



SEARCH FOR A METHOD

by Jean-Paul Sartre

Translated from the French and with an Introduction by

HAZEL E. BARNES



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Sartre goes on to say that the possibility that we may someday discover the existence of a "concrete dialectic of Nature" must be kept open. As for man, he is one material being among others and enjoys no privileged status. Yet Sartre rejects the view that human events are determined by any sort of external law imposed upon them. Today's Marxists, he says, have indeed tried to maintain a "dialectic without men," and this is precisely what has caused Marxism to stagnate and turned it into "a paranoiac dream."

Even granting that a dialectic of nature just might exist, there are two reasons why we cannot make it a support for dialectical materialism as it is usually conceived. In the first place, it could at present be only "a metaphysical hypothesis." To treat it as an unconditioned law driving men to make History by blind necessity, is to substitute "obscurity for clarity, conjecture for evidence, science fiction for Truth." There is another, stronger reason. Even though neither God nor Nature has allotted to man a privileged position, there still remains in his consciousness that power of effecting a nothingness, or putting a psychic distance between itself and its objects. Hence man is never one with the matter around him. Sartre points out that matter as such—that is, as Being which is totally devoid of any human signification—is never encountered in human experience. "Matter could be matter only for God or for pure matter, which would be absurd."⁴ The world which man knows and lives in is a human world. Even if it could be shown that there are dialectical connections in Nature, man would still have to take them to his own account, to establish his own relations with them. The only dialectical materialism which makes

⁴ *Critique*, p. 247.

sense is a "historical materialism," a materialism viewed from inside the history of man's relation with matter.

The human project remains central in Sartre's thought. Man makes his being by launching himself toward the future. He can do so only by inscribing himself in the world of matter.

At each instant we experience material reality as a threat against our life, as a resistance to our work, as a limit to our knowing, and as an instrumentality already revealed or possible.⁵

Man's way of being is his way of relating himself to the world. There could be no relation without the free consciousness which allows man to assume a point of view on the world. But man would be equally unable to have any connection with matter if he did not himself possess a materiality. In this way Sartre arrives at a definition of work, one which could just as well be applied to any human activity.

The meaning of human work is the fact that man reduces himself to inorganic materiality in order to act materially upon matter and to change his material life. By transubstantiation, the project, which, by means of our body, is inscribed in the thing, takes on the substantial characteristics of that thing without entirely losing its own original qualities.⁶

In any human activity in the world there is an interchange. The person cloaks the thing with a human signification, but in return, his action, by becoming objectified in the realm of matter, is at least in part reified, made into a thing. Sartre says that men are things to the exact degree that things are human. It is only through

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

the destruction of man. This species is obviously our own . . . in a milieu of scarcity.⁷

When he speaks of scarcity, Sartre means both the lack of the most immediate things which enable men to stay alive and the lack of those other things which are necessary to make people's lives satisfying, once they have got beyond the problem of mere subsistence. Society "chooses its expendables." Through the established social structure, it determines whether to combat scarcity by means of birth control or by letting natural forces handle the problem of overpopulation. It decides whether the hazards of existence will be shared equally by all of its members, or whether it will organize itself into sharply divided classes, each living at the expense of the other. In certain colonial societies, Sartre claims, the colonialists deliberately designate "the natives" as sub-men, keeping for themselves the appellation of the truly human. Or in extreme cases the masses of men support a small minority who live among them as gods. The material fact of scarcity is there at the start, but human action makes out of the material fact a specific social pattern.

From one point of view, history might be said to be the story of how human *praxis* has inscribed itself in the *pratico-inerte*. The two terms *praxis* and *pratico-inerte* are not to be equated with "Being-for-itself" and "Being-in-itself," but there is a sense in which they hold equivalent positions in Sartre's most recent work. *Praxis* (the Greek word for "action") is any meaningful or purposeful human activity, any act which is not mere random, undirected motion. The *pratico-inerte* is more than just matter, though it certainly includes the material environment. It comprises all those things which go

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

tion" which we observed in the relation between persons and things. The class structure and the characteristics of a particular class depend upon the addition of each individual *praxis*, but each *praxis* is conditioned and deviated in the milieu of the already existing class. Sartre goes to great pains to show how everyone from childhood on inscribes his own history by means of the instruments and against the obstacles offered by his social environment. I come into being in a community to which my parents have already sworn my commitments. I am born under a vow (*assermenté*). The language which I speak, the common ideas which I meet and use in formulating my attitudes—all these "steal my thought from me," either by conditioning it at the start or by twisting it, putting upon it a counter-finality after I have formulated it, so that its end-expression is taken as something other than I intended. It is in this way that man finds himself to be "the product of his own product."

