SARTRE: THE NEW HUMANISM

by

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INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

Jean-Paul Sartre has come to be recognized as the leading contemporary exponent for a particular set of ideas known as existentialism. Sartre's wide ranging philosophical, literary, and political activity has been in large part responsible for the popularization of the existential creed in the post-war period. The contributions he has made to this body of thought go far beyond the spread of "the word." It is to Sartre (the only major existentialist willing to call himself such) that we owe the idea of existentialism as humanism. From a philosophy that has been called one of anguish and despair, and which Marjorie Grene dubs the "Dreadful Freedom", Sartre has sounded a note of hope. Whereas most existentialists leave man alone and anguishing in the void, Sartre uses this predicament as an irreducible springboard to action and commitment in society. It is the purpose of this paper to explore and interpret the unique link that Sartre makes between man and humanity.

As Sartre's "link" is a radical departure from rather more traditional concepts of man and community, the writer will attempt to explore, from a Sartrian point of view, some of the major systems of thought on social man prevalent in Western civilization. A fuller explanation of the basis of Sartre's ideology and his justification for it will then be given.
CHAPTER I:

THE GREEKS: PLATO AND ARISTOTLE
CHAPTER I: PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

In the West, the Greeks were the first to present a dominant and ever-persisting theme of man and community. Plato was unable to conceive of man separated from community, or state. Although the city-state which influenced his notions is gone, his ideas which came from it are still a driving force today. In the Republic, Plato put forth his ideas on the "just state." A just state was one in which each man performed a function best suited to the welfare of the total community, the individual being a part of an harmonious whole. His goal was unity of the state achieved through proper regulation of the parts.

To quote from the Republic:

[Justice is] that each one practice that one thing, of all in the city, for which his nature is best fitted. Further, that to do one's own business and not to meddle with many businesses, is justice....

Our aim in founding the commonwealth was not to make any one class specially happy, but to secure the greatest possible happiness for the community as a whole.

Does not the worst evil for a state arise from anything that tends to rend it asunder and destroy its unity, while nothing does it more good than whatever tends to bind it together and make it one.

Man may do "his own business" but what business his nature was suited for was to be determined by the philosopher-kings who knew truth with a capital "T"; that nature chosen could only be one which fitted what was considered best for the community as a whole.

Plato also laid down for Western man a belief in the need for
thought and reason over action and irrationality:

Is it not in the nature of things that action
should come less close to the truth than thought?4

And it will be the business of reason to rule
with wisdom and forethought on behalf of the
entire soul.5

The belief in eternal truths and knowledge of them as a neces-
sity for right action is also an important segment of Plato's thought:

In the world of knowledge, the last thing to be
perceived, and only with great difficulty, is the
essential Form of Goodness. Once it is perceived,
the inclusion must follow that, for all things, this
is the cause of whatever is right and good; in the
visible world it gives birth to light and to the
lord of light, while it is itself sovereign in the
intelligible world and the parent of intelligence
and truth. Without having had a vision of this Form,
no one can act with wisdom, either in his own life
or in matters of state.6

Aristotle, although not desirous of as great an amount of
unity in the state as Plato had, still maintained that man was
"by nature a political [social] animal," and that the state is
the highest community aiming at the highest good:

The proof that the state is a creation of nature
and prior to the individual is that the individual,
when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore
he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he
who is unable to live in society, or who has no need
because he is sufficient for himself, must be either
a beast or a god; he is no part of a state.7

Thus the two major early Greek thinkers place man in a highly
subordinate and dependent position to the state, society, or com-
munity.

A Sartrian analysis of the Greek conception of man is harsh
and devastating. Greek thought, as manifest in Aristotle and in
Plato particularly, which has so strongly influenced Western civilization, is the quintessence of all which denies man his basic humanity. It either denies man his subjectivity (his being-for-itself, a concept which will be discussed at length later) or refuses to recognize it; it treats man as an object. This is particularly seen in the Republic. The society is rigidly divided into three distinct classes, each individual, in turn, is divided into three distinct parts. The working class is told myths by the guardians because they, as a group, are considered incapable of understanding or reaching the Good. The individual worker is not "Xerxes the man, who is also a worker," but a member of the class of object things called "workers." Once fitted into his category, his fate is determined, he is a member of that class of things called "worker" and thus is treated according to the standard applied to "worker." The individual in Plato's planned society is not allowed to follow his own interests, but those of the state. He engages in something which is socially useful and contributes to the harmony of the whole. His own harmony as a subjective human being is denied; he is merely a physical piece which must be molded to fit in the unity of the whole.

Although Sartre would not deny Plato's concern for humanity, he would say that Plato treats man as a symbol, an object, forgetting that man writ large does not exist. Plato illustrates the danger of social planners who forget this fact.

