

BETWEEN ABSTRACTION AND THEOLOGY.
On the Heritage of Kierkegaard's Project of the Subjective
Thinker in K. Jaspers and M. Heidegger

Jakub Marek¹²

Abstract

This paper addresses some of the characteristic concerns of Jaspers' and Heidegger's philosophical projects. The relation between the two thinkers is presented as a history of misunderstanding, yet also as a history of their respective interest in the *existentiell* aspect of philosophy. In analyzing Heidegger's and Jaspers' works, I present the ideas of "abstraction" and "theology" as the two extreme limits of the conceptual field within which their thinking evolves. After doing so, I make the suggestion that the *ethos* of their philosophy draws heavily from the heritage of Kierkegaard's project of the subjective thinker.

Keywords: Existentialism, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, subjectivity, theology, prophetic philosophy.

In the 20th century, the form of philosophizing which was associated with the notion of *existence* established itself and achieved major success. Whether as the philosophy of existence [*Philosophie der Existenz*] in Germany or, mainly in France, as existentialism, it came to be understood as a new direction in philosophy, as a restoration of the lively philosophical thought which is responsive to the individual and his or her needs. In my paper, I will present the philosophy of existence principally in this sense as it intensified a certain understanding of philosophy itself and exposed and stressed some of its aspects. In doing so, I am not singling the philosophy of existence out of the whole of philosophy, but rather trying to show that this is a new way of placing emphasis and asking the principal philosophical questions. In order to capture the special and most telling features of the philosophy of existence, I will employ two important notions – *abstraction* and *theology*. It is the task of this interpretation to follow the attempts of the philosophy of existence to deal with the extreme position of abstraction as its unwanted possibility – running the

¹ Marek Jakub is Assistant Professor of Department of General Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague. Fields of interest: Philosophical Anthropology, S. Kierkegaard, F. Nietzsche, K. Jaspers, philosophy of mind, evolutionary perspectives in philosophical views of man, narratology and literary science.

² This publication was supported by the The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports – Institutional Support for Longterm Development of Research Organizations - Charles University, Faculty of Humanities (Charles Univ, Fac Human 2013).

risk that this philosophy becomes merely a “theory of existence” – and how it stresses the actuality of an individual’s existence. This philosophy must also, on the other hand, delimitate itself or clarify its relation towards theology. As it is to be shown, this theological aspect is the second extreme possibility or (in Heidegger’s words) *danger* of philosophy of existence.

This paper is being staged in the historical background of the Heidegger – Jaspers correspondence.³ The case of the relationship of the two German thinkers will become our point of departure for following how the question of the meaning of philosophy became to be asked anew in this historical era and how it transformed into understanding philosophizing as the task of *existentiell* [*existentenziell*] *self-relation* of the thinker to himself. It surely will be interesting to trace this existentiell aspect back to Martin Heidegger, yet let it be stressed that I will not be elaborating primarily a *material* interpretation of Heidegger’s or Jaspers’ philosophy, but I will, by making use of their disputes and misunderstandings, try to point out to their *mutual* interest in a new formulation of philosophy as an *appeal*, as a task, which is placed on the philosopher or which he places on others – most of all on other philosophers.

I will devote the last *pasus* to S. Kierkegaard. By then it should become evident, on the grounds of the analysis of the discussed meanings, claims, appeals and understanding of philosophy, that this is a heritage of Kierkegaard’s *project of the subjective thinker*.

In February 1949, Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) decided, for the second time since the end of the war, to write a letter of good-will to Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). He did so regardless of the fact that the events of the Second World War and of the National-Socialist regime placed the two of them, as it were, on the opposite banks of the flow of history. The first of them, Jaspers, became the conscience of Germany and a moral authority.⁴ The second lost his professorship and arrived in a state of mind he himself commented on: “I feel as if I were only growing in the roots, not in the branches anymore.”⁵ Yet there still remains something between the two of them, some essential connection. For this reason, Jaspers offers to Heidegger an invitation to resume their discussions. He was hoping to restore at least a faint glint of their former bright relationship which had, in the 1920s and early 1930s, meant so much for them and of which they were both nostalgically remembering. Heidegger will

³ N. B. that this paper was written before the publication of the so-called *Black Notebooks* [*Schwarze Hefte*], the last volumes of Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe*. The notebooks have not only initiated a new wave of anti-Heideggerian criticism, but they also provide additional material for this paper which the author unfortunately could not include.

