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The Second Davos University Conference

To mark Urbanomic and Sequence Press's publication of a new translation of On Logic and the Theory of Science, we present a young Jean Cavallès's report on the Second Davos University Conference, Easter 1929—the setting for a now legendary confrontation between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger.

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Introduction

With its stringent critiques of Kantianism, logicism, and Husserlian phenomenology, Jean Cavallès's *On Logic and the Theory of Science*, written in 1942–43, seeks to clear the ground for what was to be a full account of his philosophy of 'mathematical experience'. Central to this philosophy is the need to reconcile the fact that mathematics unfolds as a 'becoming' with the necessity of its 'concatenations'—both the chains of reasoning internal to mathematical theories and those that govern the order of their discovery. Cavallès, that is, shuns any suggestion of a static, eternal register in which mathematical necessity could ultimately be isolated from the unfolding of these concatenations, or from the work that enables them to be formulated; but he also refuses to make the becoming of mathematics conditional upon either the consciousness

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within which it emerges or the symbols in which it is embodied. In other words, for Cavallès, to insist on the autonomy of mathematics entails that the combined necessity and processual character of mathematics can be grounded neither in a final instance of consciousness nor in an apodictic set of operations reducible to formal tautology.

In *On Logic*, while leading his readers through the thickets of Kantianism, logicism, and Husserl's formidable *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Cavallès begins to outline his own position: one that would be instrumental in setting the agenda of a whole lineage of modern French philosophy (Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and Badiou to name a few), even though he was never able to elaborate it beyond the sparing formulation presented in this, his last

book, posthumously published in 1946 by Charles Ehresmann and Georges Canguilhem following Cavallès's death in 1943.

It is more than a matter of mere biographical curiosity to explore the impact upon Cavallès's philosophical trajectory of his presence in Easter 1929, as a student alongside other philosophical luminaries-to-be including Emmanuel Levinas, Rudolf Carnap, Léo Strauss, and Norbert Elias, at the second conference held in the Alpine resort town of Davos. For in this event as in Cavallès's life and work, the aspiration toward the necessary and absolute, the conflict between national philosophical traditions, and the space of European politics, converge.

The Davos Conferences were established in 1928 with the ostensible aim of enabling intellectuals traumatised by the Great War to come together and rebuild Franco-German relations, at least in the sphere of the intellect.¹ The legacy of the war had exacerbated an already-existing tendency toward the separate evolution of the two intellectual cultures since the late nineteenth century, and in the shock and fear of its aftermath there an urgent need was felt to put in place such healing enterprises. The conference programme at Davos aimed to further not only the warming of Franco-German relations but also interdisciplinary cooperation, as emblematised by the 1928 conference's pairing of Albert Einstein and sociologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl. Not to mention, finally, that for the municipal authorities of the Swiss resort, this grand ambition to play a part in the process announced by the Locarno Treaty also served as a way to promote a role for Davos beyond its traditional reputation as a location for a Swiss rest cure.² (With evident success: the alpine setting for Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* is now, famously, home to the summit meetings of the World Economic Forum).

In the following years, then, for three or four weeks around Easter time, prominent European academics

1. The local and international contexts of the Davos conferences and the circumstances of their origins and organisation are fully detailed in M. Grandjean, *Les cours universitaires de Davos 1928–1931. Au centre de l'Europe intellectuelle*, Master's thesis, University of Lausanne, 2011, <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/77147672.pdf>>.

2. See Grandjean, *Les Cours*.

and students came together in the bracing mountain air for a series of forty-five minute lectures during the day, followed by nightly debates that brought together groups of students instructed by a teacher who guided the debate and discussion.

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It was during one of these 'working group' sessions that a debate took place that has become quasi-legendary in the annals of twentieth-century philosophy. Ernst Cassirer was at the time the leading spokesman of the dominant school of neo-Kantianism, which aimed to depsychologize Kantian epistemology and recast it as a theory of the historical elaboration of the scientific world view. The second Davos conference found Cassirer defending the reading of Kantianism as a theory of scientific cognition against an intriguing young radical by the name of Martin Heidegger, who had published *Being and Time* a few years previously, and was determined to see in Kant not an epistemology but the first stirrings of a fundamental ontology ultimately (un)founded in finitude.

