

"SOCIALIST MORALITY" IN SARTRE'S

UNPUBLISHED 1964 ROME LECTURE:

A SUMMARY AND COMMENTARY¹

The first principle of play is man himself; through it he escapes his natural nature; he himself sets the value and the rules for his acts and consents to play only according to the rules which he himself has established and defined. . . . This particular type of project, which has freedom for its foundation and its goal, deserves a special study. . . . But such a study cannot be made here; it belongs rather to an *Ethics*. . .

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (1943)²

If we grant that capitalism and bureaucratic socialism are so anti-human as to require all humans to seek their overthrow as a matter of moral priority, in favor of some more human future, then how can this task be accomplished in an effective and morally defensible manner? One reason socialists have been unable to attract more persons to their cause may be because of their poor answers, or lack of answers, to this question. Jean-Paul Sartre, in an unpublished lecture of 1964 for a conference on "Morality and Society," offered elements of a novel response. On May 23 of that year, invited by Rome's Gramsci Institute—the research center of the (then-named) Communist Party of Italy—Sartre addressed a group of left intellectuals from Europe and North America on "socialist morality." Having discussed the origins and structure of

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²*Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 581 (hereafter "BN").

this morality in earlier chapters of *The 1964 Rome Lecture*, Sartre discusses its bearing on socialist revolution in the final chapter, entitled "Morality of Praxis and Alienated Moralities." This unpublished, roughly written, and incomplete work is available for study at Paris' Bibliothèque Nationale. In the course of its four chapters and 139 typescript pages, it applies Sartre's progressive-regressive method to moral phenomena. Though we have discussed the first three chapters elsewhere we will briefly review them below.³ In Chapter Four, Sartre arrives at the moment of "progressive synthesis" in which he attempts "to grasp the moral problem as it is manifested to [the historico-ethical agent] through his historical task and in the present conjuncture."⁴ We cannot fully analyze this chapter here in its proper context of Sartre's criticisms of capitalism and bureaucratic socialism. We will introduce its basic concepts, summarize its contents, and briefly situate it in Sartre's *oeuvre*—suggesting its role in fulfilling his 1943 projection of an ethics—and finally, we will raise what we take to be pertinent questions for its evaluation.

Since for Sartre the dominant systems under which we live exploit and oppress humans, what he calls "the ethical problem" is to learn how a revolutionary "counter-system" can attain its goal of "humanity" while in the process surviving within those systems. Surviving will involve giving birth to "limited," even "alienated," moralities at various stages of struggle. But how, then, can the revolutionary force avoid degenerating into repeating the capitalist or bureaucratic socialist systems themselves? Such degeneration would

³See our "Dialectical Ethics: A First Look at Sartre's Unpublished 1964 Rome Lecture Notes," *Social Text* No. 13-14, Winter/Spring 1986, pp. 195-215; and also our "'Making the Human' in Sartre's Unpublished Dialectical Ethics," in *Writing the Politics of Difference*, ed. H. Silverman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 111-122. Eyewitnesses say Sartre consulted the entire large bundle of pages he brought to the podium—often turning many pages at once. News accounts confirm he touched on central points from each of *The 1964 Rome Lecture's* four chapters. These notes may have been drafted with a view to the lecture series he already planned to give in the U.S. at Cornell University the following year. This series was not given due to Sartre's protest of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam in February, 1965, though he drafted lectures specifically for Cornell (which complement *The 1964 Rome Lecture*). See our "Sartre's Morality and History: A First Look at the Notes for the Unpublished 1965 Cornell Lectures," in *Sartre Alive*, ed. Ronald Aronson and Adrian van den Hoven (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991).

⁴This phrase comes from Sartre's overview of the mid-1960's project at the start of *Morality and History*.

indefinitely postpone "humanity," making the latter a "pure ideal, pure regulative concept" instead of an ongoing unifier of struggle. "Socialist morality" (he also speaks of "revolutionary morality") is therefore characterized by a certain "contradiction," which it does not resolve. On the one hand, it is the only morality determining itself in relation to the goal of "integral humanity." On the other, it knowingly produces alienated moralities within itself in order to meet the needs of present struggle. Thus

The problem is therefore to learn how to produce that dialectical movement which, while positing such alienated moralities, can also contest their limits in relation to the very end which they seek to attain. (147/122)

Sartre's solution to "the ethical problem" is, in a word, "morality." This designates in Chapter Four a practice of reflection and self-criticism within the "revolutionary organization." A "socialist morality" that generates and controls alienated moralities in the course of struggle is possible because the future goal of "historical praxis" generally—"humanity"—provides a present "rule of efficacy." "Morality" for the revolutionary group, then, becomes in part the activity of ordering means in light of ends:

Morality is control of praxis in light of itself, that is, of its end.

Rule of efficacy: all means are good for attaining the end, on the condition that they do not alter it in producing it. Morality is a supplementary control of efficacy: the end being the synthetic ensemble of means, socialist morality is none other than the end itself returning upon the means to control them in light of itself, that is, in order to demand of the means that they should be absolute means, meaning that they are at once means to means (hence linked mediately to the end) and means to the end, linked directly to the end. [Such means are linked directly to the end by] at once *respecting the final demand* and producing humanity in the negative form of sub-humanity negating its sub-humanity. (163/138)

This is the center of the "socialist morality" sketched in Chapter Four. But to grasp Sartre's proposal here we must step back and introduce Sartre's terms, in particular: what "humanity" as end entails; how historical "praxis" as means posits humanity as its end; the "sub-human" condition of the starting point; and, the danger of "alienation" facing the "revolutionary organization." We'll clarify these terms in the context of the mid-60's writings on ethics.

1. Introduction

The morality of revolutionary action arises for Sartre not from norms whose validity can be established independently of history, but from the inner structure of historical action itself. Sartre has described "praxis"—human action in its historical context—in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Volume I, published in 1960, four years earlier.⁵ That work argued that praxis has a means-end structure. Along with other components of history, this structure evinces a dialectical rationality that allows history itself—understood as developing "totalization" of *praxeis*—to be at least "comprehended" and perhaps consciously made.⁶ As we will see, *The 1964 Rome Lecture* builds directly on both volumes of the *Critique*,⁷ advancing on them by bringing out the normative aspects of praxis. The paradigm case of praxis is productive work aimed at sustaining life. As the title of Chapter Four implies, there is a "morality of praxis." We will examine this morality in the context supplied by the three earlier chapters of *The 1964 Rome Lecture*. These were in turn developed on the bases of *CDR* I and II. The spring or motive for historical action, Sartre repeats in 1964, is in *need*. The end or goal posited in need, however, is what he calls "humanity" (or, also, "autonomy"). The dialectical "birth" of "humanity" is a minor event as described in *CDR*. It occupies center stage in *The 1964 Rome Lecture*.

⁵Typically, Sartre gave a glimpse of his ethical thinking in a footnote showing that in 1960 he already had clearly in mind many central themes he was beginning to elaborate in 1964-65. *Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume I, Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Rée (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 247n. (Hereafter: "CDR I.")

⁶Analysis of action *within* history is, Sartre notes, inherently likely to yield "the instrument of thought by means of which History thinks itself insofar as they [the instruments by which History thinks itself] are also the practical instruments by means of which it is made." (*CDR* I, p. 40.)

⁷Sartre may have had much of Volume II done when he published *CDR* I in 1960. He briefly resumed work on Volume II in 1962, though the incomplete results were published only posthumously as *Critique de la raison dialectique, Tome II (inachevé): L'intelligibilité de l'Histoire*, ed. Arlette Elkaim-Sartre (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); English translation by Quintin Hoare, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume II (Unfinished): The Intelligibility of History* (London: Verso, 1991). This translation is hereafter referred to as "CDR II."

"Humanity" is a rich concept designating a multi-faceted entity. Humanity's root is in need. Need is not reducible to preference (as liberal economic theory would have it); rather it posits a future satisfaction, and, thereby, continued life. A normative demand is already present, according to Sartre, who writes (believing he is quoting Marx, though we cannot find it in Marx): "[need] carries within it its own reason for satisfaction." (97/77)⁸ The norm here, though teleological, is not utilitarian. The satisfaction aimed-at is not for Sartre a mere benefit to a humanity that is presumed to be already complete. What is posited by need is rather "integral humanity" itself. How is this to be attained or got at? Such humanity, which is presently lacking (*through* some particular lack), does not come to "practical organisms" from without. The practical organism's own capacity for productive action (if only that of picking a fruit from a tree) is given, along with need itself, as the means of closing the gap opened by the need between present lack and future satisfaction. The practical organism's goal is thus "temporalized" by need in the form of the historical project of filling its lacks through its own action. It thereby aims literally to make itself. Need points, then, not just to satisfaction or restored wholeness but to "humanity" qua humans who are "their own product," hence, to wholeness restored by the action of the needy beings themselves.