Technically Sartre prepared us for this view in *Being and Nothingness*. There he allowed two limits to freedom: (1) The fact that I exist at all and my existing as a free being do not depend on me. I am not free not to be free. Necessity compels me to exert my free act of choice in "internalizing the external." (2) My freedom is limited by the freedom of the other person. It is the second of these limitations to which Sartre has given a new emphasis. He continues to insist that only human beings can make an object of man. But he goes much further in the direction of seeing man as really made an object. He attaches more significance to the conditioning of the inward life—though he never quite wipes out the tiny *décalage*, the gap or nothingness which lies between the individual and the situation in which he

go beyond this "factual evidence" until transformed social relations and technical progress have freed humanity from the yoke of scarcity. Marx had said that the reign of freedom would begin only when the problem of material production had been fully met and solved. Sartre writes:

As soon as there will exist *for everyone* a margin of *real* freedom beyond the production of life, Marxism will have lived out its span; a philosophy of freedom will take its place. But we have no means, no intellectual instrument, no concrete experience which allows us to conceive of this freedom or of this philosophy.⁹

It would be easy to conclude upon superficial reading that this is what all his critics insisted in the first place. Man's existential freedom doesn't amount to a pair of deuces when the chips are down. And if we can't even conceive of what a philosophy of freedom would be like, then what are we to make of existentialism? Is this Sartre's recantation? Was *Being and Nothingness* false or merely irrelevant? The statement certainly indicates a departure from what Sartre had led us to expect in 1943. At that time, in the concluding pages of *Being and Nothingness*, he implied that his next work would be an ethics. The *Critique* is not an ethics. Sartre evidently believes that so long as we live in a society based on falsehood and inequity, any individual ethics is at best a compromise. Both in order of importance and logically, social reorganization seems to Sartre to come first. He has always maintained that the source of values, upon which ethical conduct depends, must be the choice of the free individual or of many free persons working together. Where the value has not been

⁹ *Search for a Method*, p. 34.

pellation by pointing out that "Marx is primarily concerned with the emancipation of man as an individual, the overcoming of alienation, the restoration of his capacity to relate himself fully to man and to nature."⁴ I do not think that Sartre could object to Fromm's formulation of Marx's essential aim. He is like Fromm, too, in refusing to identify Marxism either with the writings of post-Marxist theoreticians or with Communism as it has been institutionalized in the Soviet Union. But Sartre prefers to think of existentialism as the contributing ideology and of Marxism as the philosophy which at the present time we cannot go beyond. His aim is not to incorporate a modified Marxism into existentialism, but to hasten the moment at which existentialism may welcome its own dissolution into Marxism. It is easy to see why. Existentialism has been concerned with the individual's attempt to rediscover himself and his freedom and to learn how he might best commit his freedom. Stalinist Marxism, as Sartre sometimes calls it, suppressed the individual fully as much as Hegelianism, allowed him no more specifically "human" traits than behaviorist psychology. But a Marxism which has been de-Stalinized, which recognizes that it is still in its infancy, a Marxism which reinstates the individual and his *praxis* at the very heart of history—this seems to Sartre the proper place for an existentialist freedom to commit itself. A true Marxism will recognize that history is not necessarily and forever a history of human relations determined by scarcity. It will seek its own dissolution at that time when men and women will find that the image which their *praxis* has inscribed in the *pratico-inerte* is in truth the reflection of their freedom.

⁴ *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961), p. 5.

actions which are conditioned by their mutual opposition. He shows that homosexuality is the result of the scarcity of women (and of polyandry), but he goes further and is able to demonstrate, as the result of his investigation, that homosexuality is not simply a satisfaction of the sexual need but a form of revenge against the woman. Finally, the result of this state of affairs is a genuine indifference in the woman and a great gentleness on the part of the father in his relations with the children (the child grows up in the midst of *his* fathers)—hence the free development of the children and their precociousness. Precocity, homosexuality as a revenge against the woman who is hard and without tenderness, a latent anxiety expressing itself in various behavior patterns: those are irreducible notions, since they refer us to what has had to be *lived*. It matters little that Kardiner employs psychoanalytical concepts to describe them; the fact is that sociology can *establish* these characteristics as real relations among men. Kardiner's research does not contradict dialectical materialism, even if Kardiner's *ideas* remain opposed to it. We can learn in his study how the material fact of the scarcity of women is lived as a certain aspect of the relations between the sexes and of the males with each other. We are guided to a certain level of the concrete which contemporary Marxism systematically neglects.

American sociologists conclude from such reports that "the economic is not entirely determining." But this sentence is neither true nor false, since dialectic is not a determinism. If it is true that the Eskimos are "individualists" and the Dakotas co-operative, and true too that they resemble each other in "the way in which they produce their life," we should not conclude from this that there is a definitive insufficiency in the Marx-

its bylaws, its officers, its budget, its procedure for recruiting, its function; it is upon these terms that its members have set up among themselves a certain type of reciprocal relation. When we say there are only men and real relations between men (for Merleau-Ponty I add things also, and animals, etc.), we mean only that we must expect to find the support of collective objects in the concrete activity of individuals. We do not intend to *deny* the reality of these objects, but we claim that it is *parasitical*.

Marxism is not far removed from our conception. But in its present state, we may, from this point of view, make two essential criticisms. To be sure, it shows how "class interests" impose upon the individual against his individual interests or how the market, at first a simple complex of human relations, tends to become more real than the sellers and their customers; but Marxism remains uncertain as to the nature and origin of these "collectives." The theory of fetishism, outlined by Marx, has never been developed; furthermore, it could not be extended to cover all social realities. Thus Marxism, while rejecting organicism, lacks weapons against it. Marxism considers the market a *thing* and holds that its inexorable laws contribute to reifying the relations among men. But when suddenly—to use Henri Lefebvre's terms—a dialectical conjuring trick shows us this monstrous abstraction as the veritable concrete (we are speaking, naturally, of an alienated society) while individuals (e.g., the worker submitted to Lassalle's law of wages) fall into abstraction, then we believe that we are returned to Hegelian idealism. For the *dependence* of the worker who comes to sell his working strength cannot under any circumstance signify that this worker has fallen into an abstract existence. Quite

