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Sartre's Existential Marxism and the Quest for Humanistic Authenticity

Abstract

The essay reassess Sartre's work as a philosophical synthesis of thought and struggle, in which authentic human relations and concrete political action assume a much more central place than it is granted in many (perhaps most) accounts. This essay also identifies certain inconsistencies, methodological limitations and points of controversy in his work, while affirming the essentially authentic core of his philosophy and political activity.

Key words

freedom, facticity, intersubjectivity, authenticity, civic virtue, left-wing politics

"To be Human means to become human."

Karl Jaspers

"(W)e thought that human relations are to be perpetually invented, that a priori no form is privileged, none impossible."

Simone de Beauvoir[1]

Introduction

There have been few 20th century thinkers and writers who have so enriched world culture and widened our intellectual and artistic horizons like the irreverent Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), that *enfant terrible* of French and international social and cultural life who greatly overshadowed the official institutions he so despised. A thorn in the eye of manipulators, dogmatists and mediocrities, Sartre epitomised the *intellectuel engagé*, standing in some of the best traditions of independent inquiry and fearless activism, his allegiances with the oppressed, and the unbreakable ideal of human dignity. He tried to reflect his philosophy in his own life, fighting for what he believed in, avoiding his own institutionalisation and rejecting the membership of the French Academy, the *Légion d'honneur,* and even the Nobel Prize in Literature. Although from an "upper-middle class" background, *épater les bourgeois* became his lifelong motto, free consciousness his enduring priority. The essence of being human is Freedom.

1 Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *Les Écrits de Sartre*, *chronologie, bibliographie commentée*, Gallimard, Paris 1970; in: Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 1975, p. 76.

Extending the (libertarian socialist) principle of free associations to sexual and romantic relations, Sartre and Beauvoir practiced polyamory (or free love), approved of homosexuality, and even defended nonviolent and nonauthoritarian intergenerational relations.[2] Sartre's and Beauvoir's sexual democratism and dissidence, echoing the conceptions of Foucault, Daniel Guerin and Kate Millet for instance, their romantic defiance of "bourgeois law and order", and the consistency with which they espoused the concept of radical freedom, doubtlessly added to the Stalinist and petty-bourgeois suspicion and detestation of their left-libertarian philosophy.[3] Beauvoir recounted their basic principle:

"(O)ur most passionately held conviction (was) that freedom is an inexhaustible source of discovery, and every time we give it room to develop, mankind is enriched as a result."[4]

Autoregulative morality and the invention of integral humanity

Sartrean freedom is based on the self as Subject, "being for itself" (loosely corresponding with Heidegger's *Dasein*) or human consciousness, which is a nothingness in the sense of a negation, a separation from inert matter ("being in itself"). The inherent aspect of being human is the possibility of self-definition, and we must embrace the contingency of human life. Existence precedes essence.

"What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man, as the existentialist sees him, is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself."[5]

Sartre faced a difficult, never completely successful trajectory towards grasping a complex interplay between freedom and facticity – the basic notion, in accordance with Marx, being that "humans make themselves out of the conditions which are made for them."[6]

To an almost unprecedented extent, he embraced the ideal of the *self-made man*, a conscious creator of social relationships in charge of his own destiny, also responsible for the wellbeing of others. Sartre constructed his existentialism as "a humanist philosophy of action, of effort, of combat, of solidarity…"[7]

We cannot be subsumed to the society we live in. Léopold Senghor rightly pointed to Marx's definition of "the economic law of motion of modern society" as being a social *tendency* rather than a fixed, immutable law.[8] Human freedom is fundamentally manifested in the possibility of detachment and disengagement, questioning, doubting and imagining what is not and might be. By grasping nonbeing one is able "to put himself outside being" (*Being and Nothingness*). Nothingness is identified as the realm of freedom. Humans can detach themselves and transcend what is ("put themselves outside of being") because we are not simply predetermined by the present and the past, not simply locked into being what we were and currently are, but can also grasp the nonexistent. Every act, as the argument goes, is the projection of the being for itself toward what is not. The workers' resignation and conformism, failure to imagine what is presently not and refusal to make a clear choice and stick by it are seen by Sartre as constituting bad faith, which is characterised by the individual lying to him- or herself. The retreat from the choice to rebel into

normality is a manifestation of the worker's essentialist miscomprehension of his role in society, lack of understanding and neglect of possibilities and of the contingent nature of being in history. The return to "normality" is a return to the seriality of a depersonalised socio-economic order, an order reliant on "practico-inert" individuals in whose existence the dominant experience are the phenomena of alienation and reification.

