

Article

Must the Apocalypse Disappoint? Philosophers in the Midst of Climate Change and Before

Alexander García Düttmann

Institute for Art History and Aesthetics, University of the Arts Berlin, 10623 Berlin, Germany;
a.garciaduetmann@udk-berlin.de

Abstract: Is self-preservation the only question humanity faces when confronted with self-induced annihilation? Must humanity not also ask whether there are different ways of extinguishing itself? Whether an extinction that a few impose on the many should not be distinguished from an extinction that results from a collective decision? Is there a self-extinction of humanity that can testify to its unity and autonomy rather than to its dividedness?

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A contemporary, perhaps a young philosopher, a volunteer who engages hands-on in a clean-up operation, finds a wet piece of paper or a flickering screen among the remains of a local catastrophe caused by climate change. A long sentence is typed on the piece of paper or appears on the flickering screen. The finder does not know who wrote it and why it was written. The sentence reads as follows: “Since the possibility of apocalypse is the result of our making, something produced with our own hands, a fate that we have brought onto ourselves, it is also up to us—or at least so it may seem—whether this possibility becomes a reality or not, whether we allow it to become a reality or not” (Anders 1981, p. 61).¹

The contemporary who reads this sentence will probably feel strongly inclined to relate it to the present times, to climate change, to the climate catastrophe or the climate apocalypse, to a transformation of the climate triggered by human dominion over, and exploitation of, nature. At its most radical, this transformation announces the destruction of the planet as a place that can be inhabited in ways familiar to us. It heralds the demise of the world as we know it. The sentence stems from an old and yet young philosopher, young on account of his unorthodox and unacademic way of thinking, young because of the pressing topic on which he dwells and because he belongs to the “first generation of last men” and hence of last philosophers (Anders 1981, p. 174). It stems from Günther Anders and was written in a different context, in the context of another change, another catastrophe, another apocalypse, namely in the context of the atomic threat that loomed at the end of the nineteen-fifties.

One might conclude from this fact that the apocalyptic, the “naked apocalypse” or the “apocalypse without kingdom,” of which Anders speaks occasionally, has turned into a distinctive trait of our times and of time itself since time is meant to be in jeopardy (Anders 1981, p. 207). It has ceased to accommodate events in its infinite, merely formal, neutral course. Time has become a “reprieve”, as Anders puts it, something conditioned, and cannot be seen as a merely “conditioning form” anymore (Anders 1981, p. 204). The apocalyptic contents may vary, yet the apocalyptic as a general trait remains, and the possibility of apocalypse as the self-destruction of humanity keeps perpetuating itself. On the one hand, one can no longer consider time a pure form of intuition that is independent of the apocalyptic event, a form that has a conditioning effect on the sequence of possible apocalyptic events without participating in them. On the other hand, time does not change with the appearance of each new apocalyptic threat. Thus the form of time is henceforth the quasi-form of the apocalyptic, generated by specific content, by the possibility of a

catastrophe that lies in the hands of man, who either causes or avoids it. However, what kind of hands are human hands if they induce humanity's self-annihilation? What does it mean to cause or avoid such annihilation? What can an apocalypse be that does not prompt a revelation, or give rise to an opening, and that seems to be so naked, so bereft of everything that it triggers only destructive effects, a destruction of the whole, as if revelation were external to it and as if it had to be disappointing? What is a hand that—as in the case of the atomic threat—simply needs to push a button to unleash the apocalypse, far away from where the destruction is supposed to happen and without giving its gesture, or its move, much thought? Is it a hand that disappoints? What is a hand that—as in the case of climate change—produces something that escapes the control of the producer, something that is not a discernible product but contributes to a chain of increasingly inconceivable and fateful events? Is it also a hand that disappoints, a sort of prosthesis, a hand within quotation marks, a disappointed hand? What is a causation that no longer recognises itself in whatever it causes, and what is an avoidance that must be regarded as unavoidable, at least to the extent that no change can be devised that would introduce “a new criterion for a new age”, a criterion capable of competing with the criterion that defines our current age, namely the “virtual self-annihilation of humanity” (Anders 1981, p. 205)? Are they a causation and an avoidance that disappoint? Even in a transformed world, non-capitalist or communist, the criterion adduced by Anders would still be decisive since the self-annihilation of humanity would still be technologically possible by firing bombs or carrying on with climate-changing practices. As redundant as avoidance may appear in such a world, it would continue to prove unavoidable. That the contents vary while the same quasi-form or quasi-mode stays more or less in place—from the atomic bomb to climate change the quasi-apocalyptic maintains itself unchanged—confirms the thesis that once the “possibility of apocalypse” has been disclosed, the “virtual self-annihilation of humanity” constitutes an end time, marks the end of times, inaugurates an age that can no longer be followed by a radically different one. Each future transformation of society and every coming social revolution will have to seek a “preservation” of humanity and the world, ensuring that humans do not use their technological means to eliminate themselves (Anders 1981, p. 206).