collectives—that is, in his “social field” considered in its most immediate aspect—that man learns to know his condition. Here again the particular connections are one mode of realizing and of living the universal in its materiality. Here again this particularity has its peculiar opaqueness which does not allow us to dissolve it in fundamental determinations. This means that the “milieu” of our life, with its institutions, its monuments, its instruments, its cultural “infinities” (real like the Idea of Nature, or imaginary like Julien Sorel or Don Juan), its fetishes, its social temporality and its “hodological” space⁹—this *also* must be made the object of our study. These various realities, whose being is directly proportional to the non-being of humanity, sustain among themselves, through the intermediary of human relations, *and with us* a multiplicity of relations which can and must be studied in themselves. A product of his product, fashioned by his work and by the social conditions of production, man *at the same time* exists in the milieu of his products and furnishes the substance of the “collectives” which consume him. At each phase of life a short circuit is set up, a horizontal experience which contributes to change him upon the basis of the material conditions from which he has sprung. The child *experiences more than* just his family. He lives also—in part through the family—the collective landscape which surrounds him. It is again the generality of his class which is revealed to him in this individual experience.¹

⁹ Sartre has borrowed this expression from Lewin. “Hodological space” is the environment viewed in terms of our personal orientation. It sets up demands upon us and offers, as it were, pathways and obstacles to the fulfillments of our needs and desires. H.B.

¹ “Charlie Chaplin’s whole life is contained in this landscape of brick and iron. . . . Lambeth Road is already the stage setting for *Easy Street* (*la rue des Bons Enfants*), where Charlie Chaplin pulls the gas lamp down over the head of the big Bully. Here are all the

anything of historical totalization except its abstract skeleton of universality. The result is that it has entirely lost the meaning of what it is to be a man; to fill in the gaps, it has only the absurd psychology of Pavlov. Against the idealization of philosophy and the dehumanization of man, we assert that the part of chance can and must be reduced to the minimum. When they tell us: "Napoleon as an individual was only an accident; what was necessary was the military dictatorship as the liquidating regime of the Revolution," we are hardly interested; for we had always known that. What we intend to show is that *this* Napoleon was necessary, that the development of the Revolution forged at once the necessity of the dictatorship and the entire personality of the one who was to administer it, and that the historical process provided *General Bonaparte personally* with preliminary powers and with the occasions which allowed him—and him alone—to hasten this liquidation. In short, we are not dealing with an abstract universal, with a situation so poorly defined that several Bonapartes were *possible*, but with a concrete totalization in which *this* real bourgeoisie, made up of real, living men, was to liquidate *this* Revolution and in which *this* Revolution created its own liquidator in the person of Bonaparte, in himself and for himself—that is, for those bourgeois and in his own eyes. Our intention is not, as is too often claimed, to "give the irrational its due," but, on the contrary, to reduce the part of indeterminateness and non-knowledge, not to reject Marxism in the name of a third path or of an idealist humanism, but to reconquer man within Marxism.

We have just shown that dialectical materialism is reduced to its own skeleton if it does not integrate into itself certain Western disciplines; but this is only a nega-

in fact: "The invention of a new military weapon, the firearm, of necessity modified the whole inner organization of the army, the relationships inside the cadre on the basis of which individuals form an army and which make of the army an organized whole, and finally, the relations between different armies." In short, the advantage here seems to be on the side of the weapon or the tool; their simple appearance overturns everything.

This conception can be summed up by a statement which appeared in the *Courrier européen* (in Saint Petersburg): "Marx considers social evolution to be a natural process governed by laws which do not depend upon the will, the consciousness, or the intention of men, but which, on the contrary, determine them." Marx quotes this passage in the second preface to *Capital*. Does he really accept it as a fair appraisal of his position? It is difficult to say. He compliments the critic for having excellently described *his* method and points out to him that the real problem concerns *the* dialectical method. But he does not comment on the article in detail, and he concludes by noting that the practical bourgeois is *very clearly conscious* of the contradictions in capitalist society, a remark which seems to be the counterpart of his statement in 1860: "[The workers' movement represents] the conscious participation in the historical process which is overturning society." Now one will observe that the statements in the *Courrier européen* contradict not only the passage quoted earlier from *Herr Vogt* but also the famous third thesis of Feuerbach. "The materialist doctrine according to which men are a product of circumstances and of education . . . does not take into account the fact that circumstances are modified precisely by men and that the educator must be himself educated." Either this is a

mere tautology, and we are simply to understand that the educator himself is a product of circumstances and of education—which would render the sentence useless and absurd; or else it is the decisive affirmation of the irreducibility of human *praxis*. The educator must be educated; this means that education must be an enterprise.¹

If one wants to grant to Marxist thought its full complexity, one would have to say that man in a period of exploitation is *at once both* the product of his own product and a historical agent who can under no circumstances be taken as a product. This contradiction is not fixed; it must be grasped in the very movement of *praxis*. Then it will clarify Engels's statement: men make their history on the basis of real, prior conditions (among which we would include acquired characteristics, distortions imposed by the mode of work and of life, alienation, etc.), but it is *the men* who make it and not the prior conditions. Otherwise men would be merely the vehicles of inhuman forces which through them would govern the social world. To be sure, these conditions exist, and it is they, they alone, which can furnish a direction and a material reality to the changes which are in preparation; but the movement of human *praxis* goes beyond them while conserving them.

