

THE AMERICAN RESPONSE TO JEAN PAUL SARTRE

1945-1972

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To present a comprehensive view, let alone a critical one, of Sartre's impact in the United States would be a forbidding assignment. There is so much in quantity that it would be impossible to be exhaustive, and very difficult to be selective. Yet in the pages that follow, I hope to offer more than a random sample. What I shall attempt to do is to point out some of the typical or representative responses to Sartre's philosophy, concentrating on two of Sartre's most comprehensive exposition of his views, i.e. *L'Être et le néant* and *Critique de la raison dialectique*. The last section of this article will examine the impact of Sartre's existential psychoanalysis.

To assess Sartre's impact in America is a difficult problem. The tendency, after having exaggerated it, is now to minimize Sartre's influence. If a rigidly orthodox "Sartrisme" is on the decline it might be, partly, as a consequence of the diffusion of many original or adopted Sartrean ideas.

One objective criterion of the American response to Sartre is the number of publications devoted to the different aspects of his work, both philosophical and literary. My fairly exhaustive bibliographical survey discloses close to 600 publications. There include books, chapters in books devoted to existentialism or philosophy in general, articles, and Ph.D. dissertations. It is interesting to observe that over 75 Ph.D. dissertations have been devoted to Sartre. A significant trend is brought out in Appendix A. This shows that from 1945 to 1958 inclusive, the average number of publications per year is about 10. From 1959 to 1964, the average jumps to about 25. And since then, the average has been running to about 40 per year.

Generally speaking, the early American response to Sartre tended to be negative. There are many reasons for this. Partly because of its

very novelty, the term existentialism entered the daily vocabulary of people who lacked any knowledge of or inclination toward philosophy. In the United States, existentialism was described as the esoteric creed of Parisian bohemians, and became associated with jazz, café singers, and pony tails. Even as late as 1964, James Edie wrote that "Existentialism has retained a meaning in American usage which it has practically ceased to have in Western Europe; it is associated with certain beatnik-like phenomena with clichés about the absurdity of life and despair". The connotations of the word were such that some philosophers, as for example Heidegger, hastened to deny that they were existentialists. Sartre, while critical of the misuse of the terms, did not disown it. Through no fault of his own, he was identified as the high priest of the movement; most of his publicity was sharply critical, which of course made him the idol of rebellious youth.

This period is now ancient history, but must be evoked because of the effect which it has had on the attitudes of even relatively informed commentators toward Sartre. Public opinion formed by articles in *Life Magazine* came to regard Sartre and existentialism generally with the mingled attitudes of fascination and contempt which are the standard responses to such marginal social phenomena, most recently represented by the Beatniks and Hippies. Consequently, now that existentialism has begun to be respectable, and even taught in philosophy courses at universities, some commentators go so far as to dissociate Sartre from existentialism or to indicate that he is a minor and unrepresentative figure in the movement.

To understand the resistance of academic philosophers in America to Sartre, it is well to point out that "philosophy" has always been an ambiguous term, more so perhaps in English than in some other languages. Nowadays, it has a new ambiguity of a curiously geographical sort. In fact, when we talk about philosophy, it is necessary to make clear to what large geographical group of philosophers we are referring. Anglo-American philosophy differs in some notable respects from Continental philosophy. There is, of course, a different approach to the subject. The very subject, or at least the central problems of those philosophies are different. Thus it has been suggested that Anglo-American philosophy is centered on science, while Continental philosophy is mostly interested in man. Morton White, the editor of an anthology of twentieth-century philosophy, entitled *The Age of Analysis*, describes the existentialists as hedgehogs of contemporary philosophy. He uses the term, taken from Isaiah Berlin's *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, to indicate the difference between existentialism and the dominant philosophical

movements of the Anglo-Saxon countries; the existentialists are interested in *one big thing* —“philosophies as maps of the universe or as total insights into man’s desperate, anxious, forlorn existence”, while the analytic philosophers are interested in *one or many little things*, such as the methods of science or the meaning of words. The representative of different currents are not on speaking terms. There is very little dialogue between them, and when they do condescend to take notice of the other movement, they are very critical. The typical European philosopher thinks that the British or American philosopher’s fascination with mathematical logic, linguistic analysis and the philosophy of science is quite understandable given his commitment to analytic reason. Anglo-Americans often think that what the European calls dialectic is nothing more than an elaborate linguistic façade for mysticism.

Most of the American articles on Sartre published in the immediate Post-War years dealt with his plays and the two published volumes of *Les Chemins de la liberté*. Edmund Wilson, at that time one of America’s leading literary critics, writing in 1947 about *L’Age de raison* admits that Sartre displays here the “same kind of skill at creating suspense and at manipulating the interactions of characters that we have already seen in his plays.” The novel, he says, makes an interesting document on the quality and morale of the French just before their great capitulation. But when it comes to assessing the stature of Sartre as a writer, Wilson writes that he “gets the impression of a talent rather like that of John Steinbeck. Like Steinbeck, Sartre is a writer of undeniably exceptional gifts: on the one hand, a fluent inventor, who can always make something interesting happen, and, on the other hand, a serious student of life, with a good deal of public spirit. Yet he somehow does not seem quite first-rate”. (Wilson, 1947).