Of course, Sartre opposed ontological dualism, acknowledging in the beginning of the first chapter of *Being and Nothingness* that he is largely dealing with abstractions when speaking of "being for itself" (*l'être pour soi*) and "being in itself" (*l'être en soi*) where it is actually the concrete totality which should be the object of our analysis. Yet, at least in his early phase, Sartre fails to realise the materialist potential of the idea that "existence precedes essence".

For Sartre, consciousness is entirely "translucid", and it is precisely because we are prereflectively aware of our freedom that we are able to be and act in bad faith, to escape freedom. It is, however, a highly contentious assertion that we are always prereflectively conscious of our being. In the case of the workers in part IV of *Being and Nothingness*, perhaps a more classical Marxist notion of false consciousness is needed. People can be truly unaware of things – and fooled – just as they can fool themselves (however, these categories are usually not easy to demarcate – the notion of cognitive dissonance, whose existence in "liberal" societies Žižek often discusses,[9] is interesting here). Particularly important is that, if consciousness indeed "exists its body" and is "wholly body" (as Sartre writes), then those bodily needs and the will for self-preservation weigh heavily on what characterises our consciousness as well. If consciousness is its body (among other things), it would seem to be at least partly conditioned by external factors, which negates the possibility of absolute spontaneity and absolute mental autonomy.

A "structuralist" attack on Sartre's conception of freedom is possible, and a charge of voluntarism is often made. Even if we intentionally limit our discussion of freedom to the freedom of consciousness (as opposed to concrete, material or factual – or indeed integral – freedom), rage, fear, emotional or physical pain, ignorance, mental deprivation, and also indoctrination and brainwashing are all clear examples of factors which might effectively force

2
See for instance letter in *Le Monde*, January 26, 1977, http://www.ipce.info/ipceweb/Library/00aug29b1_from_1977.htm, and the 1977 petition addressed to the French parliament, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_petitions_against_age_of_consent_laws.

3
For Lefebvre, who initially held very orthodox views on Sartre's existentialism, Sartre's *Nausea* was a "manifesto of the pederast" (Henri Lefebvre, *L'Existentialisme*, Anthropos, Paris 1946, p. 221, in: Poster, *op. cit.*, p. 117).

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In Contat and Rybalka, *op. cit.,* p. 26.

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Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 1946, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm.

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T Storm Heter, *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement*, Continuum, London 2006, p. 3.

7
Jean-Paul Sartre, "À propos de l'existentialisme, mise au point", *Action* 17, Dec. 29, 1944; in: Poster, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

8
Léopold Senghor, "Socialism is a Humanism", in: Erich Fromm (ed.), *Socialist Humanism*, The Penguin Press, London 1965, p. 58.

9
As an example, see Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*, Routledge, London 2001, pp.15–16.

us to consider things in a certain way, to reject autoregulative morality and fail to commit the existential act. The worker might be free to accept or reject the wage relationship, but in many respects he is only abstractly free, *effectively* incapable of self-definition. In real life, it could be argued, workers are *effectively* forced to sell their labour power to the employer, if they are to acquire the resources that will enable them to satisfy their (historically and culturally, as well as biologically defined) needs, and the needs of his or her family. A worker can choose to fight the coercion of the state and of the ruling classes, risking death, but how can he "authentically" risk the lives of his children as well, unless they have made the same decision themselves? Needless to say, these investigative observations do not detract from the moral value of rebellion and nonconformism, of seeking *u-topos*. A philosophy which starts with moral freedom and the presumption of choice to be tested in practice – that is the starting point of a radical emancipatory thought which is a necessary ingredient of *active* hope.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre's notion of authentic freedom was still troublingly "Robinsonian", presented as an individualist project, disconnected from the notions of collective struggle and collective liberation. In comparison, Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (seen as the original exposition of Marxist humanism) and his notion of alienation were much more objectivist. For Marx, human nature has to be understood as a dynamic concept created through social relations and their alterations. Later, Sartre was right in pushing for a dialectical totalisation which fully incorporates the role of subjective force in history, right in calling for the restoration of subjectivity and praxis as constituent elements of a theory which strives to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the human condition; he was therefore also right in appreciating a certain complementarity between his thought and classical Marxism, where existentialism could help illuminate the subjective and Marxism the objective side of human interactions.

"From the day that Marxist thought will have taken on the human dimension (that is, the existential project) as the foundation of anthropological Knowledge, existentialism will no longer have any reason for being."[10]

Sartre adopted a "progressive-regressive" method which was supposed to aid us in appreciating both sides of the dialectical movement, the mediation of humans by things and the mediation of things by humans.