Certainly men do not grasp the real measure of what

¹ Marx has stated this thought specifically: to act upon the educator, it is necessary to act upon the factors which condition him. Thus the qualities of external determination and those of that synthetic, progressive unity which is human *praxis* are found inseparably connected in Marxist thought. Perhaps we should maintain that this wish to transcend the oppositions of externality and internality, of multiplicity and unity, of analysis and synthesis, of nature and anti-nature, is actually the most profound theoretical contribution of Marxism. But these are suggestions to be developed; the mistake would be to think that the task is an easy one.

THE PROJECT

THUS alienation can modify the *results* of an action but not its profound reality. We refuse to confuse the alienated man with a thing or alienation with the physical laws governing external conditions. We affirm the specificity of the human act, which cuts across the social milieu while still holding on to its determinations, and which transforms the world on the basis of given conditions. For us man is characterized above all by his going beyond a situation, and by what he succeeds in making of what he has been made—even if he never recognizes himself in his objectification. This going beyond we find at the very root of the human—in *need*. It is need which, for example, links the scarcity of women in the Marquesas, as a structural fact of the group, and polyandry as a matrimonial institution. For this scarcity is not a simple lack; in its most naked form it expresses a situation in society and contains already an effort to go beyond it. The most rudimentary behavior must be determined both in relation to the real and present factors which condition it and in relation to a certain object, still to come, which it is trying to bring into being.³ This is what we call *the project*.

heart of the totalizing movement and thereby will achieve results opposed to those which it sought: this will be a method, a theory, etc. But one can also foresee how its partial aspect will later be broken down by a new generation and how, within the Marxist philosophy, it will be integrated in a wider totality. To this extent even, one may say that the rising generations are more capable of *knowing* (*savoir*)—at least formally—what they are doing than the generations which have preceded us.

³ Failing to develop by real investigations, Marxism makes use of an arrested dialectic. Indeed, it achieves the totalization of human activities within a homogeneous and infinitely divisible continuum which is nothing other than the "time" of Cartesian rationalism. This temporal

Starting with the project, we define a double simultaneous relationship. In relation to the given, the *praxis* is negativity; but what is always involved is the negation of a negation. In relation to the object aimed at, *praxis* is positivity, but this positivity opens onto the "non-existent," to what *has not yet* been. A flight and a leap ahead, at once a refusal and a realization, the project retains and unveils the surpassed reality which is refused by the very movement which surpassed it. Thus knowing is a moment of *praxis*, even its most fundamental one; but this knowing does not partake of an absolute Knowledge. Defined by the negation of the refused reality in the name of the reality to be produced, it remains the captive of the action which it clarifies, and disappears along with it. Therefore it is perfectly accurate to say that man is the product of his product. The structures of a society which is created by

environment is not unduly confining when the problem is to examine the process of capitalism, because it is exactly that temporality which capitalist economy produces as the signification of production, of monetary circulation, of the redistribution of property, of credit, of "compound interest." Thus it can be considered a product of the system. But the description of this universal container as a phase of social development is one thing and the dialectical determination of *real* temporality (that is, of the true relation of men to their past and their future) is another. Dialectic as a movement of reality collapses if time is not dialectic; that is, if we refuse to recognize a certain action of the future as such. It would be too long to study here the dialectical temporality of history. For the moment, I have wanted only to indicate the difficulties and to formulate the problem. One must understand that neither men nor their activities are *in time*, but that time, as a concrete quality of history, is made by men on the basis of their original temporalization. Marxism caught a glimpse of true temporality when it criticized and destroyed the bourgeois notion of "progress"—which necessarily implies a homogeneous milieu and coordinates which would allow us to situate the point of departure and the point of arrival. But—without ever having said so—Marxism has renounced these studies and preferred to make use of "progress" again for its own benefit.

Only the project, as a mediation between two moments of objectivity, can account for history; that is, for human *creativity*. It is necessary to choose. In effect: either we reduce everything to identity (which amounts to substituting a mechanistic materialism for dialectical materialism)—or we make of dialectic a celestial law which imposes itself on the Universe, a metaphysical force which by itself engenders the historical process (and this is to fall back into Hegelian idealism)—or we restore to the individual man his power to go beyond his situation by means of work and action. This solution alone enables us to base the movement of totalization *upon the real*. We must look for dialectic in the relation of men with nature, with "the starting conditions," and in the relation of men with one another. There is where

contradictions which are posited and surpassed; for example, the totalization which appraises the act in its relation to historical *praxis* and to the conjuncture of circumstances is itself denounced as an abstract, incomplete totalization (a *practical* totalization) insofar as it has not turned back to the action to reintegrate it *also* as a uniquely individual attempt. The condemnation of the insurgents at Kronstadt was perhaps inevitable; it was perhaps the judgment of history on this tragic attempt. But at the same time this practical judgment (the only real one) will remain that of an enslaved history so long as it does not include the free interpretation of the revolt in terms of the insurgents themselves and of the contradictions of the moment. This free interpretation, someone may say, is in no way *practical* since the insurgents, as well as their judges, are dead. But that is not true. The historian, by consenting to study facts at all levels of reality, liberates future history. This liberation can come about, as a visible and efficacious action, only within the compass of the general movement of democratization; but conversely it cannot fail to accelerate this movement. (3) In the world of alienation, the historical agent never entirely recognizes himself in his act. This does not mean that historians should not recognize him in it precisely *as* an alienated man. However this may be, alienation is at the base and at the summit; and the agent never undertakes anything which is not the negation of alienation and which does not fall back into an alienated world. But the alienation of the objectified result is not the same as the alienation at the point of departure. It is the passage from the one to the other which defines the person.