Cavallès clearly recognises and highlights the tendentious nature of Heidegger's Kant interpretation and its appeal to finitude, and takes far more seriously Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic form, which seeks to give an account of the emergence of abstract thought from the human life world. Nonetheless, he is evidently just as impressed as his fellow students with Heidegger's audacious development of phenomenology. As Cavallès recalls, one of the guiding themes of the 1929 Conference was 'generations', and the clash of generations between Cassirer and Heidegger was already loaded with significance for those present.

However, although Cavallès's own account affords us some brief glimpses into the discussion between the two men and the intellectual excitement

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it occasioned,³ in his report he places this meeting within a broader context. He is keener to extol the exalted aims of the Davos programme and to describe the intellectual environment it afforded its attendees. Indeed, in what one is tempted to call a ‘Cavallèsian aesthetic’, it is as if, in his paralleling of the ‘magnificence of the intellect and the splendour of the landscape’, or at least his recognition of the capacity of the one to stimulate the other, Cavallès finds in Davos the perfect topographic embodiment of the element in which he sought to think, the icy abstractions of which, it seems, crystallise in the sunlit conviviality of collective labour: a levelling of the intellect operating in a retreat that offers respite from all contingent affiliations and reveals the common striving of different disciplines and traditions of thought. The snowy peaks are a Nietzschean image, perhaps—but rather than a vertical axiology differentiating the exalted from the base, for Cavallès the ‘magic’ mountains of Davos figure as screens, the sunlight on their white flanks making the Swiss mountain village a philosophical redoubt, sheltering thought from all accident of circumstance, all intellectual chauvinism of origin and national belonging.

Cavallès specifically insists that the commonality engendered by this ‘ephemeral university’ surpasses

3. The philosophical substance of Heidegger’s presentation at Davos, along with a transcription of the ensuing discussion, can be found in M. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, tr. R. Taft [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990] 191–207). The enduring significance of this encounter for intellectual history, especially in terms of the divide between analytic and continental philosophy, is explored in M. Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), and the interplay between its historical, political, and philosophical dimensions is examined at length in P.E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). For a reading of the Davos moment specifically in terms of Cavallès’s work, see K. Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavallès to Deleuze* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 27–30.

the cosmopolitanism one might hope to encounter in some conference in a great capital city. The isolation of Davos is a subtractive blankness, a deparтикуlarized space of passage that allows one to connect anew even with one’s own fellow countrymen: ‘It is not just with foreign professors that you have put us in personal contact; you have also sought, perhaps a little mischievously, to show us that the route from Paris to Caen or Lyon, or even from the literary Sorbonne to the philosophical Sorbonne, passes via Davos!’⁴

All the more reason to regret the fact that the ‘young tradition of Davos’ barely outgrew its infancy. The 1932 conference was cancelled, and the initiative came to an end in 1933.⁵ *On Logic*, the culmination of Cavallès’s philosophical reflection, would be drafted over a decade later under conditions of oppression and confinement as a prisoner of war, in the midst of a conflict which, disappointing all the hopes with which the young philosopher had invested the ‘Davos spirit’, saw Europeans drawn once again into the most abject particularisms. Heidegger, of course, publicly participated in the new mobilisation of nationalisms and struggled to think through an aftermath which, with the displacement of so many intellectuals (Cassirer, along with Carnap, became an emigré in the US), would deeply mark intellectual history and the possibilities of philosophical thought.

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Reading *On Logic*, we may marvel at the fact that, under such conditions, a thinker can patiently draft a work that seemingly offers so little personal comfort, owes so little to the circumstances

4. Report in *Davoser Revue* 8 (15 may 1929), 226–27, quoted in Grandjean, *Les cours*, 105.

5. There is no conclusive evidence as to why the initiative ended at this point. See Grandjean, *Les cours*, 88–89.

of its composition, and is so densely packed with references to a philosophical world apparently untouched by the vicissitudes of war. But the young Cavallès's Davos report affords us a glimpse of the space in which he sought to think, one which he found reflected in the place and the spirit of Davos, and to which perhaps he was capable of finding his way back even within a prison cell.