"The dialectical movement, which proceeds from the objective conditioning to objectification, enables us to understand that the ends of human activity are not mysterious entities added on to the act itself; they represent simply the surpassing and the maintaining of the given in an act which goes from the present toward the future."[11]

The unflinching rejection of this perspective by the dogmatists manifested their inability to grasp a revolutionary dialectic irreducible either to the material external world or to consciousness, its "diluted" internal form. Laying the foundations for an "open" Marxism is murky business, especially for the majority that is adamantly certain in the possibility of attaining "correct consciousness", an idea inconsistent with the Heideggerian, Sartrean (or Lacanian for instance) concept of "double negation". There was no practical or theoretical middle ground for the Cold War intelligentsia. Zhdanovism in particular had no affinity for such theoretical sophistication. Some other Marxist critics, however, weren't entirely dismissive of Satre's later thought, and Lukács nicely summarised a general conception of freedom which he did share with Sartre:

"All social activity is composed of individual acts and the influence exercised by material conditions, however important they may be, is only realised as Engels said 'in the last instance'. This means that at the moment of making a decision the individual always finds himself confronted by a certain degree of freedom…"[12]

What particularly distressed many Marxists, including Lukács, was that Sartre chose Husserlian phenomenology rather than Marxism as the general methodological tool for his thought. It was this phenomenological, "individualistic" method, the stress placed on the individual *cogito* (notwithstanding Husserl's principle of intentionality) which limited Sartre's ability to grasp the collective,[13] and his ability to fully convey the fact that the "dynamics of history cannot be deduced from individual existence".[14] The subject-object binarism, despite his best intentions, remained an unresolved problem for Sartre. For instance, in presenting an oppositional view to the "Pavlovian" psycho-anthropology, Sartre grossly underestimated the element of biological (as well as socio-economic) necessity and pre-determination, as well as the element of "the alienation of agency".[15]

Although there might have been some truth to the charge that the phenomenological approach has been used as a refusal to engage in a serious search for objective explanations, outside of the "logic of irrationality",[16] the notions of contingency, absurdity and superfluousness of being quite closely parallel the non-teleological, Marxist-atheist view of existence (philosophical or "ethical" rather than "religious" atheism). In fact, Sartre is here already beginning to approach the conclusion that integral freedom presupposes a collective recognition of humanity's commonality, and of its common emancipatory project.

Truth be said, the ideological battles he fought with the intellectuals of the French Communist Party still represented a clash of two forms of political "spiritualism" – the romantic existentialist and the orthodox Stalinist. The dialectical interplay of freedom and necessity doesn't seem adequately acknowledged in Sartre's thought, the main exception being some rather general remarks on scarcity in *Critique de la raison dialectique*.[17] Freedom itself is relative and variable. Sartre's philosophy, despite efforts to the contrary, remained disconnected from the concept of Marxism as the "philosophy of the concrete", revealing the limits of his largely speculative, abstract and normativist thought, ostensibly unable to develop serious historical, sociological or economic lines of analysis, centred around concretised causalities. While the danger of structuralist and similar approaches is that they tend to function as self-fulfilling prophecies (especially in the sphere of *real-politik*), reinforcing

10
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method,* Vintage, New York 1968, p. 181.

11
Ibid., p. 159.

12
Georg Lukacs, *Existentialisme ou marxisme?*, Nagel, Paris 1948, p. 105; in: Poster, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

13
Ibid., p. 124.

14
Milan Prucha, "Marxism and the Existential Problems of Man", in: Fromm (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 146.

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Heter, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

16
See for instance George Novack, *Polemics in Marxist Philosophy*, Pathfinder, New York 1989, p. 69.

17
Even here, betraying a lack of rigorous – and in particular orthodox – Marxist education, Sartre discusses the "market's inexorable laws where Marx had demonstrated that the inexorable laws arise from *production*" (Raya Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution*, Columbia University Press, New York 1989, p. 204).

the very occurrences they claim to neutrally observe, Sartre's theoretical subjectivism widely opened the door to naive, uncritical, "sentimentalist" voluntarism. Are his anarcho-Maoist political escapades not a poignant example of this? On the other hand, structuralist "objectivism" proved itself as anything but non-ideological in practice, as Althusser's politics itself partly illustrated. A possible reconciliation between Marxist existentialism and structuralism might be an "existential", humanistic acknowledgment of moral, socio-ethical creativity and of the ideological (interest-based) nature of our motivations armoured with a structuralist, "scientific" rigour in the evaluation, creation and implementation of political strategies and tactics. Human and scientific perspectives can remain connected.