Eric Bentley, an influential dramatic critic, writes that the trouble with *La Putain R . . .* “is that the characters and situations are simplified to the point where we begin to laugh contrary to the author’s intention. I should think that in any American production the actors will have to fight to keep the play from being ridiculous.” In *La Putain R . . .* “Sartre is engaged —one might perhaps say, chiefly engaged— in the old French sport of bewildering the bourgeoisie; but, fond as he may be of our southern novelists, he has no imaginative grasp, and perhaps little factual knowledge, of the American South. It is the desperate externality of the whole thing that makes the play slightly ludicrous.” (Bentley, 1948.)

One of the few positive response to Sartre and existentialism is to

be found in an article by Hanna Arendt. She claims that "it would be a cheap error to mistake this new trend in philosophy and literature for just another fashion of the day, because its exponents refuse the respectability of institutions and do not even pretend to that seriousness which regards every achievement as a step in a career." This success, equivocal as it may be in itself, "is nevertheless due to the quality of the work. It is also due to a definite modernity of attitude which does not try to hide the depth of the break in Western tradition". (Arendt, 1946.)

We must now present the critical response of some American philosophers to Sartre's major work, *L'Être et le néant*, which, incidentally, was not translated into English until 1956.

L'Être et le néant

One of the very first articles devoted to this work is by William Barrett who, among other things, accuses Sartre's discussion of time to cut altogether loose from phenomenology and to return us to Hegel and idealism, "whereas it was a principal aim of phenomenology to cut under both idealism and materialism." (Barret, 1946, p. 240.) Concerning the problem of the existence of other people, Barrett asserts that Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* says considerably more than Sartre in twice the number of pages. We will postpone Barrett's objections to Sartre's discussion of Freud, psychoanalysis and the unconscious. These will be presented in the last section of this article dealing with Sartre's existential psychoanalysis.

The most serious attempt to evaluate *L'Être et le néant* is by Herbert Marcuse (Marcuse, 1948). Marcuse points out that the development of Sartre's existentialism spans the period of the war, the Liberation and reconstruction. But neither the triumph nor the collapse of fascism produced any fundamental change in the existentialist conception. "In the change of the political systems, in war and peace, before and after the totalitarian terror, the structure of the "réalité humaine" remains the same. The historical absurdity which consists in the fact that, after the defeat of fascism, the world did not collapse, but relapsed into its previous forms, that it did not leap into the realm of freedom but restored with honor the old management —this absurdity lives in the existentialist conception. But it lives in the existentialist conception as a metaphysical, not as a historical fact. The experience of the absurdity of the world, of man's failure and frustration appears as the experience of his

ontological condition. As such, it transcends his historical condition." (pp. 310-311.)

According to Marcuse, Sartre's existential analysis is a strictly philosophical one in the sense that it abstracts from the historical factors which constitute the empirical concreteness. In so far as existentialism is a philosophical doctrine, it remains an idealistic doctrine: "It hypostatizes specific historical conditions of human existence into ontological and metaphysical characteristics. Existentialism thus becomes part of the very ideology which it attacks, and its radicalism is illusory." (311.)

Still, Marcuse recognizes that while certain aspects of *L'Être et le néant* seem to commit existentialism to the innermost tendencies of bourgeois culture, others seem to point into a different direction. Sartre himself has protested against the interpretation of human freedom in terms of an essentially "internal" liberty—an interpretation which Sartre's own analysis so strongly suggests—and he has explicitly linked up his philosophy with the theory of the proletarian revolution, as in *Matérialisme et révolution*.

Marcuse accuses existentialism of offering two apparently contradictory aspects: one the modern reformulation of the perennial ideology, the transcendental stabilization of human freedom in the face of its actual enslavement; the other, the revolutionary theory which implies the negative of this entire ideology. The two conflicting aspects reflect the inner movement of existentialist thought "which reaches its object, the concrete human existence, only where it ceases to analyze it in terms of the "free subject" and describes it in terms of what it has actually become: a "thing" in a rarefied world." At the end of the road, according to Marcuse, the original position is reversed: the realization of human freedom appears, not in the *res cogitans*, the "Pour-soi," but in the *res extensa*, in the body as thing. Here existentialism reaches the point where philosophical ideology would turn into revolutionary theory. But at the same point, existentialism arrests this movement and leads it back into the ideological ontology.

In "Fetichism in the existentialism of Sartre" (1950), Van Meter Ames underscores the "fallacies and hypostatizations in the Sartrean dialectic as it turns abstract nouns into vast supernatural objects." Sartre, he says, is obliged to have not-being haunt being after saying that being is all there is. Somehow nothingness must appear within it like a worm in the core of an apple, as Sartre says. That anything should happen within the massive inertia of all that is, must be

illogical.* So Sartre thinks of man as somehow able to “place himself *outside being* and at the same stroke to weaken the structural being of being.” There is no way around the “vast Parmenidean road block and nothing can break through it.” No wedge can be inserted but the utter thinness of the “ultrasubtle nothing which is consciousness.” It has nothing of the thickness of a thing; it is so tenuous that it can fit an unimaginable interstice within the undifferentiated density of being. “Since being is an abstraction there is nothing to prevent violating it with abstract consciousness as a kind of abstract nothingness, which then turns out to have the concreteness of existence.”