The normative element in praxis—the "reason" for its satisfaction which need "carries with" itself—becomes evident when we focus on the prospective, future-oriented character of need. Initially praxis confronts a field from which what is needed is *lacking*; humanity *does not yet exist*. The oddity of human action is that in it an unknown future, not the past, precedes and conditions the present. In need the present is transcended in favor of a non-existent, possible, future satisfaction. All lacks and obstacles stem from this upsurge of the practical organism's original need: if there's no need, then there's no lacked object or obstacle to getting it. Similarly with all diversions, alienations, and failures of praxis: if there's no goal-oriented free project of transcending the present, then there's no diversion, alienation, or failure of that project. But there can't be such an understanding or praxis unless it sometimes does and in principle can achieve its goal. Since need is an experience only of *practical* organisms, the field containing lacks and obstacles can always *in principle* be

⁸These numbers refer to the manuscript and typescript pages, respectively, of the unpublished, untitled text which we call *The 1964 Rome Lecture*.

transformed. Freedom—which is presumed in any reorganization of the given field in light of a non-existent future—thereby underlies and makes possible all failure and unintended results. This field can be made into a source of means for filling the lack and overcoming obstacles, since lacks and obstacles can only be discovered as such by a being that has first posited both a possible future humanity and its own power to attain it. This means may in fact be lacking. And even *after* obstacles are transformed into tools the whole endeavor may fail. But then we can say that humanity is present in and subtends its own failure. Need thus posits no impossible tasks, though along the way, the task may be diverted into producing the opposite of what was intended.

Sartre calls this power of transformation "invention." It is the capacity of practical organisms to use everything, including themselves, as means to the end of autonomous humanity. In *Morality and History* Sartre characterizes invention as "the moment of morality in historical praxis." Yet we find it is only morality's "optimistic" side (our word) that enters the dialectic here. Morality's historically invariant "form," Sartre says (without endorsing all the Kantian overtones) is the sheer "unconditional possibility" of *doing* whatever act is *morally* required (though again, such acts may *fail*). Morality's "content"—the conduct required by this or that actual morality—changes historically. What is constant and typical of morality is therefore invention, that aspect of praxis activated in the actual undertaking and unfolding of the morally required act. Specifically moral action reminds us that ordinary historical action, with its moral moment, is conditioned but not determined by the past or the present. Due to invention, humanity as the goal of historical praxis is "unconditionally possible." In sum:

... the root of morality is *in need*, that is to say, in the animality of man. It is need which poses man as his own end, and praxis as domination of the universe by man *to be effected through work*. (100/79)⁹

Humanity, inasmuch as it is lacked, and inasmuch as its inventive praxis is the basis for any other lack, and hence any value whatever, may be valued and sought in its own right. This is true even if human reality is presently

⁹The sexism of Sartre's use of "man" here to refer to both sexes is moderated by the fact that in general he uses "man" and the non-sexist term "humans" interchangeably in this regard.

"alienated." Our capacity to autonomously be our own product is *indirectly* aimed at inasmuch as praxis is presently devoted first to maintaining, say, a system of profit or bureaucracy. Humanity—this capacity for autonomous self-production—is devoted first to repetitive reproduction of such systems. It is diverted from its proper goal, itself, to the extent humanity is sought as a mere by-product of such reproduction. This *misdirection* of a capacity doesn't entail loss of humanity as a goal, however, just its pursuit in alienated form. Even though historical praxis has in fact always been blocked and diverted from this goal, humanity, which has sustained this alienation, can aim at itself. Thus humanity *can be* made the *direct* novel aim of heretofore historically alienated praxis.

Others qua opposing classes, etc. are pitted against Others (including ourselves as "Others") in a milieu of scarcity, in existing conditions of praxis, according to Sartre. This circumstance has fragmented our history into the plural and hierarchicized histories of classes, races, genders, and nations. In such a "serialized" milieu our attainment of humanity will be blocked. Our results will always be diverted from and unrecognizable to our intentions, with the consequent want of "autonomy." This is an essential feature of humanity, whose keynote is consciousness of being the authors of our acts and their results. Autonomous humanity is for Sartre—as for Aristotle—impossible in isolation from others. Rather it requires *group praxis*. Humanity is not a glorious, lost past to be recovered. We can see that humanity as *sustained* global group praxis *can be a future goal* of praxis without ever having occurred more than sporadically and locally in the past.¹⁰ Thus humanity must be invented without

¹⁰Specifically, "humanity" initially arises in the praxis of what in *CDR I* Sartre had called "the pledged group." This is the dialectical sequel to the "group-in-fusion." When the fusing group succeeds—at least inasmuch as the external threat that had unified it from without is temporarily missing—it must hold itself together *by itself* against the centripetal influence of scarcity on its members. The pledged group is the cooled-down group-in-fusion, poised between the danger of regressing into seriality or progressing with its task of social change. The pledged group is, he says, "the origin of humanity." Sartre's quasi-technical use of the term "humanity" originates at this point. The group's "interior objectivity" is "materially objectified" in, e.g., a written pact. This expresses not the group's "being" but rather "the eternal, frozen preservation of its rising" as a group. "We are all brothers" (sic) can be said by the pledged group's members, Sartre claims, not because they share a common "nature" that the pledge externalizes (for that would license us to speak of peas in a pod as "brothers"), but rather "in so far as, following the creative act of the pledge, we *are our own sons*, our common creation." Autonomy as group self-production is thereby temporarily

models. Under such conditions of class struggle amidst scarcity—which are those of history to date—praxis first aims at reproducing a system instead of producing humanity. Instead of being its own product, humanity is an alienated by-product of a system.

Another way of characterizing the present alienation of praxis is to say that to date the "practico-inert"—the domain of worked matter inherited from the past that conditions all present conduct and thereby diverts it from its aim—has dominated praxis.¹¹ The practico-inert presently guides praxis rather than the reverse. Yet this very fact shows us that it *need not* guide praxis, the practico-inert being itself a product of praxis. Morality cannot be neutral here. Historical moralities are themselves for Sartre "practico-inert." This is the "pessimistic" side of morality, as it were. Moralities reside in things, especially tools of all kinds, for Sartre. There are dormant commands in "worked matter" of all sorts that are activated when we re-use it. The domain of worked matter enshrines past actions and class interests in imperatives, values, etc, that weigh on and divert present action away from making the human.¹² Instead of being the product of this giant past product, humans can be their own product; they can dominate, instead of being dominated by, the practico-inert (including moralities). Given the structure of historical praxis, then, the object of need—and hence the goal human history *could* have (should we choose to give it one)—is no less than "autonomous humanity." This goal is ourselves,

attained. Oaths such as the Tennis Court Oath of 1789 (and perhaps, we would add, the Declaration of Independence of 1776) codify the voluntary introduction of terror into the revolutionary group. "Humanity" thus seems to entail the mutual power that insurgent group members assert over each other, at least so long as scarcity endures, a phenomenon Sartre calls "fraternity-terror." (*CDR I*, p. 436-437). See also Sartre's analysis in *CDR II* of the Bolsheviks as a pledged group (*CDR ii*, pp. 152-153). Though it arises in a milieu of scarcity, the humanity of the pledged group cannot be *sustained* in such a milieu. To avoid sinking back into seriality requires (at least) solving the problem of production and introducing abundance, which Sartre considers possible.

¹¹*CDR I*, pp. 67, 71, 318-320.

¹²Though this point is fully developed only in the writings of the mid-1960's on ethics, it is already present in *CDR I*, p. 249n. As Sartre makes clear in his work on Flaubert, "worked matter" can also consist of ideas in literary texts, such that Flaubert's possibilities as a writer are limited and his projects are diverted by the literary tools he inherited from his literary forebears. *L'Idiot de la famille: Gustave Flaubert de 1821 à 1857* (Vol. III) (Paris: Gallimard, 1972.)

understood as the future global grouping of beings producing ourselves through meeting our needs by joint praxis upon the material world.¹³

While such "humanity" (and "autonomy") is *not yet* "the future of humans" it *could be*, that is, it is an underlying and irrepressible possibility of our actual history. Humanity is precisely what would be possible if, instead of doggedly reproducing a system (be it of profit or bureaucratic hierarchy), we produced ourselves as human. Our present state of reproducing such systems, in the hope that doing so will make our humanity for us, Sartre designates as that of the "*sous-homme*," the "sub-man," which we will also render, with some discomfort, as "sub-humanity." The ongoing "praxis-process" (a process sustained by praxis)¹⁴ of capitalism and bureaucratic socialism, leaves some "favored" and others "unfavored"—language Sartre evidently prefers in *The 1964 Rome Lecture* to the language of classes. The favored in general are oppressors and the unfavored are the oppressed. The unfavored are compelled to reproduce the system by their raw need; the favored are compelled to reproduce it by their "interest," i.e. their dependence for their life on "the thing" (system-produced profit, privilege, etc.)¹⁵ Both the favored and the unfavored

¹³The concept of "autonomy" in *The 1964 Rome Lecture* is closely related to the concept of "sovereignty" advanced by Sartre earlier in *CDR I*: "By sovereignty, in effect, I mean the absolute practical power of the dialectical organism, that is to say, purely and simply its praxis as a developing synthesis of any given multiplicity in its practical field, whether inanimate objects, living things or men. This rearrangement—insofar as it is performed by the organic individual—is the starting-point and milieu of all action (whether successful or unsuccessful). I call it sovereignty because it is simply freedom itself as a project which transcends and unifies the material circumstances which gave rise to it and because the only way to deprive anyone of it is to destroy the organism itself." (*CDR I*, p. 578). The alienation of such *individual* sovereignty in the personal power of Stalin—effected, paradoxically, in the very name of the power of the people—is traced in *CDR II*, written about two years before *The 1964 Rome Lecture*. (Cf. esp. *CDR II*, p. 122-123). See also Ronald Aronson's discussion of sovereignty in *Sartre's Second Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 116-119. Autonomy, by comparison, Sartre makes clear in *The 1964 Rome Lecture*, is not a feature of *individual* action since such action, under conditions of seriality, can utterly alienate its sovereignty. Rather, autonomy *can* be a feature of *group* praxis since it alone has the possibility of controlling unintended practical consequences ("counter-finalities").

