneous Dasein into its historicity must be completed under constant consideration of the ontological structure of Dasein and the world. A concrete historical phenomenon such as a scientific system, a hierarchy of values, a social order can be recognized in its existential significance only when it is compared in its facticity to the ontological structures of a “scientific system,” a “hierarchy of values,” etc., which can only be ascertained by way of the phenomenological method.

In addition, the analysis of contemporaneous Dasein outlined here must be assigned to philosophy and not to the historical sciences for the reason that such an investigation cannot remain at the level of mere analysis, but must rather be carried through to the point of establishing normative guidelines for action. If concrete philosophy truly wants to bring Dasein into truth, then it must take hold of it in the only sphere in which existential decisions can occur: in the sphere of action. The existing of Dasein in its concrete form as “happening” is always a changing, a transforming of conditions, an affecting, in other words, an acting. Even a “*bios theoreticos*,” as long as it gives expression to an “authentic” existing, as long as it is concerned with existential necessities, will entail a changing and thus an affecting [*Wirken*] and acting, even where such an “effect” [*Wirkung*] is in no way its intent. The guidelines for action in which concrete philosophy culminates will never contain—this will have already become clear from the preceding discussion—abstract norms, empty imperatives. They will necessarily have been drawn from the necessities of concrete existing in its historical situation and will in every case be addressed, not to an abstract universal, but to a concrete, existing subject. The question that now arises is this: how does philosophy arrive at such guidelines for action and what type of subject will follow them? How can philosophy approach concrete existence at all? Certainly not by confronting existence with truths, taken from who knows where, that are presented as unconditionally binding and stopping short at the proof or the demonstration of these truths. If philosophy in the appropriation of truths is committed to a real movement of existence, then it cannot be satisfied with the knowledge of truth as an impetus for this movement. Human Dasein does not exist on the basis of knowing, but rather on the basis of fateful happening in a particular situation in the shared and surrounding world [*Mit-und Umwelt*]. Knowledge can only give rise to an existential movement (which is always a transformation in happening) when it intervenes in the concrete fate of the Dasein it addresses: when it takes upon itself the historical situation of this Dasein, together with its possibilities and its reality, and initiates the movement within and out of this situation. Only by this path can knowledge find and make manifest the concrete necessities of Dasein. And such knowledge will complete and realize itself in a real transformation of the structure of historical existence and its world: not in the vague sense of some or other influence of the “idea” on historical reality, but rather in the sense of a conscious transformation of this reality with the real means made available by the situation.

Concrete philosophy can thus only approach existence if it seeks out Dasein in the sphere in which its existence is based: as it *acts* in its world in accordance with its historical situation. In becoming historical, concrete philosophy, by taking the real fate of Dasein upon itself, also *becomes public*. It must take upon itself the existence of the Dasein contemporaneous with it, and this is at bottom only a grasping of its own fate. For “contemporaneity” [*Gleichzeitigkeit*] does not mean a mere temporal juxtaposition, but rather is always an existing-with-one-another [*Miteinander-Existieren*], a sharing of fate. To say that philosophy is in a relationship of contemporaneity with a concrete Dasein is to say that philosophy must concern itself with the thoroughly concrete struggles and difficulties of this Dasein, that it is burdened by the same cares regarding a life that must exist in this and no other way.

Kierkegaard saw most clearly this existential character of contemporaneity and the profound obligation it entailed for philosophy: “For contemporaneity is the tension that prevents one from allowing the matter to remain undecided; rather, it forces one either to be offended or to believe.”

It provides “the proper qualitative pressure; distance, in contrast, helps both to make something into nothing and to make something, more or less from nothing, into the extraordinary.”<sup>10</sup> Concrete philosophy grasps the situation of contemporaneity as a demand for relevance. If contemporaneous Dasein is to be brought into truth, then this must occur as the movement of a present existence: Dasein’s present existence in the fullness of its historical uniqueness, under the full strain of its historical position. With this, philosophy’s occupation with [*Sich-Kümmern*] existence becomes a concern for [*Bekümmern*] the thoroughly concrete difficulties of this existence. Philosophy, once it has found itself in a situation of contemporaneity with its Dasein, can no longer philosophize as in a vacuum, in generalities “without qualitative pressure”; existing in reality, it will be forced to take an unequivocal position, to make decisions, to choose its point of view, visibly and tangibly, ready to submit itself to any test. Concrete philosophy will exist in the public realm, because only by so doing can it truly approach existence. Only when, in full public view, it grabs hold of existence in its daily being, in the sphere in which it actually exists, can it effect a movement of this existence toward its truth. Otherwise, only an absolute authority, which is believed unconditionally to be in possession of revealed truth, can call forth such a movement.

