

BETWEEN BEING AND NOTHINGNESS: SARTRE'S EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF LIBERATION

Nythamar de Oliveira*

SÍNTESE – O artigo tenta mostrar como a dialética sartreana do ser e do nada se afasta da concepção fundamental heideggeriana do Dasein enquanto ser-no-mundo, na medida em que seu modo de ser e autocompreensão existenciais conduzem-no em última análise à sua práxis histórica de libertação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE – Dasein. Dialética. Existencialismo. Fenomenologia. Libertação. Marxismo. Nada. Ser.

ABSTRACT – This article seeks to show how Sartre's dialectic of being and nothingness departs from Heidegger's fundamental conception of Dasein qua being-in-the-world, as its existential mode of being and self-understanding ultimately lead to its historical praxis of self-liberation.

KEY WORDS – Being. Dasein. Dialectics. Existentialism. Liberation. Marxism. Nothingness. Phenomenology.

*À la mémoire du Professeur
Dominique Janicaud (1937-2002)*

Introduction

Western philosophy has been traditionally divided into four long periods, regardless of how long they actually were, to wit, Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary – for the fourth remains by all criteria the shortest and the second the longest of all, spanning over a whole millennium. From Plato and Aristotle through Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Hegel, one cannot fail to realize how contemporary currents relate to the thinking of these and other thinkers. The reception of phenomenology in France attests to this *ad fontes* return that haunts philosophical attempts to overcome previous traditions and schools of thought, just as German idealism evolved as a response to Cartesian rationalism and British empiricism, and Husserlian phenomenology paved a third way between logicism and psychologism, in the search for a standpoint beyond the subject-object di-

* Professor of Philosophy, PUCRS, Porto Alegre.

chotomy. French phenomenology was in effect broadly conceived as a conjugation of the reception of the writings of Husserl and Heidegger with the development of original readings of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche, just to name its most important interlocutors. Hence structuralism and Marxism found intersections with French existentialism that passed unnoticed in other schools of phenomenology and hermeneutics elsewhere.

The thought of French philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) has been commonly regarded as the epitome of such a peculiar pot-pourri, as the most prominent representative of existentialism since the bombastic success in the fifties – “*la bombe Sartre*,” in Janicaud’s felicitous phrase¹ –, of his first major philosophical work, *L’être et le néant* – whose first edition came out in France in 1943, and a partial English translation appeared in 1953. As the subtitle indicated – *Un essai d’ontologie phénoménologique*, – Sartre’s philosophy sought in Heidegger’s critical appropriation of Husserl’s phenomenology its first foundations, on the very level of the ontological difference between being (*Sein*) and beings (*Seienden*).² To be sure, before any contemporary influence from the outside, Sartre had been fascinated by Henri Bergson’s philosophy of consciousness (*la vie intérieure*), and became thus interested in the philosophical adventures of great minds from the past, in particular Plato, Descartes, and Kant. “Above all Descartes,” he would admit overtly, “I consider myself a Cartesian philosopher, at least in *L’être et le néant*.”³ Kierkegaard, Hegel, and Marx, according to Sartre himself, were other influences which would come later – in that order – in the evolution of his self-acclaimed dialectical thinking and writing. But it was the Husserlian phenomenology and the Heideggerian hermeneutical turn explicated in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) which were decisive for the Sartrean orientation towards an existential philosophy of human freedom. The predicament of Descartes’s provisional morality and the Humean predicament of a naturalist skepticism are revisited by Sartre’s atheistic materialism and his recasting of a Marxian-inspired program of self-liberation through social praxis. Such a post-Heideggerian return to the critique of modernity took place in a sociocultural milieu that followed the monstrosity of two World Wars and saw the emergence of the propagandist blackmailing of the Cold War. Mark Poster has reconstructed, in a remarkable book, the historiography of Sartre’s passage from existentialism to Marxism and has rightly emphasized the decisive role which the Hegel Renaissance played in the formation of an “existential Marxism in postwar France.”⁴ It is against such a background that one can better under-

¹ Cf. Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger en France*, Paris: Albin Michel, 2001, vol. I, p. 55-79.

² Whenever using the established translation of *Sein* and *Seiend*, esp. in *Being and Time*, I will resort to the spelling with capital B so as to distinguish “Being” from “being.” Otherwise I shall simply use “being.”

³ “Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre,” in Paul Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, “The Library of Living Philosophers,” vol. XVI, La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1981, p. 8.

⁴ M. Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, Princeton University Press, 1975.

stand the intriguing shift of the Sartre of *L'être et le néant* to the Sartre of the *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960). Yet the current study does not seek to outline any kind of biographical or historical analysis, but shall be rather confined to a philosophical re-examination of Sartre's existential anthropology. It will be shown how Sartre's phenomenology of freedom gradually develops into an existential-Marxist anthropology of liberation. It is instructive to recall that a thorough Heideggerian, post-Marxist reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* had already been successfully undertaken by Alexandre Kojève at the *École des Hautes Études* in the thirties. As Allan Bloom asserted in the editor's introduction to the English translation,

Anyone who wishes to understand the sense of that mixture of Marxism and Existentialism which characterizes contemporary radicalism must turn to Kojève. From him one can learn both the implications and the necessary presuppositions of historicist philosophy; he elaborates what the world must be like if terms such as freedom, work, and creativity are to have a rational content and be parts of a coherent understanding. It would, then, behoove any follower of the new left who wishes to think through the meaning of his own action to study that thinker who is at its origin.⁵

Innumerable philosophers and theologians of our times have repeatedly stressed the relevance of Hegel's thought to our own generation. Among them are those who support post-colonialist, liberating movements from Third World countries. If the so-called "New Left" found in Britain and Germany (notably in the Frankfurt School) their most renown historians and theoretical exponents, it was from French intellectuals that the "new proletariat" drew their *programme d'action* throughout underdeveloped and developing nations all over the globe. It seems thus that it is not a mere coincidence that both Sartre's existential Marxism and liberationist thinkers have advocated the revolutionary emergence of the "new man,"⁶ of a new society and of a new form of humanism. In effect, this overall program has certainly not been abandoned nor has the Christian-Marxist debate become *dépassé* – however outmoded it has indeed become for many Christians and nonreligious intellectuals. As long as the historical struggle goes on for movements that claim for some form of political liberation, it seems that much of this ferment resides in the very problem of human nature and its destination.

Phenomenology and Anthropology

Sartre has admitted that his "conversion" to phenomenology came about when he began to read Emmanuel Levinas's articles about the German mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl. Husserl's phenomenology, in its profound and radical criticism of British empiricism and psychological subjectivism, found in the Cartesian "radical doubt" the starting point of its transcendental method. As Levinas has written:

⁵ A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. J. Nichols, New York: Basic, 1969, p. xviii.
⁶ I maintain the sexist terms "man" and "homme," within their given context.