it gets its start, *resulting* from the confrontation of projects. The characteristics of the human project alone enable us to understand that this result is a new reality provided with its own signification instead of remaining simply a statistical mean.⁵ It is impossible to develop these considerations here. They will be the subject of Part Two of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. I limit myself here to three observations which will at least permit us to consider this presentation a brief formulation of the problems of existentialism.

• 1 •

THE GIVEN, which we surpass at every instant by the simple fact of living it, is not restricted to the material conditions of our existence; we must include in it, as I have said, our own childhood. What was once both a vague comprehension of our class, of our social conditioning by way of the family group, and a blind going beyond, an awkward effort to wrench ourselves away from all this, at last ends up inscribed in us in the form

⁵ On exactly this point Engels's thought seems to have wavered. We know the unfortunate use which he sometimes makes of this idea of a *mean*. His evident purpose is to remove from dialectic its a priori character as an unconditioned force. But then dialectic promptly disappears. It is impossible to conceive of the appearance of systematic processes such as capitalism or colonialism if we consider the resultants of antagonistic forces to be means. We must understand that individuals do not collide like molecules, but that, upon the basis of given conditions and divergent and opposed interests, each one understands and surpasses the project of the other. It is by these surpassings and surpassings of surpassings that a social object may be constituted which, taken as a whole, is a reality *provided with meaning and something* in which nobody can completely recognize himself; in short, *a human work without an author*. Means, as Engels and statisticians conceive of them, suppress the author, but by the same stroke they suppress the work and its "humanity." We shall have the opportunity to develop this idea in Part Two of the *Critique*.

tions; their universal meaning is narrowed and deepened. The word "Nature" in the eighteenth century creates an immediate complicity among those who question it. We are not speaking here of a strict signification, and they never left off discussing the Idea of Nature at the time of Diderot. But this philosophical motif, this theme, was understood by everyone. Thus the general categories of the culture, the particular systems, and the language which expresses them are already the objectification of a class, the reflection of conflicts, latent or declared, and the particular manifestation of alienation. The world is outside; language and culture are not inside the individual like stamps registered by his nervous system. It is the individual who is inside culture and inside language; that is, inside a special section of the field of instruments. In order to *manifest* what he uncovers, he therefore has at his disposal elements both too rich and too few. Too few: words, types of reasoning, methods, exist only in limited quantity; among them there are empty spaces, lacunae, and his growing thought cannot find its appropriate expression. Too rich: each vocable brings along with it the profound signification which the whole epoch has given to it. As soon as the ideologist speaks, he says more and something different from what he wants to say; the period steals his thought from him. He constantly veers about, and the idea finally expressed is a profound deviation; he is caught in the mystification of words.

The Marquis de Sade, as Simone de Beauvoir has shown, lived the decline of a feudal system, all of whose privileges were being challenged, one by one. His

field; Goldmann points to the determination of one part of this field by a human passion experienced concretely by a particular group upon the occasion of its historic fall.

controlling faction of the members of the Convention? And Robespierre's dream of a nation with neither rich nor poor, where everybody was a property owner—was not that too going against the current? To give first place to the necessities of the struggle against the reaction within, against the armies of the hostile Powers, to realize the bourgeois Revolution fully and to defend it—such was, to be sure, the task, the only task, of the National Convention. But since this Revolution was made *by the people*, was it not necessary to integrate in it the popular demands? At the beginning the famine helped: "If bread had been cheap," writes Georges Lefebvre, "the brutal intervention of the people, which was indispensable for assuring the fall of the *Ancien Régime*, would perhaps not have taken place, and the bourgeoisie would not have triumphed so easily." But starting with the moment when the bourgeoisie overthrew Louis XVI, from the moment when its representatives assumed plenary responsibilities in its name, it was necessary for the popular force to intervene in support of government and institutions, no longer to overthrow them. And how could this aim be accomplished without giving satisfaction to the people?

Thus the situation, the survival of ancient significations, the embryonic development of industry and of the Proletariat, an abstract ideology of universality—all contributed to deviate both the bourgeois action and the popular action. It is true that the people *supported* the Revolution and true, too, that their distress had counter-revolutionary tendencies. It is true that their *political* hatred of the vanished regime varied according to circumstances, tending either to disguise the people's social demands or to give way before them. It is true that no genuine synthesis of the political and

slav regime. For us the most remarkable thing is the fact that the contradictions and errors in date, with which the confessions of Rajk were crammed full, never awakened in the Communists the vaguest suspicion. The materiality of fact is of no interest to these idealists; only its symbolic implications count in their eyes. In other words, Stalinist Marxists are blind to events. When they have reduced the meaning of them to the universal, they are quite willing to recognize that a residue remains, but they make of this residue the simple effect of chance. Fortuitous circumstances have been the occasional cause of what could not be dissolved (date, development, phases, origin and character of agents, ambiguity, misunderstandings, etc.). Thus, like individuals and particular enterprises, the lived falls over to the side of the irrational, the unutilizable, and the theoretician considers it to be *non-signifying*.