Politics, the Party and self-government

> "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world; the point, however, is to change it."
>
> Karl Marx
>
> "Human Power is its own end."
>
> Karl Marx

Sartre dedicated his post-war years to the exploration of the path which could lead towards the establishment of an authentic, radically democratic, humanistic socialism. According to him, the Stalinists were not only in bad faith,[18] but their simplistic materialist philosophy – especially the attempt to identify the *dialectics of nature* – constituted a form of idealism, a metaphysical, universal law imposed on reality. Sartre was suspicious of those proclaiming "objective necessities". He saw this as largely being an excuse, an example of bad faith where the refusal to choose (and therefore also risk) is rationalised by a perceived static "material law", laws of inert matter transcribed onto the human condition. A different philosophy of uncertainty, possibility and thus also responsibility largely developed from his experiences in the Resistance movement, which had little time for human frailties and despondency.

"(T)he basic idea of existentialism is that even in the most crushing situations, the most difficult circumstances, man is free. Man is never powerless except when he is persuaded that he is and the responsibility of man is immense because he becomes what he decides to be."[19]

Sartre restated his position when in 1951 Albert Camus published his sceptical *L'Homme révolté*, helping to kindle a hostile wider polemic (largely focused on the question of political violence rather than progressive change as such) which would separate the two forever:

"Does History have a meaning, you ask? Has it an objective? For me, these are questions which have no meaning. Because History, apart from the man who makes it, is only an abstract and static concept, of which it can neither be said that it has an objective, nor that it has not. And the problem is not to know the objective but to *give* it one."[20]

There was no authenticity in escaping the radical freedom and the radical responsibility of being human. Time and time again, Sartre proved how the renunciation of the emancipatory project entails a renunciation of freedom, of being fully human.

It was his underlying belief in the inherent backwardness of the masses, his scepticism towards the "practico-inert" proletarian masses and towards the possibility that they might assume the role of Subjects which made him ac-

cept the outside force ("the group infusion") of the vanguardist party for so long. How much more could have been expected from a still rather "classical" intellectual who was only to start resolutely destroying the characteristics which chained him to the capitalist division of labour after 1968?

In *Communists and Peace*, adopting a subject-object dualism with regards to the party-class relationship, he fell under the influence of quite vulgar substitutionist vanguardism, according to which the implantation of class consciousness from the outside constitutes the only possibility, a notion for which he was strongly criticised by Claude Lefort. While we could accept his (and Marx's and Lenin's) basic claim that a "class in itself" was little more than a subject of its self-exploitation, his contention that leaving the Party (and, incidentally, the PCF in the French case) could only mean "disintegrating into dust",[21] for the working class essentially meant leaving it at the mercy of the "benevolent dictator". This polemic happened long before PCF's Eurocommunist turn.

The only coherent, consistent application of an existentialist Marxist theory would have to mean a participatory democratic, self-managing socialism, the constitution of the *class for itself* primarily through its own exertions – strong organs of workers' and citizens' participation – and the French Communist Party at the time was certainly no advocate of any such thing, nor even a genuine reformist organ of popular democratic empowerment. Sartre's theory once again fell pray to his own internal ambiguities and confusions, and an overly formalistic and schematic approach, so he, for instance, comes up with a rather abstract notion of "fraternity terror" which is supposed to lead to a crystallisation of hierarchical authority through the voluntary self-imposition of discipline among organically fused agents – a contentious and simplified explanation of inner-party contradictions, to say the least.

Only with the advent of new anti-hierarchical (and largely spontaneous) social struggles did he clearly start realising the danger of allowing the perpetuation of hierarchies through a petrified division of labour, and began to advocate the need for democratic liberatory groups based on power-sharing and collective control, implying mutual recognition, voluntary acceptance of roles and responsibilities, a certain egalitarianism and mutually recognitive relations, which are to serve as true guarantees for the establishment and preservation of a commonality of experiences and interests inside the party. For a brief

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"(O)ur Garaudys are afraid. What they seek in Communism is not liberation, but a re-enforcement of discipline" (Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution", in: *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, Collier Books, New York 1967, p. 249; in: Poster, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

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Jean-Paul Sartre, "Jean-Paul Sartre répond à ses détracteurs", in: Colette Audry (ed.), *Pour et contre l'existentialisme*, Atlas, Paris 1948, p. 188; in: Poster, *op. cit.*, p. 126. Sometimes, however, this position lapsed into a "stoical commitment (…) taken without hope" (Poster, *op. cit.*, p. 127), which is dangerously incompatible with the Marxist strategic, utilitarian, goal-oriented perspective. While ontological freedom (conceived in the classical terms of free will) is a necessary precondition for freedom as agency, it is an insufficient condition in itself for the attainment of free agency. Disregarding this is a retreat to ontological, "Cartesian" freedom, constituting an example of bad faith, for it is closely related to a strategy of escapism from the domineering, coercive facticity of the social condition one is thrown into, which is also Sartre's (benevolent) accusation of the imprisoned "deviant" writer Jean Genet in *Saint Genet* (1952).

