HOPE NOW

The 1980 Interviews

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

and

BENNY LÉVY

Translated by

ADRIAN VAN DEN HOVEN

With an Introduction by

RONALD ARONSON

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
Chicago & London

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

Printed in the United States of America
05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98 97 96 1 2 3 4 5
ISBN 0 226-47630 8 (cloth)

Originally published as *L'espoir maintenant: les entretiens de 1980.* © Éditions Verdier, Lagrasse, 1991. The text of Jean Paul Sartre is published with the kind permission of Éditions Gallimard. An earlier English translation of the interviews, by Adrienne Foulke, appeared in *Dissent,* Fall 1980, pp. 397 422 (see below, Translator's Note, p. 43)

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Sartre, Jean Paul, 1905 80
[Espoir maintenant. English]
Hope now : the 1980 interviews / Jean-Paul Sartre and Benny Lévy ; translated by Adrian van den Hoven, with an introduction by Ronald Aronson.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Sartre, Jean Paul, 1905 80 Interviews. 2. Philosophers France—Interviews. I. Lévy, Benny. II. Title.
B2430.S34a5 1996
194 dc20 95 35973
CIP

∞The paper used in this production meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48 1984.

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Introduction

SARTRE'S LAST WORDS

Ronald Aronson

Nothing could be more striking: we turn the page and are face to face with Sartre's last words. In tone and content, they are astonishing to almost everyone who is familiar with Sartre. Published dur ing the last weeks and days of his life, these discussions are about past and present politics, about his philosophy, about his newest ideas. Out of forty hours on tape with Benny Lévy, this is the only part that Sartre himself corrected, and thus the only part to which we are likely ever to have access. As we read, we see Sartre speaking to an aggressive and self-confident young man, his secretary of sev eral years and, before that, his post–May 1968 political comrade. Although Lévy has turned from Maoism to the Talmud, he is no less militant about his opinions. He interviews Sartre without def erence or distance, as someone who has read and understood him, has been influenced by him, and has long since become comfortable saying *tu* to Sartre, challenging him and disagreeing with him. This matchup generates a riveting series of discussions between young man and fading star, so unlike the three hundred page and several-year-old retrospective with Simone de Beauvoir published as an appendix to *Adieux,* her last book on their life together. Sartre in con versation with Lévy is challenged to criticize an important part of his life; he moves in unexpected directions, listens to new ideas, and proposes still others. By far the largest section deals with Jews, Jewishness, and Judaism and ends with Sartre's stressing the relevance to non-Jews like himself of the idea of the coming of the Messiah.

The interviews occasioned an explosion: the thoughts are not those of the Sartre we know. Is this really Sartre's voice? Who is

Benny Lévy and what is he up to? *Le Nouvel Observateur* published the interviews on March 10, 17, and 24, 1980. Articles appeared for and against, denouncing Lévy and defending him. Sartre's old friends felt that the dialogues, fruit of the years the young and the old man spent together, really reflect the voice and concerns of the Maoist-turned-orthodox Jew, and not those of Sartre. And yet it was well known that Sartre always thought against himself, and that, accommodating to a fault, he frequently adopted the views of his interviewers.[1] In the midst of the controversy, on March 20, Sartre was admitted to the hospital. He died on April 15. Because it is bound to be seen as his intellectual testament, as his last words, the text becomes the center of a controversy that demands sorting out.

Does it reflect the "new philosophical adventure" mentioned by the editor of *Libération,* Serge July, in the eulogy that opens the Sartre memorial issue of the daily he helped found?[2] Sartre's old friends at *Les Temps modernes,* with the exception of Gérard Horst (André Gorz), were scandalized. According to Simone de Beauvoir, these are not really Sartre's own words at all but have been placed in his mouth by the domineering and self-interested Lévy, who had abandoned his pseudonym Pierre Victor when, "like many other former Maoists," he became religious.[3]

How then to read the text that follows? Certainly it would be ideal if we could encounter Sartre's last words directly, without commentary, but that was never possible, and is even less so today. Lévy, already vigorous and directive enough in the discussions, not only insists on introducing them but follows the interviews with "A Final Word." As if Sartre's own statements were not startling enough, we observe Lévy assimilating Sartre to messianic Judaism. So the reader cannot help but be puzzled about how to read this Sartre-and-Lévy text sandwiched between two Lévy texts.

Wouldn't respect for Sartre's genius, and his powerful contribution to twentieth-century intellectual life, require that we not lend much credence to the reflections of his last days? Especially when we compare the recantations and tentative new thought of 1980 to the 1974 discussions with Beauvoir, taped when he was still fully articulate and capable of complex responses. For the fact is that the Sartre below is a shadow of the genius who made such an imposing

mark on his time. We are no longer dealing with the man who in the 1940s and 1950s made himself into the most hated man in France, or who, as late as the early 1970s, gave us the amazingly ambitious biography of Flaubert; he has become an old man, and has lost most of his powers.

Does not this tragic fact counsel silence, allowing the interviews to pass into oblivion so that Sartre's real contribution can once again take center stage? Perhaps so, but in the "Presentation" preceding the interviews below, Lévy tells us that he decided to offer this edition for a reason: only now does he hear Sartre's voice in them. Sartre, it now appears to Lévy, was detaching himself from his earlier interests and beginning to reconstitute himself in these interviews. He was really talking about an "eschatological morality," premised on the Jewish historical relationship with a single God, and thinking "of a theme like the resurrection of the dead." For Lévy, Sartre's voice guides us to the truth of messianic Judaism.

In the face of this presentation of Sartre, it is obviously necessary to ask the question anew: Whose voice do we hear in these interviews? And what does it say? How does the Sartre of these interviews relate to, say, the man who won, and refused, the Nobel Prize for literature; the philosopher of commitment; the author of *No Exit* and *Being and Nothingness* and a dozen other major works? Enough time has now passed that these questions can be posed dispassionately, some distance in time both from Sartre's imposing presence and the heat generated by the inevitable squabbles over his heritage.

ABDUCTION OF AN OLD MAN?

Beauvoir's account must be our starting point because for thirty years her memoirs self-consciously presented the "official" Sartre. She describes Lévy matter-of-factly for most of *Adieux* until quoting Sartre's adoptive daughter and former mistress, Arlette Elkaïm, as worrying that this young man, who had been taken on to be the blind writer's secretary, "might become Sartre's Schoenmann"[4] a reference to Bertrand Russell's secretary, who played a major role in the Russell Vietnam War Crimes Tribunal and arrogated to himself

the right to speak for the feeble Lord Russell. Briefly taken on as a member of the editorial board of *Les Temps modernes* (probably to keep Sartre interested in the journal), Lévy became furious when Beauvoir and others succeeded in persuading Sartre to withdraw Lévy's interviews with Sartre in Israel from *Le Nouvel Observateur*. He stormed out of his last meeting, calling Beauvoir and Sartre's friends "corpses." She describes Lévy scathingly as a "petty boss," someone before whom "everything had to give way. . . . He moved easily from one conviction to another, but always with the same obstinacy. From the ill-governed intensity of his various enthusiasms he derived certainties that he would not allow to be called into question."[5]

This incident lays the groundwork for Beauvoir's effort to wrest Sartre's heritage from the text that appears below. Without questioning the authenticity of the transcript, here is how she describes the interviews:

> Victor did not express any of his own opinions directly; he made Sartre assume them while he, by virtue of who knows what revealed truth, played the part of district attorney. The tone in which he spoke to Sartre and his arrogant superiority utterly disgusted all the friends who saw the document before it was published. And like me they were horrified by the nature of the statements extorted from Sartre.[6]

Beauvoir goes on to interpret what happened in the creation of *Hope Now:*

> [Sartre] would struggle with Victor for days on end, and then, tired of contention, would give in. Victor, instead of helping him to broaden his own thought, was bringing pressure to bear on him so that he should repudiate it. How could he dare to claim that anxiety had been no more than a fashion for Sartre—for Sartre, who had never taken the slightest notion of fashions? How could he so weaken the notion of fraternity, so strong and firm in the

> *Critique of Dialectical Reason*? I let Sartre know the full extent of my disappointment. It surprised him. He had expected a certain amount of criticism, but not this radical opposition. I told him that the whole *Temps modernes* team was with me. But this only made him the more set on having the conversation published at once.[7]

And then Beauvoir asks how this "abduction of an old man," (*détournement de vieillard* as in *détournement de mineur,* leading a young person astray)[8] occurred, resulting in the "vague, yielding philosophy that Victor attributed to him." It was a case of the weakening old man falling under Victor/Lévy's influence, an influence demonstrated earlier in his political and personal relations.

> Sartre had always lived with his eyes fixed on the future; he could not live otherwise. Now that he was limited to the present, he looked upon himself as dead. Old, threatened in his own body, half-blind, he was shut out from the future. He therefore turned to a substitute—Victor, a militant and a philosopher, would be the "new intellectual" of whom Sartre dreamed and whom he would have helped to bring into existence. To doubt Victor was to renounce that living prolongation of himself, more important to him than the praise of future generations. So in spite of all his reservations he had elected to believe in Victor. Sartre did have ideas and he did think; but he thought slowly. And Victor had a great flood of words; he stunned Sartre and he did not leave him the time he needed to bring things into focus.[9]

A second explanation, according to Beauvoir, had to do more directly with Sartre's physical deterioration. Lévy was hired to spend time with Sartre because he could no longer read. Even if Lévy and Arlette Elkaïm, who was learning Hebrew with Lévy at the time, read the text of an interview back to Sartre, he lacked the "reflexive criticism" that in the past had always enabled him to judge and improve his texts. Confronted with their alliance, Sartre "lacked the

perspective that only a thoughtful, solitary reading could have given him; so he gave way."[10]

Beauvoir does not directly accuse Lévy of falsifying the text it self. Raymond Aron publicly says that the ideas are so reasonable that he could have agreed with them. Accordingly, he insists, they could never be the work of the Sartre he had followed with unrequited interest, and disagreed with so strongly, for over thirty years.[11] François Truffaut, not an intimate of Sartre, writes to Liliane Siegel, who was, that the interview is "pure shit. Those aren't Sartre's words, that's crystal-clear."[12] In response to Beauvoir's insinuations in *Adieux,* Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre finally spoke out publicly, in 1981, in an open letter to Beauvoir:

> When Sartre and I were alone together, I tried to be his eyes as much as possible. As I did with other interviews of that same period, I therefore read and reread their [Sartre's and Benny Lévy's] dialogue to him, repeating word after word as well as the whole text several times, to the point of irritating him, aware that certain phrases of his would be surprising. Sartre added and corrected as he wished. He thought that he would explain himself in greater depth in their future book. I grant that my rereadings didn't achieve the intimacy that one has with one's own text when one reads it oneself, but how could that be helped?[13]

These words, however, do not answer the main accusation: Sartre gave way to a relentless Benny Lévy.[14] With this interpretation, the text that follows has been damned for all time by Beauvoir, recorder of their joint life, source of the official Sartre. As if to replace it with his *real* last words, she offers over three hundred pages of her own interviews with Sartre appended to *Adieux* as a mountain to a mouse,[15] taped in 1974 but unpublished until 1981. Following Beauvoir's account of his death, the interviews are the way she would have Sartre remembered: reflecting with his customary companion, in customary fashion and still with full lucidity, on the circumstances and meanings of his various interests and works.

The problem is that, as Sartre scholars know, time has revealed how constructed is the picture of Beauvoir and Sartre: the model couple leading exemplary lives, including their personal, philosophical, literary, and political relationship.[16] As Jean-Pierre Boulé points out, Beauvoir deliberately sets about creating a certain image of Sartre in their interviews.

> For example, on pages [202–7 of the English translation] she wants to make Sartre say that for him philosophy played a more important role than literature. He doesn't want to agree with her; she insists heavily. Elsewhere, she wants to make him say that he had relations of friendship with women that had no sexual dimension—he admits to only one woman being in this category [306]. At other times, she has a very precise motive behind her question. . . . She acts as someone acquainted with the "real" Sartre. . . . If we so insist on the role of Beauvoir in the course of these interviews, it is because the Sartre/Beauvoir relationship such as it is perceived in the course of these interviews influences, indeed, wholly dictates, the tone of Sartre's remarks.[17]

If, as noted by Geneviève Idt, the Benny Lévy interviews "were sometimes interpreted as a recantation and a conversion to a sort of mysticism,"[18] Beauvoir deliberately set out to reply to these rumors by writing *Adieux*. Idt shows the construction-interpretation process down to its smallest details, including Beauvoir's decision to end *Adieux* with "a selection of his 1974 remarks which constitute a profession of atheism."[19] Beauvoir thereby confirms Sartre's fidelity to his previous choices, affirms that he remained really himself as he died.

> To finish the deceased off properly but also to edify and console the survivors—such is the role of the funeral oration, which always tends toward hagiography. *Adieux,* likewise, contains a success story, memorable and imitable, the exemplary happy end of a man, of a couple, and of an

> autobiography. In a society where a man's last moments still decide his eternal fate, the public was waiting for Sartre to reach old age and death, watching for or fearing a recantation or a weakness, or dreaming of a pathos-laden cliché ridden romantic end. *Adieux* responds partially to that expectation by presenting Sartre's death as logical, serene, and reassuring.[20]

Beauvoir's normalizing strategy ends with the real Sartre, edited by herself, in place of the outlandish statements extracted by Benny Lévy. The latter, she has told us as well as demonstrated, can't be the Sartre we know. Instead, she gives us Sartre through the remarkable juxtaposition of seven year old interviews with her account of his death a year earlier. Thus does Beauvoir present us, for the noblest reasons, what we can all recognize as the commonest form of ageism: interpreting old people so that everything about them remains as we knew it to be. The period when they become different, other, frightening, as Sartre once so startlingly conveyed in the unforgettable description of the normalization of M. Achille in *Nausea,* is returned to its customary order: "He's crazy as a loon, that's that."[21] Whatever is disturbing or threatening *or new* is cast aside, in this case projected onto Benny and Arlette. His final voice, and the interests it reveals, is replaced by his accustomed voice. In her interviews we see again and again how Beauvoir seems to know Sartre better than Sartre: not arrogantly or obstreperously, but comfortably yet firmly, commandingly. Isn't that it — the process of reminding the aging who they really are, of speaking *for* them even while letting them speak?

Thus we have Sartre as a carefully constructed object, a transcendental ego: the real Sartre. The actual subject, always changing, contesting himself, becoming new and frightfully different, is frozen in place, six years before his death. In a reversal of *Nausea,* nothing new is possible: he has become, he is finished. What remains? To be true to what he was, and above all, to die that way. Certainly Beauvoir felt that giving respect to Sartre's new direction was a form of disrespect for the Sartre she had known at his peak. I have said that Beauvoir acted for the noblest of reasons, and it is important to stress

this. She had thoroughly studied aging in *La Vieillesse* (*Coming of Age*), published in 1970, which presents an overwhelmingly negative picture of aging as a time of loss, especially of one's praxis and powers. Now, after recording Sartre's deterioration and death, she chose to conclude by preserving the image of Sartre — the century's great moralist and outstanding radical—at the height of his powers.

But, as Elkaïm-Sartre responded to Beauvoir:

> Before his death, Sartre was quite alive: he virtually no longer saw anything, his organism was deteriorating, but he heard [*entendait*] in both senses [understood and heard] of the word, and you treated him as a dead man who, inconveniently enough, appeared in public—this last comparison is not mine but his. Neither my indignation nor the odious character that you assign to Benny Lévy explains it. Perhaps your way of perceiving his old age . . . Otherwise, how can one understand that you were able to say to him, *to him,* that you were thinking of having a "Sartrean tribunal" meet to judge these interviews.[22]

Think of Sartre's fluid intellectual itinerary to the mid-1970s: he overcomes his individualism to become political (the early 1940s); he overcomes his political idealism to become a realist (the early 1950s); he seeks to integrate existentialism and Marxism (the mid 1950s); he despairs of communism and then the West and becomes Europe's leading voice for the Third World (the early 1960s); he discovers how he was marked by the illusions of a writer (the early 1960s); he abandons the classical role of an intellectual in politics (the late 1960s); he gives his energy to the activism of the young revolutionaries (the early 1970s). Why can't the blind, aging, but always new Sartre now change in still another direction?[23] And what if that direction disturbs not only the Sartreans but Beauvoir herself? Is it any surprise that the one Sartrean who was in no way troubled by *Hope Now* was Gérard Horst (André Gorz) — he who also remained politically intransigent, growing in stature and strength as a revolutionary thinker, himself changing through the 1960s and 1970s (and, we might add, into the 1980s and 1990s)?[24]

RECIPROCITY?

We come now to the second way of reading these interviews: to take them as a kind of smuggled document, reflecting the person that the Sartreans, Beauvoir above all, refused to let Sartre be, containing both his old radicalism in full force and his disposition to contest himself, change, and move in strikingly new directions. Embarrassingly different from former selves that he was, this Sartre is embarrassingly alive. Adopting this approach means taking the interviews as they present themselves, letting Sartre speak, listening to his voice, as Boulé tries to do.

Boulé cites Idt's essay on *Adieux* to help undermine Beauvoir's construction of Sartre, and his own study of Sartre's interviews undermines Beauvoir's damnation of Lévy-Sartre. In contrast, Boulé makes a detailed and careful case for taking their discussions seriously as expressing Sartre himself, and as reflecting the fruit of Sartre's final stage. In a sustained counterpoint to Beauvoir's judgment, he argues that the last interviews with Benny Lévy represent a new direction for Sartre, a move toward actually *living* and *experiencing* an ethics of reciprocity not only in theory but in his very relationship with Lévy.

Measured by the interviews Sartre granted throughout his career, including the one with Beauvoir, *Hope Now* is one of the rare times Sartre can be seen actually living a relationship of equality where he thinks *with* someone else and is actually contested by that person. It reflects, according to Boulé, Sartre's final project, "le travail en commun"—working together with another person.[25] Having no form of work left but the interview, Sartre "moved on [*est passé*] to *discussion* and to *reciprocity*. This evolution is not due to senility but is the end result of a reflection pursued for his entire life on the duality of subject and object. It represents equally the transcendence of the Cartesian dualism, which was the foundation-stone of *Being and Nothingness*."[26]

If Beauvoir's story focuses on the "abduction of an old man" who nevertheless died true to himself and his original choices, Boulé's account gives us a story of growth, moving beyond philosophical limitations, culminating in reciprocity and plural thought.

Engaging in daily reading and talking with Lévy, who was hired in response to the stroke that left him virtually blind in 1973, Sartre slowly moves beyond the emotional and physical crises created by his semiblindness (and the depression evident in his 1974 interviews), and with Lévy hatches new major projects: first a television series on the history of freedom, and then the book *Pouvoir et liberté*. As a result, Sartre is also more active and aggressive in what has now become his sole mode of thinking: discussion. A few of his other interviews of this period, notably those with Michel Contat[27] and Michel Sicard,[28] grow beyond the flat mode of interviewer-interviewee into genuine interaction. But *Hope Now* goes even farther in this direction, reflecting "a concrete experience, the Sartre/Lévy relationship, which is the living proof of reciprocity."[29] Even as these discussions are taking place, Sartre looks forward to the work that will more systematically reflect this process, their collective book whose goal is to develop a new ethical basis for the left.

BETWEEN TWO STRONG SYSTEMS?

But there are problems in reading the discussions as the unambiguous assertion of growth and a new direction. For years Sartre stressed that he and Benny Lévy were thinking together. He even indicated his chagrin that the tenor of these dialogues, focusing as they do on *Sartre's* thought, fails to capture the actual working relationship between Sartre and Lévy (sec. 5). So are we hearing his own words or Lévy's, or, because produced jointly, neither-and-both—that is, *theirs*? Do we go into the text looking for a joint voice, only to discover the conventional form of interviewer-interviewee, dealing with Sartre's ideas? We cannot help asking whose voice is Sartre's.

Moreover, doesn't taking the interviews as a kind of culmination reflect in its disregard for aging a quite different kind of ageism, one that ignores growing weakness, dependency, and the approach of death? Sartre, after all, was not only blind but, as the interview with Contat poignantly testifies, had lost much of his physical functioning.[30] Unable to write, he was equally unable to be alone. His last

years were lived in a state of near-complete dependency. Contrary to Elkaïm-Sartre's affirmation, we will see John Gerassi indicate below that Sartre was not always lucid near the end. That is, if she is right to say, "he heard [*entendait*] in both senses of the word," it would be an exaggeration to say that he did so on all occasions. At a March 1979 colloquium organized by Lévy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Edward Said notes that Sartre appeared "quite absent" and spoke in a series of "ritualistic, emotionless formulas."[31] Boulé does not face this situation squarely. Whatever else it may have meant, Sartre's new stress on "plural thought" also reflects his acceptance of his condition: there was no other way he could think, or act, or live. In his "new ideas" Sartre is doing no more and no less than embracing the ever more limited situation in which he finds himself at the end of his life. He *needs* Benny Lévy if he is to think at all. As Annie Cohen-Solal observes:

> Indeed, Victor was caught in an impossibly ambiguous role. He had almost complete power over Sartre: he was punctually at his door at eleven every morning, he stirred him out of his somnolence and torpor, he was paid to keep him alert and informed and to provide him with all the books that might interest him. He had to work for Sartre as well as with him, according to the myth of equality. In any case, their relationship was a bit false from the start. Sartre was aware of it and tried to explain it to Victor during one of the discussions they had for *Libération* in 1977. "Either I am a doddering old fool you want to manipulate, or a great man from whom you expect to get food for your thoughts. There are two possibilities. But there is a third one, the best one: we could be equals."[32]

Or, as *Hope Now* shows, perhaps there is a fourth: that *all three* possibilities might be realized. The reader will notice, for example, the dialogue about Sartre as a fellow traveler, in which Lévy pursues him vigorously, pushing for ever greater acknowledgment of mistakes. Lévy's bad faith on this issue becomes evident when placed alongside a similar discussion that took place seven years ear-

lier in *On a raison de se révolter*. In the first two chapters—over thirty pages—of this dialogue with militants Pierre Victor (Lévy) and Phi lippe Gavi, Sartre's relations with Communism are explored. Sartre is frank and sober about his role as a fellow traveler, and shows himself to be more complex and subtle—both more historical and less moralistic than Lévy in his judgments of the French Com munist Party. He uses analyses from *Critique of Dialectical Reason* to stress that the PCF could not have been expected to behave in any way other than it did. And he partakes, somewhat less than Lévy and Gavi, of the myth of the revolutionary working class the stress on its militancy, the lack of a need for revolutionary theory. Why does Lévy so doggedly insist on repeating the discussion, more superficially although with an even greater insistence on Sartre's mistakes, in the dialogues below? The fact is that this is not merely a discussion between the two of them; Lévy deliberately and self consciously directs it at an audience. But to what purpose?

Cohen-Solal's point is that Beauvoir did not build her negative evaluation on thin air. Liliane Siegel, one of Sartre's many female intimates, quotes Sartre's account of his interaction with Lévy: "Pierre would quite like to absorb me. Some days he baits me, we have a row, sometimes that amuses me and I stand up to him, but at other times it bores me so I give in."[33]

Boulé mentions not a word of the many accounts accusing Benny Lévy of being arrogant, domineering, opportunistic, dog matic, and inauthentic, but these accounts can hardly be ignored. In his political prose poem *1989,* Roland Castro describes him as "the least humane of all leftists. He is a monstrous mix of cynicism and mysticism. Hypocritical as a Jesuit parish priest in the colonies."[34] Cohen-Solal cites several such accounts as she explores the relation ship which she considers essential to understanding Sartre's last years.[35] And she herself uncharacteristically concludes that his "new friends . . . may well have pushed him too far and, with his own consent, thrown his reputation into question."[36] In fact, Cohen Solal's treatment of this period of Sartre's life is one of the very best moments of her biography of Sartre. Here she engages her subject with a sympathy found nowhere else in her text, and even begins to assume, however cautiously, an unaccustomed authority.