Existentialism reacts by affirming the specificity of the historical event, which it refuses to conceive of as the absurd juxtaposition of a contingent residue and an a priori signification. Its problem is to discover a supple, patient dialectic which espouses movements as they really are and which refuses to consider a priori that all lived conflicts pose contradictories or even contraries.⁶ For us, *the interests* which come into play cannot necessarily find a mediation which reconciles them; most of the time they are mutually exclusive, but the fact that they cannot be satisfied at the same time does not necessarily prove that their reality is reduced to a pure contradiction of ideas. The thing stolen is not the contrary

⁶ If two propositions are contradictory to each other, this means that one cannot be true without the other's being false, and vice versa (e.g., "A is true" and "A is not true"). If they are contrary, then they cannot both be true at once, but it is possible that both are false (e.g., "All S is P" and "No S is P"). H.B.

the meaning and nature of this weapon if one forgot that it was invented by the Counter Reformation and used first against the Protestants' "bondage of the will." It is of primary importance in this connection not to pass over one fact which the Marxists systematically neglect—the *rupture* between the generations. From one generation to another an attitude, a schema, can close in upon itself, become a historical object, an example, a closed idea which would have to be reopened or counterfeited from the outside. It would be necessary to know just *how* Robespierre's contemporaries received the Idea of Nature. (They had not contributed to its formation; they had got it, perhaps, from Rousseau, who was soon to die. It had a sacred character, due to the very fact of the *rupture*, that distance within proximity, etc.) The action and the life of the *Ancien Régime* (plutocracy is a worse regime), as well as the man whom we are to study, simply cannot be reduced to these abstract significations, to these impersonal attitudes. It is the man, on the contrary, who will give them force and life by the manner in which he will project himself by means of the Idea of Nature. We must therefore return to our object and study his personal statements (for example, Robespierre's speeches) through the screen of collective instruments.

The meaning of our study here must be a "differential," as Merleau-Ponty would call it. It is in fact the *difference* between the "Common Beliefs" and the concrete idea or attitude of the person studied, the way in which the beliefs are enriched, made concrete, deviated, etc., which, more than anything else, is going to enlighten us with respect to our object. This *difference* constitutes its uniqueness; to the degree that the individual utilizes "collectives," he depends—like all the

which will realize within a creative movement the transverse unity of *all* the heterogeneous structures.

Nevertheless, the project is in danger of being deviated, like Sade's project, by the collective instruments; thus the terminal objectification perhaps does not correspond exactly to the original choice. We must take up the regressive analysis again, making a still closer study of the instrumental field so as to determine the possible deviations; we must employ all that we have learned about the contemporary techniques of Knowledge as we look again at the unfolding life so as to examine the evolution of the choices and actions, their coherence or their apparent incoherence. *St. Anthony* expresses the whole Flaubert in his purity and in all the contradictions of his original project, but *St. Anthony* is a failure. Bouilhet and Maxime du Camp condemn it completely; they demand that it "tell a story." *There* is the deviation. Flaubert tells an anecdote, but he makes it support everything—the sky, hell, himself, *St. Anthony*, etc. The monstrous, splendid work which results from it, that in which he is objectified and alienated, is *Madame Bovary*. Thus the return to the biography shows us the hiatuses, the fissures, the accidents, at the same time that it confirms the hypothesis (the hypothesis of the original project) by revealing the direction and continuity of the life. We shall define the method of the existentialist approach as a regressive-progressive and analytic-synthetic method. It is at the same time an enriching cross-reference between the object (which contains the whole period as hierarchized significations) and the period (which contains the object in its totalization). In fact, when the object is *rediscovered* in its profundity and in its particularity, then instead of remaining external to the totalization (as it was up until

ture the field of possibles; it is the choice which must be interrogated if one wants to explain them in their detail, to reveal their singularity (that is, the particular aspect in which *in this case* generality is presented), and to understand how they have been lived. It is the work or the act of the individual which reveals to us the secret of his conditioning. Flaubert by his choice of writing discloses to us the meaning of his childish fear of death—not the reverse. By misunderstanding these principles, contemporary Marxism has prevented itself from understanding significations and values. For it is as absurd to reduce the signification of an object to the pure inert materiality of that object itself as to want to deduce the law from the fact. The meaning of a conduct and its value can be grasped only in perspective by the movement which realizes the possibles as it reveals the given.

Man is, for himself and for others, a signifying being, since one can never understand the slightest of his gestures without going beyond the pure present and explaining it by the future. Furthermore, he is a creator of signs to the degree that—always ahead of himself—he employs certain objects to designate other absent or future objects. But both operations are reduced to a pure and simple surpassing. To surpass present conditions toward their later change and to surpass the present object toward an absence are one and the same thing. Man constructs signs because in his very reality he is signifying; and he is signifying because he is a dialectical surpassing of all that is simply given. What we call freedom is the irreducibility of the cultural order to the natural order.