⁴ Esp. in *The Question of German Guilt* (K. Jaspers: *Die Schuldfrage*, München: Piper 1996 [1946]).

⁵ M. Heidegger – K. Jaspers: *Briefwechsel*, München: Piper 1992, 174.

later mention these recollections in the last item of the Heidegger-Jaspers *Briefwechsel* – in his condolence telegram to Gertrude Jaspers.

“Enough of silence” writes Jaspers in the first attempted letter of March 1948 which, however, remained unsent. What he has in mind is Heidegger’s silence about his role over the last 15 years, but he has also hopes that the two could have an honest conversation. The relationship of the two seems to be, as we can see in Jaspers’ letter from February 1949, based in the *medium of philosophy*, and this even in spite of the “fundamental differences” of the two thinkers.⁶ Jaspers disagrees with Heidegger vehemently, he refuses his philosophy mainly in regards to its *contents*; he characterizes it as if “in [Heidegger’s philosophy] joined earnest nihilism with an initiation into magical arts [*Mystagogie eines Zauberer’s*].”⁷ Yet again, despite all this, Jaspers makes a hard effort to help Heidegger – he particularly wants to make sure that Heidegger can continue publishing his works. Interestingly, he adopts a very different stance to Heidegger’s pedagogical role – this he rejects, because Heidegger’s thinking is, according to Jaspers, “unfree, dictatorial, uncommunicative” and his influence as of a teacher might, in a situation where the German youth lacks any opinion of their own, be fatal.⁸

So what then is it that connects these two different thinkers? What is so essential that it makes Jaspers contact his Freiburg colleague and, possible friend, from many years ago? Is it their affiliation with the so-called philosophy of existence or existentialism which characterizes their relationship? Undoubtedly, in this regard their names used to appear often together in philosophical circles. When Jean Wahl (1888–1974), the popularizer of the new philosophy of existence in pre-war France, connected the two in mid-1930s, both Jaspers and Heidegger felt compelled to react to this inappropriate and unpleasant connection – and they both, independently, wrote a letter to Jean Wahl in order to remedy the situation.⁹ We might find in their parallel attempts at strong delimitation from one another a fascinating mirror passing-by and simultaneously an important agreement in their fundamental views on the nature of philosophy.¹⁰

Jaspers, in his letter to Jean Wahl, repeats his thesis presented in the *Reason and Existenz* that he never claimed to have understood or dealt with the whole Being, but that he only spoke of the ways how is the *Encompassing* [*Weisen des Umgreifenden*]. The Encompassing is “not a horizon within which every determinate mode of Being and truth emerges for us, but rather that within which every particular horizon is enclosed as in something absolutely comprehensive which is no longer visible as a horizon at all. ... It is the whole as the most extreme, self-supporting

⁶ M. Heidegger – K. Jaspers: *Briefwechsel*, München: Piper 1992, 170.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁹ For a discussion of this Jaspers-Heidegger-Wahl affair see R. D. Cumming: *Phenomenology and Deconstruction*, Vol. IV, Solitude, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2001, 174.

