

István KIRÁLY V., *Death and History*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, ISBN: 978-3-659-80237-9, 172 pages, 2015.

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Throughout this provocative book, István Király invites us to leave behind our current linguistic habits and the comfortable ways of thinking, specific to a world of "certainties". The author encourages his readers to begin analysing the process of thinking from an existential-ontological perspective, as structures of being. In light of these remarks, we should step towards understanding the most important purpose of this book: identifying the opportunities for a new philosophy of history, i.e. a philosophical inquiry about history which, from an ontological point of view, is to be understood, ultimately, as an ontology of history. This endeavour is announced from the title, through the interconnection between death and history, where the use of "and" must be perceived as a "question" in itself and therefore "must first be explicitly and articulately: *asked*."

In order to highlight the relationship between history and death, the author claims we must first interrogate the very terms with which we operate. Accordingly, in the first chapter (*Human Finitude and History – Prolegomena to the Possibility of a "Philosophy of History" and Ontology of History*) he begins by asking: "what is history?". Moreover, the following questions are how can a concept such as death be properly discussed? What is death for the "living humans" who are wondering, always in the present, about the meaning of death and whose lives are always "threatened", in an inexorable way, by the possibility of death?

First, death must be thought and properly assumed as *dying*. The firmness with which the author states this nuance is due to the manner in which the entire

Western philosophical tradition understood and still relates to death – that is, without ever dying. In the Greek-Christian interpretation of being, this "everlasting-problem" was either shrouded in silence, or was seen through the light of "a metaphysics of immortality, a metaphysics of «What next?» or «What comes after death»". However, through these (comforting) attempts to escape the fear and the anxiety of death, which are perhaps noble in their intentions, but constitute a failure for a proper philosophical inquiry, "it is not only death which loses its weight in a denied death, but life itself as well", inasmuch as death is (and has to be thought as such) – among the possibilities of being of mortal human beings – the most certain and unavoidable possibility of being, i.e. the possibility of their no-longer-being, which,

"by its own «substantive» happening which is dying – precisely by it but always beyond it – derives and constitutes, as well as structures, articulates, permeates and colours *all of their other modes and possibilities of being*. In other words, it *opens them up*, truly and really, structures them opened in, and precisely because of its finitude".

Here it is already possible to make the transition to history, since, if death is a "something" that continuously radiates upon every moment of human life as the sole horizon in which these moments, actions, deeds etc. make sense, then history itself "exists in fact because there is human death, because there are beings who relate – explicitly or implicitly – to death in and with their being, in and with their mode of being, in a *being-like* way."

István Király states that throughout the history of philosophy there were (only) two (great) thinkers who saw "this force and weight of death and mortality which grounds and articulates history and historicity", namely Thomas Hobbes and Martin Heidegger. In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes argues that man, in his natural state – following the logic of *homo homini lupus* – is inclined to war, destruction, and, consequently, death. Due to this continuous threat (of death) and in order to preserve the precious human life, people found necessary "first to create public authority and then obedience to it"; and what is more, not only all that organizes and articulates public life, but in fact all modes of being of this particular being – "which is originally temporal due to its mortality" – all human

things, events and processes are unthinkable and meaningless without death, and therefore history itself “derives and gains its always actual weight and dynamism from where time originates. Namely, precisely from death, from human finitude.”

The German thinker, with whom István Király repeatedly starts a dialogue in this book, by highlighting, examining, and also by going further with the inquiry of some issues, is Heidegger. Király tackles not only Heidegger’s works or the Greek-Christian tradition of the thinking in which this great philosopher created a radical and essential turn, but also with the way in which Heidegger was understood or, what is more important, misunderstood by those who followed him. The author mentions and discusses not only *Being and Time*, but also one of Heidegger’s former (and less frequently analysed) works: *Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle*, “which expose for the first time the basic ideas of *Being and Time*”, and where Heidegger’s philosophical approach is articulated in the service of a history of ontology and logic. In this book, death is seen as the “how” of life and, as such, it “constitutes the temporality – that is: historicity – of factic life. For, with its future standing-before, death makes visible for factic human *Dasein* both its present and past.” Also, history cannot be understood without a factic human *Dasein* – which is always in a living-present – who questions its nature. Hence, “it is the question-points of the present (pertaining and supporting, as well as deriving from the future) which direct such investigations, as well as the questions which move them, to the landscape of an always historically articulated past.” In this specific (always present) process of questioning made by a *Dasein*-like being, “whose meaning cannot be taken beyond question and questioning”, history, or, more precisely, the dimensions of history, past and future become two horizons of possibilities, temporally simultaneous with that inquiring present.

From this point of the interpretative discourse it is already clear that the obvious and major consequence of all of the arguments above is the fact that the common way in which time itself was understood – linearly, as past-present-future, the grammatical time – becomes a main critical target of this book. Of course, for the author it can no longer be a valid method of interpretation. Thus far this inquiry revealed the “why” and the “wherefrom” of history, with the answers: (because of) death (as dying), thought and assumed as the most certain and unavoidable possibility of being (and not mere as a givenness) which, as the

"how" of life, defines, articulates, opens up, and gives weight and sense – in an existential, ontological and constitutive way – to all other possibilities and modes of being and, as such, opens *Dasein's* freedom itself, because "freedom can only derive and come from where the *weight of being* also *derives* and *comes* from." However, there is still a need to clarify the issue of the "what" of history, namely by thematising the dimensions, the ecstasies of time. This is why in the second and the third chapters, the author focuses on the past and, respectively, on the future.