Not to overstate the case, of course: what is present here of what would later become Cavallès's distinctive contribution to a 'philosophy of the concept' is largely limited to aspiration: the first breath, vividly evoked, of an intellectual element he would seek to inhabit, in writing and in action, for the rest of his life. A conviction that only in the 'patient and demanding' work, as much social as intellectual, of constituting a common society of thought, and in the context of 'working communities', is it possible to advance, in unison, (indeed in a 'collective mind') 'the cause of peace in general', the 'internal development of culture' and the 'advancement of universal science'.

Following this general orientation toward extricating the necessary from the contingent matrix of historical accident while affirming its autonomous becoming, the text contains a few telling formulations in which features of Cavallès's nascent philosophical sensibility emerge, perhaps facilitated by the Davos conjuncture: 'to project man outside of the contingencies of time and space, into a sort of universal region rendered concrete and sensible'; 'a certain entanglement of relations between man as creator of the absolute, and the chain of circumstances to which necessity unremittingly attaches itself'; 'long chains of reasoning that are typical [...] of mathematical intelligibility'; and, most pertinent to *On Logic*, an opposition of the tendency of science to 'the reason that satisfies and reassures logicians': a science which, 'surpass[ing] itself, breaking, with its intelligible dynamism, what is contingent and limiting' acts against the 'human tendency toward conceptual stabilisation'.

Preoccupied above all with locating the universal 'under the light of the intelligible sun', beneath the cloudless skies of Davos Cavallès attends to the conditions—geographical, social, and even meteorological—propitious for bringing about the 'synthetic spirit' necessary for the collective pursuit of this

goal. Today, in an intellectual environment where even the most 'lively' of thinkers is liable to be reduced to a 'flat mosaic' by the tendencies Cavallès homes in on at the close of his article—'academic particularism' and the urbane demands of theoretical cosmopolitanism—it is revelatory to see a thinker of apparently austerely abstract temperament placing such emphasis on the decor of thinking, and affirming the importance of the contingent conditions of thought—albeit conditions he regards as those apt to expel all contingency. [RM]

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'The mind bloweth where it listeth'

In their opening for the second in the series of university conferences at Davos, organisers and government representatives appealed to the beneficent influence of the spirit of Locarno. And indeed, it was a veritable Locarno of the intellect that they strove to realise in Davos, for the second time, by presenting German culture and French culture alongside one another in a sort of Camp of the Golden Flag where all the pomp and ceremony honouring human industry was replaced by the magnificence of the intellect and the splendour of the landscape. But this was hardly a simple encounter, banal and inconsequential for the future—a simple Easter vacation taken in one another's company. To only way to teach German, Swiss, and French professors and students how to really become acquainted was to have them work together, united by the organic link of a single institution and, above all, brought together by a shared interest in knowledge, and the same scientific preoccupations. Among individuals, a society can only be constituted through collaboration on a common project, and it is this cooperative labour that the Committee of Davos proposed to the academics united under their auspices, in the hope that from this there might be born a beneficent solidarity, as much for the cause of peace in general as for the internal development of the cultures present and the advancement of universal science itself. If we might speak of a philosophy of history embodied in these courses, it would involve a consideration of this threefold ambition that has inspired their concatenation and would supply the key to it. A fruitful scientific labour, an enrichment of national modes

of thought via the abolition of a mutual ignorance that can be limiting and often sterilising, and finally a bringing together not only of minds, but of people—such were the anticipated results of the Davos meeting, for which its organisers tried to put in place the most favourable possible conditions.