A man who has committed what might be called a Platonic error is the Self-Taught Man in the novel, *Nausea*. The Self-Taught Man
is a quiet, introverted clerk who has decided to learn all there is to know by reading, in alphabetical order, every book in the local library. His contact with others on a personal basis is nil. As Plato thinks in eternal Forms such as Justice, Good, Courage, Wisdom, so the Self-Taught Man thinks of Man as a series of symbolic representations. His attitude is expressed in an exchange between himself and Roquentin, which was prompted by the Self-Taught Man's exclaiming the love he felt for a young couple in a restaurant, whom he neither knew nor could overhear:

"You see that you don't love them. You wouldn't recognize them in the street. They're only symbols in your eyes. You are not at all touched by them; you're touched by the Youth of Man, the Love of Man and Woman, the Human Voice."

"Well? Doesn't that exist?"

"Certainly not, it doesn't exist! Neither Youth, nor Maturity nor Old Age nor Death".

Plato's emphasis on reason and Aristotle's belief that the faculty of reasoning is that which distinguishes man from beast is anathema to Sartre. The man of reason in Sartre's plays is represented as sterile, unattached, and ineffectual. Although he by no means discredits the value of clear thinking, he feels that the important thing is action upon the thought. Reason, a product of imperfect man, can never intellectualize away doubt and make for "certainty." Certainty can come only when we act, realizing that we are operating on imperfect knowledge and that what we do our reason may later tell us was "wrong." Sartre speaks well to this theme in the play, Dirty Hands. The story
takes place during wartime, and France is about to be liberated by the Russian army. Hoederer is the head of the local Communist Party and is attempting to form a coalition between his party and a fascist party and a liberal party, the other groups of the resistance movement. The basic reason for this is what after the occupation, the Communists would not be able to establish a government alone. Hugo is appalled by the coalition, saying it violates the ideals and purposes of the party. He maintains that they should never compromise their principle. The following is an excerpt from that scene:

Hugo: "And the best means you've found to fight that class is to ask it to share power with you?"

Hoederer: "Right! Today it's the best means. How you cling to your purity, young man! How afraid you are to soil your hands! All right, stay pure! What good will it do? Why did you join us? Purity is an idea for a yogi or a monk. You intellectuals and bourgeois anarchists use it as a pretext for doing nothing. To do nothing, to remain motionless, arms at your sides, wearing kid gloves. Well, I have dirty hands. Right up to the elbows. I've plunged them in filth and blood. But what do you hope? Do you think you can govern innocently?"

Perhaps the pivotal conflict between Sartre and the Greeks is the question of man's nature viewed in the Existence-Essence syndrome. Aristotle said that "the whole is of necessity prior to the part;" that "the nature of a thing is determined by its end." Man is constantly moving from Being to Becoming and to Being again. This unfolding from actualization to potentiality
is terminated in a pre-existent end which is the nature of the thing, the essence of it. Thus man's existence is a movement to a prior essence which is determined by his very nature.

In Plato, the conflict is more clearly seen. To him, there were eternal essences which existed prior to man and were always existing regardless of whether man saw them. As quoted earlier, it was from the ultimate essence, Good, which all things right and good flowed. Further, only a few men would be able to discover for themselves the essence, Good. Essence is clearly prior to, and even independent of, Existence.

It is the doctrine of Essence preceding Existence that Sartre most vehemently denounces. In his famous lecture, Existentialism, he announces that much misunderstood and criticized premise "Existence precedes Essence." Man comes into the world with no prior individual or universal essences to guide him or predetermine him. Out of man's existence, he must forge whatever essence there shall be. The first principle of Sartre's existentialism is that "man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself."  

To give an example, a physical object such as an automobile, could be said to have essence prior to existence. Before it was even constructed, there were a vast number of blueprints, designs, and graphs which determined how it would look when completed. In other words, its essence was prior to its existence. Plato and Aristotle attributed a similar circumstance to man. Plato saw absolute, eternal values which existed, independent and a priori, to which it was man's duty to aspire. Aristotle saw man as simply unfolding towards an ultimate essence.
Sartre says that these prior essences or eternal values do not exist and as a consequence man creates his own essence. Man begins with nothing other than his objective existence, to which he adds his capacity for "negation." Thus, he creates his own values, attitudes, and beliefs and is responsible for whatever he becomes. What a man is as a man will be determined entirely by himself. 12

Much as Sartre disavows prior essences, he also refutes the belief that a man is of necessity dependent on, subordinate to, or determined by society. Aristotle says that "he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state is either a bad man or above humanity." For Sartre, a man is in a very real sense precisely what Aristotle said he was not -- above humanity. He is above humanity in the sense that humanity has no necessary, predestined relationship to him. Humanity is being-in-itself, a being which must be negated in order to attain being-for-itself. Man acts as a god, choosing himself and his relation to society. Plato and Aristotle ignore man's right of and necessity for choice in society. Plato's Republic postulates a society in which man's choice is almost entirely suppressed. Aristotle even excludes the possibility of man's questioning certain social arrangements. 13

The importance of choice and the need for questioning basic tenents of the social order was brought very forcefully to Sartre when he was struggling against the Nazis in the French Resistance:

Because the all-powerful police tried to force us to hold our tongues, every word took on the value
of a declaration of principles. Because we were hunted down, every one of our gestures had the weight of a solemn commitment... and the choice that each of us made of his life was an authentic choice because it was made face to face with death, because it could always have been expressed in these terms: "Rather death than...." And here I am not speaking of the elite among us who were real Resisters, but of all Frenchmen who, at every hour of the night and day throughout four years, answered "No!"