But this ingenious trick, according to Ames, is nothing but a “confession of philosophical impoverishment.” In the British and American tradition, Ames says, one can readily grant that mind or consciousness is not physical, not a thing, not a region, without being obliged to conclude that it is a kind of nothing. It can be a kind of behavior, a quality of performance. “But for Sartre any intentional process becomes an act of annihilation, of reduction to nothing, since being is all there is, hence must be disintegrated to permit anything significant.” Man, the *pour-soi*, who exist for himself and his purposes, must somehow be detached from the *en-soi*, the massive in-itselfness of being in general. “In Sartre’s system this can happen only through magic by making something of nothing.”

Ames further charges existentialists to be in the impossible position of asserting a bifurcation between man and nature, because, having excluded man from his habitat, they are faced with the artificial problem of how to get him back in. “He is already in, even for them; they insist upon his presence in the world, but as a mind and freedom which can not be of the world.”

So the chief fetish here is the idea of mind or consciousness, of man and his freedom as without a footing in nature, hovering above the body, above the brain, above society, above anything accessible to science. But science need not pretend to establish the world, since it is there, with people in it. The sciences do not start from scratch. They begin with experience and its problems, and so does philosophy “when it makes sense.” When it makes fetishes it can dismiss experience and science.

Maurice Natanson, who incidentally was just then completing his

* But the existentialist “is proud of flouting the law of identity. . . and the law of contradiction. . .”. The reason is that he must bring in human existence.

doctoral studies with the first American dissertation, and admittedly a brilliant one, on Sartre's ontology, rushed to the latter's defense. According to Natanson, it is impossible to understand Sartre's position without recognizing the fact that his is a radical ontology which attempts to explicate Being via an analysis of man's Being, making use of a phenomenological method which derives as much from Hegel as from Husserl. Sartre's problem is then the product of a group of connected questions which are historically associated with Kant, Hegel, Dilthey, Scheler, Husserl, and Heidegger. As they achieve formulation in Sartre, these questions emerge as a concern with the relationships between Kantianism, Husserl's phenomenology, and Heideggerian ontology. More specifically, Natanson goes on to say, implicit in Sartre's work are such questions as whether phenomenology is a generalized Kantianism and whether Husserl's phenomenology can be expanded into an ontology. Thus, Natanson contends, Sartre is dealing with questions which are a part of what Jaspers calls the "perennial scope of philosophy," and which can not be written off as a literary faddism. And consequently, Natanson accuses Ames of having failed to indicate Sartre's problem in its proper philosophical content.

Secondly, Natanson contends that in existential analysis there is no divorce of man from the context of human experience which would lead Sartre to create an artificial alienation of mind from nature. Existential analysis is analysis of situations and, being such, it is an attempt to penetrate to the heart of the *pour-soi* as it is in dialectical conflict and liaison with the *en-soi*. Far from extracting mind from nature, Sartre's entire case rests upon "the radical contention that the dualism of *en-soi* and *pour-soi* is integral and inevitable, and that the polarities of *en-soi* and *pour-soi* cohere dialectically."

And finally, Natanson asserts that the whole point of Sartre's position is that a phenomenological analysis of man's Being is the answer to a new type and order of philosophical questioning: that the problem of man's existence is not the problem: Is existence a predicate? Natanson does concede that the answer to Sartre's problem of existence "can not be given fully in any language which would satisfy an empirical criterion; for the answer is the dialectic which Sartre describes, and it is obvious by now that the dialectic depends as much upon mood and metaphor as upon as introspective "revealing" of a unique experiential content." The essential meaning of such a description of existence can not be reduced to indicative sentences. Existence for Sartre is this dialectic of choice-situation-freedom-nothingness.

In 1956, Van Meter Ames wrote an article comparing George H. Mead and Sartre on man. Mead and Sartre have much in common, he says. Both think of life as process and transition, taking time and moving into a future that requires constant revision of the past, so that nothing is ever settled and anything can be thrown into question. But there is an important difference between them. Mead relies on the life-sciences; Sartre would like to reject them in favor of a supposed higher outlook. "The reason is that his sixteenth or seventeenth century notion of science, including psychology, is mechanistic and deterministic. So he feels obliged to get away from science to make room for freedom, whereas for Mead science is the great means of increasing freedom. Sartre almost prefers magic to science, and apparently would if he did not believe that he can rise above science and magic to Husserl's transcendental grasp of consciousness as its own pure source." (205.)