La phénoménologie transcendantale sera une *mathesis universalis* pensée jusqu'au bout ... La philosophie véritable et vraie ne sort pas toute armée de la tête d'un seul penseur. Elle est, comme la science, l'oeuvre des équipes et des générations de philosophes. Mais Husserl aborde le problème de la certitude et le fondement du savoir d'une façon étrangère à Descartes. Il s'agit pour lui moins d'assurer la certitude des propositions que de déterminer le sens que peut avoir la certitude et la vérité pour chaque domaine de l'être. Comme dans le criticisme, il convient de se rendre compte des conditions et du sens dans lesquels les prétentions de la pensée à la vérité se trouvent justifiées. Au lieu de concevoir la vérité sur un modèle unique et ses divers types comme des approximations, Husserl envisage les prétendues incertitudes, propres à certaines connaissances, comme des modes positifs et caractéristiques de la révélation de leurs objets. Au lieu de les mesurer par rapport à un idéal de certitude, il recherche sa signification positive de leur vérité, qui définit le sens de l'existence à laquelle elles accèdent. Plus que par aucun autre aspect de sa doctrine, Husserl apporte ici une nouvelle manière d'interroger les choses et de philosopher.⁷

Because of its emphasis upon the "science of experience" as the point of contact between being and consciousness ("intentionality"), the phenomenological method cannot but elevate the place of human beings in its philosophical reflection. Beyond the Cartesian *cogito (res cogitans)* and the Kantian judging consciousness (transcendental ego), Husserl sought to relocate the thinking and living ego in its own correlative milieu of consciousness, the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), so that the transcendental cogito remains "inserted and involved in the dense world of human life," which he calls the *Weiterfahrendesleben* ("life-experiencing-the-world"). The ultimate meaning of such transcendental ego is to be found not in the material, empirical ego, the "*Mensch*," but in the ego qua subject to the world, "exterior" to the world albeit "oriented" towards it. The objectivity of the world becomes thus a "transcendental intersubjectivity," in which the problem of "the other" will always point to the transcendental ego, in a descriptive analysis worked out through the "phenomenological reduction" (*epoché*, *Einklammerung* ("bracketing")). According to Husserl, in such reduction both the transcendental ego and the world-phenomenon intended by this consciousness reveal, as it were, the very meaning of their relationship. As Pierre Thévenaz has so well explained it,

The reduction reveals not the *cogito* alone but the *ego-cogito-cogitatum*, that is to say, consciousness-of-the-world, consciousness constituting the meaning of the world. And the world, in this new perspective, "is not an existence but a simple phenomenon," it is signification. Let us not imagine then two spheres which divide the whole of reality: the natural world and the transcendental field, which would be like a metaphysical ulterior-world (*arrière-monde*) susceptible in its turn of being described, grasped, known as a second nature. There is only one world and the transcendental is rather, it seems to me, another name for the constituting intentionality of consciousness.⁸

⁷ E. Levinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris: Vrin, 1949, p. 8.

⁸ P. Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?*, trans. J. Edie et al., Chicago: Quadrangle, 1962, p. 47 f.

Husserl's phenomenology, by its serious dialogue with Descartes, Hume, and Kant, sought like Hegel to overcome the traditional metaphysical dualism between subject and object, in its search of a new foundation for human knowledge, not on the epistemological level of an ideal world but on the ontological sphere of human experience in the world. The problem of a philosophical anthropology became thus one of the most controversial issues among those who came under the influence of the phenomenological method, from Scheler and Heidegger up to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Foucault, and Ricoeur. In effect, as Heidegger has pointed out, the ancient question "What is man?" occupied a central position in Kant's Copernican revolution of restoring metaphysics by its deconstructing critique. Nevertheless, as against Max Scheler, who set out to explore what might be *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (his last work, published in 1928), Heidegger refused the very idea of traditional philosophical anthropologies, which he saw as an "anthropologism," insofar as they tend to reduce all philosophical problems to the essence of man.⁹ Although he was filled with great wonder at the *mysterium hominis*, Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology is rather concerned with the being of beings (*das Sein des Seienden*) than with the human being itself. His phenomenological reflection is essentially based upon the *Dasein* of man, its being-there, thrown as a project in the world, in contrast with Husserl's *Intentionalität* as "consciousness of." According to Heidegger, "phenomenology is our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible."¹⁰ This is why Heidegger employs phenomenology as a hermeneutical propaedeutics to the problem of being, in his ambitious project of re-establishing a *Fundamentalontologie* so as to "raise anew the question of the meaning of Being." Heidegger distinguishes thus his existential "Analytic of Dasein" from all previous philosophical and theological attempts to understand the meaning of being human. Both the Greek conception of an *animal rationale* and the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of the *imago dei* have failed, according to Heidegger, to "give an unequivocal and ontologically adequate answer to the question about the kind of Being which belongs to those entities which we ourselves are." In his own words,

The two sources which are relevant for the traditional anthropology – the Greek definition and the clue which theology has provided – indicate that over and above the attempt to determine the essence of "man" as an entity, the question of his Being has remained forgotten, and that this Being is rather conceived as something obvious or "self-evident" in the sense of the Being-present-at-hand of other created Things. These two clues become intertwined in the anthropology of modern times, where the *res cogitans*, consciousness, and the interconnectedness of Experience serve as the point of departure for methodical study. But since even the *cogitationes* are either left ontologically undetermined, or get tacitly assumed as something "self-evidently" "given" whose "Being" is not to be questioned, the decisive ontological foundations of anthropological problematics remains undetermined.¹¹

⁹ See M. Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929); *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. J. S. Churchill, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962.

¹⁰ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, New York: Harper&Row, 1962, p. 60.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

Heidegger's *Daseinsanalytik* is based on the fundamental distinction between the *existenziell* (French *existentiel*, "that which relates to the ontical, the *ontisch-seiend*) and the *existential* (French *existential*, referring to the *ontologisch-sein*), the latter providing the level on which we find the so-called "*existentialia*" of *Da-sein* ("*Weil sie sich aus der Existenzialität bestimmen, nennen wir die Seinscharaktere des Dasein Existenzialien.*")¹² These can be enumerated as follows: *Befindlichkeit* ("state-of-mind"), *Verstehen* ("understanding"), and *Rede* ("discourse"):

The fundamental *existentialia* which constitute the Being of the "there," the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world, are state-of-mind and understanding. In understanding, there lurks the possibility of interpretation – that is, of appropriating what is understood. In so far as a state of mind is equiprimordial with an act of understanding, it maintains itself in a certain understanding. Thus there corresponds to it a certain capacity of getting interpreted... The existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk. Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding. The intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any appropriative interpretation of it. Discourse is the Articulation of intelligibility. Therefore it underlies both interpretation and assertion. That which can be Articulated in interpretation, and thus even more primordially in discourse, is what we have called "meaning"[*Sinn*].¹³

Although it is certainly outside the scope of the present essay to examine Heidegger's description of the existence-structure, it cannot be overstated the hermeneutical character of such a phenomenological analysis, as it unveils the intimate interdependence between hermeneutics and ontology in *Dasein's* analytic. According to Heidegger, even before one thinks or speaks, Being is unveiled by rendering language, logic, and thought possible. Now, it has become commonplace to draw a distinction between "the early Heidegger" of *Sein und Zeit* and "the later Heidegger," after the *Kehre* which Löwith and Ott place in the second half of the thirties, and of which Heidegger himself speaks in his celebrated *Brief über den Humanismus*.¹⁴ This "open letter" was written in November 1946 in reply to Heidegger's French interlocutor Jean Beaufret, who had suggested, in a letter to the German thinker, that Sartre's manifesto *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* was indeed an expression of Heideggerian philosophy in France. The letter was originally published in German in 1947, appended to Heidegger's *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*, and was fully translated into French in 1953 and 1957 by Roger Munier, upon a partial version by Joseph Rovin in 1947, along with Beaufret's study on "Martin Heidegger et le problème de la vérité."¹⁵

¹² Cf. *ibidem*, p. 70.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 203 f.