Perhaps it is people like the French Resisters that will make the Republic an impossibility.

The responsibility of choice achieves an even more ominous tone when seen from another point of view. Because there are no pre-existent values or absolutes, there is no external standard by which a man can judge the merit of an action; he must act without illusion, realizing full well that his action may turn out "wrong", but accepting complete responsibility for it nevertheless. He must likewise be aware, however, that he has not frozen himself by that past action but is, rather, capable of transcending that situation and asserting his free choice in another direction. For past actions are part of the "dead" past and therefore of being-in-itself.

The fallacy of attempting to gear one's actions to an external, static value is seen in Sartre's play, The Devil and the Good Lord. Goetz is the leader of a rebel army at the time of the Reformation and the Peasant's Revolt in Germany. All his life Goetz has dedicated to doing Evil, but a dispute arises and Goetz wagers that he can do Good. In his doing of Evil he was unwittingly unsuccessful. Personally, his Evil acts only
caused his mistress, Catherine, to love him more. The total irony of his Evil having opposite consequence of his intents is expressed in an exchange with Nasti:

Nasti: "You bring about disorder. And disorder is the best servant of established power. You weakened the entire order of chivalry the day you betrayed Conrad... You serve the rulers, Goetz, and you will serve them whatever you do; all destruction brings confusion; weakens the weak, enriches the rich, increases the power of the powerful."

Goetz: "Therefore, I am doing the opposite of what I intend." 15

Goetz' attempts at doing Good are even more ludicrous. His attempts at doing Good resulted in, among other things, a senseless slaughter of twenty-five thousand peasants. Finally Goetz realizes the futility of trying to achieve perfect Good or perfect Evil. He ceases to think of Good and Evil as distinct and exclusive absolutes always attainable by man.

Goetz: "Men of the present day are born criminals. I must have my share of their crimes if I want to have my share of their love and virtue. I wanted pure love: ridiculous nonsense. To love anyone is to hate the same enemy; therefore I will adopt your hates. I wanted to do Good: foolishness. On this earth at present Good and Evil are inseparable. I agree to be bad in order to become good." 16

The Republic conceives man's freedom as the "freedom" to live within the strictures of the social whole. Man is free to "do his own business" but that business is determined by society and its rulers. The individual is not free to choose good in the sense of determining it because the good already exists in
the external truths. By a process of education, Plato attempts to make man do the good and extinguish in him any possibility of doing evil.

The Platonic conception of freedom is an abomination to Sartre. To him, man is free, absolutely and totally. Man may choose to accept or reject all or part of society. Because of the totality of his freedom, he may, nay must, choose and then create the good. No attempt at education can ever make a man completely good, for in his capacity of free choice he may select evil.

Plato contends that knowledge is absolute and attainable. Sartre says that the only absolute knowledge is knowledge of the Cartesian "I think"; all else is only probable. Man must act on imperfect knowledge, choosing and constantly interpreting his own truth.

The Greek thoughts on man and his community are seen as the antithesis of Sartre's existentialism. The glorification of State, Reason, and Goodness at such a tremendous cost to the individual Sartre must emphatically reject, and with it go many of the foundation stones of Western society.
CHAPTER I -- FOOTNOTES


3. Ibid., v.

4. Ibid., v.

5. Ibid., iv.

6. Ibid., vii.


13. Ibid., p. 29-31.


16. Ibid., p. 145.
CHAPTER II:

THE CHRISTIANS: ST. AUGUSTINE AND ST. THOMAS AQUINAS
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THE CHRISTIANS: ST. AUGUSTINE AND ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Western thoughts on man and community are heavily stamped with the seal of early Christianity. St. Augustine and later St. Thomas Aquinas may be said to have articulated the dominant courses of thinking concerning "Christian community" in the Church's early and middle years, and the power of their theological spinnings is far from exhausted today. Deeply indebted to Plato and Aristotle, respectively, they nevertheless have made significant contributions of their own.