Cohen-Solal painstakingly reconstructs Sartre's relationship with Benny Lévy and its meaning for Sartre during his declining years. In her analysis, Sartre at the end of his life was caught between "two strong systems," warring worlds equally insensitive and, although they both cared about "their" Sartre, equally self-interested: Beauvoir and his old friends around *Les Temps modernes,* the "guardians of the Sartrean Truth," and the new friends upon whom he had become dependent, Benny Lévy and Arlette Elkaïm.[37] The former represented his past and, in a sense, his death; moreover, they had their own work and had little patience for his growing weakness, his slowness, and (to quote Jean Pouillon) his "difficulty following a normal conversation."[38]

They thought absurd his "dream of sharing an intellectual future with Victor, a dream that Victor helped foster,"[39] but they knew that it entertained Sartre and gave him something to look forward to. "Everybody knew that Sartre's plan to 'experiment with new forms of writing with another person' was more the delusion of an old man who refused to give up than a viable new approach."[40] Victor/Lévy, on the other hand, took it seriously. As activist and intellectual he represented a possible future and thus life, vitality, the chance for Sartre of being new again. He imposed his own enthusiasms on Sartre, exhausted him with his passions. Thus does Cohen-Solal's account return us to Beauvoir's: to continue feeling alive Sartre joined with those who demanded that he renounce, indeed, betray himself.

A WILY OLD MAN?

But did he? As insightful as Cohen-Solal's discussion is, it contains yet another sort of ageism: the myth of the helpless object. Sartre's physical, emotional, and even intellectual deterioration leads to his being seen as no more than a plaything of contending forces. It is as if he has ceased completely to determine his own behavior and has simply submitted to those around him. AIDS activism and the movement for assisted suicide should remind us of the quintessentially Sartrean point that even those who are dying can choose how

they shall die: human freedom extends that far. A Sartrean interpretation of Sartre's last words will acknowledge both weakness and pressures, as well as the approach of the end, but above all it will *not reduce his actions to these objective processes.* Although Beauvoir quotes from Sartre repeatedly in *Coming of Age,* her relentless exploration of enfeeblement is fundamentally non-Sartrean; even the enfeebled still act, and their actions are still meaningful.[41] A non-ageist reading of his last words avoids the trap of seeing him (1) as merely mouthing what he must to keep Benny Lévy's goodwill; or (2) as believing and being just what he says; or (3) as no more than the product of his dependency who bows to the demands imposed on him by his warring families. We should no more now than at any other point in his career deny the possibility of change or dismiss his capacity to say multiple things at the same moment.[42] Sartre himself is speaking to us, if not always transparently and straightforwardly, in these interviews. That is, we should still give him credit for being able to act, even if in a situation which, because of its conflicting and overwhelming demands, severely circumscribed and enfeebled his action.

This approach draws support from a discussion between Sartre and John Gerassi. Gerassi writes:

> In the last two years of his life, Sartre was made to seem to repudiate his total achievements. . . . Surrounded by petty Stalinists, Sartre's history was totally rewritten even before he died. To his old "family," to Simone de Beauvoir, to me, it was all one hell of a manipulation.
>
> But was it?
>
> "Tell me, Sartre," I asked him in 1979 during one of his rare moments of lucidity, "is it true that you have renounced the dialectic and found God?"
>
> He exploded in his famous gutteral laughter. "I tell them what they want to hear," he finally answered me, "but don't you print that until they have all published their *new* analyses."[43]

Sartre goes on to tell Gerassi about how he welcomes, even seeks, publicity—"An article or a book which claimed that I had all

along been influenced by the Talmud, by the Cabal, by the Koran for that matter, or Loyola's exercises? Eh? A *scandale,* right?[44] in order to keep being read during the ascendancy of the right. Gerassi gives us a Sartre whose every action deliberately sets out, *even in his choice of Gerassi as his biographer,* to create a very specific impression. Gerassi testifies to a Sartre who is very different from the relentless fame-seeker of Annie Cohen-Solal; he is the *adulte terrible*—the revolutionary intellectual forever identifying with the powerless and oppressed and forever speaking truth to power.

If, in other words, we have seen it argued that Benny Lévy was manipulating Sartre, why not see the old man, however infirm, as skillfully manipulating his situation, right down to and including the choice of his interlocutors and biographer? Sartre as manipulator: this often appears in triangular relationships that reflect what Michel Contat calls Sartre's "wily side."

> For Sartre the trio corresponded more or less deliberately to the basic pattern of his life. One always says "Sartre-Beauvoir," but in reality and quite early in the couple's evolution a triangular relationship was formed: Sartre, Beauvoir, and someone else. This undoubtedly reproduces Sartre's original childhood relationship: Poulou–Anne-Marie Schweitzer Karlémami (Grandfather Schweitzer absorbs his spouse as if the grandparents were one and the same person). In a sense this also characterizes *No Exit,* this time negatively. It reproduces the hellish adolescent relationship: Poulou–Mme. Mancy–M. Mancy. Sartre recreates it spontaneously, or at least tries to improve upon it in all his personal relationships, which are never dual but always triangular. It is as if occupying the apex of the triangle permitted Sartre, through clever affective manipulations of the two other partners, to maintain control. He is at the center of their relationship even in his absence and hence remains the trio's principal character. This trio is not always made up of one man and two women, as is the case in *No Exit.* All three variations are possible.[45]

Thus we should not be surprised to find this trait in the relationships of Sartre's final years. According to Liliane Siegel's recollection, for example, Sartre's words about Lévy wanting to "absorb me" were followed by her questioning his praising the cooking upon coming back from visiting Victor/Lévy, his family and friends, in Groslay, a suburb of Paris:

> "I don't go there very often, and anyway food doesn't matter so much any more. They go to a lot of trouble, you know. And anyway, it amuses me to watch Pierre's evolution."
>
> "You lie to him. But I thought you were fond of him."
>
> "I am, and I'm fond of Arlette too. You're asking stupid questions! Castor's the only person I never lie to, but it would take too long to explain. Don't you ever lie? And yet you're fond of them both!"[46]

Whether or not we agree that Sartre never lied to Beauvoir, this and the exchange with Gerassi convey an important feature of Sartre's relationships: Sartre's creating of circles of intimacy with a second person by sharing confidences about a third. This does not completely rule out the intimacy and good-faith relationship with the third, or indeed with the second, but it mitigates the degree of sincerity we are to attribute to any single relationship.

Or, more to the point, to any one discussion. Rather than taking the wily old man's remarks at face value, we are best advised to see in them the kind of multiple meanings that Sartre was able to achieve in writing and that he originally complained about being unable to achieve once he had lost his sight. As we have heard Beauvoir say, and Elkaïm-Sartre confirm, Sartre the writer prized the ability to reread and rewrite. In 1975 he told Contat that although incapacitated by blindness, he would make a sincere attempt to achieve with a tape recorder the multiple meanings that he used to be able to achieve with the pen.

Enfeebled, dependent, blind, but still acting, and with multiple intentions: this is how we can best read the Sartre who appears in these

interviews. What then might Sartre be saying in them? What do we find if we approach Sartre's last words as the intentional work of Sartre himself, and so as saying more than one thing at the same time, indeed as quite possibly saying *all* of the things attributed so far? If first we look for his broad intentions, we should recall that contesting himself is nothing new for Sartre—that he has done so again and again during his life, and doing so at the end of his life is no great surprise. And we have already noted evidence of one major goal: to cause a scandal. We have also heard Sartre himself say that at times he concurred with Lévy in order to preserve their relationship, which he found important. And I have insisted above that it would be ageism to deny the possibility of his thought changing; indeed, Boulé quotes a number of remarks indicating that Sartre himself spoke of developing new ideas.[47] Furthermore, we can also find testimony about a more particular goal, or at least an expectation, of Sartre: that the interviews would shock his old friends.[48]

These are at least some of the intentions we can expect to find in the text. Accordingly, let us now look directly at the interviews themselves, noting some of their most remarkable features.

THE SARTRE-LÉVY RELATIONSHIP

For most readers, the most striking aspect of the interviews on a first reading is likely to be the relationship of Sartre and Benny Lévy. This is of course what so outraged many in the Sartre "family"—this brash former Maoist they had no connection with, saying *tu* to Sartre when his intimates, including Beauvoir herself, always said *vous!* Lévy's tone of easy equality is obvious from the first word, as is his familiarity with Sartre's work, as is his disposition to challenge the great man, as is his peremptory, sometimes sarcastic manner, which appears not merely self-confident or aggressive but arrogant. And missing from the interview is any sign of special respect or deference for Sartre, even though the interview is about Sartre's ideas.

Also missing is reciprocity. Both speakers are aware of playing to an audience (6) and of creating a text about Sartre, which is per-

haps why Sartre is frequently forced to defend his actions and his thought. Lévy, rather than allowing himself to appear as vulnerable as he insists on Sartre's being, is again and again on the attack. For example, Lévy tries to sum up a lengthy discussion of the idea that "man is a useless passion":

> Lévy: . . . A cafe waiter, a public leader—Hitler or Stalin—a Parisian drunkard, a revolutionary militant Marxist, and Jean-Paul Sartre—all these people seemed to have this much in common: even though they all assigned themselves goals, all of them failed.
>
> Sartre: I didn't say exactly that, you exaggerate. (1)

Lévy gives Sartre an especially hard time about his relationship with Communism in the early 1950s and his espousal of violence as positive, particularly in reference to the Algerian struggle of the late 1950s and early 1960s. With regard to the former, as mentioned above, *On a raison de se révolter* opens with a far longer, as well as more insightful and detailed, discussion of Sartre as fellow traveler. In light of the fact that they had already discussed this matter several years earlier, Lévy's insistence is puzzling. Does it stem from Lévy's extreme anti-Communism, his judgmentalism about complex historical events that appears elsewhere in the interviews, or from his opportunistic desire to recreate the earlier discussion for a far wider audience? Whatever the case, there is something exaggerated, indeed inauthentic, about the former Maoist's intent pursuit of Sartre on this issue.

With regard to the theme of violence, Lévy looks for Sartre's motives for having once espoused violence as redemptive, and in the process he comes as close as he will to admitting a past mistake ("Militant stupidity was our norm" at *La Cause du Peuple* [10]). Going on to cite Sartre's childhood project of righting the world's wrongs, Lévy totally misunderstands the extent to which violence has been a structural part of Sartre's political personality and philosophy; he ignores the fact that violence has to be dealt with as analysis and argument as well as biography.[49] Although he wrings admissions from Sartre on both questions, he does so with such a

lack of understanding, not to say appreciation, that we can scarcely ignore the force of Sartre's resistance at each step of the first interrogation (captured in his "I know, I know" [2]) or his concluding qualification at the end of the second, "In part, yes; in part, certainly" [10]).

Obviously, Lévy does not dominate Sartre in either exchange, any more than he does in the exchange about failure. Still, outwardly it is Lévy who is in control. Note that he steers the discussion from beginning to end: he initiates the opening interchange about hope (1); he tries but fails to shift the discussion of the *ens causa sui* to "a specific theological tradition" that runs "from Christianity to Hegel" (2); he demands that Sartre admit the mistakes of his period as a fellow traveler (2); at several points he calls attention to the fact that Sartre is abandoning his earlier ideas (1, 5, 10). As I have indicated, Lévy presses Sartre to admit mistakes in his argument for revolutionary violence in his preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (10). He feeds Sartre his lines at one point when the latter apparently doesn't recall the key term for one of their joint ideas: "The answer is on the tip of your tongue, I think. We are talking about the brotherhood of the insurgents of 1793" (6). And it is Lévy who introduces the long and surprising discussion of *Judéité*—Jewishness—that concludes the book (12), and who signals the end of the interviews (p. 108). In the process of this discussion Lévy poses one question that sounds like an obvious prompt, coming as it does from someone who has shared so much reading and conversation with him on the subject:

> At the time of *Anti-Semite and Jew,* you thought that the Jew—let's put this provocatively—was an invention of anti-Semites. In any event, according to you there was no such thing as Jewish thought, no such thing as Jewish history. Have you changed your way of thinking? (12)

Of course Sartre has, he will tell us, and this is precisely because of his relationship with Lévy!

Most remarkable about their interaction, however, is not Lévy's pursuit of Sartre's alleged errors or his role in directing the conver-

sation, but rather the strength with which Sartre resists his interlocutor's conclusions, ideas, directions, albeit without conflict. One of Sartre's strongest moments is his reaffirmation of the need to go beyond the extension of liberal-democratic politics Lévy seems to be advocating. The former Maoist leader actually appears on the defensive when Sartre insists that radical politics means more then extending electoral democracy (7).

A few pages later, Lévy tries in vain no less than eight times to have Sartre admit that he is speaking in mythological terms with his scandalous idea that "all men are brothers in the sense that they came from the womb of a woman" (9). Lévy cannot accept Sartre's repeated insistence that this is a real and not a mythical relationship. Elsewhere Sartre disagrees quite openly with Lévy in several places, as I have mentioned—for example, about his role as a fellow traveler and, within this, about the appropriate use of the term "Stalinism" (2); about Lévy's giving the left total responsibility for its own violence (11); and, not responding to Lévy's fear of the anti-Semitic potential of mass movements, about the positive relationship between Jews and social revolution (12). Although agreeing again and again with Lévy's conclusions or his formulations of Sartre's ideas, Sartre manages to make clear that his agreement is not quite complete in no less than a dozen places with a variety of qualifications, using formulas such as: "If you like" (2); "Yes, but only roughly" (2); "Sure, there is something in that" (10); "I will keep my reservations for later" (11); and "I think you're not wrong" (12). And although Sartre picks up on the discussion of Jewishness introduced by Lévy, he runs away with it, as we shall soon see, by brushing past Lévy's concerns and turning Lévy's growing orthodox Jewish interest in messianism to his own purposes.

SARTRE'S INTENTION

What are Sartre's purposes? Gerassi quotes him as wanting to create a scandal in order to be read, but he is not doing this for reasons of sheer vanity. In these discussions Sartre is reviewing his life and thought, in so doing both admitting mistakes and defending himself

against Lévy; he is also demonstrating their process of thinking together; and he is openly speculating in a number of new directions. If upon close reading we see him deliberately creating a scandal to attract readers, at once accommodating and resisting his interlocutor, can we also look for an overriding purpose emerging alongside and within these various, sometimes even conflicting, intentions? Since his recantations and new ideas created a brouhaha that has swirled about *Hope Now,* we should attempt to situate these in the context of a dominant goal.

Of course, a good deal is working against our finding such an intention: Lévy's vigorous control of the agenda; Sartre's self-conscious stress on their joint work; the blindness that, as we saw above, forced him to give up writing and militated against his assuming the author's role with regard to the text. Also, we must admit, much of Sartre's thought is manifestly feeble: his opening idea of hope is tepid and doesn't begin to adequately address his "useless passion" argument; his characterizations of Marxism are surprisingly crude coming from one of the geniuses of Western Marxism; in spite of several years of their interaction, it is surprising that most of the interesting Sartre/Lévy ideas are mere outlines for *Pouvoir et Liberté,* presented schematically, still to be developed in the future. Still, a loss of customary force and complexity is not the same as a loss of intentionality or even originality. I have warned against the ageism that would deny that Sartre is acting, even in complex ways, in these interviews; it is time to see how far his wiliness informs them. We have seen his multiple intentions, yes, but does he have a clear direction?

In fact, Sartre states his purpose early on: "I would like our discussion here both to sketch out an ethics and to find a true guiding principle for the left" (2). Sartre's goal in *Hope Now* is to indicate the philosophical foundation of a revived Left-wing politics. And this foundation will be an ethics, a project whose completion has eluded him for over thirty years. In the interviews we see that virtually the entire discussion Sartre initiates is concerned first with reaffirming his revolutionary political commitments in the face of defeat, and second with outlining new theoretical bases for these hopes.

Certainly the interviews do not at all begin in this vein. Upon close reading, however, it turns out that Sartre's guiding principle, called "working toward society" (2) and, later, "fraternity," is posited as the alternative to the famous Sartrean "spirit of seriousness" whose failure raised the question of hope with which the interviews began. In response to Lévy, Sartre initially describes hope as believing that an action we have undertaken, or that concerns us or the group we belong to, "is in the process of being achieved, will be achieved," and will be favorable for us and our community (1). This discussion is immediately eclipsed by the startling revelation that Sartre himself never felt anguish and only used the term in *Being and Nothingness* because it was fashionable in the 1930s. But in spite of the scandalous touch there is an inner logic here, even if it does not appear in many of Lévy's subtitles.

The new principles will begin with the ethics he has been trying without success to develop since *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre now points to fraternity, dependence, solidarity, sociality, and working toward society as the basis for a new ethics of reciprocity and the "guiding principle for the left" to be constructed from it. Every consciousness contains a dimension of obligation—that is, a "requisition" that goes beyond the real and gives whatever action I perform "a kind of inner constraint" (4) and every goal I propose a moral dimension. At the beginning of these interviews this is precisely the path he proposes for escaping the inevitable "useless passion" of all action motivated by the spirit of seriousness.

If the scarcely developed first pages about hope are in this sense strongly tied to what follows, *every one* of the subsequent sections of the interviews, and particularly those lines of thought initiated by Sartre himself, continues to develop his "guiding principle." Even section 5, "A Thought Created by Two People," an apparent side reflection initiated by Lévy, discusses the fact that, according to Sartre, "we are working together" (5) because of his blindness. But this comes immediately after Sartre elaborates the outlines of a theory that revises his early thought by positing dependence alongside individuality and now lays the groundwork for an ethical relationship (4). Sartre then talks about his actual situation of dependency: embracing it, he now discovers thinking *with* another person. Thus

he shows us the existential basis for the ideas developed just a moment earlier, which are central to the project of creating an ethical foundation for the left.

But why in 1980 does Sartre become preoccupied with the left's need for ethical principles to sustain its hope? This question points us to the philosophical core of *Hope Now,* and it implies the underlying crisis Sartre is wrestling with again and again during the interviews. The crisis is, most simply, the fact that Marxism is no longer "the philosophy of our time" as Sartre described it in *Search for a Method* in 1957 and reaffirmed in an interview with Gerassi published in 1975.[50] The Marxist project of social transformation, within whose outlook Sartre willingly placed his own existentialism, has been eclipsed in France. Although Sartre never articulates it at any length, he and Lévy have been reflecting on the resulting crisis during the last several years.

Sartre indicates the crisis in the most unexpected of places: in explaining why Lévy's Jewish messianism has become important to him at the end of his life. It is "precisely because it possesses no Marxist element. I mean, it is not an end that is defined in terms of the present situation and then projected into the future, one that will be attained by stages through the development of certain facts today" (12). The rest of *Hope Now* repeatedly registers the world-historical failure of such anticipations. What Marxism has been for Sartre since Liberation, it is no longer: the goal, *contained in the present situation, which is being realized through human struggles that are actually taking place.* I italicize because this is precisely what Sartre means by hope at the beginning of the interviews: being able to see a connection between our action and its intended result. And this integral tie between the really existing situation and the anticipated future had been the hallmark of Marxism.

Whether or not Sartre actually experienced the anguish and despair built into his early thought, the fact is that it was only through his discovery of political commitment, socialism, and Marxism that he began to move away from the twin impasses immortalized in "Hell is other people" and "man is a useless passion." Taken by itself, his early philosophy lacks a sustainable basis for hope. His encoun-

ters with Marxist politics and philosophy are precisely what gave him hope between the late 1940s and the 1970s. Sartre enters the world as activist as well as political essayist, dramatist, and social philosopher, in relation to Marxist movements, states, and ideas.[51]

The worldwide revolutionary wave, the Soviet Union, and the flourishing French Communist Party once made it possible for him to believe that, in however distorted and ugly a manner, a better world was coming into being, and that this was happening under the aegis of an outlook that drew "us to it as the moon draws the tides."[52] As he says below, in these incarnations of Marxism he discerned "social forces that were trying to move forward, and I believed that my place was among them" (2). In 1957, Sartre proclaimed Marxism to be "the very movement of history" and of knowledge, while existentialism was "a parasitical system" on its margin.[53] His alignment of existentialism with Marxism was a major moment of modern intellectual history. Indeed, in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre regards himself as no less than Marxism's Immanuel Kant, seeking to found our knowledge of history and society. And in his voluminous biography of Gustave Flaubert, still unfinished when he loses his sight, he seeks to answer nothing less than Marxism's key neglected question: "What, at this point in time, can we know about a man?"[54]

Not that his existentialism ever becomes wholly integrated into Marxism. Nor do the two even become rendered theoretically compatible. For either to happen, what would have been necessary is a reworking of Sartre's basic premises, placing the social at the very least on a parity with the individual. It would have been necessary, in short, to reconsider the cogito as the absolute foundation of Sartre's thought, by at least indicating that the *pour-soi* is a consciousness belonging to an individual who in turn belongs to a social division of labor that makes survival, and thus questioning, possible.[55] Instead, his existentialism remained separate, in a vital, productive tension with Marxism, yielding Sartre's controversies with Merleau-Ponty and Camus, plays such as *Dirty Hands, The Devil and the Good Lord,* and *The Condemned of Altona,* as well as the *Critique* and *The Family Idiot.* In this sense Marxism became a vital external-

and-internal pole of Sartre's own thought and action — nourishing, contradicting, defining, absorbing, and repelling him, in a process that continues right to the end of these interviews.

Lévy's dismissive comments ("in order to give a content to the future, you end up delegating it" [2]) play this down, ignoring that the existentialism that emerges is profoundly political, situated in history and society, committed both to this world and its transformation. It is inescapably Leftist in nature, devoted to the oppressed and against all oppressors, taking sides in struggles on behalf of equality and freedom and against all systems of racial, class, and ethnic privilege. And the Marxism that emerges can never again ignore the individual. It is irrevocably open: stripped of any determinism, it can no longer place its faith in history as an autonomous force unfolding in, through, and around us, bringing us into a better world.[56]

By the end of 1968, Communism, the movement of history that nurtured and contested him, had received crushing blows. Already in the *Critique,* especially its unfinished second volume, Sartre had traced how the frozen dialectic that gave rise to Stalin deviated from both the Bolshevik revolution and its heirs.[57] This is at least part of the reason for his looking beyond the Soviet bloc and embracing the Third World throughout the 1960s.[58] The counterrevolutionary role of the PCF in May 1968 (which he comes to see as "the worst enemy of revolution" [6]) and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that summer were to be the last straws. For a short while, the non-Communist Marxism inspired by Sartre and others continued to generate a new sense of possibility, through the Leftism whose autopsy Sartre and Lévy seek to perform. After exploding onto the scene in France and elsewhere in the West, it flourished briefly and then flickered out. Indeed, one of its final moments in France was the decision in late 1973 by the leader of *La Gauche prolétarienne* to dissolve what remained of that organization. His name: Pierre Victor — Benny Lévy.

Having done so much to create a Marxism without the dogmatic assurances of orthodoxy, by the late 1970s Sartre now found himself totally deprived of even history's most tentative assurance—one could no longer pretend that any movement or society was

headed toward human emancipation. In 1957 Sartre had written that "a philosophy remains efficacious as long as the *praxis* which has engendered it, which supports it, and which is clarified by it, is still alive."[59] By the late 1970s, not only official Marxism seemed lifeless to him but also the leftism that his own work had encouraged and to which he had given so much of himself during and after May 1968. If Marxism in practice has turned out badly, in France as in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and if it is in fact a spent force, can Marxism any longer be regarded as the overarching philosophy? For several years this question must have been simmering within Sartre.[60] In a 1975 interview with Michel Rybalka and Oreste Pucciani he indicates that he is leaving Marxism behind, but it is only with Lévy that he begins to explore some of the consequences, both for his own thought and for the left, of this historic defeat.