First, material conditions. In order to succeed in these aims, it is not enough to hold a congress just anywhere. ‘The mind bloweth where it listeth’, as Dr. Branger recalled—but more easily in some places than others. If all Davos did was to physically bring together students and professors of diverse nationalities, there would be nothing particularly original in it. Fortunately, there is an increasing intensification of academic exchange between European countries: if a French student in Paris wishes to find himself in the midst of a group of German comrades, he need not even take a train, but can simply take a stroll along the Boulevard Montparnasse. Yet whatever the advantages of these migrations, they could never take the place of an enterprise such as Davos. For only in Davos can two different cultures not just encounter one another, but understand and interpenetrate one another on a perfectly equal footing. A student in a great foreign city who does not simply want to submit to its influences but also to contribute something, finds himself inconvenienced by the adaptations he continually has to make in response to the demanding symbolism of objects and customs, and even the very immense collectivity under whose gaze he exists—oppressing him somewhat, making his gestures clumsy; he discovers a whole obscure, dense language, signs of complicity between the city and its inhabitants, from which he is excluded and which reminds him at every instant that he is indeed a foreigner. In Switzerland, first of all, and then especially in Davos, it is impossible for a Frenchman or a German to feel this way. Country of reconciliation par excellence, ever a site of encounter between French and Germanic cultures, Switzerland also makes its own original contribution to this synthetic spirit, this desire for the incorporation of diversity, this universal, sincere sympathy that is characteristic of its own culture and enables it to assimilate others. It is not in a cosmopolitan space, where all specific traditions are replaced by a thin veneer of internationalism, but rather in this Swiss valley, faithful to its national ideal, that German and French science can come together without either

being diminished or stripped of their national identity—in short, can feel simultaneously at home and abroad. In offering their snowy mountains as a homestead, if I may say so, the Swiss at once afford the participants shelter from all the nuisance and noise without, separating them as if by immense screens from the material preoccupations of their homelands, so that everything that is contingent and consequently negative in the national spirit can be allowed to fall away. Nowhere other than in this tranquil atmosphere, on these candid slopes, could the peaceable breezes of the celebrated Italian lake reign so easily; nowhere other than in this valley, dear to the hearts of the Swiss, where there circulates an air so pure and so light, symbolic of freedom in all of its material and spiritual forms, in this little colony grouped in peace around a common devotion to the regenerative and salutary sun, could representatives of German and French universities be better disposed to get to know and understand one another, and enter into a common search for truth under the light of the intelligible sun.

Obtaining a rewarding cure from such a sun within a maximum of three weeks is, however, no easy task, above all when one of the preconditions is to ensure the collaboration of people who are doubly diverse—in their specialisms as well as their nationalities. The great variety of subjects discussed in the seminars is an advantage in the sense that it can provide a representation of the academic activity of a country on a multitude of different points; it is as if one is in the presence of samples of the work done by every faculty in the study of every problem from the many disciplines of the humanities. But on the other hand, by the same token, any collective work of any real intellectual value is excluded: in order for the courses to operate at a certain level, and to be followed fruitfully by the majority of the audience, this great variety must be constrained somewhat. What is more, for the sake of the very unity of life and of the preoccupations of this ephemeral university, it is important to focus the interest upon only two or three major questions to be addressed by discussions and reflections on the part of students and professors during the whole duration of the courses. The conferences this year were accordingly restricted to a number of questions of philosophy and literary history, and in principle were all meant to be oriented in their arguments toward the study of one central problem: Man and Generation.

It would perhaps be difficult to try and prove that this second condition was completely fulfilled. In any case, among the literary scholars and historians in particular, despite the apparent diversity of the titles of the lectures, one almost invariably found a desire to gravitate around the central subject and, while taking up a particular point of view suggested by the specific question, to ultimately use it to clarify an unforeseen aspect of the relation between man and history. For example, after presenting a curious study that had seemed to be purely technical in nature on the representation of Ancient Greece and Rome in French literature, having given a few typical examples of divergences of interpretation that have come to light in this subject and shown how a 'classical sensibility', from the authors of the Romance of Thebes and the Enneads to Valéry, had been used to express absolutely opposed or at least highly heterogeneous intuitions, Professor Pauphilet, in his conclusion, insisted on demonstrating how the common aim of all of these allusions, all of these returns to Antiquity, was to give an entirely human—that is to say universal—status to the thoughts and sentiments expressed; in short, that they all harboured the same concern to project man outside of the contingencies of time and space, into a sort of universal region rendered concrete and sensible under the aspect of Greco-Roman civilisation. Professor Carré took a similar approach, this time minutely covering some very precise but very significant problems of intersecting literary influences in writers of various nationalities. As for the other speakers, for the most part they chose more general problems or combined properly literary studies with studies of the evolution of cultures, in which case everything naturally led up to the posing of the central question of the course. Whether it was a matter of method in literary history, or of the constitutive permanent laws that provide a common ground for European literatures throughout their changing aspects, it was not at all difficult to see past the simple enumeration of facts or the pure appreciation of formal beauty, and to understand the work of art as an event within a history, as a production that is a part of a general intellectual activity and, through this twofold nature, to see it as the sign of a certain entanglement of relations between man as creator of the absolute, and the chain of circumstances to which necessity unremittingly attaches itself. Professor Wechsler's analysis of the problem of generations in French

