Titre	Quelques implications de la phénoménologie existentielle / Richard Turner
Auteurs	Turner, Richard (1941-1978) Auteur.
Adresse	[S.l.] : [s.n.], 1966
Collation	1 vol. (131 f.) ; in-4

Thèse	Thèse d'université : Lettres : Paris : 1966
Langue	fre
Pays	FR
No. de contrôle	174782861
NO. NOTICE	http://www.sudoc.fr/174782861
Sujet rameau	Phénoménologie
	Thèses et écrits académiques

THESE présentée à la FACULTE DES LETTRES

de l'UNIVERSITE DE PARIS

pour obtenir la titre de Docteur de l'Université par

Richard Turner

Some implications of existential phenomenology

THESE

présentée

à la

FACULTE DES LETTRES

de l'

UNIVESITE DE PARIS.

pour obtenir le titre de Docteur de l'Université

par

Richard TURNER

Quelques implications de la phèmenologie existentielle

Table of Contents

Introduction. 'The ghost in the machine and intentionality'[1] TOC

If I try to determine how I should behave towards others, I immediately find myself immersed in complex philosophical problems. First, what is the structure of my relationship with others? To answer this question, I need to know what *I* am and what *others* are – so I need to identify my original relationship with the world before I can address moral and political issues. In other words, all moral and political theories imply a theory about the nature of man and the world.

The most general problem found in philosophical books is whether or not the world in which humans, trees, cars and elephants exist is 'real', or whether it is entirely imaginary, or the 'appearance' of some deeper reality. So we will start with this problem.

We will see that this is a pseudo-problem, and from our analysis we will derive a method that will allow us to avoid several philosophical pitfalls.

What do these questions about the reality of the world mean? How can they be answered? Let's start with a more familiar question of the same type.

What do I mean when I ask myself whether something is real? If I ask myself, 'Is that rat real?', I want to know whether the rat exists *in the world*, in the same way that this chair, this pen, this book exist. There are methods of verification, all of which involve not thinking but looking in the world of things and people. The word 'real' derives its meaning from this world. It is clear that if the question about the reality of the world means, 'Does the world exist in the same way as this chair, this pen, this book?', it is not [2] possible to answer it, because it is nonsense. When we ask whether something is real, we already know what 'real' means, and indeed 'the world' means 'what is real' (in everyday language, if not always in philosophical language). Thus, to ask whether the world itself is real is to ask a question that is devoid of any meaning.

---

1   [FvG: Addenda by the translator are in [square brackets]. I express my gratitude to Dan O'Meara for checking especially the translations of Sartre quotations against the original - as well as many other passages. The original can be consulted by clicking on its title page, which is reproduced above. The page breaks and pagination of the original are marked here by numbers in [blue]. The occasional footnote by the translator is meant as a stimulus for further discussion.

The original has a hand-written label on the cover page: "RT's Doctoral Dissertation from the Sorbonne". It needs to be pointed out that this is not the equivalent of a Ph.D., but rather that of an M.A.]

The mistake comes from separating the word 'real' from its everyday context in order to ask a very general question. There is always a danger in doing this. A word derives its meaning from its context, and by forgetting the everyday context, we risk either changing or destroying that meaning. Therefore, if we want to ask such questions, we must first analyse the words we want to use. Otherwise, we will get lost in irreconcilable contradictions. This can be easily demonstrated in the case of Descartes. It is true that the fact that we can doubt our reality implies that we exist. But it also implies much more. First, it implies an understanding of 'doubt' and therefore of 'knowledge'. Secondly, as I have just shown, doubting the reality of something implies the world as reality. Thirdly, the act of doubting is a project, that is, a relationship of means and ends in time, and thus implies not only that man is not confined to an 'instantaneous' present, but also that the meaning of words remains stable, and the possibility of memory. These concepts: knowledge, world, time, language, memory (and undoubtedly others) provide us with the context in which all our activities take place, including our philosophical activities.

Merleau-Ponty expresses it this way:

> For if I can speak of 'dreams' and 'reality', question the distinction between the imaginary and the real, and cast doubt on the 'real', [3] it is because I have already made this distinction before analysis, because I have experience of the real as well as the imaginary, and the problem is then not to seek how critical thinking can give itself secondary equivalents of this distinction, but to explain our primordial knowledge of the 'real', to describe the perception of the world as that which forever grounds our idea of truth. We should not therefore ask ourselves whether we really perceive a world; on the contrary, we should say: the world is what we perceive. (*PP* xi)

How could Descartes have been so mistaken as to believe that he could doubt the reality of the world? From a logical point of view, philosophy is a secondary activity, an activity of reflection. An act of reflection takes place in a context of pre-reflective (or unreflective) activity. When I want to reflect on a (pre-reflective) act that I have done, I consider it in the context of other pre-reflective acts. A few examples will be useful here. If I am eating lunch, I do not constantly repeat to myself, 'Here I am eating lunch.' I am busy putting peas on my fork, or I am listening to my companion's exciting account of what he saw on TV last night. There is no reflection. However, if someone in the next room asks me what I am doing, I immediately reply, 'I am having lunch.' This is the simplest form of reflection; it is simply a matter of verbally expressing what I am doing at that moment. Then I might be asked, 'Why are you having lunch?' This question, if it has its usual mean-

ing, requires little more thought. I answer, 'Because I was hungry,' or 'I always have lunch at this time so I can listen to the news.' I place my action in the context of my day or my daily life. There is no discovery in either case. It is simply a matter of thematising what was *already there.* [4]

To answer a philosophical question, which is by definition an unusual question, we must first analyse the very words that make up the question. For it is not only that the question refers me back to my pre-reflexive actions, but the words and their meanings are not given in their entirety in the 'moment'. There is a pre-reflexive dimension to words. Therefore, an analysis of the vocabulary used by the philosopher implies, or rather is, a description and 'explication' of the pre-reflexive. It is a matter of beginning philosophy with ontology, according to Jeanson's definition that 'ontology is an extension of description, it *renders explicit*; metaphysics is an extension of science, it seeks to *explain*' (Jeanson 146), and not by the classical route of epistemology. But I prefer Ryle's definition, for whom, in *The Concept of Mind*, it is a matter of 'not increasing what we know about minds, but of *rectifying the logical geography* of the knowledge we already possess' (p. 7) (my emphasis). In both cases, it is a matter of explicating what Sartre calls 'pre-ontological understanding' (*EN* 203), but the word 'ontology', which is rather ambiguous, is perhaps unfortunate. Especially because it suggests that we are going to talk about 'Being'. The word 'being' is not a noun. As Jean Wahl says, the idea of "being" is a 'grammatical myth'. (*L'Expérience Métaphysique* 192).

Descartes forgot the pre-reflexive context, the pre-ontological understanding. (There is always a tendency to hypostasise words in this way). This led him to another very serious error. A pre-reflexive act, such as the act of eating, involves the use of the hands and mouth, the calculation of the relative widths of my mouth and the potato I want to put in it, etc. That is to say, it is partly 'intellectual' and [5] partly "physical" (although this formulation, which itself comes from Descartes' errors, is very inaccurate). But reflection seems to be totally 'intellectual' and does not seem to directly imply the existence of either my body or the things of this world. The result of this is that Descartes was able to conclude that, although his existence as a thinking being was certain, there was no necessary connection between this and the existence of his body. He believed that he could know his mind with greater certainty than his body, and thus introduced the problem of how res cogitans could know res extensa. The outcome of all this is what Gilbert Ryle calls 'the ghost in the machine' (see *The Concept of Mind*). I am a mind, located inside a machine, into which signals from the 'outside world' enter, which I must then translate in order to form a representation

of that 'outside world'. Thus Descartes and his successors were faced with the problem: can I form a *true* 'representation' of this world? And how can I do so?

But their problem is flawed, because there is no reason to accept the initial description of the relationship between 'mind' and 'matter'.

I do not claim to offer a detailed critique of Descartes. I am merely criticising the idea that there is 'a substance whose entire essence or nature is nothing but thinking' (6th *meditation*, p. 121) – the ghost – and that there is also a body, the machine, which is distinct from this substance. Ryle uses the idea of a 'ghost' to indicate something that is real and independent, but which exists on a different "level" from the body, and this is what we want to deny. I will use the adjective 'Cartesian' to describe such theories, not to refer to Descartes' ideas. [6]

It seems to me that it is almost impossible to underestimate the harmful effects of this description. Almost all of Descartes' successors have worked within this framework of a 'closed' mind and a 'closed' object, and the vocabulary has crept into the sciences. It has become the vocabulary of Western thought.

In addition, this theory required the invention of objects called 'sensations,' which no one has ever seen or heard, to explain the everyday fact that we see trees and elephants. (In English we have the expression 'sense data', and we can more easily distinguish between the sensation I experience when, for example, I burn my hand, and the 'sensation' – a technical and philosophical term – that I am supposed to experience when I see a tree. It is the existence of this second kind of sensation that I dispute). In fact, no matter how I analyse my perceptions, I cannot divide them in a precise or detailed way. How many coloured spots make up this table? How long do they last? Such questions cannot be answered. I do not see coloured spots, I see a table. (See J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibility*, and also *EN* 377-8.)

The usual solution to the problem of sensations – the postulation of a 'constituting ego' or a 'synthesising ego' – introduces a new difficulty. Locke invented 'sensations' in order to solve the original problem posed by the difficulty of escaping the machine, and then a 'constituting ego' of the Cartesian type had to be invented in order to explain the coherence of these objects that are supposed to be discrete. Thus the problem of solipsism, inherent in Descartes' position, became even more difficult to solve. [7]

Let's address this question of solipsism. If it is difficult for a ghost trapped in a machine to learn what is happening outside, it is even more difficult for it to learn what another ghost trapped in another machine is doing.

Even if it could observe the other machine in some way, it could not observe the other ghost; thus, it can only rely on highly questionable analogies to admit that the other ghost is there.

To express the argument in a less tendentious way, the question is: Do I have 'privileged access' to my own mind (consciousness), or can others know as much about it as I do? In the first case, I can have no immediate reason to believe that others exist in the same way as I do. It must therefore be shown that there are not *two* 'worlds', one internal (and private) and the other external. We have already seen that Descartes' reasons for such a distinction are not valid. It must also be shown that there are no phenomena that such a theory could explain.

If I am asked to describe myself, I might reply that I am honest, somewhat stingy, gentle, ambitious but lazy, interested in politics, and that I like classical music, mountaineering and plump girls. I do not think there is any other *category* of answer possible. Is this answer, in any way, an account of some secret 'inner state' that no one could observe, or could an attentive and well-placed observer verify it?

What do I mean when I say I am honest? Nothing more than that in most cases I tell the truth, even if it puts me at a slight disadvantage, that if I find a hundred-franc note in the street I hand it in to the police, and that I do not express the same political opinions [8] as the people I am with in order to please them. All these acts are activities that others can observe as well as I can. But perhaps I observe them without the possibility of error, whereas others might be mistaken. Admittedly, I am in a better position than others to say whether I have told the truth recently. But that is only because I am *always there* when I do something. Someone else could always be there with me (a Siamese twin, for example) and thus be as well informed as I am. And I may well forget yesterday's little lie and even convince myself that what I am saying is the truth. So I am not infallible even in the case of particular lies.

I am no more infallible, and I could even be led to admit that I am wrong, when I attribute a character trait to myself. For example, if my friend points out that I usually falsify my tax returns, that I occasionally accept too much change, and that, although I call myself a Christian, I do not love my neighbour, I may, after reflection, admit this and agree that I am indeed not honest at all. To a certain extent, a good observer who knows me well would probably give more accurate information about my character than I would, since I might want to believe that I am honest, whereas it is of no consequence to him.

Thus, the question of my honesty is not decided somewhere in my heart or my brain, but in the world, in the sense that Sartre says:

> We would like to show here that the Ego is neither formally nor materially in consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*, it is a being of the world like the Ego of others. (*TE* 13).

(Sartre himself gives the example of Clovis' ambition – "How would Clovis' ambition [9] have differed from the specific project of conquering Gaul?" (*EN* 525) – i.e. ambition is not a 'pre-existing motive').

If, after you have shown me that I am dishonest, I tell you that I am determined to change and become honest, it could be argued that I have privileged access to my intention, which you cannot verify. First, you *can* verify it if you ask me, 'Are you sure?' and if you observe my facial expression while pointing out the consequences (10 years of taxes, etc.) of this intention that I claim to have.

This intention is nothing outside of my statement. (The fact that I might want to deceive you is no more a reason for you to doubt all these statements than the possibility of illusion is a reason for you to doubt the reality of the world). I test the truth of my intention in much the same way as you do. And, no more than you, do I know whether I will actually be honest; just like you, I have to wait and see what I will do.

Part of the problem of solipsism here stems from a bias in favour of the present. We believe that if I cannot verify what you say about yourself at the very moment you say it, you have Privileged Access. But if you shout from the top of a mountain, 'The view from here is magnificent,' no one will invent a metaphysical principle to explain the fact that it takes me a good 10 minutes of climbing before I can verify your opinion. In truth, all verification takes place *in time*.

This brings us back to reflection. Thinking is itself a pre-reflexive activity – while I am thinking, I am not also thinking that I am thinking. If I want to make [10] my act of thinking about mountaineering the subject of my thought, when I do so I am no longer thinking about mountaineering but about the act of thinking about mountaineering, which is not at all the same thing. We see, therefore, that what I grasp in reflection is not my *present* act or thought, but the act that is *immediately past*. Reflection is retrospection (see Ryle 166). Any act of reflection can be replaced by another that targets it.

> Self-commentary, self-ridicule and self-admonition are logically condemned to eternal penultimacy. Yet nothing is left out of any particular commentary or ad-

> monition forever. On the contrary, it may be the target of the very next commentary or rebuke. (Ryle 195)

Ryle calls this fact "the systematic elusiveness of 'I'" (Ryle 195), and Sartre says that "the ego is by nature fugitive" (*TE*). That is to say, my thoughts unfold in time and so I can never catch myself. (Incidentally, this is hardly more remarkable than the fact that, as we say in English, 'Tomorrow never comes'. Each new day 'tomorrow' advances by one day and we never arrive there. Verification in the moment would be impossible for me. Thus, if we wanted to confine the concept of 'me' to the moment, I would never be able to thematically grasp my own self, and, a fortiori, the 'self' of others either. I will show later that there is no 'instantaneous' present. For the moment, we can only point out that there is no reason to demand this limitation, just as there is no reason to demand that a perception be incorrigible, that is, certain in itself, without reference to anything else.

Thus, the words we use to talk about others, and also about ourselves, all refer not to secret acts 'in the mind,' but to public acts in the world. But it could perhaps be argued that, for [11] an act to be *intelligent*, it must be accompanied by an intellectual act in the mind, and that, although I can see your act in the world, I cannot know anything directly about the intellectual act, and so I can never know with certainty whether your act is truly intelligent, rather than automatic.

However, first, these intellectual acts are only *postulated* as an explanation for intelligent behaviour; they are never *observed*. For example, if I tie a difficult knot, which undoubtedly requires concentration and intelligence, and if I then reflect on my act, I will realise that while I was doing it I was not repeating to myself the 'rules' according to which I had to do it. It is quite possible that I repeated these rules to myself once or twice, but in the meantime I continued to tie the knot intelligently and knowing what I was doing. Secondly, even if these intellectual acts existed, they could not explain the difference between doing something intelligently and doing it unintelligently, because thinking is in itself something that is done with or without intelligence. That is to say, if we say, with Aristotle, that doing a good deed is applying a rule, we must ask ourselves how we knew that this rule should be applied. Is there a rule for applying rules? And another for applying that rule? We fall into an infinite regress. (See Ryle, pp. 30-31.)

My intelligent actions in the world do not express the activities of my mind. They are those activities. My behaviour is in itself an understanding of the world. Even my strictly theoretical thoughts cannot be confined to my mind alone. When I discuss a theory with my friends, [12] I am engaged

in abstract thought, but that does not mean that, while I am speaking, I am simultaneously having silent thoughts. My words *are* my thoughts. (Although this does not mean that all my words are thoughts, or are intellectual. That is, they do not all have the same status). Ryle therefore suggests that private abstract thought, i.e. my thoughts when I am alone, comes from public abstract thought. Just as we first learn to read aloud and only then to read silently, we also learn to speak aloud and then to *speak* silently, to think. (See Ryle p. 35: "the technical trick of conducting our thoughts in auditory word images", and also p. 27.) According to Piaget, up to the age of 7, children say what they think – they have no verbal restraint (see *Language & Thought of the Child* p. 38). This means that when I think privately, I *imagine* a conversation (in which, perhaps, I play all the roles).

This brings us to the last problem: isn't imagination (especially in the sense of picturing a 'picture') something irretrievably private? Certainly, others cannot see the house I imagine. But, strictly speaking, neither do I; I *imagine* it. You cannot imagine my 'images' any more than you can eat my dinner, and for the same logical reason – if you eat it, it becomes *your* dinner. This does not make dinner something private. If we both look at a tree, we both see the same tree, even though I do not see it 'through' your eyes. Similarly, if we both imagine my house, we both imagine *the same house*.

[13]

'Representing' something derives from knowledge of that thing. (This is why images do not teach us anything.) One of the facts implied by my knowledge of a certain city is that I will not be surprised when I find a fountain at the end of a certain street, even though I did not say to myself continuously while walking, 'I am going to find a fountain at the end of this street.' (That is, there is no representation of the fountain.) Before arriving there, I could have stopped and said to myself, 'I'm approaching the fountain,' but the fact of being in that place is not the stimulus necessary to make me think of it. Another small fountain, the sound of a small waterfall, a photograph or even a 'daydream' could have drawn my attention there. Here, it is a question of 'representing' something we have already seen. Representing is not exactly the same as remembering. If someone asks me what I did yesterday, I could answer without representing yesterday's events in my mind. For example, I can tell my friend what I saw in Venice. It's a memory and I can date it. I can also represent Venice in my mind. Although I can't represent it because I saw it that day, my representation is not dated. It is a representation of Venice, not of Venice on 18 July 1965. But there is still a fairly close relationship here between remembering and representing. In *L'Imaginaire* Sartre shows that imagination is a way of being

'present to' an absent or even non-existent object. But he believes that there is an "analogon" of the imagined object, which is the "mental content" or "matter" of the act of imagination. He is wrong, because the mind is not a container. His argument is based on his theory that a photograph "serves as the matter for the image" (*I*. p. 35). This is false. I can very well look at the photograph [14] without 'representing' the person to myself. If I represent her to myself, it is because the photograph reminded me of her in the same way that an old letter, a recording, or even a place might do. These things could not be considered 'material' for an image.

Thus we can conclude that imagination is not some kind of activity that takes place inside my mind. There is no private interior of my mind.

From this brief discussion of the errors of the Cartesian theory of the 'ghost in the machine' we can draw the following conclusions. I am not cut off from the world or from others. I am not imprisoned in the present. Above all, my intellectual acts do not enjoy any logical primacy. They are just one space for intelligent acts among others. They are no more essentially private than others (although they are easier to hide).

I do not contemplate the world, I live it. All my acts are connected to it and directed towards it.

This is what Husserl refers to when he says that consciousness is 'intentional'. This idea of intentionality is also expressed by the existentialists in the phrase 'man is a being-in-the-world' (cf. Sartre: "A fundamental idea of Husserl's phenomenology" [*Situations I*, p. 33]:

> Imagine that we are thus rejected, abandoned by our very nature in an indifferent, hostile and unyielding world, and you will grasp the profound meaning of the discovery that Husserl expresses in this famous phrase, 'All consciousness is consciousness of something'... Husserl calls this necessity for consciousness to exist as consciousness of something other than itself intentionality.)

In other words, man is not a concrete being, [15] with his own nature, sitting on a cloud and watching the world go by with indifference (the 'overview thought' referred to by Merleau-Ponty). He is nothing apart from what he does and makes of himself in the world. It is impossible to consider him in abstraction from the world.

That man lives and acts in the world of things, people and elephants is also the opinion of 'common sense'. But haven't psychologists and physiologists shown that this is not the case, that in truth there is no world; there is only a succession of discrete reactions to a succession of equally discrete stimuli? That is to say, can they effectively explain everything that happens based on the theory of man as imprisoned in the body? In *La Structure du*

Comportement and *La Phénoménologie de la Perception*, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that such theories can only succeed insofar as they are implicitly based on the 'openness to the world' that is intentionality. He says:

> We do not mean that the analysis of the living body encounters a limit in irreducible vital forces. We only mean that the reactions of an organism are understandable and predictable only if we think of them not as muscular contractions taking place in a body, but as acts directed towards a certain environment, present or virtual: the act of taking prey, walking towards a goal, running away from danger. (*SC* I64).

Acts directed towards a certain environment, acts towards a goal: these two aspects are inseparable. We perceive the world through particular aspects. The world as a whole is what we call the horizon of my project. It is this horizon that distinguishes normal perception from hallucinatory perception. Sartre says,

> Perception is articulated only against the ontological background of presence [16] in the world, and the world reveals itself concretely as the background of each singular perception. (*EN* 229).

Of course, when I see a real tree, I do not see the whole world at the same time; I see it as part of the world. Or perhaps we can say that I see the world through the tree. Just as my steps are only understandable in relation to my goal, the goal itself is only understandable in relation to the whole world.