St. Augustine's concept of the political community is heavily tainted with Platonic thought. Insofar as they are similar, the Sartrian criticisms directed previously towards Plato need not be reiterated. But, Augustine injects some additional elements of great import -- God and a "society" beyond the temporal world. In the City of God, he states:

Peace between a mortal man and his Maker consists in ordered obedience, guided by faith, under God's eternal law; peace between man and man consists in regulated fellowship. The peace of the political community is an ordered harmony of authority and obedience between citizens. The peace of the heavenly City lies in a perfectly ordered and harmonious communion of those who find their joy in God and in one another in God.¹

The Platonic ideal of the "harmonious whole" is evident. However, he makes, perhaps unknowingly, a radical departure from Plato, for he says there is a higher good than the state; the state is denied its omnipotence and self-sufficiency. The City of God, the heavenly city, is a higher good. Ultimate Justice is not in man to man, but man to God. Augustine conceives of the
ordered community as the greatest good of the secular world, but says it is only a stepping-stone to the spiritual city. Speaking of the earthly city, he says:

But the things which this city desires cannot justly be said to be evil, for it is itself, in its own kind, better than all other human good. But if they neglect the better things of the heavenly city, which are secured by eternal victory and peace never-ending, and so inordinately covet these present good things that they believe them to be the only desirable things, or love them better than those things which are believed to be better -- if this be so, then it is necessary that misery follow and ever increase. 2

Augustine, then, has added a new dimension to the relationship between man and community. As did happen, men began to use the words and revelations of God as a defense for attacking or preserving a society (Augustine himself defended the Platonic state as precondition for entrance into the heavenly city). The idea of the invalidity of the encroachment of the state into certain areas would be applauded by Sartre, but placing its justification in God would receive his boos.

The other prime element in the compound is God. St. Augustine substituted for Plato's Good, from which all things right and good flow, God. The substitution might even be called a fusion, for he says of the Platonists that "they hold that the blessed life which all men seek can be found only by him, who... embraces that one Supreme Good which is the unchangeable God." 3 Thus Augustine saves the essences. "God alone is the Founder of every nature" 4 and is "He who had created their [man's] good nature out of nothing." 5
The latter of the preceding passages is very important, for here we see another crack in the Platonic wall. Plato held that the essences always existed, therefore they were indestructible. For Augustine, however, God creates man's essence "out of nothing." Of course, the essence is still there independent of man's action, but the idea of creation is placed beside the Platonic idea of discovery. All that is needed is a change of creators -- Sartre relishes the task.

Sartre, through the voice of Goetz in The Devil and the Good Lord, thunders "God is dead." Sartre kills God and leaves the "nothing" from which Augustine creates man. Without essences, either pre-existing or created for us by God, we are left with the Void. Man is reduced to his physical existence confronting the universe of Nothingness. The realization of this Void is repulsive and frightening. Its intensity is felt in Nausea in one of Roquentin's numerous encounters with it:

You couldn't even wonder where all that sprang from, or how it was that a world came into existence, rather than nothingness. It didn't make sense, the World was everywhere, in front, behind. There had been nothing before it. Nothing. There had never been a moment in which it could not have existed. That was what worried me: of course, there was no reason for this flowing lava to exist. But it was impossible for it not to exist. It was unthinkable: to imagine nothingness you had to be there already, in the midst of the World, eyes wide open and alive; nothingness was only an idea in my head, an existing idea floating in this immensity: this nothingness had not come before existence, it was an existence like any other and appeared after many others. I shouted "filth! what rotten filth!" and shook myself and there was so much, tons and tons of existence, endless; I stifled the depths of this immense weariness.
The negative awareness that a man experiences in this terrible confrontation is precisely what gives a man his hope -- and his power. A man is his god, he creates what he is, instead of God.

The death of God has other implications for Augustine's philosophy. Augustine's "humanism" was rather pallid. It was needed to establish the conditions for entry into the City of God. He said that the "divine Master inculcates two precepts -- the Love of God and the love of our neighbor." God decreed that we must love all men and that it is our duty to do so. This reminds one of the Self-Taught Man discussed earlier who treated Man as an abstract symbol. The existentialist death of God destroys the necessity of loving all men. Man must now judge men a posteriori as subjective individuals and there is no duty for loving any of them other than that which he places upon himself.

Augustine says that in the heavenly city men can truly commune with "one another in God." By denying God, Sartre says that this is impossible and further states that communion is impossible in the earthly city. The belief that you can "know" someone else is what Sartre calls "bad faith;" each man is irretrievably alone and isolated from other people. This is illustrated in the play No Exit. Garcin and two others are in "Hell." Garcin feels that the only way they can "save" themselves is to try to communicate with each other and their "self." His desperate struggle at realization of the others and even of himself is futile, which prompts him to utter, "Hell is -- other people."
Augustine attempts to preserve the free choice of man in the face of the existence of an omniscient God. He makes the seemingly contradictory statement that asserts that God is all-knowing but we still have freedom of choice. "God knows all things before they happen; yet, we act by choice in all those things where we feel and know that we cannot act otherwise than willingly." Sartre would say that it is, indeed, a contradiction. As long as there is the God of Augustine, man cannot have free will. One of Sartre's first principles is the death of God. It is from this premise that man has absolute free choice. St. Augustine's freedom is an illusion.

The importance of faith in Augustine is a departure from Plato. Plato, in his emphasis on reason, further sealed off part of man's humanness -- his irrationality and subjectivity. While Augustine certainly values reason, he recognizes that there is knowledge beyond intellectualization. He said, "Faith is really faith only when, in hope, it awaits that which is not yet seen in substance." The belief that all things cannot be reasoned certainty but must be believed and acted upon nevertheless is a mainstay in Sartre's philosophy.