literature, for example, was conceived in this spirit: in striving to show that in every epoch (and not only in France) there had existed families of writers bound together by their attachment to the same artistic ideal and therefore sometimes to the same sense of the meaning of life, he was naturally led to seek what part was played in these affinities by the purely historical and what by necessity; what was inherited from an intellectual community, and what was determined by the infinitely complex action of economic and social circumstances. Taking a more general point of view on history, other speakers such as Karl Joel and Professor Riezler developed considerations of the same order, the former in relation to the nineteenth century, considered simultaneously through its economic, technical, scientific, and artistic developments, the latter by showing how, within the man of today, destiny is locked in a struggle with liberty—the influences of dispersion, separation, and mechanisation at war with a new emancipatory and truly human '*Weltgefühl*'.

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The professional metaphysicians, on the other hand, generally paid little mind to the question, no doubt assuming that, once the fundamental premises of their systems had been expounded upon, the auditor would have no trouble—if they had understood, which perhaps was not always the case—in deducing the solutions applicable to the problems in they were interested. By means of a rather remarkable reverse-symmetry, it was Heidegger who spoke of Kant, and Cassirer who took the conceptions of Scheler and of Heidegger himself as points of departure for his personal analyses. In a sort of preliminary preview of his forthcoming work, Heidegger tried to prove that in Kant there is already a conception of metaphysics congruent with the existential analysis of the Husserlians, and that the traditional

interpretation of critique as a theory of scientific cognition is not only too narrow, but radically false. In so far as he established a classic special metaphysics—the world, the soul, God—in so far as he saw human cognition as resulting from the collaboration of two heterogeneous faculties, sensible intuition and thought, a collaboration that takes place in a pure synthesis whose existence is legitimated by the transcendental deduction and whose possibility is explained by the schematism; and finally, in so far as he saw those two faculties as deriving from the imagination as from a common root, Kant was defending the fundamental theses of Heidegger's philosophy in advance. For these are indeed Heidegger's own preliminary assertions: the necessity of grounding the possibility of all ontic knowledge upon that of ontological knowledge, the attribution to human thought of an essential finitude—as revealed for example by angst—knowledge of which alone allows one to pose the problems of Being and Nothingness correctly, and the definition of true metaphysics, prior to any anthropology or philosophy of culture, as the study of the structure of Dasein, this last assertion, moreover, appearing only in germinal form, so to speak, in Kant's reduction of pure sensibility and pure understanding, and even of practical and theoretical reason, to the imagination, in such a way that the guiding notions of Eastern metaphysics, Mind, Logos, and Reason, are eliminated.

In the face of this effort to find in Kant an inspiration whose real presence in his work one would be forgiven for doubting, and which, in its current form at least, seems to lead to results opposed to those that Kant arrived at, Cassirer took up the inverse labour of applying to the problems of contemporary phenomenology a mode of thought this time directly determined by the Kantian system. The knowledge of existents is assured via the supple and subtle doctrine of symbolic forms, without freedom, the creative activity of the mind as defined by traditional criticism, being curtailed in any way. By way of a necessary process that unfolds equally through the constitution of language, through the evolution of spatial representations—magical, plastic, and geometrical—through artistic and scientific creation, and in the living world, uniquely sensed as a system of possible actions, a formal and knowable world, no longer grasped by the '*greifen*' but by the '*begreifen*,' emerges, progressively and by intelligible

necessity carrying out the synthesis of mind and reality. A doctrine which the French will perhaps not find so novel, closer as it is to their habit of considering thought as the necessary creative activity par excellence—the natural and immediate object of all philosophical reflection.