Both Mead and Sartre speak of the act as central to an interpretation of human life, but Mead's assumption that the act is the act of an organism is in contrast to Sartre's "squeamish separation of the human from the animal or the physical" (207). It is for lack of an adequate theory of mind that Sartre's often acute insights are vitiated. Sartre sees no way to acknowledge free creative intelligence short of lighting mind or consciousness above the facts accessible to science, because he thinks of these as simply physical and hence mechanistic. Sartre's shortcoming here, according to Ames, is in the limitation of his reading in philosophy and psychology, which is almost confined to French and German and some classical British writers. The result is that Sartre, although he thinks he rejects idealism, is pretty much of an idealist, in holding that the psychical must be kept out of the meshes of the physical—as if here were two disparate realms rather than two levels of reality.

The deep difference between the two philosophers is that Mead's outlook is social as well as scientific. Sartre thinks of the person or *pour-soi* as somehow there alone, living his life in freedom, then suddenly being disagreeably limited in discovering the presence of others. Sartre's world is practically devoid of anything like Mead's notion of sharing with others, caring about them, merging with them in a "generalized other." Sartre's claim to humanism may seem to lie in this direction. But he is driven to it by desperation, as the soldiers are driven to it in the third volume of *Les Chemins de la liberté*, when they have been defeated and are waiting to be captured. This kind of humanism still fits the anti-social philosophy of *L'Être et le néant*.

Sartre's theory of freedom has come in for its fair share of criticism. Plantinga, for instance, asserts that Sartre's theory of freedom makes it impossible to draw a distinction between right and wrong, and therefore it cuts off the very possibility of moral endeavor or action. Sartre's doctrine of freedom, Plantinga maintains, results from a series of confusions. "When Sartre argues that I am free from the past because separated from it by this nothingness which I am, when he argues that since I am a nothing I cannot have an essence, and when he argues that insofar as I am a nothing, being cannot in any way affect me, he is "in every case confusing these two senses of 'nothing'." When we realize that for Sartre the self is nothing only in the sense that it introduces form and qualification into being, the argument loses all appearance of plausibility.

Plantinga's conclusion is that Sartre's ontological argument for absolute freedom is involved in serious confusion. If Sartre really means to hold that consciousness is nothing at all, then it makes no sense to talk about its being free, anguished, the sources of truth, etc. But if he does not mean that it is nothing in the literal sense, then his argument for freedom collapses. And if his ontological arguments for absolute freedom are unconvincing, we may expect that the way in which Sartre tries to take care of the traditional objections to a theory of absolute freedom will also be less than adequate.

It can be said without hesitation that *L'Être et le néant* represents one of the most radical statements of freedom in philosophical literature. But, with the possible exception of Sheridan, whose *Sartre: The Radical conversion* (1969) will be examined in our next section, few critics of Sartre in America examine *L'Être et le néant* with respect to the limitations within which freedom finds itself. It is Sheridan's contention that these limitations have been too little noted by those who contrast Sartre's earlier work with his later efforts and that those readers overstate the contrast because they neglect the constraining features of the world in which the human reality finds itself. The human reality, for Sartre, Sheridan emphasizes, is always being-in-a-situation. But what does that peculiar phrase mean? At a minimum, he says, it means that a human being awakens to himself as being "always already in the world," furnished with physical body, a social origin and status, immersed in an historical epoch, engrossed in dealing with the necessities of having been born, having to labor, and to die. His situation results from the fact that he *lives*, in his own fashion, the objective limitations which Sartre calls the "human condition." This prophet of radical freedom sees the man who *is* his freedom as a man

who is also caught in a network of social relations. Insofar as what a man can *know* himself to be, he knows himself through the eyes of the Other. And Sheridan finds it a difficult question to answer why some of Sartre's critics have given insufficient emphasis to this. It is Sartre who has said again and again that the human reality finds itself alienated in the world where oppression is a fact so formidable that Sartre confesses himself unable to write an ethics. It is not open to man at this time to choose a situation in which oppression is not an ingredient even though Sartre does claim that its present forms may be surpassed.

But there is a category of alienation which cannot be avoided by man as man: it is the alienation imposed on man by the presence of other men. Insofar as we *are* it is other people as well as ourselves who decide on what we are. The self of the Sartrean man is intimately haunted by the Other. As Champigny (1959) has pointed out, it is this eminently theatrical atmosphere which is the subject of *Huis-clos*, the basis of the often misinterpreted aphorism: "Hell is the other." This fundamental experience indicates one of the limits within which morals have to be thought and lived. It contributes to making morals a perpetually renewed question instead of a set of wise formulas.

There is no doubt, and here we must side with some of Sartre's American detractors, that in the period dominated by *L'Être et le néant* Sartre's conception of freedom was so radical that it prevented any effective account of man as a social being. If in *L'Être et le néant* the stress was laid on the "I" and on the "you", beginning in the early 1950's, the "we" receives now an equal emphasis. If perfect communion is practically impossible, it should not be set up as an ideal. Sartre does not stress communion, but solidarity.

