

From the "AUTHOR'S PREFACE" to THE DRAMA OF JOB

by ANTANAS MACEINA

[**The Drama of Job: A Meditation on Human Existence** was published in 1950, by Venta press, in Germany. It appeared as the third volume of the author's **Cor Inquietum** series, described as a series of studies to elucidate the relations between God and man. Trans.]

This study is the author's attempt to develop the outlines of theistic existentialism. Both words are emphasized, for both are of decisive importance here. Both are needed to indicate the contents of the book, its tendency, and its method. But for this reason, they are in need of explanation.

The name existentialism is nowadays given to that tendency in philosophy the problems of which center not around the eternal essence of man, but around his temporal and earthbound existence. The centuries long investigations of essence have given us an excellent definition of man, known since the time of Aristotle: that man is a rational animal. But this does not answer the question of how this rational animal exists — of what kind of existence is his in a world destined to support and display that eternal essence. The still young philosophy of the present which has been given the name of existentialism has resolved to answer this question, to find the essential characteristics of existence which distinguish man from any other creature. Without doubt, the collective name is only a generic mark. It only indicates an interest shared by all who belong to this tendency in the problem of human existence, without revealing anything of the specific answers which the branches and twigs of the tendency have given to the great question of existence. Existence by itself is neutral. Everyone has the right to make it the starting point of his thought. However, the answers which the study of existence bring us will no longer be neutral. Upon them will depend which of the streams and streamlets our thought will join. **The Drama of Job** also attempts to pause and reflect upon the human aspect of existence in this world. It too places the question of existence at the center of its reflections. In this way it joins the contemporary efforts to find in the study of existence an answer to the question "what is man?"

However, the answer of **The Drama of Job** is its own. A widespread existentialist current, stemming from M. Heidegger, answers that existence is only here and now; on this side it begins and on this side it ends. There are no roads to the other side, there are no glimmerings from the beyond. For this current, God remains a complete unknowable, an eternally untouchable equation which, it is said, we have no way of solving. It is true that this existentialist current does not deny God, as did the materialistic philosophy of the nineteenth century, and as Marxist materialism does today. Existentialism only fails to find God. But even this is quite sufficient to make the tendency unacceptable to Catholic thought — or, at least, one to be looked upon with suspicion. This is properly so. Taught by revelation that man is the image of God, the Catholic mind cannot admit that an image would not reveal by its existence what it means. It is an impossible thing that man, created in the image of God, would be so much without light that in the darkness the marks of his creator would be entirely invisible. Thus, **The Drama of Job** undertakes the difficult task of revealing transcendence in existence. Thomistic and existentialist philosophies both recognize that man does not have in himself the basis of his existence and, hence, is always in the presence of non-existence. **The Drama of Job** attempts to develop this wonderful characteristic of existence to its ultimate consequences, and to see in it man's essential determination for God, a determination which lies in the very ontological structure of man and is prior to and independent of a conscious attitude for or against the Lord. Through his own will, man can fail to find God or he can reject Him. However, he cannot do this by his existence, for it, to its very depths, is so built that it by itself expresses God, seeks and asks for Him, even if the conscious lips were to utter not a word about God. Existence is a question opened in the presence of transcendence. This is the central thought of **The Drama of Job**. This is the answer, obtained from the elucidation of existence, it gives, using for this purpose the achievements of existentialism, though extended and enriched.

In carrying out this difficult task, the author was aided by the circumstance that he analyzed man's existence not in the abstract, but used the person of Job described in Holy Writ. Later we will mention the fact that existential reflection is always concrete — that is, always centered around the existence of the thinker himself, not losing itself in the abstract concepts of being in general. But this characteristic of existential reflection is a guide to all reflecting of this kind. This guide reveals that the elucidation of man's existence can be true only when it is the elucidation of a person. In other words, when it chooses the existence of a concrete man for its object, a man with body and blood, a man in a definite situation; for only a personal existence is in any true sense a human existence. Thus, only the elucidation of personal existence can reveal how man really is in this world. This is why the author chose the Job of Holy Writ for his reflections.