NEW IDEAS: CHANGES IN SARTRE'S THOUGHT

Accordingly, hope is the first and last theme of the interviews, and for Sartre it is above all a political hope. "Either this left is going to die, in which case man dies at the same moment, or new principles must be discovered for it" (2). For Sartre, militant philosopher for thirty-five years, political urgency and theoretical urgency amount to the same thing. "In my opinion," he says, "the left is dead because the principles it used were never clearly articulated on paper or registered in people's minds" (6). However, the task of articulating new principles will not be a simple one. Based on all I have said so far, Sartre moves through no less than four fields of tension during the interviews: (1) between his current thought and his original ideas; (2) between the relatively simple ideas Sartre is capable of expressing in conversation and those that could only be developed at length by a writer in full possession of his faculties; (3) between Sartre and Marxism; and (4) between Sartre's trajectory and that of his interlocutor. We will see Sartre's new ideas making their way through these fields of tension. In the process, I will sketch some of the original thoughts presented in *Hope Now*.[61]

For the first time in Sartre's thinking, he now recognizes that our social dimension is "at least as basic" (2) as the desire to *be* that led to the structural, although not personal, despair of his early thought. He now acknowledges that he originally saw the individual as being "too independent" (4). This meant that previously he had been mistakenly "looking for ethics in a consciousness that had no reciprocal, no other (I prefer *other* to *reciprocal*). Today I think everything that takes place for a consciousness at a given moment is necessarily linked to, and often is even engendered by, the presence of another" (4).

This drastic reformulation of the *pour-soi* as simultaneously and originally *pour-autrui* means that "the other is always there and is conditioning me" (4). This ontological change affirms "the dependence of each individual on all other individuals" (4). And this in turn is the basis for Sartre's new argument that one's primary relationships are ethical, that "each consciousness has this ethical dimension" (3).

For Sartre this entails both obligation and a vision of a new social order. "Requisition" is the term he uses to describe the constrained, obligated, socially dependent consciousness: it contrasts with the stark freedom of *Being and Nothingness* that admitted no such obligation. In the interviews Sartre insists, without developing the relationship, on both freedom and obligation, on a constraint that "does not determine" (4). It leads naturally to a political vision of "a genuine constituent body in which each person would be a human being and in which collectivities would be equally human" (3).

For Sartre at seventy-five, as well as two decades earlier in the *Critique,* this is not a serial relationship but one of fraternity, in which people "are all bound to each other in feeling and in action" (10). But now he wants this to be more than the ephemeral moment of the group in fusion, and also to be more than the unity of a particular group opposing itself to those who threaten its survival. He now seeks to found radicalism on a universal human unity that is part of the very structure of existence. This leads to the scandalous notion that what binds us together is that we are all children

of the same mother. Through it he is trying to capture a non-class, elemental bond involving all people of the same species—"an original relationship among themselves that exists prior to the vote and without which the vote would be impossible" (8).

NEW IDEAS: TO BE DEVELOPED

This sense of fraternity is actualized at great moments of political solidarity, and Sartre projects it as the root of ethics and of radicalism. But he only projects it: we are a long way away from achieving its development in these interviews. Again and again the key dimension of this discussion is the future. The most striking feature of the new ideas is that they are little more than preparations for future work by Sartre and Lévy. Sartre again and again indicates that their joint work on ethics will develop and explore the issues he and Lévy raise in these interviews. That book will anchor the next left. Sartre notes that they must "try to clarify" the appeal to brotherhood of the insurgents of 1793 (6); that "we have to define" what such insurgents want (7); that he and Lévy must "examine the idea of democracy" (7); that the "primary relationship of the individual to the individual" (8) is something else they must discover. In short, Sartre is not here speaking *after* developing his ideas, but before. If for no other reason, then, these discussions will invariably sound preliminary and tentative.

Even so, it quickly becomes apparent that he is not saying these things just to be scandalous. *Hope Now* contains plenty that is scandalous; but, as Sartre indicated to Gerassi, a sensational aspect of the interviews is far less significant than Sartre's sustained concern for an ethical foundation for a continuing revolutionary commitment. *This* is the heart of the discussions.[62]

Nevertheless, we are entitled to ask whether Sartre really intended to complete this program. On the one hand, a socialized *pour-soi* has been slowly developing in Sartre's work over the years: the writer who needs the reader to complete his work in *What Is Literature?* begins this line of thought; young Gustave Flaubert's de-

pendence on his family and his social milieu for his sense of self brings it to fruition. But in the 1950s and 1960s Sartre never reconsiders the uniquely individual *pour-soi* of *Being and Nothingness,* and even the *Critique* is theoretically based there.[63] Thus, while the motivation for such a new line of thought has long since been clear, it is equally clear that this distinctly different ontological structure would lead to others, entailing a rethinking of the whole of Sartre's philosophy.

Rather than a "plan of work" for a project of systematic rethinking,[64] what we see is far more casual. Broad political goals, in conversation, require broad ethical statements. These in turn suggest specific key theoretical revisions. Now that he is blind and unable to rework his thought, Sartre can either leave it as a finished body of work by discussing it only retrospectively, which he did with Beauvoir, or surrender such control over it by reopening old questions and exploring alternative formulations of his original terms. The new ideas, I am suggesting, are as much a product of Sartre's new situation as are his conversations with Lévy. Perhaps the intention that they *will not* be fully developed is given in their very formulation. In this most profound sense they would reflect Sartre dialoguing with the future as well as with the past: alternative paths he might have taken, or would like to take in the five or ten years he hopes are left to him, but whose effects on the rest of his thought are so disruptive that they can be considered only in what turns out to be his last conversation.

NEW IDEAS: CONTRASTS WITH MARXISM

I have indicated ways in which Sartre articulates his political-ethical concerns in relation to two of the fields of tension these discussions establish. The third revolves around the fact that both Lévy and Sartre introduce his ideas by contrasting them with Marxism. As I have mentioned, in most cases Marxism is presented remarkably crudely — as in Lévy's notion that Marx sought to use today's submen "as raw material to build the new whole and total human

being" (2). Sartre himself now regards "all Marx's distinctions among superstructures" as being "utterly false" (8), and he also rejects what he now takes to be the Marxist notion that the relationship of production is "the primary one" (8) which, if we look at *Search for a Method,* the *Critique,* or *The Family Idiot,* was never his considered Marxist opinion. In short, these caricatures belie the sophisticated New-Left Marxism that Sartre was so instrumental in creating. Are Sartre's formulations due to Lévy's efforts to "absorb" him, to giving in under pressure? After all, this is the Lévy for whom by 1980 the only "good radicalism" of the past involved struggles for universal suffrage (8). Whatever the source of his own formulations, the fact remains that without the sense that Marxism was on its deathbed, Sartre would hardly be having these particular discussions in the first place. As I have already shown, in a fundamental sense they are about the left's crisis. Accordingly, both in his general purposes and in most specific directions, Sartre does respond directly and appropriately to his conclusion that Marxism as he knew it was finished.

In contrast to Marxism, we have seen him insist that messianic Judaism gives us something beyond history, an ethics that is not "in" the present situation or unfolds from it but whose principles in some sense lie outside of our situation (12). If Marx saw philosophy terminating in Marxism's project of social transformation, and if he equally saw the construction of an ethics as a diversion from this task, for Sartre, as for so many who remain committed to its revolutionary goals, the collapse of Marxism necessarily entails a revival of philosophy. Ethical thinking now becomes essential again, especially insofar as ethical principles are not being realized by history. No wonder, then, that Sartre seeks principles that are not exhausted by their historical embodiment or cannot be said to lie within events, such as: "what I have is yours, what you have is mine; if I am in need, you give to me, and if you are in need I give to you that is the future of ethics" (10). The direction is simple: "you need to extend the idea of fraternity until it becomes the manifest, unique relationship among all human beings" (10). After Marxism, we must relate to this as an *ought*—a term fiercely rejected in Sartre's earlier

thought. If, contrary to Marxism, fraternity is not becoming historically true, it is something we must make happen. On the theoretical side, then, Marxism is replaced by ethics.

THE SARTRE-LÉVY RELATIONSHIP REVISITED

I have already indicated the fourth field of tension in relation to which we see Sartre's own ideas take shape: his relationship with Benny Lévy. Beauvoir spoke of Lévy as a kind of Vishinsky in these interviews,[65] thus calling to mind the powerful and tragic moment of the Moscow trials when Nicolai Bukharin, great light of the Bolshevik Party and author of the Soviet constitution, was brought to trial by ex-Menshevik chief prosecutor Andrei Vishinsky. Through a secret deal that spared his wife and son, Bukharin accepted in advance the death sentence by agreeing to admit to every charge against him. Yet, in one of the most dramatic exchanges in Soviet history, he fought tooth and nail for the truth and his reputation by keeping the bargain and yet disputing every detail of the charges that Vishinsky tried to establish.[66] Thus, against Vishinsky, Bukharin spoke on two levels, appealing to the future reader of the trial transcript. Is this Sartre's strategy in the places where he disagrees or has reservations?

Certainly we see a Sartre willing to admit mistakes, even apparently damaging ones, to an interlocutor who often misunderstands his philosophy and often seems to use the discussion to grind his own axe. And we also see a Sartre reaffirming his radicalism to someone who is apparently leaving his own behind. Does this mean that Sartre keeps the peace by broadly agreeing with Lévy while resisting over details and with qualifications?

Certainly two very different itineraries are at play here, but the situation is even more complex. After all, the 1980 interviews are based on an initially political, then political-and-personal, and now intellectual and-personal relationship that has been going on for ten years. In each respect it is Sartre's most important relationship of the final years of his life. Parts of the interviews clearly indicate a process of Sartre and Lévy thinking together — for example, the discussion

about the Left's distant history, the pitfalls of militant activity, and the nature of political parties (6 8).

Moreover, certain features about the relationship that have raised eyebrows are based on its generational aspect. A rejection of authority, an insistence on equality, and a commitment to informality and naturalness were all key features of the way the 1960s generation approached elders. The Nobel prize-winner, arriving at the podium to address the striking students at the Sorbonne in May 1968, found a note waiting for him saying, "Sartre, be brief"; he played the humble role of interviewer to the movement's leader, Daniel Cohn-Bendit. A foremost product of the "star system," Sartre had found himself lionized and financially well off, permitted to publish his works virtually as they flew off his pen. Hence, unhesitatingly and with deep cultural warrant, he always spoke with the authority of a widely recognized voice. Now, finding this position challenged by a new generation, Sartre responds enthusiastically, throwing over not only his classical intellectual's status but, within the limits of his age and health, seeking to find new ways to be politically useful.[67] But if he gave the movement his time, name, and money, he also resisted Lévy's 1972 demand, in *On a raison de se révolter,* that he write a popular novel—"something more useful for the movements of May '68"[68] and insisted, until his eyesight failed a year later, on pursuing his study of Flaubert. Going a long way toward becoming the "new intellectual" he himself called for, Sartre claimed that at sixty-seven he was too old and too weak to remake himself completely.[69]

Given this demand and response in 1972 we might be surprised to find the two interlocutors still together eight years later, in a relationship that has deepened personally and intellectually. Especially because, like Camus and Merleau-Ponty before him, Lévy has begun to change in ways that will make him distinctly less radical and less political than Sartre. If in the interviews we see Sartre not only standing by the personal and historical reasons for his brief period of being a fellow traveler, but also asserting the radical political conviction that has informed his life for nearly forty years, Lévy demonstrates no such passion and no such consistency. Having dissolved *La Gauche prolétarienne* in 1973, and having since begun to discover

himself as a religious Jew, Lévy is changing drastically from the militant and "new intellectual" of their early relationship. Sartre broke off with peers like Camus and Merleau-Ponty in the 1950s over politically similar changes. Why, then, does he draw even closer to Lévy during the second half of the 1970s?

Why, to focus on the last part of *Hope Now,* does the Sartre who has been close to secular, leftist Jews his whole life, who has contributed an important and powerful text to thinking about anti-Semitism, and who has supported Israel from the beginning, seem to accept Lévy's notion that the religious Jew is the "real Jew"? How is it possible that the Sartre who remained devoted to the most embracing conception of social justice could fail to contest Lévy's exclusivist statement that the Bolshevik Jews of 1917 did not "remain" Jews (12)? This brings us to the startling section on Jewish messianism, by far the longest of the interviews, which is initiated by Lévy but features long reflections on Jewishness by Sartre himself. Lévy's own title for it is "The Real Jew and the One."

After expounding at length on messianism, which he has learned about through his relationship with Lévy, Sartre indicates why it is important to him. Having run away with the discussion, the wily Sartre says that messianic Judaism can be used by non-Jews like himself because their goal is revolution: "Doing away with the present society and replacing it by a juster society in which human beings can have good relations with each other" (12). Lévy begins to comment, perhaps once again to warn of the consequences of revolution, but Sartre breaks in and continues his thought, saying that this is not a de facto society, but a kind of de jure society. "That is, a society in which the relations among human beings are ethical. Well, it is through a kind of messianism that one can conceive of this ethics as the ultimate goal of revolution" (12). While Lévy's original point seemed to be to separate Jew and Leftist, Sartre takes over the discussion and turns it in his own direction. He trumps Lévy's interest in orthodox Judaism by insisting on the broadest conception of Jewishness: "Jewish reality must remain in the revolution. It must con tribute the power of ethics to it" (12). In short, messianic ethics must be at the center of the next revolutionary wave. The reader will note that Lévy's bizarre patchwork of quotes that follows the interviews,

written ten years later, seems intended to reverse this emphasis on the connection between revolution and ethics. He has the last word by reclaiming Sartre for messianic Judaism.

At this point in the final conversation, however, Lévy tries to bring Sartre to a personal conclusion with a note that rings a bit odd on the heels of the last remark: "In short—since we have to stop soon—you're beginning afresh at seventy-five?" We have seen of course that Sartre is most definitely *not* beginning afresh, but is at heart remaining consistent with his last thirty-five years. Although Sartre now accommodatingly replies on a personal note, he continues by bewailing the current triumph of the right in a world that "seems ugly, evil, and hopeless." But this horrible reality is only one side of the story, and Sartre concludes by linking the theme with which *Hope Now* begins to his commitment to revolutionary change: "Hope has always been one of the dominant forces of revolutions and insurrections, and . . . I still feel that hope is my conception of the future" (12).

How is it possible that a man who could break with Raymond Aron, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Albert Camus when their paths separated for political reasons could at seventy-five remain close to a young man whose itinerary was so clearly diverging from his own? We must not forget why their paths had parallelled each other: if Lévy's anti-Communism in *On a raison de se révolter* lacked the historical-philosophical appreciation of a Merleau-Ponty or even a Camus, 1968 had turned Sartre against both the PCF and the Soviet Union. In *On a raison de se révolter,* one of the things that brought the old man and young militants together was precisely their common revolutionary attitude and their understanding that the PCF had become a conservative force. If Sartre remains political and revolutionary in these dialogues and still stays on good terms with a Lévy who has begun to seek personal salvation, one reason is that they are not divided by the issue that split Sartre and the others.

Moreover, for all its informality and intimacy, Sartre's relationship with Lévy is asymmetrical. These are not equals, and this fact is another basis for the intimacy.[70] Lévy is a young man between vocations, in formal terms hired as Sartre's secretary to take care of and nourish him intellectually, who in the process becomes a junior

collaborator in works that will never see the light of day. Sartre's stature, his blindness, and aging are the bases for the relationship. In short, this is not a competitive or primarily political relationship between free-standing peers and collaborators, but is an asymmetrical one of mutual dependency.

Furthermore, by the mid-1970s this relationship concerns a joint movement away from previously and commonly held *gauchiste* ideas. At the beginning it is not clear that they will diverge. By very different routes, Sartre and Lévy had found themselves together in the non-Communist revolutionary left in the wake of May 1968. Their closest relationship coincides with that movement's collapse. For Sartre, turning away from Communism and the end of the New Left definitively entails a disillusionment with Marxism and a search for other intellectual bearings for radical politics. Lévy's "A Final Word" suggests *his* direction: the God of orthodox Judaism.

For the moment, in the interviews, the two can continue along the same path because the quest for human equality and social justice harmonizes with Lévy's developing religious vision and Sartre's political quest. For Lévy, his discovery of ancient sources will give him what he was searching for in the revolution. Sartre is merely continuing his own search, already evident in the 1940s, for a way of realizing a good society on earth. If we can assume that their paths would eventually have diverged, that point is not reached in these interviews.

But how are we to interpret the Lévy texts that frame this Sartre-and-Lévy text whose Sartrean intentions I have been describing? Talking about Sartre with the Benny Lévy of today, firmly settled in his particular form of Jewishness, we encounter a Sorbonne lecturer who is also a rabbi and a religious schoolteacher, and in all of these capacities a wrestler with ancient and modern texts. Above all, he lives an orthodox Jewish life in Strasbourg. It is easy to understand how his natural assertiveness and combativeness would have led him to France's greatest and most radical thinker and how these traits in a developing young man, along with his informality and mental acuity, would have endeared him to Sartre. What was Sartre to him? First, the man whose writings introduced the French language to the Egyptian Jewish teenager. Then, years

later, in the wake of May 1968, the established radical who generously lent his name and reputation to *La Cause du Peuple* and other projects supported by *La Gauche prolétarienne*. After his blindness, the old man gave employment to the young man, and together they shared projects that were important to both of them. In the mid-1970s, Sartre directly appealed to President Giscard d'Estaing to grant French citizenship to this former Maoist leader, and Giscard agreed. Moreover, when Lévy discovered the Talmud as *his* possible path in the late 1970s, Sartre encouraged him to find himself through Judaism. In the end, he not only gave Lévy these last dialogues, but he strongly encouraged him to abandon the pseudonym Pierre Victor and to publish them in his own name. In the most profound sense, then, Sartre helped Benny Lévy to find his French and then Jewish identity, his voice, and even his name. No wonder Lévy's strongest praise of Sartre today is not for the thinker but for the man. As Lévy says of him, summing up his deepest feelings: "C'était un gars bien"—"This guy was OK."[71]

Are Lévy's opening and closing words below a kind of ultimate exploitation of Sartre by Lévy, an opportunistic twisting of Sartre for his own purposes? What explains "A Final Word," this remaking of the old man in the younger man's orthodox Jewish image? If the old man's ultimate intention was irreducibly political, by what right does Lévy proclaim that since the political "is no longer acceptable to our age, nothing is clear anymore"? And then he ignores what the interviews say to instead reveal Sartre's "mysteries," his "secret," the "myth" contained within his body of work. Sartre, bolstered by Plato, Kant, Levinas, and Heidegger, would then be presenting hidden intimations of the messianic kingdom right down to and including key ideas of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* the social meaning of counterfinality becomes theological! What this reveals, alas, is not a plausible reading of Sartre himself but that all-too-familiar kind of exercise that rips statements from their context, disregards the original structures of meaning within which they are made, and reconfigures them outlandishly according to their interpreter's divinations. But why does Lévy now patch together selected fragments of Sartre for such non-Sartrean purposes? At root, I believe, is Lévy's insistence that he has not really diverged from

Sartre—that his messianism is rooted in the old man's writings and outlook. He asserts a deep continuity between his own Jewish salvation and Sartre's idea of commitment, even to the point of rendering Sartre unintelligible. Although it will not survive a reading of Sartre, "A Final Word" is nevertheless a strong filial tribute: while apparently assimilating Sartre to Lévy, it asserts Lévy's identification with Sartre. The profound personal tie becomes remade into an intellectual and spiritual one.[72]

Lévy's tribute gives us the final paradox of *Hope Now:* even though we have to locate Sartre's own complex intention in and through several fields of tension, including that of his relationship with Lévy and the divergence between his own purposes and those of Lévy, it is thanks to Lévy that we have these last interviews. While it seemed to many that Lévy sought to absorb Sartre into his newly discovered beliefs, we see the subtle interaction of two independent minds who are attempting both to find common ground while each one pursues his own objectives. Sartre not only tenaciously holds on to his own project but carries his interlocutor along with him. Exploring this interaction, seeing Sartre "saying three or four things in one," and watching him move in new directions while remaining true to his deepest self are among the pleasures of reading *Hope Now.*

Hope Now

The 1980 Interviews

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Benny Lévy's interviews with Sartre were first published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* on March 10, 17 and 24, 1980. They were then translated by Adrienne Foulke and published in *Dissent* (Fall 1980, 397–422) which had obtained the copyright. In the summer of 1980, however, *Telos* (no. 44, 155–81) published a "Special Tribute to Sartre," which contains an unofficial translation of these interviews entitled "Today's Hope: Conversations with Sartre" (the three parts having been translated, respectively, by Lillian Hernandez, George Waterston, and Claire Hubert). Michel Rybalka wrote the introduction to the "Tribute" and provided considerable assistance to the translators, who were his students. *Dissent* was unhappy with *Telos* and its editor Paul Piccone for having published that unauthorized translation. I have made considerable use of these two translations of the *Nouvel Observateur* interviews, but it must not be forgotten that Benny Lévy made a significant number of changes and additions in the version published in book form as *L'Espoir maintenant* (Paris: Verdier, 1991). *Hope Now* is based on that version. I was fortunate enough to be able to interview Benny Lévy about this text in 1993. His suggestions were most helpful, and I would like to thank him for his kindness and generosity. In translating and, occasionally, supplementing Benny Lévy's notes, I have substituted English-language editions for Lévy's citations wherever possible. I would also like to thank E. Bowman, R. Chenavier, L. Fisher, B. Kingstone, M. Rybalka, and R. Stone for their assistance and very useful suggestions. Last but not least, I must thank my wife Monica for assisting me in the proofreading of this manuscript.

Adrian van den Hoven

PRESENTATION

Benny Lévy

I had ended up forgetting this text. It constituted a part of the work that Sartre and I had been preparing for several years, and it was to appear in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in the beginning of 1980.[1] Sartre's close associates reacted very violently when they read the proofs. And then everything went quickly: Sartre was admitted to the Broussais hospital,[2] where he died shortly afterward.[3] The publication of the text continued in *Le Nouvel Observateur* and apparently scandalized some of the readers. Then came the period of insults, either written or whispered. Sartre could no longer laugh at those who "treated him like an old man"; no one spoke out at a time when old age no longer evoked wisdom but only the threat of physical disintegration. Therefore there was nothing left to say. One could only stay away. After ten years, I had ended up forgetting this text.

But recently *Les Temps modernes* requested a contribution from me for their special issue in honor of Sartre.[4] I then recalled "The Interviews," and, in particular, that enigmatic last section. I remembered having been frightened myself by the strangeness of Sartre's remarks. I wanted to get back to this uneasy reaction. I wrote "The Final Word"[5] without having reread "The Interviews." *Les Temps modernes* received my contribution warmly: it appeared that an era had ended. "The Interviews" could finally be presented to the public in book form. I opened them up again. And discovered them.

Now I understand: during my dialogue with Sartre, I hadn't heard his voice. I hadn't paid attention to it because I had been preoccupied with justifying our work of the previous years, stressing the important changes that Sartre was making to his earlier formu-

lations, obsessed with the "outside reader" whose surprised reactions we could well imagine—even though in this respect we were wide of the mark. The theme on which Sartre wanted to lay heavy stress in the title—"hope now"—even irritated me a little. I did not much like the "naïveté" of the word "hope." In short, I was ill at ease in the role of Sartre's interlocutor, especially since I was about to come out from under the shadows and reveal my real name (until then I had been called Pierre Victor). No doubt I listened to Sartre in an intelligent manner, but I was not sensitive to his voice.

And today I hear it. I thought that Sartre, as was his habit—an exceptional habit—had gone back to the cogito to express his thoughts. At that point he would ensconce himself in his enormous easy chair and begin again: and anything became possible. Sartre had taught me to think in the present as if yesterday's thoughts did not count: they would come back if they were still needed. I thought I was rediscovering the cogito; instead, I was present at the birth of "the Soul," as it is defined in *Phaedo:* detachment from one's interests and the reconstitution of the self.[6] Ascesis, as the later Foucault taught us to rediscover it, an ascesis that the noise of the scandal aimed to cover up completely.

I am not thinking primarily about what Sartre recognizes as an error from the time when he was a fellow traveler. For at least three generations this kind of confession has been an obligatory exercise, and it can have both the most positive and negative results. I am referring rather to the gesture of stripping oneself of one's most intimately held "ideological interests": "Personally I have never despaired, . . . I have never known anguish"[7] (section 1).

This is a shocking statement, coming as it was from the author of *Being and Nothingness* who had written, "it is in anguish that man becomes conscious of his freedom."[8] But when one rereads these particular pages, one discovers a Sartre in the false posture of the theoretician who is sketching out Kierkegaard's "anguish-before-the fault" and Heidegger's "anguish-as-the-grasping-of-nothingness."[9] Arbitrating between the two, Sartre remarks: "It seemed to me that [Kierkegaard's] these words could possess a reality for other people. So I wanted to deal with them in my own philosophy" (1).