Critique de la raison dialectique

We know that Sartre regards *Critique de la raison dialectique*, his second effort at a philosophical anthropology, as his major work of theory. However, as Lionel Abel points out, since its publication in 1961 (only a small section of it has so far appeared in English translation), it has had little effect on thought or action in America, or Europe for that matter. Certainly it has stirred up nothing like the excitement which followed the publication of *L'Être et le néant*.

In his article "Sartre vs. Levi-Strauss," Lionel Abel writes that in his opinion *L'Être et le néant* was more genuinely philosophical than

the *Critique*. It was not, like the latter, a generalization of anthropological and historical facts, assembled from all kinds of sources, but an attempt to think about man as the central object of our philosophical problems. As such, it implied an ethic, and Sartre announced he would follow it with an ethic, though many doubted that he could. Instead of making good his promise, he states categorically in the *Critique* that philosophy cannot advance today beyond the philosophical position already taken by Marx, and limits himself to generalizing anthropological and historical data in ways he thinks consonant with Marxist doctrine. And so, according to Abel, the *Critique* is not a genuinely philosophical work nor does it even imply an ethic. It assumes, says Abel, the absolute validity of historical action, and of anything that might be done to gain access to such action. And Abel further charges that it does not go beyond the view of ethics Sartre expressed in his book on Genet, published in 1952, in which he wrote: "Thus a morality which does not explicitly assert that it cannot possibly be adhered to today contributes to the mystification and the alienation of men."

Many critics claimed that the *Critique* was a betrayal of the existentialism which Sartre had earlier espoused. It was quite clear that many Sartre's critics were selecting themes from some of his total output and simply neglecting themes in other writings which were inconsistent with the portrait which they had formed of him.

Critics of Sartre describe his *Critique* as the dissolution of his existentialism into Marxism. At least four critics, Desan, Morot-Sir, Odajnyk and Novack, believe the transformation may well be doomed. Burkle and Lichtheim appear to be more optimistic. We cannot within the limits of this article make an evaluation of this considerable body of critical study. We will have to restrict ourselves to a brief summary of some of the points raised in these critical studies.

Wilfrid Desan's critical *explication de texte*, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, devotes two chapters to the question of Sartre's Marxism and reaches the conclusion that it has not been successfully merged with existentialism. In Desan's view, the *Critique* marks an abandonment of the sovereign and free individual of Sartre's earlier period. Although Sartre refuses to give the group a status all by itself and makes it exclusively dependent upon the creation of the individual self, he does not deny that the growth from seriality to group and later on to institution results in a serious loss of freedom for the individual self. Desan considers these passages the most impressive of the whole book. Actually, says Desan, he has done so

well that, "for me at least, he has reversed his own theses: he has convinced me that the *group* is more and other than the *individual*. I am thinking, for example, of that force of fatalism which comes so strongly into the foreground as the book progresses. The term fatalism is obscure and I would like to return to its eventual meaning later, but at this point one thing emerges with force and clarity, namely the fact that within the growing trend of organization, it appears that the *subject is no longer sovereign*. The least which can be said is that the acceptance of a fatalistic trend means a limitation of the subject *qua* Sovereign, since it posits a power above and beyond that of the individual." (273.)

In *Marxism and Existentialism*, Walter Odajnyk, a specialist in political science and philosophy, is less interested in expounding Sartre's thought than in assessing the proposition that Sartre is both a Marxist and an existentialist. Odajnyk is convinced that such a union is impossible. Chapter by chapter, he juxtaposes the two philosophies on such questions as materialism, the dialectic, revolution, freedom, ethics, action and society, and shows that they are irreconcilable. Although Odajnyk does not use the *Critique* to develop his theses, he says that he "delves to a certain extent into" it; moreover, he studies what Desan has to say about it and concludes that it corroborates his own argument: The *Critique* "proves only that the Marxists are correct in insisting that a union between Marxism and Existentialism is impossible." Odajnyk then adds, with obvious regret, that the *Critique* "fails at the expense of Existentialism . . . Sartre is now a Marxist and no longer an Existentialist. . . in the *Critique* we deal with a totally different Sartre."

Although Odajnyk and Desan agree that Sartre fails to reconcile his existentialist liberty with responsible life in society, they do not exactly agree on the nature of this failure. Odajnyk thinks that Sartre sacrifices individual freedom and becomes a Marxist. Desan, on the other hand, thinks that Sartre preserves his existentialism: "No influence whatsoever has made Sartre deviate from his fundamental assertion: the Self is sovereign . . . Sartre has in fact created an entity too isolated in a hostile world to be ever successfully committed to a group or to anything . . . The *Critique* has killed the status of the group and of the inter-subjective." In Desan's opinion Sartre has not so much given up his existentialism as failed to graft it into the Marxist trunk. His two concerns fall apart, intact but barren.

Burkle makes it clear that he sees no point in discussing whether Sartre has successfully melded existentialism with Marxism. He is prepared to accept Sartre's own word that he espoused existentialism

for a time as an "ideology" but has now left it and gone on to what he considers Marxism. Burkle recognizes that Sartre's enduring commitment to freedom, his orientation toward the particular and concrete, etc., are existentialistic in character, but he denies that he is now attempting to be an existentialist. The question that interests Burkle is whether Sartre has contributed to a philosophically plausible understanding of social freedom. Has Sartre shed light on the question of whether men as men can be free in society, and if so, what the defining traits and principles of this freedom are?