¹⁴*CDR I*, pp. 551-554.

¹⁵*CDR I*, pp. 197-219.

are products of the system, both are tied in conflicting ways to the same false hope that reproducing the system will make them human, and both embed themselves ever deeper in their sub-humanity by failing to attempt to "make the human" against the system. The only end possible for such "sub-humans" is "humanity," that is, the permanent termination of their sub-humanity.

Humanity is the end—unknowable, but graspable as orientation—for a being that defines itself by praxis, that is, for the incomplete and alienated humans that we are. (135/112)

"Humanity," then, entails: satisfaction of needs instead of scarcity; self-production instead of alienation; novelty instead of repetition; group instead of serial action; and praxis guiding, instead of being guided by, the practico-inert. Humanity is an objective possibility. This is to say it *can* be the goal of sub-humans; it is an option, not a necessary outcome or even a probability. Thus humanity is already implicit in historical praxis insofar as the latter is taken up by existing systems as a mere means to *their* reproduction. It demands to be its own direct goal, since as an end it is lacking, it *is not*; it is needed. This, then, is a hasty overview of the context into which Sartre introduces his "socialist morality" with its "rule of efficacy."

2. Summary

How is socialist morality to help in attaining humanity? Concretely, how is humanity as the end of historical praxis to "control" the "alienated moralities" to which it gives birth as a means to itself? Chapter Four is devoted to answering this question.

For Sartre, humanity or autonomy, if it is not a mere ideal but an historical project, requires as a condition the classless world of communism in its profound sense. If parents are to cease giving birth to sub-humans, birth itself must be "humanized." This requires that practical agents first make a society where no economic structures produce humans, and no state or alienated morality inhibits "pure common decisions." (141/117) Production of its own collective life by needy humanity implies a "solidarity" in which "the entire human group, struggling against the division of labor, renders to integral humanity the entire product of its work." (143/118) For such global self-production, common ownership of the means of production is required.

Otherwise everyone's labor, including those who do own the means of production, aims at profit, bureaucracy or some other end alien to the producers themselves. Communism, understood as such common ownership of the means of production, is the undiverted end implicit in human need. In the second volume of his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre had examined how the project of attaining this end, because it had been undertaken in the pre-capitalist conditions of the former USSR while encircled by hostile capitalist powers, had been diverted into realizing its opposite in the form of Stalinism.¹⁶ Under these conditions the socialist impulse itself brought about its own hellish derailment. But in 1964 Sartre is focussed on that original socialist project itself. This project, he insists, does not aim at a *system*. Its objective is instead "beyond all systems." (106/84) Socialism is rooted in need and aims at humanity.

Socialism as the general movement whose objective is the creation of communist society is therefore the real movement of the oppressed masses insofar as these are defined, in their daily life, by the absolute demand that humans be their own product. (146/120)

Socialism is not an end in itself but a movement, a means to the end of integral humanity. Communism is one feature of the end sought: humans who do not control the means of production cannot be their own product.¹⁷ But communism, socialism, and all other movements are themselves mere means to (and components of) the goal, i.e. of humanity.

To make the human, starting from within existing systems that suppress it, requires "organization and institutions." (145/119) The goals of the socialist movement cannot be immediately attained through the spread of good feeling or

¹⁶Cf. esp. *CDR* II, p. 115-117.

¹⁷Sartre two years earlier had more amply described socialism—understood as the means to communism—as follows: "For what characterizes it fundamentally is *neither* abundance, *nor* the total elimination of classes, *nor* working-class sovereignty—even though these characteristics are *indispensable*, at least as distant aims of the essential transformation. It is the elimination of exploitation and of oppression, or—in positive terms—the collective appropriation of the means of production." (*CDR* II, p. 115-116) Commenting on this passage, William L. McBride notes pertinently how traditional and uncontroversial Sartre's characterization of socialism is here. See his *Sartre's Political Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 163.

through spontaneous moral conversions *ad seriatim*.¹⁸ This is because historical praxis, aimed at autonomous, integral humanity, discovers itself *initially* as blocked by persons with interests who benefit from the system and stand between one's need and its satisfaction. To unblock praxis so that humans may indeed be their own product therefore requires of sub-humans a "pure" or "revolutionary" praxis aimed at classless society. Such higher-order praxis is addressed not only to meeting needs within the system but to altering the system itself. This requires construction of what Sartre calls a "counter-system" in the midst of the system. Since it is unlikely, in particular, that the owners of productive machines will voluntarily hand them over to producers, "rigorous organizations" are needed in order to wrest them away from their present owners for service to integral humanity.¹⁹

Their needs unmet, oppressed and exploited persons will initially lash out "against all moralities." In fact though, Sartre contends, they reject the system in the name of a "fundamental moral demand which is at one with the organism's material demand to live." And this demand is precisely "morality as unconditional and radical future." (144/119)²⁰ But if "morality" in such a

¹⁸Prior to developing his theory of groups, Sartre had both entertained and cast doubt on the idea of revolution through mass conversion *ad seriatim* in his *Cahiers pour une morale* of 1947 (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 95.

¹⁹Nine years later, in 1975 Sartre envisioned this socialist revolution as a concrete, long-term, but not permanent *task*: "I can only say that at least fifty years of struggle will be necessary for the partial victory of the people's power over bourgeois power. There will be advances and retreats, limited successes and reversible defeats, in order finally to bring into existence a new society in which all the powers have been done away with because each individual has full possession of himself. Revolution is not a single moment in which one power overthrows another; it is a long movement in which power is dismantled." "Self-Portrait at Seventy," in *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken*, trans. Paul Auster and Lydia Davis (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 84.

²⁰In the mid-1960's Sartre evidently believed that satisfaction of workers' needs was impossible in the structure of the *status quo*, and thus the *demand* to satisfy them would inevitably tend to disintegrate the *status quo*. In 1972, though, it seems Sartre modified this view. He granted that "capitalism satisfies certain primary needs" and even that an artificially created need (his example is the need for a car) can be "an instrument of integration of the proletariat into certain processes engendered and directed by profit." Consciousness that capitalism is tolerable must henceforth be built not on "the impossibility of satisfying elementary needs but above all else, in the consciousness of alienation . . . the fact that this life is not worth living and has no meaning, that this is a

class-divided system is not to be itself a tool for integrating people into that system, it can only mean that each revolutionary's means must meet a certain criterion supplied by the end of autonomous humanity. "Revolutionary morality" requires first aiming at such humanity in the future, partially realizing it in the present through revolutionary action, and judging all means by their harmony or disharmony with all the other elements of this undertaking.

Sartre articulates this solution to "the ethical problem" in the course of four numbered sections (three of which have titles) that form the body of the chapter. Each treats an example of the birth and control of alienated, "limited moralities." These moralities correspond roughly to the following four stages of transformation of the *status quo*: (1) The initial revolutionary impulse may be to restore a known if alienated past rather than undertake the risks of creating a novel future. (2) As the insurrectional phase mobilizes, the organizational apparatus may either be foolishly sacrificed for pure ends or made an end in itself, thereby falling into either a self-defeating leftism, or a maintenance of the apparatus that substitutes for revolutionary praxis. (3) As insurrection advances, terror, if it is necessary, risks becoming an ideology or even a system of governance, especially if counter-revolutionary forces are strong. (4) Finally, as local obstacles are overcome, the revolution risks universalizing itself as a particular incarnation of socialism, imposing itself elsewhere and thereby distorting other struggles, as well as itself.

These four limited moralities entail risks to the socialist task that emanate from that task itself. Yet Sartre claims that all the ways to control these risks also emanate from that same task, thus holding out the possibility of correcting revolutionary means in light of revolutionary ends. In each case Sartre seeks to show how these risky "limited moralities" arise as useful, even unavoidable tools of change, how they proceed to endanger their goal of integral humanity, and how they may nevertheless still be controlled by "morality" precisely in light of that goal.