Intentionality is the key idea in phenomenology. I tried to introduce it through Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* because it seems to me that what we might call 'the historical function' of the idea is to escape the Cartesian dichotomy of res cogitans and res extensa, but that phenomenologists themselves too often use the vocabulary of this dichotomy, whereas Ryle deliberately tries to avoid it. We must even be wary of the word 'phenomenon', which comes from the Greek 'that which appears'. In fact, things do not *appear*. Someone appears at the window, for example, but I *see* or *feel* or *hear* something. So when we started talking about 'phenomena' instead of 'things', we were already halfway trapped in the machine. Of course, Sartre, for example, finds a loophole, but to do so he has to talk about 'the being of the phenomenon' and 'the phenomenon of being'. 'The being of the phenomenon' means 'the description of the thing', but 'the phenomenon of being' means nothing because being is not in the class of objects that we can say we can see, etc. It seems to me that Sartre manages to express a valid philosophy through this vocabulary of 'being' and 'phenomenon,' but he could have done so more easily.

In this introduction, without having contributed anything positive, we have avoided the 'pitfall of solipsism' and [17] we have discovered my fundamental relationship of intentionality to the world. I would now like to explore the idea of intentionality in greater depth, not in order to construct a metaphysical theory of the world, but only in relation to the problem of action. I will do this by studying the idea of freedom as it is presented in *Being and Nothingness* and *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*. These two works have broader aims than the discussion of freedom alone, so I will not address all the points they raise. There are aspects of *Being and Nothingness* that could be interpreted idealistically, as well as the rather realistic interpretation (in the sense that objects are independent of consciousness) that I will give. This interpretation has the advantage of being more compatible with the later development of existential phenomenology. I have tried to avoid the special vocabulary that Sartre uses in *Being and Nothingness*. It seems to me that this can be done without at the same time missing the point of his philosophy, for the reason that it is not a metaphysics but a description. So 'the in-itself', 'the for-itself', etc. are not abstract concepts whose content must be brought to light in order to understand the philosophy. They are simply linguistic tools designed to explain certain elements of our experience, and we can just as well try to give the same description using different, and perhaps more practical, tools.

Broadly speaking, we find in *Being and Nothingness* the abstract skeleton of human freedom, and in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* we see how this freedom could be lost in the world, which then gives us the possibility of explaining the conditions for concrete and true freedom. Moral imperatives, or their absence, [18] will emerge on their own in the course of the discussion. My method will be to identify the general characteristics of human behaviour and then see how beings with these characteristics could behave together in our world (i.e., in a world possessing the contingent characteristic of *scarcity*).

The word 'freedom,' like all big words, is ambiguous. The way Sartre uses it in *Being and Nothingness* is a bit unusual. But it seems to me that what he calls freedom is the 'quality' that distinguishes humans from all other species, and which is thus the basis for the more common concept of freedom. This 'quality' is, as we shall see, what makes it possible to apply the idea of political freedom to man and not to a chair or a dog. It is therefore correct to retain the word 'freedom' to describe it. [19]

Part One

The Abstract TOC

Ch. 1 – Freedom and "nothingness".

Before addressing the question of freedom, let us remember that this is a work of ontology, in the sense of "descriptive". And it could not be otherwise, for *Being and Nothingness* is an essay in phenomenological ontology, and in phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty says, "It is a matter of describing, not explaining or analysing." We will therefore attempt to describe consciousness, not explain it.

"It is enough to open one's eyes and question in all naivety this totality that is man in the world" (*EN* 38) says Sartre. But the language he uses to do so is bizarre. He introduces the idea of freedom as follows:

> This capacity of human existence to secrete a nothingness that isolates it, Descartes, following the Stoics, gave a name: it is freedom. (*EN* 61).

And a little further on:

> Freedom is the capacity of the human being of distancing himself from his past by secreting his own nothingness (*EN* 65).

It does not take much thought to realise that the expression 'secreting nothingness' does not mean much. Let us leave aside 'secreting' and examine "nothingness". 'Nothingness' is not a word that is used very often (except, perhaps, when speaking pejoratively about a person). We can therefore only examine how Sartre uses it.

We have already seen the difference between reflexive consciousness and pre-reflexive consciousness. If I think about an elephant, I know at the same time that I am thinking about it. This means that [20] I could, if I wanted to, stop thinking about the elephant and instead start thinking about my thoughts about the elephant. Here we have two 'mental' activities, which are separate but also seem to be continuous. This continuity becomes even more striking when we notice that at any moment during the first activity, I can switch to the second. The reflexive act seems almost to be *contained* in the first in an implicit state. There is always a non-posi-

tional awareness of oneself. Sartre expresses this fact by saying that "The reflexive is separated from the reflected by a nothingness" (*EN* 199). It is this non-positional awareness of oneself that accompanies all my acts that is the defining mark of consciousness. Thus, at the centre of consciousness we find a 'nothingness' that separates consciousness from itself. To express it in more familiar terms, we can say that this 'nothingness' is, in a sense, that structure of consciousness which makes reflection possible.

But he also says:

> Thus, the for-itself (consciousness) must be its own nothingness. The being of consciousness, as consciousness, is to exist at a *distance from itself* as presence to itself, and this zero distance that being carries in its being is Nothingness (*EN* 120).

Consciousness is nothingness. By this we must understand the *indefinable* nature of consciousness. We cannot say that consciousness is consciousness in the same way that a chair is a chair. My consciousness is unstable, 'troubled'. It is always consciousness (of) belief, consciousness (of) mountains; it is never simple consciousness. Nor can it be identified with belief or with mountains. It

> exists from the outset as escaping from itself, as breaking the unity of all concepts in which we might wish to enclose it (*EN* 18).

The chair remains a chair, but consciousness (of) belief must [21] continually become consciousness (of) belief.

It can always become consciousness (of) belief (i.e., reflexive consciousness) or consciousness of anything else. It is nothing other than this flight from one to the other.

We have seen that reflection is retrospection. It is in this temporal character of consciousness that we will find the true nature of 'nothingness'.

When I reflect, I *withdraw* from a series of acts in order to look at them from a distance. This act of 'putting myself at a distance' is a more picturesque expression of Nothingness. I put a space between myself and the thing I am looking at, just as I step back to get a better look at a painting. But in the case of retrospection, I look at *myself*; thus it is an imaginary space. Or rather, it is what separates my present from my past.

> The condition for human reality to be able to deny all or part of the world is that it carries nothingness within itself as the *nothing* that separates its present from all its past' (*EN* 65).

This helps us to see why reflection is the defining mark of consciousness. For any act of consciousness refers not only to the situation that is directly present, but also to the past and the future. That is, pre-reflective consciousness *always* involves an escape from the present, to which it nevertheless remains linked, just as reflection involves an escape from pre-reflective consciousness, to which it remains linked. Both have the same structure, which is why one implies the other.

Consciousness is never attached to its object. It is not absorbed by the object or by the instantaneous present. Mechanical determinism tries to enclose [22] consciousness not only in the body, but also in this instantaneous present, as an instantaneous reaction to an instantaneous stimulus. And indeed, if the present is an instant in time, it seems difficult to see how I could do anything other than simply be in the present. But if we look a little closer, we see that even determinism is not understandable in the light of an instantaneous present. That is, if time is made up of a series of discrete moments, it is impossible to postulate any relationship between them. This would imply a continuous process of annihilation and recreation of the entire universe (see Descartes). The hypothesis is absurd, but the ideas of philosophers who demand proof that we can know the future or the past imply this hypothesis.

Furthermore, we have no experience of the present in terms of such a moment. In a simple activity, such as a game of tennis, it is impossible to separate my gesture of raising the racket when the ball crosses the net from my opponent's completed act of hitting the ball and the future completion of my gesture. (See *EN* 169).

We can thus observe that, in a sense, I 'see into' the past and the future.

So what is the present? We cannot abandon it as a concept, since it fulfils a useful task in everyday language. Here it has no precise meaning. I could say, 'Stop talking about history, I'm only interested in the present,' in which case 'the present' would mean a fairly long period of time - this year, last year, and next year. Or, 'What are you doing now?' 'I'm writing a letter to my friend' - but not (usually) 'I'm writing a "d."' However, this last [23] answer would be normal if you insisted, saying, 'No, I mean right now.' But even writing a "d" takes time.

I am not trying to show that time is infinitely divisible. *Rather, time is not divisible at all.* When we speak of the present in the most precise sense, we are not talking about some 'part' or 'section' of time. We are making a *cross-section* of time, just as an engineer might draw a cross-section of his machine. Just as a machine is not made up of a series of these cross-sections added together, time is not made up of a series of presents stuck together.

There is a thickness to the present we experience. It is an indefinite thickness. As I wait at the bus stop, watching the bus approaching me, my present is made up of my walk from home to the stop and the bus's journey to the stop, which I 'see' in its entirety, even though the bus has not yet reached me. What I will do on the bus is still in my future, and what I was doing before I left home is beginning to slip into the past. Similarly, if I am looking at a house, I see it in the past and in the future; otherwise I would be continually surprised to find the house in front of me, and suddenly the house would disappear. ("This inkwell, as soon as I perceive it, already has its three temporal dimensions in its existence" *EN* 255).

This ability to 'see into the past and future' should not be confused with the acts of remembering and predicting. It is not true that, at the same moment, I look at the house, remember what it looked like a minute ago, and predict what it will look like in a minute. First, I [24] do not do that. Second, even if I wanted to, I couldn't, since the acts of remembering and predicting themselves take time. This would imply that, while predicting, I would have to remember the beginning of my prediction, and while remembering, I would have to predict the end of my memory. Thus, I could never escape the beginning of my first memory or my first prediction. Predicting and remembering are themselves reflexive acts that are only possible within the confines of the pre-reflexive present. I can only remember that the house was there five minutes ago because my knowledge of this fact is *already* implied (not thematically) in my act of seeing it now (cf. Sartre:

> It is not because I "represent" my past to myself that it exists. But it is because *I am* my past that it enters the world, and it is from its being-in-the-world that I can, following certain psychological processes, represent it to myself.' - *EN* 159)

and Ryle "Bearing in mind is not recalling, it is what makes recalling, among other things, possible" (Ryle *M* 17-81). The fact that the present disappears if we analyse it rigorously helps us to understand 'nothingness'. Sartre says:

> A rigorous analysis that claims to rid the present of everything that is not itself, that is, the past and the immediate future, would in fact find only an infinitesimal instant, that is to say... nothingness (*EN* 165).

Strictly speaking, the present is nothing. However, it separates my past, what I have done and, in a sense, cannot change, from my future, which is problematic. One could say that it is a bit like the invisible line that forms the border between two countries. They are contiguous and different, and nothing separates them. (This analogy may help us avoid the trap of

believing, when we speak of a nothingness that separates two things, that we mean there is some kind of very singular 'something' that separates them). [25]

It is the fact that there is no present that makes it impossible to say that I *am* this or that, in the sense that we can say 'This is a chair'. We can say, with finality: 'This was a tree. It is now a chair.' It will be a pile of ashes, 'because the chair is what it is,' and we speak of its present in the imprecise sense in which we say that 'today' is the present, not in the precise sense we have just defined. But consciousness itself has no present at all, not even a very small one. It is flight, escape, gushing, motion. But these words are only analogies. There is no vocabulary to express the temporalising character of consciousness, since it is the phenomenon from which all human behaviour derives and is therefore not usually thematised. Ultimately, we can only refer the sceptic to their own lived consciousness.

Just as consciousness is directed towards the world of things and people, the present is directed towards the future and the past. Thus, what I have said about time can be expressed by saying that consciousness is intentional *in time* as well as in space. (And we must not believe that there are two separate 'powers' here. They are not distinct.)

Calling consciousness 'nothingness' and at the same time saying that it can be consciousness (of) belief, consciousness (of) joy, consciousness (of) a mountain, is only understandable from the perspective of time. *It is a 'nothingness' because we can never grasp it.* I can see a mountain and at the same time avoid becoming defined as [someone having a] 'vision of a mountain,' only because I escape it in time. Merleau-Ponty says,

> What must be understood is that the same reason makes me present here and now and present elsewhere and always, absent from here and now and absent [26] from all places and all times. This ambiguity is not an imperfection of consciousness or existence; it is its definition. (*PP* 383).

This is what Sartre calls the 'diasporic' nature of consciousness.

This does not mean that I have some kind of God's-eye view of the world from a point outside time and space. The ambiguity Merleau-Ponty refers to lies in the fact that, although I can see the mountain, I remain connected to my window, from which I see it. In a sense, I am in both places at the same time, but unlike God, I am 'more squarely' in one than in the other. This becomes less complicated when we realise that this description remains within the Cartesian framework. It is only if we have a small machine *here* and a large box with the mountain inside *there* that I should be considered as something flying very, very fast between the two, and that we

should talk about being 'present elsewhere and always', 'diaspora', 'existence outside oneself', "transcendence" or 'ek-stasis'. Such terms are only useful in the Cartesian framework; their complexity comes from the fact that they try to express everyday facts, such as 'I see a tree', with the vocabulary of an absurd theory.

So when Sartre says that freedom is "the possibility for human reality of secreting [creating, generating?] a nothingness that isolates it," he is talking about intentionality, the fact that man directs himself towards the world and is therefore not at all bound to any part of the world. He thus escapes determinism. But we must not believe that Sartre means that there is a 'faculty' called 'free will' that establishes [27] freedom. Freedom is not a faculty, it is a kind of behaviour or conduct (which Sartre will express more clearly in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, where he will talk about *praxis* rather than freedom). Thus, freedom is the name of a certain kind of behaviour, human behaviour. This is why Sartre can argue that man is either entirely free or not free at all. He uses the words 'nothingness' and 'annihilation' to emphasise the fact that the singularity of this behaviour is that it is directed towards what *is not*: the future, the imaginary, etc. We have already seen some examples: the tennis player who projects himself into the future, and, in the introduction, the imagination as 'presence to' what is absent. Another example of 'nihilisation' is language.

A word can be either a sign or a symbol. When a dog hears its master's name, it looks for him; the word is a sign that indicates the existence of its master. But when I hear the name, I don't look for him, I think about him; for me, the word is a symbol. "Signs announce their objects to him (the subject) whereas symbols lead him to conceive their objects". (S. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, p. 49). Thus we can speak of the 'unrealising' function of the symbol, as well as of the image. Language is essentially symbolic.

If the fact that human behaviour is freedom is most clearly evident in imagination and language (or thought), it is only because these two are *the thematisation* of the fundamental intentional attitudes that underlie all our behaviour. Here we see again the fact already emphasised that the game of tennis *is* thought. [28] Let us repeat that this is a description and not an explanation. One of the difficulties in understanding *Being and Nothingness* comes from a tendency to believe that Sartre is trying to explain facts by postulating two *'substances'* called "being" and 'nothingness,' or 'in-itself' and 'for-itself,' whose interaction would give rise to us and our world. De Waehlens, for example, speaks of a *metaphysics* of Sartre that would be

in contradiction with his phenomenology (Introduction to *The Structure of Behaviour* viii-x), and Jolivet criticises him because he

> reasons from the theses of his ontology as if they were self-evident. (Jolivet 55).

But there is neither metaphysics nor 'ontological theses'. Sartre sought a linguistic tool to explain his own experience of pre-reflexive consciousness, and he chose this vocabulary of "being" and 'nothingness'. It seems to me that this was a rather unfortunate choice; *but*, if we realise that these are not metaphysical categories but simply a linguistic tool, I think we can understand what he means. [29]

Ch. 2. – Value TOC

The act is intentional – that is, it is directed towards the future. But isn't it possible that it is a reaction to a stimulus? If I 'see' the tennis ball arriving at a certain place in the future, couldn't this act as the stimulus that automatically triggers a reaction to hit the ball at that place? This might seem true until I ask myself *why*, in fact, I hit the ball instead of letting it pass.

The answer is simple: it is because this action is part of playing tennis. Someone with normal body coordination can very easily hit the ball the first time it is thrown at them. It is not true that they build conditioned reflexes before they can hit the ball where it lands.

Quite simply, they know what a game of tennis is and they orient themselves in a certain direction. In itself, the ball is not labelled 'to hit', 'to catch' or 'to let pass'. The value 'to hit' derives from my project to play tennis.

Let's take a closer look at this idea of value. First of all, it should be said that value here does not mean economic value or moral value. It means the function that something has in my life. We could just as well say 'importance' or 'meaning'. The first point to note is that the things we find around us have no value in themselves. If I am hungry, a piece of bread has a certain value for me, but that value is completely different if I am not hungry, and yet again if I am on hunger strike. This last example suggests that there is not even a [30] necessary relationship between physiological states and values.

If there were things that had value in themselves, this would mean that our behaviour towards them would be determined. These things would behave like *magnets*. For example, according to the doctrine of 'economism', 'material goods' are irresistible magnets for human behaviour. That is to say, 'human nature' is such that these objects necessarily have value-

for-human beings. We must try to demonstrate that, according to the structure of consciousness, this is impossible, and that there are neither values-in-themselves nor values-for-human beings.

We have already seen the negative character of consciousness in relation to its objects. It isolates itself from them, it 'puts its past out of play'. Intentionality means not only that I can escape from 'here' to the mountain, but also that I can escape from the mountain. Sartre expresses this by saying that to be conscious (of) the mountain is to be conscious of the mountain as not being oneself: "the for-itself that constitutes itself as not being the thing" (*EN* 222). I can always reflect; thus I am never hypnotised by the thing. Being conscious of something implies that one can question or doubt it. This 'something' can be any theme of consciousness, a thing, an image, a value. Of course, since these objects 'appear' or 'are given' in different ways, they are doubted in different ways. I ask whether something is real, whether an image or a memory is accurate, whether a proposition is true, whether a value is absolute, whether a fact is established. Doubting a fact, a thing or a proposition implies that there are established facts, real things and true propositions. [31]

But doubting a value does not imply that there are absolute values, since a value is defined by its relationship to humans, and noting that there is a certain relationship between certain things and certain humans does not imply that there is a necessary relationship between a certain thing and all humans. That is to say, there are necessarily values, because man is action, but there are no necessary values. Moreover, it could very easily be shown empirically that there are no 'magnets-for-Man'; for any postulated value, one can find individuals who have rejected it.

> (Value) can only reveal itself ... to an active freedom that brings it into existence as value by the mere fact of recognising it as such. It follows that my freedom is the sole foundation of values ... values, because they reveal themselves in essence to freedom, cannot reveal themselves without at the same time being 'called into question' (*EN* 76).

But perhaps, one might say, we have slightly distorted the definition of value. We could agree that there is no absolute 'duty', but nevertheless maintain that there are absolute 'obligations'; that is, 'transcendent[al]' values, inscribed not in human nature, but in the nature of the universe: God's commandments, for example. Thus, there would be moral values that do not derive their status from man. We could question them without undermining the fact that they are absolute.

However, there cannot be values inscribed in the nature of the universe, because the universe is contingent. There is no reason why there should be *something* rather than *nothing*. The world is absurd. That is to say, there is no possibility of value in itself. [32]

Roquentin's 'enlightenment' in the park is a description of the world without values that lies beneath the values created by our projects. ("Words had vanished, and with them the meaning of things, their modes of use, the faint landmarks that men have traced on their surface" (*La Nausée* 179). Beneath it there is nothing except a pulsating 'something' whose only characteristic is *being there*. There are no written instructions on it, I have no idea what to do with it.

We have identified two distinct facts about value. First, since any value can be doubted, there is no necessary value that humans cannot help but act upon. This fact can be expressed by saying that there is no *human nature* (but it must be understood, as many commentators on Sartre have failed to understand, that he only denies 'the existence of a nature as an essence that *unfolds*, as when we say, "Ah, but it is in human nature to act this way."' Of course, we do not want to deny that human beings have a common condition, because it is this condition that makes it possible to speak of human beings, and not just of Pierre, Jean, Jeanne, etc.). Secondly, since I and the world are contingent, there is no possibility of an absolute moral value towards which human beings *should* act. Even God, if he existed, would be contingent. 'Ens causa sui' is just a very respectful way of expressing this fact – and so the values he would ordain would themselves be contingent. Moral values can only be expressed in terms of *if....*; *therefore ...* They imply a *choice* between *ifs*.

The distinction between a thing and its value suggests [33] what we might call a new kind of world. Each individual creates a world of values around themselves through their projects. It is in this world, and not in the underlying world of things, that we live. But we cannot *separate* it from the world of things either. Sartre explains this by saying that man is always in a *situation*. I am 'condemned to be free' in the sense that I *find myself* in this world and thus cannot help but take a position towards it, thereby creating the world of values. (the lebenswelt). Even the decision to commit suicide is a way of taking a position, thus attributing values to the 'raw' world in itself.

So it is man's projects that give this world its values. In a sense, man is nothing but his projects. Or "human reality ... exists first as a lack" (*EN* 132). That is to say, consciousness, by its very nature, can never settle anywhere, always remains unfulfilled. What it projects itself towards is defined as value, and since it projects itself towards a future state of itself, we

can say that value is a consciousness that would not lack, that would be a totality. Sartre calls this being that aims at itself as a totality "a detotalisated totality". (*EN* 652)

The ambiguities and contradictions of this project can be expressed by saying:

> man is fundamentally a desire to be God (*EN* 653).

God is *defined* as a being who is complete in himself, but who is also consciousness. Man wants to become complete in himself, but remain conscious. However, the idea of God is contradictory, since consciousness is intentional, that is, always related to something outside itself, never complete in itself. The 'project of being God', therefore, is just another way of expressing the fact that man is condemned to be free, to never find true absolute value. [34]

It should be emphasised that when Sartre says that man is the desire to be God, he is not postulating a concrete object that all men must desire – which would destroy freedom. Rather, he is seeking a way of explaining what freedom is – freedom is project, is lack, is totality-detotalisised, is the desire to be God. All these definitions are synonymous. The importance of the last one is that it reveals the essentially desperate nature of all projects (see *EN* 645).