¹⁰ Cf. *Heidegger – Jaspers Briefwechsel*, op. cit., 170.

ground of Being, whether it is Being in itself, or Being as it is for us”¹¹ Then Heidegger, in a parallel and independently conceived letter stresses that he, “does not care about the question of man’s existence, but only for the question of the being in whole and as such.”¹² His *Being and Time*¹³ is a completely new and unique enterprise which has no predecessors in Kierkegaard (1813–1855) nor Nietzsche (1844–1900) and which Jaspers himself, according to Heidegger, fails to understand. There certainly is a passing-by, a misunderstanding between the two in that Jaspers demands a far more concrete notion of philosophy, which certainly lacks the Heideggerian level of *existential* [*existenziell*] or *ontological* analysis, but which is *de-facto* an attempt at an *existentiell*, *ontic* determination of philosophy. What is this determination? Jaspers rejects any “theory of existence.” “Existentialism would be the death of the philosophy of existence.”¹⁴ What he has in mind is that any philosophy which would be just a mere disinterested analysis would fail to touch the essential problem – i.e. the individual human existence. True philosophy only takes place in the personal relation of the philosophizing individual to himself, in the awakening of the existence to an actual self-relation. Given that Heidegger does not care about the problem of the (individual) human existence, his philosophy is, from Jaspers’ point of view, deficient. It is the individual, the existentiell, the ontic – only this *existence* which it all comes to. Jaspers cares about individual existence and that which belongs to it.

So perhaps it is the existentiell aspect of philosophy which is the *scandalon* of the Heidegger-Jaspers dispute about the nature of philosophizing. This is not the first time they both discuss this matter. For Jaspers, the idea is hardly new. As early as in his *Psychology of World-Views*,¹⁵ the work which marks Jaspers’ turn to philosophy, there he makes the distinction between the so-called “mere contemplation” [*bloße Betrachtung*] and the so-called “prophetic philosophy” [*prophe-tische Philosophie*]¹⁶. Whereas Jaspers understands contemplation, in this case *psychology*, as a disinterested and “objectivizing” instrument of analyzing the whole of human mental life,¹⁷ *philosophy* is, on the contrary, an interested prophecy, propagation and gospel of a certain world-view. A world-view is, according to Jaspers, no banal political conviction or a life-style handbook of “how-to’s” but a complex whole, which provides the individual with moral leads and value scales, but which, most im-

¹¹ K. Jaspers: *Reason and Existenz*, transl. W. Earle, New York: Noonday Press 1955.

¹² *Heidegger – Jaspers Briefwechsel*, op. cit., 277.

¹³ M. Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1967.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹⁵ I have discussed Jaspers’ *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* in detail elsewhere (J. Marek: Existence a světový názor (Jaspers) [Existence and World-View (Jaspers)], in: L. Benyovszky: *Úvod do filosofického myšlení*, Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk 2007, 402–408).

¹⁶ K. Jaspers: *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, München: Piper 1985.

¹⁷ “Die Weltanschauungspsychologie ist ein Abschreiten der Grenzen unseres Seelenlebens, soweit es unserem Verstehen zugänglich ist” (*ibid.*, 6).

portantly, provides what Jaspers calls the “grounds of comfort”, a firm foothold [*Halt*] and this foothold is a foundation and justification which makes it possible that a human existence does not despair and succumb to nihilism. The point being that Jaspers understands this prophetic philosophy as having the *actual existentiell role in the shaping of individual existence*: the prophetic philosophy gives meaning and goals to this existence, it transforms it, it conditions it and makes the individual its follower or disciple. Philosophy as an activity takes place in this self-relation when the individual, guided by the philosophy, changes the ways of his life and his existence as such. “Philosophizing is an act which works upon the inwardness of man,”¹⁸ he put forward in a formulation 16 years later. The *ethos* of his understanding of what philosophy is remains the same. According to Jaspers, every true philosophy fulfills this role and provides grounds of comfort and existentiell leads for existence. To stress the point, the important aspect of the true, i.e. prophetic philosophy is its *affect* on the individual. And only in its affect is it what it is.