The second chapter (*"HAD-BEEN-NESS" AND PAST – History and Memory. An Essay in applied philosophical dialogue with Martin Heidegger*) begins with the idea that the issue of the past has not been raised (so far) "as a problem of being, but only as a problem of time" – a way of thinking by which solely temporal distance is that which makes something become past and in which "there are no relevant ontological differences between past and present, only methodological differences". On the contrary, says István Király, "Had Been" does not automatically form the Past, i.e. due to the simple "passage" of time. All of its possibilities of existence as such were suspended. That is to say, Had-Been-Ness is by itself detached of time, it is "outside" of time, and we are those who have the responsibility to choose what to assume, turning it into (our) Past because "Had-Been-Ness will only turn into an actual Past if we make it past, that is, if we make-pass that what Had-Been", and what to annihilate, in which case "nihilised Had-Been-Ness is a disappeared no-longer-being. We do not know about it when was it nor that it «was» at all because it does not even appear as absence on the horizon of forgetting." As a result, the Past "is not simply connected to time, but to ourselves", and in this connection it becomes a zone of our existential possibilities. We are open towards the Past, we are in search of it, and "there" we can find what Had Been, but what is to be noted is the very fact that what Had-Been, now, is not, that it is-no-longer, and "we can only liberate us from what Had Been and what we ourselves Had Been if we realize that we will never or no-longer be like that".

In the same manner as with the search for the past, if we search for the future "we are promised that which Will Be" but, which now, obviously, is not. However – as the author asserts in the third chapter (*The Future, Or, Questioningly Dwells the Mortal Man... Question-Points to Time*) – we should not think about this dimension of time only in a negative way (due to its Not-Yet-Being), because Future is "that what Is-Not-Yet (but) Will Then Be", this "Then"

opening a horizon of "highly articulated «positiveness»". This also applies in the case of death, which is always in the future, which is not yet, but which, as an unavoidable possibility of being, will (Then) definitely happen. Therefore, future is to be thought as a realm of possibilities, of our possibilities, revealed in the very process of questioning. That is why "future is something that always *pertains and belongs to us*."

Moreover, from an ontological perspective, by questioning this dimension of time (questioning the "When?", perceived as an existential category), we project ourselves into the future, holding the possibilities of (our) being. In this way, following the Heideggerian idea of human as *Dasein*, that is, of a being which "is" not, but rather has-to-be and which, "in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it", the mortal human being, says István Király, precisely because of its mortality, dwells questioningly. Thus, questionableness, in an existential-ontological sense, is a mode of being through which, from all possibilities of being which are opened, articulated and constituted by (our) death, we hold to our being, becoming ourselves. Consequently, if Being and the meaning of Being are held in this particular way and if man dwells questioningly precisely due to its mortality, then death "is exactly that «something» which originally holds in our existence... and which, as such, «gives» weight to our constraints with the past and the present, coming from and going towards the future."

However, claims István Király, starting with an idea presented by Heidegger, in order to become ourselves, to have an authentic existence, we must first "become mortals". That is to say, we must assume and make death-as-dying possible (and not only be aware of it) and, as such, to open and to free ourselves towards this certain possibility. And this can be done, as the author states, by philosophy alone. That is why, in the forth chapter of the book (*HISTORICALITY – MORTALITY – FACTICITY. The Foundation of Philosophy an Atheism in Heidegger`s Early Works – Prolegomena to an Existential-Ontological Perspective*), he states that philosophy is "a mode of existence of the Dasein" and, as such, it is that mode of being constituted against the "declining tendency of factual life", i.e. against the "how" of the non-authentic existence in the zone of the impersonal "it". As Heidegger declared, it is necessary that this philosophy become "fundamentally atheist". By this, it is envisaged that philosophy is to be totally non-biased and without any ideological implications. Also, this does not

make philosophy a comforting and consoling mode of being, but, as the author states, it is not in fact its role and task to be so; religion and perhaps sciences deal with consoling, but philosophy has to assume, to show, and to explicit the complexity and the difficulties of life.

The book ends with an Appendix (*Life – Death – Secret – Terrorism*), where the phenomenon of terrorism is analysed in the light of the above-mentioned explanations about death and also in the light of another subject preferred by István Király: the secret. "For terrorism cannot be understood – says he – without the secret and the instrumentalization of death, which presupposes and is conditioned by the denial of death". Moreover, terrorism is to be perceived as a mode of existence, because, once a person upholds an oath in a specific terrorist organisation, the oath involving the assumption that one will surely be put to death in case of betrayal, becoming thus an initiate, his identity is ontologically changed. He is no longer determined by any ethics or common "human" values because the power of the secret gives him "rights of disposing over life and death". Acting in secret is the very condition of the existence of terrorism and therefore here we should attack, if we want to fight against terrorism, its very core: the secret. Regarding the rapport established with the idea of death through sacrifice, terrorists want in fact to ensure their existence beyond life and, as such, they deny (their) death as dying, i.e. as that "something" that ends their existence.

To conclude, this book proposes reconsidering, from an existential-ontological point of view, the way in which we perceive the ecstasies of time and our relation with death. In his inquiry, István Király demonstrates that history itself exists only because we are mortal, that due to our mortality we questioningly dwell on the idea of death. This is our most certain and unavoidable possibility, that opens, articulates, constitutes and gives weight and sense to all other possibilities and modes of being.