¹⁴ Heinrich Ott, *Denken und Sein: Der Weg Martin Heideggers und der Weg der Theologie*, Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1959. The opposition of Heidegger I and Heidegger II was consolidated by the publication of William Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1963, which contained a famous letter-preface by Heidegger where he explicitly says: "Die Kehre spielt im Sachverhalt selbst." (p. xix)

¹⁵ Cf. D. Janicaud, *op. cit.*, p. 113-134.

Heidegger's explicit repudiation of Sartre's existentialism and the respective *malentendus* from both sides have become, since then, one of the most controversial issues of contemporary philosophy. In Heidegger's view, Sartre had completely misunderstood the former's ontological critique of metaphysics, in part because of the reversal (*die Kehre*) of Heidegger's philosophy towards the truth itself (*aletheia*) of Being revealed (*die Wahrheit des Seins*):

Sartre on the contrary expresses the basic statement of existentialism thus: existence precedes essence. Here he takes *existentia* (existence) and *essentia* (essence) in the meaning current in metaphysics, which since the time of Plato has said that *essentia* precedes *existentia*. Sartre turns this sentence around. But the reversal of a metaphysical sentence remains a metaphysical sentence. As such it remains with metaphysics in the forgetfulness of being. The adequate reproduction of and participation in this other thinking that leaves subjectivity behind is indeed rendered difficult by the fact that when *Being and Time* was published, the third Division of the first Part, entitled "Time and Being," was held back. In "Time and Being" everything is, turned around. The Division in question was held back because thinking failed in adequately articulating this turn (*Kehre*), and did not achieve its goal by means of the language of metaphysics.¹⁶

As one proceeds to examine Sartre's anthropology one can see why, as Thévenaz has rightly remarked, Heidegger was "grossly mistaken" and "that he [Heidegger] has not understood him [Sartre]" –inasmuch as Sartre himself departs from the *Meister aus Messkirch*.¹⁷

Sartre's Phenomenology of Freedom

The Cartesian problematic of alienation between the object and the subject, following the separation and correlation of the thinking ego and its corporeal thinghood, to a large extent reconciled by the philosophy of Hegel, translated for Sartre the anthropological absolute of freedom. Just as Descartes affirmed the autonomy of man ("*je suis*") in his own free thinking ("*je pense*"), Sartre defines human freedom as the only possible way of knowing what human nature is all about. Like Orestes, man is bound to be what he is only by his freedom: "*Je suis ma liberté!*"¹⁸ After all, there is no such a thing as a "human nature" or an "essence" to which would correspond an existential condition of being a human being. Our "*condition humaine*" is given within the very facticity of our existence, and it is only by freely choosing to transcend ourselves that we can be authentic in our humanness. This is, in a nutshell, the kernel of Sartre's anthropology as he outlined it in his first novels and plays, and in the phenomenological ontology of *L'être et le néant*. It is only in the light of his philosophical writings, however, that one may attempt to understand his anthropology. Before the publication of *L'être et le néant* in 1943, Sartre had already known a substantial success with three of

¹⁶ *Über den Humanismus*, p. 17, apud. J. Robinson and J. Cobb, Jr. (eds), *New Frontiers in Theology*, Vol. 1: *The Later Heidegger and Theology*, New York: Harper&Row, 1963, p. 3 f.

¹⁷ P. Thévenaz, op. cit., 176, n. 86.

¹⁸ J.-P. Sartre, *Les mouches*, Paris: Gallimard, 1947, p. 181.

his "nonphilosophical" works, namely, the novel *La Nausée* (1938) and the plays *Les Mouches* and *Huis clos* (both 1943). The fact is that Sartre always sought to articulate his philosophy in the plots and personae of his literary and theatrical productions, in such a way that the philosophical problematics of the human condition emerge not out of some speculative abstraction, but out of the concrete situation of human existence itself. One should emphasize, *en passant*, the dialectical coherence of these three terms in Sartre's philosophy of freedom: "le concret," "la situation," and "l'existence," all of them associated with the Hegel Renaissance and the ever-growing influence of German phenomenology in France. *L'être et le néant* marks in effect the explicit commitment of Sartre's reflection to Hegelian and phenomenological problems, as attested by the problematic opposition of the *pour soi* (consciousness) to the *en soi* (world). Nevertheless, many years before that, Sartre had already been occupying himself with questions about "l'être" and "l'existence," as one can infer from an enigmatic letter of 1929, sent to *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* in reply to an inquiry among French students of the time:

It is the paradox of the human spirit... that man, whose job it is to create the necessary, cannot raise himself to the level of being... It is for this reason that I see at the root of both man and nature sadness and boredom. This does not mean that man does not think of himself as something which is [un être]. On the contrary, he puts all his efforts into it. Hence the Good and Evil, ideas of man working upon man. Vain ideas. A vain idea is also that determinism which tempts us strangely to produce the synthesis of existence [existence] and being [être]. We are as free as you please, but powerless... Everything is too weak: all things tend to die...¹⁹

These naive albeit revealing pronouncements attest to Sartre's search for some transcendental absolute in order to overcome human finitude and assure its freedom. In *L'Imagination* (1936), Sartre critiques Bergson's theory of the imagination, that is "la conscience comme intuition créative." Sartre charges Bergson of "chosisme," in that consciousness is reduced to a substantial form for the things themselves, leading to an inevitable confusion between the world and consciousness. This is why Sartre dismisses Bergson's "durée" as a "substantialization of consciousness." The failure of Bergsonism led Sartre to study the phenomenology of Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger at the Institut Français in Berlin, for two years (October 1932 to 1934). The influence of Husserl's "phenomenological description" is very clear in Sartre's *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions* (1939) and *L'imaginaire* (1940). As in *La Nausée*, where Antoine Roquentin's metaphysical disease vis-à-vis the nauseating "thing" ("la Chose") finds liberation in an aesthetic experience of the "rigor" (in a jazz recording!), *L'imaginaire* uses also Husserl's phenomenology of essences (*Wesensschau*, "eidetic intuition") to liberate man from his nauseating and unjustifiable existence in a veritable flight into the realm of beauty. Sartre's critical appropriation of Husserl's phenomenology and the development of his own existential psychoanalysis reached an important

¹⁹ Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *Mémoires d'une fille rangée*, Paris: Gallimard, 1958, p. 341 f.

climax in *L'être et le néant*, which definitely marks the beginning of his ontological existentialism. Janicaud recalls that it was, in fact, thanks to Henry Corbin's French translation of Heidegger's *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?* in 1938 (Gallimard, "Les essais VII") that Sartre himself came to read the Freiburg *Meister*, as he would later confess in February 1940, posthumously published in the *Carnets de la drôle de guerre* (1983): "Certes, si Corbin n'avait pas publié sa traduction de *Was ist Metaphysik?*, je ne l'aurais pas lue. Et si je ne l'avais lue, je n'eusse entrepris à Pâques dernières de lire *Sein und Zeit*."²⁰ At the heart of Sartre's "essai d'ontologie phénoménologique" is the concept of existential freedom. The concrete, individual existence which Sartre has in view is the one envisaged by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. The Kierkegaardian dialectics of existence has been summed up in a recapitulating remark by S.U. Zuidema:

Indeed, existing is: standing in relation to oneself, in reference to oneself, being-oneself in self-consciousness and being-oneself in becoming oneself. In his existing a human being is deliberately and knowingly occupied with himself, refers himself actively to himself, constitutes himself, chooses himself, appropriates himself, becomes himself, is on the way towards himself, ascends beyond himself, deepens himself, "internalizes" himself, escapes from himself, maintains himself, rejects himself, returns to himself, turns in upon himself, finds and molds himself, accepts himself and is conscious of himself. Man is occupied with himself and sees himself as so occupied; he is occupied with himself, knowing that he sees and knows this of himself; he is occupied with himself "before his own face."²¹

The Hegelian phenomenology of man as the one who stands in a conscious relation to himself was thus "de-mediated" by Kierkegaard's paradoxical existence *coram deo*, as the Wholly Other resists any reconciliation of alterity to be grasped in a totalizing move of *Aufhebung*. Nevertheless, like Heidegger's reinterpretation of the Hegelian *Dasein*, Sartre's "existence" radically differs from Kierkegaard's in that for the former it is the ontological "existential" which determines the meaning of transcendence, whereas the latter maintains the encounter of two different horizons (divine and human) on the level of ontical existence ("*existentiel*"). Moreover, since this criticism applies to both Heidegger and Sartre, in their opposition to the Kierkegaardian "*télescopage entre l'existentiel et l'existential*," it is opportune to add that Sartre's emphasis upon the *existentiel* as the sole sphere where the *existential* is revealed and appropriated has certainly contributed to Heidegger's repudiation of Sartre's existentialism as a "philosophical anthropology" of sorts. If Heidegger substituted Husserl's somewhat idealistic notion of "transcendental consciousness" with the ontological structure of "*Dasein*," Sartre by contrast places himself at the heart of the phenomenological reduction, before

²⁰ Cf. Janicaud, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

²¹ S. U. Zuidema, "The Existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard," in *Communication and Confrontation*, Toronto: Wedge, 1972, p. 149 f. Cf. my "Dialectic and Existence in Kant and Kierkegaard," *Veritas* 46/2 (2001): p. 231-253.

attacking Husserl's vestiges of philosophical idealism. Therefore, Sartre's approach to the ontological problem of man's existence is methodologically different from Heidegger's, and that was an intellectual option which had to do with Sartre's indebtedness to René Descartes and French philosophy. Now it becomes more understandable why, in Heidegger's eyes, both Husserl and Sartre could be charged of Cartesian subjectivism. Yet it does not automatically follow that Sartre's existence was a mere reversal of the metaphysical, essentialistic "ontology" of traditional philosophy. As stated above, *L'être et le néant* opens with a phenomenological description of being, which indicates that Sartre's ontology is to a great extent much more akin to Husserl's "*Zurück zu den Sachen selbst*" than to Heidegger's "*Fundamentalontologie*." It is important however to point out that "Sartre's place in the phenomenological movement" remains an *incognito*, as one can infer from his allusion to "*la Phénoménologie*" of Husserl and Heidegger in quotes, in the very introduction of the idea of the "phenomenon" in *L'être et le néant* (p. 12; ET p. 4).²² If Sartre grounds his phenomenology upon the previous work of Husserl and Heidegger, he does not conceal his criticism toward them and his intention to develop his own ontology beyond theirs. Sartre charges Husserl, among other things, with "infidélité" to his original conception of phenomenology when the latter interprets being and the objects of intentional consciousness as non-real (p. 24, 28); for not having escaped the "illusion chosiste" (p. 23, 63, 389); for having "remained timidly on the plane of functional description" and, therefore, deserving "to be called a phenomenalist rather than a phenomenologist." (ET p. 119) The most serious charge, however, was against Husserl's eidetic phenomenology of essences, which cannot lay hold of freedom – for freedom, according to Sartre, is to be identified with consciousness itself and with an existence that is at the root of all human essence. It is worth quoting this long passage:

Husserl and Descartes, as Gaston Berger has shown, demand that the cogito release to them a truth as essence: with Descartes we achieve the connection of the two simple natures; with Husserl, we grasp the eidetic structure of consciousness. But if in consciousness its existence must precede its essence, then both Descartes and Husserl have committed an error. What we can demand from the cogito is only that it discover for us a factual necessity; that is, as a contingent existent but one which I am not able to experience. I am indeed an existent who learns his freedom through his acts, but I am also an existent whose individual and unique existence temporalizes itself as freedom. As such I am necessarily a consciousness (of) freedom since nothing exists in consciousness except as the non-thetic consciousness of existing. Thus my freedom is perpetually in question in my being; it is not a quality added on or a property of my nature. It is very exactly the stuff of my being, my being is in question, I must necessarily possess a certain comprehension of freedom. It is this comprehension which we intended at present to make explicit. (ET p. 566)

²² Unless otherwise indicated, all the page references are to those of the French edition, *L'être et le néant*, Paris: Gallimard, 1943; the English translation (abbreviated as ET) used is *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. E. Barnes, New York: Washington Square, 1966.

Indeed, Sartre's anthropology overtly proclaims the triumph of freedom over being, something which would certainly outrage Heidegger's subordination of human existence to being. And this divergence does not merely reside in that Sartre insists on dealing with ontical concepts ("liberté," "l'existant," "l'étant"), but it stems from the Sartrean understanding of ontology after all. Even though, like Heidegger, Sartre would concede that ontology describes being itself, he holds the phenomenological description to provide the best *logia* on the meaning of Being. Sartre defines ontology thus as the study "of the structures of being of the existent taken as a totality." (p. 30-34) This is why freedom assumes an ontological magnitude, as an absolute, in Sartre's philosophy: it is impossible to separate freedom and being in Sartre's phenomenological ontology, for they are intrinsically given in the same experience of being what we are, in the consciousness of our human existence. In effect, according to Sartre, one must begin with the pre-reflective consciousness in order to avoid the pitfalls of both realism and idealism: before any subject-object relation or idea, there is nothing which can be equated with consciousness, for everything is external to consciousness. Consciousness is nothingness, "*rien n'est cause de la conscience*" but "*elle est cause de sa propre manière d'être.*" (p. 22) Consciousness appears thus as "*néant,*" an "*être pour soi,*" as against the "*être*" qua "*être en soi.*" Sartre radicalizes thus Husserl's intentionality, as he reverses his phenomenological reduction, no longer a reflection but a nihilation (*néantisation*), unveiling the "*conscience de*" as "*conscience (de) soi*"; that is, as "non-positional" consciousness of itself: "This self-consciousness," says Sartre, "we ought to consider not as a new consciousness, but as the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of something." (p. 20; ET p. 14) Sartre proceeds then to define consciousness as "existence" without "essence":

Consciousness is a being whose existence posits its essence, and inversely it is consciousness of a being, whose essence implies its existence; that is, in which appearance lays claim to being. Being is everywhere. Certainly we could apply to consciousness the definition which Heidegger reserves for Dasein and say that it is a being such that in its being, its being is in question. But it would be necessary to complete the definition and formulate it more like this: consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself (*la conscience est un être pour lequel il est dans son être question de son être en tant que cet être implique un être autre que lui.*) (p. 29; ET p. 24)

Besides the three characteristics mentioned above (nothingness, self-consciousness, and existence) the Sartrean definition of consciousness is crowned with the identification between consciousness and freedom. The freedom in question is, like nothingness itself, transcendental, as a relation of consciousness to the world – and not of the ego to the world. Freedom is not a new "essence" or a new qualification of consciousness: freedom is by necessity always "*engagé,*" "involved, committed, in situation," and therefore the facticity ("*facticité*") of freedom consists precisely in making itself free, as the very being of the For-itself, for "*la liberté ne peut pas ne pas être libre.*" According to Sartre,