To grasp the meaning of any human conduct, it is necessary to have at our disposal what German psy-

tion, a project, an event. The cinema has so often used this process that it has become a convention. The director shows us the beginning of a dinner, then he cuts; several hours later in the deserted room, overturned glasses, empty bottles, cigarette stubs littering the floor, indicate by themselves that the guests got drunk. Thus significations come from man and from his project, but they are inscribed everywhere in things and in the order of things. Everything at every instant is always signifying, and significations reveal to us men and relations among men across the structures of our society. But these significations appear to us only insofar as we ourselves are signifying. Our comprehension of the Other is never contemplative; it is only a moment of our *praxis*, a way of living—in struggle or in complicity—the concrete, human relation which unites us to him.

Among these significations there are some which refer us to a lived situation, to specific behavior, to a collective event. This would be the case, if you like, with those shattered glasses which, on the screen, are charged with retracing for us the story of an evening's orgy. Others are simple indications—such as an arrow on the wall in a subway corridor. Some refer to "collectives." Some are symbols; the reality signified is present in them as the nation is in the flag. Some are statements of utility; certain objects are offered to me as *means*—a pedestrian crossing, a shelter, etc. Still others, which we apprehend especially—but not always—by means of the visible, immediate behavior of real men, are quite simply ends.

We must resolutely reject the so-called "positivism" which imbues today's Marxist and impels him to deny the existence of these last significations. The supreme mystification of positivism is that it claims to approach

social experience without any a priori whereas it has decided at the start to deny one of its fundamental structures and to replace it by its opposite. It was legitimate for the natural sciences to free themselves from the anthropomorphism which consists in bestowing human properties on inanimate objects. But it is perfectly absurd to assume by analogy the same scorn for anthropomorphism where anthropology is concerned. When one is studying man, what can be more exact or more rigorous than to *recognize human properties in him?* The simple inspection of the social field ought to have led to the discovery that the relation to ends is a permanent structure of human enterprises and that it is *on the basis of this relation* that real men evaluate actions, institutions, or economic constructions. It ought to have been established that our comprehension of the other is necessarily attained through ends. A person who from a distance watches a man at work and says: "I don't understand what he is doing," will find that clarification comes when he can unify the disjointed moments of this activity, thanks to the anticipation of the result aimed at. A better example—in order to fight, to outwit the opponent, a person must have at his disposal several systems of ends at once. In boxing, one will grant to a feint its true finality (which is, for example, to force the opponent to lift his guard) if one discovers and rejects at the same time its pretended finality (to land a left hook on the forehead). The double, triple systems of ends which others employ condition our activity as strictly as our own. A positivist who held on to his teleological color blindness in practical life would not live very long.

It is true that in a society which is wholly alienated, in which "capital appears more and more as a social

power of which the capitalist is the functionary,"⁶ the manifest ends can mask the profound necessity behind an evolution or a mechanism already set. But even then the end as the signification of the lived project of a man or of a group of men remains real, to the extent that, as Hegel said, the appearance possesses a reality as appearance. In this case as well as in the preceding, its role and its practical efficacy must be determined. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason* I shall show how the stabilization of prices in a competitive market *reifies* the relation between seller and buyer. Courtesies, hesitations, bargaining, all that is outmoded and thrust aside, since the chips are already down. And yet each of these *gestures* is lived by its author as an act. Of course, this activity does not belong to the domain of pure representation. But the permanent possibility that an end might be transformed into an illusion characterizes the social field and the modes of alienation; it does not remove from the end its irreducible structure. Still better, the notions of alienation and mystification have meaning only to the precise degree that they steal away the ends and disqualify them. There are therefore two conceptions which we must be careful not to confuse. The first, which is held by numerous American sociologists and by some French Marxists, foolishly substitutes for the givens of experience an abstract causalism or certain metaphysical forms or concepts such as motivation, attitude, or role, which have no meaning except in conjunction with a finality. The second recognizes the existence of ends wherever they are found and limits itself to declaring that certain among them can be neutralized at the heart of the historical process

⁶ Marx: *Capital*, III, 1, p. 293.

in action. Always *on the other side of the present*, it is fundamentally only *the present itself seen from its other side*. Yet in its structures it holds relations with a more distant future. Flaubert's immediate objective, to conclude *this* paragraph, is itself clarified by the distant objective which sums up the whole operation—to produce *this* book. But as the desired result is more of a totalization, it becomes that much more abstract. At first Flaubert writes to his friends: "I would like to write a book which would be . . . like this . . . like that. . . ." The obscure sentences which he uses at this stage have more meaning for the author than they have for us, but they give neither the structure nor the real content of the work. Still they will not cease to serve as a framework for all the later creative work, for the plot, for the choice of characters. "The book which must be . . . this and that" is also *Madame Bovary*. Then, too, in the case of a writer the immediate end of his present work is clarified only in relation to a hierarchy of future significations (that is, of ends), each one of which serves as a framework for the preceding and as content for the following. The end is enriched in the course of the enterprise; it develops and surpasses its contradictions along with the enterprise itself. When the objectification is terminated, the concrete richness of the object produced infinitely surpasses that of the end (taken as a unitary hierarchy of meanings) at any moment of the past at which it is considered. But this is precisely because the object is no longer an end; it is the product "in person" of labor, and it exists in the world, which implies an infinity of new relations (the relation of its elements, one with the other, within the new objective milieu, its own relation with other cultural objects, the relation between itself as a cultural product and men).