In "The Interviews," Sartre calmly undermines this theoreti cal position, which falsifies the cogito's work. The Soul freedom grasped by truth does not enter into the surveying consciousness: "For that matter, if one wants to be cynical about it, one can take the view that I never thought [that the failure of existence is inevitable] I only thought that it was true for other people. I saw how they were mistaken, how, even when they thought that they had succeeded in doing something, they had completely failed. As for me, I told myself that the fact of my thinking that and of my writing it meant that I was succeeding" (1).

Hence his lack of interest in his contradictions: "I thought that my contradictions were unimportant and that, in spite of everything, I had always held to a continuous line" (1).

Or, rather, I should say his disinterestedness. What does it matter if immense sections of the "system" fall away in the course of the "Interviews"—the desire of the for-itself, the for-others, or fraternity-terror? The only thing that counts is "the straight aim." Sartre was right and I was wrong: "I know that I have not always said the same thing, and on this score we are in disagreement" (1). Because *I* worried about his contradictions. And because of this I had difficulty discerning the meaning of the operation that he was performing on himself. The simplicity of his effort. So far removed from the irony of his autobiography. What is more true: his un ceasing return, during our discussions, to the salvation that "saves one from contingency," or the astounding conclusion of *The Words?* "If I delegate impossible Salvation, what remains? A whole man, composed of all men and as good as all of them, and no better than any." [10]

The Words makes our head spin: just as we are beginning to be lieve in salvation, the author shuts the door and declares it impossible, and then, just as we are about to despair, he pulls a community of singularities out of his hat "a whole man who is as good as all of them . . ." In the meantime one stumbles again over the fact that this community is not to be found anywhere. In "The Interviews" Sartre does not let himself be constricted by the "straight aim." He only thinks it, without ulterior motives, without considering the clever tricks of the theoretician or the writer's turns of phrase: hope now.

Ascesis permits Sartre to consider carefully and at length a difficult problem that the busy and involved Sartre apparently wanted to ignore: "I have always, even when not talking about it, thought that [hope] was one manner of grasping the goal I set myself, as something that can be realized" (1).

Sartre always knew, even if he did not know how to say it, that the free act implies a good genius, just as the cogito presupposed an evil genius. Sartre never thought that this kind of confidence could be a delusion: "I have never envisaged hope as a lyrical illusion" (1). "And, as I told you, I don't think that this hope is a lyrical illusion: it is in the very nature of action" (1).

At the very heart of spontaneity, Sartre uncovers a "kind of necessity": "and there is even a kind of necessity in hope" (1), which he explains immediately thereafter as being a demand: "Every consciousness must do what it does, not because what it does is necessarily worthwhile, but, quite to the contrary, because any objective that consciousness has presents itself as being in the nature of a requisition, and for me that is the beginning of ethics" (4).

Appearances notwithstanding, what Sartre says here should not surprise us. If we rejoiced when reading the description of the café waiter and the coquettish woman in *Being and Nothingness,* it was because we were sure that Sartre was aiming beyond bad faith at a . . .good faith. But all forms of good faith ended up by appearing as new forms of bad faith. Even the "sincere man" was comical. Recall that in reaction against the spirit of seriousness Sartre asked himself: How can one be (courageous, cowardly, sincere, etc.) in the mode of not-being-it? He searched for a purifying negation whose existence was productive. In other words, the eidetics of bad faith possessed the essential traits of negative theology. In the latter, Sartre could have revealed his stake in existence if only he could have grasped the import of reflecting about the One-who-does-not-speak-his-name. And at the end, when Sartre returned to the beginning and naïvely wanted to define good faith, he could have found in Proclus the resources to recover *pistia* (faith) and to tear it away from *doxa* (opinion) and inauthenticity. But we know that this dialogue did not take place in Sartre's intellectual life. And so on this point he is "naïve" and trapped: In the midst of free spontaneity,

how can one conceive of this type of constraint? A constraint that presents itself in a trusting obedience. It's as if I could be sure that from the beginning my hope is not an illusion because my freedom retains the trace of an order. After all, does not Sartre state, on the one hand, that hope is "the very fact of positing an end as *having* to be realized" (1; my emphasis) and, on the other, that it is "a manner of grasping the goal . . . as something that *can* be realized" (1; my emphasis).

You must, therefore you can, as in Kant? Sartre stresses the difference. "[Ethics] did not come about in a well-ordered world that one finds posited in general at the beginning of any previous ethics, such as Kant's: the ethical world considered as being the free reality that penetrates necessary reality. I did not want that. On the contrary, I wanted free reality to appear in a contingent reality. And the commands that it could give would manifest themselves in flaccid and doughy transcendence."[11]

Sartre has in mind a freedom that tears itself away, on command, from contingency. But order, giving rise to freedom, obliterates itself without having been able to cancel the original contingency. What remains is a spontaneity forgetful of the imperative and haunted by contingency: "What is surreal about this constraint is that it does not determine; it presents itself as a constraint, yet the choice is made freely" (4).

Sartre's desire to distinguish himself from Kant should not hide the innovative character of this description, which fruitfully repeats Kant's gesture. Kant had revealed freedom starting from the imperative fact. So does Sartre: freedom draws from order the power to tear itself away from contingency. Compared with Kant, however, Sartre wants to gain more: he raises the possibility that the imperative *singularizes* itself. Sartre never forgets Poulou: "Born of a future expectation, I leaped ahead, luminously."[12]

Sartre wants to distinguish the requisitioning of freedom from "moral law." For he could not accept moral law in its universal form. For two reasons: it does not recognize that the subject is singularized under the impact of the imperative; but it ignores the "original contingency" in another sense as well. It forgets that the contingent fact of scarcity stands in the way of the carrying out of the universal.

Sartre had already criticized Kant's "You must, therefore you can" from that point of view in a 1964 lecture.[13] In "The Interviews," he again stresses the imperative of universalization. "[In *Being and Nothingness*] I hadn't determined what I am trying to determine today: the dependence of each individual on all other individuals" (4).

How can the imperative provoke individual freedom as well as everyone's freedom? The source of this power that is capable of avoiding the formalism of moral law? The interviews do not elaborate on this question. The criticism of the desire to be (God) does not result in defining another form of subjectivation under the impact of the imperative; it turns abruptly to the exaltation of the "desire for society" and of the "truly social goals of ethics." The name of "Man" enters into that empty space: "Our goal is to arrive at a genuinely constituent body in which each person would be a human being and in which collectivities would be equally human" (3).

As was the case in the 1964 lecture, Sartre outlines an Adamology without having been able to elaborate a conception of the One. As in 1964, he risks *representing* an ultimate end using the name of Man. But by means of his critique of Marxist representation, Sartre is already seeking to go further.

As in the first part of "The Interviews," when, beyond failure, Sartre wanted to go back to the position of the end itself, to its up surge in hope, he moved back from the historical end—historical endings—to the radical initial intention, the principle of fraternity. In so doing, he defined the end as "transhistorical": "It appears in history, but does not belong to history" (7).

Sartre sees himself then constrained, at the edge of "myth," to identify the "initial relationship": the family relationship. It is another repetition of the "birth ceremony," something which he emphasizes throughout the work: "For every person birth is to such a degree the same phenomenon as it is for his neighbor that, in a certain way, two men talking to each other have the same mother" (9).

We must understand that, when using the word *mother,* Sartre is trying to conceive of a unification that preserves each person's singularity. Having the same mother means being the other's equal, starting from one's "undefinable kernel." We must agree that this is not an obvious theme. Sartre introduces it abruptly—he had been

led to preoccupy himself with this theme when dealing with the description of the for-others[14]—and his thinking is confused, as is shown by the discussion of myth.

But Sartre succeeds in taking another step in the direction of conceiving of the One, which would allow us to articulate individual freedom as well as everyone's freedom. Indeed, it is the Jew who allows him to separate himself from the political model of the One—the synthetic and despotic One, the One as third party in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* the One of "history": "One would have had to conceive of history differently if one wanted to say that there is a Jewish history. One had to conceive of Jewish history not only as the history of the Jews' dispersion throughout the world but also as the unity of this Diaspora, the unity of the dispersed Jews" (12).

In the mode of political Unity, the Jews are dispersed; but the fact is that the Jews are united, and so there exists a Unity other than political unity: "For the Jew the essential thing is that for several thousand years he has had a relationship with a single God" (12).

This thesis is overwhelming in its simplicity. It reverses the model on which modern political philosophy has been built. Modern political philosophy had constructed the concept of political Unity on the basis of the example of the Jewish state (the alliance inspiring the contract). Spinoza drew the logical conclusion: since the state has been destroyed, the Jew has lost his raison d'être. Sartre, on the basis of Jewish facticity—the dispersed Jews are united—reverses the argument: Jewish existence attests to a Unity other than political unity.

The remarks that Sartre then makes about the Jew astonish me even today. I am not speaking of his recognition of the Jew's reality: that went without saying after our more than two years' discussion about the Jewish texts that I had begun to study. Sartre had become aware of the breadth of thought of Israel's great thinkers, something he had never suspected before. He had already become cognizant of the depth of modern man's ignorance. No, what astonishes me is what he was capable of saying about such themes as the resurrection of the dead. At the time, I was by no means ready to formulate such thoughts.

Indeed, in a final round of meditations, Sartre again modifies the "end"; it becomes the "end of the world": "[The Jewish end is] the beginning of the existence of men who live for each other. In other words, it's an ethical end. . . . the Jew thinks that the end of the world, of this world, and the upsurge of the other will result in the appearance of the ethical existence of men who live for one another. . . . We non-Jews are also searching for an ethics. The question is to find the ultimate end, the moment when ethics will be simply and truly the way in which human beings live in relation to each other" (12).

Starting from the simple consideration that all action implies hope, Sartre consequently arrives, after the necessary criticism of historical ends, at the position that ethics presuppose eschatology.

Certainly one can avoid that consequence by refusing all reflections about the "end." "But then, why live?" (3).

Of course, in the manner of Spinoza's atheist one can answer: for honors and riches. Popular liberal thinking nowadays says basically the same thing. It makes a display of "busyness," whereas the subject continues to be concerned with his salvation. Does current opinion still doubt that Spinoza was concerned with founding the liberal state only in order to assure bliss for the Wise Man? And that his only real political problem was to conceive also of a salvation for the ignorant, and for that purpose the Scriptures appeared necessary to him? No, today we only want to preserve the worst of that kind of thinking: the sacralization of the political. And we forget that in Platonism, and in the authentic political tradition that grew out of it, the question of the typology of political forms is secondary. Justice is the primordial question: the soul according to Socrates or eschatological ethics according to Sartre.

Will Sartre finally succeed in making it understood that, beyond historical apocalypses, it has become urgent to begin thinking about the beginning of the world?

THE INTERVIEWS

I. BEYOND FAILURE

BENNY LÉVY For some time now you've been questioning yourself about hope and despair. In your writings you hardly touched on those subjects.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE In any case, not in the same way. Because I have always thought that everyone lives with hope, that is, he believes that something he has undertaken or that concerns him, or concerns the social group to which he belongs, is in the process of being achieved, will be achieved, and will be propitious for him as well as for the people who constitute his community. I think hope is part of man. Human action is transcendent it always aims at a future object from the present in which we conceive of the action and try to realize it. It situates its end, its realization, in the future, and hope is in the way man acts, in the very fact of positing an end as having to be realized.

BL You certainly said that human action aims at a future goal, but immediately thereafter you added that this action was futile. Of necessity, hope leads to disappointment. A cafe waiter, a public leader Hitler or Stalin a Parisian drunkard,[1] a revolutionary militant Marxist, and Jean Paul Sartre all seemed to have this much in common: even

though they all assigned themselves goals, all, such as they were, failed.

J-PS I didn't say exactly that, you exaggerate. I said that they never attained exactly what they had searched for, that there was always failure . . .

BL You stated that a human action aims at a future goal, but you also said that this transcendent movement ended in failure. In *Being and Nothingness* you described for us an existence that projected goals to no purpose, yet in a spirit of perfect seriousness. Man set himself goals, yes, but basically the only goal he desired was to be God, to be what you called self-caused. Whence, of course, his failure.

J-PS Well, I haven't entirely given up on this idea of failure, although it is at variance with the very idea of hope. One must not forget that at the time of *Being and Nothingness* I didn't talk about hope. The value of hope came to me gradually and only later. And I have never envisaged hope as a lyrical illusion. I have always, even when not talking about it, thought that it was one manner of grasping the goal I set myself, as something that can be realized.

BL Perhaps you didn't talk about hope, but you did talk about despair.

J-PS Yes, I did talk about despair, but, as I have often said, it was not the opposite of hope. Despair was the belief that my fundamental goals could not be achieved and that, as a consequence, human reality entailed an essential failure. All in all, at the time of *Being and Nothingness* I saw despair merely as a lucid view of the human condition.

BL You said to me once, "I've talked about despair, but that's bunk. I talked about it because other people were talking

about it, because it was fashionable. Everyone was reading Kierkegaard then."

J PS That's right. Personally, I have never despaired, nor for one moment have I thought of despair as something that could possibly be a characteristic of mine. Consequently, Kierkegaard did indeed greatly influence me on this point.

BL Funny, since you don't really like Kierkegaard.

J-PS Yes, but all the same I was influenced by him. It seemed to me that his words could have reality for other people. So I wanted to deal with them in my own philosophy. It was the fashion: the idea that something was lacking in my personal self-knowledge so that I couldn't extract despair from it. Yet I had to consider that despair must exist for other people since they were talking about it. But note that despair is hardly mentioned in my work from then on. It was a passing moment. I see that in many philosophers, in connection with despair or any other philosophical idea. Early in their work they talk from hearsay about some idea, they give it importance; then, little by little, they stop talking about it because they realize that for them its content doesn't exist; they've merely picked it up from other people.

BL Is that true of anguish, too?

J-PS I have never known anguish. That was a key philosophical notion from 1930 to 1940. It also came from Heidegger. It was one of the notions we made use of all the time, but to me it meant nothing. Of course, I knew grief or boredom or misery, but—

BL Misery?

J-PS Well, I knew it for others. If you like, I saw it. But anguish and despair, no. Well, let's not go back over this since it has nothing to do with our research.

BL But it does. After all, it's important to know that you didn't talk about hope, and that when you talked about despair it was basically not part of your own thinking.

J-PS My thinking was very much my own, but the heading I placed it under, "despair," was alien to me. To me it was the idea of failure that was most important. The idea of failure in relation to what could be termed an absolute goal. In short, what I did not say in so many words in *Being and Nothingness* is that everyone has a goal beyond the practical or theoretical goals of the moment, matters of politics, say, or education; beyond all such matters, everyone has a goal that I would call, if you wish, transcendent or absolute, and all practical goals have meaning only in relation to this goal. The meaning of a man's acts is therefore this goal, which varies from man to man but has the special characteristic of being absolute. And hope is bound up with this absolute goal, and so is failure, in the sense that true failure concerns this goal.

BL And is this failure inevitable?

J-PS We now come to a contradiction I've not yet resolved, but I think I may through these conversations. On the one hand, I hold to the idea that a man's life manifests itself as a fail ure: he doesn't succeed in what he tries to do. He doesn't even succeed in thinking what he wants to think, or in feeling what he wants to feel. This leads ultimately to absolute pessimism, which is something I did not claim in *Being and Nothingness* but am obliged to acknowledge today. And then, on the other hand, since 1945 I have been thinking more and more and now believe completely that, as I was telling you a moment ago, an essential element of any action undertaken is hope. Hope means that I can't undertake an action without expecting that I am going to complete it. And, as I told you, I don't think that this hope is a lyrical illusion; it is in the very nature of action. In other

words, action, being at the same time hope, cannot be in principle doomed to absolute inevitable failure. This doesn't mean that it must necessarily achieve its end, but it must present itself in a realization of the goal posited as future. And there is even a kind of necessity in hope. The idea of failure is not deeply rooted in me at this moment. On the contrary, what remains most present in my thinking now is hope insofar as it is the relation of man to his goal—a relation that exists even if the goal is not attained.

BL Let's take an example—that of Jean-Paul Sartre. As a boy he decides to write, and this decision ensures him immortality. What does Sartre say at the end of his career about this decision? This choice of choices, which was yours—has it been a failure?

J-PS I have often said that on the metaphysical plane it was a failure. By that I meant that I haven't produced a sensational body of work, on the order of a Shakespeare or a Hegel, and so in relation to what I would have liked to do, it's a failure. Yet this response seems to me quite untrue. Of course I'm not Shakespeare or Hegel; but I have written works that I've polished as carefully as I could, and some have been failures, surely, but others less so, while still oth ers have been successes. And that's enough.

BL But how do you consider your work as a whole, in relation to your decision?

J-PS As a whole, it's a success. I know that I have not always said the same thing, and on this score you and I are in disagreement, for I believe that my contradictions were unimportant and that, in spite of everything, I have always held to a continuous line.

BL Now that's "aiming straight"! So you don't think that falling short of the mark is inevitably bound up with your position

that the end can only be realized in the element of the absolute.

J-PS I don't think so. For that matter, if one wants to be cynical about it one can take the view that I never thought that of myself; I only thought it was true for other people. I saw how they were mistaken, how even when they believed they had succeeded in doing something, they had completely failed. As for me, I told myself that the fact of my thinking that and of my writing it meant I was succeeding and, in a more general way, my work was successful. Of course, I didn't think it that clearly; otherwise I would have noticed the enormous contradiction; but I thought it nevertheless.

2. THE DESIRE FOR SOCIETY

BL But what is it, all cynicism aside, that distinguishes the desire for being of a café waiter, filled as he is with his own spirit of seriousness—something we talked about at the beginning—from Sartre's desire for immortality? Or is there more to that difference than cynicism?

J-PS I think, after all, that the idea of immortality I quite often gave into when I was writing, and until I stopped writing, was a pipe dream. I think immortality exists, but not like that. I'll try to explain what I mean a little later. I think the way in which I wanted immortality, the way I conceived of it, was not very different from that of the café waiter or Hitler, but the way in which I worked at my writings was different. It was clean, it was ethical—we'll see later what that means. So I believe that a certain number of ideas that necessarily accompany an action, for example, the idea of immortality, are suspect, murky. My work has not been guided by the will to be immortal.

BL But can't we take this difference as a starting point? You talk to us about writing as a pact of generosity, a pact of trust between reader and author. You have always made that essential to a writer's work.

J PS Working toward society—

BL Is there not, in this working toward society, the expression of a desire that is at least as basic as the desire to *be,* which you talk about in *Being and Nothingness?*

J PS Yes, but I think it must be defined. If you like, I think there is a modality other than the primary modality of the spirit of seriousness. It's the ethical modality. And the ethical modality implies, at least at that level, that we stop wanting to have being as a goal, we no longer want to be God, we no longer want to be *ens causa sui* [our own cause]. We're looking for something else.

BL After all, the idea of *ens causa sui* belongs only to a very specific theological tradition.

J-PS Yes, if you like.

BL From Christianity to Hegel.

J-PS If you like, yes, I agree. That is my tradition. I have no other, neither the Eastern nor the Jewish tradition. I lack them because of my historicity.

BL And you have just put a certain distance between yourself and that tradition by disengaging yourself from the definition of the self-caused being, the man-God?

J PS Yes, and I don't think the ethics we envisage is linked to the Christian tradition. What we must envisage, and the goals

we must look for in ethics, are certainly not the goals that Christianity offers us.

BL The pact of generosity would take us back, somehow, to a desire for society that is at least as basic as what the spirit of seriousness calls the desire to be?

J-PS I think so. But what "society" means here will have to be clearly defined. It's not the democracy or pseudo-democracy of the Fifth Republic. It's an altogether different kind of relationship among men. Nor is it the socio-economic relationship Marx envisaged.

BL In your exhausting debate with Marxism, weren't you basically looking for what is now commonly called the desire for society, so that you could escape from the dialectics of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness?*

J PS Unquestionably.

BL At the end of *Being and Nothingness* you thought you were opening up a new perspective on ethics, and then what we get is not a book on ethics but this debate with Marxism. The two things must be intimately connected.

J-PS Yes, intimately.

BL You believed one might get around the impasse that *Being and Nothingness* led to if the meaning of history were what Hegel and Marxism defined it as.

J-PS Yes, but only roughly. And then I thought we had to look somewhere quite else, which is what I am doing now. And let me tell you that this search for the true social ends of ethics goes together with the idea of rediscovering a guiding principle for the left as it exists today. A left that has given

up on everything, that currently is crushed, that allows a wretched right wing to triumph.

BL A disgusting right wing.

J PS When I use the term "right wing," for me it means dirty bastards. Either this left is going to die, in which case man dies at the same moment, or new principles must be discovered for it. I would like our discussion here both to sketch out an ethics and to find a true guiding principle for the left.

BL The first approximation we arrive at today is that the left has some connection with a desire for society.

J-PS Absolutely. And with hope. You see, my books are a failure. I haven't said all I wanted to say, nor said it in the way I wanted. At times in my life, this has caused me great distress, and at other times I haven't recognized my mistakes, thinking I had indeed done what I wanted to do. But at this moment I think neither the one nor the other anymore. I think I have done just about what I was capable of doing, and it's worth whatever it's worth. The future will disprove many of the things I have affirmed; I hope other things will endure; but in any case there is a slow movement, in history, of man's becoming conscious of his fellowman. When that happens, all that's been done in the past will fall into place, everything will assume its true value. Among other things, what I have written. That's what will give everything we have done or will do a kind of immortality. In other words, we must believe in progress. And that, perhaps, is one of my last naïve ideas.

BL Let's go back, if you don't mind, to your discussions with the revolutionaries. You used to say you shared their aims. But deep down you always felt a measure of distrust: if only

they won't achieve those goals! You yourself put it more or less in those words. You were just a fellow traveler. Didn't that promote a system of doublethink?

J-PS That's not quite accurate. It isn't doublethink, it's just that I find every political party is, of necessity, stupid. Because ideas in a party come from on high and shape the thought of the rank and file. That's the best way to produce a stupid idea, since ideas, of course, must be forged at the base. They must not be anticipated at the top. That's why I've loathed the mere notion of political parties ever since I was twenty. One must recognize that a political party doesn't possess truth, and doesn't try to seek it. A party has intentions, it follows a given path. Fellow traveler—to me the term means precisely the guy outside of the Party. who tries to think the truth, hoping the Party will make use of it.

BL One possible result of this fellow-traveling business: Romain Rolland arrives in the Soviet Union in the thirties—the period of forced collectivization, the liquidation of the peasants by the hundreds of thousands, the revolution's darkest hour—and he declares, "In the Soviet Union I've seen a remarkable expansion of the rights of the human spirit."

J-PS Romain Rolland is not a remarkable thinker.

BL Jean Paul Sartre arrives in the Soviet Union in 1954, he makes a little official tour, and when he gets back home he declares in a major evening paper that there is more freedom in the USSR than in any other country.

J-PS It's true that I thought well of it, if less so than you seem to think I did. But that's because I kept myself from thinking ill of it.

BL I must say, the fellow traveler has some odd intellectual habits.

J-PS I'm not saying a fellow traveler is perfect. It's not that simple. In fact, I'm not trying now to defend the fellow traveler because the trouble is, his ideas are addressed to the Party but never accepted by it.

BL A party—stupid in the sense in which you've defined it—and a fellow traveler, in other words an intellectual who, as such, should have some idea of truth: the one plus the other adds up to something that has failed miserably, as you well know.

J-PS I know, I know.

BL But still you seem somehow to be praising the fellow traveler posthumously.

J-PS I'm simply saying that now parties are done for. It's quite obvious that in twenty or thirty years the major parties of the Left will no longer be what they are now. One or two may even have given up the ghost. Something different is going to come into existence, and there will no longer exactly be any fellow travelers. There will be, as I have explained, mass movements for definite, specific goals. In these mass movements, the notion of fellow traveler will no longer make sense.