The disappointment at stake when it comes to the quasi-apocalyptic, the disappointment inherent in acts or actions carried out under the looming threat of the self-annihilation of humanity, results from a kind of amputation or mutilation of language. It is as if a restricted usage of concepts, and a restricted orientation in the world that this usage allows and makes possible, had replaced an unrestrained one. For example, an avoidance that has become unavoidable and hence generalised can no longer be deemed an avoidance. To avoid implies that one does not always avoid. The specificity of the act provides its strength to a successful avoidance and defines the weakness of an avoidance that fails. It is not just because it succeeds rather than failing that avoidance is successful but also because it relates from within itself, as it were, to a conduct that is not an avoidance, whether one succeeds or fails. When avoidance ceases to relate to other, unrelated acts or actions, to a conduct or a behaviour that has nothing to do with averting, when it is generalised and becomes a symptom, it stops being an avoidance that succeeds or fails and thus comes to fail precisely by succeeding. It is as if avoidance, to be what it is meant to be, had to affirm itself in a larger context in which other acts or actions that have no relation to it need to affirm themselves as well. Disappointment itself turns out to be disappointing under conditions of generalised avoidance not because it cannot measure up to its contrary, to fulfilment, but because when everything one does results in disappointment, the time and the space in which one could experience it as such do not exist anymore. When the mode or the quasi-form of apocalypse prevails, the apocalypse without kingdom or a disappointing apocalypse, then disappointment turns into quasi-disappointment. When apocalypse prevails as a possibility, a mode, a form or a quasi-form, it turns into quasi-apocalypse, regardless of how it has come to prevail. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the apocalypse has come to prevail by means of a technological disclosure of the

possibility of a self-annihilation of humanity—this disclosure creates the atomic threat—and through the devastating and self-defeating effects of technology in the service of a system of uncontrolled and uncontrollable capitalist exploitation—from which climate change ensues.

Perhaps this is also the reason why, with the generalisation of the threat, its recognisability dwindles, is “even totally” pre-empted, a paradox to which Anders points (Anders 1981, p. 64). And perhaps it is also the reason why no matter how many justified warnings are emitted and how many samples of an imminent catastrophe are collected, recognition as a recognition of the whole, of a doomed totality, remains tied to the fatality of a too-late, to a delay that prevents it from being a total recognition of totality. The total, unavoidable and disappointing character of such hindrance seems to be programmed by the whole, or by totality itself.

We must always avoid the worst, and its recognition always comes too late. “What we no longer own—having let go of it or having invested it with the form of theory or the shape of a thing—we own forever, or rather: it owns ‘us’ forever”, Anders remarks and provides yet another clue to the withdrawal of totality and the disappointment that this withdrawal produces (Anders 1981, p. 58). Precisely by penetrating and mastering the whole, that is, so-called nature, precisely by giving a form to such penetration and mastering, precisely by setting free and subduing energies technologically, energies that can destroy the entire world and all of humanity in the guise of bombs and environmental destruction, the whole, or totality, becomes impenetrable and cannot be mastered. What mankind is capable of doing—its abilities and competences—collapses invariably into its opposite. What preserves itself through the form it receives turns into something alien. This collapse and this alienation block any possible recognition and understanding of what is going on. However, what befalls us is what we ourselves have brought about, not something foreign and other that heads towards us from outside and eventually collides with us violently. Quasi-apocalypse is inscribed within the most insignificant act of reification without which there would not be dominion over, and exploitation of, nature. It follows that a humanity that takes steps against its self-annihilation is never primarily an agent who has recognised something of the greatest importance, or an agent who achieves a cognitive act.