However, this choice was conditioned by still another circumstance. Contemporary existential philosophy has correctly drawn attention to so-called ultimate situations (Grenzsituationen, K. Jaspers). These are situations in which man in a special way feels himself at the limits of his existence and experiences the threat of non-existence. Among such situations, according to Jaspers, we should list suffering, strife, guilt, and death. When he finds himself in such predicaments, man strives with great effort to overcome them by the use of his natural powers — the mind, will, creativity — and to restore the earthly order damaged or even completely upset by the crises. The long process of the history of mankind is filled with such efforts. Man ever hopes to become the master of suffering, to overcome it by his inventions. He expects to prevent conflicts by establishing a perfect social order. He is tempted to try with his own powers to redeem himself from guilt and achieve salvation. Even the conquest of death is an ever present dream of man. But all such efforts are vain. The crisis situations are, according to Jaspers, like a wall against which we shatter and are defeated. Man cannot conquer the ultimate situations and extricate himself from them with his native abilities. In this respect, the idea of failure (das Scheitern) adduced by existential philosophy is well founded. But let us extend this failure to its limit and we will see a wonderful triumph for man. In ultimate situations, man clearly experiences the fact that he is dust and will become dust unless someone Else, superior and stronger than he, liberates him. In other words, in such situations man understands that he himself is not the author of his being, that not through himself he remains in existence, that not by his own will can he conquer the non-existence which is constantly present to him, woven into his structure. The experience of this ontological incapacity becomes especially sharp in ultimate situations. And if man admits to this incapacity, and does not enclose himself within it, as did the fallen angel, he naturally, with his very being, turns towards the transcendence from which he has received existence, which sustains existence and restores it when injured. In such a case, the ontological openness of existence to God becomes a psychological experience and lays the foundation for man's religious relation to the Lord. This is why in his study the author asserts that ultimate situations are the real way to God, perhaps even surer and more successful than rational arguments.

All crisis situations are paths towards God. All of them reveal to man the non-existence which embraces him on the one side, and the Absolute Being which sustains him on the other. Leaving for a later time the elucidation of human existence in situations of warfare and guilt (Conrad in **Forefather's Eve** by A. Mickiewicz and Raskolnikov in **Crime and Punishment** by Dostoevskii), the author in this study concentrates only upon suffering. By his own efforts, man is incapable of conquering suffering or escaping it. He can only endure it. The Job of Holy Writ is an example of a man beset by suffering who has endured it. The sudden and external onset of suffering, its unknown significance, its limitless importance in Job's existence, come out into the open with full clarity. And thus Job offered himself to the author as an example for the elucidation of human existence in a situation of suffering, for suffering is woven into the whole of our existence. It is our companion for the whole of our life on earth. Our existing itself takes place in suffering. Thus in suffering, as if in a mirror, the characteristics of our existence are most clearly reflected. The drama of Job is the drama of the whole of human existence. We are all larger or smaller Jobs.

Suffering, as the raging of evil within us, erodes our existence. It disarranges our existence, it makes us exist less, for evil is non-being. Thus every acceptance of evil, whether great or small, is a sliding towards non-being, is a losing of the existence which we had. Existence, of course, is not understood here in the widest sense as everything that is (**to on or ens**), but is limited to the human reality here and now. Not even philosophically can there be doubt that man exists even in the beyond. The immortality of man is a consequence of his spirituality. However, philosophy cannot say how man exists in that other reality. The analysis of existence is incapable of reaching to man's life in the beyond, and is forced to remain on this side. Philosophy leads man to the gates of eternity and asserts that through these gates he enters and lives there forever. But philosophy does not analyze this eternal existence, for its character is beyond the natural human intellect. Consequently, the concept of existence is narrowed in existential analysis. Existence here is neither the eternal essence of man, which is a temporal, unchanging, and shared by all, nor the human archetype in accordance with which man was created and which, being in God, is also a temporal and unchanging. Existence is what and how man is in this world. And he exists in many different ways. Man lacks not only the fullness of being in general, but in this world he lacks even the fullness of human existence. Thus, human existence is constantly a process, either approaching the divine archetype or receding from it. Existence on this earth is the arena of self-realization. There are many factors which tend to build man and many which tend to destroy him. Man exists in a deeper or shallower, in a stronger or weaker way. Of course, all such terms are to be understood not in a quantitative, arithmetical sense but in a qualitative, metaphysical one. The divine archetype which contains the fullness of our existence beckons us to journey towards it, to realize it in our existence, realizing ourselves at the same time. However, our freedom can lead us away from the archetype, turn us away from God and place us on a road to non-existence. In realizing the divine archetype, we build our existence, strengthen it, and enrich it. In receding from this archetype, we disarrange our existence, weaken it, and debilitate it. It is surprising that our will is capable of this! Without doubt, the destructive activity affects only existence understood as this reality, this earthly