Let's then review Sartre's four examples of such moralities.

1) *Instituting a past state of affairs as "natural."* (This is our title.) The property rights ethic of the capitalist class is alienated because it subordinates

deceptive mechanism, that these needs . . . only serve profit." From "France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party" (1972) in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, trans. John Mathews (New York: Pantheon, 1974), pp. 124-125.

humans to things. In France after 1789 this class sought to add political power to its already-established economic power. It conceived its affinity for property as "natural," a propensity inherent in all humans that merely awaited uncovering (or re-institution) by political action—as against the "unnatural" hierarchy of the landed aristocracy. It invoked Greek and Roman iconography. At first coinciding with the liberation of large sectors of the masses, this past-oriented ethic became "particularized" by the favor capitalism awards capital interests. Meanwhile, made sub-human by the new system, propertyless workers actually have no "interests," only needs. "Socialist praxis" is stimulated by lack of both political and economic power on the part of those "unfavored" by capitalism. Yet such praxis aims at neither, according to Sartre, seeking instead "the simple *naked* power of the exploited to be human, whatever their real power in the *productive forces* might be." (149/124) The object of their need is humanity, a pure future that does *not* already exist. The very possibility of grasping this power can incite a fear of freedom and novelty. Thus: "praxis, inside a present-past system, is *afraid* of being pure future. Against the system, it must constitute a past." (150/124) Though genuinely opposing the *status quo*, revolutionary morality may thus initially reinstate an alienated but familiar past.

To illustrate, Sartre points to the early stages of the Algerian Revolution. After nearly one hundred years of French occupation, the first impulse of insurgents in the mid-1950's was to restore a lost sovereignty. This was partly symbolized by bringing back the *chador* or veil for women, with all the subordination implied. But since this earlier state of freedom from colonial rule was itself alienated, restoring that past could not yield liberation. Integration into the present is equally impossible, dominated as it is by what Sartre aptly calls "the club of man," i.e., the exclusive culture of the colonizer. Blocked against flight into the past, or integration into the present, no alternative is left Algerians besides plunging into the future and "inventing humanity" through independence. A "realistic" revolutionary will not tear the *chador* off but will oppose it while constantly re-directing attention to this difficult task of invention without models. In this way, the alienated morality of restoring a lost sovereignty need not deviate the revolutionary movement's pursuit of the "pure future," since that

morality can be "limited" by consideration of that end and re-directed toward it.²¹

2) "*Moral insurrectional achievement*" (Sartre's title). Dominance by "the system" over praxis continues only so long as the masses are serialized and hence impotent. To resist effectively, "a practical union against the system" in favor of a "non-existent moral society" is required. (152/126) However, effectively opposing the system injects imperatives into the insurgent union that come from the system itself. System-generated repression exists, and this fact renders instantaneous pure group praxis impossible. To oppose the system's negation requires a "counter-system": a "revolutionary organization" or "party" or "organism" or "apparatus" that helps individuals avoid internalizing repression and turns such negation back upon its true source.²² Such a "provisional means" points radically beyond the present, but must meanwhile also operate within it. In describing the problems facing the organization, Sartre subtly but scathingly criticizes the Communist Parties represented in his audience, and offers a corrective.

"Praxis requires" maintaining the revolutionary organization in readiness for the insurrectional moment, according to Sartre. Yet, since party functionaries' "interest" is in their jobs, they can confuse this requirement of praxis with the *permanent* availability of the party *within* the existing system. Thus confounding their own system-generated interests with the norm of pure future, these functionaries may measure members' devotion to revolution by the unconditionality of their faith in the apparatus. When this happens "the end [that is, liberatory revolution] becomes the means of the means." (153/127) Revolution-talk then serves to cover up the assimilation of revolutionaries into existing structures of power.

²¹Sartre had no illusions about the actual results of the revolutionary movement for independence in Algeria between 1956 and 1961. In an earlier chapter of *The 1964 Rome Lecture*, he said that this revolution had succeeded not in ushering in an effective socialism but only in moving from *de jure* statutory colony to *de facto* economic colony, a modest but real progress withal.

²²By contrast, and in the context of ontology, Sartre's description of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness* is of a "consciousness, [which] instead of directing its negation outwards, turns it toward itself." (p. 48) For a discussion of the origins of bad faith in real social repression, see Robert V. Stone, "Sartre on Bad Faith and Authenticity," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (LaSalle: Open Court, 1981).

Avoiding this alienation requires constant practice of *criticism* at the revolutionary group's base, criticism capable of changing leadership. Humanity makes itself "reflexively," Sartre says, by critical "axiological" reflection on the action by which it produces itself. This means reflecting not just on alienated products, but on one's own actions that produced them. Democratic centralism—requiring defeated minorities within the apparatus to portray the majority position as their own all along—is to be avoided. "The problem," Sartre says, "is to give to the masses the possibility of dissolving the being [*l'être*] of the leaders. . . ." such that "the masses surpass their own leaders." (154/127) The apparatus seeks not to wield existing levels of political and economic power; it seeks rather to prepare the masses within the system to produce "integral humanity." It does so by providing "the framework in which, by dissolving limited moralities, the masses learn humanity as unconditional demand." (154/127)

Yet this "apparatus," composed as it is of those experienced in struggle, is itself needed. Wildcat strikes outside the apparatus may also posit humanity; however, "because [such strikes] do not discriminate between immediate and distant objectives, they vanish without traces whether won or lost." (154/128) Similarly, a revolutionary strike, when an unfavorable balance of force risks failure and breakup of the apparatus, should be stopped. The apparatus, by linking immediate with distant objectives, provides both a "consolidation of progress" and a "synthetic memory" of mass struggles.

There is a "dialectical tension" within the revolutionary project between conserving the organization as means and realizing humanity as its end. This tension is healthy. Its component tendencies are "opportunism" and "leftism" in Sartre's appellation. Opportunism is "conserving the means while changing the end." "Leftism" is "letting the means perish rather than not affirm the unconditional end." Each needs the other as corrective. Opportunism and leftism, or at least tendencies *toward* them, are in fact *both* necessary "for moral praxis." (155/129) Moral praxis is the *linking* of (opportunism's focus on) immediate efficaciousness to (leftism's focus on) the ultimate end.²³ Only

²³Under this rubric, we should label Hugo and Hoederer, the main protagonists of Sartre's play *Dirty Hands* (1948), as leftist and opportunist, respectively. Hugo and his sponsors are willing to risk fatally injuring the apparatus in order to keep revolutionary action pure and untainted by compromise with class enemies. Hoederer is willing to make such compromises in the present in

through such linking is revolution possible. Sartre holds that non-revolutionary reforms, however deep, that are aimed opportunistically at preserving the present system, will yield only illusory progress since "it is impossible for humanity to be born if sub-humanity [merely] advances on its sub-humanity. Humanity can only be born from humanity." (155/129)

Even as sub-humans posit humanity in resisting their condition, they risk being made sub-human again by their own apparatus of struggle, if it treats them as passive means. "This would be to alienate man to the future just as the system alienates him to the past." (155/130) If individual revolutionary action is not to be stolen from its initiator, or its import lost by isolation from the instrument for registering collective progress, then there must be a democratic process within the revolutionary organization. Revolutionaries may not fully transcend their "sub-human" status through such a process but they will "incarnate the humanity [they] realize," even if that incarnation is necessarily "abstract" in relation to general liberation.

When such an organization functions properly, moral praxis will have a "normative" but not an "imperative" aspect. A leader's command is normative if it emanates from the shared goal of realizing the *form* of norms, which is the "unconditional possibility of integral humanity." A command is imperative if it asymmetrically reduces freedom to the task of realizing the *content* of a norm. Sartre's example of such alienated imperatives is the use Stalin made of Marx's doctrine of the "withering away of the state." According to Sartre, Stalin meant that the state disappears as it is "installed in each person as an apparatus of constraint," (158/132) that is, as state repression is internalized by its victims. Clearly, for Sartre, the USSR and East European countries *failed* to synthesize

order to gain strategic advantage for the entire movement later. Both perspectives are necessary for revolutionary success. They are not *sufficient* for such success, however, and indeed the play seems to show revolutionary praxis in 1948 is compromised at the start by Hugo's murder of Hoederer, apparently out of personal jealousy. On the occasion of a performance of *Dirty Hands* in Italy in 1964, Sartre, already in Rome, indicated to an Italian interviewer, two months *before* the Rome lecture, that he would be returning to the problems of this play in the forthcoming lecture. See Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, trans. R. McCleary, Vol. I (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 191-193. If Hoederer cannot bring together opportunism and leftism, it might be argued that Goetz, the revolutionary hero of Sartre's 1951 play *The Devil and the Good Lord*, does exemplify this synthesis, at least as an individual, and in somewhat ideal terms.

opportunism and leftism, erring in the direction of an opportunism that made the apparatus an end in itself.

