

# BASIC FORMS AND KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Ludwig Binswanger

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## Preface to the 3rd and 4th edition

The first edition of this work was published in 1942 by Max Niehans in Zurich, the second in 1953 by the same publisher. Since Mr. Niehans, whom I would like to thank most sincerely for his publishing efforts, has meanwhile given up his publishing house, the Ernst Reinhardt Verlag Munich/Basel has kindly decided to publish the third edition, which has become necessary in the meantime. I am also sincerely grateful to Mr. Jungck, the owner of this publishing house, for his decision, because, even though it was written in the decade between the late twenties and the late thirties, the subject matter on which this publication is based has lost none of its original interest for me even today.

While the preface to the second edition was limited to stating that it was an unaltered copy of the first, the first edition was preceded by a longer preface. This followed on from my comprehensive "Introduction to the Problems of General Psychology", published in 1922 (out of print since 1926), and explained why I could not decide to reprint it. The main reason was that the interest in definition and methodology that dominated that writing had strongly receded in the course of the nineteen-forties due to the further advance of Husserl's *Phenomenology*, which had admittedly already been extensively acknowledged in the "Einführung", and above all due to Heidegger's "Sein und Zeit" (Being and Time) from 1927, which opened up a completely new understanding of being, and the ontological interest newly awakened by it. In addition, Karl Löwith's 1928 book "Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen" (1928), which is very important for me, analyses the being together of one and another in a very subtle way, but the loving being together of you and me has not yet been appreciated. The latter then became the focus of interest through the writings of Martin Buber and his circle. All this would not only have gone beyond the title of an "Introduction to General Psychology", but even if the book had been completely reworked, it would not have been possible to accommodate it in a single writing. Consequently, instead of a new edition of this "Introduction", I decided to write a completely new book, with special consideration of the phenomenology of loving and friendly togetherness and its "counterpole", the mere being together with another in everyday dealings and intercourse, the taking of the other person with something, with the aim of showing the possibility of an "awareness of existence" from the interaction of these incisive ways of being together. Instead of psychological description on the one hand, methodological reflection on the other hand, phenomenological, anthropological and ontological aspects had to be taken into account.

### I.

As new and exciting as Heidegger's ontological approach was, the boundaries, especially to anthropology, were still somewhat obscure at that time. The essay which clearly pointed to the unsolved, even insoluble difficulties at hand here was the essay by Hans Kunz "Die anthropologische Betrachtungsweise in der Psychopathologie" (Z. Neur. 172, H. 1); but it was not published until 1941. The author reveals here the reason which makes a sharp separation of the analytics of existence and anthropology impossible or at least makes the frequent, if not prevailing, misunderstanding of fundamental ontology appear comprehensible as philosophical or metaphysical anthropology. He thinks thereby primarily of the "ambiguity", which consists in

the fact that the "existentials" could always also be understood as characteristics of being human, and in general of the "ambiguous" relationship between "Dasein" and being human. (Cf. also Hans Kunz "Die Bedeutung der Daseinsanalytik Martin Heideggers Einfluss auf die Wissenschaften, Bern 1949, pp. 37-57.)

If in this context I too have been accused, and rightly so, of falling prey to a misunderstanding, albeit a productive one, of an anthropological nature, the productive nature of this misunderstanding consists, to anticipate this, in the fact that, as I have already stated in writing myself, "it is Heidegger's teaching that drives our investigation forward" (pp. 59), but at the same time pointing out that also here "the tremendous power of the negative" proves itself. The procedure was as Szilasi once said of my psychiatric method: "Since existential analysis analyzes the constitution of Dasein, it provides the corresponding categories, the so-called 'existentials', within which psychiatry can bring the categorical (i.e. existential) variations to view" (Philosophie und Naturwissenschaften, Bern 1961, p. 113 f.). The first productive misunderstanding was to understand the existentials not as such, as ontological ones, but only in terms of, albeit extremely fruitful, categorial guidelines for our investigation.