Burkle finds Sartre's dialectic of freedom and unfreedom an illuminating and balanced concept of choice. It does justice, he says, to both the liberties and constraints involved in choice and it conceives of freedom correctly as a continuing involvement in the world. Once the ambiguity about success and the misunderstanding of the dialectical character of freedom are cleared up, it can be seen that even the most tightly constrained choice has a measure of autonomy and that man thus has an unbreakable foothold in the objective world. Burkle also claims that Sartre's concept of fusion is a suggestive lead for understanding the ontological ground of a free society. Fusion is an empirical manifestation of autonomous choice on a social scale. The group which emerges from fusion is the social counterpart of the "for-itself" (the autonomous individual ego described in *L'Être et le néant*). Sartre is saying that society is "the individual writ large," and that, like a self-transcending individual, it can create social unity.

Another contributor to this debate, Arthur Lessing, says it seems evident that some of the controversy generated by this union of "existentialism" and "Marxism" is proceeding on ideological rather than philosophical grounds. For him the problem does not lie in welding together two "historical" movements, "movements" which have been characterized and formulated by intellectual historians. It may well be that future historians can locate two strains of thought which can be labeled "existentialism" and "Marxism" and recount how some sort of ideological union was attempted in the 1960's, and either failed or succeeded. But such success or failure indicates little to the philosopher who continues to be concerned not with ideology or social attitude but what truly is, in other words, truth.

If economic oppression does characterize man in modern times, Lessing says, then Marxism united with existentialism speaks for the individual by preparing him at the same time for his revolt against oppressing economic conditions and institutions. With the end of oppression, however, would come the end of Marxism, as Sartre

admits. Sartre seems to suggest that philosophies are either *passable* or *indépassable*, depending on the times in and for which they appear. This means that just as existentialism is a passing phase of Marxism, so Marxism must ultimately become a passing phase of dialectic reason. Sartre's conception of philosophy therefore seems now to include the historicity of all philosophy, including his own. Such a view, Lessing points out, seriously weakens the absolute basis on which he earlier developed his concept of consciousness. In *L'Être et le néant*, Sartre argues persuasively that the synthesis of *pour-soi* and *en-soi*, nothingness and being, cannot dialectically develop. Man is therefore a useless passion. If this conclusion is now understood as a historical comment, or a philosophic realization which attains and consequently loses its truth in passage, then the basis of truth itself is no longer the *cogito* but history. Truth as the ontological condition of negative consciousness is replaced by the so-called truth of history.

Sartre proclaims in *L'Être et le néant* the absolute autonomy of the individual. This proclamation is the conclusion of a series of ontological arguments which point toward the irreducible character of nihilation and its need to-be and to-be-in-the world. But now, Lessing says, Sartre argues in the *Critique* that this philosophical position is to be subsumed by another in which the individual is now seen to be a socio-economic product defined by labor and production first, consciousness second. On the grounds established in *L'Être et le néant* such as subsumption is not an expansion of the notion of man, but obviously a contraction. We have contracted a metaphysical definition of the individual to an empirical definition. But more seriously, we have exchanged phenomenological descriptions of the necessary conditions of human existence for sociopolitical descriptions of certain contingent "facts" which shape contemporary man and society.

Sheridan is the only American critic I know who denies that the *Critique* is a betrayal of the existentialism which Sartre had earlier espoused. Concerning the frequently-made assertion that Sartre has failed to achieve an integration of existentialism and Marxism, and has abandoned the former for the later, Sheridan says that it is not clear that Sartre even needed to seek an integration and much less clear that he has abandoned the views announced in *L'Être et le néant*. He underlines the fact that Sartre still insists that his "existentialism" is opposed only to an "idealistic" Marxism, that his views do and must occur in our Marxist situation. Sheridan sees also rather obvious connections among the notions of *pour-soi* and *en-soi*,

being-in-a-situation, and the predicted demise of Marxism when our situation has become one of real freedom.

Sheridan attempts to show that Sartre's view of human freedom has long been exactly what it is now —there is no freedom apart from situation. Sheridan fully agrees with Merleau-Ponty that only the paradoxical assertion that involvement *both* affirms and restricts freedom does full justice to Sartre's thought. In *L'Être et le néant*, Sartre concentrated primarily upon an "individualistic" or "psychological" treatment of the Other. The *Critique* represents Sartre's further analysis of the individual, but now of the individual *as social*, perhaps even as the social being which Marx insisted he was. Sheridan's concern is to show that the *Critique* has in part spelled out many of the themes indicated in Sartre's earlier work, for instance, the theme of reciprocity. This, of course, is not to deny that the *Critique* is an independent synthesis but to contend that "development" is a much more appropriate term than "conversion" to describe the relationship between Sartre's early concerns and those of his latent massive work. An examination of the notion of dialectical reason, the philosophic core of Sartre's Marxism, shows that the work Sartre did in the *Critique* not only permits, but requires, the inclusion of his radical conception of freedom. To a large extent, the rest of the *Critique* consist of the concrete task of showing how that conception may be integrated with man's social being. Sheridan concludes that the charge that Sartre's early thought is fundamentally inconsistent with his later efforts is simply mistaken.