In an uncanny anticipation of the "revolution of 1989," Sartre concludes this second sub-section on the revolutionary apparatus by noting optimistically that while praxis will always tend to "crystallize" into a system,

one must also know that this crystallization cannot lose humanity forever, for humanity is itself the real basis of this limitation upon it, and from this viewpoint, it will certainly contest its new sub-humanity as soon as this is possible. (158/132)

One could argue in the case of Eastern Europe, that this contestation became possible near the end of 1988, when Soviet leaders gave Poland assurances of non-intervention. The subsequent uprisings seem to illustrate what Sartre calls in *The 1964 Rome Lectures* the "irrepressibility of humanity as the future of humanity." (158/133)

3) "*The Necessity of Praxis*" (Sartre's title). The tie linking immediate objectives and long-term goals is stretched most during the "night-time moments" of making the human when the revolutionary leadership must engage in terror and lying. By "necessity" Sartre intends the reduction of possibilities to *one*. When action has such "inflexible rigor," he asks, doesn't it exclude the unconditional end? If there's but one way to humanity and it involves means incompatible with a human world, isn't action with humanity as its end impossible? Sartre's answer is no. Humanity as end can still turn back on the means and "control" them.

He does not envision using *humanity* as a means. Terror is characterized as action in which "sub-humans become the means of humanity." (159/133) Such action "born of the masses" is inherently defensive, being "forced by the adversary." Terror not only re-introduces imperative orders, it accompanies them with "sanctions." Sartre names no sanctions, but he alludes to "the violent liquidation of private interests and of old classes" (161/135) and to the Russian, Cuban, and Algerian revolutions. Paradoxically, "one maintains these sanctions in order to suppress them." (159/133)

The original situation facing the practical organism is for Sartre one of workaday violence. Sartre is ambiguous as to whether he is talking of bureaucratic socialism or capitalism. "The system" in either case makes all its participants sub-human by its unimpeded, normal selection of its victims *a priori* for misery or death, based on their class, race, gender or other irrelevancy. In

its original instance terror is for Sartre a counter-violence in which one uses oneself qua sub-human as a means to one's own humanity *beyond* the system. In *Morality and History* he analyzes cases of revolutionary militants who, under systematic torture by the Nazis (and the French), nevertheless conceal their absent comrades by making their pain-racked bodies, indeed their very lives, the "absolute" means to the end of silence. Humanity as unconditional end is present in such cases. Among those who use their sub-humanity in this way there is "solidarity." This is neither a merging of persons nor their assimilation into a higher-order personality. Rather, due to their common aim, the seriality and alienation of hierarchical society are just dropped. In short, the human collectivity partly makes the human in aiming together at the "pure future." Insofar as this effort entails resistance to a violent system (a reluctance that is always itself defined as "violent" by the dominant system), the revolutionary group—if it is to resist at all, much less succeed—must to some degree engage in violence. Sartre notes:

Kant is wrong. Even in the city of ends man will be both ends and means at the same time. The ideal moment of the *means*, is simply when humans will themselves such in light of the end, and as such the end incarnates itself in them in the moment in which they will themselves as means (solidarity). (159/133)

The revolutionary group then primarily uses itself collectively as its own means. May it use other sub-humans outside the group as means? Sartre does not seem to exclude this and it seems to us harmonious with his overall position, assuming the validity of revolutionary action in the first place. He proceeds to discuss the four conditions under which alone terror, lying, etc.—in general, using sub-humans, through imperatives with sanctions, to create humans—really might count as "inevitable" and therefore permissible. If any of these conditions cannot be met, we read Sartre as saying, then terror is not permissible and other alternatives must be invented. The conditions are:

(1) Only when terror can be restrained from becoming a "system" like that of the adversary.

But the terrorist's struggle must be pursued as a provisional expedient. It is the adversary who forces him to make humans the pure and simple *means* to humanity. The terrorist must in that case sense the Other in himself (as the Other denied but conserved as threat) in producing and maintaining Terror as a system. (159/134)

Provisional and defensive terror is necessary (i.e., the only alternative), we interpret Sartre as saying here, only when it can be kept from becoming a system. It would seem that treating *humans* as means only (without also treating them as ends) *can't* be restrained from becoming a system. If using terror in a given case would tend to use humanity as a means only, then that use would not be permissible.

(2) Only if those who exercise terror can and do avoid "ideologies" of terror. An example is Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country." This slogan was used to rationalize re-instituting sub-humanity precisely among those struggling against it.²⁴

(3) Only if no justification of terror is offered beyond its necessity. If one does not struggle against terror *while applying it* one maintains sub-humans in their sub-humanity. Thus one must: strictly limit its exercise; present it as inhuman to those who undergo it; never use it as the easiest solution; and never in order to cover a mistake.

(4) Only if terror originates in the masses and is "assumed [by] the leaders in their turn." (160/134) But it must be assumed as "unjustifiable" and in the name of all. If terror is thus grounded in what Sartre calls "fraternity-terror," rather than in some claim to legitimate power, then it can give way to fraternity.²⁵

²⁴In *CDR II* Sartre had analyzed three aspects of terror in the USSR of the 1930's: the "fabricating" of a working class out of peasants in order to industrialize rapidly; the forced collectivization of agriculture; and the reverberation of terror within the bureaucracy which "must be as one" (see esp. pp. 176-179). As a requirement of praxis such terror *might still have been abandoned*, once its task of unifying the struggle had been accomplished, *but for* the institutionalization of ideological slogans like "socialism in one country." (*CDR II*, p. 164). This conceptual "monstrosity," which split the Soviet proletariat from the other proletariats it needed, had initially been invented to defeat Trotskyist universalism. But it then went on to help codify in state power the hierarchicization of both the bureaucracy and the proletariat, two contemporaneous developments whose legitimation actually made socialism *less* likely. (*CDR II*, pp. 103-107) Cf. Aronson, *Sartre's Second Critique*, pp. 102-113.

²⁵In *CDR I* terror had been portrayed as a given structure of the system, an inevitable structure of resistance to it, and a tacit source of unity within the insurgent movement. Terror *within* the revolutionary movement is "fraternity-terror." (See note 10 above.) This refers to the standing link between members of the "pledged group." The antecedent birth (in Sartre's dialectic) of revolutionary militants as "common individuals" (an individual whose praxis is common) gives to

May a Nazi torturer in occupied France be assassinated even if one knows doing so will result in the retributive murder of several arbitrarily selected fellow citizens? The example is ours. It seems to us that if the resulting retribution held the real prospect of awakening large numbers of one's fellow citizens to the need for solidarity and resistance, then the assassination, itself an indirect use of sub-humanity in one's victims and fellow citizens, might meet Sartre's four requirements (to the third of which he in fact appended a few more). Terror, Sartre holds, is "always a revolutionary pause" which "marks history negatively." Yet, if these four conditions are met, "Terror becomes *revolutionary justice*. In short, the humanization of terror is possible *in principle*."

Sartre seems to want to allow only insurrectional, popular terror such as occurred against the Nazis (and against the French in Algeria), not the institutionalized terror of the USSR and Eastern European regimes that made terror an ideologically justified system of governance. In 1962 he foresaw a popular revolution against Soviet socialism, which had become "a synonym with *Hell*."²⁶ In 1964 whom does Sartre envision bringing this about? The system-created "man of Terror" is "the least capable of realizing the permanent self-destruction of the terrorized system." (161/135) Such change must come from "*beneath* the ideology of terror and its practices."

The unconditional normative is *here also* the foundation of the imperative. The transformation of the fundamental structures of the system (raising the standard of living, etc.) by making terror unnecessary does not suppress its mark, but the unconditioned end is discovered again and praxis takes it as goal, starting with the pursuit of the real revolutionary end of liquidating the limits of terrorism.

It is terror-men who liquidate the Terror in themselves. (161/136)

each member of the group thus constituted the right to violate the freedom of other members—in order to save the group as such from dissolution. (CDR I, pp. 428-444)

²⁶CDR II, p. 116.

This passage seems again in some ways to anticipate the uprisings in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, initiated against the remnants of Stalin's system of terror—in the midst of its attempts to reform itself.²⁷

4) "Incarnation" (Sartre's title) The sub-section with this title deals with issues of defending socialist gains, in particular the thorny question of the relation of revolutionary parties and groups outside the Soviet Union to the Soviet Union. Yet Sartre's dialectic of means and ends seems also to pertain to any new attempts to make the human.

Communism is the suppression of all systems. The practico-inert appears in it only to be dissolved. But socialism is still a system. The practico-inert exists in a socialist society. More to the point: such a society realizes itself as a certain individuality (traditions, historical circumstances). . . . The necessity of history is that the universal is never realized in it except in the form of singularity. This is what I call *incarnation*. (161/136)²⁸

Sartre speaks of defense of the Soviet Union and other attempts to build socialism as an "obligation." Yet he counter-balances this obligation with the cognate obligation to surmount the particularity both of these struggles elsewhere and of one's own local apparatus of struggle. No single nation embodies the universal, no organizational entity is the "home" of socialism itself, so long as capitalism endures.