To believe that the idea of consciousness as lack condemns me to perpetually fill the gaps as they appear is to fall into the Cartesian trap of believing that the 'I' is a concrete structure. Indeed, the word 'I' is ambiguous. "(The for-itself) *is* in a certain sense, it is since it can be named, since certain characteristics can be affirmed or denied of it." But according to another definition, "it is never what it is" (*EN* 184), or it is what it is not and it is not what it is. I escape into the future, leaving behind what I am 'in the world'. In one sense, I can be defined entirely – I am angry, stingy, stupid, married with seven children. But on the other hand, I never coincide with this definition. This lack of coincidence appears theoretically in the case of vertigo. Sartre also depicts it in his description of the waiter. (*EN* 98-99). The waiter, he says, plays a role: he *plays* at being a waiter. That is to say, he does not become a waiter in the same way that an acorn becomes an oak tree. When he becomes one, he does not have natural 'waiter behaviour'; he can only imitate other waiters. He can never be more than a very good imitation – and, what's more, he only imitates the imitations of other waiters!

The lack of coincidence with oneself therefore has two aspects: the need to play a role, and the possibility of escaping from [35] oneself through re-

flection. Of course, these two aspects cannot be separated – they are part of the same structure, or rather, they are the same structure.

I am not angry in the same way that a tree is a tree. My propensity for anger is, in a sense, outside of me. I can decide to abandon it, since I can realise it through reflection. Similarly, my avarice, my desire for money, is something I can take a stand on.

If I suddenly realise that I am greedy, I may be shocked, because I cannot stand the greedy people I know. So I immediately send a large cheque to a charity, buy the hairdryer my wife has been asking for for months, and buy myself a new record. Of course, these actions in themselves do not prove that I am not stingy if, the next day, already regretting them, I reduce my wife's budget in order to get my money back. But if I continue in this way, the moment when I reached my decision appears as a moment of escape from myself.

This example also shows us that the meaning of an act comes from the future. If I had lived a whole day as a generous man and then been run over by a car, I would be remembered as stingy. And that would not be wrong. I would have been a stingy man who acted generously in a moment of aberration. So we cannot say that I escape my past entirely, but only that it is the future that gives my past its meaning. Thus, the value of my stinginess and my attempt at generosity is not given; it must be constituted anew by me in the present. [36]

I have already given the example of bread, whose value changes, even if I am hungry, depending on whether it is normal hunger or hunger resulting from a hunger strike. My projects give value to this 'physiological' lack. A striking example of the difference between a lack to which we assign value and a lack that has value in itself is the comparison between the sexuality of a normal man and that of a dog that has smelled a female dog in the street.

Thus, my situation includes not only the world of things and people, but also my past and my physiological and psychological lacks – that is, my body and my psyche.

a. The world of things and people

The world itself has an objectively articulated structure. The objects of the world appear to me with possibilities; I can use them. But in the abstract, these possibilities are completely undefined. However, we never find ourselves in such an undefined world. In *our* world, there are what we might call 'social objects' and 'social techniques'. There are trees and elephants,

but there are also cars and pocket knives. The value of the latter seems, at first glance, to be much more stable than that of the former. If I live in a technologically advanced society, a car tells me what to do with it, whereas a tree does not. This is because I find myself in a situation that includes other individuals, who are themselves, by definition, sources of value. I thus encounter the values of others as objects; we could call them object values. This is what Sartre means when he says that the other is a 'centre of flow of my universe' (*EN* 312-13). I do not come into a completely chaotic world. There are [37] paths and signs. But these are not limited to manufactured objects. In an animist society, for example, a certain tree will be given to an inhabitant with a much more precisely defined value than that of a car in a technological society. There is a 'properly human coefficient of adversity' (*EN* 593). In the world, I find not only things and object values, but also techniques. First, there are those of my body – walking, grasping, a certain kind of vision, etc. The possession of some of these techniques defines 'the human species' (see *EN* 594). In addition to these, the techniques available to me will depend on the society in which I live and my place in that society. They will include not only technology but also language and systems of thought. I learn these techniques. My class, nationality, etc. are defined by the techniques and modes of thought I use. For example:

> Most attempts to define the working class boil down to taking as criteria production, consumption or a certain type of Weltanschauung belonging to the inferiority complex, that is, in all cases, certain techniques of elaboration or appropriation of the world (*EN* 596).

(The importance of being able to define such 'collectivities' in this way stems from the fact that it renders unnecessary the postulation of some inherited national "nature" or 'collective unconscious' to explain differences between peoples and races. And the fact that there are *techniques* of thought and not some kind of Platonic 'natural thought' is central to understanding the different levels of culture among different societies. All these ideas will be taken up and developed in *Critique*, and we will return to them later). With these techniques, which come to me from society, [38] I aim at the world. They are means of thinking about or manipulating the world. This means that the way I act, my understanding of the world, is conditioned by society. The world 'reveals to me a face that is strictly correlated with the means I use, *therefore the face it offers to everyone*'. (*EN* 594 – emphasis added by Sartre). Nowadays, the journey from Paris to Fontainebleau is quite short, but five hundred years ago it was long and relatively difficult. Regardless of whether we value Fontainebleau as a

destination or not, this town has a different *meaning* for me than it did for someone in the 16th century. We could therefore talk about *three* 'worlds': the 'natural world', the 'social world' and the 'world of values'. It is useful to express it this way because, instead of giving values, as I said above, to the 'natural world', people who remain within the framework of their society give values to the 'social world'. Thus, although man approaches the world through techniques that he did not invent himself, he remains free because it is he who gives value to these *techniques themselves* and to the world they reveal. And, indeed, it is clear that there is no possibility of any kind of 'direct' grasp of the world – that would again be the idea of flying over it.

   "Technique does not apply itself" (*EN* 599). Similarly, social imperatives do not apply themselves. The arrow can tell me which direction to go, but it cannot move my legs for me. I must take responsibility for the imperatives and techniques; I must *live* them. In this very requirement lies the possibility of escaping them, for it also implies that I can always invent new values, new techniques or new ways of thinking and a new vocabulary. [39]

b. My Body

I have talked about the technical aspects of my body: seeing, holding, walking, etc. Even these aren't given.

   I learn them. In addition, I learn to write, to speak, to play tennis, to drive a car, and to do a thousand other things with my body. As a collection of abilities, what I have already said about technology also applies to my body.

"The body is our general means of having a world" (*PP* 171). That is to say, it is only because I possess these bodily abilities that I can approach the world (although this does not mean that I exist first and then use a body to approach the world!). It is the state of my technical abilities that determines how the world will appear to me. The jungle is completely different for the hunter than it is for the city dweller. It is fuller for the hunter because his senses are more acute and richer, because it has meanings for him that the city dweller cannot understand. Learning expands and changes the shape of my universe. There is no basis for subjectivism in this analysis. There are certain bodily techniques and certain mental techniques with which we acquire objective knowledge. It is only when we forget that thinking is itself a technique that we begin to mistrust the fact that we must 'be in' the world through technology. Apart from what we might call the intellectual functions of my body, there is also the other side, the fact that it is itself a being

in the world, its need for regeneration, and the fact that it can be injured or killed. First, I can ignore its needs: suicide, flagellation, fasting, and vows of abstinence are examples of this. When [40] my body gets in the way of my projects, as in the case of a man being tortured to extract information, or as in the case of a man who exhausts himself during a long walk, there is nevertheless, as long as I do not lose consciousness, no specific degree of exhaustion or pain [that I am not able to overcome], up to that point where my body commands me to speak or to rest.

It is up to me to decide when pain or fatigue become unbearable. (Except, of course, if I lose consciousness, it is no longer up to me to decide whether or not to continue my walk.) In other words, I am the one who gives value to my body. My body's capabilities determine how far I can go, but within those limits, I am the one who gives value and organises the situation.

c. My psyche

We saw in the introduction that being ambitious is nothing more than the series of ambitious acts that 'express' it, and that the same is true of other characteristics that could be called 'psychological traits'. However, in a certain form of reflection (which Sartre calls 'impure reflection'), if I seek to know 'what I am' in the sense of 'what is my nature', these traits could be given as realities in themselves, and I begin to believe that there is somewhere within me a 'choleric' quality which, in certain circumstances, causes me to become irritated. This 'phantom world' populated by these qualities and states of mind "exists as a *real situation* of the for-itself" (*EN* 218, Sartre emphasises this). That is to say, when, through reflection, I realise that I am angry, I must then *take a position* with regard to this tendency, either [41] I accept it (by telling myself, for example, that it is my nature) or I decide from now on not to show myself to be angry. And if I accept it, I can decide to avoid situations that are conducive to my anger. So it is I who give value to a 'quality' or 'state' of the psyche.

d. The past

At the moment, I find myself with a particular past that I cannot change. Insofar as this past relates to my present, it does so primarily through my past projects that still 'live': my original project of writing this thesis, for example. The thesis is there, given, with its mass of written words, notes and books read; but I can decide to abandon it and become a sailor, for example. It does not oblige me to continue it.

> I alone can decide at any moment the *scope* of the past: not by discussing, deliberating and assessing in each case the importance of this or that past event, but by projecting myself towards my goals, I save the past with me and decide its meaning through my actions (*EN* 579).

Even if I decide to abandon my thesis, I cannot escape the position I find myself in, having written a third of a thesis, just as if I walk towards Fontainebleau and decide not to continue after walking 20 kilometres, I cannot avoid being 20 kilometres from Paris. Just as my future movements will have to relate to this position, so all my future actions will relate to this failed thesis. But it is up to me to decide how they will relate to it.

This analysis of the 'situation' has shown us much more clearly the meaning of 'being-in-the-world'. When we say that the situation consists of my body, my past, [42] my psyche and the world, we must remember the ambiguity of the word 'I' that we have discussed. In one sense of the word, I am nothing but my body, the world, etc., but in another sense I am more, not in the sense that there is something more that is me, but in the sense that I escape from it towards the future. I can do this because I can take an element or even the totality of my situation as the theme of my reflection.

I do not *choose* my situation. I do not choose to be born in a particular place or to have a certain past. Sartre calls this fact FACTICITY. But it is I who give it its value. This means that, in one sense of the word 'freedom', I am *completely free*. This is not about the freedom to do what I want, which can be absolute, limited or non-existent. In the sense in which it is used here, freedom cannot be separated from obstacles.

> The resistances that freedom reveals in existence, far from being a danger to freedom, only allow it to emerge as freedom. There can only be something for itself as engaged in a resistant world (*EN* 563).

I cannot give value to things if there are no things! Things are, by definition, independent of my consciousness. Thus, they inevitably resist my projects. (The "adversity coefficient" of things (*EN* 389)). The thing is 'unfathomable', that is to say, I am incapable of knowing a priori when I will have perfect knowledge of it, or how I will obtain this knowledge. Therefore, it is always, to a greater or lesser degree, an obstacle. But it is only an obstacle within the framework of my projects. A mountain is only 'difficult to climb' if I want to climb it. Otherwise, it has only the strictly neutral characteristics of being 'steep' and 'rocky'. It can even have the positive characteristic of being 'beautiful' if my current project is to enjoy the view from my hotel room window. [43]

It must be clearly understood that for Sartre there is such a coefficient of adversity, such depth, such an 'unnameable and unthinkable residue that belongs to the self considered in itself'. Merleau Ponty says:

> Sartre speaks of a world that is not vertical, but in itself, that is to say, flat. (*VI* 290).

But this does not seem right to me, unless we take 'being-in-itself' as a metaphysical concept. It is not that; it is a linguistic tool, and its function is precisely to express the fact that the world is not TRANSPARENT to consciousness, that I can never have 'adequate knowledge' of the world. So one of the things that descriptive ontology shows us is that a METAPHYSICAL ontology is impossible. The structure of the world is to be examined by the scientist, not by the philosopher. All the philosopher can do is prevent the scientist from convincing himself that he has found the absolute, that is, prevent him from constructing a metaphysical ontology.

The situation has the character of being given, a raw reality, and of being a meaningful and affective WHOLE.

> The situation cannot be *subjective*, for it is neither the sum nor the unity of the IMPRESSIONS that things make on us; it is THE THINGS themselves and myself among the things... but neither can it be OBJECTIVE, in the sense that it would be a pure given that the subject would observe without being in any way involved in the system thus constituted (*EN* 633-34).

Merleau Ponty expresses this well when he speaks of the freedom of the artist or the philosopher:

> it consists in assuming a factual situation by giving it a figurative meaning beyond its proper meaning. Thus Marx, not content with *being* the son of a lawyer and a student of philosophy, *thinks* of his own situation as that of a 'petty-bourgeois intellectual', and in the new perspective of class struggle. (*PP* 201-2). [44]

The existence of independent things, of other people's projects, of an immutable past and of a vulnerable body does not constitute a limit to freedom. On the contrary, it is the necessary condition for the possibility of freedom. However, there will be people who agree with this description of the situation and the constitution of value, but who still deny freedom. They deny it not because of 'the weight of circumstances' but because of 'human nature'. That is to say, they are willing to admit that it is my projects that give things their value, but they maintain that these projects derive from my 'nature'.

We have denied that there is any such thing as human nature. But for the moment we have not replaced it. Can we really understand human behaviour without postulating such a nature?

Ch. 3. The original choice or the framework [le cadre]

I hit the ball because doing so is part of my project to play tennis. We can easily find a broader project in which the game of tennis would in turn be part of, and so on ... But we will surely find a project that has no 'because', that does not fit into any other larger project: that is, we will find a project that has simply been *chosen*, without reason. It would seem, therefore, that since all my projects are coherent, they stem from a single original project. We have seen that consciousness 'lacks the world'. The original project would be the corollary of this fundamental lack.

Or, since this lack is not "physiological" but a lack 'of consciousness', we could say that it is my original attitude towards the world. Thus, while I maintain this original attitude, [45] the world appears to me as a complex of motifs, as composed of things with relatively stable values. According to Sartre, this attitude is chosen, and chosen without any justification, a choice for which I am totally responsible. My whole life is based on this contingent and absurd choice. The hold [over me] of this absolute contingency is manifested at the reflexive level by existential angst and by bad faith, which is itself an escape from such angst. So my freedom does not lie in a series of gratuitous choices, but in the fact that all my actions express an original choice:

> All objectively detectable manifestations of psychic life maintain symbolic relationships with fundamental and global structures that constitute the person proper (*EN* 657).

Since it is a choice, I can always change it; but we must not believe that we might find a *reason* to reject the first choice, because "it is the first choice that originally creates all motives and all reasons" (*EN* 543). A new original choice is not a possibility; it is *a threat*.

> Thus we are perpetually threatened with the annihilation of our current choice, perpetually threatened with choosing ourselves and consequently becoming other than we are ... This absolute change that threatens us from birth to death remains perpetually unpredictable and incomprehensible (*EN* 543).

We cannot therefore say that I make this choice, I am it. It is a pre-personal choice. And a second choice is also pre-personal. I would not choose; I

would be replaced by another. It should be noted [46] that, if we accept this, the entire meaning of the word 'freedom' is destroyed. First, I would be nothing more than the unfolding of this original choice in contact with the situation. Secondly, neither my actions nor those of others could influence a new choice. (cf *PP* 500-501). However, this is not necessarily false. We should not reject a theory simply because it denies us freedom.

But there is a much more serious objection to the idea of an original choice: in fact, we never observe ourselves or others making this choice. (I am talking here about the first choice. There are many examples of a total change of attitude, but never of a choice of a first attitude.) It would seem rather strange, to say the least, to argue that I choose at the moment of my own procreation, or even at the moment of my birth. However, if we place it later, we must admit that it is not a choice from nothing, since I already have experiences. So if Sartre's entire theory of freedom is based on this original choice, it must be rejected. But we can perhaps try to describe consciousness in such a way that, while we reject a first choice, there will nevertheless be the possibility of a real *second* choice that will allow us to escape from a given value system; thus we will be implicitly responsible for our values *both* before *and* after this choice.

That is to say, it does not seem necessary to me, in order to be responsible for one's values, to be aware in any way that one is responsible for them. I am not sure whether I am criticising Sartre's *thinking* here or just his *vocabulary*. For example, Jeanson says that when Sartre talks about this first choice, he does not mean that there is a 'true' or "authentic" choice: there is only a 'power of discrimination' which "is exhausted [47] in a sense in its operations on the world", but which "allows an authentic choice to manifest itself" (Jeanson 249). It seems to me that this interpretation is closer to the spirit of Sartre's thinking than the literal interpretation. (In *La Critique*, Sartre himself says that

> fundamental alienation does not come, as *Being and Nothingness* might lead us
> to believe, from a prenatal choice... *RD* 286).

However, what he says about the *threat* of a second choice does not seem to me to be compatible with Jeanson's interpretation. Naturally, Sartre is perfectly entitled to use a word in an unusual way, if he indicates this implicitly or explicitly. But I do not see that it is *useful* to do so in this case.

To understand the possibility of a second choice, we can start with the fact that a normal adult can reflect, whereas a newborn cannot. (Let us repeat that we are using the word 'reflect' in both senses of 'thinking before acting' and 'retrospection', as both have the same structure). There must

therefore be a transition to reflection, which could be either sudden or gradual. The latter possibility would imply that there are *degrees* of reflection. From the perspective of the abstract mechanism of reflection, such degrees cannot exist. Either I can escape from the present (not the instantaneous present, but the whole 'thick' stream of perception), or I cannot escape from it. On the other hand, from the point of view of the object of reflection, there are certainly degrees. We have already encountered the idea of a complex of major and minor projects. My current project exists in the context of a series of increasingly broad projects, which allows for a series of increasingly deep reflections as I successively tackle broader projects. [48]

The newborn is a sum of physical needs. It is already equipped with the mechanisms necessary to satisfy them and is nothing more than these needs and mechanisms. Paradoxically, although an adult has no nature, a baby does. It quickly becomes accustomed to a fairly regular schedule for eating, sleeping, etc., and at the same time begins to *learn* to use its body, to see, etc. It thus begins to *construct* an idea of the world by synthesising experiences. At this point, the child becomes unique through the addition of its own experiences to its given nature. There comes a time when, based on the increasing complexity of its synthesis, the child makes a project for the first time – that is, it has a need and, to satisfy it, instead of simply crying, it makes rudimentary attempts to solve the problem itself. They reflect, although this reflection has a very narrow scope. Here I only want to *note* this transition to reflection, not explain it. When talking about perception, Merleau-Ponty summarises this development of 'human reality' as follows:

> My first perception must appear to me as the execution of an older pact concluded between X and the world in general, my history must be the continuation of a prehistory whose results it uses, my personal existence the resumption of a pre-personal tradition. (*PP* 293).

It is this 'pre-personal tradition' or "prehistory" that I am referring to when I say that babies have a 'nature'. When Sartre says that we find ourselves abandoned in the world, this implies that when we find ourselves, we are already in the world, whereas the original choice would seem to imply that we find ourselves there at the moment we are abandoned. However, he discusses this problem elsewhere in terms that seem to reject the [49] original choice as a true choice, rather than an implicit choice.

> It seems scandalous that consciousness should 'appear' at some point, that it should come to 'inhabit' the embryo, in short, that there should be a moment when the living being in formation is without consciousness and a moment when

a consciousness without a past becomes imprisoned in it ... our past does not appear to us as limited by a clear and unblemished line – which would be the case if consciousness could spring into the world before having a past – but rather that it is lost, on the contrary, in a gradual darkening, until it reaches a darkness that is nevertheless still *ourselves*; we can understand the ontological meaning of this shocking solidarity with the foetus, a solidarity that we can neither deny nor understand. For, after all, this foetus *was* me; it represents the factual limit of my memory but not the legal limit of my past ... consciousness can only appear to itself as already born. (*EN* 155).

Thus, there would be no first choice, but only the constitution of a *fundamental attitude*.

We have discovered a first small reflection, which is the basis for a choice. But this choice is also situated within a very narrow field. It is not a question of ends but only of means. For the moment, the ends are still given by the 'pre-personal tradition'. However, in a sense, this pre-personal tradition is already mine; it has been constructed and constituted by the interaction of *MY* body with a certain situation that is probably unique. In other circumstances, I would have other problems, for example, 'how to avoid mum' instead of 'how to find her'. I already have a framework of ideas according to which I *live* the world. This framework is flexible. If it cannot contain a new fact, the framework transforms to better integrate it. Although my framework is unique, it is not necessarily [50] very different from that of others, because we are in the same society and because we encounter many value-objects there.

We have seen that consciousness is not limited to the present moment; this is why we can say that all my experience is implicitly present, that is, as a framework, in every new experience, just as the thesis I am writing is implicitly present in this sentence I am writing.

The framework is undoubtedly in almost constant evolution at the beginning of life, because there are so many completely new experiences; but it will tend to stabilise as soon as it refers to a sufficiently broad field of experience. The relationship between a new experience and others is *DIALECTICAL*, because the new experience derives its value from the framework - *ON THE BASIS OF ITS OBJECTIVE STATUS* - but can also *change* the framework when it is integrated into it. The framework is not automatically constituted - I create it by *INTERNALISATING* my experiences.

There do not seem to be any *NECESSARY* and original elements in this framework. Even concepts such as time and personal identity must be

learned. Laing, an English psychoanalyst who claims to be influenced by existential phenomenology, says that children must

> develop a sense of being the origin of their own actions. (*The Divided Self* p. 188).

Similarly, he says that

> the schizoid, and even more so the schizophrenic, has a precarious sense of his own person (and other persons) as adequately embodied, as alive, as real, as substantial and as a continuous being who is in one place at one time and in a different place at another time, remaining the 'same' throughout. In the absence of a secure 'base', he lacks a sense of [51] personal unity, and a sense of himself as the agent of his own actions (instead of a robot, a machine, a thing) and as the agent of his own perceptions (someone else is using his eyes, his ears, etc.) (*The Self and Others*, p. 35).