2 is common to the Murians, for example, and to the historical man of our contemporary societies. But, conversely, a real communication and in certain situations a reciprocal comprehension are established or can be established between existents thus distinct (for example, between the ethnologist and the young Murians who speak of their *gothul*.) It is in order to take into account these two opposed characteristics (no common *nature* but an always possible communication) that the movement of anthropology once again and in a new form gives rise to the "ideology" of existence.

This ideology, in fact, considers that human reality eludes direct knowledge to the degree that it *makes itself*. The determinations of the person appear only in a society which constantly constructs itself by assigning to each of its members a specific work, a relation to the product of his work, and relations of production with the other members—all of this in a never-ceasing movement of totalization. But these determinations are themselves sustained, internalized, and lived (whether in acceptance or refusal) by a *personal project* which has two fundamental characteristics: first, it cannot under any circumstances be defined by concepts; second, as a *human project* it is always *comprehensible* (theoretically if not actually). To make this comprehension *explicit* does not by any means lead us to discover abstract notions, the combination of which could put the comprehension back into conceptual Knowledge; rather it reproduces the dialectic movement which starts from simply existing givens and is raised to signifying activity. This comprehension, which is not distinguished from *praxis*, is at once both immediate existence (since it is produced as the movement of action) and the

is missing. And this lack is not—as some Marxists declare today—a localized void, a hole in the construction of Knowledge. It is inapprehensible and yet everywhere present; it is a general anemia.

Doubtless this *practical* anemia becomes an anemia in the Marxist man—that is, in us, men of the twentieth century, inasmuch as the unsurpassable framework of Knowledge is Marxism; and inasmuch as this Marxism clarifies our individual and collective *praxis*, it therefore determines us in our existence. About 1949 numerous posters covered the walls in Warsaw: “Tuberculosis slows down production.” They were put there as the result of some decision on the part of the government, and this decision originated in a very good intention. But their content shows more clearly than anything else the extent to which man has been eliminated from an anthropology which wants to be pure knowledge. Tuberculosis is an object of a practical Knowledge: the physician learns to know it in order to cure it; the Party determines its importance in Poland by statistics. Other mathematical calculations connecting these with production statistics (quantitative variations in production for each industrial group in proportion to the number of cases of tuberculosis) will suffice to obtain a law of the type $y = f(x)$, in which tuberculosis plays the role of independent variable. But this law, the same one which could be read on the propaganda posters, reveals a new and double alienation by totally eliminating the tubercular man, by refusing to him even the elementary role of *mediator* between the disease and the number of manufactured products. In a socialist society, at a certain moment in its development, the worker is alienated from his production; in the theoretical-practical order, the human foundation of anthropology is submerged in Knowledge.

It is precisely this expulsion of man, his exclusion from Marxist Knowledge, which resulted in the renaissance of existentialist thought outside the historical totalization of Knowledge. Human science is frozen in the non-human, and human-reality seeks to understand itself outside of science. But this time the opposition comes from those who directly demand their synthetic transcendence. Marxism will degenerate into a non-human anthropology if it does not reintegrate man into itself as its foundation. But this comprehension, which is nothing other than existence itself, is disclosed at the same time by the historical movement of Marxism, by the concepts which indirectly clarify it (alienation, etc.), and by the new alienations which give birth to the contradictions of socialist society and which reveal to it its abandonment; that is, the incommensurability of existence and practical Knowledge. The movement can *think* itself only in Marxist terms and can *comprehend* itself only as an alienated existence, as a human-reality made into a thing. The moment which will surpass this opposition must reintegrate comprehension into Knowledge as its non-theoretical foundation.

In other words, the foundation of anthropology is man himself, not as the object of practical Knowledge, but as a practical organism producing Knowledge as a moment of its *praxis*. And the reintegration of man as a concrete existence into the core of anthropology, as its constant support, appears necessarily as a stage in the process of philosophy's “becoming-the-world.” In this sense the foundation of anthropology cannot precede it (neither historically nor logically). If *existence*, in its free comprehension of itself, preceded the awareness of alienation or of exploitation, it would be necessary to suppose that the free development of the practical

cal organism—can take place only within a concrete situation, insofar as theoretical Knowledge illuminates and interprets this situation.

Thus the autonomy of existential studies results necessarily from the negative qualities of Marxists (and not from Marxism itself). So long as the doctrine does not recognize its anemia, so long as it founds its Knowledge upon a dogmatic metaphysics (a dialectic of Nature) instead of seeking its support in the comprehension of the living man, so long as it rejects as irrational those ideologies which wish, as Marx did, to separate being from Knowledge and, in anthropology, to found the knowing of man on human existence, existentialism will follow its own path of study. This means that it will attempt to clarify the givens of Marxist Knowledge by indirect knowing (that is, as we have seen, by words which regressively denote existential structures), and to engender within the framework of Marxism a veritable *comprehensive knowing* which will rediscover man in the social world and which will follow him in his *praxis*—or, if you prefer, in the project which throws him toward the social possibles in terms of a defined situation. Existentialism will appear therefore as a fragment of the system, which has fallen outside of Knowledge. From the day that Marxist thought will have taken on the human dimension (that is, the existential project) as the foundation of anthropological Knowledge, existentialism will no longer have any reason for being. Absorbed, surpassed and conserved by the totalizing movement of philosophy, it will cease to be a particular inquiry and will become the foundation of all inquiry. The comments which we have made in the course of the present essay are directed—to the modest limit of our capabilities—toward hastening the moment of that dissolution.