How, then, does Sartre propose to effect this delicate balance of perhaps conflicting "obligations" within the movement of universalization? By "ethics." Ethics here is the "surpassing" of singularity, not its mere "negation." Particular

²⁷Cf. *CDR* II, p. 144. In *CDR* II, and in such passages as this in *The 1964 Rome Lecture*, Sartre still envisioned a reformist—though not necessarily peaceful—overthrow of the Soviet bureaucracy by Soviet workers within the basic Bolshevik project. (*CDR* II, p. 164n) But in 1968, after the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, he wrote that "the machine cannot be repaired; the peoples of Eastern Europe must seize hold of it and destroy it." "Czechoslovakia: The Socialism that Came in from the Cold," in *Between Marxism and Existentialism*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

²⁸Cf. *CDR* II, p. 22 for a general characterization of this idea, which is refractory to any attempt to compare an ideal socialism with a case of it. Thus Marxism is for good or ill "incarcerated by becoming a national and popular culture" in the USSR. In this incarnation Marxism both *changes* the "hastily-created" Soviet working class and is *changed* by it. (*CDR* II, p. 109) Aronson in *Sartre's Second Critique* remarks "Sartre's analysis does show a corruption of Marxism in its incarnation." (p. 183)

socialist attainments are to be neither imitated nor negated, but built upon. To achieve the emancipation of workers it is not enough to blindly pursue it; "the clear representation of the essential end" of that emancipation is also required. This calls for creation of "an ethics of history, or to identify history with the dramatic overdevelopment of morality." (162/137)

In these four ways, then, the "morality of praxis" both gives rise to "alienated moralities" as temporary means to human liberation and also limits these moralities in the light of this same end, such that they are useful without freezing into permanent and oppressive ends in themselves. Ultimately it is hoped that group praxis becomes its own end and that need, instead of impelling us to re-create a system, becomes a mere occasion for the inherently worthwhile collective problem-solving that beats back the practico-inert. Morality, as the practice of criticism within the expanding revolutionary group, mediates the slow triumph of humanity over sub-humanity. The task is complex. Revolutionaries are in the contradictory position both of creating a system to combat a system and yet affirming the preeminence of humanity over all its systems. They must therefore struggle against both the system and the counter-system, even as they use the latter.

There is a risk that struggling against the revolutionary system *will destroy the revolutionary force itself*. This risk must be run, Sartre affirms. This is because "the blind reinforcement of the [revolutionary] system risks subjecting humanity to an alienation not of exploitation but of oppression." (164/139) Revolutionaries must hold firm to the norm of "unconditional humanity" in opposition both to the system's imperatives and to those which struggle imposes on them. The latter imperatives are to be respected as provisional but not definitive in light of "autonomy of praxis" as the goal. It may even happen that the revolutionary force itself must be sacrificed, yielded up, if "blind reinforcement of the [revolutionary] system" would sink sub-humans even more deeply into their sub-humanity, instead of advancing in their humanity. Clearly Sartre is willing for this sacrifice to be made since sub-humanity in all its forms, whether imposed by the system or the counter-system, is itself a limitation on or diversion of our underlying humanity. This fact allows for hope, despite the most grievous alienation, that humanity will "find itself again" due to the "irrepressible" future, the autonomy of praxis that is pointed to by sheer human need.

3. Situating Chapter Four

Simone de Beauvoir, upon re-reading *The 1964 Rome Lecture* in 1986, called it "the culminating point of Sartre's ethics."²⁹ We find this phrase apt. It suggests a buildup including earlier attempts, subsequent efforts that do not attain its level, and perhaps overall failure to reach its goal—all of which seems to us to be true of this work. What Sartre designated as "the problem of ethics" he never solved to his satisfaction (or to ours—as we explain briefly below). He planned but never published a work on ethics. He made three attempts at it: one in 1947-1950 as a practical sequel to his ontology of freedom in *Being and Nothingness*—an assault abandoned in the preparatory stages; another in 1964-1965 as a practical sequel to his analysis of the components of historical action in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*—a more successful effort that reached a high level and which he always hoped to complete³⁰; and finally, in discussions with a young associate shortly before he died, he announced a plan in 1980 for yet another assault—in whose stated terms we find little advance over the two works of the mid-1960's.³¹

While Chapter Four's "socialist morality" derives directly from the study of historical action in the *Critique*, it also draws together humanist themes of the 1940's. It recalls one of Sartre's few "positive" plays in which socialist values are ringingly affirmed amidst rigorous struggle against oppression, namely *The Victors* (1946).³² It also calls to mind his critique of official Marxism's deterministic materialism in "Materialism and Revolution" (1946). In that essay he had insisted that it is precisely in regard to workers' transcendence of the

²⁹Letter postmarked February 21, 1986 to R.V. Stone.

³⁰Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Volume I: A Bibliographical Life*, trans. Richard McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 448-449.

³¹Jean-Paul Sartre and Benny Lévy, *L'espoir maintenant: les entretiens de 1980* (Paris: Verdier, 1991), pp. 22-41.

³²"Morts sans sépulture," in *Théâtre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); "The Victors," trans. Lionel Abel, in *Three Plays* (New York: Knopf, 1949). Arguably, *The Devil and the Good Lord* (1951) is similarly positive.

given in favor of a future (albeit their bosses' future)—in a word, their freedom—that they can be said to be *oppressed*. Oppression could not be imposed on them if they really were, as the then-dominant Marxism said, bits of externally determined matter.³³ And finally, it calls to mind the writer's task—outlined in *What is Literature?* (1947)—of "representing" the end of proletarian struggle as freedom, thereby facilitating the "inventing" of "man," with socialism as the "last means" to do it. According to that task, any means of attaining freedom and humanity whose use would "qualitatively" change that end must be avoided.³⁴ Yet in its suggestions for controlling revolutionary violence so as to avoid a system of terror, Chapter Four recalls most not any work of Sartre's but rather Simone de Beauvoir's lengthy discussion of the permissibility of violence in her 1947 work *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Existentialist ethics, especially as developed by Sartre and Beauvoir up to about 1950, was forged in part to deal with moral problems imposed on those who had elected to resist the Nazis' military occupation of France from 1940 to 1944. May one kill a 16-year-old Nazi combattant who is mystified and misled, if the urgency of armed struggle for freedom precludes re-educating him? May one violently oppose an anti-colonial revolt against one's ally, Britain, if the revolt's leaders reject postponement and if prosecuting it now would derail the wider struggle against fascism? What should one do with a stool-pigeon discovered in the resistance network? May a resistance militant eliminate three Nazi officers if he knows an entire French village will be burned in retribution? Such questions—which have no obvious answers—seem out of place in the USA

³³When bosses accuse workers of "sordid materialism" official Marxists often defend them by abandoning their own materialism, Sartre had noted, and thereby inconsistently "give one to understand that behind these material demands there was the affirmation of a humanism, that these workers were not only demanding a few more *sous*, but that their demand was a kind of concrete symbol of their demand to be men. Men; that is, freedoms in possession of their own destinies." "Materialism and Revolution," in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson (New York: Criterion Books, 1955), p. 229.

³⁴*What is Literature?* trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1950), pp. 213-14, 217. "We must, in all domains, both reject solutions which are not rigorously inspired by socialist principles and, at the same time, stand off from all doctrines and movements which consider socialism as the absolute end. In our eyes it should not represent the final end, but rather the end of the beginning, or, if one prefers, the last means before the end which is to put the human person in possession of his freedom." p. 206.

of 1992, a country which is not only comfortable, but which has never suffered military occupation by a victorious enemy. In the course of treating such questions in her Chapter Three, Beauvoir evolves some guidelines for "vigilant" pursuit of freedom.³⁵ Terror must be used only to avoid a greater evil, only as a last resort, only as a temporary expedient, and never as an institution, as in the case of Stalinism. Setting down in greater detail ideas Sartre was to return to less compellingly seventeen years later, she pointed up the dialectical relation of means and ends in the ethics of revolution by remarking that

... an action which wants to serve man ought to be careful not to forget him on the way; if it chooses to fulfill itself blindly, it will lose its meaning or take on an unforeseen meaning; for the goal is not fixed once and for all; it is defined along the road which leads to it. Vigilance alone can keep alive the validity of the goals and the genuine assertion of freedom.³⁶

What, then, is the relation of the socialist morality of 1964 to the existential ethics that Sartre had himself projected in 1943 in *Being and Nothingness*? We suggest, though we cannot make out the argument in detail here, that the socialist morality lays out certain elements of this projected ethics in the form of an historical/practical project.

Having devoted most of *Being and Nothingness* to describing the "ambiguous" structures of human reality, particularly its "serious" attitude of presenting itself "as a consequence," Sartre had promised at the end of that work an ethical treatise that would describe the "special type of being" characteristic of humans at play.³⁷ The serious attitude of taking bread as desirable because it is nourishing is a pursuit of being that is in bad faith because it "hides from

³⁵*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), pp. 98-99, 149-150. One of the many dilemmas explored in Sartre's *The Victors* is: while in custody awaiting torture may one kill a Resistance comrade before he's tortured if he professes his inability to conceal (and willingness to reveal) large sectors of the network in order to save his life and sanity?