In other words, the schizophrenic is someone who has constructed a very particular mental framework. He has his own way of seeing the world and his own logic. In his case, there is a violent contradiction between his framework and his real 'self', and it is in the breakdown of this contradiction that his illness consists. The difficulty in understanding what a schizophrenic says does not mean that what they say is meaningless, but only that their words are constructed according to references and a logic that are different from the norm. (See *The Divided Self* pp. 149 and 163). Therefore, the role of the psychoanalyst is not to try to interpret what the patient says according to a pre-existing system of symbols (Freudian or otherwise); it is to try to reconstruct for the patient, based on what they know of the patient's history, the patient's *framework*. That is to say, one must not explain the patient's ideas (by referring to the unconscious, for example); one must *UNDERSTAND* the patient's consciousness of the world. ("The psychoanalyst will have to reinvent a symbolism at every turn according to the particular case he is considering".) (*EN* 661).

Another example of a distorted frame would be the case of psychological 'trauma'. Usually the frame moves slowly, because there is a continuity of experiences. For example, for the average child, their parents are initially infallible gods, but perhaps around puberty, they begin to notice small flaws in them.

Since they are in the process of acquiring skills themselves, this gradual collapse of trust is not harmful. However, if some dramatic event suddenly shatters this trust, it will have two serious effects. First, there will be immediate disorientation, since the child's entire framework will be broken. [52]

Second, the event itself will take on disproportionate importance in the new framework and may thus give rise to a neurosis. Thus, the trauma does not act on me from somewhere in the 'unconscious,' but through my framework. Laing refers to the basis of the framework as a 'pivotal self-definition' and says,

> Let us suppose that something happens that is incompatible with the nuclear pivotal definition, perhaps a hidden one, that nevertheless is determining the individual's whole system of meanings. It is as though a linchpin has been removed that had been holding the person's whole world together. Something has happened that challenges the whole meaning the individual gives to 'reality'. (*Self and Others* p. 82).

Since the 'traumatic' experience is *at the basis* of the framework, it would be very difficult to discover it, because the psychoanalyst's attempts to do so would themselves be seen 'through' that experience. It is 'unconscious' only because it permeates everything, and thus is not *THEMATISED*. (See Laing, *Self and Others* p. 8 "the phantasy he was submerged in, and hence that he could not see as such, that is, that was unconscious".) The 'unconscious' can only be defined in relation to pre-reflexive consciousness. Sartre shows the absurdity of the theory that there are 'ideas' that exist in an 'unconscious' conceived as a 'region' of the mind totally cut off from consciousness. If these ideas existed in this way, they could never influence consciousness without becoming conscious. But the phenomenon of repression, according to the theory of the unconscious, requires that censorship must somehow know what is in the unconscious in order to repress what is undesirable. This idea is contradictory. (See *EN* 191). [53]

Thus, a complex is not a 'thing' in the unconscious, it is *A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD*.

'Saint-Genet' is an attempt to describe a unique framework in development. Genet tries to understand the world through 'traumatic' experiences. To 'common sense', Genet's attempt is nothing but madness or perversion, but this is only because he started with particular data.

The fact that the psychoanalyst must try to understand these cases himself and not explain them shows the freedom of the subject. The factors involved in the patient's history do not *produce* the complex. They are powerful only to the extent that they are experienced by the patient, and the psychoanalyst cannot *predict* the extent that he *becomes* the patient; that is, he predicts from within and not from without.[2]

---

2 [FvG: These passages in RT in which he deals with psychoanalysis are the weakest in the entire text. A sentence like "The 'unconscious' can only be defined in relation to pre-reflexive consciousness" is simply posited with the same gesture as the cups, pens,

A final example of the framework and its elaboration is the phenomenon that Piaget calls 'egocentrism' (in *The Language and Thought of the Child*). At first, children believe that everyone understands them immediately – they do not realise that they see the world from a particular perspective – they only *LEARN* this by trying to cooperate with their peers: a gradual process that leads to a restructuring of their world according to multiple perspectives. (Here we see the relationship between their activities in the world and their ideas about the world.)

One point that we can usefully discuss here is Sartre's theory of emotions. He calls them

> 'magical conduits' ... which reveal ... 'a magical layer of the world' and he asks, "But who will decide whether I choose the magical or the technical aspect of the world?" (*EN* 521).

It seems to me [54] that there is an obvious contradiction here in the idea of CHOOSING the magical aspect. If I am walking quietly in the park (without emotion, and thus immersed in 'a voluntary and rational conduct' that 'will technically consider the situation') and I suddenly encounter a lion, I could, for example, look it in the eyes in the (probably vain) hope of taming it, and at the same time prepare to defend myself with my umbrella. This would be rational behaviour. But I could also simply close my eyes and scream; this would be magical behaviour, attempting to make the lion disappear through some kind of magical incantation! The problem is that Sartre argues that the transfer from rational behaviour to magical behaviour is the result of a choice. But this would imply that the choice itself is part of the series of rational acts; thus I would *RATIONALLY* choose magical behaviour, which seems impossible and contradictory. But on the other hand, we cannot admit that fear, or any other emotion, is something foreign to consciousness, coming from outside to control it. So fear must be a behaviour of consciousness; perhaps a learned behaviour, but not a rationally chosen behaviour. The framework, since it is never *complete*, is never totally rational; there are always magical elements left over (because in the beginning almost all of a child's actions are magical). Furthermore, if I am hunting lions in the jungle and I encounter one, I am not afraid, because the lion is *in its context*. But I panic if I encounter one in my garden, and I

---

elephants, rats, tennis rackets: they are presented as 'selfevident', as it was called, requiring no further justification. Lacan skewered this pedantry with the term "discours Universitaire", which he regards, rightly, as the very opposite to what it is that psychoanalysts do or discuss in the literature. The chance R.D. Laing quotes don't absolve him in the least: he regards it entirely adequate to merely *gloss* what he thinks the position of Sartre is.]

choose magical behaviour, *BECAUSE THE LION IS MAGICAL* – according to my framework, I have no way of understanding or controlling the situation. The framework collapses, as in 'trauma'. [55]

The difficulties in Sartre's theory of emotions stem from the ambiguity of the word 'choice'. (There is also a harmful tendency to drift towards the Platonic myth of a ready-made understanding that would have the possibility of choosing between the two behaviours.) Instead of choosing, I *UNDERSTAND* the situation as either magical or requiring magical behaviour.

Everything we have said about the framework shows even more clearly than before the great difference between reflexive consciousness and pre-reflexive consciousness. The latter has real depth. We could say that it has an easily visible surface, but that further reflection is needed to reach its depths. It is this depth that Merleau-Ponty calls 'sedimentation' (*PP* 152), (*VI* 312).

Critics have accused Sartre of returning to the idealistic position of a consciousness that is completely transparent to itself. And it is true that the 'for-itself' is transparent to itself – but only *IN TIME*. There is nothing mystical about this, because there is absolutely nothing that is transparent 'in the moment'. All verification, all investigation, all understanding take place *in time*. (So we might as well say that consciousness is transparent to itself, and that very often it does not *know* itself). This fact is of cardinal importance. It is, as we shall see in the second part, the basis of alienation.

One of the most important conclusions we can draw from the frame theory is that, although at the level of small-scale thinking where we are at the moment our ideas are conditioned by the world, nevertheless every fact must 'pass through consciousness', must be 'internalised' before it can influence me.

> The environment can only act on the subject to the exact extent that he understands it, that is, [56] where he transforms it into a situation (*EN* 660).

I see something happening. It seems to me to be important, so I relate it to my other ideas; perhaps it reinforces a prejudice, perhaps it changes one. But it is not very accurate to express this as if I first believed the thing to be important and then related it to my other ideas. Believing that it is important is relating it dialectically to my other ideas in a certain way.

This means that I *always* act according to my understanding of the situation. And it seems to me that this is the fundamental fact that Sartre wants to express when he uses the word choice. Ultimately, it is *the idea* and not the thing that guides my actions; this is another way of expressing the distinc-

tion between 'value' and 'thing'. Value derives from my framework. But it must be emphasised that my ideas, or my framework, do not *automatically cause* my actions. They only exist insofar as I experience them. Consciousness retains its primacy (although the distinctions between 'I', "consciousness" and 'framework' are quite subtle here). We have seen that consciousness must continually *become* conscious (of) belief, etc. Consciousness constructs the framework and it is consciousness that continually projects it into the future. It is separate from it only in the sense that it can reflect on it.

Although I am in some way pre-reflexively conscious of this framework, and conscious of it as a framework, I am conscious of it as given and as *absolute*, not as contingent, not as a choice. (Thus, the Platonic myth is a permanent psychological tendency; recognising that others may have understandings of the world that are completely different from your own is the mark of a highly evolved mind. It is easier to believe that others know the truth, as you do, but that they are [57] evil, or that they display bizarre opinions in order to get attention, etc.) We have no natural reflexive awareness of the framework, but it is always possible to reflect on it. And as soon as we think about it, the possibility of questioning it arises, since it is not really absolute. So there is a need for a real *second choice* – either I accept my framework in full knowledge of its contingency, or I choose another one, which will also be contingent, for that matter. (It should be emphasised here that the framework is a moral attitude as well as a method of understanding, because action and understanding are inseparable).

We are left with two questions: – How can we achieve this total reflection? And why is it such a rare event?

Children not only learn to understand the world, they also learn the techniques of their society. For our purposes, the important techniques are those of thought. In their relationships with their family and friends, children learn to distinguish between their dreams and reality, and they learn to control themselves, criticise themselves, etc. (see Ryle 193). They learn to count and to think abstractly. At school, they learn the basic techniques of scientific analysis. They learn language, which is a means of communication but also a means of analysis.

> Science is not the existence of a thing. It is rather a particular way in which man regards the world. It is consequently a particular way of naming things... One who wishes to be a scientist has to acquire this particular way of naming things and so he may arrive at scientific understanding (Remy-Kwant *Encounter* p. 11).

An appropriate vocabulary is the most important tool for analysing the world. Of course, such a vocabulary is not a given; it [58] has been *invented*.

But inventing is much more difficult and requires much more favourable conditions than learning, so in general we only learn the vocabularies that are available. By teaching vocabulary (in the mother tongue, of course), I point out and explain things to my students.

These thinking techniques are obviously techniques of reflection. They are neither natural nor unnatural. The only thing that is natural is the ability to reflect. The different ways in which this ability can be enriched and deepened must be acquired and in this sense are not natural, but everyone can acquire them, and in this sense they are not unnatural. They have the same status as the technique of building aeroplanes, or, if you prefer, the technique of being on time and keeping to a schedule (a technique that we tend to believe is innate but which is in fact only a fairly recent development in the history of human behaviour, and which lies at the basis of technological civilisation (see Lewis Mumford, *Technique and Civilisation*).

So I can learn thinking techniques to withdraw more and more from the immediate and dig deeper and deeper into my experience. This has two aspects: the 'outside' world, and my own personality and history. Thinking about my personality also requires techniques and vocabulary. The 'thickness' and 'sedimentation' of pre-reflective consciousness requires a technique that must be either learned or invented.

However, a problem remains, namely that I must learn techniques through my framework: thus they will be understood in terms of that framework. [59]

Can I therefore aim at the very basis of the framework, 'the pivotal self-definition', with a certain technique? It seems so – with one important reservation. Such a technique of reflection must be a *logical* technique that could show me that some of my presuppositions, which I was not previously aware of, can be questioned. However, even after learning logic in everyday life, we may refuse to apply it to certain fields of experience. Even in this case, I will have to choose reflexively and in full knowledge of the facts between logic and magic. Of course, after choosing magic, I may refuse to accept responsibility for this choice, and such a refusal would be in bad faith. (But there is no logical or magical reason why one should not be in bad faith.)

We can therefore see that it is possible to engage in this kind of total reflection, but that it requires the use of a special technique or method, and that such reflections are very rare events because this technique is difficult to acquire and even more difficult to invent, as it is based on a whole host of other mental techniques. (That is to say, philosophy is not an innate abil-

ity.) Thus, all humans are *potentially* absolutely free, but this freedom itself is *a cultural product*.

It seems to me that, although different theories can be drawn from *Being and Nothingness* and Sartre's other works from this period, the theory I have just described is in the spirit of his thinking. Sometimes it seems that Sartre wants to say that all men except existentialists are scoundrels who are in bad faith, but in his *theory* he is explicit: "existential angst is the *reflexive* grasp of freedom by itself" (*EN* 77). That is to say, [60] both existential angst and bad faith are phenomena that appear *only* on the level of reflection. He speaks of

> "the instruments and techniques necessary to isolate the symbolised choice, to fix it in concepts and to bring it alone into full light".

And he says,

> "But this 'mystery in full light' (of our original choice) comes rather from the fact that this enjoyment is deprived of the means that ordinarily allow *analysis* and conceptualisation" (*EN* 658).

So he admits the existence of techniques for achieving this total reflection (which, incidentally, he calls existential psychoanalysis, rather than reflection). He gives a first explanation of why not everyone is free in *Reflections on the Jewish Question,* where he says:

> I would readily say that existential angst is a luxury that neither the Jew nor the worker can afford today. One must be sure of one's rights and deeply rooted in the world, one must have none of the fears that assail the oppressed classes or minorities every day, in order to allow oneself to question man's place in the world and his destiny. In a word, metaphysics is the preserve of the Aryan ruling classes. These remarks should not be seen as an attempt to discredit it: it will once again become the essential concern of mankind when men have freed themselves. (162)

However, it seems that at that time there were still uncertainties in existentialism, for Simone de Beauvoir recounts,

> I argued that, from the point of view of freedom as Sartre defined it - not stoic resignation but active transcendence of the given - situations are not equivalent: what transcendence is possible for a woman locked up in a harem? Even this confinement can be experienced in different ways, Sartre told me. I persisted for a long time and only gave in half-heartedly. [61] Deep down, I was right. But to defend my position, I would have had to abandon the terrain of individualistic, and therefore idealistic, morality on which we stood. (*La Force de l'Age* 448).

In this first part, we have seen that consciousness is such that there is no human nature and no values-for-man. Man creates himself, and this fact gives him the possibility of total reflection, which would show him the contingency of his values and his responsibility for them – which would establish his absolute freedom. But this reflection remains a theoretical possibility for most men. The quotations from Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir that we have just seen suggest that the reason for this is political: the possibility for the individual to realise his freedom is conditioned by the society in which he finds himself and by his place in that society.

Why are there different societies, and why are there different social strata within these societies? *Being and Nothingness* does not answer such questions, but they must be answered in order to understand human freedom. And if we cannot answer them on the basis of what we have discovered so far, we would have to postulate autonomous laws of history and society, which would destroy freedom by making it the product of an autonomous mechanism and no longer of human effort.

The discussion of "My Neighbour" in *Being and Nothingness* (591-615) provides the basis for an understanding of society, but it is only in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* that we find the solution, a solution which, while showing how society and history are [62] sustained by individuals, will shed light on the framework theory we have developed.

Thus, we could consider *Critique of Dialectical Reason* as an attempt to concretise the still abstract idea of freedom offered by existential phenomenology in *Being and Nothingness*. [63]

Part Two

The Concrete

Introduction

In Part One, I often said that the concepts of *Being and Nothingness* should not be considered as metaphysical 'substances' but as *linguistic tools*. This interpretation is justified by the fact that in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, while still calling himself an "existentialist", Sartre no longer uses the same vocabulary.

The 'being-in-itself' which is "neither concrete nor abstract, neither present nor future" (*EN* 239), "neither activity nor passivity" (*EN* 32), and of which Sartre says: "the indifference of being is *nothing*, we can neither think it nor even perceive it" (*EN* 240), is replaced by "matter", of which he says:

> where is *matter*, that is to say, Being totally devoid of meaning? The answer is simple: it is found absolutely nowhere in human experience (*RD* 247).

The two ideas simply express the irreducibility of the world to knowledge – realism:

> the monism of materiality... is the only realism there is (*RD* 248).

The in-itself and matter are only the *reverse side* of the world. The world itself is *human* (cf. *RD* 247: "this world for and by man can only be human", and *EN* 270: "The world is human").

The correlative ideas of "for-itself", 'nihilation' [néantisation, Verneinung, Nichtigmachung, non-identity] and 'freedom' are replaced by the ideas of 'praxis' and 'totalisation'. Praxis is the free activity of the human being. The terms 'nihilation' (in one of its meanings) and 'totalisation' both express the fact that it is man *who brings about a situation*, a structured world. ("This [64] necessary condition for the given to appear only within the framework of a nihilation that reveals it" (*EN* 558)). They are both the temporalisation of man. Sartre says: 'Thus freedom, choice, nihilation, temporalisation are one and the same thing' (*EN* 543), and in *La Critique*:

> In this sense, it goes without saying that *to totalise oneself* means *to temporalise oneself*. Indeed - as I have shown elsewhere - the only conceivable temporality is that of totalisation as a singular adventure (*RD* 143).

What I call the 'social world' (p. 38), that is, the world of objectified values of others, is called here 'worked matter,' or, in conditions of alienation, 'the pratico-inert.' However, this concept of the pratico-inert is much more important than the idea of the "social world" in *Being and Nothingness*.

There is yet another question of vocabulary that needs to be briefly addressed. The stated aim of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is to establish "dialectical reason" as a type of reason different from "analytical reason". To this, Levy-Strauss replies:

> The distinction between the two types of reason is, in our view, based solely on the temporary gap that separates analytical reason from the intelligence of life (*La Pensée Sauvage* 326).

The question would be easier to resolve if Sartre had defined the word 'reason'. (He says: "Reason is a certain relationship between knowledge and being" *RD-QM* 10, but this does not go very far.) In the usual sense of the word, the idea of two [types of] "reasons" is incomprehensible. Sartre may simply mean that there are two ways of *reasoning*: the mathematical method, which is static and timeless, and a second method, which is dynamic. Everyone would easily agree with this because, as Sartre points out several times, everyone uses this [65] 'dynamic reasoning' in their daily lives. But one might wonder where the problem of 'foundation' lies.

However, it seems to me that Sartre believes he is doing something more difficult and more important, because he seems to believe that for this dynamic reasoning it is necessary to use the concepts of 'negation', 'negation of negation' and 'contradiction', and that the way in which they are used is not compatible with traditional logic. Now, it should first be noted that 'dialecticians' do not use these words in their usual sense, because ordinarily only *ideas* can be contradictory (a square circle). Negation is an *action*, not a relation, and it is the action *of the mind* - the action of denying - rather than the 'action' of one thing on another. For example, the sentence:

> Being is the negation of knowing, and knowing derives its being from the negation of being (*RD* 131)

is strictly nonsense. But there is undoubtedly *something* that Sartre wants to express when he talks about negation and contradiction. We must therefore admit that Sartre (and other dialecticians with him) give these words a

new meaning. What is this new meaning and *is it useful to use these words to express it*?

Sartre criticises the Marxist dialectic of nature, saying:

> A material change is neither affirmation nor negation; it has not *destroyed* anything, since nothing was *constructed*... (*RD* 169).

Negation would thus be *destruction*, an event that hinders the realisation of a man's project:

> negation is defined as an *opposing force* based on a primary force of integration and in relation to the future totality (*RD* 170).

This is quite clear, and it is also clear that a force opposed to an opposing force (negation of negation) will facilitate the realisation of the individual's project. But is it *useful* to describe the difficulties of realising a project in this way? For me, neither [66] Sartre's descriptions nor those of other philosophers based on negation, contradiction, etc., have ever shed light on the phenomena in question.

Take, for example, Sartre's description of need:

> Through need, in fact, the first negation of negation and the first totalisation appear in matter. Need is negation of negation insofar as it denounces itself as a *lack* within the organism; it is positivity insofar as through it the organic totality tends to preserve itself *as such*. The primitive negation is, in fact, a first contradiction between the organic and the inorganic in the double sense that lack is defined *for a totality* but that a *lacuna*, a *negativity* as such has a *mechanical* type of existence ... Need establishes the *first contradiction* since the organic depends in its being, directly (oxygen) or indirectly (food), on the inorganic, and conversely, the control of reactions imposes a biological status on the inorganic. (*RD* 166).

We can easily admit that my hunger is a force opposed to my current project to write, and that my act of eating is a force opposed to my hunger; strictly speaking, we could even say that there is a contradiction between the fact that I am an organism and the fact that I feed (indirectly) on the inorganic (but I doubt it, all the same - I see no possible meaning for the word 'contradiction' in this context). So what? Is it really clearer to say all this rather than simply saying that when I need something, it is because I lack something, and that I must seek it in the world, and, if we want my searches to change a little, myself and the world? [67]

I don't mean that the descriptions given by Sartre and the Marxists in terms of negation etc. have no value. The relationships they describe exist (at least in some cases), but a strict distinction must be made between what is described and the vocabulary used to do so. The vocabulary of 'negation'

and 'contradiction' is not only cumbersome; it is also a vocabulary of *idealist* origin. I am sure that at least a small part of the Marxist idealism that Sartre criticises (*RD*-QM 25) stems from this vocabulary. If we say, for example, that 'the proletariat is the *negation* of the bourgeoisie,' it is very easy to start believing that both are metaphysical substances, and thus forget that they are classes made up of *individuals*. Moreover, we have seen that vocabulary is an instrument of analysis. One could perhaps dismantle a watch with a hammer, but it would be preferable to do so with a screwdriver!

A more detailed discussion of this problem would take me too far from my subject. I simply wanted to explain why I do not use this esoteric vocabulary in the following exposition.