Jaspers spelled out this understanding of philosophy in 1919. To substantiate his claim he made references to the philosophical *prophecies* of Plato, Kant or Hegel. He continued to stress this *existentiell* aspect of philosophy in years to come and searched for the human grounds of comfort which would surpass the finite footholds, the footholds of everydayness, he searched for such footholds which would hold firm even in the crucial *limit situations* [*Grenzsituationen*] in which every previous foothold becomes questioned and challenged. Clearly, the search for the foothold must somehow transcend the banal everyday life, even finiteness as such and it has to be a “foothold in the infinite” [*Halt im Unendlichen*],¹⁹ or, in other words, Jaspers will search for a foothold in *transcendence*, because “only in transcendence one can find rest.”²⁰ And philosophy as such is just this nostalgia, this home-sickness in search of rest, of a fundamental foothold. “I do not deny that in my philosophy there resounds a kind of nostalgia [*Heimweh*] for something lost, an echo of religion.”²¹ Jaspers’ existentiell notion of philosophy focuses in the ideal conception of a theological, i.e. authoritative, ultimate, fundamental positivity, in a *meta-physical decision of the human condition*, which would provide individual existence with the sought-for rest and comfort.

Now the question is if there was also any analogy of Jaspers’ confession of the meaning of philosophy in Heidegger. First of all, it was the *Psychology of World-Views* as such which caught Heidegger’s attention. In 1921, he publishes a voluminous paper called *Notes on Jaspers’ Psychology of World-Views*²² where he reviews extensively this “compendium” of world-views and Jaspers’ manifesto of the existentially oriented

¹⁸ Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, op. cit., 48.

¹⁹ In the terminology of the *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*.

²⁰ Heidegger – Jaspers Briefwechsel, op. cit., 277.

²¹ Ibid., 278.

²² M. Heidegger: Anmerkungen zu Karl Jaspers Psychologie der Weltanschauungen, in: M. Heidegger: *Wegmarken (Gesamtausgabe 9)*, Frankfurt/M: V. Klostermann 1976, 1–44.

prophetic philosophy and he also formulates a very intense critique of Jaspers' *opus* and, most interestingly, he presents a *project of his own philosophizing*.

Initially, Heidegger appreciates highly Jaspers' methodical disinterestedness, his "mere contemplation". To Heidegger, this is a kind of variation of the phenomenological approach – primarily because Jaspers employs a "prejudice-less" method of investigation. The positive side of his approach is in that Jaspers avoids being a propagator of one of the investigated world-views. Yet Heidegger finds it problematic whether this method allows for adequate access to the existentiell phenomena, or perhaps is inappropriate to the task. What Jaspers created was a kind of typology or catalogue of world-views, of the possibilities and varieties of formations [*Gestaltung*] of human existence – and, according to Heidegger, Jaspers, as it were, disregarded the *individual actual existence*. Or is it not that he contemplated a kind of abstract "region of the possible", which is, from the point of view of an individual existence, *ubique et nusquam*? Heidegger, tutored in Husserlian phenomenology, places emphasis on the self-givenness and facticity:

"The crucial thing is that *I have myself*, the fundamental experience in which I encounter myself, so that I, living in this experiencing, can *accordingly* ask about the meaning of my 'I am'.²³

Heidegger is not satisfied with stressing just the facticity of his "I am". In order to express the priority of the unique *own* experience, the fundamental experience which only legitimizes philosophical statements, he understands this reflexive, philosophical self-relation as the *concerned having of one-self* [*bekümmertes Haben seiner selbst*].²⁴ The fundamental experience is concentrated and singled out by this concern or interest in one's existence and thus protected from any possible objectivization. Again, emphasis is on the *individuality* and *facticity*: "in earnest concern [*Bekümmern*] we experience the specific self-past, self-presence, self-future, not as mere time-schemes of objective ordering of things, but in its un-schematic meaning of concernment [*Bekümmern*] which captures the How of the actual experience."²⁵ What philosophy as such is all about is this "self", this "historical existing self". In this respect, philosophy is only meaningful insofar as it is taking place as the reflexive self-relation, as long as it is oriented towards the actual, individual existence – namely to the philosopher's own existence.