BL So your fellow traveler is giving up the ghost. I'd like to see him be issued a death certificate. Who's died? A sinister scoundrel, a dimwit, a sucker, or a basically good person?

J-PS I'd say, a person who's not bad. Not a sucker, necessarily, although in certain circumstances he could be. When he gave in to Party demands, he turned into a dimwit or a sucker. But he was also capable of not giving in, and then he was not so bad. It was just the Party that made the whole thing unbearable. He was a fellow traveler because there was a Party.

BL Let's talk plainly. Was that person a failure, was he one of the group of failures that has undermined the left's thinking over the past forty years?

J-PS I think so, yes.

BL What do you think today of this aspect of your activities?

J-PS I was a fellow traveler for a very short period, in 1951–52. Around 1954 I went to the USSR, and almost immediately afterward, because of the Hungarian uprising, I broke with the Party. That's my total experience as a fellow traveler. Four years. What's more, to me it was secondary, since I was doing something else at the time.

BL Do I detect a trace of doublethink here?

J-PS I've always said that what I thought differed from what the Party thought. I wasn't playing a double game. At certain moments I persuaded myself that the Party's pseudo-ideas must contain some truths and have a solid base and that what seemed stupid was only on the surface. In fact, I was impressed because the Communist Party called itself the party of the workers. I think that was a mistake. But an intellectual needs to find something to cling onto, and like many other people I found that.

BL Let's talk about the intellectual's need to cling onto something. How did this need finally lead you and many others to cling onto the Stalinist rock?

J-PS It wasn't Stalinism. Stalinism died with Stalin. The term "Stalinism" is used today to designate absolutely anything.

BL How is it that some intellectuals needed something to cling to—needed to find a prop, a basis, in that trash?

J-PS Because it was a question of finding a future for society. Society had to stop being the shitty mess it is everywhere today. I didn't think I could change the world all by myself and on the strength of my own ideas, but I did discern social forces that were trying to move forward, and I believed my place was among them.

BL Aren't we clearer on one important point now? At the outset, this totally independent intellectual, who isn't thinking about the Communist Party, writes *Being and Nothingness* and doesn't succeed in anchoring hope, in providing a positive content for this transcendence that is projecting itself toward future ends—

J-PS —doesn't succeed, but isn't trying either—

BL Our independent intellectual doesn't go out of his way to find truth in the bosom of the Communist Party and its trash. No, he elaborates his own ideas without holding himself accountable to anyone. But you run into an impasse, and then through the Resistance you glimpse a content; you assume that your earlier conclusion was not correct, and in order to give a content to the future you end up delegating it to the Party.

J-PS Yes, I need men who are united, because one unit alone or even several separate units will not be able to shake the social body and make it collapse. One must imagine a body of people who struggle as one.

BL Fine. You quickly come to posit the group as the key element of revolutionary thought, and therefore of the future—the union of a group of men in order to act. And you write a nearly eight-hundred page book to establish a theory of practical ensembles.

J-PS A book that isn't finished!

BL And was supposed to have another eight hundred pages. But, in order to construct this theory of practical ensembles, you have to resort to a representation of the ultimate end of history. You borrow it from Marxism: the working class is charged with the responsibility of completing human prehistory. Now let's add it up. You have obviously moved away from your first definition of the ultimate end as failure to a second definition of the ultimate end as the completion of history by the proletariat.

J-PS Without ever forgetting failure.

BL In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* one meets with failure, it's true, because every time one expects to encounter fraternity one bumps into terror. But the fact is that the principal direction of thought in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is toward an ultimate end.

J-PS There was to have been a second part, dealing with the ultimate end, but I haven't completed it, as you know.

BL Neither of the two definitions you proposed is clearly satisfactory. The first isn't, since you abandoned it for the second, and the second isn't, since, if I may say so, our age is abandoning it.

J-PS I assumed that evolution through action would be a series of failures from which something unforeseen and positive would emerge, something implicit in the failure unbeknownst to those who had wanted to succeed. And these are the partial, local successes, hard to decipher by the people who did the work and who, moving from failure to failure, would achieve progress. This is how I have always understood history.

3. ABOUT MAN

BL Confronted with the difficulty of thinking and living failure and meaning simultaneously, as well as the risk of losing one's way, one may prefer to abandon the idea of an end—

J-PS But then, why live?

BL I'm happy to hear you say that. But how does this idea of the end present itself today?

J-PS Via man.

BL Explain!

J-PS I mean that it could be shown what a man is. First, as you know, for me there is no a priori essence; and so what a human being is has not yet been established. We are not complete human beings. We are beings who are struggling to establish human relations and arrive at a definition of what is human. At this moment we are in the thick of battle, and no doubt it will go on for many years. But one must define the battle: we are seeking to live together like human beings, and to be human beings. So it's by means of searching for this definition, and this action of a truly human kind beyond humanism, of course—that we will be able to consider our effort and our end. In other words, our goal is to arrive at a genuinely constituent body in which each person would be a human being and collectivities would be equally human.

BL Before 1939, you tell us that humanism is shit. A few years later, without explaining why you've changed, you give a lecture in which you ask: Is existentialism a form of humanism? You answer yes. And then, a few years after that, at the time of the colonial wars, you explain to us that humanism

is a fig leaf for colonialism. Today you tell us: humanity must be created, but this task has nothing to do with humanism.

J-PS In humanism, I hated a certain way man has of admiring himself. That's what the Self-Taught Man in *Nausea* was supposed to bring out. I have always rejected that kind of humanism, and I still do. But perhaps I have been too categorical. What I think is that when, at last, man truly and totally exists, his relations with his fellowman and his way of being himself will be the object of what can be called a humanism. Which is simply to say that humanism will be man's way of being, his relations with his neighbor, and his way of being within himself. But we haven't reached that yet. If you like, we could say that we are submen, beings who have not yet reached a final point, a point we may never reach, though but we are moving toward it. At that point, what can be the meaning of humanism? If one considers living beings as finished, closed totalities, humanism is not possible in our time. If, on the other hand, one considers that these submen have in them principles that are human—which is to say that basically they have certain seeds in them that tend toward man and that are in advance of the very being that is the subman—then, we can describe as humanism the act of thinking about the relationship of man to man in terms of the principles that prevail today. Essentially, ethics is a matter of one person's relationship to an other. This is an ethical theme that will still be there one day when human beings truly exist. So, a theme of this kind can give rise to a humanist affirmation.

BL Marx, too, said that in the end the human being will be truly whole. And, in line with this reasoning, submen were used as raw material to build the new whole and total human being.

J PS Ah, well, yes, but that's absurd. It's precisely the human side that already exists in the subman, precisely those principles that tend toward the human being, that forbid his being used as raw material or as a means in order to achieve an end. Ethics begins exactly at that point.

BL In earlier days, would you not have denounced this recourse to ethics as formal or, what's worse, bourgeois? We've already played that game. You talk to us now about forbid ding this or that, you talk to us about what is human, but time was when all that would have made you laugh. What's changed?

J PS As you know, a lot of things that we are going to talk about here. In any case, yes, I would have laughed, I would have talked about bourgeois ethics—in a word, I'd have talked nonsense. Rightly speaking, and in terms of the facts and of the submen who surround us—and we are submen ourselves, ignoring our bourgeois or proletarian essence—hu manism can only be achieved, lived, by human beings; and we who are in a previous period, who are pushing toward being the humans we should be or that those following us will be, we experience humanism only as what is best in us, in other words, our striving to live beyond ourselves in the society of human beings. People we can prefigure in that way through our best acts.

4. DOES ONE ALWAYS LIVE ETHICALLY?

BL What do you mean today by "ethics"?

J-PS By "ethics" I mean that every consciousness, no matter whose, has a dimension that I didn't study in my philosophical works and that few people have studied, for that matter: the dimension of obligation. "Obligation" is a poor

word, but to find a better term you would almost have to invent one. By obligation I mean that at every moment that I am conscious of anything or do anything, there exists a kind of requisition that goes beyond the real and results in the fact that the action I want to perform includes a kind of inner constraint, which is a dimension of my consciousness. Every consciousness must do what it does, not because what it does is necessarily worthwhile, but, quite to the contrary, because any objective that consciousness has presents itself as something in the nature of a requisition, and for me that is the beginning of ethics.

BL For a long time you've been receptive to the idea that, basically, the individual is mandated. And in *The Family Idiot* you added, quoting Kafka, "*but one doesn't know by whom.*" So this idea of a freedom mandated by one doesn't know whom, is this your outline of the idea that is a requisitioned freedom?

J-PS I think it's the same thing. One difficulty we encounter in almost all the classical ethical systems in Aristotle's as well as Kant's is: Where does one place ethics in the human consciousness? Is it an apparition? Does one live ethically all the time? Are there moments when one is not ethical without, nevertheless being unethical? While having a bite or drinking a glass of wine, does one feel ethical or unethical, or doesn't it matter? And nor do we know the connection between the ethics people very often teach their children as ethics of everyday life and the ethics of exceptional circumstances. In my opinion, each consciousness has this ethical dimension; no one ever analyzes it, and I should like us to.

BL In your early works, you were already characterizing con sciousness as ethics: freedom was the sole source of value. Today you are changing the direction of your thinking.

J-PS Because in my earliest studies, like the great majority of ethicists, I was looking for ethics in a consciousness that had no reciprocal, no other (I prefer *other* to *reciprocal*). Today I think everything that takes place for a consciousness at any given moment is necessarily linked to, and often is even engendered by, the presence of another—or even momentarily by the absence of that other—but, in all events, by the existence of another. To put it differently, each consciousness seems to me now simultaneously to constitute itself as a consciousness and, at the same time, as the consciousness of the other and for the other. It is this reality—the self considering itself as self for the other, having a relationship with the other—that I call ethical conscience.
Since we are constantly in the presence of the other, even when we are going to bed or falling asleep—since the other is there, in any case in the form of an object when I'm alone in my room, in the form of some reminder, a letter lying on the desk, a lamp that someone made, a painting that someone else painted, in short, the other is always there and is conditioning me—my response, which isn't only my own response but is also a response that has been conditioned by others from the moment of my birth, is of an ethical nature.

BL You don't conceive of being-for-others in the same way any more.

J-PS That's right. In *Being and Nothingness* my theory of others left the individual too independent. I did raise some questions that showed the relationship to others in a new light. It was not a matter of two enclosed "wholes," which made one wonder how they ever entered into a relationship with each other since both were closed. It had to do with a relationship of each to each, which preceded the creation of the closed whole or even prevented the "wholes" from ever being closed. So I really did envisage something that needed to be developed. Nonetheless, I did consider that each con-

sciousness in itself, and each individual in himself, was relatively independent of the other. I hadn't determined what I am trying to determine today: the dependence of each individual on all other individuals.

BL Freedom was required, now it's "dependent." You must admit that your readers may be surprised—

J-PS It is a dependence, but not a dependence like slavery. Because I believe this dependence itself is free. It is characteristic of ethics that an action, while it seems to be subtly constrained, also presents itself as capable of not being undertaken. Therefore, in doing it one is making a choice and a free choice. What is surreal about this constraint is that it does not determine; it presents itself as a constraint, yet the choice is made freely.

5. A THOUGHT CREATED BY TWO PEOPLE

BL Is it the experience of old age that's helping to modify your ideas?

J-PS No. Everybody treats me like an old man. I laugh about it. Why? Because an old man never feels like an old man. The attitude of other people makes me understand what old age means to the person who looks at it from outside, but I don't feel my old age. So to be old doesn't in itself teach me anything. What does teach me something is the attitude of other people toward me. In other words, the fact that for others I am old is to be profoundly old. Old age is a reality that is mine but that others feel; they see me, they say "this old fellow," and they're kind because I'm going to die soon, and so they're respectful, and all the rest. It's other people that are my old age. Don't forget: in spite of the way you are participating in this dialogue—keeping out of the spotlight and talking about me—we are working together.

BL In what way has this "we" been a determining factor in modifying your thinking, and why have you accepted it?

J-PS Originally, as you know, I needed to have a dialogue with someone who, I supposed at first, would have to be a secretary—I had to enter into a dialogue because I couldn't write any more. And I proposed that position to you, but I realized immediately that you couldn't be a secretary. That I would have to include you in my meditation—in other words, would have to accept our meditating together. And that fact has completely changed my mode of inquiry, for until now I have always worked alone—sitting alone at a table, with a pen and paper in front of me. Whereas now we work out ideas together. Sometimes we remain in disagreement. But there is no doubt that I could only have considered this exchange in my old age.

BL Is it a lesser evil?

J-PS At the outset, yes, it was. But then this collaboration could no longer be a lesser evil. Either it was an abomination, which is to say my ideas were being diluted by another person; or it was something new, a thought created by two people. When I write, the thoughts I offer people in writing are universal, but they are not plural. They are universal in that each person who reads them will formulate these thoughts, well or badly, for himself. But they are not plural, in the sense that they are not produced by a meeting of several minds; they bear my mark alone. A plural thought enjoys no preferential reception; every person approaches it in his own manner. Of course it has only one meaning, but each person produces that meaning on the basis of different premises and preoccupations, and understands its structure by means of different examples.

When there is only one author, an idea bears the author's mark: one enters his thought and one moves along paths that *he* has traced, although the thought is universal.

What our collaboration brings to me are plural thoughts that we have formed together, which constantly yield me something new even though, a priori, I agree with their whole content. I thought that whatever you could say to modify one of my ideas—your objections or your having another way of seeing the idea, and so forth—was essential, because I was no longer in the position of facing an imagined public from behind a sheet of paper, which is how it has always been for me, but was facing the actual reactions that my ideas would arouse. So at that moment you became exceedingly interesting to me. And there was something else that mattered greatly: you began to think about philosophy when you were fifteen by reading my books, and you remember them very well. Much better than I do. So in our talks it's important that you remind me from time to time of what I said in 1945 or 1950, and that you confront me with what there may be in my present ideas that contradicts or reasserts my past ideas.

So you turned out to be extremely useful. This is not coming through clearly in our conversation because, as always when you are not alone with me, you stay a little in the background, so that in spite of everything what one sees in this exchange is an old man who has taken a very intelligent guy to work with him but who nevertheless remains the essential figure. But that isn't what happens between us. And it isn't what I want. We're two men—the difference in our ages matters little—who know the history of philosophy and the history of my own thought well and who are jointly working on ethics, an ethics that will, furthermore, often be in contradiction with certain ideas that I have had. That's not the problem. But the problem is that one doesn't sense in our discussion your true importance in what we're doing.

BL It's the presence of the outside reader that distorts it.

J-PS I know, but since we're writing for the outside reader . . .

6. THE LEFT'S BASIC PRINCIPLES

BL You said recently that the left no longer existed. Obviously, you said out loud what many people are surely thinking to themselves, but that isn't enough. The question should be examined a little more closely. There is still a left-wing constituency, there are still parties on the left. So what does it mean to say that the left no longer exists?

J-PS First, that although people on the left still vote left, they have lost hope. They no longer believe that voting answers a significant purpose. In the past, voting Communist was considered a revolutionary act, but now, quite plainly, it's considered standard republican behavior. There's a party that calls itself Communist, and people vote for it in the same normal way one votes for any other party.

BL We already said this back in our leftist days. We used to criticize the parties on the left for indulging in electioneering.

J-PS But leftism has also disappeared. For one thing, the electioneering of the parties on the left makes the very idea of a great and total change, the idea of revolution, quite impossible. For a long time I've been thinking that the Communist Party is the worst enemy of revolution. And, for another thing, the insurrectional aspect of leftism has also disappeared. Today we can no longer act as people did in '68 and have strikes and street demonstrations; none of that means anything now. We could do it; we could very well imagine a demonstration with people marching to the Bastille, the cops beating people up and a few of the cops being knocked off. And then what? The situation would remain exactly the same. But in the past these actions offered the left some satisfaction, and what we have to discuss is whether that was an illusion. Anyway, that's all finished. We know now that street demonstrations have less and less im-

pact. They end by everybody running away and people breaking windows, in violence against the police and police violence against the demonstrators, jail terms, etc. Political parties, like the socialist left, are nothing but a group of movements stymied by power struggles among political leaders with different conceptions of socialism Mitterand and Rocard, for instance.

All this indicates that the unity of the left, which was already seriously threatened from 1920 on by the existence of the Communist Party, is now shattered. Until 1914, the left was more of a great mass movement, with men who could lead it for a moment but were not yet party bosses. Jaurès, for instance, was more a leader than a boss. He led strikes, movements, and parliamentary action. But he was not the only one, and people didn't always agree with him. At the beginning, at least, Guesde's role was as important as his. In short, the left was diversified but nevertheless united. In other words, it had principles.

BL What principles? I don't follow you at all. What did this pre-1914 unity of the left consist of? Doesn't your return to the past smack of mythology?

J PS There was no political unity, but one senses that throughout the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth, men of the left put their faith in a general political and human principle, which was the basis of their ideas and actions. The left can be nothing else. Ever since the formation of a left, more or less from 1792 on, I'd say, and up to the end of the nineteenth century, that principle is always there, people believe in it, they're guided by it, but it remains obscure; it is not openly or consciously articulated. People say, I'm on the left. That's all. If we really wanted to do something to revive this poor dead left, we would have to try to articulate this principle, discover what it was and how it could be resuscitated. In my opinion, the left is dead because the principles

it used were never clearly articulated on paper or registered in people's minds.

BL There's been plenty of clarity! The definitions Marxism gave—

J PS Marxism had the left-wing principles of Marxism. Marx set those principles out in *Das Kapital,* and presented them in his writings in general. But those were Marxist principles, not simply left-wing principles.

Marxism appeared as a theory, a rigorous theory—or tried to be—that strove to study facts through deduction and analysis. But beyond that, it existed in a milieu, an intellectual and emotional atmosphere that was broader than the theory itself and in certain respects was disappointed by the theory. That environment was the left. When Marx went to discuss his doctrines with the German revolutionaries, he debated with them, and they made decisions together. Without anyone actually saying so, what presided over their agreement was really the left—it was the idea of their coming together to attempt some left-wing action.

BL Even so, we must decide what to call these principles and how to describe this totality. You offer some elements that should suffice: date of birth, 1792; flowering of this unity in all its confusion: the nineteenth century. The answer is on the tip of your tongue, I think. We are talking about the fraternity of the insurgents of 1793. It's Michelet and his account of July 14, 1789; it's the universal fraternity of Vallès and the Communards.

J-PS I don't say no. But fraternity is not so easy to define.

BL It functioned as a principle, as a point of reference. And yet it was never defined consistently.

J-PS That's true, but that's because it was never sufficiently developed. I think there's something in the very idea of fraternity that prevents one from developing the principle. If you like, from 1792 until the Commune the revolutionaries were brothers, yet at the same time they were not brothers; to some extent they were ashamed to be brothers. Nonetheless, they appealed to fraternity. And that's what we must try to clarify.

BL Right. Starting from the present collapse. What *is* collapsing? Let's try, all the same, to specify where things are today for that image born in 1792, and revealed by the death of leftism.

J-PS I see another cause for the collapse: the transformation into political parties of elements that, in a certain way, made up the left until 1914. The party is the death of the left.

BL Your indictment of the idea of the political party is very ambiguous. One can perfectly well say no to political parties and just go back in time in the way you outline. But don't stop at 1914. Go back to the beginning—1792.

J-PS Well, precisely, in 1792 there were no parties.

BL And yet the rot had already set in. You're describing, in fact, the very movement that guided leftism to its death. That's what leftism has always wanted; it's always wanted to go back to before the Communist or Stalinist idea of a political party. And it's tried to do so by relying both on that sentimental unity of the nineteenth century and on the very minor currents of leftist opposition running through the twentieth. And, of course, leftism wanted to identify itself with the sans-culottes and 1793 radicalism. Remember *La Cause du Peuple* and its complicity with *Le Père Duchesne*.[3] That's what collapsed. The attempt to go back to the time before

the concept of the political party by referring to the original state of affairs of 1793, that's what died.

J-PS Yes, but as a result, parties that claimed to be on the left no longer are. Because what died was the left's cutting edge.

BL Of course. Let's see what's out of date about the image of 1793. We once thought that in opposition to the parties of the left we should resort to radicalism. Like the sans culottes, who had pushed the revolution's initial idea of popular sovereignty to the extreme. All the sans-culottes from the poor neighborhoods had to do was to pour into the streets, brandish their pikes, and thereby strip the constituted authorities of their legitimacy. Sovereignty was fought for again in the streets. Power was in the streets not in the National Assembly, not at Versailles, not in the Tuileries. There's a flaw in this dynamic. Yet we've had a lot of trouble challenging the idea of sovereignty as something found in the streets.

7. A TRANSHISTORICAL END

J-PS In any case, to me, radicalism has always seemed an essential element of the leftist stance. If we reject radicalism, I think we contribute in no small way to the death of the left. On the other hand, I do admit that radicalism leads to an impasse. That is to say: if we maintain that a given action must be radical, that it must be carried out to its ultimate consequences, without taking into account the fact that an action always takes place in the context of other actions that naturally are going to modify it, then we are talking nonsense.

BL And yet, that's what we said you as well as I.

J-PS We said it, but we must admit that we were wrong. An action must be carried out, but there comes a moment when, because of pressure emanating from other actions elsewhere, the original action may be able to follow its course only by modifying itself—by accepting help from other persons or other actions from a different source. In other words, compromise. So we could say that radicalism resides not so much in the goal pursued as in the intention to pursue the goal. As Kantian ethics would have said it, intention is primary; it is the intention that must be radical. But this doesn't imply that along the road we then pursue toward the realization of the end we have intentionally and radically wanted to be radical—it doesn't imply that we can't be led to use different means from those we first conceived. Consequently, when the action achieves its goal, it differs a little from what it was at the outset.

BL Let's summarize. What did we mean by "radicalism"? It was a matter of starting from a hot spot and diffusing this heat over the entire surface of society. If there are lukewarm people, too bad for them! Off with the moderates' heads! Today we say: there's a hot and a cold sector. It's not a matter of getting the hot to penetrate the cold at any price, i.e., at the price of perversion; on the contrary, it's a matter of linking the hot and the cold sector. On the other hand, you say, and I agree: radicalism, which is the core of the hot sector, resides in the intention that provided the impulse for the formation of this sector. We also agree, as a first approximation, that this intention designates fraternity. In other words, what we are doing is abandoning the idea of a necessary connection between fraternity and terror. Of course, this doesn't mean that there have never been cases of fraternity-terror.

J-PS I suppose so, but after we have properly defined fraternity without terror, we will have to come back one day to fraternity-terror.

BL Let's go back to this idea about the intention becoming the very core of radicalism.

J-PS By its very definition, the intention is necessarily the appre hension of the goal. To say that the intention is radical is to say that it grasps a radical goal. Radicalism simply derives from the intention itself, not from the goal as such. This is what I mean: in history we very often encounter individuals or social groups who seem to be pursuing the same goal. They unite, they say the same things; yet little by little it becomes clear that they are pursuing very different goals. That's because their intentions were different. The intentions are different because behind what appears to be their common goal, the different groups see their own truths. And we see that what is common to all the groups is a rather vague formula, not the goal itself.

BL This is very important. It means that revolutionary conjunctures up to now have been based on misunderstanding.

J-PS Very often.

BL So, when we try to reject the idea of a conjuncture that may be simply an encounter based on a misunderstanding, we're looking instead for a conjuncture that is a real conjunction of intentions. To be radical, then, would be to pursue in a radical way the bringing together of scattered intentions to the point where they achieve an adequate unity.

J-PS Yes, insofar as that is possible.

BL It was one hell of a mistake to say, as we used to: we have an end the revolution—and since you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs, to attain that end it's okay to get your hands dirty. There was a flaw in that line of reasoning. It's not a question of denying filth, shit, blood. No, the flaw is in the end, the rot sets in there. From the moment confu-

sion arose about the position of the goal, additional confusion was inevitably going to follow about the unity of end and means, and it could have negative, even criminal consequences. But if, as we tend to say today, the end by which I mean the radical positing of the intention moves through history proper . . .

J-PS It's transhistorical.

BL Yes.