³⁶*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 153. For a discussion of Beauvoir's influence on Sartre, see Margaret A. Simons, "Beauvoir and Sartre: The Question of Influence," in *Eros: A Journal of Philosophy and Literary Arts*, Vol. 8, No. 1, June 1981.

³⁷*BN*, p. 581. See the epigraph above.

[itself] the free project which is this pursuit.³⁸ This attitude wrongly "asserts the priority of the object over the subject."³⁹ But if this attitude is *morally* deficient, as Sartre implies, must it not be because it is possible to *reverse* this priority and make the subject—the human itself—the object pursued? Desiring to found its own contingent existence through its self-consciousness, human reality originally takes as its ideal the type of being that God has⁴⁰—an impossible ideal whose dogged pursuit makes humanity a "useless passion."⁴¹ Within this original or given project (which need not be one's fundamental project) human reality *can* make itself its own objective, Sartre has already held in *Being and Nothingness*, and thereby at least "put an end to the reign of this value [of being God]."⁴² But when human reality effects such a "conversion," what else can it become if not the *historical* project of making the human, as described in *The 1964 Rome Lecture*? In "living" freedom's choice of itself as its new ideal, Sartre had suggested in 1943, freedom will "situate" itself as "conditioned" in order to assume "its responsibility as an existent by whom the world comes into being."⁴³ Isn't this precisely the responsibility for a human world that is experienced in historical terms by the revolutionary as described in 1964?

Yet we hesitate to say *The 1964 Rome Lecture* is the projected ethics. Sartre is proposing here more a certain undertaking than he is an ethics in the sense of a principle for realizing moral values through individual conduct, as is proposed, say, by Kant or Mill. Such principles presume it is possible to be moral in class society without having the overthrow of that society as one's first priority. As we will see shortly, Sartre repeatedly rejects this assumption. In the

³⁸BN, p. 626.

³⁹BN, p. 580.

⁴⁰BN, p. 566.

⁴¹BN, p. 615.

⁴²BN, p. 627.

⁴³BN, p. 628.

"socialist ethics" the "demand" for "humanity" implicit in need constitutes an "exigency" that might better be called *pre-moral* or *proto-moral*. The object of this exigency can itself become the objective of moral striving; moreover, it must be if any other moral value is to be capable of realization. Freedom, like humanity, is what might be called a threshold value inasmuch as its universal realization is a condition for the authentic realization by an individual of any value whatsoever. To be moral, indeed to realize any value, one must first be free, since only free conduct can be called morally right or wrong. As Linda A. Bell rightly notes, this means freedom is willed implicitly as means in willing any value whatever as end.⁴⁴ But then such collective liberation seems aimed not so much at satisfying some particular morality as at making moralities in general possible in the first place by realizing humanity. In terms of socialist morality, action aimed at satisfying this or that historically dominant moral imperative, value, or ideal, is parasitic upon, rides piggy-back on, the power of invention in ordinary historical praxis. But if being moral is impossible due to alienation by class society of this very power in praxis, there seems to be a morally *prior* task of making morality itself possible. Because the practico-inert always haunts praxis, this task has its own inner moral structure, and this is what is described in Chapter Four.

4. Evaluating Chapter Four

One strength of Sartre's account is that it avoids the dangers of a certain metaphor often used in thinking about revolutionary ends and means. A familiar, perhaps dominant, way of posing the issue of the morality of revolution goes as follows: Does the end of revolution, the better state of humanity sought as its goal, justify or outweigh the violent, perhaps immoral, acts undertaken as means necessary to attain that end? If a means is indeed immoral then, it may be argued, it *can't* be outweighed by good ends, but in that case there is no point in asking the question whether it can (unless it is simply to evoke a prejudice against revolutionary change). The question in any case presumes that revolutionary means can be conceived as external to, and then weighed morally on the opposite side of the scale from, the revolutionary ends toward which they

⁴⁴Cf. Linda A. Bell's discussion of this in *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), pp. 55-57.

aim. But this also reveals a prejudice in the question. For, since ends are precisely the sorts of things that give point and intelligibility to means in the first place (if anything does), once one disengages any means from its end, such that it *can* be weighed morally *against* its end, it will already certainly appear at least pointless and will more likely be taken as morally wrong. The burden of proof—due to the conceptual prejudices built into the "scale" metaphor itself—is thus made unduly heavy for the revolutionary.

Sartre offers an alternative to the scale metaphor that allows us to disinterestedly appreciate the moral problems of revolution. The scale metaphor treats acts as means and ends as something beyond acts. But means and ends, instead of being morally separable and weighable, are held by Sartre to be interconnected "moments" of actual historical undertakings. Ends don't *justify* means, strictly speaking; they are rather their very point and meaning. This is indicated in the ambiguity in the French word *sens*, which signifies both direction or vector and meaning. Thus Sartre says ends are "the synthetic unity" of means, the unfolding of all the means. In a word, the end is the "totalization" of the means (except when it is interrupted, leaving a "de-totalized totality" which is nevertheless comprehended through the end it *was* aiming at).⁴⁵ For Sartre, humanity is not something that can be *prepared for*, e.g. by nationalizing factories; it is rather all the acts, starting now, of creating it. The end does not come *after* the means; it is rather the significance that permeates their deployment in history and holds them together *as* means. The means, in turn, by concretizing the end in a particular situation, come to incarnate it in unintended as well as intended ways. Thus ends don't justify acts; they are the parts of acts that make up their very intelligibility as human doings rather than mere events or processes. Similarly with means: they are constituent parts or moments of acts. Being inseparable aspects of a single movement that unifies itself as it goes along, means and ends can't be weighed against each other, as one might weigh, say, proposed alternative acts against each other with respect to their consequences. Revolution is a task, a complex of acts. If anything, both revolutionary means and revolutionary ends should be together on the same side of the moral scale, to be weighed morally against action on the other side. On Sartre's analysis of means and ends, then, the initial question, which presumes

⁴⁵CDR I, pp. 45-46.

their moral separability, is meaningless. It is made from an impossible supra-historical perspective and misconstrues the structure of human action.

Toward the end of Chapter Four Sartre writes: "All means are good except those which denature the end." (164/139) In 1947 he wrote that means can be so incompatible with their end as to "smash" the syntheses they are supposed to help constitute.⁴⁶ This provides us with a criterion for revolutionaries. If we provisionally accept Sartre's replacement of the idea that means are justified (or not) by their ends, with the idea that means "denature" (or exemplify) their ends, then two questions arise: (1) Does the end of revolutionary action harmonize with *any* and all means, or are there limits, are there means that *do* "de-nature" or "smash" the "synthetic unities" or "totalizations" of which they are a part? And (2) if the revolutionary end is *not* compatible with certain means is this because a moral principle external to the revolutionary task itself supervenes for Sartre in order to guide good choices of means?

We can see that Sartre's answer to the first question is "yes," there are limits. We've just considered means that have a limited efficacy, but which, if allowed to dominate action, would undermine their end, and which therefore require consideration of that end if they are to be controlled and limited. Another even more compelling example of what the socialist ethics *rules out* is supplied by Sartre's bitter denunciation in *The Ghost of Stalin* of Soviet premier Khrushchev's invasion of Hungary with Soviet troops in 1956 to quell a workers' rebellion—a means that "smashes" the task of empowering workers.

⁴⁶"The end is the synthetic unity of the means employed," Sartre held, in *What is Literature?*, drawing the conclusion "Thus there are means which risk destroying the end which they intend to realize because by their mere presence they smash the synthetic unity which they wish to enter." (*What is Literature?*, p. 218) Certain means must sometimes be rejected not because they are quantitatively less effective, but because, even if they are *more* effective, they "introduce a *qualitative* alteration into the end and consequently are not measurable." (p. 282) Even at that, a particular case of lying by the revolutionary party *may be* permissible, despite perpetuating the oppression it would end, if it would really tend to create a world where lying is unnecessary. Such lying is *not* permissible ". . . if it helps to create a *lied-to* and *lying* mankind; for then the men who take power are no longer those who deserve to hold it; and the reasons one had for abolishing oppression are undermined by the way he goes about abolishing it." (p. 282)

It shows clearly how "the rule of efficacy" would exclude conduct by the revolutionary force that denatures or internally upsets the end it aims at.⁴⁷

To the second question, however, Sartre's answer is a perhaps unexpected "no." Contrary to the liberal tradition in morals, Sartre argues that "praxis" supplies its own moral limits. There is no autonomous morality with a priori validity for praxis. Instead there is, as his title implies, a "morality of praxis" itself (which has autonomy as a goal). No extra-historical moral principle is appealed to here.