existence. Even with the most negative decision of our will, we cannot touch the human essence, we cannot destroy it and cease being human. Essence, being a temporal and shared by all, stands above our world and thus does not obey our will. Our free will depends upon our human essence, but the reverse is not the case. For this reason, even the greatest separation from the divine archetype, even the most extreme debilitation of our human reality does not affect essence, for these two things belong on different levels. It is possible to diminish man's existence only in the same sense that it is possible to depersonalize or dehumanize him. The depersonalization which takes place, for example, in a crowd is not the disappearance of the person, it is only the ruining of his content, the destruction of his characteristics, of his development, and self-expression. No matter how much a man disappears in a mass, he does not become a thing. The mass man is also a person, but an impoverished, withered, despoiled one. In the same way, the dehumanization which takes place under tyranny or in case of mental illness does not mean the disappearance of the human being. Even in the most extreme case of mental illness, a man does not become an animal, but the disease destroys the human reality, the dehumanized man does not disappear, it is only that his self-expression is no longer like that of a man. In just the same way, the diminution of existence is not the disappearance of human existence as such, it is only a despoiling, a greater or lesser destroying of its content, a leading of him to the edge. Even the man whose existence has been diminished to the extreme still exists, for to cross the boundary of existence and disappear entirely is not within his power. Since he did not rise from non-existence through his own will, he cannot through that will return to non-existence. Only God can do this, for He alone is the author of existence and "He is the only one who holds the fall of everyone in His hands" (R. M. Rilke). The creative act whereby the Lord called us from non-existence never ceases (*creatio continua*). If it did, we would all be annihilated. There is no metaphysical reason why this could not take place, but revelation clearly declares that God will not break off the creative act and will not return us to non-existence. In other words, that ontological possibility will never become reality. Hence, the diminution of existence means neither self-annihilation from the side of man nor annihilation from the side of God. The loss of existence *is* only the destruction of the human reality existing here and now, created upon a foundation which is indestructible because it is upheld by God Himself through His eternal promise. But for the elucidation of existence, this possible diminution is its most important aspect, for in that possibility is revealed our incapacity to restore the lost being. For who can "add one single cubit to his stature?" (Mt. 6:22) And here, as we will see, our ontological openness to God is revealed.

Lacking within himself a foundation for his existence, having been called from non-existence by the will of another, man does not hold his existence in his own hands and is thus constantly in the presence of non-existence. Non-existence constitutes an ontological danger to man, which would befall him at every moment if God did not sustain his existence. This peculiar threat of non-existence manifests itself as fear. Man thirsts to be. But at the same time he realizes that he cannot be through himself. When he leans upon himself, he finds that he leans upon nothing. And then fear arises. Thus, fear is something much deeper than & merely psychological case of fright. Fear is woven into the very structure of man. It reveals the accidental character of human existence, the lack of necessity in man's existence, the fact that he remains in existence only through the power of Another. Fear is the condition proper to a creature. Thus, in an ontological sense, fear can never be overcome. To overcome fear ontologically would be to elevate man to the sphere of absolute being, that is, of God. Existential philosophy, having raised fear to the light of reflection and assigned to it a great importance in existence, especially emphasizes this ontological aspect of fear. However, it is one thing to have fear woven into an ontological structure, and entirely another to feel it in one's consciousness and to become a trembling thing in the presence of non-existence. On the ontological level, it is impossible to eradicate fear, for this would mean to eradicate man's character as something created. But on the psychological level, it can be overcome, using as a basis the promise of the Lord, announced by revelation, not to break off His creative act and thus to keep us always in existence even if we, through our will, were to turn away from Him forever. Consequentially, the Christian lacks fear not ontologically, but psychologically. Since he believes in God and trusts Him, he knows that the Lord will never let non-existence befall him. For this reason, in Christianity, the pessimism which existentialism brought about by its emphasis on fear is unknown. A Christian is never a pessimist for he lives in the keeping of the Heavenly Father who takes care of the birds in the sky, clothes the lilies in the field, and who knows what man requires (Mt. 6:26-32). Having given man the desire to exist, He satisfies him with His promise. Without doubt, Christianity does not deny fear on the ontological level. However, Christianity does not force it to the psychological level and does not through it determine concrete human experiences, as existential philosophy does. This Christianity does in accordance with its nature. Christianity has the means to overcome fear: namely, the divine promise. At the same time, a man who does not believe lacks this basis. And thus, whenever he reflects profoundly in the presence of his existence, he immediately encounters the threat of non-existence, for he understands himself as someone ephemeral, someone who is constantly diminishing, someone who neither controls his own existence nor knows of any foundation to which he could hold to survive. The threat of non-existence stands before him in all its horror and fear appears at the same time. To one who does not believe, the ontological possibility becomes psychologically real; for who shall sustain us if we do not sustain ourselves through ourselves and there is no God? In the soul of one who does not believe, the psychological experience of fear occupies a special place. It comes to control the whole of that man's substance and permeates it with a profound pessimism. If a Christian is not and cannot be a pessimist, a profoundly reflective unbeliever is and must be a pessimist. In the light of unbelief, man appears as some kind of accident which glows briefly on the horizon of being and disappears again into darkness. For this reason, all those periods of history when faith diminished are shot through with fear, pessimism, and nihilism. The current philosophy of existence also originates in unbelief (M. Heidegger). Thus, in it fear occupies a very important place, not only in the ontological but also in the psychological sense. But precisely here lies the importance of fear for the concept of human existence. When analyzed to its limits, fear shows that man does not maintain himself through himself (else he would not fear), that his existence is open to another Power capable of sustaining him, that all of our being is turned towards this Power, that all of our

existence is an ontological prayer to God, even if our lips blaspheme against Him. In **The Drama of Job**, the author attempts to express this lighter, if one may call it that, side of fear: fear arises from the threat of non-existence, but it raises hope and faith in God.