Existential Psychoanalysis

Sartre's stature as a psychologist has given rise to many conflicting opinions in America. Sidney Hook writes: "Whatever Sartre's merit as a philosopher —not very considerable, in my opinion— his writings reveal a depth of psychological insight more rewarding than a library of tomes on scientific psychology. Why, despite these psychological gifts, Sartre writes such bad novels perhaps others can explain."

William Barrett, whose criticism of Sartre's views on time and the existence of other people we have presented in the first section of this article, is very critical of Sartre's discussion of Freud, psychoanalysis and the unconscious. If he singles out this point from the whole *L'Être et le néant*, it is because, he says, in the twentieth

century any philosophical view of man must be measured against the science of Freud.

Philosophers have, of course, their own particular form of resistance to Freud, and, according to Barrett, Sartre might be excused also as simply reflecting the low level of psychoanalysis in France. But neither excuse covers his failure to make use of such figures as Scheler and Bergson, who indicate distinct philosophic grounds for the unconscious. And phenomenology itself, when reinforced by other empirical data, would lead in the same direction. But philosophy aside, what about the enormous weight of empirical evidence adduced from clinical experience? When Sartre proposes to found a new kind of psychoanalysis —“existential psychoanalysis”—he strikes as frivolous and presumptuous the reader who is acquainted with the long discipline and empirical evolution which gave birth, in the case of Freud, to the concept and technique of psychoanalysis. “However agile, a mind which can step off so blithely and briskly into a new science does not carry very much ballast. To paraphrase what Sartre has Orestes say of his moral conscience: “It is too light, it needs to become heavy.”

Sartre rejects Freud in order to absolutize the notion of “choice of oneself,” according to which man completely creates his character by his choices. He denies the existence of “character” in order to affirm the existence of “the situation.” But this notion, according to Barrett, becomes self-defeating at this point: for unless we know some of the laws of formation of character, we cannot change it as we wish, and the idea of the plasticity of human nature becomes unusable and pointless. “The result of Sartre’s rejection of Freud shows up in his discussion of the emotions, which will seem thin and puerile to anyone acquainted with the psychoanalytic treatment of these matters, and of anti-semitism, which is inadequate to the unconscious sources of this problem.”

The most systematic and sustained attempts to minimize the originality and importance of Sartre’s existential psychoanalysis is to be found among the Adlerians. Alfred Stern is a good case in point. In his book, *Sartre: His philosophy and psychoanalysis*, we find many passages such as the following. “And so it is also with Sartre’s philosophy and existentialist psychoanalysis. Everywhere the ideas or germs of ideas of his predecessors are developed” “He became a phenomenologist by reading Husserl, an existentialist by reading Heidegger, and an existentialist psychoanalyst by reading Gaston Bachelard —and also Freud and Adler, of course. For the basic idea of existentialist psychoanalysis, and even a part of its development,

can be found in some books of Gaston Bachelard . . . But we do not mean to say Sartre is merely a compiler. He has a remarkable creative talent, but one which always needs to be inseminated and stimulated by other people. Metaphorically speaking, his creative talent is feminine rather than masculine." (166.) "This short analysis of Sartre's interpretation of the inferiority complex shows that the French Existentialist is much closer to Alfred Adler than he may know or want to admit . . . Sartre's affirmation that the choice of inferiority implies the deliberate will to be superior is pretty close to Adler's conception. And if the Viennese psychiatrist insisted that the patient "is intensifying his feeling of inferiority *and yet freeing himself from responsibility* by attributing this inferiority to heredity, the fault of his parents or other factors," he expressed an idea which, thirty years later, was exploited by Sartre in his much publicized doctrine of "bad faith" . . . [. . .] but Adler did all this in 1914, and Sartre in 1943, without referring to his predecessor." (106-107.) "Practically, however, these Adlerian conceptions (goal, life-plan) have the same explanatory functions as Sartre's, and they were propounded thirty years before Sartre published *L'Être et le néant*. When Sartre wrote so many pages to explain in just which respects he disagrees with Adler, why did he not give a single acknowledgement to the basic ideas he has in common with that Viennese psychiatrist, and which, probably, *he has borrowed from him?* (My italics). Should this not be considered as an example of that "bad faith" which Sartre so violently castigates in his books, and which he defines as lying to oneself and masking from oneself an unpleasant truth?" (110).

In an article in which he examines the value of Sartre's view of sexual desires and drives for an existential psychiatry, King-Farlow concludes that Sartre's analysis is fundamentally wrong-headed, and he presents four reasons for saying this.