In his book on the atomic threat, on end time and the end of times, Anders argues against the identification of humanity’s self-annihilation with a suicidal deed. For when annihilating itself, humanity does not act as a unified, autonomous, all-encompassing subject. It is true that “from the perspective of the impending catastrophe”, something like a unity emerges that can be called humanity (Anders 1981, p. 63). Yet this humanity is unable to remove the threat and ward off the catastrophe inasmuch as its unity is the result of the impending or threatening catastrophe itself. What prohibits an identification of self-annihilation with suicide is therefore the absence of a unity that would not simply be an effect and thus remain subjugated to heteronomy. What prohibits such an identification is the disjointedness of humankind, or social antagonism. Disjointedness, or social antagonism, disallows a fully accomplished humanity from being anything except an ideal or an unattained revolutionary goal. Anders comments: “To maintain that the billions of real people who live on earth could make a decision concerning their own fate, the fate of billions, and that they could do so in a ‘manly’ fashion and with one mind, would be utter nonsense” (Anders 1981, p. 62). If an idealisation of suicide, as an act committed by an active subject, is to be avoided, the difference between a self-annihilation and a suicide of humanity cannot be justified by alleging that “in the case of genuine suicide” the perpetrator and the victim must be “identical”, while this kind of identity does not apply “in the case of the so-called ‘nuclear suicide’” (Anders 1981, p. 65). Let us assume that one could disregard this problem. Let us also assume that one could disregard the possibility that there may be no unity of the whole and the subject that belongs to it other than a unity that is imposed and extorted, a unity conducive to the pursuit of particular interests and the renewal of social antagonisms, a unity consisting in divisiveness and hence a self-undermining unity. Finally, let us assume that one could disregard the fact that for as

long as the idea of a unity of humanity, or of an identity attributed to the all-encompassing social subject, stays informed by the strength of a “manly” fashion, as trustingly as Anders may have employed this expression, self-annihilation will continue to be annihilation without a self, without humanity, an annihilation forced upon humanity and its self. One would still have to ask how Anders intends to distinguish himself from a certain type of theorist when he writes: “Those theorists who project a positive meaning onto the little word ‘can,’ which indicates nothing but inability and unfreedom in the context of the atomic threat, and who see humanity as an active agent free to commit suicide, are all counterfeiters” (Anders 1981, p. 66).

Does such forgery originate in the substitution of a now-already for a not-yet, in the fiction of a humanity that can commit collective suicide, in the illusion of an apocalypse that does not disappoint? Or is the free choice of suicide itself ultimately rooted in a lack of freedom, in an inability that masks itself as an ability, in a forgery? Must the self-annihilation of humanity always disappoint because it can never amount to a collective suicide, irrespective of how many humans take their lives simultaneously? Even if all humans decided to put an end to their lives at the same time, it would not make a difference. Perhaps there exists a third and more abysmal option, mentioned by Karl Jaspers in a radio address from 1956 on the atomic bomb and the future of man. Its ambiguity lies in the manner in which Jaspers uses the concepts of ability and liberation when referring to forces in nature that are set free:

If today reassurance seeks to find a hold again, drawing on a feeling of impossibility that arises from the enormity of what lies beyond the horizon of normal comprehension, we must turn against it on the basis of the well-known facts and ask with utmost seriousness: why should humanity not be *able* to perish, to do so sooner rather than later? It is in fact something enormous and outrageous that man can relocate the cosmic energies, or the force of solar substance, onto the earth itself by setting it free from earthly matter, in which it lay still until the present moment (Jaspers 1957, pp. 16–17).²

Is humanity supposed to perish quickly because it does not deserve any better, its quick perishing amounting to a just punishment or an act of mercy? Or should it extinguish itself quickly because its self-induced extinction would be the highest possible recognition of its abilities, an event on a par with abilities both human and suprahuman?

The omen of apocalypse or quasi-apocalypse that presides over the avoidance of a fate that humanity itself has set in motion, and also over the transformation that the world requires if it is to be preserved, cannot be dislodged from its hegemonical position. For “never will we be able to unlearn an ability that belongs to our culture as a whole and to our technical practices—as part of the stock constituted by science and its instruments”, to quote Anders one more time (Anders 1981, p. 56). The ability to do something proves stronger than the ability not to do it, or, to express the same thought differently, the possibility of apocalypse cannot be excised from the fabric, the memory, the archive, the concept of humanity, not by the same hands that designed and dropped the bomb. These hands will be able to do so only at the cost of a last and final manipulation that will still testify to the power, the intellectual and technical ingeniousness and the expertise needed to establish the possibility of apocalypse.