As far as my conception of Love is concerned, my often-criticized statement that love is frozen outside Heidegger's "conception of man" is obviously based on a misunderstanding, since Heidegger is concerned with nothing less than the establishment of a conception of man and an anthropology in general. For although he once said (Sein und Zeit, p. 17) that the analysis of existence "with the intention of a possible anthropology respective its ontological foundation ... delivers only some, though not unimportant 'pieces', the "prohibitive characterization" of his teachings in the demarcation from anthropology, psychology and biology should nevertheless have been strictly kept in mind.

My core deviation from Heidegger, by the way, lay less in the fact that I misunderstood the fundamental ontology, anthropologically; but the other way `round, that I sought to understand not only Love, but also the give-and-take of things, ontologically. This very attempt to capture the *ontological* viewpoint proved to be extremely productive for our investigation. Here too, the truth of Szilasi's sentence that we arrive at new possibilities of experience on the basis of new ways of experiencing proved to be true! Only the horizon of existence shown with Heidegger's question of Dasein and his design of Dasein has *opened the field* for the possibility of a *comprehensive phenomenological interpretation* of Love (like contact or intercourse) and *its understanding of Being*. In the realization of this possibility, in spite of all misunderstandings and everything "negative", lies the *positive* outcome of my engagement with "Sein und Zeit" and *his* phenomenology. And only with that *comprehensive* phenomenological interpretation did my writing, as its Second Part shows, come close to problem areas such as those that came to light in Hegel's dialectical union of Love and Reason in the "movement from recognizing to acknowledging", in Goethe's conception of the "ingenious penetration into", in Dilthey's conception of the "enthusiastic deepening into", in Hofmannsthal's speech of "thinking with the heart", and also in Augustine and Amiel and others. -

If, despite holding on to the ontological point of view, I did not succeed in understanding "love" in a truly ontological sense according to Heidegger, i.e. as a characteristic of Dasein, which in its Being is concerned with its own ability to be or which is *for its own sake*, this was due to the approach of fundamental ontology, namely to the conception of Dasein as "perpetually mine" or as "Unity". Especially as a student of Husserl and his teachings on the

"tremendous transcendence" of the Other as well as on the perception of the Other that continues to be decisive for me, I could not, until today, come to terms with the continuous "Unity of *Being*", especially since I never saw the I that belongs to this Mine, and yet I could never come to terms with the circumvention of the teachings on the Other Ego and the perception of the Other through the leap into the thesis that Existence is always also Co-Existence. This thesis still leaves a tangle of unsolved questions for me today.

But it must now be clear that the approach to the Unity of Being cannot be overcome with understanding or reason, but only with something quite different, namely with the imagination or power of love. Consequently, imagination is at the centre of the Phenomenology of Love and the Phenomenology of the Understanding of the Being of Love. This is also the reason why I have allowed the *poetic* imagination to be discussed to such a high degree: For if love and loving cognition can only "be 'imagined' in loving imagination" (cf. p. 490), here poetry is not only illustration but a genuine source of understanding, i.e. an objective - representing - pointing way of understanding.

But from here we can also counter another reproach that has been made repeatedly in this book. It is directed against the meaning and word of *Being-Beyond-the-World*. In Being-in-the-World as Being-in-Possession, we do not find moments of existence, i.e. no existentials, of the form of Imagination or of Grace in the sense of Love, we do not find a "you" or a "we", no "absolute" Sureness-of-Being, and very many other things we do not find, which we call "Being-Beyond-the-World" (or also "Overflowing with Love"). In doing so, however, it must not be overlooked that Being-*Beyond-the-World* is not conceivable without Being-in-the-World (the *overflow* not without the transcendental *overpass*), which is why we always say Being-in-the-World-Beyond-the-World, implying the world here, as with Heidegger, the world must by no means be conceived objectively, for instance as the Earth, and therefore not in the sense of any "Otherworldliness".

If we have just spoken of Grace and Sureness-of-Being, we would like to take this opportunity to recall the preface to the first edition, which concludes by saying that we do not want to convert Theology into Anthropology, as Feuerbach did - with the conclusion that, in our opinion, "the path to divinity is always open to the person who understands the truth".