St. Thomas Aquinas provided Christian thought with a second, yet complementary, theory of social man. Whereas St. Augustine owes much to the ideas of Plato, Aquinas is the disciple of Aristotle.

St. Aquinas, parroting Aristotle, asserts the importance of the good life and the good community. However the community
becomes not an ultimate end in itself, but preparation for "beatitude in God."

It is not the ultimate end of an assembled multitude to live virtuously, but through virtuous living to attain the possession of God. 6

Here, as in Augustine, some part of man is placed beyond the state.

The belief in the state as subordinate to the ultimate end of "enjoyment in God" led Aquinas to assert that the Church was above the State:

To him [the Pope] all the kings of the Christian People are to be subject as to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. For those to whom pertains the care of intermediate ends should be subject to him to whom pertains the care of the ultimate end, and be directed by his rule. 9

The belief in Church over State can sometimes provide a rationale for defiance of the State, but Aquinas did not use it so. He argued instead for subservience, saying that the extinguishing of one tyranny may lead to a worse one and that bad rulers are punishment for a wicked people. 10 The only remedy to an oppressive State is final salvation in God. The potential call to rebellion is thus kept silent and man is reduced to necessary submission to State, Church, and God.

Although Aquinas severed the unity of Aristotelian community, it is reaffirmed in the unity in God, and the alienation of man's being-for-itself is still maintained.

Aquinas raises reason to greater heights than Augustine. He declares that there can be no contradiction between faith and
reason, because they are both divinely inspired. Any contradic-
tions are apparent, rather than real. Reason is the hand-
maiden of faith. Faith is not contrary to reason, but above it.
Although Aquinas, in the true Christian tradition, is emphatic
about the importance of faith, his allegation that faith and
reason were not irreconcilable but even complementary opened the
gates for the coming deluge of reason that would submerge faith.
Sartre's disapproval of the emphasis on man's use of reason to
the exclusion of his subjective and irrational part is well known.

Aquinas speaks on the Essence-Existence question and, at
first glance, it might appear that his position is a departure
from past propositions. Aquinas affirms that "While existence
realizes essence, essence provides the limits within which exis-
tence is circumscribed." This is merely a rewording of Aris-
totle's doctrine that "the whole of a thing if of necessity prior
to its part" and "the nature of a thing is determined by its end." The ultimate form of a thing must exist prior to the existence of
the thing, but the thing itself proceeds towards and within the
bounds of the form it is approaching. To give an example, before
an oak tree can come into being, there must be a form, an essence
of an oak tree already existent, otherwise there would be no guar-
antee of what would grow out of the seed planted. Assuming that
the essence or form of the oak tree exists, the seed planted will
not have the essence of the oak, but will have to pass through
stages of growth (potential-actualization) to reach the essence
of an oak tree; the essence of the tree is pre-existent and the
seed merely unfolds toward it, realizing its essence. So in Aquinas, as in Aristotle, man's fate is still fixed by essences over which he has no control and, for Sartre's purposes, Aquinas establishes "essence precedes existence" just as surely as does Plato.
CHAPTER II -- FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., x.

4. Ibid., xii.

5. Ibid., xii.


7. St. Augustine, v.


9. Ibid., ii.

10. Ibid., i.

CHAPTER III:

THE NEW HUMANISM: SARTRE
CHAPTER III: THE NEW HUMANISM

After strongly criticizing two major props of Western civilization, the Greek and the Christian heritages, it is only to be expected that Sartre rebuild from the rubble his own program for man and community. It is to the "new humanism" that we now turn and, as it can ultimately only be understood in terms of man himself, Sartre's conception of the individual must be the starting point.

Sartre declares that that which separates man from beast is not his reasoning faculty and, further, there is no such thing as Man writ large to which the individual must fit himself to much as a lifeless screw is fitted to a machine. A man is not an object, but is a thinking, feeling being which is never static and is always capable of changing himself and going "beyond" himself. An animal or a stone is always and forever that which it is - an object. The object self of a thing is called its being-in-itself. A man possesses being-in-itself -- his physical body. The being-in-itself always "is"; it is unchanging in any other manner than physical. A man, however, has the ability to look into the past and into the future; he can always transcend the present moment. A man can project himself beyond himself. This is what Sartre means when he states, "I am not what I am." For the moment I define what "I am", I have gone beyond that point and am no longer what "I am." This capacity of man Sartre calls being-for-itself, or consciousness, and is the faculty which
differentiates man from animals or things.¹

In The Age of Reason, Mathieu becomes aware of the transcendent quality of his "self" and declares:

I've yawned, I've read, I've made love. And all that left its mark! Every movement of mine evoked, beyond itself, and in the future, something that insistently waited and matured. And those waiting-points -- they are myself, I am waiting for myself in the squares and at the crossroads, in the great hall of the mairie of the Fourteenth District, it is I who am waiting for myself on a red armchair, I am waiting for myself to come, clad in black, with a stiff collar, almost choking with head, and say: "Yes, yes, I consent to take her as my wife."²

Sartre exhibits a great deal of disdain over the being-in-itself. He represents man's being-in-itself as constantly "in the way." Our physical body and the physical objects around it make it more difficult to know and exercise our consciousness and make it impossible to "know" another person. Nevertheless, our physical existence is a necessary part of our conscious presence. The conflict between being-in-itself and being-for-itself is chronic and agonizing. The following passage from No Exit illustrates this point. Garcin has been attempting to communicate with himself and with the other characters in their Hell. Their lack of communication is basically caused by their practicing "bad faith", but also shown is the physical body being "in the way." (Estelle is the type who, even if her body were not there, could not be communicated to).