In his text “The Apocalypse Is Disappointing”, first published in a French journal in 1964 and then republished in the collection of essays *Friendship* in 1971, Maurice Blanchot shows how one can relate to the possibility of apocalypse not in the sense of a blind, deluded or heteronomous relationship of humans—of monsters—annihilating each other, but differently—so differently that the omen of apocalypse or quasi-apocalypse begins to vanish, as if the apocalypse, the nuclear threat and mankind’s destruction of itself, did not always and necessarily have to be a disappointing event. Blanchot takes the path chosen by Anders without referring to the writings of the Austrian philosopher, which were probably unknown to him. He refuses to identify the self-annihilation of humanity with suicide, emphasising that humanity, capable of destroying itself “totally”, does “not

yet" exist as a "totality". On the one hand, there is a "*pouvoir*", a "power" or an ability that is unable to realise or actualise itself, that is devoid of the force required to pass into reality or actuality, to stand on firm ground and to gain standing (Blanchot 1997c, p. 106). On the other hand, however, human community or society can be annihilated. It can be annihilated but not affirmed, as if the ability to self-annihilate had to measure itself against the ability to affirm and, unable to do so, turned out to be deficient, insufficient, bereft of an able agent or subject. Total annihilation is an annihilation that cannot even achieve what it achieves. Its power, the power with which science has invested mankind, bears within itself a strange impotence and weakness. Perhaps this impotence and weakness makes annihilation all the more violent and terrible. Perhaps nothing is more destructive than an annihilation without annihilation or the "platitude of an end devoid of importance", or devoid of "universality" (Blanchot 1997c, p. 107). Such an end does not attract and deserve attention. It provokes neither elevating exaltation nor devastating despair. The end to which an inconsistent, non-unified and antagonistically split humanity puts itself is not reflexive; it is a fact without a concept, a negation in which the force of negativity is not at work, an event outside reason. Blanchot writes: "It is very probable that humanity would have no fear of this power of the end if it could recognise it in a decision that belonged exclusively to it, on condition thus of being truly the subject and not simply the object of it" (Blanchot 1997c, p. 106).³

Hence Blanchot relates false, non-total, senseless self-annihilation, the apocalypse that is disappointing, to another self-annihilation, to an apocalypse that does not disappoint, to a self-annihilation that corresponds truly to a power or an ability of mankind, that is really a possibility of human existence, a possibility that humanity has disclosed and appropriated, a possibility that can evolve into a universal, conceptually determined, intelligible reality, a possibility in the hands of a unified and autonomous subject. Humanity can only annihilate itself genuinely, according to truth, if the human community has realised itself and conquered its "real freedom", the freedom that derives from its autonomy, and if reason or Spirit has revealed itself to be a "principle of unity" because it has founded a rational whole or totality that "must be called—in the full sense—communist" (Blanchot 1997c, p. 107). As can be easily gauged, Blanchot's approach differs from the one to be found in Günther Anders's, no matter how close they come to each other. The difference lies in the role that Blanchot attributes to totality, which appears as the pivotal point of the argument, as the double turning point of history, as the turning point of an awareness followed by an appropriation. Anders does not conceive of totality as something that can change totally, as an "idea", to quote Blanchot, that "arises visibly and for the first time" on the horizon along with the possibility of humanity annihilating itself in a nuclear war (Blanchot 1997c, p. 105). Mankind must preserve itself through change in the face of an atomic threat that will weigh on human life until it reaches its end. However, if we follow Anders, mankind cannot take control of this threat by founding a totality that will liberate it from its continued exposure to the imminence of a fateful disaster. Mankind cannot choose its own demise willingly in order to invalidate the threat, to catch up with the premise or the omen of the apocalyptic or quasi-apocalyptic and integrate them into its own powers or abilities, as something that it does not fear anymore because it recognises itself fully within it.

The only apocalypse that does not disappoint is the apocalypse that humans can affirm because it results from their power and their ability, the power and the ability of reason or Spirit. It results from a cognising, determining, founding interpenetration of the world, the universe, the whole. Blanchot stresses that such cognition and determination imply the "possibility of destruction", in Anders's words the "possibility of apocalypse" (Blanchot 1997c, p. 105). Will man be able to cognise and determine the world without setting boundaries for himself, for science and technology, boundaries that inhibit his freedom, his becoming, his risky and essentially open relationship to himself and that signify his destruction, or a non-revealing self-annihilation? Will the totality be able to recognise and determine itself in the movement of the subject? Only if humanity ceases to deny, to negate, to avoid or to ward off the "possibility of destruction" or the "possibility

of apocalypse” that lies within its power and abilities, that it can be aware of and master. Only if humanity is no longer forced to keep this possibility in check in the name of its own preservation. Only if humanity is able to channel the force of destruction into an affirmation of the whole to which it gives shape, into an affirmation of itself as a whole endowed with the “infinite power of negation” (Blanchot 1997c, p. 105).