J-PS And, in this sense it doesn't belong to history. It appears in history but doesn't belong to history.

BL There's a problem about the use of means, the techniques of action. But this will have to be rethought in terms of its subordination to a transhistorical goal. The end is not to seize power, as Lenin thought. The fundamental question is the nature of the end. How are we to understand it, exactly?

J-PS Yes. First we must define clearly what transhistorical means, and specify what goal we can speak of, since seizing power was a historical end: in a given society, at a given moment of its development, one seized power, and that meant that some very specific people by the name of Louis XVI, say, or Robespierre got their comeuppance according to the historical moment. What have insurgents or revolutionaries always had as their ultimate goal, the thing they wanted without being able to name it, without perceiving it clearly? That's what we have to define.

BL Exactly. So, the word "fraternity," which has been used to characterize the confused and emotional complex of ideas we term the "left," contains an element we must take note of, and that is the fraternal intention, the allusion to a genuine experience of fraternity. In this connection we can recognize our link to the insurgents of 1793. But thinking of

this intention in terms of the schema of radicalization, of sovereignty in the streets, of direct participatory democracy as opposed to fraudulent representative government no; that's done for. From now on we must regard the solution of the 1793 insurgent, and that of the leftist, as a false solution. That being so, we must reformulate the problem that lies at the root of this false answer—namely, the problem of democracy.

J-PS In other words, study democracy without thinking of it in terms of either direct or indirect democracy. Take it as a whole, and see what the relation is between democracy and fraternity, which is the primary principle that establishes democracy and has always been part of it. Because for me, and I believe for you, too, democracy seems to be not only a form of government, or a way of granting power, but a life, a way of life. One lives democratically, and in my view human beings today should live in that way and in no other. We must find out whether people today are living in a democracy and democratically, and find out what they mean by democracy. To begin with, I think we must take the term as such and examine the idea of democracy first in its political form, because that is the simplest.

BL It's not that it's the simplest, it's the only form there is.

8. MORE FUNDAMENTAL THAN POLITICS

J-PS The word "democracy" has a meaning that has become obsolete. Etymologically, it means government by the people. But it is quite obvious that in modern democracies there is no people to govern because "the people" doesn't exist. There was a people under the Ancien Régime and in 1793. Today, there is no longer a people, because we can't use the word "people" for the way human beings live, entirely individuated by the division of labor. Their only relation with

one another is through their work and the fact that every five or six or seven years they perform one very specific act, which is to take a piece of paper with some names on it and drop it in a ballot box. I don't think the power of the people exists.

In the eighteenth century and during the Revolution, life was not fragmented as it is today. At the present time, a person who votes doesn't do it in the same way as the person who lived under the Terror or before. Voting is a fragmentary act that has no connection with one's work or with the totality of one's personal concerns. That's not at all how the vote was considered in 1793; it was not an isolated act in a person's life. It was the act for the sake of which one was politically involved, for which, in a sense, one existed. The significance of the vote has changed, which is why we are not beyond the French Revolution but losing momentum with respect to it.

BL Quite. But couldn't we say that today, by means of long experience with universal suffrage, we have traveled the distance from the hot to the cold sector? The vote, I agree, started out being hot. Today it's cold. But at least the vote allowed for a linkage between hot and cold, if I may put it that way. And that's exactly what we denied when we shouted, "Elections are a trap for fools!" Wasn't that a mistake? All right, there were times—there still are—when the first vote is a hot vote. For example, right after the Revolution of the Carnations in Portugal, where they hadn't voted for almost forty years. But we know now that the vote goes from hot to cold. And that's precisely the problem we want to resolve—going from hot to cold. I agree that the vote is not the ultimate solution, since in moving from hot to cold one progressively loses heat. Agreed. But we reject the false solution, which consists of yelling "hot, hot, hot, down with the lukewarm"! Universal suffrage has at least one merit—it points to a numerical unity, a complete series: it doesn't conjure away the category of "everyone," without

which "fraternity" is in danger of no longer meaning anything.

J-PS Let's understand each other. There have always been categories of people from whom one wanted to withhold the right to vote.

BL True. But there, precisely, is an example of good radicalism, good radicalization: all the battles fought in the nineteenth century and for a part of the twentieth to radicalize universal suffrage, to win the true extension of universal suffrage. To give a more effective meaning to the notion of "everyone."

J-PS You're right. We just ask ourselves, What does "everyone" mean? What does the right to vote mean, for example? In other words, what is the relationship among the various individuals who drop their ballots into the ballot boxes when what will emerge from the voting is a constitution, or a law—in a word, a certain way of being "everyone," as you put it? Those ballots recorded a linking of individuals among themselves; it wasn't the vote yet, for that still had to take place. It was the fact that every person, every voter, lives in a milieu, in a group, along with other people who condition him at least in part—for example, in a realm of ideas—who introduce broad general theories from outside of him that he will be expressing in his vote. So, people have an original relationship among themselves that exists prior to the vote and without which the vote would be impossible. Those who go to the polls come from the same neigh borhood, from the same family; they have long shared their ideas. Their vote is simply the expression of all that.

BL Do you want to repeat what Marx said—that the vote is the expression of political man and is derived from the fundamental expression of concrete social relationships, relationships of production?

J-PS In a sense, except that I don't believe that the relationship of production is the primary one. With respect to the vote, it is primary, yes. There are neighborhoods of workers who have settled in the city, who in general are of the same trade, and who will go to vote. But to me that's not the essential thing. What unites them most profoundly beyond the bonds of production, what makes them mean something more to each other than the fact of being producers, is that they are human beings. This is what we must try to study. What does it mean to be human, and to be capable along with one's neighbor, who is also a human being of producing laws, institutions, of making oneself a citizen by means of the vote? All Marx's distinctions among superstructures are a fine bit of work, but it's utterly false because the primary relationship of individual to individual is something else, and that is what we're here to discover.

BL Did you think you had found it in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason?*

J-PS I was looking for it, but I was looking for something else too. What's more, I haven't completed the second volume. As you know, I set the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* aside because it seemed not to have ripened within me. I didn't manage to find my way out of it. That's precisely the reason. The point is, precisely, that if I were to consider society as I viewed it in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* I would observe that fraternity has little place in it. If, on the contrary, I take society as being the result of a bond among people that's more basic than politics, then I take it that people should, can, or do entertain a certain primary relationship, which is that of fraternity.

BL Why is fraternity the primary relationship? Are we all offspring of the same father?

J-PS No, but the family relationship is primary with respect to any other relationship.

BL We form a single family?

J-PS In a certain way, we form a single family.

9. CHILDREN OF THE MOTHER

BL How do you understand this primary kinship?

J-PS For every person, birth is the same phenomenon as it is for his neighbor to such a degree that, in a certain way, two men talking to each other have the same mother. Not the same mother, empirically, of course, but a mother without eyes, without a face. It's a certain idea, but the two of us share it, as we all do, for that matter. To belong to the same species is, in a way, to have the same parents. In that sense, we are brothers. Besides, this is how people define the human species—not so much in terms of certain biological characteristics as a certain relationship that obtains among us, the relationship of fraternity. It's the relationship of being born of the same mother. This is what I meant.

BL In Plato's *Republic,* Socrates, who has just spelled out all the conditions for the just society—each class has its place, everything was more or less finished—suddenly adds: "Oh, I've one more thing to add; I'm sorry to have to mention it but I really should. One more thing is required: all those people must be made to believe that they are brothers, they must be made to believe that they are all sons of the same mother, let's call her Earth. Let's put it that way, and then people will believe they've all come from the same Earth, so they are all brothers. Of course, each person is put together differently, which explains why one will be a warrior, another a plowman, another a magistrate; but, basically, they're all brothers." So, the mother, the mother you're talking about, thanks to a pious or cynical lie, risks becoming the Earth in the Greek sense of the term, and then she can

become the land in the modern sense of the term—the nation.

J-PS I've never taken Socrates' phrase to be really a pious lie. He actually means that men are brothers. But he doesn't manage to say it right, to define the kind of truth that the statement must be made to convey. So he turns it into a myth.

BL All right, Socrates' intention can be salvaged. The fact remains that he's tripped over a last-minute difficulty that threatens the whole structure. How can the mind avoid stumbling into mythology when what we want to do is get to the essential of how to be together—that is, how to practice fraternity?

J-PS It has nothing to do with myth. Fraternity is the relationship members of the species have with one another. Thousands of years ago, the first social division was the clan, characterized by its totem. The totem enveloped the entire clan, and it provided a profound reality for all members of the tribe in their relationship with one another—for example, it prevented them from intermarrying. And that relationship was fraternity. I mean that the great concept of the clan, its womblike unity—starting with an animal, for example, that is supposed to have engendered them all—is what we must rediscover today, for that was true fraternity. In a sense it was a myth, no doubt about it, but it was also a truth.

BL Aren't you now duplicating Socrates' type of thinking? When faced with a problem, fall back on a myth?

J-PS No, I don't believe so, because what I mean is that the myth is invented by members of the group only in order to account for a relationship among them, the group relationship. In other words, they invent—without knowing that they are inventing—an animal that has engendered them

all; as a result, they are all brothers. Why? Because initially they felt they were brothers. Afterward, their invention gave a meaning to this fraternity, but it was not the invention that created the feeling of fraternity. It was just the reverse.

BL But our problem is that we mustn't rely on myth in order to formulate this original idea of fraternity. How can we avoid falling into the trap Socrates fell into?

J-PS We're not falling into a trap: all men are brothers in the clan inasmuch as they are born of the same woman, who is represented by the totem. They are all brothers in the sense that they came from one woman's womb, and ultimately, at that moment, the individuality of the woman is not at issue. It's a woman who simply has the womb that will give life, the breasts that will nourish, perhaps the back that will carry. This woman can just as well be a totemic bird.

BL But you do agree, don't you, not to eliminate the reference to a biological origin? Otherwise, instead of saying "fraternity," we could just as well say something else altogether, equality, for example. But, in fact, you seemed to me to be very much attached to the idea of fraternity and no longer to the idea of equality, as you used to be. So we must find a formulation that accepts the biological reference but that can be extended to a level that's no longer biological and isn't mythological either.

J-PS Exactly. So what is this relationship between one human being and another that will be called fraternity? It isn't the relationship of equality. It's the relationship in which the motivations for an act come from the affective realm, while the action itself is in the practical domain. That is, the relationship between a man and his neighbor in a society in which they are brothers is primarily affective and practical.

Now the gift has to be rediscovered, because originally almost everyone shared that feeling.

When I see a man, I think: his origin is the same as mine; he comes as I do from, let's say, mother-humanity, from mother-earth as Socrates calls it, or from the mother—

BL So what is the mother, humanity, the earth? We're still in the realm of mythology. Is there any way to break with the mythological realm?

J-PS What is not mythological but real is, I think, the relationship of you to me and of me to you. We call the relationship of a man to his neighbor fraternal because they feel they are of the same origin. They have a common origin and, in the future, a common end. Their common origin and end—that's what constitutes their fraternity.

BL Is this a true experience? A conceivable one?

J-PS I think that the total, truly conceivable experience will exist when the goal that all men have within them—Humanity—is achieved. At that moment it will be possible to say that men are all the products of a common origin, derived not from their father's seed or their mother's womb but from a total series of measures taken over thousands of years that finally result in Humanity. Then there will be true fraternity.

BL I understand. And what today prefigures this end result?

J-PS The fact that there is an ethics.

10. SONS OF VIOLENCE

BL In our current experience, how can we speak of fraternity without resorting to mythology?

J-PS Because fraternity ultimately lies in the future. So there is no longer any reason to appeal to mythology, which is always of the past. All human beings will be in a state of fraternity with each other when they can say of themselves, through all our history, that they are all bound to each other in feeling and in action. Ethics is indispensable, for it signifies that men or submen have a future based on principles of common action, while a future based on materiality—i.e., on the basis of scarcity—is simultaneously being sketched around them, which is to say, what I have is yours, what you have is mine; if I am in need, you give to me, and if you are in need I give to you—that's the future of ethics. And men have precise needs that their outward situation does not allow them to satisfy. There is always less than there should be, less food than there should be to meet human needs, and not even enough people engaged in producing that food. In short, we are surrounded by scarcity, which is a real fact. We always lack something.

So there are two approaches, and both are human but seem not to be compatible; yet we must try to live them both at the same time. There is the effort, all other conditions aside, to create Humanity, to engender Humanity; this is the ethical relationship. And there is the struggle against scarcity.

BL Which is the cause of violence, according to your *Critique of Dialectical Reason.* And I would like to remind you of something you wrote in your Introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth.* Speaking of colonized man, you say, "He is the son of violence, he draws his humanity from it at every moment." You didn't write "son of the mother" but "son of violence." Violence is the midwife here, as in Engels.

J-PS It's not the same.

BL I don't see why not. But this is my question: Can humanity be engendered through violence? Please understand. I'm

not asking: Does violence exist or not? Nor am I asking you: Is violence necessary on certain occasions? No, my question is less broad: Can violence really have the redemptive role, the constituent function, you attributed to it at that time?

J-PS If we take the case of Algeria, which I was talking about in my introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth,* I state first of all that a nonviolent solution was never in the cards. The French settlers never envisaged a solution that could have been acceptable to the Algerians. There were two absolutely opposed points of view that could lead only to violence. As you know, that violence brought about the expulsion of the settlers and their return to France.

BL That wasn't my question!

J-PS Wait! Of course, violence is not going to speed up the pace of history and draw humanity together. Violence merely breaks up a certain state of enslavement that was making it impossible for people to become human beings. When violence has destroyed the characteristics of the colonized person—that is, the characteristics of the slave—what you have are no longer just submen who are not suffering from certain constraints anymore—though they will find other con straints elsewhere, as in Algeria—but people who are trying to come closer to the active citizen, who himself is still as far removed from Humanity as he is from the colonized subman.

BL You said: Their fraternal love is the opposite of the hatred they feel for us; they are brothers in that they have all killed. You're no longer of that opinion?

J-PS I'm no longer of that opinion.

BL The question is: Does the experience of fraternity appear through the activity of killing one's enemy?

J-PS No. But to tell you the truth, I still don't clearly see the real relationship between violence and fraternity.

BL Are people brothers inasmuch as they are the children of violence? Or do we discover fraternity first and then, when we run into obstacles that can't be surmounted by other means, resort to the use of force? Do we then use this or that type of limited violence, without that ethical finality which comes from the experience of fraternity?

J-PS To have an ethics, you need to extend the idea of fraternity until it becomes the manifest, unique relationship among all human beings. At first it's a relationship within a group, more specifically, within small groups bound in some way to the idea of family. In a remote past, fraternity was just that. It's closed off by the group. It's precisely the tendency the other or others have to breach the group, to transgress the frontier binding fraternity within itself, that gives birth to violence, the very opposite of fraternity. That's what I would say today.

BL How would you account for the fact that in your work there is a profound tendency toward an ethic of violence? For example, why the exaltation of violence in your intro duction to *The Wretched of the Earth?*

J-PS In that particular case it resulted from the wars in Algeria and Indochina, both of which filled me with profound horror. Because, as you know, since I was nineteen my only political response was to loathe colonialism. The only way I saw to get out of colonialism was violence. Violence that could be called just, the violence of the colonized against the colonizer.

BL But you overdid it. You say "*transparency,*" the "*unity one possessed at birth,*"[4] the essential comes out of the barrel of a gun! When we exaggerated like that in an editorial in *La Cause du Peuple,* it was normal, if I may say so. Militant stupidity was our norm. But what pushed *you* to do it?

J-PS At the time I was seeing a lot of Fanon, who was deeply violent, and that certainly accounted for my mode of expres sion. There was also the fact that we were in a difficult position, for in spite of everything, we were struggling *against* France and with the Algerians, who didn't care much for us even though we were on their side. That put us in quite a special situation, which found expression in the book, a situation of malaise, of greater violence, and, because it was easier, of intransigence. France is something that has real meaning for me. I found it unpleasant to be against my country.

BL You told me one day—apropos of your Introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth*—that you wrote a first draft and then systematically revised the style to make it more violent. From there, you went back to Poulou playing war games, sword in hand, in the living room, while his mother was playing the piano.

J-PS All the more so because, don't forget, Poulou was fighting for himself and against the bad guys.

BL The new Pardaillan writing the preface to the *The Wretched of the Earth.*

J-PS Sure, there is something in that.

BL And yet when you write about the Resistance, you don't exalt violence.

J-PS The Resistance fighters who were blowing up trains and the people who were writing were one and the same. In the case of the Algerians, they were not the same. That's the difference. Whether I was blowing up railway tracks or not, everyone was in the same boat.

BL The enemy was brutal during the Occupation. Why didn't you work out an ethic of regenerative violence at that time?

J-PS We ourselves were people who were employing violence, directly or indirectly. At that time, as I've told you, in a France that had been schooled before the war to feel a profound repugnance for violence, we were not people who liked to say, violence is splendid, it's right to use it. Amid the violence, we had to consider the murders, the bombs that were exploding, etc., as something we were forced to do, almost as a necessary evil.

BL Why did you move from necessary evil to—

J PS If I had seen or wished the Algerians to be less violent than they really were, I would have made common cause with the French; I would have been reclaimed by France again. I had to see the Algerians as men who were mistreated, crucified by France, who were fighting against the French because the French were unjust. And I was French, I was unjust like other Frenchmen, there was a collective responsibility. But at the same time—and that is where I set myself apart from the majority of other Frenchmen—I approved of the struggle of those tortured people against the French.

BL Verbal violence because of national self-flagellation?

J-PS In part, yes; in part, certainly.

11. UNITY THROUGH INSURRECTION

BL Our problem today is simple. If the idea of revolution becomes identified with the idea of terrorism, it's done for. To restore meaning to the idea of revolution, if it's possible, one must do away with the concept of fraternity-terror. Of course, one can choose to abandon any idea of revolution by taking it for a very costly, poetic illusion. To this there are two objections. The first is factual: there are revolts. The second touches on the legitimacy of the revolts. It derives from what we used to call the desire for society. Against the illusion — and this one is in no way poetic — that human unity has been achieved in current social conditions, a revolt raises the real and profound issue of unification; the unity of the human enterprise is still to be created. If Kant is right in relating the idea of an ethical community back to the ideal of a human totality, then the revolt is an appeal to an ethical order: the forgotten are making themselves heard.

J-PS Develop your idea further.

BL I wonder whether we shouldn't rethink the process of the insurrection and distinguish its several elements or moments analytically. Fraternity first appears at the end of a long maturation, the birth of a relationship lived as a human experience. Of course, it can make us think of what we have all learned about July 14. But closer to us in time, Foucault said that he had seen the will of the people on the streets of Teheran. At such a moment, the use of certain forms of violence is akin to a cesarean section: we are dealing with the removal of an obstacle to birth. To say that the phenomenon of fraternity is sustained essentially by recourse to violence would be, in a way, like saying that for a child to be born doesn't call for the union of a man and a woman and the maturation of the embryo, but that what basically counts is the use of forceps.

The fact remains, of course, that a displacement occurs

in the course of the insurrectional process: it was very apparent in [the Paris student revolt of] 1968 that what was emerging was no longer the significance of the event, the birth, but rather the confrontation the "rupture" in both the social and the erotic sense that Georges Bataille gave the word. That's the sacred moment, and that of fraternity as terror, too.

J-PS You're forgetting that the other—the enemy—is constantly acting, and that's what provokes the manner in which each of the two moments you have described manifests itself.

BL Be careful of the word "provokes." In the beginning, from the demonstrator's point of view, the riot policeman or the soldier, whichever, is practically just another brother. Sure, inasmuch as the soldier is identified with the obstacle to be removed, he's a misguided brother, not a real brother. But in any case, the essential thing is the creation of this fraternity; it provides the enormous strength, the almost miraculous strength of the insurrection. At this point we observe how hatred is almost totally absent. Including, and I repeat, hatred for the soldier. On the other hand, in a second phase, the sacred moment, since it's the rupture that becomes essential, there is a kind of link between the insurgent and the policeman who is shooting at him. Somehow, the insurgent needs his adversary, the way two lips need each other in order to part. It is, in fact, the violence of the repression that gives insurgents the necessary unity, the unity that allows them to become one body. People no longer know clearly whether they are really brothers or whether they are brothers only inasmuch as they are attacking a soldier. Is it the adversary who confers unity, or have they undertaken a positive unification? The two things blend from there on.

So the idea that insurrectional unity comes about thanks to confrontation, to the fact that people become brothers against the Other, the compact enemy, is obviously going to bring about the radicalization we were criticizing a

moment ago, a kind of Machiavellianism of the insurgent who will try to provoke the enemy in order to strengthen the body of insurgent brothers. But doesn't this notion of the body already testify to a degeneration of the fraternal experience? There are factions tearing each other apart, there is inertia, the inability to resolve long-concealed problems, and at this point we use the ultimate weapon hatred of the Other—like the hatred of the aristocrats in 1789, or of Americans in Iran. In reality, the positive enterprise toward unification is halted, and resorting to this form of negative unity, brought about by the former power, serves to camouflage the standstill. There you have the point at which revolutionary politics is perverted.

J-PS Which is the third phase.

BL Yes. Leninism is a good case in point. It refers to the positive experience. That's one side of the picture. But it functions totally as starting from a negative unity, because for Lenin it's a question of building an ironclad unity in response to governmental unity. As soon as positive unification runs out of steam, Leninism is terribly effective.

Didn't we see something different in '68? We had to think of the people gathering in the context of a vacuum of political power. What does that mean? Must we deny power? Certainly not. Consider power the absolute evil, and steer clear of it? Absolutely not. No, the power vacuum is merely the knowledge, and this is essential, that beneath the power, in the political meaning of the word, a void has formed. That the power lacks a foundation. This is the marvelous revelation that comes at the beginning of an insurrection. This is what makes the demonstrator say, "*Everything is possible.*" And it's true: in a sense, everything is possible. And how can we keep this revelation from drowning in political hysteria? Perhaps the answer to this must be: by not pushing it to the limit. The uprising is just one moment in the long enterprise of human unification,

only one facet of the fraternal experience. As you would say, of our relationship to the mother.

J-PS In general, I agree with your account of the three phases in which violence appears. Only I want you to develop the description of the first two and even of the third. But we will do this in the book we are devoting to a study of ethical thought. For the moment I can only approve without reservation, because I will keep my reservations for later.

12. THE REAL JEW AND THE ONE

BL Perhaps too little attention has been paid to the significance of a certain Jewish distrust of the revolutionary mob. Perhaps we haven't examined closely enough the truth concealed beneath this mistrust. Maybe the Jew, especially a Jew who lives in a Christian society, feels that the revolutionary mob can become the pogrom mob. Maybe he has some experience of the perversion we're now trying to criticize?

J-PS Don't forget that there were a considerable number of Jews in the Communist Party in 1917. In a way, they could be said to have led the revolution. So here's something that doesn't entirely jibe with what you're saying.

BL I'm talking, of course, about the Jew who has remained a Jew. This Jew knows that he is threatened when a crowd of people starts to think of itself as a mystical body. His experience makes it impossible for him to see the mob as just a group in revolt. On the other hand, in a revolutionary movement he can distinguish between what springs from fraternal truth and what derives from the terrorist threat of the sacred. Perhaps that leads us to the following conclusion: the Jewish experience is essential to a rethinking of the revolution, and one must take full measure of that experience. The Jew is doubly concerned by our problem. First of

all, he cannot help but recognize at the source of the revolutionary idea, in spite of all its perversions, the messianic idea. Second, he has a privileged view because he has suffered from the perversions of this idea. So it becomes essential to understand the idea properly and to restore its meaning.

J-PS I think you're not wrong.

BL From this point of view, the present intellectual climate presents a danger. Pretty well everywhere, messianism is being pictured as the source of all our ills. When the "new right" chooses messianism as its target, it's behaving normally. What's most serious is the fact that the left too is finding it good form to attack all forms of messianism. But has anyone asked himself what messianism, specifically Jewish messianism, is? No. People act as if they know. When will they recognize that we don't know, but that it is most urgent for us to know? How can people still forget that at the bottom of anti-Semitic filth is ignorance?

