

Alienation And All That

MIRRORS OF MAN IN EXISTENTIALISM. By Nathan A. Scott Jr.
Collins \$7.95

DERMOT MORAN

ALTHOUGH the Existentialist movement has been officially dead for about fifteen years, its literature still has the capacity to interest students, often overwhelmed by what they believe to be the inescapable dullness of professional, technical philosophy. Existentialism focuses on human existence in its concreteness, in its nauseating fluidity, its anguish. As teenagers, the idea that life was so horrible and yet so 'experientable', so deliciously *vécu*, held a fascination for us which led to the study of philosophy. However, for most, the philosophy which was taught in universities made no impression on their souls, so they left to study literature or experience more heathen living. The philosophy of the existentialists became mixed up with a general sixties do-your-own-thing, *je-ne-regrette-rien* attitude which owed more to Baba Ram Dass's *Be Here Now* than to Sartre's classic *Being and Nothingness*. The slogans of the Paris cafes, the idea that God is dead, that everything is permitted, that man is a "useless passion", served as neat explanations for frequent insobriety. But that was the extent of it, and existentialism in its popular manifestation mingled with Marxist commitment to humanity and Zen techniques for emptying the heart of attachment and detachment.

But behind this nihilistic though pleasurable *Lebensphilosophie* stands a more sober and terrifying literature—Kierkegaard's struggles with his unscientific spirit, Nietzsche's attempt at the destruction of all Christian values, Sartre's and Camus's dialogue with despair. The main effect of this literature was to point to the rotten heart of twenty-five centuries of western civilisation, a horrible idling of the machine, which left values as mere empty words and robbed actions of their destiny. Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* or Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are as relevant to metaphysics today as they were when they first appeared in the last century. Today, in fact, Nietzsche's star is on a meteoric rise, freed from the ghost of Fascism which his fanatical sister shackled to him. The term 'existentialism' does not adequately contain the varied questions and probings of these writers, and the sooner the term disappears, the better it will be for philosophy. As for the excitement of reading about humans as they actually are, rather than as they are idealistically or drearily supposed to be, that excitement will remain in these books, as it remains in Plato or Augustine, because of the metaphysical depth and sheer literary force of their inquiries.

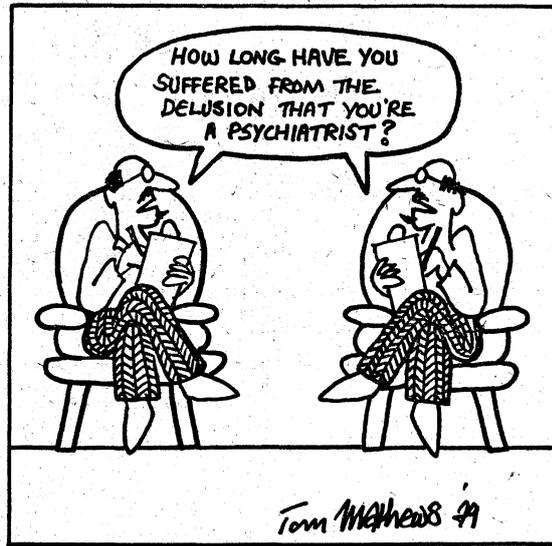
Secondary literature on the existentialists is another matter. Nathan Scott's book, *Mirrors of Man in Existentialism*, is yet another contribution to the vast literature on the subject. Like Blackham's *Six Existentialist Thinkers* (1951), it also chooses six thinkers as epitomising the movement. First, let me say that Nathan Scott adds absolutely nothing new to our knowledge of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, Heidegger or Buber.

Secondly, he insists on including Heidegger as an existentialist, against that philosopher's own refusal to be part of the movement, and his own assertion that human being had no special interest to him, except as the path to inquire about being-in-general. Thirdly, Professor Scott sees everything in a heroes-and-villains atmosphere; Nietzsche's sister, who altered many of her brother's notes to appear more racist and anti-Semitic than they were, had a "shrewish" and "grasping" nature, according to Scott. While he praises Sartre's and Camus's opposition to Fascism, Scott finds Sartre's interest in Russian Communism a blindness and a "prejudice". History is rather too simplified in Professor Scott's analysis.

To the lay person interested in philosophy, this book is an adequate introduction to some exciting thinkers. The reader is greatly aided by the clarity and bright vigour of Scott's prose; he never fails to interest, and his exposition is, except in some small instances, very sound. His outlook sees Existentialism as a religious world-view, even if God is absent or dead. It is a world-view which seeks human value and significance in the brute facts of everyday existence. Man, for Scott, in the modern age is essentially homeless, unable to rest content with himself or his surroundings. Human freedom, instead of giving man hope and power as it did in the Renaissance, now has become a burden, a chasm of emptiness which opens up under foot. Freedom is empty because it is valueless, normless. The horrors of two world wars have brought this scandal of humanity home to us. One could go on, but the picture is clear enough. Terms like "alienation", "chaos", "solitude" frequently appear. Professor Scott is able to channel fresh personal meaning into each of these terms, and he ends by seeing existentialism as a valid humanist protest in a dehumanised scientific world. But is this enough? Is it not just a little too pat? The standard pass answer to the examination question: Discuss the meaning of alienation in the philosophy of the Existentialists?