Garcin: "I can't endure it any longer, I'm through with you both (Estelle runs to him; he pushes her away.) Go away. You're even fouler than she. I won't let myself get bogged in your eyes. You're soft and slimy. Ugh! Like an octopus. Like a quagmire."³
The being-for-itself, the conscious, is the only thing we, in fact, "know." It is the essential base of our whole existence. We are capable of doubting everything except our consciousness, for in the very act of doubting our consciousness we must use our consciousness, thus affirming its existence. The Cartesian cogito, "I think, therefore I am," is the irreducible absolute truth of man's existence. All things beyond this basic reality are only probable, even physical objects.¹ When Sartre describes physical objects as being blurred, amorphous, and shapeless, it is not only because they are "in the way" as discussed earlier, but also because their existence is not a "clear and distinct" certainty. In Nausea, Roquentin's encounter with the world of objects in a garden demonstrates this point:

"It was there, in the garden, toppled down into the trees, all soft, sticky, soiling everything, all thick, a jelly. And I was inside, I with the garden. I was frightened, furious, I thought it was so stupid, so out of place, I hated this ignoble mess. Mounting up, mounting up high as the sky, spilling over, filling everything with its gelatinous slither, and I could see depths upon depths of it reaching far beyond the limits of the garden, the houses, and Bouville, as far as the eye could reach."²

The discovery of the cogito brings with it an awareness of one's own freedom. The freedom is realized in the process of doubting, of negation down to the cogito. One's freedom consists in the ability to say No to every proposition, value, custom, or thing. One may deny anything and everything except one's consciousness; there is no necessary Yes. Like Descartes, Sartre negates man down to the very core of his being. But Descartes snatches
man from the void he has created and places him in the grace of the ultimate cogito -- God. For Sartre's man there is no God, there is no Essence; his freedom is total and his salvation is his own. There is no God to spin out value and there are no eternal truths. By the process of negation, this simple assertion comes crashing down on one and he is left facing the Nothingness. Beyond the cogito, all can be doubted. The implications of this freedom in the Nothingness are dramatized by Mathieu in [Age of Reason].

"No," he thought, "no, it isn't heads or tails. Whatever happens, it is by my agency that everything must happen." Even if he let himself be carried off, in helplessness and in despair, even if he let himself be carried off like an old sack of coal, he would have chosen his own damnation; he was free, free in every way, free to behave like a fool or a machine, free to accept, free to refuse, free to equivocate; to marry, to give up the game, to drag this dead weight about with him for years to come. He could do what he liked, no one had the right to advise him, there would be for him no Good nor Evil unless he brought them into being. All around him things were gathered in a circle, expectant, impassive, and indicative of nothing. He was alone, enveloped in this monstrous silence, free and alone, without assistance and without excuse, condemned to decide without support from any quarter, condemned forever to be free.

Perhaps now the meaning of that puzzling yet simple phrase "Existence precedes Essence" is clear. Man is born and from that beginning he "makes himself," he creates his own Essence. There is neither a God nor a pre-existent essence choosing his values; there is no predestined mold he is to be poured into; there is no social contract obligating him to society; there
are no determinate laws of history or environment condemning him before his birth; there are no inexorable forces of necessity creating what he is. Man is totally free and responsible. Man must choose whatever he will be; he is without excuse. God is dead and man is God. This is vividly portrayed in The Flies, in which Orestes has realized his freedom and confronts Zeus with it.

Zeus: "Come back. I am forgetfulness, I am peace."

Orestes: "Foreign to myself - I know it. Outside nature, against nature, without excuse, beyond remedy, except what remedy I find within myself. But I shall not return under your law; I am doomed to have no other law but mine. Nor shall I come back to nature, the nature you found good; in it are a thousand beaten paths all leading up to you - but I must blaze my trail. For I, Zeus, am a man, and every man must find out his own way. Nature abhors man, and you too, god of gods, abhor mankind."