## II.

While the main emphasis in the criticism of our writings was usually placed on *Love or Being Together*, the Chapter (II) on *Taking-by-something*, human interaction or intercourse, or just Being Together[Mitsein], was decidedly neglected. This may have to do with the circumstance that things are simpler in this regard, since it is only about the "Application" of the Analytics of Beings as *Readiness-to-hand* towards the *interpersonal* acts of Being. So here we cannot speak of a disagreement with Heidegger's doctrine of being, but only of an extension of it. It was only at the end of last year that I had the pleasure of sharing a deep philosophical Understanding of the nature[Seinsweise] of Taking-by-something. It is the essay by Henri Maldiney, professor at the University of Lyon, entitled: *Comprendre* (Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale, novembre 1961). This essay is valuable, first of all, because it shows us the great variety of expressions for taking-by-something with others that the French language possesses, and also because it extends its scope to other areas: prendre à[take from] is and remains the basic form[Grundform] of language and existence, especially in French. In addition, there is the



ambiguous noun *la prise*, which in German we can only reproduce with the likewise ambiguous word "Griff", furthermore *appréhender* (e.g. au corps = to arrest) and especially *saisir à* (la saisie), furthermore *agripper* (von griffes) = to seize eagerly and *s'emparer de* = to take possession and to be taken over et al. Taking-by-something is, however, as already shown in the "Basic Forms"[Grundformen], by no means limited to the hand: "Tous nos sens expérimentent le même sens et tous les sens du mot. La vue? On saisit du regard. L'oreille? Je n'ai pas saisi. Tous ces saisies sont à. On reconnaît quelqu'un à sa démarche, à sa voix, à son parfum (saisir avec les yeux, l'ouïe, l'odorat)." [*All our senses experience the same senses and all meanings of the word. The view? One catches the eye. The ear? I did not seize. All these seizures are to. You can recognize someone by his gait, his voice, his scent (grasping with the eyes, hearing, smell).*]

More important than this inventory, however, is the phenomenological insight, following on from my essay "Dream and Existence" of 1930 on the general a priori *direction of meaning*[Bedeutungsrichtung] (direction significative ou direction de sens)[(significant direction or direction of meaning)] of Rising and Falling, which was carried out with great enthusiasm, clarity and farsightedness, that "la prise" behaves in exactly the same way as "la chute", as this was already the basis of the "Basic Forms"[Grundformen]. Both times it is such a "radical" Form of Existence that we find it "relations compréhensives entre existants"["understanding relationships between people."] in everyone. "La saisie est une *forme primitive originaire de l'existence*"<sup>1</sup> (in the sense of the physical and social world). "Le mot de saisir tire son sens d'une *situation globale antérieure à toute capacité particulière!*"<sup>1</sup>["Seizure is a primitive form originating in existence "<sup>1</sup> (in the sense of the physical and social world). "The word to grasp derives its meaning from a global situation prior to any particular ability!"<sup>1</sup>]

An important phenomenological extension of the doctrine of Taking-by-something lies in Maldiney's explanations of Sensation et Motricité[Sensation and Motion], Body Schema and Exterior Space, Organism and Organ, and Psychoanalysis and Analysis of Existence, which tie in with the works of E. Straus and R. Goldstein.

### III.

The second part of our book (cf. the Introduction, the First Chapter and especially the Second Chapter IV d: Phenomenology of Love. Purely Phenomenological Ideation and Loving Imagination) is not only confirmed by Maldiney, but also expanded, especially through his combination of *percevoir* (= per-capere) and *comprendre*. It would be too much to go into further detail here. I only refer in passing to the author's remarks on sens et expression (p. 44 f.), *appréhender* (p. 48), *saisir-à* and *percevoir* (p. 50 f.). Above all Maldiney, like us, distinguishes between the "total possession" of love and the "partial possession": Where we only take something with someone (*s'emparer-de*), it is only "une possession partielle". "Le tout de la chose ou de l'être s'évanouit dans le saisir-à." "Si je vous saisis bien" (if I understand you correctly), I have only taken "the part" of you that is contained in the word (*engagé*) that you profile ( *profiler*) from the point of view (angle) of a local situation. Maldiney here certainly follows Husserl's analysis of the perception of things. For he continues: "and from you, as from the thing, according to Husserl, I have only this profile" (in Husserl Aspect). From here, the author develops a perception that is both intellectual and concise, not as a praise, but as a surprise. If perception is nevertheless en prise sur la totalité de l'être perçu [in the grip of the