As we have seen, the absence of an external standard does not mean all means are permitted. Sartre even goes to the point of saying "the revolutionary force" itself must be sacrificed if its perpetuation would denature the revolutionary goal of autonomous humanity. This opens up the risk that Sartre's standard, which is internal to the revolutionary struggle against the system, could be used by defenders of the system against revolutionaries. Thus, if it is known in advance by the defenders of the existing system that its opponents will find certain measures morally unacceptable, then, to defeat revolutions, it will be enough to so escalate counter-revolutionary violence as to impose on the revolutionaries the choice of either abandoning the struggle or engaging in these measures—since presumably they'll choose the former because they will shrink from the latter. We see no way to secure Sartre's criterion against the risk of such manipulation. Those using Sartre's own criterion would, however, be more able to respond in a liberatory manner than would those who brought an inflexible, external standard to bear on revolutionary praxis. The scale metaphor alluded to above, if internalized by revolutionaries, could be used to stop revolution by a simple process of escalation of violence (by counter-revolutionaries unrestrained by these same scruples). Sartre's socialist morality is not thus limited, and does not have its own defeat built into itself. At the same time, there clearly have been for Sartre circumstances in which it might be best to abandon a given revolutionary force altogether in order to re-group and start again elsewhere.⁴⁸

⁴⁷*The Ghost of Stalin* (1956-57), trans. Martha Fletcher (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. 4, 66-67, 118-121, and esp. 18-19. The meditation on when violence really is "unavoidable" (pp. 13-24) is a valuable complement to section 3 of Rome's Chapter Four.

⁴⁸See, for example, note 27 above.

Yet Sartre's treatment of "socialist morality" (as briefly reviewed here) has the defects of its virtues. Its virtues are its willingness to specify the ends of revolution, its freedom from prejudice, and the sheer vastness of the domain of human affairs that it stakes out as *morally* pertinent. Yet four central aspects of this program are, in our judgement, plausible in principle yet incompletely explained and argued for.

1) We have omitted to focus here on Sartre's critique of capitalism, which is distributed throughout his *oeuvre* and nowhere synthesized. Yet it is important for his explanation of revolutionary praxis. In general this critique focuses on the claim that capitalism's devotion to "the thing," to property and profit over human action and human need, suppresses freedom. But socialism is itself also a system with all its practico-inert limits on freedom. How precisely would socialism facilitate humanity as the latter's "last means"? How should this socialism be constructed? This is not a demand for a presumptuous prediction or a guess at history's direction. But human development seems sufficiently advanced to allow description of capitalism as one choice or alternative possibility and socialism as another. Sartre had planned to investigate how the capitalist system is "invented" by "persons" in the second volume of his *Critique*.⁴⁹ If it is invented by humans, can an alternative also be invented? And what is *its* shape, then, as alternative? Unfortunately, neither his critique of capitalism nor his account of socialism is ample enough for us to be able to answer these questions decisively. There is no theoretical inhibition in Sartre against doing so, but he just doesn't give answers.

2) And what precisely *is* "humanity"? This notion combines a variety of profound Sartrean themes: freedom; the pledged group; satisfaction of need; group autonomy and individual sovereignty; socialism and communism. But *how* exactly does it combine them? Is this goal worth fighting for? In particular, how might we distinguish, if at all, between Sartrean humanity and the older, enlightenment conception of humanity that contains "masculinist" prejudices, as some feminist theorists argue? To answer, a Sartrean would need a clear enough conception of humanity (and its relation to socialism as "last means") to be useful in deciding, for example, whether a given undertaking will lead to it or to its opposite. This area of mediations is usually that of *politics*. But this dimension is notoriously weak in Sartre's all-or-nothing world view, or rather,

⁴⁹CDR II, p. 432.

the political tends to be subsumed under the moral or the historical. One result is that there is only the most fragmentary *positive* theory of democracy in his work, once his criticisms of electoral politics are over. This gap might disappear once capitalism is fully described, on the one hand, and a systematic account of humanity is given on the other.

3) How exactly does the "de-nature" criterion actually work in revolutionary practice? If we had a clear answer to this question we could also answer a related question where revolutionaries would want clarity: when terror by revolutionaries is and is not permitted. But Sartre is ambiguous on terror. What *types* of use of sub-humans to make humanity is he speaking of? Are there any permissible cases of terror that do *not* originate among the masses? May sub-humans outside the revolutionary group be used as means? The entire section on terror moves at a level of abstraction that leaves such questions unanswered.

We might be able to answer the questions on terror if we had a clearer idea of which means "denature" ends. But there is a difficulty in Sartre's account here. Clearly it is not enough to say a given means *alters* the end. This is a dialectical truth of all action as such. All means alter the end by concretizing it, giving it an incarnation, as Sartre says. Someone who goes straight ahead without taking account of the way means alter ends, can therefore lose track of where he or she is going and wind up in an unintended place. It seems that ends *guide* the choices of means, but one cannot strictly *deduce* means from ends. But then when can we say an end is not merely altered by its means or concretized by it, but is "de-natured" by the means? And how, if at all, can we reasonably *anticipate* that a given means might de-nature the end it is meant to help us attain?

Sartre is not alone. The question of revolutionary violence has bedeviled the tradition of theorizing about revolution and needs re-thinking from the ground up.⁵⁰ There are resources outside *The 1964 Rome Lecture* for *constructing* existential answers to these questions,⁵¹ and the overall strength

⁵⁰ A forthcoming book by Joseph Walsh promises this.

⁵¹ As pointed out above, Chapter 3 of Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is most useful in this regard, and almost certainly had Sartre's concurrence. Violent insurgent acts are often treated in his many concrete essays on popular struggles in Algeria, Vietnam, Cuba, the Basque country and

of Sartre's account of the task of liberation argues for doing so. Meanwhile, though, the 1964 treatment offers only an evocative, ambiguous outline. Perhaps for such reasons Sartre did not publish this work.

4) Finally, we find in the socialist ethics an uncharacteristically abstract, rootless quality. Which *situation* does the revolutionary praxis it describes respond to? Is he referring primarily to reform of Soviet-dominated regimes, to revolution in the centers of capitalism, or on its periphery—or to all three? Most of his examples are drawn from *CDR II* with its focus on Eastern Europe, yet he is clearly trying to develop a moral praxis of the revolutionary group that would be more generally applicable. This, above all, would require working out a systematic critique of capitalism. *Morality and History* contains a lengthy section devoted to an immanent critique of capitalism, showing the impossibility of living out its own most intimate structures, namely its dominant morality. But, focussed as that work is on private life under capitalism, with its patriarchal structures, it is a valuable but only incomplete part of the systemic analysis—like the one he projected regarding the USSR—that would have been required to ground a broadly revolutionary praxis aimed at replacing capitalism. Such an analysis requires mastery of vast empirical detail on capitalism. Perhaps because "socialist ethics" hangs in the air for want of such grounding, and despite the richness added by *Morality and History* and *CDR II* (which was itself dropped only two years earlier in the face of the vast research required to complete it), Sartre dropped it and never returned to finish it, going on to other projects. The revolutionary praxis it urges lacks situatedness as a result.

We believe a generous and comprehensive reading of Sartre and his fellow existentialists would uncover resources for answering these questions, perhaps convincingly. But after studying the mid-60's writings on ethics we find ourselves left with them.

Conclusion

A member of Sartre's Rome audience who was attached to an Eastern European Communist Party chided Sartre in the discussion, calling on him to get

elsewhere. A partial inventory of Sartre's positions on revolutionary violence is made by Thomas C. Anderson in his *The Foundation and Structure of Sartrean Ethics* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), Chapter 4, esp. pp. 132-136.

off the fence and either go back to Heidegger or come forward to Marx.⁵² But we believe Sartre is neither ambiguous on central issues nor un-Marxist. It is perhaps because regimes that supported such participants ignored Sartre's cautions against alienated moralities that the revolution of 1989 was inevitable. In any case, it seems to us Sartre's Marxism can still help in 1991 in thinking through revolutionary social change.

Sartre's existential "socialist morality" was born under the brutal repressiveness of fascist occupation. Following the liberation, he and his comrades hoped that, using such a morality, France would move "From Resistance to Revolution"—the promethean masthead slogan of Albert Camus' daily newspaper *Combat*. It may seem that fascist-like defenses of the *status quo* no longer exist and hence that existential ethics is only an historical curiosity. But the rape and murder of nuns and priests who work with the poor in Central America does not significantly differ from the arbitrary murder of French citizens by Nazi troops, or the lynching of blacks in the U.S. South, which Simone de Beauvoir found in 1948 to be "an absolute evil."⁵³ Such acts have a single message: obey; if you assert a need, or protest its denial, you will be treated likewise. The equivalent of fascist occupation surely exists, at least on the system's periphery where it is currently challenged. The "socialist morality" is therefore still pertinent. It would in any case be prudent to preserve, publish, and study these incomplete writings of Sartre's in order to have tools-in-waiting that can be picked up and completed for new purposes, as they are needed.

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⁵²Personal letter to the authors from Professor Howard Parsons of Bridgeport University, who attended the conference and heard Sartre talk.

⁵³*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 146.