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CHOICE AND UNIVERSALITY IN SARTRE'S ETHICS

Does Sartre have a coherent ethical position? At the end of *Being and Nothingness* he raises questions about the ethical implications of his ontology but refers them to a promised future work. For the student of existentialism it is an interesting question whether any of Sartre's later works offer this anticipated and definitive statement. Yet in the controversy over whether *Saint-Genet* or the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* fills the gap in Sartre's thought, the one concise presentation of his ethics in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* has been generally neglected. This neglect has not been groundless, for the essay, originally delivered as a popular lecture, is clearly fragmentary and at least apparently inconsistent. Nevertheless, the essay is an outline of Sartrean ethics, although it is in need of some qualifications. The need for these qualifications arises primarily from the fact that Sartre neglects to incorporate his own earlier analysis of choice and deliberation in the lecture; yet when this effect is repaired in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* some unexpected limitations of Sartre's position are revealed. The former point leads to an alteration of the form of ethical choice and the latter to a restriction of the apparently universal content of the ethical ideal.

I

The ethical position announced in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* emerges from a series of polemics which Sartre conducts against his critics. These critics — whom Sartre identifies as Christians and Communists — object that Sartre's position is unduly pessimistic and incapable of generating a social ethic. Although such charges were in fact made after the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, it is worth pointing out that their original source is Sartre himself; in effect he is engaged in negating his own earlier positions, an activity which *Being and Nothingness* holds to be constitutive of consciousness. In that work Sartre claimed that "man is useless passion" and that the basic form of interpersonal relations is conflict: these theses of his own seem to be more forceful and lucid statements of the objections attributed to his unnamed critics.

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Since the possibility of a Sartrean ethic depends on the possibility of denying or at least qualifying these claims it is necessary to review their substance. In his earlier work Sartre described human reality as being an absolute power of forming projects or goals. Consciousness is simply a spontaneous and negative power which, by assuming a particular goal, endows the surrounding world with an appropriate meaning. Following Husserl, Sartre describes consciousness as intentionality; yet the object of its intentions is not an object to be known but an act to be performed. Again departing from Husserl, consciousness is not rooted in a substantial ego or self; rather the ego is a construct of past acts of consciousness. In *Being and Nothingness* this ontological description of consciousness is combined with an analysis of man's typical projects reminiscent of the investigations of the classical French moralists. Sartre explains that "man is a useless passion" because, despite the fact that human reality is nothing but spontaneity and freedom, it is anguished over its own infinite possibilities of action and longs for the stability of the nonconscious.¹ It seeks the freedom and awareness of consciousness at the same time that it aspires to the fixity of matter. God is the paradigm of a being who combines these two ontological dimensions; yet Sartre offers an ontological disproof of God's existence, based on the indefeasible spontaneity of consciousness which is incapable of entering into any permanent synthesis with the nonconscious. If the paradigm is impossible then our own efforts to imitate it must be condemned to "perpetual failure."² Sartre also rejects the philosophical analogue of this project, the idealistic ethic of self-realization. Here the goal is a kind of fixed coincidence with oneself which can be disrupted by no spontaneity; again this is inconsistent with the radical freedom which Sartre finds in consciousness. The pessimism which Sartre's ethics must overcome is one rooted in his own perspective.

Sartre's original analysis also seems to entail that human reality is necessarily solitary. The basic relationship with others is conflict, which is capable of manifesting itself in a variety of modes, such as shame, love, hate, sadism and masochism. Moreover the problematic nature of the relationship can be derived from the hopeless nature of the typical human project. The Other, in gazing at me, objectifies me, threatening the freedom of my consciousness. In my desire to maintain my freedom and to integrate it with my objectivity (newly revealed to me by the Other), I see that the way toward my old objective now lies through the Other. In Sartre's words, "my

project of recovering myself is fundamentally a project of absorbing the Other."³ The second objection to Sartre — the impossibility of his formulating a social ethics — again seems to derive from the most basic categories of his own analysis.