totality of the being perceived], it is only because this totalité s'articule en significations (articulates itself "meaningfully" or in "meanings"). On this foundation Maldiney could already say before (p. 44): "Dans la perception nous percevons le sens, dans la compréhension nous comprenons l'expression." ["In perception we perceive meaning, in understanding we understand expression."]

#### IV.

I conclude by making this very understandable statement, although I am aware of the naivety of the criticism of Heidegger and many other shortcomings it contains, I would like to reply that, quite apart from my age, which would no longer allow me to undertake such a task, so much would have to be changed in this writing that it would lose its freshness, its consistency and thus the uniformity of its form.

But I would like to retain the right to leave this book in its first version, since the *Sense* of the "Basic Forms"[Grundformen] is not affected by the not unjustified criticism of my understanding of Heidegger at that time, since - as I expressly noted at the time (p. 128<sup>1</sup>) - "Heidegger's interest is quite different from ours! The aim of the "basic forms" was not to be a refutation of "Being and Time", but a Phenomenology of Love.

Kreuzlingen, March 1962  
Ludwig Binswanger

1) Emphasis mine.

PART ONE

# BASIC FORMS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

## Introduction

In contrast to purely objective or objectifying psychology, which is only able to construct barriers to the Knowledge of Love, the Knowledge of Existence has its foundations in the Loving-togetherness of the I-Thou. While inquiries focused on objectualities only veil the Loving-togetherness and resignedly encircles it, the inquiry into Existence receives its directives precisely from this Being. Out of the undivided fullness of Being-together, I-Thou are separated from each other, in order to gain their "Selfhood". However, the mere Taking of "the Other" by Something - in the Taking-by-the-Ear, in the Taking-by-the-Word, in the Taking-by-the-"Weaknesses," etc. - in the conduct of Society, of large and small Politics, of the administration of Justice, of the Economy, reveals the "Shrinkage" and "Decay" of Being-with-One-Another into the mere being of "One-Another". This applies all the more to the Being-to-Oneself of the self-sufficient Ego-Individuals. The fact that psychology, starting from absolute interests, activities, tendencies, functions or acts "in" them or "on" them, has methodically oriented and trained itself on this "decay" up to our time, only shows that it has taken its directions for its investigation from the impersonal objectivity of a "society" conceived according to the pattern of nature, from the concept of thing, property, function and energy of natural science, but in the best case from the idealism of unilaterally constituting intentionality.

## Chapter One

# The Togetherness of Me and You.

We-ness in Love.

### A. The Loving-Togetherness.

#### I. The spatiality of loving-Togetherness.

*Exposure of the problem.*

In the everyday interactions of people, in their small and large affairs, they are dominated by a clear imperative and precautions to limit, regulate and organize them, according to the imperative: *ôte-toi que je m'y mette* [get out of my way, so I can take your place]. If we ask about the Mode of Spatiality in which such an imperative and the clear brevity and unambiguousness of its language are "possible", we immediately find ourselves in the Mode of Extension, the *extensio* in Descartes' sense. This Mode of Spatiality, the only one that Descartes knew, and which he consequently identified with Spatiality, indeed with the World in general - to the great detriment of the Psychology and Ontology of the following period -, this Mode is characterized by Divisibility, Combination, and Movement. What endures in all these changes, remains constantly in them, is the Body-Thing, the *res corporea*. The spatial relationship between the individual Body-Things is *parallel* existence, according to which one Thing cannot take the place of another, without the former changing its location.