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Jean-Paul Sartre, "Réponse à Albert Camus", *Les Temps Modernes* 82, Aug. 1952; in: Poster, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

21
Jean-Paul Sartre, "Les communistes et la paix", in: *Situations VI*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, p. 195 and 250.

time, *Le Rassemblement démocratique révolutionnaire* (of which he was a founding member) seemed to offer prospects for such an organisation. It was led by writers and activists of the non-Communist Left, and based itself on a "third-campist" programme of socialist democracy and peace, away from both the Stalinist and the capitalist camp. The RDR hoped it would help to de-bureaucratise the PCF, and regenerate revolutionary change towards an authentic, anti-Stalinist socialist position.

"(T)he old conflict between individualism and society is one that RDR members take as transcended. (O)ur aim is the integration of the free individual in a society conceived as the unity of the free activities of individuals."[22]

The RDR was to be based on grassroots democracy, active participation of all its members in decision-making,[23] and on the attraction of communist and socialist militants without them having to leave their respective parties. The organisation tried to base itself on principles of genuine solidarity, and to fight against the fragmentation of the French Left. With regards to the Communist Party, intelligently, RDR's "role lay in non-partisan, unbigoted and friendly criticism".[24] This Marxist humanism that appeared to slowly emerge as a new material force was supposed to pave the road towards a synthesis between existentialism and a philosophy of revolution, of praxis, of free historical subjects able to forge their own liberatory future.

From *Le Comité national des écrivains* (a central coalition of French Resistance writers and intellectuals led by the Communists), through the weak, inexperienced and short-lived *Socialisme et liberté* group (sabotaged by the PCF) to *Le Rassemblement démocratique révolutionnaire* (which had a similar faith to *Socialisme et liberté*), Sartre's political trajectory lead him again, for a time at least, into a position of critical support for the strongest material force on the French anti-capitalist scene, the Communist Party. Sartre came to the conclusion that the Stalinised communist movement had to be changed from within or, at least, without directly aiding the anti-communist bourgeoisie. He grew increasingly aware that socialist policies "orient themselves around forces already at work".[25] Facing the choice of either joining the most significant material force on the Left, the PCF and its mass workers' base, trade unions etc., or retreating into a position of isolated righteousness, he tried to choose "something in between", turning into a sympathetic fellow traveller (*compagnon de route*) for a few years. In that position, like before, he continued to advocate Left unity[26] and continued to long for an agent of socialist change which did not refute his concept of radical freedom but, unwilling to side with the newly founded democratic socialist *Le Parti socialiste unifié*, the left-wing of the *Parti Socialiste*, the early Eurocommunist initiatives or some other emerging side, he refused to fully commit himself to the back-breaking, uncertain work of building a new force on the Left.

His ambivalence towards PCF revealed his own gnawing feelings of inadequacy and impotence, the realisation of his isolating petty-bourgeois roots and experiences. Sartre attacked the existence of Stalin's trials and labour camps, state tyranny in general, intellectual and practical conformism and hierarchical rigidity. Although he never was a mere apologist for PCF, it was only the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 which finally crystallised the situation, not only internationally but domestically just as well. ''The PCF was a Party which 'froze' five million votes and which, in abandoning mass action, had 'demobilized' the working class".[27] "(T)he reason why the dictatorship of the proletariat (…) never occurred is that the very idea is absurd, being a bastard

compromise between the active, sovereign group and passive seriality."[28] The Bolshevik party, according to Sartre, was "a self-perpetuating group which, in the name of a delegation which the proletariat had not given it, exercised power over the bourgeois class which was in the process of being destroyed, over the peasant class and over the working class itself."[29]

The new, post-scarcity economy of the late '60s and early '70s brought back that independent and imaginative existential subject that Sartre longed for, in the form of the rebellious students and workers who demanded self-management, forcing the Socialist Party and the Communist Party to include workers' control in their programmes, and even the Gaullists had to include a new "participatory" model of co-determination in their programme in order to neutralise and co-opt the new mood. The revolutionary party, however, could only authentically serve the movement for self-management as a catalyst, a mediator between theory and praxis, the external integrator or unifier.