In *Critique,* Sartre talks a lot about Marxism, which he considers to be the unsurpassable philosophy of our time and of which existentialism is "a parasitic system that lives on the margins of knowledge, which opposed it at first and which today is trying to integrate itself into it" (*RD-QM* 18). However, my aim here is not *historical*; I simply wanted to draw a coherent theory of man in society from what Sartre wrote. I do not mean to say that absolutely everything he said is original; what is original is his synthesis, and that is what I want to understand. I will therefore not discuss Marxism's contributions to this synthesis. [68]

Ch. 1 Praxis and Dialectic

> Anthropology will only deserve its name if it substitutes for the study of human objects the study of the various processes of becoming an object (*RD*-QM 107).

We will study man below the level of total reflection. He remains an object, that is, he has a *nature*, insofar as there are values that have become absolutes for him. In this case, we say that freedom is *alienated*. To study the processes of becoming an object is to study how man is alienated by objects or ideas. Since man always acts according to his understanding of the world, it means examining how his 'framework' can develop in such a way that he understands the world in terms of the absolute nature of some of its elements. We will therefore resume our study of being-in-the-world, but at a more concrete level than before.

> Everything is revealed in *need*: it is the totalising relationship of this material being, a human being, with the material whole of which he is a part (*RD* 166).

Need is an intentional relationship; this is what the new concept of *totalisation* expresses. To totalise is to unify, to give a definite structure to

what was previously just a set of things placed arbitrarily in the world. In other words, it is to bring about a *situation* by projecting oneself towards an end, it is to give value to the world. With need, I give value to the situation according to a *given* goal – to feed myself. Totalisation is strictly correlated with the body. Need, as a relationship between myself and the world, is original, in the sense of being first in time, but also in the sense of always being there, at the basis of all other human activities. [69]

As we have seen, the world is independent of me; it has a coefficient of adversity [coefficient d'adversité]. Thus, I do not achieve my goal instantly. My first totalisation, which necessarily applies to the entire field, is not adequate, however. Aspects of the field escape me and become 'partial organisations' that stand in the way of my original project. I must try to reintegrate them into a new and more complex totalisation, and so on. Thus my activity is *dialectical* - a never-ending series of increasingly rich syntheses, each synthesis constituting, as its own negation, a new partial organisation, a 'counter-finality' that escapes from it.

We have already seen that my framework is dialectically constituted, and we now find that my relationship with the world is itself dialectical. This is no coincidence, for my thoughts are acts and my acts are thoughts. So to say that my acts are dialectical is just another way of saying that human behaviour is intelligent. To express the unity of this dual character of intelligence and intertwining with the world of human behaviour, Sartre uses the word 'praxis'. He defines praxis as:

> the organising project of material conditions inscribed through work in inorganic matter as a reworking of the practical field and reunification of the means to achieve the end (*RD* 687).

The idea of praxis takes the place of 'freedom' in *La Critique*. This is not a denial of freedom, but only an attempt to make it clearer that freedom is a kind of *behaviour*, not a 'power' or a 'faculty'.

Since the world is independent of me, in order to act in the world I must obey the laws of the world. I must [70] become a 'mechanical system'. "The man of need is an organic totality that perpetually makes itself its own tool in the midst of exteriority" (*RD* 167) We approach the world through technology. Thus, the way I make myself a tool is dictated by the structure of the surrounding world. I am the product of my own product. The kinds of acts I perform, and thus, in general, my reactions and attitude, are conditioned by my material situation. For example, a farmer is a completely different person from a hunter. He seeks different things in the world, he probably has a different physical development and, because the way he "be-

comes a tool" includes the way he cooperates with others, the structure of his society is different. All this means that the two have different understandings (not necessarily thematised) of the world.

Cooperating with others, therefore, is a way of making oneself a means to an end. But it is not the only possible relationship with others. I encounter the other as the subject of a praxis, that is, as someone who reorganises the world, often in a way that differs from the way I myself try to reorganise it. He is a "centre of flow of reality" (*RD* 183), or "a hemorrhagic centre of the object" (*RD* 184). (See also *EN* 311-13. The 'Gaze' is only a dramatic way of expressing this reorganisation of the world by the other). They are *significant* insofar as they give the world values that I myself can recognise as *theirs*. Since we both unify the same material world, we integrate each other as independent creators of value into our own value systems. This can be expressed very simply by saying that I behave differently towards another human being than towards a statue, because I have to take into consideration what the other person thinks of me and what he is going to do.[3]

> The foundation of [71] human relations ... is nothing other than praxis itself ... insofar as it is pluralised by the multiplicity who *live in* the same material environment (*RD* 186).

That is to say, as we saw in the introduction, that my relationship with others is not the result of purely intellectual recognition, but practical recognition. But because the two are inseparable, others are part of my

---

3   [FvG: Two issues here. The meaning of the terms 'Übertragung'/'Gegenübertragung' in psychoanalysis have remained pretty much stable even in the face of very fundamental changes in in the profession at both the institutional and theoretical levels. (In the course of at least the last century, i.e. in the face of two world wars, and vast political/economic changes.) Habermas' interpretation for this is that the 'objectifying stance' (with which we approach objects and objectified processes 'in the external world' [that 'in itself' terminology in this text]) is an *anthropological* constant that goes back to the origins of our species altogether. (Though it *manifests* itself differently over the millennia - as can be demonstrated by linguistic analysis of a historical bent. [The Tomasello debates show that it's already there in Chimps.]) Psychoanalysis originated in *Psychiatry*, and that, from the outset, *objectifies* the patient, just like the rest of the medical profession does. (For very good reasons.) This *objectification* expresses itself *in* that Übertragung/ Gegenübertragung pair. (This is something dynamic, and can change over time - it *does* so, if the therapy is successful. The emotional shifts can be vast, and it is often permanent.) The reason is that *every* human being, without exception, is the 'result', the ´product´ of a socialisation process - and it is *that*, in the individual, which is the 'object' of psychoanalysis, its 'point of departure'. Those infant and childhood years.
It is my claim here that anyone wishing to quibble with the above can make their critique 'stick' only if they are prepared to engage in an 'immanent critique' both of psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytic profession, as well as Habermas and the Frankfurt School.]

understanding of the world. Thus, I always act *in relation* to others; others are part of my *horizon* when I do something.

When I enter into a relationship with another person, this 'binary relationship' is itself situated in the context of others; "the real relationship between people is necessarily triadic". There is always me, the Other and the Third (the latter two can be either individuals or groups). The behaviour of lovers who hide to avoid the Third, for example, shows that even the most intimate relationships take place in the context of others and can therefore be considered triadic. We will see later the importance of this triadic relationship in my understanding of the world.

For now, let's return to the binary relationship. Two points need to be made. First, because I encounter the Other as a project, he is for me a 'gardener' or 'road mender' and not a 'man'. That is to say, my original relationship with the other is a relationship based on his own productive relationship with the world; "each recognises the other on the basis of the social recognition as passively evidenced by their clothes, their tools, etc." (*RD* 190). Secondly, this relationship is always reciprocal. (In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre shows how, even in the case of sadism, the sadist's project requires him to recognise his victim as a subject; it is not [72] fun to torture a mannequin). The reciprocity of totalisation is not itself totalised by the two individuals who constitute the binary relationship. The objective meaning of their struggle or cooperation escapes them. They remain separate from each other.

> Thus each lives in the absolute interiority of a relationship without unity; their concrete certainty is mutual adaptation in separation, the existence of a dual-focus relationship that they can never grasp in its totality; this disunity in solidarity (positive or negative) comes from an excess rather than a defect: it is produced, in fact, by the existence of two synthetic and rigorously equivalent unifications (*RD* 194).

In this case, is there any objective meaning? Does the structure of human relations not collapse into an incoherent multiplicity?

Our struggle or cooperation takes place in the world, depending on material things: tools, stones, rabbits, words. It leaves traces in the world. This objectification of our actions gives them their unity and thus provides the possibility of totalisation by a third party. Relations between people are mediated by the world, or, as Sartre says, by 'matter'. Matter does not 'express' or 'think' these relationships. They are 'written on' the world, and thus must be 'read' before they become active and meaningful.

> Through its mediation, the third party *revives* the objective meanings that are already *inscribed* in things and that constitute the group as a totality (*RD* 197).

(The third party could be a member of the group who later reflects on the relationship). However, there is no necessary totalisation, since an act could have minor consequences, or could be well hidden. [73]

It is this mediation through matter that makes history possible. I think it will be useful here, even though we are still only at the level of the individual, to try to clarify the ideas of totalisation, praxis, dialectic and matter by considering the fact that, according to Sartre, "matter, through the contradictions it contains, becomes *for* and *by* men the fundamental motor of history". (*RD* 250).

The idea of history implies some change in structure. There are societies, or there were very recently societies, which had not undergone such changes (or, at least, had not undergone radical changes). Why? In the world, man is faced with *problems* that arise from his needs. These problems must be solved with the means at hand; that is, apart from the human factor: the physical environment: rich or poor land, water, climate, natural harbours, etc. If the means are very limited, as in the environment of the Eskimos, a balance is quickly reached. On the one hand, there are a limited number of materials: ice, bones and seal skins; and on the other hand, there are very limited sources of food: seals and fish. Therefore, there are very few possible solutions to the problem, and the totality of the environment becomes a simple daily repetition.

The things and means available are themselves limited by the tools of society; oil a thousand metres below the surface is not accessible to a pre-technological society. Why don't they invent the drill? Because an invention is the answer to a problem, and oil is not a problem for them. For example, the Bushmen, despite living in coastal regions, never invented the boat. The reason is that the coast [74] lacks sheltered natural harbours, there are hardly any coastal islands, and the rivers are not navigable. A small canoe would have been quite dangerous and of little use. And you have to invent a small canoe before you can invent a large boat! On the other hand, the wheel could have been invented anywhere, but it would only have been useful, or met a need, in a society that produced goods in bulk and had to transport them. If a group of people settle in a suitable place, they don't have any major problems at first and can make do with simple tools. But as the population grows, they need to produce more and so they develop a system of irrigation, for example, which leads to other techniques, and so on. But these techniques develop in a necessary order, and you can't skip steps.

This development can be summarised as follows: – We start with a need and a given. There is an initial totalisation that produces rudimentary techniques. At the moment of the second totalisation, these techniques are already part of the given. If the problems remain the same because the possibilities offered by the environment are virtually nil, this is the end of the dialectic. But this new data may make a new, richer totalisation possible; there are two reasons for this: either there is a purely material change, in population or climate, or the techniques themselves give rise to new problems, in the form of new possibilities or counter-finalities, so that each totalisation can give rise to the possibility of a new, richer totalisation. Techniques are preserved because they are inscribed in matter, and this is how they can appear in the given. Thus we have the dialectic of praxis: totalisation – counter-finality (problem) – new totalisation, no longer at the level of the individual, but at the level of society. Each [75] man makes his totalisations with data that includes the totalisations of his ancestors, totalisations that are objectified by the mass of buildings, tools, books, roads and other traces left in matter, which he must revive through his own totalisations. It is this objectification in matter, taken up by each generation, that makes history irreversible.

This dialectic stops where the new problem is insoluble in the given situation with the given techniques (and it must be repeated that techniques include techniques of thought). So this dialectic is necessary. It can only be escaped on an individual level. For example, Hiero invented the steam engine, but this invention was not followed up because it came 'out of the blue' and the state of other techniques, including the production technique called slavery, prevented it from being used. This example shows us that strictly 'mechanical' techniques cannot be separated from social organisation, and that the outline I have just given of the development of technology remains abstract as long as it is not integrated into the social dialectic.

Let us return to my relations with others. The fundamental fact that we discover when we take stock of the world is *scarcity*. Scarcity is not part of the essence of the 'world' – it is simply a contingent feature of *our* world, a feature that we discover *empirically*. This does not mean that *everyone* is *always* hungry. But it is an empirical fact that throughout history all societies have always been threatened by a scarcity of means of subsistence. Even those who have eaten their fill have done [76] so against a backdrop of famine that threatened them and against which they had to take precautions. So scarcity is in the background of all our activities. It is a climate, an environment (*RD* 204). And it is in this environment that our relationships

with others take place. This environment is felt negatively through birth control, abortion, etc. (*RD* 205).

Scarcity means that the other is, objectively, a *threat* to me. It translates into *violence* at the interindividual level. If there are ten people and only nine bananas, one person will starve to death. In a class-stratified society, this person is, at least partially, pre-selected, but in this abstract example, any of the ten could be selected, and thus everyone is threatened by everyone else and threatens them in turn. The only possible solution for me is to restore the balance by killing one of my companions at random. For me, this violence is only a *response* to the violence of the other.

> Violence always presents itself as *counter-violence*, that is, as a response to the violence of the Other. This *violence of the Other* is an objective reality only insofar as it exists in everyone as a universal motivation for counter-violence (*RD* 209).

The thematisation of this violence is a Manichean morality, according to which the Other is absolute evil. If there are nine people for nine bananas and a stranger arrives, he comes not as a man but as a wolf, and he cannot demand to be treated as a human being. Thus, at this level, I *understand* the Other in Manichean terms as an alien species, and violence is the expression of this understanding.

Brutal violence is, of course, abstract, insofar as it is modified and controlled by social institutions. But as long as the world remains a world of scarcity, violence is always there; and the institutions themselves will be [77] violent insofar as they support a social structure that condemns certain strata of society to deprivation.

> Violence is not necessarily an act ... It is the constant inhumanity of human behaviour as internalised scarcity (*RD* 221).

It should be emphasised that this inhumanity of human behaviour is not, as Hobbes believed, part of human 'nature' (cf. *RD* 206-7). It is simply the internalisation of a contingent fact of our world, the world understood through scarcity. My totalisation of the world and of others is of a special kind; it is a totalisation of *struggle*. Of course, the Other against whom I must struggle is determined by the material world (are there enough bananas?) and by the mode of production (who do they belong to, who harvests them, can more be produced?).

We have seen that my project creates obstacles, or counter-finalities. In the realm of scarcity, we encounter a new form of counter-finality. As soon as I make something, that something takes on a value other than my own. In

particular, just as each individual is superfluous when there are only nine bananas, my product makes me superfluous, because it escapes me as a rare product. It becomes a *threat* to me (for example, the man who is killed for his money), or an interest that I must protect against everyone else. It takes on a meaning that is completely different from what I intended. This is an example of a general alienation of all my projects, which stems from the fact that they become objectified in a world where there are other people with other projects. Sartre gives the example of Chinese peasants clearing new land. To find soil, the peasant must get rid of the trees. This seemingly innocent activity, when multiplied by thousands of other peasants doing the same thing systematically, results in erosion, [78] the clogging of rivers, and finally flooding. Because of the very thoroughness of their work, the floods appear not as accidents but as the result of praxis (see *RD* 232-3). In this case, praxis, objectified in the world and thus passive, takes on an active character. I must take precautions against it as if it were the praxis of the Other. Thus, the normal process is reversed, and instead of me ordering the world, it is the world that orders me. Objects, as carriers of human meanings, take on quasi-human powers: this is what Sartre calls the *pratico-inerte*.

He explains it as follows:

> praxis as the unification of inorganic plurality becomes the *practical* unity of matter. The material forces gathered in the passive synthesis of the tool or machine *perform acts*: they *unify* other inorganic dispersed elements and, in so doing, impose a certain material unification on the plurality of human beings (*RD* 250).

In the field of the pratico-inert, "freedom does not mean the possibility of action but the necessity of living under constraints in the form of demands to be fulfilled by praxis" (*RD* 365). I am *totally* dominated by the values of Others objectified in the world, and my freedom is reduced to a minimum: the fact that I must *live* the situation by internalising it. [79]

Ch. 2 – Alienation and the series [la série] TOC

There are two forms of alienation, one of which we have already encountered, which Sartre calls objectification, and which is the alienation of the result of my praxis. The second, which we glimpsed in *Being and Nothingness*, is the alienation of praxis itself through value – an object becomes a magnet for me. But these two forms intersect, because praxis is also

understanding, and because they can both arise from the same type of relationship with others.

The first example of alienation through value comes from the fact that my own product threatens me in the world of scarcity. So I have to protect it, and it risks escaping me as a means of satisfying my needs, becoming an *absolute end*. That is, I construct my framework around it in such a way that I understand the world through it and no longer through my needs.

> This man remained a man of need, of praxis and of scarcity. But, insofar as he is dominated by matter, his activity no longer derives directly from need, although this is its fundamental basis: it is aroused in him from outside, by the matter worked on as the practical requirement of the inanimate object (*RD* 252).

For example, a farmer's plot of land is a means of livelihood. But it is also more than that. It has been internalised as a moral code that confuses the status of man with the status of owner. A change in agricultural production techniques, such as the introduction of tractors, may mean that this plot of land is no longer the best means for the farmer to satisfy his needs, and that he can live better by joining a production cooperative. Nevertheless, the plot of land remains a value in itself for him, and [80] he fights irrationally to keep it and, in his view, to preserve his very identity.

His plot of land has become what Sartre calls his *interest*.

> From the moment when, in a given society, a collective entity defines an individual in his *personal* particularity and *demands as such* that this individual, by acting on the entire practical and social field, *preserves it* (as an organism preserves itself) and *develops it at the expense of the rest* (as an organism feeds by drawing on the external environment), this individual *has an interest* (*RD* 263).

Instead of using an object as a means to my own ends, I have become a kind of cog that transmits the activity of that object to the world.

> The relationship of interest therefore involves – at the level of individual interest – the massification of individuals as such and their practical communication through the antagonisms or conveniences of the matter that represents them (*RD* 263).

With interest, we experience *necessity*.

Sartre gives the example of the relationship between the bourgeois and his factory. Here, scarcity no longer exists as a threat to the bourgeois. If he succeeds, he earns much more money than he needs for his own consumption, and even if he does not succeed, he is not threatened by hunger. (He will simply have to sell his factory to a competitor.) Instead of retiring as soon as he has earned enough money to live on, he continually reinvests his

profits in his business; the business has become his "whole being outside himself in a thing" (*RD* 261). Scarcity does not threaten him, but it threatens his business: "competition ... places it [the enterprise] at risk in as much as it has been manufactured" (*RD* 264). Thus his Manichean morality, his inhumanity, disappears at the level of his private life, but only to reappear [81] at the level of his business. No doubt he will willingly sacrifice himself for the company, but he will also sacrifice his competitors or his workers. If possible, their wages should be lowered, or better yet, they should be replaced by machines. If they try to strike, direct violence can be used, or activists can be dismissed and the others intimidated. Violence first appeared as counter-violence against the Other who wanted to kill me, but now it will be used against the striker because he threatens the *interest* of the owner.

According to 19th-century liberalism, it is an immutable law of human psychology that 'everyone follows their own interests,' and that capitalism is the equally immutable result of this fact. Thus, the separation of men would be natural, and the attempt to 'socialise' man would be futile.

> We must choose, in fact: either 'everyone follows their own interest', which means that the division of men is *natural* – or it is the division of men, as a result of the mode of production, which makes interest appear ... as a real moment in the relations between men. (*RD* 277).

We can already conclude that interest is not natural, and that the socialisation of man therefore remains possible. Interest is an alienation, not a natural state. Moreover, it is strictly irrational from the point of view of the individual's true material interest – that is, from the point of view of his material needs. The reason why this irrationality can appear is that the material needs of the individual are not an immutable nature either. They only act insofar as they are internalised, and can thus be distorted or even rejected. It is internalisation that is the basis of alienation.

The machine is therefore in the capitalist's interest. The relationship between the worker and the machine is completely [82] different. But it also dominates him. In the factory, the pace of his work is set by the machine, and it is these demands that determine the length of his working day. Insofar as new inventions force the worker to change his habits, forcing him, for example, to leave the countryside and settle in the city, the machine controls him completely. Unlike the owner, he does not try to preserve or develop it.

> It (the machine) therefore defines and produces the reality of its servant, that is to say, it makes him [the worker] a practico-inert being who is a machine in so far as

> the latter is human and a man in so far as he remains, despite everything, a tool to be directed: in short, its exact complement as an inverted man (*RD* 269).

Insofar as the social structure requires him to work as a wage earner, the machine is his *destiny*. Its demands are internalised as part of the nature of things.

However, his destiny does not come from the nature of things. For example, before 1830, as a result of the introduction of machines, there was a continuous decline in wages. The destiny of the workers

> was nothing but the impossibility of any stabilisation. This was not because of the physical and technical materiality of the machine, but because of *its social materiality* (its practico-inert being), that is, the impossibility of controlling this materiality and directing it towards the real reduction of human labour for all and not towards the negation of workers or at least of their humanity. (*RD* 272, emphasis added).

Their fate came from the nature of society, that is, from the way in which the people of that society used things.

Why, then, did they use them in such a way that advances in production methods resulted, at least initially, in increased misery? And [83] how could respectable Christians cheerfully profit from child labour?

We have seen that all my relationships with others take place in the context of the Third. Either I assume that the Third is with me, or I assume that it is not with me (although not necessarily against me). Sartre calls the kind of grouping in which I assume that the Third is not with me a collective, or a *series*. A series is a relationship between individuals in which they are isolated from one another. In the case of people waiting at a bus stop, the passengers are isolated by their different projects; they are all taking the bus for different reasons and to go to different places. In the case of people listening to the radio, they are isolated in space. If one of them believes that the propaganda programme is bad, he cannot communicate with the other listeners to protect them from the lies. He is linked to them only through the common object, the voice, and because of this he is powerless to act. This powerlessness of the individual in the series, and the fact that they are aware of it, is the most important point for understanding the series:

> I feel my powerlessness in the Other, since it is the Other as Other who will decide whether my act will remain an individual and crazy initiative or will reject me into abstract solitude or become the common act of a group; thus, everyone waits for the act of the Other, and everyone makes themselves the powerlessness of the Other, since the Other is their powerlessness. (*RD* 325).