J-PS When I was writing *Anti-Semite and Jew,* messianism was a meaningless idea for me. Now it has acquired a richer meaning, thanks in part to our talking together, because now I understand better what it meant to you.

BL At the time of *Anti Semite and Jew,* you thought that the Jew—let's put this provocatively—was an invention of anti-Semites. In any event, according to you there was no such thing as Jewish thought, no such thing as Jewish history. Have you changed your way of thinking?

J PS No. I keep that as a superficial description of the Jew as he is in the Christian world, for example, where he is constantly being dragged down on all sides by anti-Semitic ideas, which are trying to devour him, to take over his thinking and capture him at the core of his being. Of

course, the Jew is the victim of anti-Semitism. The thing is, I confined the existence of the Jew to that, even though I knew some. I now think there is a Jewish reality beyond the ravages that anti-Semitism has inflicted on Jews; there is a profound Jewish reality as well as a Christian reality. Very different, of course, but of the same kind with respect to certain totalities. The Jew believes he has a destiny. I will have to explain how I came to think that.

BL I was about to ask you.

J-PS It came from meeting more Jews after the Liberation. Before that, I was acquainted with some, of course, but I had no close ties with them. Afterward, I got to know Claude Lanzmann, who became one of my very good friends. Then I adopted my daughter, Arlette, who is Jewish, and I've spent a lot of time with her and know how she thinks. And then I met you, and we've worked together, and we've also spent time together in a more relaxed, day-to-day kind of way. As a result, I have a much better view of Jewish concerns. That's essentially what has changed, I think. Basically, until I wrote *Anti-Semite and Jew,* I was hostile primarily to anti-Semitism, and that book is a declaration of war against anti-Semites, nothing more.

BL I was seventeen years old when I read *Anti-Semite and Jew,* and it served admirably to justify my desire to fight anti-Semitism. But at the same time, you assured me that if that war was won, I would discover what I dreamed of discovering—that I am a man, not a Jew. The book also covertly justified a kind of self-denial. Mind you, I didn't think that at the time.

J-PS It's possible. You felt that, and I think others may have felt it too. It was because the reality of the Jew is lacking in the book. Admittedly, this reality is essentially metaphysical, as is the Christian's, and at that time it occupied very little

place in my philosophy. There was a consciousness of self that I stripped of all individual characteristics that might have come from within and that I then made it rediscover from the outside. Once the Jew was deprived of metaphysical and subjective characteristics, he could not exist as such in my philosophy. Today I see men differently. I've taken pains to look for what the inner reality of the Jew could be. But there you are: to be able to understand the Jew from within—that I really cannot do. I would have to be one.

BL But why were you able to do it with Gustave Flaubert?

J-PS Because Gustave Flaubert gave me much more information than a Jew does. Most of the significant things about Jews are written in foreign languages especially in Hebrew, sometimes in Yiddish.

BL You might have overcome that obstacle.

J-PS Not knowing Hebrew is not an absolute obstacle for a Frenchman; he just has to learn it. But there a lot of time elapses between the moment when he begins to learn it and the moment when he will be able to read the books that matter to him. In short, I can't know Jewish reality in depth, but I can see some principles, some beginnings of the paths that could lead me to it.

BL But when you wrote *Anti Semite and Jew,* you surely had collected some documentation?

J-PS No.

BL What do you mean, no?

J PS None. I wrote without any documentation, without reading one book about Jews.

BL But how did you do it?

J-PS I wrote what I thought.

BL But based on what?

J-PS Based on nothing, based on anti-Semitism, which I wanted to combat.

BL If you'd opened any book at all—for example, Baron's *The History of Israel,* which you've just read it might have persuaded you not to write that there is no Jewish history.

J-PS I realize from reading Baron that it wouldn't have changed the point of view I held then.

BL Why not?

J-PS Because at the time that I said that there was no Jewish history, I was thinking of history in a certain well-defined sense—the history of France, the history of Germany, the history of America, of the United States. In any case, the history of a sovereign political entity that has its own territory and relations with other states like itself. Whereas one would have had to conceive of history differently if one wanted to say that there is a Jewish history. One had to conceive of Jewish history not only as the history of the Jews' dispersion throughout the world but also as the unity of this Diaspora, the unity of the dispersed Jews.

BL In his profoundest reality, then, the Jew can permit us to give up on the philosophy of history.

J-PS Exactly. The philosophy of history isn't the same if there's a Jewish history or if there isn't. But obviously there is a Jewish history.

BL In other words, the history that Hegel introduced into our intellectual landscape sought to get rid of the Jew, and it's the Jew who will make it possible to get away from the view of history Hegel wanted to impose on us.

J-PS Absolutely, because this proves there is a real unity of Jews in historical time, and that real unity is due not to their being gathered together on a historical territory but to actions and writings and bonds that don't derive from the idea of a homeland, except for the last few years.

BL According to you, where does Jewish reality come from?

J-PS That's exactly what I've tried to understand. All things considered, I believe that for the Jew the essential thing is that for several thousand years he has had a relationship with a single God; he has been a monotheist, and that's what distinguished him from all the other ancient peoples who all had many gods, and that's what has made the Jew absolutely essential and autonomous. What's more, this relationship with God was of a very special kind. Gods have always had relationships with men, of course. Jupiter had relationships with human beings, he slept with women—in a word, he changed himself into a man when he wished to, so there's nothing new about that.

What is new is the kind of relationship this God entered into with men. It was an immediate relationship that the Jews had with what they used to call the Name, that is to say, God. God speaks to the Jew, the Jew hears his word, and the reality to emerge from all this was a first metaphysical link of the Jew with the infinite. That, I believe, is the primary definition of the ancient Jew, the man whose entire life is somehow determined, ruled, by his relationship with God. And the whole history of the Jews consists precisely of this primary relationship.

For example, the great event that changed the life of the Jews considerably and that made them people who, in gen-

eral, suffered as exiles or martyrs was the advent of Christianity, that is, another religion with one God. So there were two monotheisms, and the second monotheism—though it took its inspiration from the first and adopted the Bible as a sacred book—has nonetheless been constantly hostile to the Jewish people.

BL Tell me, what interests you about this relationship to a single God, this destiny of Israel?

J-PS Well, it's not the Name that has any meaning for me. The essential thing for me is that the Jew has lived and still lives metaphysically.

BL So it's the metaphysical character of the Jew that you're interested in?

J-PS It's his metaphysical character, which came from his religion.

BL Of course. And this, then, is what interests you?

J-PS This. But also the fact that he has a destiny.

BL It's the same thing, isn't it?

J-PS It's not entirely the same thing. It means something very precise. The Jewish religion implies that this world will end and, at the same moment, another world will appear—another world that will be made of this one but in which things will be differently arranged. There is also another theme I like: the Jewish dead and others too, for that matter—will come back to life, they will return to earth. Contrary to the Christian conception, they the present Jewish dead—have no existence other than that of the grave, but they will be reborn as living beings in this new world. This new world is the end.

BL What interests you about that?

J-PS The finality to which every Jew is more or less consciously inclined and which must ultimately reunite humanity. It is this end, which is at bottom social as well as religious and which only the Jewish people—

BL It's clear what made you receptive to the idea of the end of human prehistory, which you found in Marx; it could give consistency to your conception of the individual project. But in what way can this Jewish messianic end interest you today?

J-PS Precisely because it possesses no Marxist element. I mean, it is not an end that is defined in terms of the present situation and then projected into the future, one that will be attained by stages through the development of certain facts today.

BL Can you develop this idea?

J-PS The Jewish end has none of this. If you like, it's the beginning of the existence of men who live for each other. In other words, it's an ethical end. Or, more exactly, it is ethics. The Jew thinks that the end of the world, of this world, and the upsurge of the other will result in the appearance of the ethical existence of men who live for one another.

BL Yes, but to adopt an ethics the Jew doesn't wait for the end of this world as you've described it.

J-PS We non-Jews are searching for an ethics, too. The question is to find the ultimate end, the moment when ethics will be simply and truly the way in which human beings live in relation to each other. The rules-and-prescriptions aspect of ethics that prevails today will probably no longer exist—as has often been said, for that matter. Ethics will have to do

with the way in which men form their thoughts, their feelings—

BL Yes, but the Jew thinks it's possible for the Law to be transcended—if the term can still be used innocently from above, not from below. It's not by putting the rules and all reflection about rules today in parentheses, as you put it, that one gets ready for the end, when all law will be abolished. Modern man has claimed he could circumvent rules from below. By transgressing them or by decreeing that all idea of law was null and void.

J-PS Absolutely. And that's why, for me, messianism is an important thing that Jews have conceived of alone but that could be used by non-Jews for other purposes.

BL Why for other purposes?

J-PS Because the goal of non-Jews, those I agree with, is revolution. And what do we mean by revolution? Doing away with the present society and replacing it by a juster society in which human beings can have good relations with each other. That conception of revolution has been around a long time now.

BL One of two things will happen, either you rediscover—

J-PS Revolutionaries want to bring about a society that would be humane and satisfying for human beings, but they forget that a society of this kind is not a de facto society; it is, you might say, a de jure society. That is, a society in which the relations among human beings are ethical. Well, it's through a kind of messianism that one can conceive of this ethics as the ultimate goal of revolution. There will be immense economic problems, of course, but—contrary to what Marx and the Marxists claim—they are not the essential prob-

lems. Their solution is, in some cases, a means of securing a true relationship among men.

BL Don't forget that the Jew has a long experience of false messianism. The conjunction of Jew and leftist, even assuming a redefinition of "leftist," is certainly not a matter of course.

J-PS And yet, Jewish reality must remain in the revolution. It must contribute the power of ethics to it.

BL In short—since we have to stop soon—you're beginning afresh at seventy-five?

J-PS Actually, the same thing has happened to me twice in my life—being tempted by despair, I mean. The first time was between 1939 and 1945. I was leaving my youth behind, I was not active politically, I was busy with literature, I was among friends, I was happy, my life lay before me. Then the war came, and gradually, especially after the defeat and during the German occupation, I felt as if I was completely cut off from the world I had thought I had before me. I was confronting a world of suffering, evil, and despair. But I rejected the option of falling into despair, as so many people were doing all around me, and I allied myself with friends who were not despairing, who believed you could fight for a happy future although there was no possibility whatever that this future might come into being. One had to resist, no question about it, but the true fortunes of war were out of our hands; they lay with the British, the Americans.

It was then that I felt the nonexistence, the daily banality that was threatening each Frenchman as well as me. And if I believed, in spite of everything, that the Nazi might would recede and that the war would end, it was because of something in me—hope—which was never absent for long. Then the war did end. From that time on, I have had a life that has not always been happy but has been strongly

marked by intellectual debates, causes to be defended, and my thoughts sometimes threatened to give way to despair—as during the Korean War—but quickly recovered. And then, little by little, once again something started to unravel. In 1975, I was still the same man who had been stirred by May '68 and who, basically, was trying to associate his ideas with those of the Sixty-eighters without too many contradictions. Then the international scene became what it is now—the triumph of rightist ideas, at least on the part of governments, in almost all nations.

BL You're including the Soviet Union among the nations with right-wing ideas?

J-PS Naturally. And the Americans, the Swedes

BL The Swedes?

J-PS Yes. Their new government is right-wing, although for years Sweden was on the left. It was a funny country, for that matter, which we other Marxians couldn't acknowledge because it was socialist, yet not Marxist. To us that seemed suspicious. In short, in all nations today the right is winning. On the other hand, the cold war seems to be coming back. The invasion of Afghanistan is a particularly disturbing fact. A third world war is not impossible for reasons that are all wrong, all badly thought out. Our planet is divided now between the poor who are extremely poor, who are dying of hunger, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the small number of rich people who are beginning to be less rich but who, even so, are still comfortably off.

What with the third world war that can break out any day, and the wretched mess our planet has become, despair has come back to tempt me with the idea that there is no end to it all, that there is no goal, that there are only small, individual objectives that we fight for. We make small revolutions, but there's no human end, there's nothing of con-

cern to human beings, there's only disorder. A person can think something like this. It tempts you constantly, especially when you're old and you think, "Well, anyhow, I'm going to die in five years at the outside"—actually, I'm thinking in terms of ten years, but it could well be five. In any event, the world seems ugly, evil, and hopeless. Such is the calm despair of an old man who will die in that despair. But the point is, I'm resisting, and I know I shall die in hope. But this hope must be grounded.

We must try to explain why the world of today, which is horrible, is only one moment in a long historical development, that hope has always been one of the dominant forces of revolutions and insurrections, and how I still feel that hope is my conception of the future.

THE FINAL WORD

Benny Lévy

Perhaps it is time to think about the final word. To be attentive to Sartre's last statements, to the full stop at which, scandalously (Sartre said "absurdly"), the count stops, and which promises precisely "hope now." The scandal of that end, but also of what it points to: the Messiah of the Jews and the resurrection of the dead on earth:

> The Jewish religion implies that this world will end and, at the same moment, another will appear—another world that will be made of this one but in which things will be differently arranged. There is also another theme that I like: the Jewish dead—and others too, for that matter will come back to life, they will return to earth. . . . This new world is the end. (12)
>
> Well, it's through a kind of messianism that one can conceive of this ethics as the ultimate goal of revolution. (12)

Using these remarks *as a starting point,* I now intend to reflect in the following note on Sartre's fundamental doctrine of commitment.

THE LOGOS AND THE MYTH

Ultimately this doctrine undergoes a fate quite similar to that which befell Plato's Republic. One ends up by retaining only the political allusion. And since it is no longer acceptable to our age, nothing is

clear any more. But just as *The Republic* is a discourse about the Soul, Sartre's doctrine is a reflection on *the subject's becoming* or, in the language of Kant—a philosopher with whom he continued to maintain a dialogue—a reflection on the "total destiny of man." Therefore we must break with platitudes about commitment, a *doxa* that enslaves the faithful as well as the ungrateful, and must focus on the point which, secretly, guides the twists, turns, and backtrackings of Sartre's thinking.

Again, Plato can guide us. The *logos,* the philosopheme, can do justice to the existence of the soul—there are proofs for the immortality of the soul—but the discourse is only complete at the moment when myth has suggested what the *logos* must necessarily keep silent about (the judgment of the soul, the rewards of the just). Reflection about the Soul requires myth: this mode of teaching suits souls that have embraced "the imaginative intellect." But we should know that these myths "probably contain within them much of the intellectual light of the truth, though on the outside they project the fictional cover that hides this light."[1] Our reading seeks that intellectual light which the *logos* would disdain to perceive/conceive.

The same is true for Sartre: commitment is expressed in the philosopheme as well as extending into myth, that is to say into "the dramatic style," into theater, "which is austere, moral, mythical and ceremonial in aspect."[2] His drama is philosophical not because it supposedly illustrates philosophical themes but to the extent that it suggests what the philosopheme is powerless to state. Our reading is based on our decision to elucidate the mythical excess of the notion (in this case, that of commitment).

Myth expresses the somber fact of existence that the philosopheme persistently designates with the term of "facticity" (contingency). Sometimes Sartre is in a hurry, and then he slips in a word that is neither philosophical nor mythical: for example, "absurd." Immediately *doxa* seizes it and exploits it to the full. This type of bastardized expression must be carefully distinguished from expressions that, in the philosophical text, are authentic signposts in the direction of myth: "the game is up," "hell is other people." One must exclude the *doxa* from the notion of commitment and uncover the mythical core.

One could certainly object by referring to Kant. The Kantian Idea appears to do without myth. Exceeding the limits of the concept of understanding, the Idea expresses the Unconditioned, which is proper to reason; and it seems sufficient to express the total destination of man. Hence the *logos* could pretend to state the truth of existence. It isn't so. It is true that the practical Idea used to express within practical philosophy something incomprehensible: freedom. It was subjectively impossible to explain the freedom of will and yet the philosopheme stated THE FACT and, hence, was intelligible. But farther on, down deeper, darkness was lying in wait for Kant: in the radical evil that freedom itself makes possible. An evil more profoundly incomprehensible than the very possibility of freedom. That is why we need a *narrative* to represent it:

> Even though it is elaborated with concepts entirely borrowed from practical philosophy, [the theory of evil] does not belong to it but serves as starting point for his philosophy of religion and already requires a myth borrowed from revealed religion (original sin) in order to be fully explained. Kant gives short shrift to the biblical narration of the Fall, but he cannot do without it. Perhaps this will also be true of all revealed religion.[3]

It is essential to note that the same word, facticity, in Kant as in Sartre, designates the philosopheme that establishes the link with myth. In the case of Kant, the "fact" reveals its intimate link with the "given" revealed in religion. The dialogue with Kant will no doubt be useful to bring out the intellectual light hidden in the Sartrean myths. At the least, thanks to this dialogue, we can hope that the reference to hell, the Messiah, and the resurrection will appear less scandalous and more intelligible.

THE PURE FUTURE AND DEATH

The Sartrean myth points directly to the essential: "our conduct in relationship to the ultimate end."[4] All of Sartre's characters flee

from gestures, search for their *act,* and bear witness to this: only one thing counts, knowing what we must do. Salvation passes through the gravity of the act. Beyond Orestes' lighthearted attitude before his crime and the sickening heaviness of the "I have to commit myself" of "The Childhood of a Leader." The doctrine of commitment is proclaimed: the concern with oneself is eschatological practice. The character who is closest to the philosopher—Poulou does not hide from it: we must "preserve . . . the order of ends in all circumstances, at all costs."[5]

And in this order resides "the secret finality" of the Self, the secret of the *For*-Itself: "Born of a future expectation, I leaped ahead luminously . . ."[6]

The philosopheme must receive this request from the myth: What may be "the future expectation"? What must the pure future be if I am expected *down there?*

The answer is obvious: it must ignore death in the same way as Kierkegaard's God "ignores" evil. But it has not been sufficiently noticed that *death does not belong to ontology* in *Being and Nothingness.* When Sartre criticizes Heidegger's being-for-death because *death* is not my death[7]—he formulates this surprising proposition: "If I make myself, I make myself finite and because of this fact my life is unique. Consequently, even if I were immortal, I would not be allowed "to give it another try."[8]

The For-Itself, given the example of Poulou, is immortal. An innocent creature that death cannot touch. Adam eating the fruit of the Tree of Life, tasting its immortal singularity. Sartre's ontology realizes what Christian Jambet, at the end of his admirable book, calls "the double desire of philosophy and monotheism: to not prepare oneself for death."[9]

But there is the fall, the anti-ontology:[10] *the fact* of the Other. Death comes from the Other. The For-Itself is immortal, the other is mortal; I learn about my death from the Other:

> There is then an undeniable and fundamental characteristic that is a *fact*—i.e., a radical contingency—in death as in the Other's existence.[11] . . . *Mortal* represents the present

> being that I am for the Other: *dead* represents the future meaning of my actual for-itself for the Other.[12]

Finitude is ontological, contingency (facticity) anti-ontological. The fragility of Sartre's philosopheme results from the difficulty of conceiving the two propositions simultaneously. In truth, the distinction between finitude and contingency seems unable to withstand the test. This has two consequences: a modification of the philosophy and a new appeal to myth. The latter immediately asks the question: How, after being touched by death, will Adam rediscover his innocence? If hell is other people, how shall I escape from hell, I who am expected—down there? Let us first deal with the changes in the philosophy.

Beginning with his *Notebooks for an Ethics,* Sartre takes a step backward:

> If a being were endowed with a temporal infinity, he could realize every possible. . . . He would disappear as an individuality (the realization of these possibles to the exclusion of all the rest) and as freedom (the dangerous and ir remediable choice of some possibles). . . . Freedom does not conceive of itself apart from death, failure, and the risk of absolute despair without any consolation.[13]

The innocent freedom of the ontological is forgotten. Death again becomes *my* death, "possibility of the impossibility."[14] Sartre here goes back to Heidegger, for whom death, as Levinas remarked when criticizing J. Wahl, was the "possibility of the impossibility."[15] It is highly significant that Sartre thus goes back to Heidegger when he is criticizing Levinas. At that same moment, the latter was medi tating on the "same" fact: death comes from the Other: "Death is the impossibility of having a project. This approach to death indicates that we are in a relationship with something that is absolutely other."[16]

Sartrean facticity expresses the same fact as Levinas' "mystery." But Levinas will accept the *signifiance* of this "passivity" of the sub-

ject, whereas Sartre prefers to go back to the "virility" of the project. What stands out in this critical note is that Levinas thought that from this situation of death, in which the subject can no longer grasp any possibility, it was possible to derive another characteristic of existence with the other: "It is the future which is in no way grasped."[17] To this remark Sartre reacts as follows: "It is not death that creates the future, it is the future that unveils death."[18]

Sartre decides to expel "the mystery" of facticity from the philosopheme (he will rediscover it in the myth) because the ungraspable aspect of the Other will not make the project fail; the project will end up by mastering it: "Although it [the future, but also death, the Other] escapes me regardless of what manner in which it may be the other and the unknown, it can only be defined as other and as unknown if my project already indicates it."[19]

Pure future as Other is forgotten: the future is my freedom's project[20] in spite of the Other.

THE MESSIAH

It is true that Sartre does not notice the originality of Levinas' description. He is completely ignorant of the language—that of the neoplatonists that could have opened his eyes. But his going back to Heidegger should not deceive us: Sartre *does not think* that death, the last possibility of experience, makes all other possibilities possible. Virile heroism embarrasses him but doesn't constitute the final word for him. Lucien Fleurier's statement "I must commit myself" contains, in its very perversity, a certain truth. The For-Itself, *detached* from the reassuring world of values, the world of the bastards, recognizes commitment as an imperative. In the last interview Sartre will no longer be afraid to speak of a "requisitioned consciousness." In short, at the critical moment when the philosopheme risks missing out on the pure future, Sartre finds in his stock of Kantian ideas the power to bounce back: you must, therefore you can. One recalls Kant's example:[21] a ruler orders a man, under threat of immediate death, to bear false witness against an honest man. Would he not, in this case, think it *possible,* however great his

love of life may be, that in spite of everything he can vanquish it? He may not dare to affirm whether or not he would do it, but he must concede without hesitation that it is possible for him. Therefore he judges that he can do something because he is conscious that he must, and he recognizes in himself the freedom that, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him. The facticity of the moral law (it is a *fact:* you must) reveals freedom or awakens it. The Unconditioned, which has come from elsewhere, provokes the possible itself. The imperative fact obliges me to postulate a relation ship with a pure future:

> We are necessarily constrained by reason to represent our selves as belonging to such a [moral] world although the senses present to us nothing but a world of appearances; we must assume that moral world to be a consequence of our conduct in the world of sense in which no such con nection between worthiness and happiness is exhibited, and therefore to be for us a future world.[22]

Through the imperative fact, I postulate a part of the future world. Sartre grasps immediately all the advantages that he can extract from "you must therefore you can."

> "You must therefore you can" means that, as of now, the factual impossibility dissolves for anyone who prefers to life the possibility of humanizing man—the future is possible because of its impossibility.[23]

Here we have the pure future, which is neither knowable nor foreseeable: the future that reveals itself only in the dim light of the "yet to be done." A future world that can only be perceived when I commit myself as an obedient listener to an unconditioned possibility.

Sartre repeats here what is extraordinary in Kantian facticity: the moral law revealed freedom, and, for Sartre, "the norm is my possibility of producing myself as subject."[24]

We must go as far, indeed, to think that Sartre's doctrine of

commitment occupies exactly the same place as freedom-for-Good in Kant (freedom as obedient response to the moral law).

But this repetition of Kantianism is made by Sartre in the course of a critique of Kant's universalist error: he cannot admit the form of the law. For Sartre the imperative is of the order of universalization: Man is to be made.