"By itself, the mass remains serialized. But conversely, as soon as the party becomes an institution, so does it also – save in exceptional circumstances – become reactionary in relation to what it has brought into being, namely the *fused group*. In other words, the dilemma spontaneity/party is a false problem."[30]

The synthesis for Sartre lies in a non-hierarchical, movement-oriented, pluralist, participatory democratic socialist party. "The real question is therefore how (…) the party may be able to receive the impulses which emanate from movements and, rather than claim to direct them, may be able to generalize experience for the movement and for itself."[31]

"(I)t would be necessary that the party should continually be able to struggle against its own institutionalization. (…) Action and thought are not separate from organization. One thinks as one is structured. One acts as one is organized. This is why the thought of Communist parties has come to be progressively ossified. (…) Before all else, the revolutionary party must, so that it may escape institutionalization, consider itself as permanently in the service of a struggle which has its own dimensions, its own autonomous political levels. This implies the transcendence of the Leninist or Bolshevik model of the party (…)."[32]

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Jean-Paul Sartre, David Rousset and Gérard Rosenthal, *Entretiens sur la politique*, Gallimard, Paris 1949, p. 40; in: Poster, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

23
"R.D.R. chapters would be laboratories in which workers would experience and develop leadership capacities, thereby generating the new, free subjects of history… At last a humanist Marxism was being joined with an organization of existential subjects." (Poster, *op. cit.*, pp. 141–142.)

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David Archard, *Marxism and Existentialism: The Political Philosophy of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, Gregg Revivals, Hampshire 1992, p. 64.

25
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Humanisme et terreur", in: Archard, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

26
Jean-Paul Sartre, "Le Fantôme de Staline", *Les Temps modernes* 129–131, Nov.–Dec. 1956, Jan. 1957, p. 696.

27
Sartre, "Le Fantôme de Staline", p. 301; in: Archard, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

28
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Verso, London 2004, p. 662.

29
Ibid., p. 661.

30
Jean-Paul Sartre, "France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party", in: *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, Verso, London–New York 2008, p. 119.

31
Ibid., p. 122.

32
Ibid., pp. 131–133.

One of the critical questions Sartre now posed to the Communist Party was what kind of people were they forming. Why weren't they fostering the self-determination and freedom of consciousness of each individual? For Sartre, it was only free individuals that could build a real democracy, an anti-authoritarian Republic. Stalinist bureaucrats, on the other hand, fostered only blind obedience to authority. A "revolutionary" party which does not centre its strategy around the emancipation of thought and action is a parody.

Notes on Authenticity and Civic Virtue

> "We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."
>
> Viktor Frankl[33]

Although for Sartre "being for others" constituted a primary dimension of the "being for itself", he didn't go as far as Marx, who (for all practical purposes) defined humans as their social interactions. Sartre recognises intersubjectivity as the constituent element of the self. In *Being and Nothingness*, however, Sartre also suggests an irreconcilable duality between "being for itself" and "being for others": a fixed, disconnected *self as agent* and *self as object*.

His concept of negation often seems elusive to any accepted notion of morality. "Action is the present nihilating of the past in the light of a future to be achieved(…) Freedom is not a being, it is the being of man, that is, his nothingness of being."[34] Taken on its own, Sartre's rejection of the Kropotkinist notion of innate human nature imprisoned by repressive social institutions could be construed to have an almost "de Sadean" quality. Sartre later admitted the limits of the kind of subjectivity he outlined in *L'Être et le Néant*.[35] Even though he never embraced a philosophically fully elaborated justification of the concept of civic virtue, Sartre inarguably posited a demanding notion of social responsibility, famously arguing that writing carries the obligation to fight injustice in all its forms for example, or that a failure to oppose imperialist policies of their governments made Western Europeans accomplices to imperialist crimes.

In the post-war works, especially *What is Literature?* and *Notebooks for an Ethics,* where he develops a new theory of interpersonal relations and discovers a possibility for mutual recognition, there is a shift from Sartre's monadic view of the active self in *Being and Nothingness* (according to which there is this irreconcilable duality between the self as agent and the self as object) to a new theory of intersubjectivity which dispenses with the depoliticised individualism of Sartre's pre-war thought and makes the first steps towards establishing that receptivity can be a humanistic virtue after all (just like the infamous Sartrean "look'', often reviled as objectifying, can nonetheless be a caring, supportive one), an argument Sartre developed in *Notebooks for an Ethics*, which is a project he abandoned as an overly voluntaristic attempt devoid of clear existentialist causality.