What adds interest to the positive ethical theory of Sartre's lecture, then, is that he is seeking to remedy the self-confessed weakness of his own earlier perspective. The solution in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* is one which combines the two themes raised in the objections: freedom and relations with others. One might well ask how a being who is nothing more than a radical freedom or spontaneity could generate any values with a validity beyond the immediate occasion of their projection; and one may be even more perplexed when told that such a value is essentially social. These questions are obvious and not original. However, those who have asked them have not always been in a position to look forward to Sartre's later work as well as back toward the apparent pessimism of *Being and Nothingness*. The question of Sartre's consistency is important, and I suggest that his social philosophy in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is, in part, an attempt to respond to it. Before opening up this perspective, however, Sartre's own statement of this ethical position should be read and examined. In his lecture Sartre says that there are grounds for making moral judgments of oneself and others and succinctly states what they are:

I declare that freedom, in respect of concrete circumstances, can have no other end and aim but itself, and when once a man has seen that values depend upon himself, in that state of forsakenness he can will only one thing, and that is freedom as the foundation of all values. That does not mean that he wills it in the abstract: it simply means that the actions of men of good faith have, as their ultimate significance, the quest of freedom itself as such. A man who belongs to some communist or revolutionary society wills certain concrete ends, which imply the will to freedom, but that freedom is willed in community. We will freedom for freedom's sake, in and through particular circumstances. And in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely upon the freedom of others and that the freedom of others depends upon our own. Obviously, freedom as the definition of a man does not depend upon others, but as soon as there is a commitment, I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as my own. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim. Consequently, when I recognize, as entirely authentic, that man is a being whose existence precedes his essence, and that he is a free being who cannot, in any circumstances, but will his freedom, at the same time I realize that I cannot not will the freedom of others.⁴

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Several of Sartre's moves here are striking, especially when one remembers the apparent pessimism of *Being and Nothingness*. Previously Sartre had only hinted at the possibility of attaining any release from a "useless passion." Now he addresses himself to the man who "has seen that values depend upon himself" and who recognizes "as entirely authentic, that man is a being whose existence precedes his essence." The imperatives which Sartre sketches can be acknowledged only by one who has given up the project of being God. This also entails that he is no longer in bad faith; that is, he no longer deceives himself into thinking that he is or could be a stabilized freedom. In good faith one accepts one's freedom for what it is and does not seek to direct it toward an essentially unattainable goal. At this point two different questions need to be answered: (1) how is it that one comes to be a man of good faith? (2) why should a man of good faith will in the manner that Sartre outlines?

(1) In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre offers some tantalizing hints about the transition from bad to good faith, but does not elaborate. In an enigmatic footnote at the end of his analysis of bad faith Sartre says that his account

does not mean that we cannot radically escape bad faith. But this supposes a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted. This self-recovery we shall call authenticity, the description of which has no place here.⁵

In discussing the ethical implications of his ontology Sartre suggests that the key to "deliverance and salvation" is existential psychoanalysis.⁶ Such an analysis is one which shows, in concrete terms, how various human projects all aim at realizing the impossible synthesis of consciousness and being. These remarks are not explained further. In effect, Sartre is attempting to produce an awareness of the possibility of good faith by a description of the actual modes of bad faith which are typically practical. Given this awareness, which may be enhanced by an existential psychoanalysis conducted on oneself, one may (or may not) freely choose the new possibility. Given Sartre's account of choice and deliberation there is no other way in which the conversion can be achieved. For on this view it is impossible to arrive at the new choice through a process of rational, voluntary deliberation. This is because "a voluntary deliberation is always a deception."⁷ As we