Blanchot even goes one step further. It is true that from a scientific and technological viewpoint, from the viewpoint of the human will to knowledge and from the viewpoint of the understanding’s “demystification” of apocalypse, there appears to be something small-time, paltry and disappointing about the atomic bomb (Blanchot 1997c, p. 108). Doubtless, humans can destroy life on earth by making it explode. Yet the reach of their destructiveness does not extend to the universe. As a consequence, the “idea of totality” that arises with the atomic bomb fails to be more than merely an “idea”. The atomic bomb does not really make totality accessible, does not really destroy it, not even when its explosion affects the whole world, or when the whole world succumbs to a nuclear war. However, Spirit, or reason, knows how to instrumentalise the understanding that produces the atomic bomb, since it is by way of the understanding that Spirit, or reason, is supposed to come into its own and achieve rational knowledge. Spirit, or reason, empowers itself and takes possession of itself through the understanding’s separating, dissolving, analytical activity. According to the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, on which Blanchot draws explicitly in his text, such activity is not just one form of power but “absolute power” (Hegel 2005, p. 127). Blanchot paraphrases Hegel’s thought in the following manner: “Understanding is held to the whole by negation” (Blanchot 1997c, p. 105). It is as if Spirit, or reason, were in need of the atomic bomb, of the possibility of a self-annihilation of humanity, of an explosion of totality, in order for the whole to become a whole of rational knowledge, the whole of a knowing, rationally configured, communist humanity. Without the atomic bomb, without an apocalypse that disappoints, there is no totality, no fulfilling apocalypse, no humanity that might know what it does because it commands its constitutive or essential “infinite incompleteness” (Blanchot 1997c, p. 105). The spiritual totality, the totality of reason, the totality of knowledge, science and technology,⁴ the totality of community and the all-encompassing social subject that emerges in the wake of the “absolute power” of division and separation, of antagonism, violent struggle and warfare, brings into play the “possibility of apocalypse” as the still unmastered and irrational possibility of a fulfilling apocalypse, as a possibility that threatens to get lost in the fateful self-annihilation of humanity. Before it can take advantage of it and turn against it, reason or Spirit must lack the force or power to leave this possibility behind and assert, or affirm, itself against the “destructive totality” (Blanchot 1997c, p. 107).

If reason hesitates to drop the bomb because it seeks to avoid the self-annihilation of humanity, it remains all the more caught up in the “destructive totality”. In the guise of the understanding, it manufactures nothing but such bombs. However, this is also true of reason when it dares to launch a nuclear missile and in so doing keeps promoting the self-annihilation of humanity. Who will ever be able to say the contrary? There cannot, by definition, exist a testimony to the self-annihilation of humanity in its totality—to the destruction of the universe, not simply of the world. This aporetic situation allows, for example, Alenka Zupančič to mock the naivety of an unrealistic and unworldly philosopher in the commentary she wrote on Blanchot’s essay. The unrealistic and unworldly philosopher imagines communist totality as an “organic, harmonious” whole, not as a whole that “does not disavow its own antagonism(s)” (Zupančič 2017–2018, p. 22). Yet is not the recognition of “antagonism(s)” in the whole which itself relies on the whole, or on the idea of totality, necessarily the recognition of “antagonism(s)” that have been overcome? If so, one is faced with a disappointing option. Either one must denounce the constitution of the whole as a forgery or a sleight of hand, as an illicit anticipation, since it already presupposes the result, the constituted whole, and since its “antagonism(s)” do not really need to be recognised because there was never any antagonism in the first place, not a real

one. Or else the constitution of the whole remains bound to a lucky turn of events that signals towards an outside of the whole and thus disavows it after all.