Sartre maintains that everyone is totally free and responsible in making himself what he is and anyone who refuses to recognize this is practicing "bad faith", or self-deception. Awareness of the cogito, or consciousness, is the taproot from whence man's freedom flows, for it is the process of negation down to the consciousness that makes one realize that there is no surety, no necessity, beyond the consciousness. If one denies this one denies the fullness of his freedom; one is in bad faith. The implications of this assertion on Freudian psychology are ominous. If consciousness is the only absolute and we
are totally free, how can there be an unconscious? There cannot be, according to Sartre, who claims that the very suppression of the consciousness affirms it. He says that in order to repress something the thing to be repressed must be known, but precisely in order to repress it. To quote from Being and Nothingness:

But what type of self-consciousness can the censor have? It must be the consciousness (of) being conscious of the drive to be repressed, but precisely in order not to be conscious of it. What does this mean if not that the censor is in bad faith?

The practice of bad faith creates a tendency to objectivize self and others. For example, a good waiter is one who "plays" at being a waiter. He realizes that he is not a waiter in the same sense that a stone is a stone or a table is a table. He is one who chooses to go to work at 8:00, to wait tables, and to be polite to customers. He is a waiter in one sense but he also realizes that he is a thinking man that is constantly going beyond himself as a waiter, that he is in the mode of "being what I am not." Self-deception occurs when the waiter attempts to become a waiter in the mode of "being-in-itself." When he denies that he is a free agent constantly exercising his choice in his situation as a waiter and constantly transcending that situation. He thus becomes self-contained, unable to move beyond situations, and becomes a waiter in the same manner as a tree is a tree.

It is only through the discovery and acceptance of one's own cogito that he can recognize the consciousness and freedom of another. An objectivization of myself can lead to the
objectivization of others. This is pointed out quite well in Portrait of the Anti-Semite. The Anti-Semite refuses to accept himself as responsible for his own acts. He fears self-knowledge and his own contingent, changing self. He locks onto anti-semitism because it gives him permanency. He can say, "I am an anti-semit" just as a stone is a stone. Thus, there is no more need for questioning or anguish, for he is self-contained. His failings and problems are the fault of the Jew; he negates his own responsibility. The Jew is not an individual, one of whose characteristics may be that he is of the Jewish faith, but a member of that class of objects which he calls Jew, all alike and all Evil. 11

By adhering to antisemitism, he is not only adopting an opinion, he is choosing himself as a person. He is choosing the permanence and the impenetrability of rock, the total irresponsibility of the warrior who obeys his leaders -- and he has no leader. He chooses finally, that good be readymade, not in question, out of reach; he dare not look at it for fear of being forced to contest it and seek another form of it. Antisemitism, in a word, is fear of man's fate. The antisemite is the man who wants to be pitiless stone, furious torrent, devastating lightning: in short, everything but a man. 12

The objectivization of others also applies on the personal level. This is particularly true in a man-woman relationship, because the sexual implications aggravate the being-in-itself—being-for-itself conflict discussed earlier. This object-subject conflict is always there in any case, and can promote the denial of the other's consciousness. This is seen in Sartre's short story, Intimacy, where Lulu is disillusioned with the relationship
with her husband and runs off with her lover, Pierre, only to realize that he is totally insensitive to her human qualities and treats her only as a sex object.

How, one might ask, can Sartre dare call a philosophy which completely severs a man from God, society, Goodness, and other men a humanism? Surely it is the ludicrous joke of a madman! Not so, says Sartre, for as Orestes uttered in The Flies, "human life begins on the far side of despair."

Firstly, it is a humanism because it deals with man not as an abstraction writ large or as some sterile faculty known as Reason, but as an individual entity filled with rationality and irrationality, pride and passions, good and evil. His starting point is not a universal but the particular individual.

The awareness of one's own being-for-itself and, consequently, the awareness of that human faculty in others forces us not to think in terms of object classes in other human beings. If man thought in these terms, the Nazi atrocities would have been impossible and the oppression of the American Negro would cease to be. Similarly, but less obvious, this is the rationale for Sartre's condemnation of the humanism of the Self-Taught Man, who, as you recall, thought of man only in terms of symbols. It is this "cult of humanity," most forcefully expressed by Auguste Comte, which Sartre deplores. The scientific sociology of Comte, determining, defining, and categorizing man, can, for Sartre, only end in Fascism. It is not man as a symbol but man as a self-determining, endless process that is humanism.13
The inadequacy of symbols is brought out forcefully in Sartre's play, *The Respectful Prostitute*. Lizzie is a prostitute from New York that has just come to a southern town. Fred is a Senator's son who kills a Negro for sport. Lizzie was a witness to the slaying and is going to testify against Fred. Fred's father, the Senator, conjures one sacred symbol after another before Lizzie and convinces her not to testify. Fred has previously slept with Lizzie and, while in pursuit of a Negro witness whom he hopes to lynch, he stops in to see Lizzie. She is driven to the breaking point and is going to shoot him. He begins pleading with her in eloquent, patriotic symbols, which are made empty by the ugliness of himself as a man.