As Heidegger<sup>1</sup> has shown, this whole concept of Space and World arises from the one-sided orientation towards Being as a constant presence. This conceptualization of Being also underlies the *ôte-toi que je m'y mette* [get out of my way, so I can take your place]. For him it is inconceivable that spatiality could mean anything other than parallel existence "in space", and that change could be brought about by anything other than the application of Pressure and Force to overcome any Resistance.

Beside the unilateral imperative "Get away, so that I can sit in your place", beside this "violent" eviction of a space in a certain area by way of clearing-away and putting-away. As an example, we can take this as the kind of possibility of scientific, indeed every purely factual discussion is based. Here, too, it is a matter of clearing and putting away a certain, but now meaningfully limited area of space within a predetermined (meaningful) spatiality. "I concede this to you" means that I admit or leave a certain "position" within a thematic context of meaning to my interlocutor, that I concede this position, step back from it or give way ( see *concedere*, *con-cessio*), in order to cede it to my partner, not to "dispute" it any longer, acknowledging that he is right in this "disputed" space of meaning and thus has "a right" to it. And it is not by chance, but on the basis of the complete structuring of human existence, that we see the admitting or admitting person making the gesture of surrender, in this way stepping

"out of his space" and carrying out the surrender to the space of the other, while the other, inclined towards him, receives the "surrender"<sup>2</sup>. What is true of the attitude and gesture of this surrender is of course also true of the gaze, facial expression and voice. The voice of the conceding person, to mention only this, "lowers" and becomes quieter by a nuance, the facial expression relaxes, the gaze becomes "less penetrating", according to the loss of personal space, of personal power; for here too the contrast between Mine and Yours still prevails, the law of the displacement of contradictory opinions, the compulsion to cede territory under the influence of an ordering power, the spatial structure of ratio. But so little does this ratio hover over human existence that it is more where it rules and as long as it rules, that it dominates its spatial overall structure until the little finger is held "in space".

If we now try to anthropologically examine loving togetherness - in short: *Love* - in terms of its peculiar Mode of Concession [Modus des Einräumens], no difficulties arise as long as we conduct this examination in terms of the two forms of concession mentioned. That Love means the exact opposite of command, coercion and the use of force, of the development of power for the purpose of overcoming resistance, but also of "decisive" unambiguity in the sense of rationality, seems to be clear from the outset. With this it is at the same time said that the Spatialization of Love must be something quite different from the violent Concession of a place by clearing away a human body-thing that is present in it or the sphere of power corresponding to it, and that its language must be different from the language guided by this Concession. Love and Power or Violence are mutually exclusive. And likewise, out of Love and *all* manner of having a Right and a Right-to-something, of exchange and transfer, of barter and commerce or trade, receding concession *of something*, there is no increase or loss, no enlargement or reduction of one's "Own Space", that is, no contact at all between the spheres of Mine and Yours in the sense of "worldly" *possessions*. Certainly, Lovers "can" engage in a scientific discussion, but it must be clear that this "ability" has nothing to do with the essence of loving togetherness as such, but is completely foreign to it. One can discuss scientifically, even "co-operate", without loving each other and one can love each other without co-operating. In this respect, there is a difference between the anthropological relationship between Power or Command and Love on the one hand, Cooperation and Love on the other; in the first case it is a matter of mutual exclusion, in the second of alienation of essence or unaffection of essence. The mere fact that you are right and I am wrong, or vice versa, does not affect loving togetherness in any way; completely incompatible with love, however, is the insistence on my right or your right, any form of compulsion to recognize a right, that is, any imperative and thus any concession in the spatiality sense of the Extensio, the presence of body-things in certain places and the forms and laws of their changing places. This can also be seen in the spatial structure of the two-sided behavior. The true Gesture of the "political" imperative to overpower the resistance of the judiciary, no matter whether it is about human or state persons, is the "*fight*", the ever-changing, calculating movements and tricks of the power struggle waving back and forth "in Space"; the true Gesture of Love is the *Embrace*: on the one hand a *situation* conditioned and controlled, the concession of foreign space and the assertion of one's Own Space, with all its techniques of tugging, shoving, crushing, tearing or even killing, and on the other hand that which is not conditioned by or determined by any unique, finite Situation, the "unmanageable", yes generally "unstructured", careless, endless concession of

the boundless, *unique* and indivisible *Space of Mutuality*, the infinite, inexhaustible and unfathomable *We in Love*. But where do we get the right to speak of love in this way?