Let us assume that the aporia could be solved, the aporia of reason, Spirit, totality that is also the aporia of the understanding, at least inasmuch as the understanding is meant to be reason before reason. Let us assume that it could be solved by a magic power or force that accrues to patience, to a lingering in the vicinity of the aporia. In this case, a disappointing apocalypse would not distinguish itself from a fulfilling one on the basis of a disappearance of the nuclear threat and the threat of climate change from the world, the universe, the whole, as one might expect. Rather, it would distinguish itself by the fact that now the threat would be brought about by Spirit, reason, communism or the real and true whole.

Would the threat then still be a threat? If not, what would it be, exactly? What would be the risk, the gamble that we, the humans, would take upon ourselves readily and affirmingly, resolutely, so as to “be ourselves” (Blanchot 1997c, p. 105)?⁵ What kind of test would humanity undergo, to what sort of haunting would it expose itself, what manner of resistance would it oppose to fate or to a disappointing apocalypse? What would be a humanity worthy of living on once survival would no longer depend on an instinct of self-preservation? What would be a humanity at the height of spiritual life, a humanity eternally dying and surviving *in and for itself*? What would such a humanity be able to achieve? What would be an apocalypse at the point where disappointment and fulfilment, elimination and preservation, self-annihilation and suicide, destruction and creation touch upon each other and where the human and the monstrous, the human and the suprahuman become indistinguishable?

In a footnote added to his text, Blanchot equates two kinds of certainty. When humanity is able to destroy not only the world but the entire universe, it will have appropriated the universe’s determinate existence. “In some sense” it will have the certainty of being able to create this existence itself (Blanchot 1997c, p. 105).⁶ The certain ability required for the destruction of the whole cannot be told apart from the certain ability required for the whole’s creation. Would man not stop being man at the very instant when he could create and destroy himself and define himself by a ubiquitous “I know” and “I can”? Would his “infinite incompleteness” not have reached a closure, the closure of the absolute subject?

Too late. Let us assume that it is too late to avoid the catastrophe of a self-annihilation of humanity. The climate change it has itself provoked will extinguish humanity eventually. Or it will be extinguished by an impending war that will be just as bad as, or perhaps even worse than, the nuclear war that loomed some sixty, seventy years ago. President Joe Biden, availing himself of a prognostic and cautionary language, recently described this war as a “real” one. Let us assume that the question of who—which scientist or group of scientists—could credibly demonstrate the irrevocability of imminent apocalyptic events has been settled without further contestation. Let us assume that the assessment of the irreversibility of boundaries drawn, of boundaries limiting what can be accomplished technically, technologically and politically, is no longer an inadmissible form of illicit interference. Under such circumstances, nothing appears to be more urgent than founding and establishing a communist totality whose measure and challenge is the collective self-annihilation of humanity. For it would be an endeavour that would have to prove itself even more urgently than under conditions of unimpeded self-preservation and unthreatened survival, no matter how many insurmountable difficulties it would encounter. Some difficulties have already been singled out, namely the difficulties arising from the aporetic concept of a rational transformation of the whole, or from its scope (the world, the universe), or from an ability that merges undecidably with another ability that excludes it—the ability to destroy, the ability to create. One could also add a further difficulty to the list, the difficulty of appraising the consequences that deadly climate change, on the one hand, and human self-annihilation, on the other, will have for plants and animals. Regardless of all these many difficulties, one could go ahead and boldly venture the thesis that every foundation and establishment of a communist totality “in the full sense”, which entails the

possibility not of the whole's destruction but of its self-destruction, is in need of a "too-late", at least if it is not to get caught up in the ropes of self-preservation and exploitation, of domination of nature and of thinking oriented towards efficiency, maximisation and profit. It is such thinking, not the thesis ventured, that expresses a defeatism of reason, a nihilism of the human way of life or a death-driven resignation. At stake here is doing what cannot be done and doing it for nothing, not for us. Would such doing not be a kind of doing that deserves its name, a doing without doing, the transpiring of a humanity that does not exist as yet, that cannot affirm itself and claim a right to existence? Can there exist any other humanity, any other totality? At stake here is doing what cannot be done because founding and establishing a totality is never something that one can simply do and that can be done with ease. Totality withdraws from what is doable or makeable, from what allows itself to be realised and accomplished. Doing it, bringing about the totality under the circumstances of a "too-late", would thus also mean doing it without (a) reason. In this sense, too, it would defy and thwart what is doable or makeable and contribute to a real doing or making.