There is, for example, the case of a police state in which the government is very unpopular, but where discontent remains serial because each individual is afraid to talk about it to their neighbour, for fear that they may be an informer. There is the case of a strike, where each individual returns to work for fear of being the only one not to do so, thus [84] risking dismissal. Here we see the second characteristic of the series, which is that each individual acts as they believe others will act. Here is a trivial example. Several boys go to the swimming pool to swim. They test the water. It seems cold, so for the moment they don't go in. One of them suggests that they all close their eyes, count to three and dive in together. They all agree, they close their eyes, they count to three - and each one does what he thinks the others are going to do. I don't want the others to laugh at me because I'm the only one in the cold water, but I also don't want to look like a coward for staying on the edge. So I have to decide whether my friends are honest, or whether they tend to play tricks. If I think the majority is going to dive in, I dive in; if not, I stay on the edge. Once again, we are faced with powerlessness. Each boy's action is conditioned by the sum of the others' actions *but without influencing them in turn*. We cannot even say that three boys are imitating a fourth. Each of them is imitating the presumed attitude of the other three - so all four are alienated. Sartre expresses this by saying that in the series, each tries to *become someone else*. This attempt to become someone else in all one's behaviour can be seen as a new kind of praxis - serial praxis.

If we return to the case of the capitalist who can lower wages by mechanising his factory, we see that he is not acting 'in a vacuum'. He acts in the context of other capitalists. He wants to reduce his costs in order to gain a larger share of the market by selling cheaper than his competitors. Otherwise, they will introduce machines into their businesses, and if he does not do the same, his business will go bankrupt. In both cases, the need to lower wages comes from the Other.

> Competition as a recurring antagonism determines the boss as *Other than himself* [85] insofar as he determines his action in relation to the Other and the action of the Other on the Others. (*RD* 254).

The Market is nothing more than the sum of all the actions of those who have something to sell or buy – capital, goods or labour. As the owner tries to 'follow the market', he tries to adjust his actions to those of the Others, while the Others try to adjust their actions to him. (Thus the Market is a series.) It is never the owner who lowers wages or hires children. It is always the Other who *forces* him to do so.

The owner understands the world through these two ideas: the necessity of violence as counter-violence to defend his interests, and the serial necessity of becoming Other. These two ideas form the basis of this world, and it is for this reason that the owner in 1840 was able to go to mass on Sundays without any worries, even though he employed children.

The worker's fate also comes from the Other; from his boss's competitors, of course, but also from the serialised praxis of other workers, because it is the competition between them that allows wages to fall. The 'iron law' of wages (like all other so-called laws of the market) is nothing more than the result of the serialisation of the workers' praxis.

Thus, the necessity we encounter in society is nothing but the impotence of serial praxis. "Necessity, as a limit within freedom ... becomes ... the very structure of all processes of seriality." (*RD* 376).

The project of becoming Other, called *extero-conditioning* [l'extéro-conditionnement], also takes other forms than submission to the Market. It can become a morality that governs the entire life of the individual. At all levels there is an attempt to do what others do, to wear [86] what others wear, 'to do the done thing' as they say in English. Sartre gives the example of hit records that are bought because others buy them. Advertising makes extensive use of exteroconditioning – 'Buy X. Everyone is buying it.' 'You have to be trendy.' 'Get with it.' It should be noted that to the extent that we try to be, act, and think like others, to buy what others buy, we are inevitably conditioned by groups, because it is only through propaganda groups (press, radio) and advertising that we can know what the Other is doing.

The best way for the bourgeoisie to protect its interests is to keep the workers in a state of seriality. This can be done directly by banning trade unions, dismissing activists and through intimidation, or by encouraging an ideology of seriality and exteroconditioning. It can be said that advertising in capitalist countries has political as well as commercial effects. In this sense, any serial ideology – that is, one that advocates a morality of exteroconditioning, or that maintains that from a scientific point of view humans should be treated as discrete molecules – can be called a *bourgeois ideology*. According to the Platonic myth, a class ideology would be a rationalisation – that is, a *lie*, invented knowingly to mystify other classes in order to consolidate its own domination. But this is not the case, because the ruling class is itself alienated. We shall see that these ideologies are merely the thematisation of bourgeois praxis. But for the moment we cannot consider classes.

If man could never escape the series, his freedom would always be alienated. We must therefore show how he can escape it. [87]

Chapter III - The group

We have seen that others are part of my framework, that I act according to the *Other*. In the series, I assume that he is not with me. In *the group*, I assume that he is with me, and so I act in a completely different way. (Sartre uses the word 'group' in a very specific sense that I will try to define. I will use the word 'grouping' as the genus of which the group, the series, the institution and the bureaucracy are species). For example, a section of soldiers is preparing to charge the enemy. Of course, a soldier would not charge alone. But when the order is given, he charges without hesitation because he *knows* that the others will charge. The unity of the charge comes from the fact that each individual *unifies* the group *by acting as if it were a unit*. There is neither a ready-made unity nor a special act of unification. The unification of the group comes from a specific quality of each act of its members; "In fact, the group is not my object, it is the *communal structure* of my act" (*RD* 403) (my emphasis). That is to say, there is a new kind of praxis in the group, which Sartre calls *common praxis*. In the series, although the Third totalises (unifies) the reciprocal relations of the others, nevertheless he/she does so from his/her own position in the series, that is, as Other. This act of unification by the Third, if it rebounds on unified relations, would do so either as if the Third were a foreigner, thus as a threat, or as indifference. In the language of *Being and Nothingness*, the Third unifies me and the other as 'we object'. The experience of the Third as unifier 'corresponds to an experience of humiliation and powerlessness: those who experience themselves as constituting a "We" with other people feel stuck among an infinity of foreign existences; they are radically and irretrievably alienated' (*EN* 490-91.) It is this alienation that is the basis of the series, where the Third always unifies from outside. Thus, 'unity, in fact, can only appear as the omnipresent reality of a seriality in the process of [88] total liquidation if it affects each individual in the *third-party* relationships he maintains with others, which constitute one of the structures of his existence *in freedom*' (*RD* 398). The Third Party must unify my reciprocal relations with the other in a new way.

According to Sartre, this new way of unifying comes from the attempt to escape serial powerlessness in the face of a threat, which can come either from the Other or from the practico-inert (*RD* 396) and on the basis of an already given passive unity – unity of place – for example. He gives the example of the first days of the 1789 revolution. At first, the population of Paris is only passively unified by the city itself. That is to say, unity is the

nominal unity given to them by the name 'Parisians'. This unity becomes positive, it is given content, by the fact that Paris is surrounded by troops preparing to 'restore order'. The citizens became aware of themselves as 'about to be massacred'. At first, the Third totalised its neighbourhood as a unit *of which it was not a part*. But, given the external threat,

> if the totalising power of a Third produces, as the discovery of an objective possibility, the seizure of the neighbourhood, *this time* as a threatened totality, it finds itself designated by this threat as *integrated into the totality it has totalised* (*RD* 400, my emphasis).

The Third-party thus no longer understands itself as an objective observer, but as an integral part of its neighbourhood, and it is this understanding that is at the basis of group formation. The first step is simply that people, worried, take to the streets. There they already find themselves in a group as they follow the currents and eddies that run through the crowd. But here the individual is only imitating the Others. Their actions come from elsewhere, the grouping remains serial, and can fall back into the pure seriality of absolute dispersion. The individual must still 'think' of the group as a group, that is, by finding in the other 'their own freedom' (*RD* 418) insofar as the Other increases the group and [89] represents for me an increase in myself:

> for the demonstrators fighting the police, it is the battle ... insofar as it is the same everywhere and everyone becomes *in it* the same as everything, that is to say, *freedom objectified* (*RD* 420).

The catalyst for the merging group could be the act of an individual who issues a slogan, not as a command, but as a simple 'signpost' (*RD* 421) that all members follow, because "*I discover in my praxis* the slogans that come from other third parties" (*RD* 421).

The particular character of the group at this level is that it has no leader. There is simply a series of slogans, emanating from anonymous individuals, which circulate and are followed by everyone. The relationship between me and each third party is mediated by the group ("I grasp the group ... as a mediation between myself and each other third party" *RD* 404) insofar as the group has become the 'medium' of my action. There is total equality, but it is not the equality of otherness found in the series. It is the equality of common sovereignty. When the crowd begins to behave as a unit, even if this unity consists only in fleeing together instead of dispersing, the Third "is sovereign, that is, it becomes, through the change in praxis, the organiser of common praxis" (*RD* 401).

Sartre defines sovereignty as follows:

the absolute practical power of the dialectical organism, that is, its pure and simple praxis as the ongoing synthesis of all multiplicity given in its practical field, whether it be animate objects, living beings or men (*RD* 568),

in short, "Man *is sovereign*" (*RD* 538). In the case of the revolutionary group, running together, regrouping, seeking a vulnerable enemy, the action is not diverse enough for us to find, even for a particular act, a specific sovereign. [90]

However, in a more structured group, such as a football team, we can see that sovereignty *circulates* among the members. For a time, the actions of one of them (the one with the ball) serve as a *regulator* for the others. They adjust their positions according to his actions, and it is he who totals the field for the group. But his actions while he is sovereign indicate the imminent loss of his sovereignty; he only takes the ball to pass it on to someone else. Thus, his sovereignty is not exercised from outside. It is nothing more than his way of integrating himself into the group. He is

quasi-sovereign and quasi-object; and the group itself, as totalised by the practice of such a common individual, is quasi-objective totality and, as a denied multiplicity of quasi-sovereignties, is in perpetual detotalisation. (*RD* 564).

Sartre calls this ambiguous relationship between the individual and the group a relationship of transcendence-immanence. The sovereign does not *tell* others what to do. The entire group expresses its understanding of the situation by reorganising itself behind the sovereign. It is this very reorganisation that makes it a group; it is the praxis of the group. The group restructures itself in the same way that I reorganise my body when I act. There is the same structure here as that found in individual praxis – the structure of an ongoing totalisation. The group internalises its goals and obstacles and reorganises itself to achieve the former and avoid the latter.

The praxis of the group is to constantly carry out its own reorganisation, that is, to internalise its objective totalisation through the things produced and the results achieved, to make these its new differentiations and new structures, and at the same time to go beyond this reorganisation towards new objectives (*RD* 412).

For example, a combat unit advancing towards the enemy across difficult terrain changes its formation constantly. Its members split up to examine both sides of a mound, the tallest crosses [91] a river, the most agile climbs a rock, and so on. There are two different elements in this praxis, one dialectical and the other not. The first is the succession of choices, of totalisations, made by the group through the Third Regulator, and the second is the

automatic reorganisation of the structure that follows these choices. This necessary reorganisation is the movement of the inert skeleton of the group, which lies beneath all these acts and makes them possible. Its necessity stems from the fact that the group, like the individual, approaches the world through technical means. The praxis of the group, therefore, understands, like individual praxis, the *project* and the *situation*: the 'external' situation (the world) and the 'internal' situation (the technical means, for the individual the body, for the group its members). The project is both limited by these conditions and gives them their value by transcending them.

The difference between the two is that the group is stronger – because it has a larger 'body' – but this comes at the price of the ambiguous relationship of transcendence-immanence between its members, which means that the group can never become a hyper-organism. The unity of its praxis always comes from the common praxis of its members. Individual praxis is a *constitutive* dialectic, but the praxis of the group is a constituted dialectic (see *RD* 432).

The praxis of the individual is also his understanding of his situation. Similarly, the group expresses its understanding of the situation in its reorganisation of itself.

> The structure, if it is to be considered, by abstraction, as knowledge, is nothing other than the idea that the group produces of itself' (*RD* 502).

This knowledge is not necessarily thematised. Each person expresses their understanding of the group in their praxis. (This is another way of expressing the fact that the praxis of the individual in the group is different from [92] their praxis in the series or alone.) But it is preferable that this knowledge be made explicit and explained to all members, because there is always the danger of the group breaking up, and this understanding is a way of avoiding it. (Here we find the basis of a dialectical ideology, which we encounter in the following chapter.)

Group cohesion presents two problems. First, there remains in each individual an element of passivity, even if it is only the fact that each has a different framework, and therefore their own limitations of knowledge. The members are *different*.

> In fact, everyone comes to the group with a *passive* [passif: individual characteristics] (i.e., with a complex conditioning that makes them unique in their materiality); and this passive - which must include biological as well as social determinations - contributes to creating, even outside of seriality, a hysteresis that can give rise to a new series. (*RD* 427).

There is always the possibility of misunderstandings, etc. Moreover, since this difference involves differences in capacity, it constitutes the basis for a permanent stratification of functions. Secondly, since the group can never become a *hyperorganism*, the individual can always leave it. Unity resides only in the unifying nature of each individual's praxis. If there is no praxis, there is no group:

The group therefore risks being destroyed as a living unit either through *disintegration* or *ossification*. (see *RD* 429) These are two different forms of return to seriality, because in ossification the group becomes passive and merely repeats its actions mechanically; it is the interest of its members, a new alienation. Unfortunately, as we shall see, the attempt to avoid fragmentation leads to ossification. But ossification and fragmentation are only *tendencies* that arise from the fact that the individual always remains *free* and *responsible*. In the following analysis, I want to show how [93] all forms of grouping can be understood in terms of this freedom. So we do not mean to say that the possible evolution from one form to another is *necessary*. We can recognise the dangers and thus, perhaps, avoid them. (The value of the analysis lies in helping us understand that society is a *human* structure, for which each member is responsible).

The first act taken to prevent the 'merging group' from breaking up is the *oath*. All members of the group swear that they will stay together, and each admits that sanctions will be taken against them if they leave unilaterally. This is an attempt to establish the unity of the group as an insurmountable limit; that is, to introduce into the group a new inertia, a rigidity, to act on the inertia of the practical field. After the initial enthusiasm has dissipated or the immediate threat has been lifted, each Third demands a guarantee that the others will stay together so that he can accomplish his tasks. The necessary rigidity is ensured by the group's violence against the deserter: "I demand that you kill me if I secede" (*RD* 449). Thus violence, terror, is the corollary of fraternity, and it is always there as the backdrop to all the group's actions. But it can only 'raise the threshold' for secession, not abolish it as a possibility. Sartre does not explain himself very clearly on this point, but it would seem that the degree of violence varies according to the group's objectives. It is quite rare for someone to be killed because they left a football club: but at the time when the club was formed, when it was still a 'hot' group, a group in fusion, one could perhaps say that violence existed as a risk of unpopularity, for example.

This violence must be understood as a new form of counter-violence, insofar as I am threatened by the desertion of the Third Party. It is merely the expression *within the group* of the fact that [94] in the field of scarcity, all

human relationships are based on violence. In this case, violence would be proportional to the threat. The oath is not necessarily a real historical act. It is an implicit *structure* of all groups. It is this structure that will form the basis for all other developments within the group.

Each individual has particular qualities (their individual characteristics), so each tends to take on particular functions. And, in any case, the group must differentiate itself in order to fulfil its purpose. This differentiation re-introduces otherness – but otherness as 'culture', and no longer as 'nature': "I understand that the Other is a practical and meaningful invention of *us the same*" (*RD* 475). The group thus becomes an *organisation*:

> Organisation is *both* discovered in the object of practical requirements and the division of tasks among individuals based on this dialectical discovery (*RD* 460).

At this level, everyone still has equal authority as quasi-sovereigns. There is no distinction between my rights and my duties. It is both my right and my duty to demand from the group what I need to fulfil my functions. I am still the Third Regulator. However, if, in order to avoid possible conflicts, the group, implicitly or explicitly, makes sovereignty the function of a certain individual, the whole nature of the group is changed. The Third Regulator is essential to the merging group, but now the individual becomes a non-essential mediation between the sovereign and the practical field. He has become a tool. The function is no longer the praxis of a certain individual. It has become an institution, that is, a position that has its own existence and that anyone can fill. "(The Function), by positing itself for itself and producing the individuals who must perpetuate it, becomes an institution." (*RD* 581) Sartre calls sovereignty as an institution 'authority'. It should be emphasised that the creation of this authority, [95] as terror concentrated in a single individual ("individual reincarnation of the group in fusion and of Liberty-Terror" *RD* 588) does not create a new force. It is a redistribution of the power of the quasi-sovereigns. Thus, the power of authority resides only in the praxis of its subjects, and it is the subjects who are responsible for it. (This applies as much to political sovereignty as to any other form of sovereignty). But the subjects are not aware of this. That is to say, their praxis is alienated:

> Through sovereignty, the group alienates itself to a single man in order to avoid alienating itself to the material and human whole (*RD* 603).

We are once again close to seriality. Relations between members of the institutionalised group tend towards a simple hierarchy. Under these conditions, the individual is no longer directly associated with the praxis of the

group. He is only concerned with his own place in the hierarchy. Thus, he behaves as he believes his superiors want him to behave. His peers are his rivals. For his subordinates, he is merely a cog in the wheel through which orders pass. He gives them kindly or brutally, depending on what he believes his superiors want. In his relations with his subordinates, he is content to control them and prevent insubordination.

> It is this triple relationship—external conditioning of the lower multiplicity; mistrust and serialising (and serialised) terror at the peer level; annihilation of organisms in obedience to the higher organism—that constitutes what we call *bureaucracy* (*RD* 626).

Any group, a government, a corporation, a church, a union, a high school, could degenerate into bureaucracy.

The group must arm itself in order to exist as a practical power rather than as a fleeting dream. But this 'concretisation' risks leading to the serialisation of bureaucracy.

> Thus the group, praxis bogged down in [96] matter, finds in its materiality - that is, in its becoming-process - its true effectiveness. But to the very extent that praxis is process, the ends sought lose their teleological character; without ceasing to be ends in the strict sense, they become destinies (*RD* 631).

It must be emphasised once again that we are not dealing with a Platonic man who contemplatively decides whether or not he wants to be part of a group or a series. Man is entirely penetrated by the group or by the series: he understands the world through them, and it is for this reason that we speak of different kinds of praxis: serial praxis and common praxis.

The difference between the series and the group becomes clear if we consider it in the light of what Sartre says about my relations with others in Being and Nothingness. We can say that in the series I act with *bad faith*, while in the group I act with *good faith*.

Sartre analysed relationships with others in terms of my ambiguous status as a subject (for oneself) and an object (for oneself-for-others). The gaze of the Other transforms me into an object. I can either accept and live with this status as an object (masochism), or reject it and try to re-establish my subjectivity by making the Other an object for me (sadism, indifference). All these behaviours are in bad faith because they are refusals to accept the fact that we are both, the Other and myself, both object and subject. In everyday life, the usual attitude towards others is *indifference:* queuing for the bus, the market – the other as a *statistic*. But those who accept an inferior position, who accept being mistreated by bureaucracy, or those who give them-

selves entirely to a leader in a fascist (serial) group, are people who accept their powerlessness and *choose* themselves as objects – this is masochism. The [97] leader himself, or the industrialist seeking domination, poses as the absolute subject in front of a series of objects that he can manipulate at will. – This is sadism – . Thus, in the series, I deny that I and the Other are both subjects. (Moreover, there are serial ideologies that expressly deny that human beings are subjects – they become objects that respond to stimuli.) Sartre also shows that bad faith is a form of escapism from responsibility – I say that my actions are the result of my nature, my psychological characteristics, God's will. Similarly, in the series, bad faith manifests itself in the frequent cry, 'I know it's wrong (torture, hunger, racism, etc.), but what can I do *all by myself?*'. We have also seen that the owner is not responsible for unemployment; it is always the Other who is responsible. So in the series we find the two characteristics of bad faith – the refusal of responsibility and the refusal of the difficult and ambiguous status of subject-object.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre shows that all human relationships are doomed to failure if they remain at the level of bad faith:

> All that remains for the for-itself is to re-enter the circle and allow itself to be tossed indefinitely between the two fundamental attitudes (*EN* 484).

But in a note he adds:

> These considerations do not exclude the possibility of a morality of deliverance and salvation. But this must be achieved through a radical conversion which we cannot discuss here (*EN* 484 n. 1).

This conversion is the change of attitude that leads to the formation of the group, because the group is, through the structure of the Third Regulators, the mutual recognition of each member as free, responsible, subject and object (as quasi-object and quasi-sovereign). We [98] can say that true lovers, and not lovers who struggle in 'Being and Nothingness', form the limit case of the group, both in terms of number and in terms of integration, of the recognition of each person as body and soul. This is the morality of good faith. [99]

Chapter IV - Classes

So far, we have remained, in two senses, at a fairly abstract level. First, I have tried only to show the abstract mechanisms of praxis, series and groups, although Sartre gives many very concrete examples. Secondly, the

group and the series are themselves abstract beings that exist only in *society*, which is a collection of groupings of all kinds. In this chapter, I want to address the concrete in both senses, showing the individual in the full depth of their true context and trying to apply the concepts we have considered to a few examples, in order to shed light not on the difficulties of the *theory* of groupings, for example, but on society itself.