Furthermore, it has been argued by some that the intersubjective constitution of the self implies an intersubjective, social dimension of authenticity, ''embracing the other in the same moment that one embraces the self''.[36] Sartre himself stated for instance that "(a)uthentic liberty assumes responsibilities, and the liberty of the anti-Semite comes from the fact that he escapes all of his''.[37] Integral authenticity is not a form of ethical solipsism. According to Heter, the authentic person has to avoid bad faith, possess a lucid awareness of herself, her situation and her social dependencies and liabilities (supposedly including the acknowledgment of the co-constitutive nature of external perception to the meaning of one's action), rather than seeking a false, asocial, ''solipsistic'' self-assertion, which implies an actual lack of self-awareness, constituting a form of bad faith. This does not necessarily imply execution of role responsibilities (in which case even Eichmann, for instance, could be characterised as existentially authentic) – in fact, existential authenticity necessitates an affirmation of the ambiguity of selfhood.[38]

Finally, the person seeking authenticity has to have *respect* for others. Sartre himself, apart from implicitly promoting this view in many of his works, openly posited in *Notebooks for an Ethics* that authentic intersubjectivity is based on mutual *recognition*, on *embracing the freedom of the Other* as mutually enriching.[39] Authenticity is opposed to solipsistic projects simply because ''within the world there are other men''.[40] Hegel's master-slave dialectic of "sublation" (*Aufhebung*) leads to the understanding of the critical role of intersubjectivity in the creation of personhood. This echoes nicely in Aimé Césairé's "boomerang effect of colonisation" (in *Discours sur le colonialisme*), where denigration and dehumanisation of the colonised also deprive the colonisers of the human character they might otherwise possess. The requirement of mutual recognition and respect excludes murder, torture and coercion as actions incompatible with authenticity, since they are the epitome of dehumanisation. Oppressing others is inauthentic. Negating the freedom of the Other, attributing a dehumanising, thing-like essence to the Other (the Jew, the homosexual, the deviant, the prisoner…) functions by confining the Other to the unpopular characteristic (real or perceived) of his or hers, and serves to maintain a sense of (delusional) superiority on the part of the accuser. This view therefore reduces the Other to a fixed (negative) essence, without releasing the persecuted individual from the responsibility and blame for this supposedly fixed, immutable essence! The concept of the socially responsible, yet ''inherently evil criminal'' is an example of this anti-intellectual parody. Therefore the concept of intersubjective authenticity, especially as elaborated by Storm Heter, carries important insights for the prison

33
Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Beacon Press, Boston 2006, p. 66.

34
Archard, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–20.

35
Jean-Paul Sartre, "Sartre par Sartre", in: *Situations IX*, Gallimard, Paris 1972, p. 102.

36
Heter, *op. cit.*, p. 75. Simone de Beauvoir was perhaps more explicit than Sartre on this issue, arguing against the notion of authenticity as a ''solipsistic ethic'' in her *Ethics of Ambiguity*.

37
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew,* Shocken, New York 1995, p. 32.

38
Heter, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

39
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethic*s, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, pp. 499–508.

40
Ibid., p. 499; in: Heter, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

abolitionist/transformative justice movement, to take an important example. Through its notion of moral transcendence, Sartrean humanism upholds the potentiality of redemption. There can be no outcasts in a truly democratic society, and the notions of restoration, restitution, rehabilitation and reconciliation must defeat the principles of isolation, prison punishment and all forms of violence. Caging and torturing people is inauthentic.

Authenticity is a political virtue for Sartre. Resurrecting P. B. Shelley's "writer as revolutionary" ethics of engagement, Sartre wrote on the writers' responsibility: "(W)e must militate in our writings, in favor of the freedom of the person *and* the socialist revolution. (…) It is our job to show tirelessly that they imply each other."[41] It was not a soulless dogma of "socialist realism" that he was advocating, not an imposed, external obligation, but an internal resolution or will to embrace one's freedom, to preserve a non-alienated authenticity and understanding of the writers' privileged position in society and its ideological/cognitive production, as well as of the ability to use it for the benefit of all. To write, Sartre proclaimed, was "to claim freedom for all men".[42]

For Sartre, "the authentic person (…) is a humanistic socialist who promotes the coming of a democratic classless society."[43]

Nonetheless, Sartre couldn't exactly serve as a model for organic intellectuals, since he never made a consistent attempt to connect with the movement and the working-class masses (bar a few interesting capers), stubbornly preserving his hermetic style of writing and his isolating intellectual preoccupations. It is doubtless, however, that he emotionally identified with the activist ethos of Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach.