It goes without saying that in a few years' time, Heidegger will radically reevaluate his idea of the meaning of philosophy. This will no longer be situated in the element of reflection of the individual existence, but it will become the return to the question of being as such. Surely, at least in *Being and Time*, he will still take the departure point in human existence. His method of the hermeneutics of facticity will value the

²³ Heidegger, *Anmerkungen*, op. cit., 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 32 n.

existentiell experience, yet only as a preliminary lead of the existential *Dasein-Analyse*.²⁶

Insofar we have followed the almost comical attempt by Jaspers and Heidegger to delimitate their positions one against another; in doing so, they eventually criticize one another in the same respect. Perhaps then we could say that they both want the same thing: there is no dispute about them both striving for philosophy as something more than just a university subject. The medium of philosophy, which makes up their connection, has nothing to do with the “armchair philosophy” – they both despise it. We have also seen that Jaspers, in his *Psychology of World-Views*, refuses to take up the role of a true philosopher and describes his position as that of a *psychologist*, yet later he will claim his philosophy to be a nostalgia for something lost, an echo of theology. His notion of philosophy synthesizes two aspects: philosophy is, according to Jaspers, no mere teaching, but only becomes what it is through the actual appropriation, in the inward self-formation of the individual. Philosophy provides with grounds of comfort and philosophical activity is this self-relation, this self-assertion. The second aspect is that Jaspers understands the fundamental foothold as something transcending, it transcends or pierces through the boundary of the Encompassing and thus it is, eventually, the *absolute*. Jaspers’ understanding of philosophy is consequently related closely to the traditional concept of *theology*.

In Heidegger’s case, we have so far followed his surprising early attempt at formulating his philosophical project as the thematization of the facticity of individual existence. He concurs that philosophy is no mere teaching, but it is the expression and reflection of a *concerned self-relation*. Yet, how about the second aspect we have analyzed in Jaspers’ case – is it possible, in Heidegger, to suggest the proximity of philosophy and theology?²⁷ Recall that Jaspers called Heidegger’s philosophy a kind of combination of earnest nihilism and charlatan mysticism. Heidegger himself proclaims his philosophy to be consciously atheistic. But, such position is not to be understood as looking away from the absolute, as a kind of sweeping philosophy clean of theology. On the contrary, it can only happen with the conception of God, as “raising hand against God” and only then it is an honest position.²⁸ Heidegger’s refusal of the absolute

²⁶ It should be noted that even in *Sein und Zeit* we do indeed find evidence of Heidegger’s earlier “project”, esp. see §§ 62–63. How else are we to read utterances like: “*Die Frage nach dem Ganzseinkönnen ist eine faktisch-existenzelle. Das Dasein beantwortet sie als eingeschlossenes*” (Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, op. cit., 309, author’s emphasis); or even: “Aber liegt der durchgeführten ontologischen Interpretation der Existenz des Daseins nicht eine bestimmte ontische Auffassung von eigentlicher Existenz, ein faktisches Ideal des Daseins zugrunde? Das ist ind der Tat so” (ibid, 310)?

²⁷ N. B. What I have in mind is a concrete elaboration of such relation, not the universal or general onto-theo-logical nature of any traditional philosophizing as Heidegger understands it.

²⁸ Cf. M. Heidegger: *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, in: H.U. Lessing (ed.): *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geisteswissenschaften*, Bd. 6, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1989, 246.

is a “qualified” decision. For this reason, Günter Figal (*1949) understands Heidegger’s philosophy as from the beginning continuing coming to terms [*Auseinandersetzung*] with theology as a possibility or as an alternative of the philosophical stance which Heidegger himself adopted.²⁹ Figal stresses that this is in spite of or in the face of Heidegger’s conviction that a relation to the transcendence of faith is a fundamental aspect of individual human life. Perhaps Nietzsche put it best in Zarathustra’s speech: “You should seek your enemy, wage your war and for your thoughts! And when your thought is defeated, then your honesty should cry out in triumph even for that!”³⁰ Heidegger’s stance to the theological aspect of philosophizing is consciously and, said with Nietzsche, *honestly* negative.³¹