The phenomenon indicated above can be illuminated by considering the final development of Kierkegaard’s philosophy as a becoming-public of con-

crete philosophy. Seldom has a philosophizing torn open so deep a chasm of meaning between the eternal, absolute, divine and the historical Dasein of man as did Kierkegaard's; seldom has it aligned itself more deliberately with the idea of the eternal and judged from this perspective, or denounced more vociferously, as cowardly escapism and irresponsibility all grasping of historicity, all attempts to address historical-social being as the true world of humans. Yet at the same time, seldom has a philosopher been as concerned, from the very outset of his philosophizing, with the truth of concrete existence; seldom has a philosopher been so convinced that the foundation of all philosophizing is found in the tribulations of simple existing. And so it necessarily came to pass that Kierkegaard, at the end of his career, came to recognize and understand the public sphere, where contemporaneous Dasein existed in an active state, as the authentic sphere of activity even for a philosophizing entirely aligned with the eternal. He takes leave of his solitude: he, who had always addressed himself only to the "individual," for whom the public impact of his books was completely unimportant, takes to the streets, in a truly Socratic act. He writes article after article for a daily newspaper, publishes pamphlets, and focuses his entire struggle on the central decision of the historical moment. And this struggle in the public realm does not take the form of Kierkegaard abstractly opposing the truth of the eternal to concrete existence and addressing existence from the realm of the eternal. On the contrary, he directs his efforts with absolute precision toward the achievement of a concrete movement of contemporaneous Dasein, a "real" transformation of its existence, and his attacks and demands are thus always directed at the concrete forms and tasks of this existence, keeping in sight the full range of possibilities for such achievement available at that moment. Only when one grasps how very important the immediacy of a real decision was for Kierkegaard in realizing the meaning of his concrete philosophy, to what degree he strove for a real movement and transformation of contemporaneous existence, only then can one understand the ferocity of his attack, the agitational force of his public appearance, the deliberate collision with representative public figures, the revolutionary concreteness of his demands (such as that its members should secede from the state church). In addition, only then can one understand how deeply Kierkegaard necessarily suffered from the absence of an impact, how agonizing he found the silence of the attacked, and how he tried again and again to break this silence.

The question concerning the reason for Kierkegaard's public collapse leads us to a problem that lies once again within the scope of our general investiga-



tion. How can the becoming public of philosophy become actual *in concreto*? To which concrete Dasein can philosophy address itself and where can it grab hold of concrete existence? Is there a guarantee of the possibility of an existential impact? Concrete philosophy is concerned with the truth of contemporaneous human existence. The bringing-into-truth of Dasein means, concretely, a “real” change in existence: not just a (peripheral) change of its contingent forms and formations (forms of life and culture in the sense of the customary terminology), but rather a change in the mode of existing itself, which constitutes the foundation of all these forms in the first place. The concrete mode of existing is the true sphere of happening: “history.” It is the mode in which a given Dasein grasps and lives its fate in its world, a fate, moreover, that unfolds in a particular historical situation, one that can be identified and distinguished through its particular economic and social structure.

If concrete philosophy intends to elicit a real change in existence, it must seek out existence in this sphere of historical occurrence. Only the true subject of historical occurrence can be the subject of such change. Concrete philosophy must first inquire as to the subject of historical occurrence. And here it becomes clear that the subject of historical occurrence is not “the individual.” Human Dasein, as something historical, is in its essence a being-with [*Mit-sein*] with others, and the historical unity is always a unity of being-with-one-another, of “social” being—it is always a “society.” The limits of being-with-one-another, the constituents of society, are different in the different historical situations and must in each case be demonstrated for a specific situation.

In accordance with these circumstances, concrete philosophy must address itself to the society contemporaneous with it, seek it out in its historical situation, analyze its forms of existence and the realms of meaning and value seized by it, and in this way work through to the truth of this society. But is this not precisely the attempt to flee that Kierkegaard opposed so adamantly, a flight into world history from the very personal difficulties of existing, an avoidance of the final, absolutely unequivocal decision, which in every case the individual can make only for himself? For if philosophy truly and in absolute concretion has existing as its object—existing is something that is always done only by the individual, and no society can take his authentic existence away from him—the legitimacy of this objection is incontrovertible. It is true that the meaning of philosophizing is not limited to the “individual,” but it can only be realized by each individual and is grounded in the existence of each individual. The concretion of philosophy in the existence of each individual

must never be pushed off on to an abstract “they” subject [*Mansubjekt*]<sup>11</sup>, the decisive responsibility deferred to some universal category.