Civic respect and mutual recognition are central democratic virtues from which spring the ideas of mutual benefit, justice and participation in decision-making, which are the necessary preconditions for a reconciliation between the individual and society. "(T)he free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."[44] Truly democratic institutions are needed to foster democratic virtues as a synthesis of individualism and the cooperative spirit, a reconciliation between individuality and collectivity. The mutual recognition/respect argument poses social issues in non-instrumental terms, where the erosion of civil liberties of the other constitutes an intrinsic loss to *me*, since it compromises my intersubjectively established self-identity as a *citizen of a democracy,* indeed the entire notion of *democratic citizenship*.[45]

Sartre understood the central, constitutive personal and socio-economic (therefore also political) role that work occupies, and the importance of integrated *social, political and economic democracy*. Capitalist relations embodying class hierarchy negate the possibility of true, intersubjective, mutual recognition which rejects exploitative objectification of our fellow citizens. Democratic citizenship requires mutually respectful relations, the promotion of *civic dignity* (if not complete equality) *of status*, with elements of relative material equality. Calling for a *Mitsein* (a collective subject) of intersubjectivity and collective responsibility, of free individuals and caring relationships between people as "the city of ends" – Sartre stubbornly argued for a radical, socialist democracy. Indeed, the freedom of all is the precondition for the freedom of each, and the humanity of each fulfils our common potential.

Daniel Jakopovich

Sartreov egzistencijalni marksizam i potraga za humanističkom autentičnošću

Sažetak

Članak preispituje Sartreovo djelo kao filozofsku sintezu misli i borbe, u kojoj autentični ljudski odnosi i konkretno političko djelovanje zauzimaju središnje mjesto mnogo više nego što je priznato u mnogim (možda i većini) drugim razmatranjima. Ovaj rad također identificira određene nedosljednosti, metodološka ograničenja i kontroverzna mjesta u njegovim djelima, istodobno potvrđujući bitno autentičnu jezgru njegove filozofije i političkog djelovanja.

Ključne riječi

sloboda, fakticitet, intersubjektivnost, autentičnost, građanske vrline, ljevičarska politika

Daniel Jakopovich

Sartres existenzieller Marxismus und die Suche nach der humanistischen Authentizität

Zusammenfassung

Der Essay überdenkt Sartres Werk als philosophische Synthese des Gedankens und der Bemühung, in welchen die authentischen humanen Beziehungen und die konkrete politische Tätigkeit eine zentralere Stellung einnehmen, als dies ihnen in zahlreichen (voraussichtlich den meisten) Überlegungen eingeräumt wird. Desgleichen identifiziert diese Arbeit gewisse Inkonsequenzen, methodologische Schranken und Kontroverspunkte in seinen Werken, indem sie synchron den wesensmäßig authentischen Kern seiner Philosophie und politischen Aktivität affirmiert.

Schlüsselwörter

Freiheit, Faktizität, Intersubjektivität, Authentizität, Bürgertugend, linksgerichtete Politik

41
Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?,* Washington Square Press, New York 1966, p. 191.

42
Jean-Paul Sartre, "La littérature, cette liberté", *Les Lettres françaises*, Apr. 15, 1944; in: Archard, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

43
Thomas C. Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity*, Open Court Publishing, Chicago 1993, p. 66.

44
Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm.

45
Heter, *op. cit.*, p. 112. Normatively and phenomenologically, it could be argued that the role of emotions and emotional interpretations of self-constitution and our conduct towards others are not to be ignored either, but the lack of universally applicable, non-arbitrary, logical criteria makes emotional judgement very open to conflicting, even non-humanistic interpretations, which isn't to say that humanistic ethics are or should necessarily be entirely logically explicable. David Hume is the most prominent thinker who had already asserted this in his emotivist ethical theory, which was sustained by Kierkegaard, and indeed by Sartre through his notion of "committed knowledge".

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Le marxisme existentialiste de Sartre et la quête de l'authenticité humaniste

Résumé

Cet essai réexamine l'oeuvre de Sartre comme une synthèse philosophique de la pensée et de la lutte, dans laquelle les relations humaines authentiques ainsi que l'action politique concrète prennent une place beaucoup plus centrale que ce qui n'est admis dans de nombreuses (peut-être la plupart) analyses. L'article identifie également certaines incohérences, restrictions méthodologiques et points de controverse dans son oeuvre, tout en affirmant le coeur essentiellement authentique de sa philosophie et de son activité politique.

Mots-clés

liberté, facticité, intersubjectivité, authenticité, vertu civique, politiques de gauche