shall see, this claim has serious consequences for Sartre's ethics. Sartre's meaning is not that voluntary deliberations do not occur, but that when they do they always presuppose choices of a prior nature which are themselves non-deliberate. Suppose that I am faced with a choice among several different courses of action. I voluntarily deliberate by considering the various alternatives in the light of some criteria or standards of evaluation. Balancing possible advantages and disadvantages I make a decision. I may believe that by going through this process in a cool and reflective manner I have acted rationally within the bounds of a situation which has simply been given to me. Yet questions can be raised about the source of the alternatives considered, the criteria of decision employed, and even the necessity for making any decision at all or a deliberate decision in particular. On Sartre's view none of these is intrinsically part of the situation aside from my choices. For it is my freedom (or choice) which gives the situation its meaning. I might have considered a wider or narrower range of alternatives; I might have employed different criteria or differently weighted criteria; and I might have simply ignored the alternatives or chosen impulsively or emotionally rather than deliberately. It is true that some or these prior choices may themselves be deliberate, but Sartre's general analysis of choice leads to the conclusion that these choices must themselves rest, ultimately, on non-deliberate ones. A full explication of any choice that I make would lead back, through existential psychoanalysis, to the original choice which I make of myself and which is expressed in all my particular acts. Since Sartre conceives of all such choices as equally free and conscious he does not detect any special relationship between rationality and freedom. I must "will to will";⁸ an emotional choice is no less free than a careful weighing of alternatives and the latter must rest, in any case, on choices which are not careful weighings. In relation to freedom there is no privileged psychic phenomenon. All my "modes of being" manifest freedom equally since they are all ways of being my own nothingness.⁹ Given this account, it is not surprising that Sartre is not more specific about the means of attaining good faith. The man of good faith will emerge only through a radically new choice of his own; Sartre's task is not to provide someone who has already decided on the conversion with a recipe for attaining it but to give knowledge which might help to provoke the conversion itself. In this respect *Being and Nothingness* is structurally similar to the negative way of certain religious mystics. By seeing the futility of the modes of life which are in

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bad faith one may, on his own, project an alternative attitude, just as the man who sees that God is not this and not that may suddenly realize that what he is seeking is categorically distinct from any finite being.

(2) So far Sartre's view is not obviously untenable. For although the transition from bad to good faith cannot be explained as the result of a rational deliberation, it can be explained as an instance of a conversion from one original choice to another. Sartre does tend to speak as if the conversion were a deliberate one based on the acceptance of truth as an absolute value, but this line of thought (which Sartre does not wholly endorse) is misleading for it glosses over the question of how conversion to truthfulness can occur. Difficulties arise when we consider the implications of Sartre's analysis of choice for the second question: why should the man of good faith will only one thing? What is puzzling is not simply Sartre's attempt to introduce something like a Kantian notion of rational will at this point, but his general characterization of the man of good faith in terms of will rather than choice.¹⁰ It is more than a linguistic accident that Sartre repeatedly speaks of will and its derivatives here (*volonté*) rather than choice (*choix*): the context and tone of this central passage make it clear that he has in mind a deliberate decision on the part of a certain type of agent. Even if the deliberation intended is only a secondary one, based upon the non-deliberative choice of freedom, it would be paradoxical for the man of good faith to engage in such a self-deception. The problem is with the form in which the choices of the man of good faith are understood, not (at this point) with Sartre's account of the content of those choices. One of the tasks of Sartre's later work is to explain how to reinterpret the man of good faith in terms of spontaneous rather than deliberate choice; since I will be examining this change in some detail I will simply note the completely anomalous nature of Sartre's account in this crucial passage.

Now consider the content of these choices, disregarding the question as to whether they are spontaneous or deliberate. To say that I choose my own freedom as opposed to some mode of bad faith or one of the many impossible pursuits of being is simply to reiterate that I am a man of good faith, one who has undergone the radical conversion. Yet why should this choice involve a commitment — especially of a deliberate sort — to the freedom of others? Sartre obviously is thinking of something much stronger than the fact that others' freedom may be instrumental to my own. Given

Sartre's radical conception of freedom which sharply distinguishes it from rationality, it seems quite possible to imagine a choice of oneself as an extreme individualist whose own freedom will take undisputed preference over others. There is an even more serious problem here. The lengthy account of relations with the Other in *Being and Nothingness* maintains that my basic relation with the *Other* is one of conflict; how has this restriction on my choices disappeared? It is true that Sartre derived the element of conflict in my relation with the Other at least in part from my desire to be God; the Other objectifies me in seeing me and threatens my self-caused status. Now although Sartre may claim that for the authentic man the Other is not necessarily encountered in conflict, he must go a long way to show that my choice of freedom for myself is also a choice of freedom for all.