But precisely because concrete philosophy is concerned with concrete existence, it must ask itself this question: how is it possible, in concrete terms, to approach this individual? Does the individual even exist in the historical situation of contemporaneity? If so, then it is not enough to write books whose addressee is always merely an abstract universal, books that do not concern themselves with the question of who appropriates their truths and for whom this appropriation is possible. Socrates could still address the individual in the marketplace and philosophize with him, because the individual still existed in the society of the Athenian city-state. His questions are binding for every individual with whom he speaks and they force this individual to bear the full weight of decision. Whom do the philosophical books oblige to make a decision? Concrete philosophy must not suppose the existence of the individual to be such that its appeal can reach and impact him and his interiority “just like that.” To be sure, philosophy must take hold of the “interiority” of the individual existence, and it must struggle to establish itself in this arena, but interiority is not some abstraction that stands beyond historical space and historical time. Both the world of the individual, precisely as a specific, historically determined surrounding and shared world, and the world of nature and society in the fullness of its unique situation, belong ontologically to the Dasein of the individual, even if it is grasped as contrary to them. And this world of the individual is by no means a function of him, such that it could be changed through a simple change in the individual himself. On the contrary, in the “thrownness” of his Dasein, the individual is given over to this world in such a way that his decisions are prescribed to him by it (without thereby relieving the individual of the seriousness of decision and transferring it to “fate” or society.) Society is neither a determinately existing [*daseiendes*] subject alongside the individual nor the sum of individuals; rather, society is in a very concrete sense each and every individual, it is the concrete-historical mode of individual Dasein. Thus it is precisely when philosophy intends to become serious about its concern for the individual that it must not lose sight of the world in which the individual’s Dasein realizes itself. The individual exists as an individual only in a particular situation of the surrounding and shared world, in a particular situation of social being. This situation is never merely coincidental, such that it could or must first be “stripped away” in order to gain access to the “authentic” existence of the individual. It is the reality of

his existence itself and only through it can the individual truly be addressed, be affected. Admittedly, the question can now be posed whether the path of philosophy must not nevertheless lead from the individual to his surrounding and shared world rather than vice versa: whether or not meticulous care on the part of the individual for the truth of his existence must serve as the starting point from which the truth of his surrounding and shared world can then be grasped. Aside from the fact that both points of departure, when separated in this way, are abstractions, aside from the fact that the main idea of concrete philosophy, in contrast, is a consistently synthetic consideration of the individual together with his surrounding and shared world, this question can only be answered from within the context of the historical situation in which it becomes urgent for philosophy. There are historical situations in which the individual can serve as the foundation for a construction of existence, in which revolutionizing the individual can lead to a social revolution. And there are historical situations when this is no longer possible in any fashion because the contemporaneous mode of social being precludes the authentic existence of the individual. In such cases revolutionizing the individual can only be achieved by transforming society. In such cases the individual is no longer the point of departure, but rather the goal of philosophy, because individuality itself must first be made possible again. In such a society the Dasein of the individual is necessarily false, because no essentially true individuals can exist in an essentially false society. In both situations philosophy can only impact the individual in his existence when it grasps him not as an abstract subject, but rather in the fullness of his unique historical determinacy: when it impacts and grasps together with him a contemporaneous shared and surrounding world, a social being. Philosophy must intervene, on the basis of the knowledge of truth accessible to it, in the distress of contemporaneous existence; it must propel existence forward in accordance with its historical possibilities. The becoming-concrete- of philosophy is impossible without philosophy's commitment to contemporaneity (in the Kierkegaardian sense). And this is the crucial point: this commitment can never remain on a merely theoretical level. If philosophy is truly concerned with existence, then it must take this existence upon itself and, existing together with it in a state of contemporaneity, fight for truth. The philosopher must know that he has not only the right, but also the duty, to intervene in the entirely concrete difficulties of existence, because the existential meaning of truth can only be realized in this manner. Thus, at the endpoint of every genuine concrete philosophy, one finds the public act: the accusation

and defense of Socrates and his death in prison; Plato's political interventions in Syracuse; and Kierkegaard's struggle with the state church.

The task that remains is to explain the philosophical possibility of linking knowledge and truth with historical contemporaneity. The necessary presupposition is that philosophy can only intervene in contemporaneity by means of *knowledge*, that every attempt to "animate" the concepts of philosophical knowledge by subordinating them to "life," by trying to make them duplicate the movements of life, means abandoning philosophy. Furthermore, the relation of concrete philosophy to contemporaneity is not to be understood in the sense that contemporaneity is in each case the "truth" to which philosophy must accommodate itself. On the contrary, as corresponds to the existential character of truth, a given human existence has a very particular relation to its possible truths, whether of falling short of or achieving realization, proximity or distance, striving toward or concealing. To the extent that philosophy constantly opposes the truths that have become known to the state of contemporaneous existence, it lives in the crucial tension out of which alone it can become necessary and productive. Rather than being comingled in an artificial manner, the true interconnectedness of knowledge and "life," truth and contemporaneity, will be established when completed knowledge is propelled forward toward the realization of its truth in contemporaneity, after knowledge itself has been achieved on the basis of genuine care for existence. The concrete tension of philosophy will not lead in every historical situation to public acts, to an intervention in the sphere of happening. But in situations where contemporaneous existence has actually been shaken to its foundations, that is to say, where a struggle is actually taking place over new possibilities of being, it would be a betrayal by philosophy of its *own meaning* (not, as some would claim, of "history") to stand on the sidelines and continue to occupy itself with "timeless" discussions. Philosophy lives up to its traditional title as the "first science" only when it takes the lead at precisely this moment.