Fred: "The first Clarke cleared a whole forest, just by himself; he killed seventeen Indians with his bare hands before dying in an ambush; his son practically built the town; he was friends with George Washington, and died at Yorktown for American independence; my great-grandfather was Chief of the Vigilantes in San Francisco, he saved the lives of twenty-two persons in the great fire; my grandfather came back to settle down here, he dug the Mississippi Canal, and was elected Governor. My father is a Senator. I shall be Senator after him. I am the last one to carry the family name. We have made this country, and its history ours. There have been Clarkes in Alaska, in the Philippines, in New Mexico. Can you dare to shoot all of America?"

Without determinate external forces, man can, in fact, be evil. Sartre, during a trip to America, reached an impasse in a political dialogue and explained it by saying, "He refuses to recognize the existence of evil." The existence of evil in the
world is one of the things that sets Sartre at odds with traditional humanists and liberals. Their belief in the perfectability or goodness of man is impossible by the very fact of man's freedom to choose. Thus, Sartre builds on a more realistic humanism and surfaces a dilemma that contemporary liberal theorists have far from fully confronted.

Because "man makes himself," I am completely responsible for what I am. My choice, or lack of choice, which is in itself a choice, makes my essence. There is no legislator telling me what is right and Good and how I should act. I must choose my own values. If I do not speak out against an injustice in my own community, there, for that moment, I am a coward. It makes little difference whether I regarded it as an injustice if I did not act on my belief; the belief, to have meaning for my total self, must be acted upon. Likewise, if I get married, I am choosing it as a good. Regardless of any protestations I may make against marriage, "I am a man who married."

The responsibility and the weight of my freedom is further compounded by the fact that choice is an unending process. Because we are human, we are constantly transcending our situation, choosing, and redefining ourselves, but each time we define ourselves we go beyond it. I am constantly "not what I am." Thus I must constantly choose and reaffirm my values. I cannot rest on my laurels until death. However, it must be pointed out that because I am free, I am always capable of choosing something else
and overcoming past choices which I might now consider false.\textsuperscript{15}

The consequences of choice, burdensome as they are to the individual, extend their effect beyond the individual. For when one chooses, one chooses for all humanity. There is no God to create man's image. Rather, a man, as God, must cast man in the image he chooses. Translated into somewhat more concrete terms, the only "images" or values that are in the world are man-created. Therefore, when I, as an individual man, choose I am placing a value "in-the-world". The value that I choose comes into contact, and sometimes conflict, with other men and values in the world. The choice I make delimits or extends the situational choice of others.\textsuperscript{16}

The concept of situational choice is important, perhaps crucial, to the understanding of Sartre's humanism. The failure to understand it has led to its being criticized as a social fatalism. The critics have charged that his doctrine of total freedom and responsibility means that the slum dweller is responsible for his juvenile delinquency, the unemployed worker is responsible for his lack of work, and that the Negro is responsible for his low level in society. They allege that Sartre's existentialism justifies, willingly or not, these social conditions. Such allegations show little more than a tragic misinterpretation or misunderstanding of Sartre's existential philosophy.

Sartre says that man is "in situation" and that within that situation, he is totally free. In any circumstance, no
matter how limited, man always has alternatives to choose from. Man must, and always can, say Yes or No to any proposition as long as he has consciousness. This point is well made in the short story, The Wall, and the play, The Victors. Here the main characters' situational choice is intensely limited, for they are prisoners condemned to ultimate absurdity -- death. Their range of choice, though small, is extremely real and crucial; for they must choose how to face death.

In the previous example, the characters were imprisoned and sentenced largely by forces outside their control. In much the same way, society or its elements may imprison in varying degrees peoples, a group, or an individual. The choices of others limit the sphere of choice of another. Nevertheless, what that man makes from the "situation" is determined entirely by himself. The environment may pose conditions, but what the man does with them is entirely his own choosing.

The keystone of Sartre's link between man and community is thus revealed. A man, aware of his own freedom, must commit himself to the freedom of others. For his freedom is inextricably linked with the freedom of others. Man cannot deny his own freedom without denying the freedom of others and, vice-versa, he cannot recognize his freedom without recognizing that of others. Man must commit because he must choose, and if he is not practicing "bad faith", he must inevitably choose the freedom of others with his own.

Speaking less abstractly, I must commit to extending man's
situation so that he can more fully exercise his freedom of choice. My conception of the social ideal may be different from others and conflict or defeat may result. In a world of man-created values, there is no guarantee that "good will out." If totalitarianism is triumphant, that is man's truth of the moment.

The free individual, acting in a world of good and evil, must commit to his conception of the good, without illusion as to the success of the venture.

The new humanism of Sartre posits no necessary obligation external to the individual man. He owes duty neither to the State or God, nor to studied moral or scientific judgements of man. The essential obligation of an individual is the realization of his own humanity. But the result is not anarchy, for in this realization a man becomes aware of the humanity of others. He cannot deny the humanity of others without denying his own humanity. A man is inextricably bound to Man; only through conscious personal commitment can society be bettered. Sartre thus places the burden of and the power for Man's salvation where it always has been and only can be -- with the free, human individual.
CHAPTER III -- FOOTNOTES


10. Ibid., pp. 256-57.


12. Ibid., pp. 286-7.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