Two interpretations of how Sartre might fill in this gap present themselves. On the first account, Sartre is simply declaring a personal choice, one which finds expression in his varied literary and political activity. The gap between his freedom and that of others is simply closed by his choice which happens to be oriented toward universal freedom. This explanation is only partial, for Sartre is making claims about existentialism and the authentic man in general. The second interpretation sees Sartre not as performing a logical derivation or transcendental deduction but as proposing a certain program to be completed. Sartre is claiming that the connection can be shown in a more perspicuous fashion although he is not ready at the time, and in the space of a short lecture, to show it himself. In the meantime it is of value to report on the structures of authentic choice, which will hopefully be realized by others as well, and postpone the task of validating that choice to an appropriate occasion. Assuming that Sartre himself has made such a choice this line of conduct does not seem in any way inconsistent. If *Being and Nothingness* was a kind of negative theology, aimed at provoking a radical conversion from futile projects, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* is a confession of faith. Sartre, being a philosopher, has not only lived his faith in earnest but has sought to understand it. Whereas the first interpretation offered of the anomalies in Sartre's position closes a gap prematurely, this one sets a task to be accomplished and leaves the result in some uncertainty. Moreover, even in the passage cited, Sartre gives an indication of how his account will be filled in. Sartre says that it is in "concrete circumstances" that we discover that our own willing of freedom is a willing of general freedom and he cites a significant example: "A man

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who belongs to some communist or revolutionary society wills certain concrete ends, which imply the will to freedom, but that freedom is willed in community.”

II

In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre fills in some of the gaps. Despite the richness, multiple purposes and even confusion of this last work, it can be read as an attempt to show how and in what circumstances my choice of my own freedom can be at the same time a choice of the freedom of others. Moreover, Sartre will be concerned with a spontaneous choice rather than an act of will: he will try to show concretely the situation in which I choose general freedom in choosing my own. This will support his earlier ethical position while simultaneously showing its limits by associating the concrete instantiation of the goal of general freedom with a rather determinate set of circumstances.

The necessity of demonstrating a concrete instance of Sartre's ideal should be plain. In the case of my relations with the Other, I need to know how the general condition of conflict can be overcome. In an even more general perspective, if the ideal of universal freedom is to be taken seriously, it is necessary to see how it can become the end of some sizable group of people. Sartre himself must have been aware that the radical conversion available to a few capable of existential psychoanalysis or a sensitive reading of his own philosophical and literary works would not be adequate to the content of truly universal freedom as an end of action.

To provide such a concrete demonstration, Sartre needs to perform an existential psychoanalysis of men's projects in a historical and social setting. This requires him to fall back on some of the analytical categories of *Being and Nothingness* which were neglected in his popular lecture and to give those categories a social content which he does through a Marxist account of social dynamics. In the lecture Sartre's dictum that "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" receives hardly any qualification. In his ontology, however, Sartre clearly stresses the claim that human freedom is always freedom in a situation with specific, contingent restraints.¹¹ Given my bodily fatigue, I am free to give in to it or make a heroic effort to overcome it, but I cannot magically eliminate it (although by an emotional res-

ponse I may very well *endeavor* to eliminate it). The factual aspect of the situation is necessary to my freedom, because conscious action requires material in which to embody its projects, while any specific situation limits my choices in the sense of ruling out some possibilities it provides me with an infinite number of others. Despite some of the more extravagant claims of Sartre and his critics, then, his view of freedom is apparently less extreme than those who postulate an absolutely trans-empirical or supernatural (and perhaps timeless) choice: Plato and Kant come to mind as examples of the latter.

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre characterized the factual aspect of the situation as that which is simply other than consciousness; it is the inert (the in-itself) which offers me both possibilities and material for choice and action. The Other enters into the situation by objectifying me or becoming my object; my struggle with him aims at integrating his consciousness into the field of my situation or, if that fails, at eliminating him. In the situation so understood, Sartre's choice of universal freedom appears as anomalous at best. Assuming that such choices are possible, it is necessary to give a fuller account of the situation such that they become comprehensible. The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* attempts to give such an account by providing an expanded analysis of the situation. Now the situation involves both a free consciousness and that which consciousness encounters in the world. It is only the second of these elements which receives a different treatment in Sartre's later work. The world as I encounter it is now seen as the product of social labor directed to the satisfaction of human needs. The in-itself has become the practico-inert or the reification of human intentions. The Other does not gaze at me from a distance (primarily) but competes with me for scarce goods, attempts to use my labor, or becomes the instrument of my own projects.