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And indeed it was to this object that the two French philosophical courses were dedicated. M. Spaier, from a psychological point of view—at least initially—closely analysed the infinitely complicated entanglement of abstract and concrete elements in the different forms under which thought is presented in action and in speculation. He thus found himself obliged to set out the basis of a theory of knowledge, claiming in particular to overturn the assertion of a heterogeneity between sensibility and reason by showing that every sensory experience, as concretely impossible to think as it seems at first sight, presupposes a representation of classes, a judgement, and that inversely, in the most purified abstraction there is always an inevitable reference to sensory experience. M. Brunschvicg, finally, taking Descartes as his fundamental reference, sought to indicate how true creative Reason is defined in scientific progress and spiritual experience, as opposed to the fixed and sterilising Reason of human imagination. This type of solely fecund rational action is already defined in Descartes's 1637 *Geometry*, in terms of the putting to work of that analysis, perpetually generative of new truths, which constructs long chains of reasoning that are typical, even, of mathematical intelligibility. Thus, in science, at every instant, true reason—and not the reason that satisfies and reassures logicians—surpasses itself, breaking, with its intelligible dynamism, from what is contingent and limiting in the concept that it has engendered but to which it does not want to limit itself—'things are more reasonable than people,' as

Klein said. And this human tendency toward conceptual stabilisation turns out to be just as disastrous to spiritual life, since it gives rise to theological constructions that refuse man direct access to God. To the theology of intermediaries stands opposed that of the Word, which allows man to find God from inside, via a deepening of spirituality, by the 'movement of going further' that is the mark of the infinite in man. Thus reason manifests divine immanence by revealing itself to be an absolute power of truth—such is the true meaning of the Cartesian ontological proof—and, after having stripped its human condition of that which attaches it to the *hic et nunc*, not via the naively wilful misunderstandings of the old cosmologies but via a realisation that allows it to liberate the spiritual world via a sort of equivalent of the intrinsic equations of the universe established by Einstein, it finds itself, indeed, to be a sort of reality—or reality as such, self-subsistent.

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Such were the subjects of thought and discussion made available to participants in the courses—the intellectual material upon which the collective labour was to bear. For the Conference itself could only play the role—albeit a necessary one—of a preliminary catalyst for the concordant or discordant reactions of the future collaborators. It was, in a certain sense, an outside contribution, the indispensable basis for future labour. But if this were as far as the organisation of Davos went, then nothing would have taken place that could not have happened elsewhere: no doubt it was a novel audience, but the speakers would have remained as they would have been in Paris or Freiburg, all the more so in accordance with their notoriety. In the *Arbeits-Gemeinschaften* [working communities], on the contrary, the audience played an active, discerning role; even when few questions were posed, the sole fact that the speaker had to improvise on a point that he had not chosen—before a silent collective perhaps, but one whose expectations he felt and whose reactions of disappointment or satisfaction he in turn watched for, transforming the way in which he presented his ideas—already made him subject to the action of the collective mind of Davos. Nothing could have been more lively and instructive than some of these working meetings were, both in terms of the interventions that they brought to

bear and the frequently invaluable clarifications that followed. In the great Cassirer-Heidegger discussion, despite the difficulty of the subject and the technical character, often to the point of obscurity, of the vocabulary used, one felt a true community being established among the audience, and between it and the two German philosophers. It was here, moreover, under this collective influence perhaps, that both of them were led to expound upon their respective systems with the greatest clarity and vigour. Cassirer was able to underline precisely what, in his view, was inadmissible in Heidegger's interpretation of Kant—namely, the radical misunderstanding of the scientific inspiration behind the Critique and the total subordination of reason to the schematism. And it was, above all, with a true intellectual joy that the audience listened to Heidegger, whose ardour had been roused by these objections, define in impressive formulations the meaning of Dasein in his doctrine, situate the place and function of truth in metaphysical reality, and finally bring to light the role of angst in the revelation of man's finitude and the presence of the Nothing. In other meetings, both formal and informal, where most of the questions raised by the courses were discussed, it was interesting and instructive to compare the diverse reactions of the students, depending on their training and their nationality. Whether it was a problem, as introduced by Professor Pos, of the interpretation of the philosophy of history (which the Marxists took as an opportunity to vigorously assert their thesis), or the problem of generations (either in the present world or from the point of view of literary history), lively and often fruitful discussions were had everywhere between professors and students.