I have always been troubled by the ease with which such terms as alienation or emptiness can be thrown about. Safe and secure professors write books about the ultimate meaning of the human condition. Even if the answers are all depressingly vacant, these people go on acting as if there are answers. In most cases it is the questions which have never been asked.

Kierkegaard, Camus, Sartre, Nietzsche were all rebels and iconoclasts (even if Sartre has been institutionalised in France, his actions were always a mocking of his bourgeois role). These people are best read on their own; the potted academic versions are as frigid as death itself. The questions and the inquiries which come from the heart will be answered by the heart. That is the great gift of the existentialists: they teach that the passions too have a voice, and that voice will be heard.



Vive La Différence

KAREN HORNEY: GENTLE REBEL OF PSYCHOANALYSIS.
By Jack L. Rubins. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. £10.00

MONK GIBBON

KAREN Horney was born at the village of Blankensee near Hamburg, on 16 September 1885. Her father was a blue-eyed, somewhat autocratic Norwegian who adopted German nationality and eventually became a commodore in the Hamburg-American Line. Her mother was Dutch-German. Karen had one brother, Berndt, who was four years older than her and a cause of early jealousy to a little girl who was already something of a feminist and who was to have some difficulty in persuading her father to allow her to take a university course. She was before her time and when she took her *physikum*, a step on the road to becoming a doctor, it is not surprising that a photograph shows her as the only woman among seven successful candidates.

She was born into a highly interesting transitional epoch, and Dr Rubins, a training-analyst and dean of the American Institute for Psychoanalysis, has managed to produce a highly interesting biography of a remarkable woman who was involved from a very early stage in the struggles, and later the internecine warfare, of a highly controversial and developing movement. She herself was a courageous but tolerant individual and saw no point in turning impersonal issues into personal quarrels. And her biographer has the same gift of tolerance. He never attempts to dramatise the painful rivalries of organised psychoanalysis when even Freudians disagreed among themselves and Jung, Adler and others went off presently in entirely novel directions. The history of these various disputes is an interesting part of the history of that period covering two world wars and culminating in the rise of the Nazis with their strong objection to psychoanalysis, a doctrine originated by a Jew and, from its start, with a strong Jewish following. It equalled and indeed surpassed their hatred of certain contemporary tendencies in art, which also had many Jewish supporters.

Because we meet her as a child,



Karen Horney:
before her time

schoolgirl, medical student, young wife and mother of three talented daughters (who have obviously given Dr Rubins every degree of cooperation), his book will hold interest even for a reader who dislikes analysis. It may confirm many of their prejudices against the movement. If Germany became the foster-mother of a Vienna-born creed, the United States unquestionably ended as its Sugar-Daddy (or Mummy? One cannot be too careful about sexual orientations where psychoanalysis is concerned). People like Marilyn Monroe would place their hopes of salvation on it, and it would become a kind of substitute for religion although, in Karen's case, her friend Paul Tillich could say of her after her death, "Few people were so strong in the affirmation of their being, so full of the joy of living, so able to rest in themselves and to create without cessation beyond themselves. . . . It was the voice of people, of inner experience, of nature, of poetry. . . . and in the last year, the voice of eastern religion, which grasped her heart."

She did not become an American resident until the year 1932 and it was in that country she pub-

lished her books such as *lem of Neurotic Anxiety*, *Roots of Some Typic Conflicts*, *Psychoanalytic Values*, and even *The P* *sis of Psychoanalysis*. more she came to be re deviationist by the p zealots who, on one managed to reduce her one of their meetings. time there was mutual tween her and Freud, c differences. In the end, his displeasure, although and courageously.

I feel inclined to in and original complex, s plicable to the origina term. It will be the Mosa It manifests itself in a d the part of Moses the Lc it is, as Freud must have fomented by the fanat enthusiastic and conten ents. But Freud himself and become more and ent on his prophetic r certain psychological a phic rulings a part of h mandments. In what termed "that decade science" various postu: sacred. Karen tended size the role of cultural as opposed to the pre laid on instinctual fact viewed individuals as destructive, driven by -instinct", whereas Kare them as "self-healing a in a constructive direc only did she always ac tiously but she had a Rubins points out, of s plex concepts in simple as any sensible individu marriage as both a sex emotional relationship, fully aware of the dan importance of analyst completely free of it h admitted the existenc ing childhood factors in but refused to see ther sively all-important. T need for love could be tinguished from real lo its deeper purpose to xiety. She was never do always hopeful. "We m get that life may be the pist."

As against all this, J proach was always i masculine and he had li standing of femininity as member being told—by a of all people—of a suffra ing where the speaker "After all there is very l ence between a man and Whereupon a heckler at the hall shouted, "Three the very little differer story would have beer butter and honey to Freud. In 1938, in his la commented, "We shall r surprised if a woman a has not been sufficiently of her own desire for a fails to assign adequate i to that factor in her which Dr Rubins regard swipe at his gentle rebel. of his book has no less teen page references to I It was a crucial topic Little girls were suppos pect that they had beer Consultation with my who had no sister but thre reveals that she had som vy for the opposite sex their ability to perform function standing. Kare would have thoroughly the simple commonst this observation.