Now let me stress and point out two key aspects which make up the actual medium of Heidegger’s and Jaspers’ philosophical interest:

(1) *Firstly*, there is the aspect of the formalized or merely theoretical contemplation of existence – and they both, eventually, reject such *abstraction*. Heidegger rejects it as being only a marginal or insignificant moment and he himself never put forward any “theories of existence” in this sense. The earlier Heidegger of 1921 situates his philosophical interest in the self-relation of the philosopher to his own existence. Nor in his later philosophy does he formulate any theory of existence, for he understood his thought as an attempt not at a thematization of existence, but as the restoration of the question of being as such. Jaspers rejects the same abstraction for the reason that this theory would not communicate anything, it would be deprived of its medium, of the actual existence and thus it would become hollow talk.

(2) The *second* aspect they both deal with is *theology*. Jaspers openly confesses himself to echoing it for he understands philosophy as a movement of transcendence because it uncovers and mediates the ways how the Encompassing opens up or how transcendence shines through the cracks in the Encompassing. Conclusively, the only philosophically important question is that of a foothold or of a resting place which would protect human existence against nihilism. Heidegger delimitates himself radically from the theological aspect of philosophy, against God himself, and – in paraphrasing Figal’s interpretation – his atheistic coming to terms with God creates a kind of a negative imprint of the absolute in every sentence of his philosophical work (at least as long as it positions itself honestly “against God”). Theology is an alternative and a counter-movement to his own efforts. It should not surprise us to find out that it was Heidegger who, in his letter to Jean Wahl, formulated the two extreme aspects of philosophy of existence like this: on one side it

²⁹ G. Figal: *Heidegger zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Junius 1992.

³⁰ F. Nietzsche: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, transl. by Adrian del Caro, Cambridge: CUP 2006.

³¹ N. B. Heidegger’s view of the *divine* changes fundamentally in the period of his thinking which is announced by the famous *Letter on Humanism* [*Brief über den Humanismus*, 1946]. It should be also noted that Heidegger situates the change of perspective expressed in the *Letter* in the mid-1930, i. e. in the period of the followed Heidegger-Jaspers-Wahl controversy.

is endangered by *abstraction*, on the other side there lies the danger of *theology*.³²

There is one last important connection between Jaspers and Heidegger. Even though we have mentioned Jaspers' assertion that they differ substantially in regard to the contents they employ in philosophizing, they also: "have a kind of critical-negative stance to the traditional school-philosophy and a certain *dependence on Kierkegaard's thinking*."³³ Jaspers refers to Kierkegaard as to the common denominator of his relation to Heidegger.

In the last section of this paper, I will briefly investigate the question in how far can Kierkegaard be understood as the common denominator of that *ethos* of philosophy of existence which, in the conceptual field between abstraction and theology, constituted itself as an actual self-relation of the philosophizing individual.

Søren Kierkegaard³⁴ referred to himself primarily as a *religious author*, he avoided the label of a philosopher: yet much of his distaste for the term "philosopher" was due to his fear that he could be mistaken for a follower of the Philosophy in his day (i. e. System), of Hegel's speculative philosophy. In his works, Kierkegaard undoubtedly addressed the essential tension between the extremities of abstraction and theology. He understood the danger of hollow thinking which loses its lively character and succumbs to abstraction. He also reflected on Christianity as transcending the sphere of reason or as a nullification of philosophizing. Kierkegaard was well aware of this conceptual framework. Yet, as long as he was just a religious writer, did he also develop his thought within the framework of abstraction and theology or did he simply leave it in favor of Christianity?