Since the limits of the situation are now perceived as social and not merely natural, Sartre suggests a typology of possible social conditions which roughly corresponds to the typology of individual projects in his attempt to lay the foundations for existential psychoanalysis. Whereas Sartre had previously distinguished having, doing and being as modes of the human project (all ultimately reducible to the desire to be God) he now sketches in social situations which are functions both of the social structure and the free project of consciousness within that structure.

Actually Sartre offers not merely a typology of social situations but also a

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developmental or dialectical scheme for understanding changes from one structure to another and a categorical scheme which enables him to discern the various kinds of group and individual activities which may be involved in any specific situation. What is of interest here is the way in which this scheme is applied to the problem of showing how one very specific type of choice takes place. So it is appropriate to reproduce roughly Sartre's scenario of that choice.

Let us imagine a number of people waiting in line for the bus to work. They studiously ignore one another both while waiting and after boarding the bus. Each not only sees the others as separate from himself but endeavors to be, at least in outward behavior, as detached and separate as the others. Each undertakes a project of solitude which produces the apparently paradoxical result that "each person is the same as the Others insofar as he is Other than himself."¹² The condition on the basis of which such a project occurs is the social structure which involves buses, large cities, regular work schedules and other things of the sort. It is the bus and other institutional facts which provide limits to the possibilities of our action. I may rebel against this condition by being rude, refusing to pay, or throwing myself in front of the bus, but all of these activities are the solitary acts of a serialized individual. Bad faith has now become a social category, because to the extent that I see my project of solitude as not a project but a completely given and natural state of affairs, I have deceived myself concerning the real relation of my freedom and the environing world. Is there a way in which this social form of bad faith can be overcome, perhaps analogous to the way in which the authentic man emerges from the man in pursuit of being? Suppose that, living in a solitary and serialized condition, a number of people individually sense an external threat to their welfare. Sartre, following the chronology of the French Revolution, thinks of the Parisians aware that their city is surrounded by the armies of the king, but the condition may be generalized. Gradually each sees that he shares an essentially common situation. For each the goal is the same: the elimination of the external threat. The threat is a threat to the freedom of all and my own freedom can be secured only through a common effort. I choose, not through a process of deliberation, but spontaneously, to participate in the collective effort to storm the Bastille. At this point the series of solitary individuals is dissolving because the project of each ceases to be solitude and becomes the common action in pursuit of freedom. Just as the authentic

man is the one who has achieved what Sartre calls a radical conversion from the pursuit of being, so the group in fusion has abandoned the project of solitude. Moreover, it has abandoned a certain attitude toward the practico-inert, which now appears as the field for a common project rather than the limits of an individual pursuit; so that the Bastille, for example, is seen not as a place which I must avoid by a life of honesty or escape from the law, but, because of its arms it is a threat to the group which may in turn be transformed into the group's instrument: "The operation defines itself for everyone as the urgent discovery of a terrible common freedom."¹³ Here the situation of the group is analogous to that of the individual of *Being and Nothingness* who discovers his own freedom in anguish: walking on a mountain cliff I suddenly see the abyss not only as something to be feared and avoided but also as the object of a possible project of suicide. The freedom of the group is terrible because it is anguish in this strict sense of a realization of its own possibilities. For the group this anguish is social because its objects are paradigmatically institutional and practical rather than merely material and because the freedom involved is the interdependent freedoms of the members of the group. Just as the authentic man in *Being and Nothingness* is the one who accepts his anguish for the richness of its possibilities, so the group in fusion can be defined in terms of the consciousness that each has of the possibilities of the group.

At this point it is necessary to interrupt this ideal history in order to see that the group in fusion does (at least partially) fill the gap in Sartre's ethics. In revolutionary situations, each person accepts and, in Sartrian language, *chooses* his own freedom; but because of the factual constraints of the situation this choice is necessarily the choice of a commitment of the freedom of all those in the revolutionary group. It is the fact of our earlier serialization combined with an external threat which allows such a choice to be made. Without the correct set of circumstances I may phantasize about the ideal revolutionary group and even, perhaps, value it above all other ends and activities, but I cannot actually make a choice which involves such a reciprocity of freedom.