... freedom is not a faculty of the human soul to be envisaged and described in isolation. What we have been trying to define is the being of man in so far as he conditions the appearance of nothingness, and this being has appeared to us as freedom. Thus freedom as the requisite condition for the nihilation of nothingness is not a property which belongs among others to the essence of the human being. We have already noticed furthermore that with man the relation of existence to essence is not comparable to what it is for the things of the world. Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom. What we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the being of "human reality." Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the being of man and his being-free. (p. 60)

Sartre's hermeneutics of freedom does not interpret thus existence as the actualization of a being (Latin, *existentia*), as Heidegger insinuated in his attack upon Sartre's existentialism. Existence is nothing other than consciousness, and this has to be understood in light of the nihilating reduction worked by Sartre's phenomenology. Even though Sartre never criticizes Heidegger's work as a whole, but espouses his phenomenological hermeneutic of *Dasein*, Sartre applies to Heidegger his favorite charge of "*mauvaise foi*," in that the German philosopher has fallen into a "pseudo-idealism" with his interpretation of transcendence (p. 307) and has undermined the importance of consciousness, when he remarks that no one can die another's person death (p. 532). Besides, Sartre criticizes Heidegger for the "insufficiency of his hermeneutic descriptions" (p. 503) and for his "brusk and slightly barbaric method" in discussing social existence, *Mitsein* (p. 304). In effect, Sartre follows Corbin's translation of Heidegger's *Dasein* as "*réalité-humaine*" – which Derrida would later refer to as a monstrous, disastrous translation²³ – and sets out to construct his phenomenology upon its "existence as consciousness." Existence, consciousness, and freedom – the being of *Dasein* comes to full expression when it negates what is and defines thus its own values. For Sartre, this is indeed the free and conscious pathway into the totality of the *humanum*. For it is only in his freedom to negate and say "No!" that man affirms himself, just like positive creativity which presupposes a negation of what was there before the act of creation. In the same manner, man is free to create himself and attain thus a positive, worthy existence through his conscious choice to negate the nothingness of existence itself. That creativity, like nothingness, is an ultimate category for human existence will become even clearer as we proceed to expound the anthropology of Sartre's post-Marxist existentialism.

²³ J. Derrida, *Glas*, Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1981, p. 11; "Entretiens du 1er juillet et du 22 novembre 1999," in D. Janicaud, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 89-126.

The Anthropology of Sartre's Existential Marxism

In an interesting article about "Le non de Sartre à la logique de Hegel," Peter Kemp evaluates Sartre's refusal of Hegelian logic against the phenomenological background partially provided by Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.²⁴ As against Hegel, who identified "pure being" with "pure nothingness," Sartre views being as a non-logic entity, which precedes every theoretical attempt of our thinking, being confronted with the nothingness as a concrete negation to determine its being. (p. 50) Furthermore, Kemp points out a decisive rupture between Sartre's *L'être et le néant* and Hegel's *Phänomenologie*, on the level of two contradictions whose *Aufhebung* the French philosopher cannot concede: the contradiction between subject and object, and the contradiction between consciousness and the Other. Because Sartre defines consciousness as "presence" it follows that the *gegenständliche* duality between subject and object is virtually insurmountable (p. 28, 119). Because the elevation to "*la conscience universelle de soi*" is impossible for Sartre (he ironically accuses Hegel of "*optimisme épistémologique*"), he cannot dream of a reconciliation between lord and slave (p. 296-298; 310-334). Later in his *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960), Sartre would allow for the possibility of an equal relation between the "I" (ego, *das Ich*, le "je", le "moi") and the other, but this equality is envisaged not on a logical or epistemological order, it is rather on the level of the praxis (p. 384f.) In brief, to a certain extent, Sartre does follow Hegel in recognizing that man longs for the Absolute and seeks to overcome (*aufheben*) the object-subject and intersubjective contradictions. Sartre even defines man in his desire to be God in these terms: "Être homme, c'est tendre à être Dieu; ou, si l'on préfère, l'homme est fondamentalement désir d'être Dieu." (p. 654) Nevertheless, Sartre cannot follow Hegel when the latter asserts the possibility of overcoming such contradictions, in the realm of absolute Science. This aspiration to *Aufhebung* remains, for Sartre, a *devoir être* (*Sollen*) which translates one's responsibilities vis-à-vis her neighbors and her own self. As we have seen, the anthropology of *L'être et le néant* exalted consciousness as freedom and the idea that we are free to constitute our own selves. Although historicity and concreteness were not absent in the Husserlian phenomenology, it seems that the *humanum* which Sartre tried to define in his early writings was the "universal man" of the Pascalian tradition, "*ni ange ni bête*." Man as a "*pour-soi*," in the Sartrean tension between "*liberté*" and "*angoisse*," is dialectically defined rather as a becoming than as a being, "a being who is what he is not and is not what he is (*être qui n'est pas ce qu'il est et qui est ce qu'il n'est pas*)." (p. 121) The realization of authenticity appears thus as a victory of humanness over the thingness in the appropriation of our own situation. Because we negate that which would assume the deterministic character of an "essence," an "*en-soi*," we become what we are. In fact, as Poster has rightly observed, "both Marxism and existentialism began by

²⁴ P. Kemp, "Le non de Sartre à la logique de Hegel," in *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 20 (1970): p. 289-300.

rethinking the early Hegel of the *Phenomenology*... Both accepted Hegel's early attempt to define human reality as unfolding in time, as an essentially temporal phenomenon."²⁵ As Kojève has shown in his seminal analysis of Hegel's *Phenomenology* it was Hegel's "*anthropogénèse de la praxis*" which inspired both Marx and Sartre in their humanistic philosophy of self-liberation:

..Man exists humanly only to the extent that he really transforms the natural and social World by his negating action and he himself changes because of this transformation... The freedom which is realized and manifested as dialectical or negating Action is thereby essentially a creation. For to negate the given without ending in nothingness is to produce something that did not yet exist; now, this is precisely what is called "creating." In the dialectical interpretation of Man – i.e., of Freedom or Action – the terms "negation" and "creation" must, moreover, be taken in the full sense... Generally speaking, Negation, Freedom, and Action do not arise from thought, nor from consciousness of self or of external things; on the contrary, thought and consciousness arise from Negativity which realizes itself and "reveals" itself (through thought in Consciousness) as effective free action.²⁶

It is my contention here that Hegel's anthropology elucidates, to a certain extent, the shift of the early Sartre towards Marxism. In point of fact, as Karl Löwith has shown in his classic study *Von Hegel bis Nietzsche*, Feuerbach's "anthropologization" of the Hegelian *Geist* opened the way to Karl Marx's critique of religion and his humanistic philosophy of the praxis: "Feuerbach's entire work was directed toward converting the absolute philosophy of the spirit into a human philosophy of man."²⁷ In effect, the Young Marx's appropriation of Feuerbachian anthropology was one of the central motifs that dominated the scenario of the Hegel Renaissance for both Marxists, structuralists and phenomenologists in the France of the fifties. One of Marx's most famous quotes in philosophical anthropology can be evoked to characterize this coming of age of humanism:

Man is a species being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species [*die Gattung*] as his object [*Gegenstand*] (his own as well as those of other things), but – and this is only another way of expressing it – also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a *universal* [*universellen*] and therefore as a free being [*freien Wesen*].²⁸

Although he was employing a Hegelian terminology, the Young Marx was rather following Feuerbach in his critical reversal of Hegel's dialectics. According to Marx, Feuerbach's great achievement consisted in having unmasked the theological foundations of Hegel's anthropology, establishing the "true materialism" and "real science" of the "social relationship of man to man" and opposing to the

²⁵ Poster, op. cit., p. 104.

