# SCHOLASTICISM WITHOUT GOD: MARTIN HEIDEGGER (1889-1976)

JONATHAN D. MORENO
*Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.*

It is intriguing to count the similarities between Martin Heidegger, who died in May of last year in the West German village of his birth, and the late J. L. Moreno. Both were born in middle Europe at about the same time; both were products of Teutonic education; both had early flirtations with formal religion which influenced their later careers; both inspired major new trends in "existential" psychology as alternatives to Freud; both were charismatic and somewhat mysterious figures who excited either unflagging loyalty or unabashed contempt among their colleagues. Though they never met, they did have an indirect contact in the person of a tailor whom they shared in Freiburg many years ago.

Yet these similarities of background and professional status should not divert our attention from their differences, for these are far more instructive. Heidegger, though a brilliant lecturer by all accounts, was a rather reclusive sort who preferred Messkirch to the rest of the world, and his peasant neighbors by far to his philosophical colleagues. Moreno was gregarious and social, deserting Bucharest for Vienna early on, then Vienna for New York, then living in perpetual motion throughout Europe and the Americas, seemingly at ease with intellectual and laborer equally well. While Heidegger's early religious involvement was with traditional Christianity, Moreno's was as messiah of a new vision; and while Heidegger was allegedly a National Socialist sympathizer who became rapidly alienated, Moreno always declined identification with any ideology but his own. Although both were heavily influenced by Nietzsche, Heidegger's was the Dionysian road to ratiocination, Moreno's the Apollonian quest for redemption through the spontaneous act—i.e., self-creative and appropriate.

Indeed, Moreno's greatest debt was not to ancient or medieval philosophers*, as was true for Heidegger, but rather to thinkers who heralded the twentieth century: the Frenchman Henri Bergson and the under-appreciated American genius Charles Sanders Peirce, forerunner of William James, G. H. Mead and John Dewey. Bergson's philosophy of "durée," of reality as dynamic process, was extremely popular in Moreno's student days

* The possible exception to this is Aristotle, but his *Poetics* stimulated more a radical alteration than adoption in Moreno's thought.

among the liberal intellectuals. It seemed to sound the exciting experimental chord of the coming era, though ironically Bergson died an anonymous pauper in Nazi-occupied Paris. Peirce's pragmatism had as its basic tenet the notion that the meaning of a sign rests in the *action* that it calls forth, hence that experimentation is the key to definition. Moreno may also have been impressed by Peirce's infatuation with formulae and mathematization (Peirce's father was a distinguished Harvard mathematician), and his ingenious contributions to logic and chartography, as well as philosophy. This personally irascible but enormously productive harbinger of the new century also died in extreme poverty and without recognition. Activity, precision, and practicality were guiding themes in Moreno's vision of the human sciences, perhaps culled from the pages of Bergson and Peirce.

Heidegger, on the other hand, was a Graecophile, hankering for those halcyon days of the pre-Socratics when "logos" (order) was the aim of the intellectual quest and had not yet been obscured by lesser modes of being. After the project of *Sein und Zeit* ground to an unfinished halt, Heidegger decided that the fault lay in the kind of language he had inherited, one whose inadequacy both originally occluded and rendered painfully improbable any recapture of the nature of being. Thus the next forty years were to be devoted to an avalanch of books purporting to show how the question of fundamental ontology—the ultimate meaning of uncategorical Being—has been the "telos," or purpose, of Western philosophy. Heidegger's convoluted syntax and propensity for neologism and undefined usages brought him ridicule from the new-style logical empiricists of Germany and England. He fast became the whipping boy for new generations of English-speaking philosophers, replacing Hegel as the paradigm of obscurantism in philosophy. If Moreno was a man of the twentieth century, Heidegger was always its uncomfortable observer, especially with regard to the growing technology which he abhorred. In a just-released 1966 interview Heidegger was asked what God is now, and he replied, "cybernetics."* Moreno would have agreed, I think, but not with utter resignation, for typical of his pragmatic existentialism Moreno believed it possible and desirable to tame and harness the robot-vision on behalf of humanity's self-determined objectives.

Despite Heidegger's pessimism, many in Europe and a few in America heard this intriguing voice harkening them back to a nontheological scholasticism. Ludwig Binswangers "Daseinanalyse" was a direct result of his reading of *Sein und Zeit,* and R. D. Laing's *Divided Self* is obligated in large part to this new approach for interpreting Being-as-Consciousness (though

* "Only A God Can Save Us: An Interview With Martin Heidegger," *Philosophy Today,* January, 1977.

Swiss psychiatrist Medard Boss is closer to Binswanger); theologian Rudolf Bultmann applied a Heideggerian exigitical interpretation to his project of "demystifying" scriptural accounts; the French were surely influenced, among them M. Merleau-Ponty and Sartre; among Americans there are few capable—and fewer original—Heideggerian phenomenologists, but Carr, Edie, Idhe, Stambaugh, and Zaner are able and have taken up the cudgel from older transplanted students of Husserl like Dorian Cairns and Herbert Spiegelberg, though none subscribe wholly to Heidegger's position; and even in Eastern Europe the courageous conscience of the Prague Spring, Michael Kosik, sought to revivify Marxism with an Heideggerian subjectivity.

Surely, Heidegger's place as one of the foremost twentieth century continental philosophers (along with Husserl, Wittgenstein and Sartre) is assured, and in terms of impact in other fields he may be more influential than any since Nietzsche. But if his project was grand and fundamental it was also dark and uninviting: a realm of Being with no God, no love, and finally no genuine encounters, but a goal which has to be attained for the West to avoid catastrophe, although no strategy but a proposed "resoluteness towards being" is offered. Unlike Nietzsche, whose Overman would be skilled in dancing, laughing and playing, Heidegger's Dasein (human being) is prey to falling from its authentic being into such idle activity that it forgets death is its inherent possibility and time the meaning of its being. Though we regard this as but one side of existence, we honor those who so brilliantly remind us of it. ". . . The deceased, in his kind of Being, is 'still more' than just an item of equipment, environmentally ready-to-hand, about which one can be concerned," says Heidegger. "In tarrying alongside him in their mourning and commemoration, those who have remained behind *are with him,* in a mode of respectful solicitude."*

---

* Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Harper & Row, New York, 1962, p. 282.

*Dr. Moreno's address is Moreno Institute, Box 311, Beacon, N. Y. 12508.*