It is a well-known fact that the meaning of the language of love is highly and definitely interspersed with "spatial ideas". If we have just spoken of the boundless, infinite, inexhaustible, and unfathomable space of love, we have only spoken in the language of love itself. This may prove to be the language of a tragedy on which, in the words of Lessing, "love itself has helped to work":

"In kindness I am as unprovoked as the sea,  
Love is so deep... the more I give<sup>3</sup>,  
The more I have, the greater the limit to both."  
(Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, II, 2.)

Here the loving creature speaks of herself, the lover speaks of herself; but her experience comes from the togetherness, the togetherness or we of love, Eros, who alone knows an increase of having through giving,  $\acute{\epsilon}\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\upsilon\acute{\xi}\omega\nu$  is<sup>4</sup>, self-reproducing, "boundless". The same is true of the language of a great lover himself:

"Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth."  
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning.  
Sonnets from the Portuguese XVI)

Rilke (*Island Library* No. 252, XVIII) transmits freely:

"What can I do when your love is near,  
...as if to say, "I want her to grow and multiply me."

But the spatiality of the loving one as such is already mentioned when Rilke says of the lovers: "Since they always wish and expect the utmost of each other, neither can do wrong to the other by restriction; on the contrary, they constantly create space and expanse and freedom for each other" (Letter to Miss Schenk, 4 November 1909, *Sperrung von mir*).

Here, too, there is talk of the "everlasting" extreme, unrestricted, of vastness and freedom, space in general, but no more than a quality or ability of the loving creature, but as a "product" of incessant mutual production. And even where Rilke commemorates the "contradiction" of loving togetherness and selfhood (of the wisdom of love and the selfhood of care<sup>5</sup>), he speaks the language of space:

"Don't lovers always tread on the fringes, one within the other, promising each other vastness, hunting and home<sup>6</sup>."  
(4th *Duino* elegy)

But there is something else that must already be noticed here, namely that the unrestricted "space", the "boundless" expanse, freedom, hunt are not synonymous with

unfamiliarity "of space" or lost "in space"; rather, we are confronted with the strange fact, which is completely incomprehensible from the point of view of extensio, that "extreme" boundlessness and unrestrictedness, "extreme" vastness and freedom from all "restrictions", that all these negative spatial meanings of language have an inherent positive, the meaning of home and thus of familiarity or closeness. Thus, the spatiality of love as such (quite apart from the contradiction between loving wisdom and selfhood) is already in a peculiar "contradiction" to all the "extensive" spatial content of language, more correctly expressed, it is this contradiction.

<sup>1</sup> Sein und Zeit I, §§ 22-24

<sup>2</sup> One can see how much the so-called ego-space extends beyond the living space into an outer space, whereby outer space must of course be understood as the entire spatiality of "the World", including the "spiritual".

<sup>3</sup> Translated to Gundolf. In the original: more I give to thee, the more I give to thee! - In order to avoid misunderstandings, it should already be noted here that although we draw our linguistic examples from the language of the love of the sexes, our investigation is by no means limited to the love of the sexes in the sense of the passion of love or the passion of love. We use the language of love-passion only to the extent that it expresses love rather than passion! Apart from the love of mother and child, which, as love between lovers who are not "equals", cannot exhaust the full phenomenal content of loving togetherness, there is actually nowhere else where love can express itself more deeply and clearly than in the love of the sexes.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Heraclitus Frg. 115 (Diels), where it is said that the Logos multiplies itself (in a very different way): "The Logos is proper to the soul, which multiplies itself".

<sup>5</sup> Cf. section IV d. below.

<sup>6</sup> Emphasized by me.