²⁶ A. Kojève, op. cit., p. 222 f.

²⁷ K. Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, trans. D. E. Green, New York: Holt, 1964, p. 310; 335-342.

²⁸ K. Marx, "Estranged Labor" (*Die entfremdete Arbeit*), in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. M. Milligan, edited by D. Struik, New York: International Publishers, 1986, p. 112; cf. the German text of the Marx-Engels *Werke* edition, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1973, Suppl., t. I.

Hegelian "negation of the negation" the absolute, "self-supporting positive."²⁹ In his critique of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Marx follows the latter as he outlines the history of the alienation process in terms of consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason. However, as opposed to the "abstract" Hegelian conception of the "self-creation of man as a process" to be effected through the "externalization" (*Entäußerung*) of consciousness, Marx appropriated Hegel's anthropogenesis in the "concrete" terms of Feuerbach's communal materialism:

Just as society itself produces man as man, so is society produced by him. Activity and mind, both in their content and in their mode of existence [*Existenzweise*], are social [*gesellschaftlich*]: social activity and social mind. The human essence of nature first exists only for social man; for only here does nature exist for him as a bond with man – as his existence [*Dasein*] for the other and the other's existence for him – as the life-element of human reality [*Wirklichkeit*].³⁰

Although rejecting Hegel's equation of human essence with self-consciousness, Marx concedes his indebtedness to the *Phenomenology's* dialectical relation of labor to human estrangement (*Entfremdung*), particularly as it was articulated in the last chapter on "Absolute Knowledge." Nevertheless, Marx criticizes Hegel for remaining within the "one-sided," mental objectification of self-consciousness, which cannot account for the real nature of man (nor of nature itself, as "the other" of man). In order to surmount and overcome (*aufheben*) the alienation resulting from his opposing of nature (as "in-itself") to himself (as "for-itself"), man must transcend the estrangement of self-consciousness in its externalizing relation to the object (*Gegenstand*) of his thought. And this is only made possible by starting from below, as it were, from the totality of social relations which determine both the nature of human beings and their interactions with nature itself. Thus Marx adds,

Only here does nature exist as the foundation of his own human existence. Only here has what is to him his natural existence become man for him. Thus society is the unity of being of man with nature – the true resurrection of nature [*die wahre Resurrektion der Natur*] – the naturalism of man and the humanism of nature [*Humanismus der Natur*] both brought to fulfillment.³¹

Just as the later Heidegger would admit the *Kehre*, yet without denying its continuity with his early works, the later Sartre criticized his own work, notably *L'être et le néant*, though at the same time maintaining that there was a dialectical pattern which has been preserved throughout his writings. In the case of Sartre, the problem of his identification with other philosophical trends becomes very delicate since he never conclusively embraced either phenomenology or Marxism.³² In fact Sartre has admitted the unfinished character of most of his major

²⁹ Cf. K. Marx, "Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole," *Manuscripts*, ed. Struik, op. cit., p. 172.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 137.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² See the interview in Schilpp, *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., p. 16-33.

works, including *L'être et le néant* and his *Critique de la raison dialectique* – above all, he never published an ontology called *L'Homme*, which had been announced for at least ten years, and ironically coincides with his view of man as an incomplete being, "*l'histoire d'un échec*!" That is probably why existentialism remained the only philosophy really associated with the name of Jean-Paul Sartre. Now, it was in a popularizing lecture of October 29th, 1945, "*L'existentialisme est un humanisme*," that Sartre definitely assumed his *programme d'action vis-à-vis* Christians and Marxists alike, who had been attacking his philosophy since the publication of *L'être et le néant* two years before. Although one should not regard its contents as the foundations for Sartre's philosophy of man, one may take it to be quite revealing and indicative of his search for an appropriate theory of *engagement*: "existentialism," said Sartre, "is a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity."³³ It does not seem that Sartre was asserting anything new, in comparison with the anthropology of *L'être et le néant*. However, the fact that he starts from the situation itself, of "*l'être engagé*," and then proceeds to think man's existence, always "*dans le concret*," that seems to indicate that Sartre was as it were reversing his approach to the "*réalité humaine*." In effect, instead of the phenomenological description adopted in *L'être et le néant*, Sartre goes on to establish, like Marx, the concrete existence of man as the only possible "*point de départ*" for his philosophy. Such is indeed the "irreligious solipsism," as Zuidema rightly remarked, that lies, along with the correlated idea of freedom, "at the root of Sartre's philosophy of man."³⁴ For Sartre's atheism is not a philosophical accident but, like Marx's critique of religion, functions as the ontological corollary of man's self-sufficiency and self-creation. Not in a positivist demonstration against the existence of God – for Sartre is not trying to prove anything after all – but in his explicit denial of any absolute other than the "human reality." As he himself wrote,

Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality [*réalité humaine*] (*Dasein*)... 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. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is... Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.³⁵

³³ J.-P. Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Walter Kaufmann (ed.), *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, New York: Meridian, 1963, p. 288.

³⁴ Zuidema, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁵ "Existentialism is a Humanism," *op. cit.*, p. 290.

As we have already seen, Sartre's concept of "existence" is not simply that of a metaphysical opposition to essentialism (ontical), but presupposes the phenomenological reduction ("*néantisation*") articulated in *L'être et le néant*, on the very order of being (ontological). In fact, Sartre has appropriated – certainly, in his own manner – the Heideggerian *Existenzial* of *Befindlichkeit* ("*facticité*") expressed in *Dasein's Geworfenheit* ("*déréliction*", "la situation qui résulte pour l'homme du fait d'être jété [*geworfen*] par l'Être.") Thus, when Sartre speaks of "projection" he is consciously translating Heidegger's "*Entwurf*", which the German philosopher situates in "the full disclosedness of Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*)."³⁶ For Sartre, "before that projection of the self nothing exists; not even in the heaven of intelligence: man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be."³⁷ Yet Sartre makes it clear that this act of self-choosing is ontological, to be carefully distinguished from the classical conception of "free will" or any idea of philosophical voluntarism. However, Sartre does emphasize the continuity between the ontologic and the ontic, in his conception of a transcendental subjectivism that moves away from the Cartesian ego toward the Kierkegaardian concrete individual and the social being:

Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject and, on the other, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity. It is the latter which is the deeper meaning of existentialism. When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men ... I am thus responsible for myself and for all men, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself I fashion man.³⁸

One is prone to say that Sartre's existentialism, at this stage, seemed to come closer to an "ontology of the social being" (Lukács) than to any other phenomenological "ontology of Existenz" (Heidegger). In this respect, it is interesting to recall that Lucien Goldmann has drawn the ontological parallel between Heidegger's "Being/Existence" and Lukács's "Totality".³⁹ It is precisely the presence of a Hegelian-Marxian *Sozialphilosophie* at the bottom of Lukács's anthropology that makes his view of existence more "concrete" than that of Heidegger. "Concrete" here is to be understood in its etymological sense which, according to Hegel, designates the development (*Entwicklung*, Latin *con-crescere*) of the parts within the Whole, that is, the Totality (*die Totalität*) dialectically constructed by its Moments (*Momente*). The "social" assumes thus, especially in Marx's critique of Hegel, the historical concretization (*Verwirklichkeit*) of the Total Man (*der allseitige Mensch*). In brief, the neo-Marxist rehabilitation of the "concrete existence" of man provided

³⁶ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., p. 186. For Heidegger's articulation of *Dasein*, *In-der-Welt-sein* and *Weltlichkeit*, cf. my "The Worldhood of the World in Heidegger's Reading of Heraclitus", *Manuscrito* XIX/1 (1996): p. 201-224.