The word class is defined in terms of the means of production. A class is a grouping of individuals who all have the same relationship to the means of production. The division of society into such groups stems from scarcity. Society did not produce enough to feed everyone, so it was necessary to designate certain individuals as undernourished and exclude them through violence, i.e. counter-violence, control of the means of production. Thus, in a context of scarcity, society is divided into two groups: the haves and the have-nots. The have-nots, as underfed, are threatened by the haves, and the haves, having no divine right to their property, are threatened by revolution and the loss of their property.[4] It is these *internalised* threats that constitute what is called *class struggle*. It should be emphasised that the class structure is always *violent* and *deadly*, even though there is not always conscious struggle between two (or more) classes that are conscious of themselves. We will see why. [100]

In European societies, the current class structure is the result of a long evolution, and there is no point in time when we can say that a society violently divided itself into two classes. But there are certain societies where this violent action has occurred recently: these are the European colonies in Africa and Asia. Sartre takes the example of Algeria to show the development of classes in colonial Algeria. The aim is to show that the class structure is violent, and that it is nothing but the result of the praxis of all individuals in society, that 'the class' or ('the nation') is not at all a natural 'being', a hyperorganism, and that the actions of the individual do not come from his nature, but from his *understanding*, his framework, i.e. that colonialism and classes are not inevitable or 'natural'.

---

4   (1) Here I am not making an empirical observation. I am defining the word. There are other definitions, for example based on lifestyles or levels of consumption. It should be noted that according to my definition, engineers, for example, as non-owners, are included in the proletariat.
(2) (Although in different societies there are different ways of owning, and thus of being non-owning, and within the same society there may also be subdivisions according to different means of production, for example the rural proletariat, which differs from the urban proletariat.)
(3) (Because 'class' is not defined in terms of level of consumption, it has only an approximate identity between the non-possessors and the 'underprivileged', but in what follows I will, for the sake of brevity, consider the two as identical. The reader must make the necessary reservations himself.)

First, it is hardly necessary to say that the original conquest was violent (although there were parts of Africa where force was deployed without being used). This violence had two consequences: the destruction of the old social structure, which would have been a threat as a rallying point (and as a possible new authority), and the need for the continued presence of the army. When the French government decided to make Algeria a settlement colony, it encouraged the deterioration of the pre-colonial order by introducing new property laws to cover the confiscation of Muslim land with a semblance of legality, to provide land for the settlers, and to create an impoverished rural proletariat that would be forced to work for them. Thus the so-called transformation of peasant vagrants was not the automatic consequence of a collision between two 'cultures' or two 'civilisations'. It was the violent and deliberate destruction of one society by the praxis of the members of another. (Moreover, as Sartre points out, the destruction did not come from the superiority of [101] French culture, but rather from its vices:

> if bourgeois society is turning feudal society into a society of beggars, it is no longer because of its superior qualities ... but because of its inferiorities, because of the filthy brutality that so clearly marked capitalism in its early days (*RD* 675).

The colonist finds himself among men whom he knows to be *dangerous*, since they had to be conquered, and who are objectively inferior to him insofar as the status of a man is defined by his job, his salary, his clothes, and on whom he depends since they are his workers. That is to say, he finds himself in a racist society - *the structure* of society is racist. But this structure is nothing more than the praxis of the colonisers and the colonised, the way they revive the past, institutions, etc. The coloniser must *internalise* and *live* the racist system in his daily actions. Racism is his way of understanding the world, and racism as a theory is merely the thematisation and explicit expression of this lived racism. Of course, this is not a rationalisation on the part of the colonisers to justify their privileges, because there is no *natural* knowledge (the Platonic myth) that the coloniser would consciously try to distort. For the coloniser, racism is a *practical truth*. Neither those born colonisers nor newcomers from the metropolis are capable of questioning this practical truth; neither have the necessary intellectual tools. Even if there are some among them who are educated enough to understand scientific theories, it is quite possible that they will not understand theories about race, because their racism is *unconscious* in the sense that we have defined it, that is, so deeply rooted in the framework that we think through it without realising it. The racist 'intellectual' will therefore limit

himself to listing simplistic 'proofs,' without much concern for logic, because it all seems so obvious to him. (I even heard a white South African justify laws against marriage between [102] different 'races' by the fact that there are two species of ducks which, although biologically compatible, feel repugnance for each other – without even realising that if such repugnance existed between whites and blacks, these laws would be superfluous!). On the other hand, racism is not part of the 'essence' of the coloniser, because it is possible for a coloniser to realise, slowly and painfully, that racism has no basis and that all his thoughts were previously largely imbued with racism.

One of the characteristics of racist thinking is its seriality.

> All racial thinking is merely behaviour that realises in otherness the practical truth inscribed in the material being worked on and in the system that results from it (*RD* 672).

Behaviour is realised in otherness because it is alienated behaviour; each coloniser behaves as he believes others will behave. A clear distinction must be made between the praxis of associations defending colonists, their political parties, or their government (South Africa, Rhodesia), and the daily and serial praxis of each colonist. The former is entirely secondary and derivative of the latter. At the level of the racist group, there is a recognised responsibility of the group. The group knows that it wants to crush 'agitators', spread propaganda in the metropolis, etc. But the colonist as owner does not associate himself within a group with other owners. He is not responsible for the misery of his employees, because he pays them the same wages as everyone else. According to him, he does not choose the wages, he pays the worker strictly according to what he is worth. And since the worker is stupid, lazy, a thief, etc., he is not worth much. (One could respond to this by saying that one would have to be really stupid to be honest and courageous when one is paid only a pittance – but let us move on). In other words, [103] [in the mind of the colonist/owner] low wages are not the result of a surplus of labour, which is itself a consequence of the policy of expropriation; they are merely the result of the inferiority of the natives. Not only the wages he pays them, but also his daily conduct towards his workers comes from the Other: "I try to realise the Other – that is to say, to make myself more deaf, more pitiless, more negative towards the demands of the native than my plantation or my own requirements would demand, so that this attempt may become, in the Other who is tempted to make a concession, the real presence of the Other, as a magical force of constraint" (*RD* 346).

There is a close relationship here between my "ideology", the ideology of the Other, and the structure of Society. My ideology is my own internalisation of the structure. The structure is only the sum of the praxis of the Others; that is to say, it is only the sum of the ideologies of the Others, since the act comes from the idea. So my ideology is the ideology of the Other, the ideology of each Other is his internalisation of the structure, which is partly produced by my ideology ... Once again, we find nothing but imitations of imitations without any real praxis. For example, the coloniser believes that the colonised is inferior because in that society he is poorly paid and thus suffers from all the evils caused by poverty. He believes him to be inferior and gives him a low wage because the other colonisers give him a low wage, and vice versa.

On this basis of seriality, colonisers can form a group to protect themselves against the metropolis or against a possible revolt by the colonised. But this group praxis remains alienated insofar as it acts according to an ideology that has become explicitly racist and thus posits race as the coloniser's 'otherness', i.e. as an interest. Violence and lies are justified as [104] counter-violence in the face of the threat that every movement of the colonised poses to the [colonising] race.

If racism as praxis-structure and racism as ideology are identical, one may wonder how there could be a change in society. There are two possibilities. First, ideology is identical to structure only at the pre-reflexive level. It is always possible to escape it through reflection. Second, since praxis is serial, its results are alienated, different from the results that were intended. The structure of society can thus change 'by itself', through the blind praxis of its members (counter-finalities), and ideology follows this change. We can take as an example the idea of the inferiority of black people as it relates to slavery. The slave trade, as we know, has its origins in the need for labour in the American colonies. Unfree labour was needed because there was so much virgin land that it was impossible to keep free men as employees on their own land. However, in the beginning, the necessary labour was provided not only by black slaves, but also by white convicts transported under contract ('indentured labour') and even by people kidnapped from the large cities of England. These white people were shipped in exactly the same appalling conditions as the blacks and treated just as brutally by the overseers and white bosses. There was no racism – only contempt for the poor by the rich. However, the need for labour was growing in both the colonies and the metropolis as a result of the increasing importance of sugar in the English economy. As there were no longer any surpluses in England, only Africa could supply the necessary slaves. Blacks

replaced whites, and racism replaced class contempt. It should be noted that all these changes, and thus [2 x 104][105] the change in ideology, came from nothing other than the serialised praxis of merchants and bosses in England and the colonies (see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, pp. 9-19).

Before moving on to consider classes in advanced capitalist societies, we can talk a little about the idea of 'ideology', a word I have often used without attempting to define it until now. First, it should be emphasised that it has no pejorative meaning. An ideology is not necessarily false. Secondly, by 'ideology' I mean above all the *political* ideas of the individual: the framework of their ideas about their society, their role in that society, history, morality. It is these ideas that are often simply an internalisation of the structure. There is a permanent *tendency* to take what exists as absolute. This tendency is not part of 'human nature'; it comes from the fact that all reflection, all questioning, requires time, and that in our world of scarcity, time is the scarcest of all goods.

> I [Sartre] endorse without reserve the formulation in *Capital* in which Marx defines his 'materialism' as: "the mode production of material life [that] conditions the social, political and intellectual life of a people in every aspect and in every way". This seems to me to be an unavoidable truth *as long as* the transformation of social relations and the progress in technical means "have not freed man from the yoke of scarcity." (*RD-QM* 31-32)

For this reason, ideology usually (but not necessarily) follows praxis. I learn the ideology of my milieu, and I continue to practise it throughout my life, probably without trying to justify it. As we have already noted, one of the characteristics of the framework is that it is 'unconscious'. It is therefore quite possible for an intellectual – that is, someone who has time to think – to remain a victim of their framework. In this case, they would, for example, construct a theology that would justify the interests of their class: perhaps by sketching out [106] a hierarchical universe said to underpin the social hierarchy (such as medieval Catholicism), or perhaps by finding a religious justification for the separation between private morality and public morality (such as Calvinism). But in neither case would there be a *conscious* and *dishonest* search for a means of mystifying the people. Rather, an attempt is made to apply principles that are *obviously* true in one sphere to all other spheres. Nevertheless, I do not deny that it is *possible* for the bourgeois, the racist, to act in bad faith, to say things they know to be false. But here again, there is no *absolute* bad faith. According to their own principles, they have the *right* to lie – lying is part of the violence that is nothing

more than counter-violence in the face of the threat of the Other. So they are not cheating. Finally, the 'lower' classes, as we shall see, can accept the ideology of the ruling class. And they can only escape their condition by developing a new ideology, that is, by realising that this political structure is not natural.

The relationship between classes in advanced capitalist countries is much more complex than the relationship between colonisers and colonised. The current social structure is the result of a long evolution; the two major classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, have evolved from other structures and other classes, and the very relationship between them has changed greatly during their 150 years of existence. Another difficulty arises from the fact that this evolution cannot be understood without reference to imperialism, which has made it impossible to consider a country such as England or France as a closed society. In fact, imperialism has so thoroughly integrated the economies of the 'Atlantic' countries and the 'Third World' countries [107] that we can no longer consider them as separate societies. Sartre had to simplify, and I will have to simplify even more.

Violence manifests itself on two different levels. The first level is the relationship between the worker and the boss. The latter, in order to protect his interests, must pay as little as possible for as much work as possible. (Of course, what is 'possible' can vary greatly.) All his actions towards his workers will be dominated by his understanding of the need to exploit them (although he does not frame it as 'exploitation', because, as we have seen, he has become a cog in the wheel between his interests and the world. He does not exploit, he obeys the demands of the world).

> It is directly against future unemployed workers that he buys his machines, not, as they say, 'without caring about their fate', but on the contrary, expressly caring about it, insofar as every boss at the time is trying to build up a reserve army of labour by increasing the number of unemployed workers (*RD* 697).

The worker is, in a sense, the *enemy*, because unlike the machine, he does not automatically submit to the demands of the company. The reality of this initial violence can be expressed by saying that the boss wants to treat his worker *as a thing*, not as a human being. The Malthusian theory of wages, which considers the worker as a commodity exactly like any other commodity, is the epitome of this attitude. It is violence because it can result, for the worker, in permanent under-nutrition, unemployment, etc.

On this level, violence is serial; it is a relationship between *each* boss and his workers. The boss derives his power from his property. But he has no natural *right* to his property. (I do not mean to say that the boss denies the

rights of the worker. Neither has any rights because *there are no* natural rights.) How, then, can he keep it in the face of the workers, who are, at least [108] numerically, stronger than him? First, if he has no natural rights to his property, he has legal rights, which are guaranteed by the laws of his country, that is, by the State and by the State's police and army. What is the State? *Sovereignty*, as the power of one individual over other individuals, is the power of each Third Party *in a group*, centralised as authority in the hands of one, on the basis of an oath. Thus, the sovereignty of the State can only be the power of a certain group. But since capitalist society is not a group, we cannot speak of the sovereign of society. It is not the 'expression of the general will', because only a group can have *a will*. "In a given society, the state is neither legitimate nor illegitimate" (*RD* 609). The power of the state is nothing but the serial powerlessness of individuals in the face of a certain group. It would not be accurate to say that this group *is the* ruling class, because a class is not a group. But since class is defined by its relations to the means of production, and since it is the state that establishes the laws controlling these means, we can say that the state represents the class that benefits from the type of property (feudal, capitalist, etc.) that it protects. As long as these property relations remain the same, changes in the policy of the state apparatus only concern disputes among members of the ruling class - that is, in our case, the bourgeoisie.

Thus, violence in defence of the interests of the bourgeoisie is legal, but if the workers, whose very existence is threatened by the system, resort to violence to defend their lives, this is *illegal.* ("non-interventionism in the economic operations of the ruling class, repressive and permanent interventionism against the working class" - *RD* 712). This quote applies to the 19th century and is, of course, a simplification [109] compared to today's society. It therefore seems to me that the minimum condition that must exist in order for there to be a *class struggle* is that there must be a state apparatus that uses violence (or is prepared to use it) to defend a (serial) social structure that guarantees the interests of one class and is itself violent. "Every society decides who dies" (*RD* 727). Of course, it does not do so by creating a court of law to decide who is superfluous, and the Prime Minister does not execute the victims himself. No individual is chosen personally. It is the *system*, the *structure* that decrees that the infant mortality rate will be so many per cent higher among the disadvantaged classes, that workers will live so many years less than the bourgeoisie. The system kills. (And the system is nothing more than the praxis of the individuals who keep it in existence.) This is what state violence is in a class society. It is serial violence, and thus easily concealed, but it is much more serious than the violence of

the group that defends the system against revolutionaries, because it is always there.

After what I have just said, it seems strange that there is not much more open violence. The reason is that the bourgeoisie has another weapon – *mystification*. Workers will only revolt against the system if they realise that their ills come from it. So as long as they are imbued with bourgeois ideology, they will accept their fate as immutable.

The ideology of the bourgeoisie, as I have said, is not a rationalisation. It is the description of the current situation *taken to the extreme*. Broadly speaking, it has three aspects (at the political level, of course):

a) seriality as the natural relationship between human beings, from which [110] derives the impossibility of human socialisation, the necessity for the individual to "realise" himself through the selfish effort to earn more than his neighbour, and extero-conditioning.

b) the right to property as the foundation of freedom, order and stability.

c) the right to use violence to protect this property. These ideas constitute what Sartre calls 'the general schemes' of a "situated understanding" or "directions for understanding" (*RD* 715), or "the objective class spirit, ... an environment for the circulation of meanings" (*RD* 721) - that is, the 'framework,' learned almost from birth, through which we understand society. These ideas permeate all popular literature, newspapers (which tend, for example, to talk about personalities rather than ideas), part of philosophy (such as atomistic theories, etc.) and part of religion. One could speak of a veritable serial 'brainwashing'. It should be emphasised that it is serial. There is no concerted attempt on the part of the bourgeoisie to make its ideology acceptable to other classes; there are only individuals, political and religious groups, and the state apparatus, each expressing their own version of this ideology. The existence of the state is another factor of mystification in that it creates the illusion of national unity and allows for appeals to chauvinism. All these influences, added to the fact that he lives in a world where bourgeois ideology is the 'practical truth', make the worker accept his position.

There are therefore two things that are necessary before the worker can become revolutionary. He must rid himself of bourgeois ideology and he must join forces with a group in order to fight the state apparatus and replace it with a human system, i.e., a non-serial system. But in fact these two requirements are one and the same, for they can be summed up by saying that he must exchange his serial ideology for a group ideology. Since praxis and ideology are so [111] closely linked, change could come from a new ideology propagated by a handful of militants, or from a change in praxis re-

sulting from a change in the situation, as in the case of the Paris insurrections we have discussed. But usually changes are parallel, influence each other and are equally indispensable.

What is entirely new in the capitalist system as it has developed in Europe is the multiplication of the productive power of men through cooperation and the use of machines. This cooperation has allowed the formation of a new ideology. While the boss sees his company as an individual fighting against other individuals in the market, the worker (and the philosopher who examines the system) sees it as the cooperation of several people towards the same goal. (Of course, he does not necessarily see it that way, because for him, the goal of his work is not to create a particular product, but to earn a living, and he does not care about the rest. In this sense, the factory is both a series within and a member of a series outside. But it remains true that it is easier to see the factory than the market as a rational relationship between individuals, with a well-defined product. And, at the very least, the factory remains a 'passive unit' that would be the basis for this unification of the grouping from within by the Third Party that transforms the series into a group. Thus, the factory provides the possibility for the development of a group ideology and praxis.

But the worker must still understand that his destiny comes from the boss and not from nature. It is in grasping this fact that he grasps his class being. When he realises that he is not simply *employed* by his boss but that he is exploited by him, he sees at the same time that he is linked to other exploited people. It is in the analysis of this [112] double relationship to a boss and to other exploited people that he constructs an ideology of his own class. Moreover, it is not necessary for this ideology to be thematised at the beginning of the workers' protest activities, but it must be so for the praxis of a revolutionary group to become effective. The reason for this is that the class itself is not a group –

> The class manifests itself simultaneously (in the arena of the struggle for demands) as an institutionalised apparatus, as a (serial or organised) set of direct action groups, as a collective that derives its status from the pratico-inert field (through and by means of relations of production with other classes) and its universal scheme of practical unification of groups that are constantly forming on its surface (*RD* 649, collective=series).

In a sense, the unity of the class is only *nominal*. In other words, the class is to be *unified*. There are always upheavals, conflicts between the union and the masses, between the union and 'wild groups', and ideology is the tool that must resolve these conflicts, that must "endow the working class with

class reflexivity based on the determinations it undergoes in powerless-ness" (*RD* 737). It can do this because "truth in its original sense is, as sociality and in an integrated group, *the liquidation of all otherness*" (*RD* 530) (my emphasis). There is "a spontaneous reformism among workers" (*RD* 737) that stems from their failure to understand that their social status is not only unjust in its details, but that it is unjust in *its very principle*. This 'spontaneous reformism' has been fostered by imperialism and colonial-ism. For, insofar as capitalist exploitation aims at *accumulation*, colonial-ism and neo-colonialism, by increasing the accumulation of capital in the metropolis, have enabled metropolitan workers to advance more rapidly in terms of their standard of living, and at the same time, by appealing to chauvinist sentiments, have divided the proletariat into two sections: colo-nised [113] and metropolitan workers, and set them against each other.

For all these reasons, class struggle as the conscious praxis of groups may sometimes be confused and disorderly, but it nevertheless always exists as a system supported by the praxis of a myriad of individuals. It is therefore always necessary to propagate the class ideology that will explain both the nature of the series and serial powerlessness and the possibility of escaping it in the group.

> The worker will only free himself from his destiny if human multiplicity is for-ever transformed into group praxis (*RD* 351).

Sartre says that 'analytical reason' is the ideology of the bourgeoisie and that 'dialectical reason' is the ideology of the proletariat. By this he means that only dialectical reason, insofar as it attempts to understand in terms of totalities and the *reciprocal* relationship of conditioning between the indi-vidual and the totalities of which he is necessarily a part, can understand se-rial praxis and common praxis as *essentially* different from individual praxis.

The ideology of the proletariat is thus a *dialectical* ideology of *group* praxis. According to Sartre, it is also a *universal* ideology. That is to say, it aims at a society that is not based on exploitation. He does not explain how this would be possible, but it is easy to do so, and it may help us to better un-derstand Sartre's concepts. Since class division is based on the contingent fact of *scarcity*, it follows that a classless society is only possible where scarcity has disappeared, at least where a society can be established in which it would be possible to guarantee everyone the means of subsistence, regardless of the risks of flooding, drought or other natural disasters. (Speaking of the beginnings of the industrial revolution, Sartre says:

> No doubt this new [114] mode of production did not make it possible to overcome scarcity, so that *it was not even conceivable* that the means of production could be socialised. (*RD* 227, emphasis added.)

Without this possibility, a revolutionary group could only replace one form of exploitation with another. For example, part of the proletariat might want to overthrow the state in order to cooperate with the bourgeoisie in the exploitation of other workers and peasants (a bit like in many newly independent countries where the local ruling class joins forces with the former colonial companies to exploit the peasants); or the urban proletariat could take power simply to exploit the peasants directly (as happened, at least initially, in the USSR and perhaps in other socialist countries).

The new historical factor that makes a universal ideology possible is the combination of an economy of accumulation and powerful technology, which makes it possible to envisage steady progress towards a society of abundance, and that we could, even today, with the means available in the world, ensure a comfortable standard of living for every human being. Of course, no society, even a small one, currently does this – even the most advanced capitalist countries, such as the United States (see Harrington: *The Other America*) and the United Kingdom (see Abel Smith and Townsend: *The Poor and the Poorest*) have citizens who are undernourished. But it would be possible to do so, and therefore it is also possible to create a classless society.

There is thus a close relationship between the development of universal ideology, the economy of accumulation and technology. For capitalism is itself both a means of production and a social system; capitalism and technology were invented in response to the [115] same problems. The accumulation of capital allows the boss to employ more workers and buy machines, which in turn allow for greater accumulation. Working together in factories required new technical means, new machines, and accumulation allowed for the manufacture of objects not intended for immediate consumption. All this made possible a group ideology and a universal ideology. (Thus, critics of Marxism who believed that Marx was naive to believe that the proletarian revolution could abolish classes as such, and not just certain classes, failed to understand the relationship between class and the contingent fact of scarcity. As at least one Marxist, François Hincker, failed to understand, for he speaks of Sartre's theory of scarcity as 'a tragic theory of history'. *La nouvelle Critique*, March 1966, p. 164. They believed that classes came from 'human nature': selfishness, love of power, etc.)