Yet the most useful work, the most real work, was not even visible. It was in chance encounters—at evening meals in the restaurants, around glasses of beer in the brasseries, or on the snowy paths surrounding Davos where lasting relations between

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French, Germans, and Swiss had been established—that patient and demanding conversations arose in which each of the interlocutors wanted to be understood and let nothing escape, and where, much more easily than in a lesson or an officially organised discussion, new knowledge or new concepts could be procured. It was in such a manner that on the day of the meeting between Cassirer and Heidegger, between the morning session and the evening session where the debate was concluded, several particularly important passages of *Sein und Zeit* were read and discussed with great passion throughout the whole of a sunlit afternoon on the slopes overlooking the lake of Davos; and something of the light reflected by the white peaks opposite seemed to aid the intellect in understanding this difficult German philosopher. What is more, all settings, from the paths of Clavadel or the Flüela valley to the lobbies of hotels, were equally propitious to methodological comparisons between the metaphysicians of Hamburg, Freiburg, and Paris. To claim that these conversations had not only succeeded in initiating the work of rapprochement, but had also precisely instructed the French on the state of philosophy in Germany, and reciprocally, the Germans on the state of philosophy in France would be absurd. Even had they lasted longer, they could not claim to replace personal contemplation of the written works. But they have at least served as a catalyst to these necessary studies and, even more so, in many cases they have armed those in whom they have awakened the desire to undertake similar metaphysical voyages with a sort of guidebook, designed to help them avoid all the groping about in the dark, all the wrong turns, oversights, and misunderstandings. Before beginning the scholarly study of a system, nothing is more precious than knowing its real life value, than seeing how it is thought, acted, and spoken by the master and his disciples. The whole relief emerges in this way, as if through a play of light and shadow, and what would have only appeared as a vexing and flat mosaic blazes into a landscape of stunning vigour and expressive unity.

As for questions of history and literature, these same personal conversations could procure equally great advantages. Only they were capable of providing those nuggets of information—so brief, but impossible to get from a book, or even a course—about the respective importance of events, works,

or people. In contemporary literature in particular, errors of perspective often seem to be considerable, on both sides. Too often, even in situ it seems a difficult and dangerous business to judge the significance of a literary or moral influence, for example; discrimination between mere acclaim and true prestige, between fleeting fashion and profound influence, are almost impossible for a foreigner to make, even when present in the country that is the object of study, unless he has some sure evidence. From this point of view, the atmosphere of Davos, where by convention sincerity had been exalted from the beginning, but where, on the other hand, the most varied prejudices and preferences would find representatives in both cultures, proved itself to be particularly favourable to the reestablishment of a hierarchy of values, and to the destruction of these myths that exist in the eyes of each country but only on the other side of the border.

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It was in such a manner, then, that the real work of political rapprochement proceeded. Not, that is, via the discussion of problems that are the preserve of statesmen (and which, with rare exceptions, never produce anything but confused exchanges of not only banal but unfounded assertions) but rather through friendly and trust-building conversations on various contemporary influences active in the world today. And not just inspired and provoked by the thought of constructing a precise archive, but also by the greatest human sincerity, the basis of all sympathy. The creation of true connections between students from three countries—this was one of the results of the Davos courses. The sense of real life community over these few weeks, participating in the same motions of interest or criticism, and then the encounters on the ski slopes or during spontaneous excursions—all of this has served to fatefully knot the threads of a cordial camaraderie, and even led, in many cases, to plans for more enduring relationships. Not only did individuals exchange promises of correspondence and future meetings, but there were groups of students that even ended up signing something like treaties of friendship and permanent collaboration, whose main goal was to spare their members the inevitable vicissitudes of a visit to a foreign university.

It is the same spiritual universe that is expressed by French rationalist reflection and German phenomenology; is it not obvious that they will benefit from coming out of their splendid isolation?