³⁷ "Existentialism is a Humanism", op. cit., p. 291.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 291 f.

³⁹ L. Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

a humanist anthropology which appeared to be much more consistent with Sartre's *programme d'action* than Heidegger's subordination of Dasein to a quasi-mystical primordiality of *Sein*. Indeed, the later Heidegger moves even further away from an anthropological articulation of the being of human existence with her social existence, for Heidegger's "*Ek-sistenz*" was meant to "transcend" previous humanist conceptions of the *Menschlichkeit*.⁴⁰ As he has summed it up, in an oft-quoted passage from his "Letter on Humanism":

In *Sein und Zeit* (S. 42) steht gesperrt der Satz: "Das 'Wesen' des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz." Hier handelt es sich aber nicht um eine Entgegensetzung von existentia und essentia weil diese beiden metaphysischen Bestimmungen des Seins überhaupt noch nicht, geschweige denn ihr Verhältnis, in Frage stehen. Der Satz enthält noch weniger eine allgemeine Aussage über das Dasein, insofern diese im 18. Jahrhundert für das Wort "Gegenstand" aufgekommene Benennung den metaphysischen Begriff der Wirklichkeit des Wirklichen ausdrücken soll. Vielmehr sagt der Satz: der Mensch west so, dass er das "Da," das heißt die Lichtung des Seins, ist. Dieses "Sein" des Da, und nur dieses, hat den Grundung der Ek-sistenz, das heißt des ekstatischen Innestehens in der Wahrheit des Seins. Das ekstatische Wesen des Menschen beruht in der Ek-sistenz, die von der metaphysisch gedachten existentia verschieden bleibt.⁴¹

If Sartre's early existentialism had been the target of Heidegger's criticism, the former's shift towards an anthropology of the social being only increased the gulf separating him from the later Heidegger. It seems thus that the misunderstandings of both parts – for I really think they both (deliberately) misread each other's projects – point to some substantial divergence in their conception of the social reality. As Klaus Hartmann has put it,

Bei Heidegger ist eine Sozialphilosophie nicht ausgeführt, aber es ist deutlich, dass seine Auslegung des Menschen als Daseins sozial Differentes impliziert (wir denken an seine Auffassungen über Eigentlichkeit und Alltäglichkeit, das Sein zu Tode), und zwar in einer Weise, die theoretisch wegen der absolut beibehaltenen Zentralsubjektivität des Daseins, inhaltlich wegen des aristokratischen Pathos der Eigentlichkeit, nichts Gutes erhoffen liesse für den sozialen Bereich, wenn wir nicht überhaupt sagen wollen, dieser sei von dorther nicht traktabel. Bei Sartre ist die Beziehung von Mensch und Sozialität mit größerer Explizitheit fassbar, und so kann die Frage nach dem Grund für das Soziale und nach der Prädisposition der sozialen Theorie angesichts dieses Grundes deutlicher werden.⁴²

In effect, Sartre's project of a self-creating man ("*l'homme, c'est l'avenir de l'homme*") can be translated as a negative anthropology ("*l'homme en tant que pour-soi*," as opposed to "*essence*" and "*nature*") in search of its positive fulfillment in the Totality of Being. This dialectical pattern was certainly present in Sartre's early description of the "*néant*" emerging like a worm out of the ground of

⁴⁰ Cf. M. Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, op. cit., p. 9-14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴² K. Hartmann, *Sartres Sozialphilosophie: Eine Untersuchung zur "Critique de la raison dialectique I,"* Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966, p. 14.

Being ("au centre même de l'être, en son coeur, comme un ver.") (p. 57) Yet it was in his preface to the *Critique de la raison dialectique* that Sartre outlined the anthropological project of his existential-Marxist philosophy:

Ce qui s'appelait à l'origine *Existentialisme et Marxisme* a pris le titre de *Question de Méthode*. Et, finalement, c'est une question que je pose. Une seule: avons-nous aujourd'hui les moyens de constituer une anthropologie structurelle et historique? Elle trouve sa place à l'intérieur de la philosophie marxiste parce que ... je considère le marxisme comme l'indépassable philosophie de notre temps et parce que je tiens l'idéologie de l'existence et sa méthode comprehensive pour une enclave dans le marxisme lui-même qui l'engendre et la refuse tout à la fois.

And he immediately adds,

Du marxisme qui l'a ressuscitée, l'idéologie de l'existence hérite deux exigences qu'il tient lui-même du hégélianisme: si quelque chose comme une Vérité doit pouvoir exister dans l'anthropologie, elle doit être devenue, elle doit se faire totalisation. Il va sans dire que cette double exigence définit ce mouvement de l'être et de la connaissance (ou de la compréhension) qu'on nomme depuis Hegel "dialectique." Aussi ai-je pris pour accordé, dans *Question de méthode*, qu'une telle totalisation est perpétuellement en cours comme Histoire et comme Vérité historique... Y a-t-il une Vérité de l'homme?⁴³

In *Question de méthode*, where Sartre criticized contemporary Marxism as "*matérialisme historique*," he sought to work out a new method of historical analysis. In the longer section, *Théorie des ensembles pratiques*, he presented some criticism of the "*matérialisme dialectique*" and set out to establish the role of dialectical reason in the historical process. In this regard, Sartre's *Critique* reminds us of the neo-Marxist "dialectical critique" elaborated by the Frankfurt School and the New Left. It is also within this strand of Marxist analysis that most liberation theologians would situate themselves, in their reflection upon the social praxis, to a large extent following the steps of Herbert Marcuse and Ernst Bloch. Insofar as Sartre's anthropology is concerned, I confine myself to summarizing, in conclusion, the critical remarks specifically related to his own philosophical contribution.

Conclusion

As stated above, Sartre's *Critique* turned out to be an apologetic treatise of the historical truth of dialectical reason, hence an overtly atheistic humanist manifesto of dialectical thinking, very similar albeit radically opposed to Paul Ricoeur's own plaidoyer for a Christian conception of civilization and world history.⁴⁴ It would be, however, misleading to conclude that Sartre was simply embracing the

⁴³ J.-P. Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, précédé de *Question de méthode*, tome I: *Théorie des ensembles pratiques*, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, p. 9 f.

⁴⁴ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Histoire et vérité*, Paris: Seuil, 1955. Ricoeur develops a highly original contribution to the French appropriation of Heidegger's *Geschichtlichkeit* along with the Judaic-Christian specificity and the new insights of theologians such as R. Bultmann, K. Barth, and K. Rahner for a new understanding of history.