1) In the concluding discussion of *Existentialism and Humanism* the critic M. Naville suggests that Sartre rejects the terminology of human nature but pursues the old essentialist approach by talking of "the human condition." Naville's complaint is reinforced, King-Farlow says, by considering the rationalistic, deductive nature of Sartre's enterprise in *L'Être et le néant*. The book attempts an analysis of what must be the basic structures of human consciousness. King-Farlow charges Sartre with attempting a largely *a priori* justification for his picture of man, despite his lip service to man's possibilities for making of himself whatever he wills.

2) Not only is the picture arrived at in the grand essentialist

manner, but it is often an intolerably gloomy picture, unfit to set before men, let alone sick men, as their own image. "The pictures presented by the more optimistic of the religious existentialists, Gabriel Marcel and Martin Buber, seem to offer more promise for mental health since they emphasize man's capacity for fellowship, generosity, love, peace with others . . ." (299.)

3) Sartre's enterprise bears an interesting resemblance to one of the psychologists whose "determinism" he most affects to oppose. Sartre charges that psychologists have given a naively superficial account of sexual drives, but "his plan for deducing a deeper reason for these drives from principles more basic has a rough parallel in a work of his arch-enemy Freud, *Beyond the pleasure principle*.

4) All three previous criticisms would be worthless if Sartre had managed to prove his case. If his account of human sexuality smacked of essentialism, pessimism and Freudian methodology, we would still have to accept it, should it rest on sound demonstrations. But actually Sartre is said to be a good deal less frank than is Freud in *Beyond the pleasure principle* about the element of speculative metaphysics in his arguments. "Sartre's account of consciousness and its relation to sexuality, despite his intervals of describing empirical situations, cannot be said to follow logically from obvious premises. Obvious, rather, is the conceptual confusion to which he ever returns after illuminating some important conceptual distinctions." (300.)

John Wild, who has long been known as a sympathetic expounder of existentialism, claims that Sartre's analysis in *L'Être et le néant* reveals three weaknesses of the existentialist theory of man in striking clarity. The first of these is the supposed arbitrariness of human choice, and the lack of any firm grounds. For Sartre, he points out, the whole effort to justify an act is a cowardly abandonment of freedom and responsibility, the turning of myself into a thing. Whether I decide to die for justice or drink at a bar, the matter is indifferent. As Heidegger also maintains, in either case I am necessarily and equally guilty. This may be an account of something that might be called metaphysical guilt. But the phenomena of moral guilt and justification are never focused.

The second weakness is an almost exclusive emphasis on what may be called *subjective time*. It may be true that human existence temporalizes itself through an integral order of the ecstasies. But surely, Wild argues, this is not the only time with which we are concerned. Unless it is wholly fantastic, my projected future must take account of world-time, and my very act of projecting it must occur within this universal flux.

The third and most evident phenomenological weakness of the existentialist theory of man is its failure to account for human communication. In Sartre, this weakness emerges "with brutal clarity." When two persons meet, each tries to absorb the other as an object into his world. Communication is thus restricted to conflict. Love, friendship, and devoted cooperation for common ends are excluded *a priori*. Wild says that this must seem dubious to any careful empiricist.

Champigny has emphasized that Sartre stresses both solidarity and aloneness, for they imply each other. It is through the subjectivity of others that our autonomous subjectivity, our aloneness, is revealed to us. It is because Sartre wants his philosophy to be a humanism, Champigny contends, it is because he wants his "myth" to be human, that he stresses aloneness and solidarity, not communion. A reconciliation between men will be ethically valid if they are reconciled within themselves and with each other to the principle of aloneness and reciprocity, to the principle that there can be no valid ethics for the man who has not assumed his aloneness.

In concluding this article, it might be pointed out that there has taken place recently in the United States an outburst of interest and activity in the field of phenomenological and existential psychology and psychiatry. The chief milestone in the development of this movement was the publication in 1958 of the volume, *Existence: A new dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* edited by Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger. As Herbert Spiegelberg, the eminent historian of the phenomenological movement, has pointed out, prior to it there had been only sporadic spurts of what was mostly grass-roots phenomenology, with eclectic loans from the scant sources then available in translation from the German and French philosophical and psychological world. With the appearance of May's volume the climate changed rapidly.

Interestingly enough, Sartre has had very little influence on this American movement. Rollo May himself has written in the volume mentioned in the preceding paragraph: "Quite apart from the fact that Sartre is known here for his dramas, movies, and novels rather than for his major, penetrating psychological analyses, it must be emphasized that he represents a nihilistic, subjectivist extreme in existentialism which invites misunderstanding, and his position is by no means the most useful introduction to the movement." (11.)

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Appendix A: A yearly tabulation of publications devoted to Sartre in the U.S.A.: 1945-3, 1946-6, 1947-8, 1948-19, 1949-14, 1950-13, 1951-8, 1952-10, 1953-9, 1954-8, 1955-8, 1956-12, 1957-9, 1958-12, 1959-26, 1960-17, 1961-29, 1962-27, 1963-26, 1964-36, 1965-44, 1966-31, 1967-43, 1968-48, 1969-34, 1970-41, 1971-37, 1972-35.