Sartre says that "the essential characteristic of the group in fusion is the sudden restoration of freedom."¹⁴ Although this may sound paradoxical when taken in conjunction with the Sartrian claim that we are condemned to freedom as the inescapable condition of all human action, it becomes comprehensible when viewed contextually. Sartre is attempting to produce

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a concrete case of the choice which he advocated in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Freedom is "restored" in such a choice in several ways. Strictly speaking, the individual's freedom never disappears, nor can it even admit of degrees. It may, however, be hampered or restricted by a choice of oneself in bad faith, such that one takes oneself to be a stable, objective thing and a consciousness at the same time. In the social circumstance of serialization freedom takes the project of solitude as a condition of things, rather than one possible project, and so it is "the mode in which alienated man must live his own servitude in perpetuity."¹⁵ In a more interesting sense, freedom is restored (or perhaps created) in the factual aspect of the situation itself. In serial life each person sees the focus of things in the practico-inert structure of the social environment; it is outside himself and it is seen as an objective, inescapable limit. In the group in fusion the others in my social world, who previously were part of this restrictive structure, are now, in their freedom, the condition of my choice. The situation has become more spiritual and less material: the others still constitute a limitation on my choice but they do so as free agents rather than as units in a stable system of functions. Sartre maintains consistency with his ontology of freedom in *Being and Nothingness* by denying that my freedom admits of degrees; but the entire situation which includes my freedom and its factual limits may admit of such degrees insofar as these limits may be merely material, others in bad faith, or, finally those who form, with me, a group in fusion.

The restoration of freedom can also be understood in terms of the categories of Sartrean existential psychoanalysis. In his earlier work, Sartre argued that the three general modes of human activity, having, doing, and being were all reducible to the desire to be. If I act, it is in order to make something, even if my only material is my own gestures or character; I make in order to have, and when I have something, whether it is my own product, another's, or a natural object, the aim of my having is a synthesis with the object had. Now the desire to integrate my consciousness with the thing — as in the case where I identify myself with "my house," "my family", etc., in order to achieve a condition of stability — is the desire to be both in-itself and for-itself.¹⁶ Such a project is undertaken in bad faith; in it freedom seems to aim at its own extinction. In his description of the group in fusion, Sartre gives an account of a doing and a having which are not reducible to being. I act in the group for the sake of an essentially in-

determinate aim, the common freedom of the group : the activity has no end outside itself and freedom is such that the activity is essentially progressive and open-ended. As a member of the group, I feel that the others and I belong together and even that they are my own people. This having, however, is not reducible to being because recognizing the others as free I do not seek to integrate them into a stable synthesis.

While the group in fusion illustrates the possibility of Sartre's ideal choice it differs in one very important respect from the description of that ideal in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. There Sartre spoke not of spontaneous choice but of willing. Yet, as we have seen, this earlier formulation must be rejected because it is inadequate; and in fact Sartre abandons the terminology of willing. I cannot will to be part of the group in fusion for two very essential reasons. First, the genesis of such a group depends upon circumstances which lie beyond the range of actions available to individuals :

The explosion of the revolt, as liquidation of the collectivity, does not *directly* draw its sources from the alienation, revealed by freedom, nor from freedom suffered as powerlessness; a conjunction of historical circumstances is needed; an historical change in the situation, a risk of death, violence.¹⁷

The second reason is the one cited previously : given Sartre's own account of voluntary deliberation, an original choice cannot itself arise from deliberation although it may be the basis of such deliberations. This second point has deep implications for Sartre's ethics. For it not only makes the fundamental choice of the collective project of freedom a spontaneous and a rational one, but also shows that choice to be extremely precarious and fragile.