Thus capitalism has created the possibility of a *human* society – that is, without violence and Manichean morality. But because the praxis of the bourgeoisie is *alienated* insofar as it acts to protect its *interest*, it maintains violence and demands that society be organised according to enterprise and profit, not according to man. For this reason, man is not free in such a society. He is controlled by the system (the pratico-inert) instead of controlling it. [116]

Conclusions - And some moral and political perspectives

We began with the following problem: 'How should I behave towards others?' In order to resolve it, after dismissing the Cartesian myth of the "ghost in the machine," we undertook a phenomenological description of the individual, thanks to which we were able to dispel three other illusions: the illusion of the moment, the belief in the existence of "*human nature*", and one version of this belief, the Platonic myth of a ready-made mind, of natural knowledge and understanding of the world. Man has no nature because the structure of consciousness, which projects itself into the future, is such that it can never be bound to anything, that it can question any value. It is this structure of consciousness that makes it possible to say that man is free. He transcends the given towards a goal, a value, which he himself constitutes, implicitly or explicitly. This transcendence is the behaviour that characterises human beings. Man constitutes values according to his framework [cadre], his understanding of the world. He constructs this framework by synthesising all his experience. This process is unconscious, not conceptualised, but it can be thematised and become a conscious attempt to construct a theory of the world by using the instruments of thought [that are available]. [au moyen des techniques de la pensée.] Insofar as he can change his values, he is responsible for them, but to the extent that he believes his framework is absolute, he is unaware of his responsibility. Through the techniques of reflection, he can grasp the contingency of his framework and thus make a real choice for himself. Since these techniques of reflection and thought themselves derive from society, he is largely conditioned by his society, although society and other aspects of his situation – body, psyche, world – exist for him only insofar as he *internalises* and *experiences* them. [117]

Nevertheless, in order to understand freedom, it was necessary to study society more closely to satisfy ourselves that there is no automatic mechanism at the level of society that would determine which techniques [of

thought] would be available to each individual. Society is made possible by matter, the world of things, which mediates between me and others, and also between me and the past, through and by the meanings traced on the world and re-activated by me. Society has a synchronic dimension and a diachronic dimension – history. Neither is a 'dead weight' that inevitably conditions me. The social system is nothing more than the praxis of the individuals in society. It is therefore not immutable. The fact that the system appears to be something that has its own life independent of human beings stems from the fact that there are two kinds of formations, two kinds of social structures: the series and the group. In the series, the praxis of each individual is alienated and its result is a counter-finality [contre-finalité] that no one has intended, a "praxis without an author" (*RD* 235). History unfolds blindly.

The fact that conditions this process, making it contingent, is scarcity. The scarcity of the means of subsistence means that people are threatened by each other, and thus the fundamental relationship with others is violence, or rather counter-violence in the face of the threat of the Other.

In advanced societies, scarcity is reflected in the designation of certain individuals, defined by their relationship to the means of production, as underfed and disadvantaged, and violence is reflected in class struggle. This struggle may appear as a direct confrontation between two groups, but in any case it always exists as a daily struggle between bosses and workers and as a state apparatus that underpins the social structure. Scarcity prevents purification through reflection, which requires time, and thus creates the possibility of alienation, whereby certain objects become absolutes, 'magnets' for humans. In its [118] form of interest, it causes counter-violence to be used no longer to protect man, but to protect a thing – a company, for example – which has become a man's being. Thus, a society dominated by serial praxis and interest is alienated, inhuman and irrational.

The means of escaping this irrationality and the impotence of serial praxis is the group, in which each individual is free, as a quasi-sovereign who unifies the group and cooperates with the other members on the basis of a common understanding of the situation. Changes in society are also changes in the understanding of the world. The historical development of society is both an enrichment of praxis and an enrichment of understanding. This development is the consequence of the praxis of individuals who try to solve their problems in the midst of scarcity and class struggle. Their understanding is linked to their praxis, and as long as the development of society has been blind, political ideologies have remained the simple internalisation of the given (serial) system. But capitalism, through the in-

stitution of cooperative production, and above all through the current possibility of abolishing scarcity by means of technology, has created the possibility of an ideology that is both universal and group-based, i.e., one that promises the abolition of counter-violence and serial alienation.

We can now try to define freedom more precisely. Man is always potentially free, in that he has the abstract possibility of making a 'second choice,' of changing his fundamental attitude or project. To actualise this possibility, he needs certain mental resources. Since it takes time to acquire these resources and to use them, this freedom will remain an illusion in a world of scarcity where man must [119] work without respite simply to feed himself. Moreover, in a serial society, whose principle is external conditioning and where praxis is immediately alienated, even a philosopher who liberates himself through reflection is only *formally* free. To translate this freedom into real and effective praxis, the individual must integrate himself into a group that is animated by his philosophy.

I am free in a society where I live, in all its intensity, the relationship of transcendence-immanence with the group. I cooperate fully with the group in the creation of society, but at the same time I know that society, as a structure, is only a means, and that it is I, as an individual, who am the end-goal. Otherwise, society becomes my *interest*, which is to say a new alienation.

The idea of oneself as the ultimate goal leads us to the problem of ethics. Is it possible to establish ethical imperatives? Once I have freed myself, is it possible to say how I should act, what goal I should choose, how I should behave towards others? Unfortunately, the answer is 'No.' As soon as I realise, through 'purifying reflection', that I am responsible for my values, I find myself completely isolated; it is impossible to deduce moral 'duties'. An existentialist morality is illusory. It is not even possible to say that I must act in good faith.

All we can do is undertake a phenomenological study of moral life, i.e. try to show the internal logic of different ways of doing things. For example, *Being and Nothingness* analyses the internal contradictions of attempting to live in bad faith (as Simone de Beauvoir says: "Being and Nothingness is largely a description of seriously-minded people and their universe." (*MA* 67) It shows that it is impossible to achieve a stable relationship [120] with others if one does not accept their ambiguous status as subject-object. Knowing this is very useful if one wants to establish a stable relationship with others. But if one does not want to do so, it is of no interest. For in the end, there is no reason to want to be happy, except in the tautological sense that I am happy when I do what I want to do. 'Duties' are only

obligatory if there is such a thing as human nature. In that case, one could say: 'By your very nature, you want this; therefore, you *must* act in this way.' But there is no such thing as human nature. Ethics is impossible, not because we live in an alienated world, as Colette Andry (*Sartre*, pp. 112–113) suggests, but because morality can only be an individual choice without any foundation.

We can only *shed light* on the world and correct the logical geography of moral concepts.

> No one is supposed to be ignorant of the law because there is a code and the law is written down: after that, you are free to break it, but you know the risks you run. Similarly, the function of the writer is to ensure that no one can be ignorant of the world and no one can claim innocence. (*What is Literature?* 31)

Everyone can be shown their *responsibility*. If you believe that you love your neighbour, I can show you that this requires a political commitment to abolish a system that kills children in India and provides mink coats for dogs in England. But if, when you realise that loving your neighbour is not just a pleasant feeling but a lifelong task, you tell yourself that perhaps you were wrong to want to love your neighbour after all, there is nothing more I can do. Except, perhaps, to point out that wolves cannot expect to be treated like men. The only true [121] existentialist moral philosophy is the passage in *La Nausée* where Roquentin calls the good bourgeois of Bouville *Salauds* (*La Nausée* 36).

Assuming that we want to be free, authentic and sincere, and assuming that we consider freedom to be a *human* value and not just a personal value, this study can provide suggestions for political action.[5]

---

5   The fact that existentialism cannot provide a universal morality does not prevent each individual from being faced with the necessity of choosing their own morality. And it is in this sense that Sartre believes we must await the advent of the affluent society, because for him this search for personal salvation that preoccupied philosophers such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard is, in our world of scarcity, a kind of mystification, a kind of personal escape. In a world of abundance, philosophers will have to ask themselves what they should adopt in the face of the contingency of the world, but, according to Sartre, if we do so today, we deny our responsibility towards our fellow human beings. Of course, it should be noted that this is Sartre's *personal* choice, his own attempt to give meaning to his life, his own personal salvation. And Sartre would undoubtedly agree with this criticism. He would say that by rejecting 'moral philosophy', he wants to prevent young philosophers from losing themselves in a certain "fashionable" existentialism that seems to be concerned with the 'states of mind' of the individual without ever realising its 'social dimension'. However, it must be added that for us ('Sartre, myself, and probably you, the reader), 'petit bourgeois intellectuals,' our decision to become progressive activists can only come from our attempt to find a kind of 'personal salvation,' because, except insofar as we are all threatened by war, we are not threatened by scarcity; we could live very comfortably without worrying about politics.

The first principle is that "freedom will never be given, but must always be fought for" (de Beauvoir *MA* 171). This is true both on an individual and on a political level, because alienation is always a threat. There are no simple solutions, precisely because there is no human nature, and therefore humans must create themselves. Freedom is not something that can simply be guaranteed by a declaration of human rights. It is inherently difficult.

The possibility of freedom is hampered by two factors: scarcity and serial alienation. They seem to pose two distinct problems, but we will see that for most people they amount to the same thing.

If I spend my whole life threatened by famine, constantly worrying about my next meal, I am not free. There is a *hierarchy of freedoms*, not in the sense that some are more important than others, but in the much deeper sense that certain freedoms cannot *exist* unless certain others are guaranteed. The most fundamental freedom, of course, is the freedom to live; society must ensure that all its members have the means to subsist. A society that does not do this is not free, no matter how free its universities and press may be. An intellectual reduced to poverty nevertheless retains the freedom to analyse and criticise. But the Indian peasant is not a fallen intellectual. The tendency [122] among liberal intellectuals to believe that the peasant is just a very, very poor liberal intellectual is as false as the conservative view that peasants are a biologically inferior species; both beliefs are different versions of the theory of human nature. Each individual constructs his own world, and there is no room for anything but hunger in a world constructed on the basis of hunger as an omnipresent reality.

The second freedom is the freedom to think. This must be understood in the most concrete sense. I am not free to play tennis if I have no racket, no ball, no court and no possibility of obtaining them. Similarly, I am not free to think if I do not have the necessary tools, because thinking in the sense of rational analysis is not a 'natural' activity, it is not an innate power. It is inseparable from certain technical means [of thinking] and a certain vocabulary that must be learned. Up to a certain level, all education is indoctrination: all education, formal or informal, is just a way of selecting, consciously or unconsciously, certain characteristics and certain ideas, because there are no natural characteristics or ideas. We have seen that in a class society, culture, and therefore education, is unconsciously imbued with the ideology of the ruling class. This 'serial brainwashing' must be replaced by conscious indoctrination. If we choose characteristics such as a spirit of logic and curiosity, and provide the technical means of reasoning and research, then at a certain level a conscious process of self-education will replace indoctrination and the pre-reflective construction of a framework. If we do

not do this, most people will have an understanding of the world that is narrowly conditioned by the way things are. Nevertheless, there will always be individuals who escape indoctrination; in a society that guarantees freedom of thought without providing [123] the tools of thought, they will be the only ones to benefit. For the rest, their religious and political ideas will be nothing more than forms of alienation.

Political freedom follows other freedoms, not in absolute value, *but in possibility*. Political freedom means nothing in an alienated society that does not guarantee other freedoms. For example, the very limited political freedom allowed to individuals in China is nevertheless much more real than the much greater degree of political freedom allowed in India, because it is based on sufficient (if not substantial) food and an effort to give the entire population an education and the tools of political analysis.

The second limitation on freedom is serial alienation. It can only be avoided through group praxis. We have already seen that capitalist society is essentially serial, and therefore inhuman, in the sense that it is governed by irrational principles rather than human principles. A person's needs are quickly satisfied, but the needs of a corporate entity are boundless; therefore, when a corporate entity becomes a person's entire being outside of themselves (their interest), their needs become endless, and they remain inhuman even when they are not personally threatened. Thus, it will be impossible for a capitalist society to solve the problem of hunger on a global scale, and even if it did, it would remain an alienated society.

Only a cooperative society can protect the individual against scarcity. We need an economy regulated according to human needs: rational planning. The great danger in a planned society is the tendency we have encountered for a group to ossify into bureaucracy. A socialist society could become a vast machine directing a relatively passive population. Society can never become a true organic unity - a hyperorganism. An individual can always leave the group and revert to [124] pure seriality, and leaders will always be tempted to take shortcuts, to use authority instead of reason. The corollary of this is the 'Marxist idealism' that Sartre criticises in *Question of Method*.

> On the other hand, the planning imposed by a bureaucracy that refused to acknowledge its mistakes became, by that very fact, an act of violence against reality, and since a nation's future production was determined in offices, often outside its territory, this violence was counterbalanced by absolute idealism: people and things were subjected a priori to ideas; experience, when it did not confirm predictions, could only be wrong. (*RD-QM* 25)

However, these dangers are only dangers - they are not inevitable. The goal, which is also possible to achieve, is the creation of a society in which all members act consciously according to the needs of society - society considered not according to the fascist principle of a "Volk" as a superior being, but as the sum of individuals. We have seen that there is no human nature that would prevent them from acting in this way. Only two conditions are necessary: everyone must believe in the good faith of others, must believe that they all unite the group at the same time as themselves, and everyone must *understand* the needs of society. Thus, the most important activity of government is not planning, it is political education. The government must continually explain what it is doing and why it is doing it. This cannot be limited to speeches on television and propaganda leaflets. It must happen constantly and at all levels. The explanation must take the form of a *personal dialogue* with each individual, because each individual is unique. The only institutions that could be called 'democratic' would be those that ensure such dialogue, in the community, in the factory and [125] in the nation.

What I have just described has nothing to do with political parties that campaign with slogans and promises to attract the votes of serialised voters. Sartre says:

> Any electoral system constitutes the electorate as passive material for external conditioning, and the list of candidates does not represent the will of the country ... The only possible manifestation of a 'will' among the masses is their revolutionary grouping against the inertia of the institutions and against the sovereignty that is built on their powerlessness. (*RD* 624)

Even if a party with a genuinely socialist programme won an election in this way, it would not be able to carry out its programme, *because the possibility of implementing socialism presupposes a change in the mode of praxis of individuals* - from serial praxis to shared praxis - and this conversion cannot be achieved by a simple electoral victory.

Thus, the first task of a socialist party is not to win elections, but to educate. To do this, it must have a clear (and, of course, true) ideology, because people always act according to their understanding. Party activists must explain this ideology; they must spread a new tool for political analysis. Of course, it is also necessary to win elections (in a country where elections are held, at least), because elections have become the measure of success in bringing about this conversion to collective praxis. Only then will it be possible to undertake the necessary social upheaval.

I am only truly free in a society where I control the system by cooperating with my neighbour. But if I am born into a serial society, [126] as soon as I realise my alienation and powerlessness, I can begin to gain my freedom by cooperating with others to change society. It is in this sense that wanting my freedom necessarily implies wanting the freedom of others.

Sartre said that existentialism is the attempt to follow through on the denial of God's existence. It seems to me that it would be more accurate to say that it is the attempt to follow through on the idea that there is no human nature. This idea implies that man can consciously create and control his own society, because it is he who sustains the present society through his alienated praxis. But it also implies that, although I can explain to the Other that he is responsible for what happens in his society - the world - he can both agree and say that he doesn't care. Man must *choose* to be human. [127]

Bibliography TOC

Abel-Smith & Townsend: *The Poor and the Poorest*. Bell, London 1965.

Audry C.: *Sartre*. Seghers, Paris 1966.

Austin J.: *Sense and Sensibilia*. Oxford University Press 1962.

Ayer A.J.: "Jean-Paul Sartre". *Encounter*, April 1961. (pp. 75-77)

Beauvoir S. de: *La Force de l'Age*. Gallimard, Paris 1960.

    "   *La Force des Choses*. Gallimard Paris 1963.

    "   *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. Paris 1964.

  (MA)   *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*. Gallimard (Idées) Paris 1947.

Colombel J.: "Jean-Paul Sartre – approches méthodologiques" – *La Nouvelle Critique* 1966.

Coplestone F.: *Contemporary Philosophy* (ch 9-12). Burnes & Oates, London 1956.

Desan W.: *The Tragic Finale: An essay on the philosophy of Sartre*. Harper, New York 1960.

Descartes R.: *Discours de la Méthode. Méditations*. Flammarion, Paris.

Gisselbrecht A.: "Sartre est-il Marxiste?" *La nouvelle Critique* 1966.

Gluckmann C.: "J.P. Sartre et le gauchisme esthétique". *La nouvelle Critique* 1966.

Gorz A.: "De la conscience à la praxis". *Livres de France* 1966.

Harrington: *The Other America.* Penguin Harmondsworth 1963.

Hinckner F.: "J.P. Sartre et l'histoire" *La nouvelle Critique* 1966.

Husserl E.: *Ideas* (Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie) Allen and Unwin, London 1931.

Jeanson F.: *Le Problème moral et la pensée de Sartre*. Editions du Seuil, Paris 1965.

Jolivet R.: *Sartre ou la Théologie de l'Absurde*. Fayard, Paris 1965.

Kelkel, A. and Schérer, R.: *Husserl*. PUF, Paris 1964.

Kwamt R.: *Encounter*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh.

Laing R.D.: *The Divided Self*. Penguin, Harmondsworth 1965.

    "   *The Self and Others*. Tavistock, London 1961.

    "   & Cooper D. G.: *Reason and Violence: A decade of Sartre's philosophy 1950-1960*. Tavistock, London 1964.

Langer S.: *Philosophy in a New Key*. Mentor, New York 1948.

Levi-Strauss C.: *La Pensée Sauvage*. (CH 9, pp 324-357) Paris 1962.

Luijpen W.: *Existential Phenomenology*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1962.

Marcel G.: *Homo Viator*. (pp 166-184 Being and Nothingness) Harper, New York 1962.

Merleau-Ponty M.: *Les Aventures de la Dialectique*. Gallimard, Paris 1955.

    "   *Humanisme et Terreur*. Gallimard, Paris 1947.

  (PP) *La Phénoménologie de la Perception*. Gallimard, Paris 1945.

    "   *Les relations avec Autrui chez l'Enfant*. Centre de Documentation Universitaire, Paris 1965.

    "   *Sens et non-sens*. Nagel, Paris 1948.

    "   *Signes*. Gallimard, Paris 1960.

  (SC) *La Structure du Comportement*. PUF, Paris 1942.

  (VI) *Le Visible et l'Invisible*. Gallimard, Paris 1963.

Mumford L.: *Technique et Civilisation.* Editions du Seuil, Paris 1950.

Murdoch I.: *Sartre*. Bowes and Bowes, London 1953.

Odajnyk W.: *Marxism and Existentialism*. Anchor Books, New York 1965.

Piaget J.: *Language and Thought of the Child*. Routledge, London 1960.

Robinet A.: *Merleau-Ponty*. PUF, Paris 1963.

Rony J.: *J.P. Sartre et la politique*. La Nouvelle Critique 1966.

Ryle G.: *The Concept of Mind*. Barnes and Noble, New York 1949.
Sartre J.-P. (*RD*): *La Critique de la Raison Dialectique*. Gallimard, Paris 1960.
    "   *Esquisse d'une Théorie des Emotions*. Hermann, Paris 1963.
    (*EN*) *L'Etre et le Néant*. Gallimard, Paris 1943.
    "   *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*. Nagel, Paris 1946.
    (*I*)   *L'Imaginaire*. Gallimard, Paris 1940.
    "   *L'Imagination*. PUF, Paris 1936.
    "   "Une Idée fondamentale de la phenomenologie de Husserl: L'Intentionnalité". *Situations I* (pp 31–35). Gallimard, Paris 1947.
    "   "La Liberté Cartèsienne". *Situations I* (pp 314-355)
    "   "Matérialisme et Révolution". *Situations III* (pp 135-228) Gallimard, Paris 1949.
    "   "Les Mots". *Les Temps Modernes*, Octobre et Novembre 1963.
    "   *La Nausée*. Livre de poche (Gallimard, Paris 1938).
    "   "Palmiro Togliatti". *Les Temps Modernes*, Octobre 1964.
    "   *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?* (pp 44) Gallimard (Idées), Paris 1948.
    "   *Réflexions sur la Question Juive*. Gallimard (Idées), Paris 1954.
    "   *Saint Genet*. Gallimard, Paris 1952.
    "   *Situations IV*. Gallimard, Paris 1964.
    "   *Situations V*. Gallimard, Paris 1964.
    "   *Situations VI*. Gallimard, Paris 1964.
    (*TE*) *La Transcendance de l'Ego*. Vrin, Paris 1965.
Sartre, Rousset, Rosenthal: *Entretiens sur la Politique*. Gallimard, Paris 1949.
Sartre, Garaudy, Hippolite, Vigier: *Marxisme et Existentialisme*. Plon 1962.
Thody P.: *Jean Paul Sartre*. Hamish Hamilton, London 1960.
Turner V.: "Ghosts in Machines." *The Month* April 1950 (pp 257-273).
Wahl J.: *L'expérience Métaphysique*. Flammarion, Paris 1965.
Walker L.J.: "Gilbert Ryle & Jean Paul Sartre". *The Month* June 1950 (pp 432-442).
Warnock M.: *The philosophy of Sartre*. Hutchinson, London 1965.
Williams E.: *Capitalism and Slavery*. André Deutsch, London 1964.
Williams F. & Kirkpatrick R.: *Introduction à the Transcendence Of the Ego*. Noonday Press, New York 1957.

transl. update FvG Sept. 19, 2025