The *fact* of scarcity bears witness to the factual impossibility of man. The coming of the Messiah—the reign of Man, of the universal—in short, the "normative" must be understood as being beyond the factual impossibility. Sartre's Messiah is a Jew. "There is not enough for everybody."[25] The Earth is not a communal residence: "it is impossible for *all* those bound by reciprocal links to stay on the soil which supports and feeds them."[26]

The man of the Enlightenment, in a hurry to project the Reign [of Man] onto nature's plan, contemplated the Earth's spherical sur face in order to detect the *presence of the* ONE. He conceived from the beginning a common possession of the Earth "because of the unity of place that the Earth's surface presents since it is a spherical surface: because if the Earth were an infinite plane, men could disperse over it in such a way that they would not succeed in forming any kind of community, which would therefore not be a necessary con sequence of their existence on Earth."[27]

For Sartre, on the contrary, the normative intention can be read in the trace of the ONE who is *absent* on earth. From the depths of distress. The liberal vulgate of the day obscures everything. Sartre's messianism is criticized in the name of legal thinking. The critics forget that the law itself is an expression of the messianic Idea of the Reign: "All men on earth possess . . . a concept of practical reason that contains *a priori* the only principle that allows men to use of the earth's places by following a system of laws."[28]

Sartre and Kant raise the essential problem of messianism: in what sense does the Messiah put an end to the distress? Or: how to put an end to radical evil?

For Kant, a *factual* universality—namely, evil—unceasingly perverts the (ethical and legal) Reign [of Man]. It submits the total destination of man to the ultimate gamble: "the end of the world"!

> The duration of the world has a value only to the extent that rational creatures in it are commensurate with the ultimate purpose of its existence; but if this was not meant to be achieved, *creation itself appears to be pointless to them,* like a drama that is totally without issue and has no rational design.[29]

It appears that Sartre continued to believe in an end of history, history being "a bitter struggle against scarcity."[30] To put an end to evil or to end History (prehistory) is all ONE. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. Sartre comes up against a "primitive alienation"[31] that is more profound than the fact of scarcity. The "end" results in failure because of an evil that is more radical than scarcity. "To what extent will collective objects, the signs of our alienation, be dissolved into a true intersubjective community in which the only real relations will be those between men?"[32]

The following question remains unanswered. Would Evil—"the antifinal,"[33] that which is contrary to purposefulness prevent the coming of the Messiah, or would the Messiah himself be incapable of resolving the problem of the antifinal? Is this the ultimate problem raised by Sartrean commitment? "This is not what I wanted," and "I understand that this is what I have done and that I could not do anything else."[34]

The *gravity* of the act has driven Sartre to this extreme position: Can I stop *engraving* my evil image on things?

The doctrine of commitment begins with "One must do" and ends with the question, How to undo? "What's done will remain done . . . I would have wanted . . . you are going to laugh . . . I wish that I had never been born."[35]

THE RESURRECTION

It will be recalled that death had struck the immortal body of the For-Itself. And we asked ourselves then: how to restore the innocence of the For-Itself?

Myth allows Sartre to describe an "experience" of death that escapes from the ontological. Concerning the characters in *No Exit,* Sartre comments:

> If they were cowards in the first place, nothing can alter the fact that they were cowards. That is why they are dead, that is the reason: it is a way of saying that to be wrapped up in the perpetual preoccupation with judgments and actions which you do not want to change is a living death.[36]

To be dead is to experience the point where the Other "steals" my act. To be dead is not to be master of my act. Free existence is lost in the dead essence, where the subject cannot find himself again. The experience of death is that of the tomb. It is finished. To be enclosed in finitude: to be dead or to be sequestered, it is all ONE. "You know very well I'm dead," says Inès, "and we are together forever."[37]

The committed man is no longer free, he is incapable of disengaging himself, of escaping from the Other's determination and definition. Garcin tries to leave. In vain. Like the tyrants in the hereafter described by Er the Pamphylian:[38] "And when these supposed that at last they were about to go up and out [from the heart of the earth], the mouth would not receive them, but it bellowed when any one of the incurably wicked or of those who had not completed their punishment tried to come up."[39]

To be free is to commit oneself; to commit oneself is to be no longer free: such is the basis of the "ethical paradox"![40] Hence freedom would always reveal itself "*when the second try is made,*" but death stands in the way. It is quite true that freedom calls out for immortality, but in a sense that now goes beyond the ontological. For one can no longer pretend to ignore the facticity of death. One might be tempted to speak of a *postulate* of freedom in Sartre: freedom insists on *departing again,* because it is *awaited*—down there: "I don't see myself as so much dust that appeared in the world, but as a being who was expected."[41]

Death could not be the final word, according to the postulate of

freedom! And that is why the ethical paradox exposes us, in the myth, to the trial of judgment. Freedom is-for-the-judgment. I am judged by Inès, a tribunal of crabs, the thirtieth century, whomever. There is judgment. Subjectivation implies judgment, according to the postulate of freedom.

> *Frantz:* Imagine a black window pane. Thinner than ether. Ultrasensitive. It records the slightest breath. The *slightest* breath of air. All History is engraved on it from the beginning of time up to this snap of my fingers.
> *Léni:* Where is it?
> *Frantz:* Everywhere. Here. It is the day in reverse. They will invent machines to make it vibrate and everything will come back to life. You see? All our actions.[42]

The myth of the inscription on the black window pane takes us back to Plato's myth:

> that after every judgment [the judges] bade the righteous to journey to the right and upward through the heaven with placards (*sēmeia*) attached to them in front with the judgment passed on them, and the unjust take the road to the left and downward, they too wearing behind placards of all that had befallen them.[43]

The mythic-semantic chain *sōma* (body)-*sēma* (tomb)-*sēmeia* (placard) clarifies the Sartrean plot: finite freedom (commitment of the body)—imprisonment in the tomb of determination inscription on the black window pane (placard).

One must pay even greater attention to the Sartrean myth. Don't the dead threaten us with an "existence" that is worse than death? After all, as long as they are dead, Inès, Garcin, and Estelle can "continue." Garcin's cowardice is still written down somewhere, forever. But everyone sees the worst: being effaced from the earth. At the moment of her confession, Estelle sees: "The earth has left me."[44]

Garcin states the worst: nothingness. The nonword of the end:

"Finished: case closed, I am nothing more on earth, not even a coward."[45]

And Frantz knows how to answer to nothingness: "Everything will come back to life . . . all our actions."

The "absurdity" of death will be powerless against this answer; Frantz will throw himself in the Elbe with his father, but what is done will not be undone. Frantz will answer for his act "on this day and forever."[46]

The postulate of freedom is based on a principle: hope. If the earth has left me, I can still hope—in this place of judgment. Hell, arthropods anything is preferable to a "life that is not sanctioned."

Worse: there is no judgment. Sartre is a Platonist: "injustice will not appear a terrible thing after all if it is going to be fatal to its possessor, for that would be a release from all troubles."[47]

The doctrine of commitment goes no farther than this: the "it must be done" of the subject's becoming had sent us back to the imperative of universalization, which in turn led us back to singularity-before-the-judgment. Sartre says no more than this, except for this final allusion to the "resurrection of the dead": Could the earth possibly not obliterate itself, contrary to what Estelle sees?

We should come back to the antifinal of the act, to what escapes us. We are not masters of our acts. I must stop *believing* that the act is the work of my hands. One should dispense with this belief before one can hope to dispense with the weight of the act, even if it does not obliterate itself. This is the price at which freedom can begin again . . .

Notes

I wish to thank Hazel E. Barnes and Jean-Pierre Boulé for their comments on this essay, as well as Michel Contat, Benny Lévy, and Michel Rybalka, whose contribu tions are acknowledged in the notes below.

References to the interviews are by section number.

1. "Sometimes too much, as in his interviews with Gerassi [see note 50 below], or as in his interview with Leo Fretz [in Frederic Elliston and Hugh Silverman, eds., *Jean Paul Sartre: Contemporary Approaches to His Philosophy* (Pittsburgh, 1980)]. I remember that, when I interviewed him [see note 50], I had to fight against this type of complaisance." Michel Rybalka, personal communication, May 17, 1995.
2. Serge July, "Le Miroir Sartre," *Libération/Sartre* (1980), 1.
3. Simone de Beauvoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (New York, 1984), 119.
4. Ibid., 63.
5. Ibid., 110.
6. Ibid., 119.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., translator's note.
9. Ibid., 119 20.
10. Ibid., 120.
11. "Sartre à 'Apostrophes,'" *Libération/Sartre* (1980), 49.
12. From a conversation in Liliane Siegel, *In the Shadow of Sartre* (London, 1990), 107.
13. "Polémique: La Cérémonie des Adieux," open letter to Simone de Beau voir from Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, *Libération,* December 3, 1981, 26.
14. See p. 14 for Sartre's own words.
15. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* vol. 1 (London, 1976), 1.
16. Beauvoir herself acknowledges that she has "omitted the conversations that seemed to me without interest. The others I have arranged according to their theme, at the same time keeping more or less to their chronological order. I have tried to give them a readable form as everyone knows, there is a great difference

between remarks recorded on tape and a properly written text." Preface to the Conversations, *Adieux,* 131.

17. Jean Pierre Boulé, *Sartre médiatique: La place de l'interview dans son œuvre* (Paris, 1993), 161 62.

18. Geneviève Idt, "Simone de Beauvoir's *Adieux:* A Funeral Rite and a Literary Challenge," in Ronald Aronson and Adrian van den Hoven, eds., *Sartre Alive* (Detroit, 1991), 366.

19. Ibid., 370.

20. Ibid, 369.

21. Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (New York, 1964), 93.

22. Elkaïm Sartre, 26.

23. As Michel Rybalka suggests, Sartre's philosophy of freedom can be seen to evolve in three stages: *liberté, égalité, fraternité.* The first lasts until his discovery of political commitment and socialism in the 1940s; the second informs his work until the late 1960s; his embrace of the New Left moves toward the understanding of brotherhood only fully articulated in these final interviews; in some fundamental sense we all come from the same mother (Michel Rybalka, personal communication, May 17, 1995). For an extended account of the changes and continuities in Sartre's career, see Ronald Aronson, *Jean-Paul Sartre — Philosophy in the World* (London, 1980). See also William L. McBride, *Sartre's Political Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN, 1991).

24. According to Jean Daniel, editor of *Le Nouvel Observateur,* Horst said: "They are all defending the Temple. I should probably do the same thing, but this time I am not going to. This text does not bother me in the least." Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life* (London, 1987), 514.

25. Boulé, 166. Sartre enunciates the goal in *On a raison de se révolter* (Paris, 1974) and returns to it again and again during his last six years. Indeed, such collective projects were the raison d'être of his final years; the fact that his relationships of long duration, such as that with Beauvoir, did not permit genuine dialogue was apparently a major reason for the strains that developed. See Boulé, 168 70, on the lack of dialogue in his "dialogues" with Beauvoir.

26. Boulé, 219.

27. Jean Paul Sartre, "Self Portrait at Seventy," *Life/Situations* (New York, 1977).

28. Michel Sicard, *Essais sur Sartre: Entretiens avec Sartre 1975 1979* (Paris, 1989).

29. Boulé, 224.

30. "Self Portrait at Seventy," 3 10.

31. Cohen Solal, 512 13.

32. Ibid., 499. See "Pouvoir et Liberté," *Libération,* January 5, 1977.

33. Siegel, *In the Shadow of Sartre,* 137.

34. Roland Castro, *1989* (Paris, 1984), "1976."

35. Cohen Solal, 499.

36. Ibid., 516.

37. Ibid., 498 503, 510 19.

38. Ibid., 501.

39. Ibid., 502.

40. Ibid., 501.

41. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age* (New York, 1978).

42. He regards this as the role of *style* in writing, "which is above all a way of saying three or four things in one." "Self-Portrait at Seventy," 7.

43. John Gerassi, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Hated Conscience of His Century* (Chicago, 1989), 22.

44. Ibid.

45. Michel Contat, "Sartre by Himself: An Account, an Explanation, a Defense," in Aronson and van den Hoven, 349 50.

46. Siegel, 138.

47. See especially Boulé's final two chapters.

48. See Cohen Solal, 513–16.

49. For example, given the concept of seriality in his social philosophy, the only way of overcoming such a relationship would seem to be a violent rupture; similarly, his early self other relationship is inherently conflictual. See also Sartre's remark in his January 1977 interview with Lévy ("Pouvoir et Liberté," 11) that he no longer sees Marxism as the "philosophy of our time."

50. See "Jean-Paul Sartre," *Oui,* June 1975. However, in a May 1975 interview with Oreste Pucciani and Michel Rybalka for the Sartre volume of the Library of Living Philosophers, Sartre declares himself as no longer being a Marxist, and says that they are "witnessing the end of Marxism." *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre,* ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (LaSalle, IL, 1982), 20. On the other hand, in "Self Portrait at Seventy," which took place well after the Gerassi interview and around the same time as the one with Pucciani and Rybalka, Sartre declares that Marxism's "essential aspects are still valid" (60) although "we must develop a way of thinking which takes Marxism into account in order to go beyond it, to reject it and take it up again, to absorb it" (61). The person he expects to do this according to this interview is none other than Lévy who according to the May interview "is no longer a Marxist, or at least he envisions the end of Marxism" (25).

51. See Aronson, *Jean Paul Sartre Philosophy in the World,* 107 21, 157 79.

52. Jean Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York, 1963), 21.

53. Ibid., 7 8.

54. Jean Paul Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821 1857,* vol. 1 (Chicago, 1981), ix.

55. See Aronson, *Jean-Paul Sartre Philosophy in the World,* 89 103, 243 92.

56. See Aronson, "Sartre and Marxism: A Double Retrospective," *Sartre Studies International* 1 (1995).

57. See Aronson, *Sartre's Second Critique* (Chicago, 1987), 76 183.

58. See Aronson, *Jean-Paul Sartre Philosophy in the World,* 303–24. Sartre's trip to Cuba, which celebrates a revolution without an ideology, takes place immediately after the *Critique* is published (233 41).

59. *Search for a Method,* 7 8.

60. See for example his questions about the sources of revolutionary commitment in *On a raison de se révolter,* 174, 178 98.

61. See also McBride's excellent discussion in *Sartre's Political Philosophy* (2029), which does justice to the multiple levels and richness of this "frustratingly brief text."

62. McBride agrees with this, as does Francis Jeanson. Jeanson, interestingly enough, virtually ignores the "scandalous" sections and treats the ethical discussions

as serious philosophical statements, showing how Sartre retains continuity with his earlier concerns as well as introducing new directions. See "De l'Aliénation morale à l'exigence éthique," *Les Temps modernes* 2, nos. 531 33 (October December 1990), 890 905.

63. See Aronson, *Sartre's Second Critique,* chap. 8.

64. The words are Michel Contat's. Interview with Michel Contat, Paris, June 27, 1994. See Herbert Spiegelberg's discussion of the work lying ahead for Sartre in "Sartre's Last Word on Ethics in Phenomenological Perspective," *Research in Phenomenology* 11 (1981): 96 101.

65. Cohen-Salal, 515.

66. See Robert C. Tucker and Stephen F. Cohen, *The Great Purge Trial* (New York, 1965), 327 410 and 656 68.

67. For a critical discussion, see Aronson, *Jean-Paul Sartre — Philosophy in the World,* 313 54.

68. *On a raison de se révolter,* 71 73, quoted by Cohen Solal, 477.

69. Ibid., 7.

70. See Sartre's striking acknowledgment that his equality with Gérard Horst did not lead to discussion between them but that he preferred to talk with people like Lévy, who "are less formed than I am on some point, who are less cultivated, or who have reflected less" (Beauvoir, 280).

71. Interview with Benny Lévy, Strasbourg, France, June 28, 1994.

72. Lévy did not wait until the publication of *L'Espoir maintenant* to do this; he earlier devoted an entire book to this kind of depoliticizing and messianic read ing of Sartre. See *Le Nom de l'homme: dialogue avec Sartre* (Lagrasse, 1984), which he concludes by affirming that "Sartre's voice resounds in such a way that it permits me to say in French what is revealed to me in the perspective of Hebrew" (191).

PRESENTATION

1. "L'Espoir maintenant," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1 (March 10, 1980); 2 (March 17, 1980); 3 (March 24, 1980). Translated by Adrienne Foulke as "The Last Words of Jean Paul Sartre," *Dissent,* Fall 1980, 397 422.

2. March 20, 1980.

3. April 15, 1980.

4. Benny Lévy, "Le mot de la fin," *Les Temps modernes,* "Témoins de Sartre," 46th year, 1 (October December 1990), nos. 531 533, pp. 149 63.

5. See below, p. 111.

6. Plato, *The Collected Dialogues, including the Letters,* ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, with Introduction and Prefatory Notes, Bollingen Series LXXI (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961). "Phaedo," 67 c, p. 50: "to withdraw from all contact with the body and concentrate itself by itself."

7. References to the interviews are by section number.

8. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology,* trans. H. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 29. Translation slightly changed.

9. In *Being and Nothingness,* 29, Sartre cites J. Wahl, "Kierkegaard et Heidegger," *Etudes Kierkegaardiennes* (see note 18).

10. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words,* trans. B. Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1964), 255.

11. Unpublished note, 1979.

12. *The Words,* 237.

13. *L'Espoir maintenant* reads (13), "Dans une conférence prononcée en 65," and (14) "Comme dans la conférence de 65," "Le risque est, comme en 65." E. Bowman and R. Stone comment as follows on these remarks: "The lecture he *gave* in which this point was made was in 1964, not 65. *Morality and History* (1965) elaborates the structure of praxis that allows for this 'you can'—called 'invention'—but it engages Kant by name very little. It is true but megarian to say Sartre criticizes Kant here. It's like saying Marx criticizes Hegel on dialectic: he borrows as much as he criticizes. See our 'Dialectical Ethics: A First Look at Sartre's Unpublished 1964 Rome Lecture Notes,' *Social Text* 13/14 (Winter/Spring 1986): 197 205, for the complexities."

14. In the unpublished interviews.

THE INTERVIEWS

1. "All human activities are equivalent (for they all tend to sacrifice man in order that the self cause may arise) and . . . all are on principle doomed to failure. Thus it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is the leader of nations" (*Being and Nothingness,* 627).

2. *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* vol. 2, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1991).

3. Lévy is referring here to the Maoist newspaper *La Cause du Peuple,* published in the 1960s in Paris, which like the paper of the same name issued by Marat during the French Revolution tried to imitate or compete with *Le Père Duchesne,* an ultraleft paper issued during the French Revolution by Hébert and notable for its extreme violence and its cynicism of tone.

4. "And the colonized cures himself of the colonial neurosis by expelling the colonizer by force. When his rage explodes, he rediscovers his lost transparency, he knows himself to the very extent that he makes himself. . . . Either one remains terrified or one becomes terrifying: that means, one abandons oneself to a life that is a fake or one conquers the unity one possessed at birth." Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), "Preface," 21 22 (translation changed).

THE FINAL WORD

1. Proclus, *Commentaire sur la République,* vol. 3, trans. Festugière (Vrin, 1970), 50, 51.

2. Jean Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Theater,* trans. Frank Jellinek (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 42.

3. J. L. Bruch, *La Philosophie religieuse de Kant* (Paris: Aubier, 1968), 75.

4. E. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. N. Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 630.

5. Sartre, *The Words,* 233. It should be noted that, at the end of his life, Sartre says exactly the same thing.

6. Ibid., 237.

7. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* 535: "It is my subjectivity defined by the

prereflective *cogito* which makes of my death a subjective irreplaceable, and not death which would give an irreplaceable selfness to my for itself."

8. Ibid., 546. H. Barnes writes: "It would be forbidden me to 'recover my stroke.'"

9. C. Jambet, *La Grande Résurrection d'Alamût* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1990).

10. Expression used by Birault in his work on Heidegger, *Heidegger et l'expression de la pensée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

11. *Being and Nothingness,* 545.

12. Ibid., 547.

13. *Notebooks for an Ethics,* trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 326.

14. Ibid., 416.

15. E. Levinas, *Time and the Other* and *Additional Essays,* trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 70, note 43: "Death in Heidegger is not, as Jean Wahl says, 'the impossibility of possibility,' but 'the possibility of impossibility.'" (See Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 294 307.) This apparently byzantine distinction has a fundamental importance. (See *Totality and Infinity,* 235.)

16. Levinas, *Time and the Other,* 63.

17. Ibid., 64.

18. *Notebooks,* 416.

19. Ibid., 416 17 (translation changed).

20. Ibid., 416.

21. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* trans. With an Intro. by L. W. Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), 159 60.

22. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 639 (translation changed).

23. The complete quotation from the manuscript (135) and typescript (112) of *The 1964 Rome Lecture* (and not the 1965 conference as Benny Lévy indicates) supplied by E. Bowman and R. Stone reads as follows (trans. A. van den Hoven): "'You *MUST* therefore you can' means also that, as of now, the factual impossibility dissolves for anyone who prefers to life the possibility of humanizing man.

"Hence the pure future as unconditioned possibility manifests itself as a permanent beyond of the impossible. Let's say that it is possible *because of its impossibility.*"

24. Ibid., p. 15.

25. Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* vol. 1, p. 128.

26. Ibid., 132.

27. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals,* Intro., trans., and notes by Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 83 84.

28. Ibid., 84.

29. *Kant on History,* ed. with an Intro. by Lewis Beck White (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1957), 73 (emphasis added). It should be noted that in this passage Kant does not proclaim that the world will end; he simply asks: "Why do people expect an end of the world at all?"

30. *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* vol. 1, p. 123.

31. *Notebooks for an Ethics,* 412.

32. *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* vol. 1, p. 307, note 89.

33. Michel Despland, *Kant on History and Religion, with a translation of Kant's "On the failure of all attempted philosophical theodicies"* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's

University Press, 1973), 284 85. Despland translates the relevant passage as follows: "There are three kinds of contradictions to purposefulness in the world out of which objections could be made to the wisdom of its creator. (1) That which is absolutely contrary to purposefulness which wisdom cannot allow nor desire, nei ther as an end nor as a means. (2) That which is conditionally contrary to purpose-fulness, which cannot coincide with the wise will as a goal, but can as a means. The *first* is that which morally runs against purpose, evil properly speaking (sin). The *second* is that which physically runs against purpose, evil as pain. . . . (3) The con tradiction to purposefulness in the world which lies in the disproportion of crime and punishment."

34. *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* vol. 1, pp. 226 27.

35. Jean Paul Sartre, *The Condemned of Altona,* trans. S. G. Leeson (New York: Knopf, 1964), 173.

36. Sartre, *Sartre on Theater,* 200 (translation slightly changed).

37. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Flies and In Camera,* trans. S. Gilbert (London: H. Hamilton, 1946), 166 67 (translation changed).

38. See also Jean Paul Sartre, *Écrits de jeunesse* (Paris: Gallimard, NRF, 1991), 287 334.

39. Plato, *The Collected Dialogues,* "The Republic," book X, 615 e, p. 840.

40. E. Bowman and R. Stone comment as follows: This phrase occurs in *The 1964 Rome Lecture,* manuscript p. 20 21, typescript p. 15 16, but also roughly in 1947 in *Situations, II: Qu'est ce que la littérature?* Paris: Gallimard, p. 296. *What Is Literature?* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 268. In 1965, Sartre speaks of "the paradox of ethos" an important refinement. (Cf. R. Stone and B. Bowman, "Sartre's Morality and History: A First Look at the Notes for the Unpublished 1965 Cornell Lectures," in R. Aronson and A. van den Hoven, *Sartre Alive* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 72 74. The pertinent manuscript and type-script pages from 1964 show plainly that Sartre's "ethical paradox" is nothing like Benny Lévy's gloss on it: "It is a strict obligation for the Australian aborigine to marry according to certain exogamic rules. This phrase contains both fact and norm in the same proposition: exogamy is objectively *a rule to be observed,* a nor-mative structure for all aborigines: it is *his future* if he is not married, the future of his son or of his nephew, and later, his family's future. In short, *for him* the future is given as a certain change that is oriented. But it is also true that the same abo rigine, when he functions as the informant for the ethnographer, speaks of that structure as a *customary fact: we marry* in such or such a way. That's what we will call *The ethical paradox.*"

41. Simone de Beauvoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre,* "Conversations with Jean-Paul Sartre," trans. P. O'Brian (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 438.

42. *The Condemned of Altona,* 63 64.

43. "The Republic," book X, 614 cd, p. 839 (translation slightly changed).

44. *The Flies and In Camera,* 149.

45. Ibid., 162 (translation changed).

46. *The Condemned of Altona,* 178.

47. "The Republic," book X, 610 e, p. 835.

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