To see the significance of this last qualification it is necessary to take up Sartre's ideal history at the point where we interrupted it. Suppose that the group is successful, as were the Parisians at the Bastille, in carrying out its immediate goals. While acting the members of the group do not reflect; historical forces and their own freedom have brought them to spontaneously choose this project of collective action. The unity of the group is not ideological, for it has not had time to formulate an ideology. Like all consciousness, for Sartre, the consciousness of the group is primarily a consciousness of an object — in this case an object of action. Consciousness may become reflective but it need not do so in any particular case. Sartre expresses the point in Hegelian language : "the group did not posit itself

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for itself : it posited the objective, and it *became praxis*.”¹⁸ History impinges on the group at this point because there are powerful tendencies toward reflection (and deliberation) which arise from the structure of the situation itself. Once the immediate external threat to the group has disappeared the group will want to plan for future encounters; in order to do this it must impose some kind of organization upon itself and engage, at least minimally, in deliberation about its course of action. Therefore it must reflect upon itself; in this reflection “the group becomes the means of future action by becoming its own immediate objective.”¹⁹ The group is to be its own instrument just as a man’s primary instrument is himself. In each case, following the Marxist model, this self-instrumentation results in an objectification and reification of the agent. If one is to engage in instrumental action one must see to it that the instrument is reliable : reliability entails predictability and regularity. The group, now thinking of itself as its own instrument, sees that the threat to its reliability is now primarily internal. It is the freedom of individuals who may leave or challenge the group which must be guarded against. By taking an oath the group commits itself to maintain its identity and purpose in the face of such threats. The group’s oath is paralleled in the moral development of the individual by the lapse into bad faith and has similar ethical consequences. Both moves respond to the anguished awareness of freedom by attempting to limit, ignore, or deny that freedom. The oath defends the group against the freedom of its own members in the same way that the solid citizen denies his own possibilities for deviant action by identifying himself with an established social role. Bad faith or the oath leads to further parallels in the actions taken to implement the stability which they claim. The individual in bad faith is committed to a course of neurotic behavior aimed at suppressing his own awareness or desire for change; the group disciplines itself by terror which will either frighten its erring members into obedience or eliminate them. Whereas for the person in bad faith the aim is to deny one’s own possibilities, “it is the individual *praxis* that constitutes the suspect for the apparatus of terror.”²⁰ The group repeats the dynamics of the individual on a grander scale; Platonically speaking it is the individual writ large.

The effect of reflection and deliberation is to destroy the group in fusion. From this point on, Sartre traces out the various degradations of the group in much the same way that Plato outlines the degenerate forms of the state. Since these forms are obviously incapable of realizing Sartre’s ideal there

is no need to be concerned with them here, although they present a very suggestive typology of social and political forms. Sartre's final account of the ideal and program projected in his lecture does not escape the paradoxical twist which one finds throughout his thought. In this case the following dilemma presents itself. If collective freedom is willed or deliberately chosen (as was suggested in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*) the fact of reflective or deliberate choice is sufficient to destroy or at least radically transform the nature of the choice; if (as Sartre attempts to show in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*) the choice is a spontaneous one, it is viable only so long as it does not become reflective — and yet there seem to be overwhelming tendencies for such reflection to occur, as in human consciousness generally. The need for Sartre to explicate the "concrete circumstances" involved in his ideal choice leads equally to the conclusions that the choice is possible (if spontaneous) but that it is intrinsically liable to self-destruction. As Hegel would say, it transforms itself into its own other. For Sartre there is no way in which the freedom of all can be rationally willed.

Sartre's negative solution to the ethical problem set by his own thought is not an anomaly. It corresponds to his attempts to demonstrate that "man is a useless passion" in *Being and Nothingness*. In that analysis, which is oriented toward the individual, Sartre mentions several conditions which seem to offer the promised synthesis of consciousness and being. If in a state of aroused desire my desire is satisfied and yet maintained simultaneously, I have attained such a synthesis. It is this fact which seems to lie behind Sartre's notorious remark that "the quietism of the solitary drunkard is superior to the vain agitation of the leader of nations."²¹ Such a state is necessarily evanescent, as is the choice of universal freedom, but it represents the closest possible approximation to the ideal. The same point can be made by pointing out the respective victims of Sartre's negative dialectic. In *Being and Nothingness* one of Sartre's goals is to demonstrate the impossibility of an idealistic ethics of self-realization. If I am to realize myself my consciousness must correspond with my actual being so that I am capable of a complete self-knowledge. Ontologically speaking, I must have narrowed down my possibilities so that they coincide with my actuality. In his discussion of sincerity Sartre argues that such a state cannot be achieved because the spontaneity of consciousness escapes the limitations imposed by the goal. If the target here is Hegel and his followers, the object of Sartre's

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later arguments are the Marxists. The revolutionary consciousness of the group in fusion is as evanescent, for essentially the same reasons, as is the self-realization of the idealists.