Would the young philosopher into whose hands an anonymous sentence has fallen, the sentence about the possible and at the same time impossible avoidance of a self-imposed apocalyptic fate ("... or at least so it may seem ..."), be willing to press forward and commit himself to the fiction of a "too-late" and its global relevance for humanity? Or would he then have to burden himself with too much anachronistic philosophical baggage and too much idealistic conservatism? What would he be ready to admit and take on, how much climate change, how much apocalypse? What would he be prepared to allow himself?

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Notes

- ¹ This is a new edition of a work originally entitled *Endzeit und Zeitenende*, or *End Time and The End Of Times*.
- ² Emphasis added. The strange possibility Jaspers mentions here must be distinguished from a possibility that concerns political decisions. At the time he presents his radio address, wars are fought "using all technological means available except for the atomic bomb" (Jaspers 1957, p. 23). Since they take place under the conditions of a world split into two hostile power blocks, at some point they cannot but confront the "free States" with a clear alternative: "Utilisation of the atomic bomb or acceptance of totalitarianism? Risk of an annihilation of humans or relinquishment of freedom?" (Jaspers 1957, p. 23) It is this politicisation of decision making that Anders has in mind when, in the passage about theorists as counterfeiters, he states that Jaspers comes "damn" (Anders 1981, p. 66) close to a position that tries to extort a "positive meaning"—the meaning of a collective suicide—from the self-annihilation of humanity. What could Jaspers, who in his radio address takes into account that "the totalitarian privation of freedom" would not make life forever "unworthy of being lived", reply to this objection? (Jaspers 1957, p. 6) He could reply that those who have been robbed of their freedom would still participate in the decision making, namely by proxy, as if the free people, the people living in "free States", had liberated them after all. Does the dispute turn on an understanding of politics as politics of substitution and replacement? Just as the ones in power who claim the right to decide whether or not bombs should be dropped, or launched, that destroy both humanity and nature take the place of those on whom the decision is imposed, those who in the name of freedom vindicate a proxy-politics take the place of the ones who are said to be, or who actually are, unfree. It is assumed that the decision they would make could only be the decision made by the free ones, a decision in favour of humanity's self-annihilation. In a hopeless situation, self-annihilation must always be preferred to totalitarianism and its unfreedom. As is well known, the popular slogan, or saying, into which this argument can be translated, runs, or reads, "rather dead than red". Mere or bare life, self-preservation, should not be placed above the reasons for continuing, or ceasing, to live. Proxy-politics is informed by a philosopheme.
- ³ The text ends with a eulogy to the understanding that is also a warning. This means that it contains a fearful element that proves reasonable and incompatible with the understanding. While the understanding has an enlightening effect and prepares the coming of reason, of Spirit—they found the whole, or totality—reason must mistrust the understanding because it takes away fear, the kind of fear that "misleads" but also the kind of fear that "warns" (Blanchot 1997c, p. 108).
- ⁴ In the essay on disappointing apocalypse, Blanchot endorses the right to scientific knowledge, the right to boundlessness, to the illimitability that pertains to the concept of man. In the essay on "Marx's three voices", statements or discourses, that immediately precedes the essay on disappointing apocalypse in the book *Friendship*, Blanchot observes that the word "science" is a "key word" of the present (Blanchot 1997a, p. 100). Yet he also reminds the reader of the dependence of the "scientificity of science"

(ibid.) on ideology, on an ideological character that no particular or regional science can shed. In the essay on Mascolo's attempt to approach communism, an essay that in the order of the aforementioned book comes just before the essay on "Marx's three voices", statements or discourses, domination of nature is said to be an indispensable element of Marxism. Man must, Blanchot claims along with Mascolo, liberate himself from things by making himself into a thing, into an active and productive means (Blanchot 1997b, p. 110).

⁵ At the beginning of his text, Blanchot polemises against Jaspers, and rightly so. He turns against the German philosopher's traditional idealistic conservatism. His own claims notwithstanding, Jaspers, Blanchot writes, does not allow himself to be disturbed by the disruptive event of the atomic bomb's explosion. Yet "The Apocalypse Is Disappointing" and "The Atomic Bomb and the Future of Humanity" also share a trust in reason or an elevation of reason above the understanding in the face of the nuclear threat. That Blanchot regards reason as the founder of unity and totality, while Jaspers sees it as a "purifying flame" (Jaspers 1957, p. 27), signifies that they both consider it to be the sole cure or remedy that can save humanity from falsity, a false totality, and disappointment.

⁶ The English translation of this footnote does not seem to grasp Blanchot's meaning.

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