What would be the point in philosophy if all it took was merely God's grace and faith? Kierkegaard, through the pseudonym of Anti-Climacus, stressed that only God can "draw" man to him and man cannot do anything, anything at all. Jaspers' notion of a foothold becomes conceptualized as *eternal happiness* in Kierkegaard. There is no other true interest in human existence other than this eternal happiness. Existence, verged between life and death, a sickness unto death even, is deprived of any possibility of reaching the foothold of eternal happiness all by itself – it is completely dependent of God's grace. Yet, and this is a fascinating aspect of Kierkegaard's thought, in order for this drawing to God to take place, there is something the individual must do. He not only can, but has to prepare himself in an inward movement, in becoming a spirit, a free individual, who understands himself in his existence.³⁵ This condi-

³² Cf. Heidegger – Jaspers *Briefwechsel*, op. cit., 277.

³³ Ibid., 278 (italics mine).

³⁴ I have presented a concise interpretation of Kierkegaard's philosophical work elsewhere (J. Marek: *Kierkegaard. Nepřímý prorok existence [Kierkegaard. The Indirect Prophet of Existence]*, Praha: Togga 2010).

³⁵ For a more concise exposition of the idea of a dual movement of becoming a spirit and being drawn to God, cf. J. Marek: Anti-Climacus, in: *Kierkegaard*

tion spelled out by Anti-Climacus finds another expression in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* through another pseudonym, Johannes Climacus. The inward activity and the self-relation of the individual are the hallmarks of the *subjective thinker*.³⁶

“The subjective thinker’s task is to understand himself in existence.”³⁷ The emphasis is placed on one-self, no one else, this individual actual existence. The task is to understand oneself in this existence, or: “In all his thinking, then, he [the subjective thinker. – J. M.] includes the thought that he is someone existing.”³⁸ Once he becomes truly conscious of this existence it yields passion – his thinking becomes passionate, concerned for his existence. Passion accompanies such thinking, it intensifies it, protects it from objectivity, for its only interest is this individual existence. Only then does the individual, according to Climacus, relate truly to himself and understand his existence as a task, as an appeal, as the *pathos* of relation to eternal happiness. At its most intensified form, such thinking reaches the ultimate point when it cannot proceed through thinking but uncovers the standpoint of faith and of the paradoxical religiousness – Christianity.

The project of the subjective thinking is Kierkegaard’s rendering of such a philosophical thematization of the individuality of human existence, which understands subjective thinking primarily as a self-relation and as an inward action. This action is a preparation or existentiell “completion” of the individual’s self in order to be ready for faith and God’s grace. Nonetheless, we must also emphasize that the subjective thinking should be understood as a stand-alone, independent *ethos* of thinking or philosophizing which, taking a departure from the individual existence, takes place in the conceptual field between abstraction and theology.

Kierkegaard conceived of the trichotomous structure “abstraction – philosophy – theology” dialectically. The standpoint of abstraction was the Hegelian idealism, philosophy was then the transition sphere where the inwardness of the subjective thinker becomes articulated and self-related, so that, finally, the possibility of Christianity as the true goal and *telos* could be uncovered. Kierkegaard’s *prophetic philosophy* points to Christianity as to that which oversteps the boundaries of philosophy. But still, it was Kierkegaard’s work which explicitly and unambiguously articulated the *turn to existence in philosophy* as a question which necessarily belongs in the framework of *abstraction* and *theology*.

Research: Sources, Reception, Resources, Vol. 17, Ashgate Publishing, to be published in 2014/15. Also cf. the third “Practice” (“From on High He Will Draw All to Himself”) in S. Kierkegaard: *Indøvelse i Christendom* [*Practice in Christianity*], *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* 12, København: G.E.C. Gads Forlag 2008, 149–253.

³⁶ Cf. S. Kierkegaard: *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift* [*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*], *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* 7, København: G.E.C. Gads Forlag 2002, 320–328.

³⁷ S. Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, transl. A. Hannay, Cambridge: CUP 2009, 294.

³⁸ *Ibid.*