In this perspective the optimism of Sartre's lecture appears to have been misguided. In that lecture Sartre managed to reply to objections which were essentially his own only by suppressing the negative implications of his own dialectic. Accordingly his optimistic statement could not have been more than programmatic without a new analysis of choice and the situation. Since the realization of the program, however, was achieved by an extension rather an abandonment of his original method, the negative result is not surprising.

Yet Sartre's result is not necessarily dissatisfying; in any case his own ideal fares better than the ends of action subjected to scrutiny in *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre might argue that we will be disappointed if we aim at being part of the kingdom of ends in the same way that the bourgeoisie of *Nausea* aim at coinciding with their social roles; for we would then be guilty of an extremely complex form of bad faith. Despite the inevitable collapse of the group in fusion we may choose to commit ourselves to an activity which is essentially indeterminate and open-ended, as does the man of good faith when he rejects the pursuit of being. The justification of such a choice is surprisingly naturalistic: since the negative dialectic is inescapable it is foolish to choose in opposition to it.

NOTES

¹ *Being and Nothingness* (BN), translated by Hazel Barnes. Philosophical Library, 1956. P. 615. A more technical and even more categorical statement appears in Sartre's discussion of bad faith: "The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it, precisely because it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself. Human reality therefore is by nature an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state" (BN, p. 90).

² BN, p. 623.

³ BN, p. 364.

⁴ "Existentialism Is a Humanism" (EH) in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by Walter Kaufmann. Translated by Philip Mairet. Pp. 307-308.

⁵ BN, p. 70

⁶ BN, p. 627.

⁷ BN, p. 450.

⁸ BN, p. 444.

⁹ BN, p. 445. Sartre gives this account of emotion in *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. Philosophical Library, 1948. He appeals to the analysis in *Being and Nothingness*.

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10 Sartre argues at length for a distinction between choice and deliberation in "Freedom: The First Condition of Action" (BN, pp. 433-481). The distinction also appears at the beginning of *EH*: "what is usually called my will is probably a manifestation of a prior and more spontaneous decision" (p. 291). It unaccountably disappears by the time that Sartre announces his ethical position. An interesting illustration of the general difference between *BN* and *EH* in this respect is found in Sartre's two accounts of anguish. In *BN* anguish is an immediate consciousness of my own possibilities and is illustrated by Kierkegaard's example of a man on a mountain path who suddenly sees that it is his own possibility to throw himself into the abyss (BN, pp. 29-45). Bad faith is, by contrast, a reflective phenomenon in which I seek to eliminate anguish by denying my possibilities. In *EH* anguish has become both reflective and social: "what do we mean by anguish? The existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish. His meaning is as follows — When a man commits himself to anything, fully realizing that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind — in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility... Who, then, can prove that I am the proper person to impose, by my own choice, my conception of man upon mankind?" (pp. 292-293).

11 See "Freedom and Facticity: The Situation," *BN*, pp. 481-553 *passim* and especially 481-489. In his defense of the continuity of Sartre's thought, James Sheriden ably points out that much of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is a Marxist gloss on this original conception of the situation. See James Sheriden, *Sartre: The Radical Conversion*. Ohio University Press, 1969.

12 Robert Denoon Cumming, ed. *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Modern Library, 1966. (Cumming), p. 460.

13 Cumming, p. 472.

14 Cumming, p. 472.

15 Cumming, p. 472.

16 See "Doing and Having," *BN*, pp. 557-616.

17 Cumming, p. 472.

18 Cumming, p. 472.

19 Cumming, p. 473. Although Sartre speaks of the "consciousness of the group" in several places, such consciousness seems to be analyzable as the typical consciousness of members of the group rather than as that of a single collective or super-personal consciousness. On the other hand, the particular type of consciousness involved is inconceivable apart from the awareness by each member of the group of his complex relations with others in the same group.

20 Cumming, p. 475.

21 *BN*, p. 627.