Marxist gospel of self-liberation after his disillusionment with bourgeois existentialism. "*La dialectique, c'est de la dialectique*": the Marxism which Sartre was proposing, after all, was the Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre, the existentialist philosopher. Therefore, Sartre's formidable project consisted in resuscitating the individual, "*l'être-en-situation*," at the very heart of her concrete existence in history. Both existentialism and Marxism contributed thus to this dialectical adventure, which had attracted many other respected philosophers and writers, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Claude Lefort, and Albert Camus. On the one hand, Sartre goes on to say:

In choosing as the object of our study, within the ontological sphere, that privileged existent which is man (privileged for us), it is evident that existentialism poses to itself the question of its fundamental relations with those disciplines which are grouped under the general heading of anthropology. And – although its field of application is theoretically larger – existentialism is anthropology insofar as anthropology seeks to give itself a foundation.⁴⁵

Now, the paradoxical fact that anthropology must, at the same time, deny "man" (by the systematic rejection of anthropomorphism) and take "man" for granted (as the ethnologist does), implies that a contradiction has to be surmounted not on the level of knowledge but in reality itself ("*une contradiction plus profonde qui touche au sens même de la réalité humaine.*") Sartre affirms then the necessity of an "*anthropologie structurelle et historique*":

There is no doubt, indeed, that Marxism appears today to be the only possible anthropology which can be at once historical and structural. It is the only one which at the same time takes man in his totality – that is, in terms of the materiality of his condition. Nobody can propose to it another point of departure, for this would be to offer to it another man as the object of its study.⁴⁶

As Sartre mentioned in the *Critique*, such was the "concrete" which existentialism had been tending "towards." Alluding to one of Jean Wahl's most popular books at that time, *Vers le concret*, Sartre expressed himself in these terms: "*c'est du concret total que nous voulions partir, c'est au concret absolu que nous voulions arriver.*"⁴⁷ Marxism assumes thus a Messianic role of concretion in Sartre's "*chemins de la liberté*." And this freedom in question, by its own insertion in an eschatological struggle for the nihilation of its nothingness, had necessarily to arrive at the battlefield of liberation, insofar as *libération* stands for the effective realization of concrete *liberté*. For Marxism alone has provided the totalizing structure which guarantees the historical concreteness of the human genre, the total *Geschichtlichkeit* which transforms the social *Mitsein* not in an abstract "ontology" but in the revolutionary concretization of the "generic man" (*Gattungswesen*). Following Marx's critique of Feuerbach's anthropology, Sartre

⁴⁵ J.-P. Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. H. E. Barnes, New York: Vintage, 1968, p. 168.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174 f.

⁴⁷ *Critique de la raison dialectique*, op. cit., p. 23.

set out to overcome the post-Kantian objectification of man through the dialectical praxis of man as the producer-product of history. As he explained it in his *Critique*,

Nous verrons aussi qu'elle est l'essence de l'homme en ce sens que l'essence – comme passé dépassé – est inerte et devient l'objectivation dépassée de l'agent pratique (ce qui provoque la contradiction perpétuellement résolue et perpétuellement renaissance de l'homme-producteur et de l'homme-produit, en chaque individu et au sein de toute multiplicité). Nous apprendrons en outre qu'elle est le moteur inerte de l'Histoire, en tant qu'elle peut seule supporter la nouveauté qui la scelle et qu'elle garde, à la fois, comme un moment irréductible et comme un souvenir de l'Humanité. C'est à partir de là (trois moments dialectiques) que nous pourrions poser sous son vrai jour la question de la possibilité en histoire (et, en général, pour la praxis) et de la nécessité historique. C'est aussi dans ce moment progressif que nous comprendrions enfin le sens de notre problème originel: qu'est-ce que l'Histoire; pourquoi y a-t-il quelque chose comme une histoire humaine (puisque l'ethnographie nous a fait connaître des sociétés sans histoire); quel est le sens pratique de la totalisation historique en tant qu'il peut se dévoiler aujourd'hui à un agent (totalisateur et totalisant) situé au milieu de l'Histoire en cours.⁴⁸

In conclusion, Sartre's project can be thus opposed to Heidegger's ontological *Entwurf*, as the former sought to establish the foundations ("jeter les bases"), in his *Critique*, of a "prolegomenon to any future anthropology" (to parody Kant's *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*).⁴⁹ In contrast to the Welt-schmerz-like anthropology of *La Nausée* (man as an eternal *homo viator*, groundless and "de trop") and the sadomasochist "être-avec" of *Huis Clos* ("l'enfer, c'est les Autres"), the later Sartre concentrates the ultimate meaning for the *humanum* upon the social praxis. In effect, the "pour-soi"/"en-soi" dichotomy of *L'être et le néant* gives way, in the *Critique*, to a new dialectic between praxis and what Sartre calls "le practico-inerte." That means, for Sartre, that "man" is to the "praxis" what "things" are to the "practico-inerte": "La découverte capitale de l'expérience dialectique," he says, "c'est que l'homme est médié par les choses dans la mesure même où les choses sont médiées par l'homme."⁵⁰ This is why Sartre goes on to define human being as praxis, insofar as her human activity entails the dialectical negation of its negation (the practico-inert), to which her activity is internally related (the human being vis-à-vis the product of her work). Such is indeed the liberating character of human praxis, as Sartre set it against the Marxian conception of alienation:

Il faut entendre par là: l'expérience dialectique de l'aliénation comme possibilité a priori de la praxis humaine à partir des aliénations réelles qu'offre l'Histoire concrète. Il ne serait pas concevable en effet que l'activité humaine fût aliénée ou que les relations humaines puissent être réifiées si quelque chose comme l'aliénation et la réification n'était donné dans la relation pratique de l'agent à l'objet de l'acte et aux autres

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 159 f.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 153.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 165.

agents ... C'est dans le rapport concret et synthétique de l'agent à l'autre par la médiation de la chose et à la chose par la médiation de l'autre que nous pourrions trouver les fondements de toute aliénation possible.⁵¹

Liberation of the whole man is to be opposed thus to any idealistic, bourgeois notion of freedom: Sartre rejects even the determinism of some "pseudo-marxistes," in order to emphasize the dialectical concretion of the negative within historical being. The absolute freedom which the early Sartre equated with the "être humain" itself implies now that liberation is the concrete, history-making realization of freedom, and these two concepts presuppose each other. Just as the French experience of *Résistance* and *Libération* during World War II, the human experience of self-liberation is an actual praxis that refuses a given historical situation. Furthermore, it is only for their own liberation (and for the liberation of the society as a whole) that human beings are truly created as humans. And this liberation is the sole outcome of the humanization of man, as the self-creative activity of man alone. In a word, according to the later Sartre, man is the liberating self-creation of man insofar as man makes himself. History becomes thus the privileged locus of the "true" and the "right," insofar as social being seeks to overcome all the different levels of its alienation. If the early Sartre had already denied the possibility of a priori, absolute moral principles and values (man is free to make his own moral laws), the later Sartre would affirm that "freedom alone can account for a person, in his totality," in that man's self-liberation remains a personal choice. Therefore, "ethics" is a social product of the human struggle for liberation, both on an individual and on a collective level. In brief, according to Sartre, historical materialism alone provides a non-metaphysical ethics for human beings in their search for total liberation:

Le seul monisme qui part du monde humain et qui situe les hommes dans la Nature, c'est le monisme de la matérialité. C'est le seul qui soit un réalisme, le seul qui écarte la tentation purement théologique de contempler la Nature "sans addition étrangère"; c'est le seul qui ne fasse de l'homme ni une dispersion moléculaire ni un être à part, le seul qui le définisse d'abord par sa praxis dans le milieu général de la vie animale, le seul qui puisse dépasser ces deux affirmations également vraies et contradictoires: dans l'univers toute existence est matérielle, dans le monde de l'homme tout est humain.⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 154.

⁵² Ibid., p. 248.