However, the University of Davos's principal aim in creating this rapprochement was not exclusively political. Working for the maintenance of peace may have been one of the organisers' desires, but their essential objective was more general, and more directly in the interest of universal culture—namely, the struggle against the spirit of particularism in all its forms. Not just the national particularism that can be found, even in spite of themselves, in the most unchauvinistic of individuals, and which leads them to prefer, in fact if not in principle, the philosophical or artistic tendencies of their own country, but also the academic particularism of specialists, who are bound to a certain mode of thought, a given order of preoccupations, and often unconsciously determined to judge everything in terms of their own narrow perspective. Both of these forms of particularism, moreover, are complemented by similar forms: a clan mentality, regardless of its object—a university, a school, a sect of disciples gathered around a master, a political party or religious group—and tenacious intellectual egotism, always fearing an assault on its integrity, thereby condemning itself to not understanding, and subsequently never learning anything new through fear of compromising itself. The survival and development of European intellectual life is not yet completely free of such dangers. Despite all kinds of exchanges, despite the diffusion of texts and the work of translators, in the majority of cases national particularism remains the basis of university teaching. 'My brain isn't tricoloured', an eminent French philosopher once said. And indeed, such a disgrace would have been particularly painful for the founder of so radically idealist a metaphysics to bear; moreover, as he also liked to recall, Kant was the patron of French philosophers fifty years before even the French were generally able to understand them. But the fact alone that, among the students assembled at Davos, the specialists in philosophy for the most part knew nothing of the metaphysical doctrines in vogue overseas, no matter how

important they were in shaping intellectual movements there, is sufficiently revealing of a persistent spirit of national particularism in the universities. It is no doubt especially absurd to emblazon a meditation on Being with national colours, but the meeting in Davos, if there is additional need of its testimony after that of the books and journals published in both countries, shows that it is carried out today in very different ways in Germany and in France. Now, any limitation involves a privation: like those fulgurations with which Leibniz's God engendered the monads, it is the same spiritual universe that is expressed by French rationalist reflection and German phenomenology; is it not obvious that they will benefit from coming out of their splendid isolation (like two inland seas), to open up between them channels of communication that will procure for both of them greater movement and fecundity? If it is true that to philosophise is not simply to act like an artist, translating profound and personal intuitions via an intricate verbal symbolism, but rather to construct a rigorous system of concepts that bear upon a determinate object—and this does indeed seem to be one of Heidegger's favourite propositions, the specificity of metaphysical knowledge—then it seems more necessary than ever today to ensure the collaboration of diverse minds, and, through their cultural habits and technical training, their particular gifts, to put to work, in the service of this new knowledge, all the conceptual resources, all the modes of comprehension available to particular civilisations and above all, to make available the special methods of thinking of the various sciences.

The twofold evils of European universities—mutual ignorance between them, and total separation of the various faculties within them—are something the work of Davos is not capable of healing. At the most it can hope to apply to it, among other things, some not insignificant remedy. Its organisation and what it has already achieved are a sure guarantee of this, and, perfectible as any human work is, perhaps in the future it will be able to act yet more effectively. Since its duration is necessarily limited, perhaps it would be possible to make up for the brevity of the courses, and above all the *Arbeitsgemeinschaften*, with a greater intensity, by placing all the labour of preparation outside of the session proper. If, for example, on one hand, the subjects of the courses, while addressing a necessary diversity of matters,

were to converge more toward a central preoccupation, and if on the other hand both this central problem and the way in which the various professors understand and envisage the aspects of it that encroach upon their particular discipline, were communicated in advance to all the future participants of the session, perhaps the courses themselves would gain in intellectual density, the speaker being sure of the level and degree to which their auditors would be informed, and above all the *Arbeitsgemeinschaften*, while remaining free discussions, would be more animated and all the more productive if professors and students had constructed a common basis of reference in advance. Not only would divergences then appear all the more clearly, and the doctrines of the professors be laid out with more clarity—as was realised already in the final sessions this time—but the positive work of collective research could also be further organised between professors and students.

But these are just wishes that the young tradition of Davos will have to realise for itself through the spontaneous development of its internal virtualities. For it, as for the necessary being of the Cartesians, what is essential is to exist, and this is the fundamental perfection to which all others are necessarily linked.

That all the European universities should find in Davos a meeting point, a palpable indication of the solidarity of their interests and the shared ends they pursue—this is an invaluable fact both for the bringing together of minds and for the training of well-informed researchers, equipped with the most varied modes of thinking. Since, beyond all cultural and technical differences, the same ardour for truth unites academics, professors, and students of all countries, it was a fine and even necessary thing that this essential internal solidarity should have been found at Davos, in what we might call the University of Universities, at the same time encouragement and effective relief.

J. Cavallès

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