FROM FREEDOM TO LIBERTY

SANFORD G. THATCHER
FROM FREEDOM TO LIBERTY
A Critique of the Ethics of
Jean-Paul Sartre

by

Sanford G. Thatcher

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A CRITIQUE OF THE ETHICS
OF
JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

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PREFACE

It is difficult to be impartial about the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. His writings have had a wider, more penetrating influence on the general public than perhaps any other philosopher alive today, and their influence has been due in large part to their intimate connection with the problems of the present-day moral situation. To fail to take a stand on what Sartre says, to fail either to praise him or condemn him, seems, therefore, equivalent to the decision to remain aloof from the most pressing concerns of contemporary society.

Such may be the impression which this paper will leave with the reader. He may be tempted upon completing it to accuse the author of moral indifference or lack of commitment. He may point to the ways in which other critics have treated the same subject and may insist on that basis upon the impossibility of remaining without any word of praise or blame to bestow upon Sartre's views. He may, finally, render as a crowning insult that worst of all final judgments by accusing the author of belonging to that currently popular school of philosophy which takes a greater interest in words and symbols than in the reality for which they stand.

These charges are not without justification. The reader will notice, for instance, that there is a striking lack of that attention which is usually devoted to Sartre's ideas of
total responsibility, of commitment, of interpersonal conflict, of authentic choice, and even of bad faith in its application as a tool of moral censure. What is said about these matters will seem to be only that bare minimum necessary to make a point about language or to demonstrate a logical error. All those many interesting ideas Sartre presents which are of the greatest consequence to the solution of today's moral dilemma the reader will find here only in skeletal form or not at all.

How can this paper, then, claim to be a study of Sartre's ethical thought? It can, but only because it aims at a deeper level than most. That Sartre's ideas are of immense relevance to ethics today is the tacit presupposition on which this paper is founded. There is really no question here about the importance of his thoughts. The point is, rather, that they are so crucial that it cannot help but be a matter of the most vital concern whether Sartre can formulate from them a viable ethics or whether he can at least lay down the basic principles on which such an ethics must be founded. Any ethics which is worthy to command the allegiance and obedience of rational men must be more than the blind assertion of a value or a set of values. It must rest upon a solid ground, a ground that only reason can provide. Beliefs must be justified in order to become the basis for values, even if the ultimate ground of appeal is one of a common feeling of humanity or faith. Sartre, no less than any other moralist, is bound to produce
reasons for his beliefs, to justify his moral attitude. He does provide reasons; they constitute his philosophy. But are these reasons satisfactory? Do they lead to an ethics? If they do, do they lead to the ethics to which Sartre wants them to lead? These are the questions which lie at the heart of the undertaking this paper attempts.

A few technical details remain to be treated. The translations of those passages which have obviously been drawn from the original French sources are all mine, but there should be no problem concerning them since in every case the translation follows the meanings of the French words in a quite literal fashion. Whatever errors may be found in these translated portions, needless to say, are solely my responsibility.

In a very few instances I have used as titles for works by Sartre what, strictly speaking, are not the proper titles for them in the editions from which I have quoted them. Thus, what I have labelled Existentialism is a Humanism appears as "Existentialism" in a book called Existentialism and Human Emotions, which also contains some excerpts from Being and Nothingness; and what I have called at one point What is Literature? is really entitled Literature and Existentialism in the edition I have used. The justification for these changes is the fact that the titles I have substituted are those most widely used in referring to these works and may render them more readily identifiable to the reader than would be the case
if the proper titles were used.

The form in which the footnotes appear is a shortened form which is being used here not only to save space but to avoid the needless re-duplication of information which is contained in detail in the bibliography. Special remarks concerning the bibliography will be found in an introductory note there.

My debt of gratitude to others for providing the stimulating atmosphere in which the ideas for this paper were germinated is inexpressible, if only because there were so many people over so long a period with whom I have discussed both Sartre and ethics. To Sartre himself, of course, I owe my deepest thanks, for, although I have never met him except through the medium of the written word, it would be no exaggeration to say that the past five years of my life have in great part been spent in a "loving struggle" with the ideas of this remarkable man.
The alpha and omega of all philosophy is freedom.

--- Schelling
CHAPTER I
THE APPROACH

One approach to the problem about the ethics of Jean-Paul Sartre may be discarded at the start: the attempt to discover some general agreement among those who have written about his ethics. A perusal of the literature reveals the most antithetical attitudes. On the one hand we have those who believe Sartre's thought to be "putrid offal, exuded by the ailing mind of Europe." ¹ Critics with less vivid imaginations convey the same opinion by equating the ethics of Sartre with "nihilism", "anarchy", and "pessimism" -- three terms which occur with monotonous regularity in their commentaries. On the other hand we notice a genuine enthusiasm for Sartre's ethics, which runs the gamut from calling it a "rashly optimistic humanism"² to claiming that it "is only a hairsbreadth (though a few million words) away from the Golden Rule."³ At least one thing is certain: the ethics of Sartre is a subject of violent controversy.

Now what seems amusing about this whole controversy is that the object of so much dispute does not actually exist. Sartre has never written a book on ethics. He has never even presented his ethical thought under that name. At the end of Being and Nothingness he did, it is true, promise to devote a

¹Straelen, Man the Lonely, p. 12.
³Kappler, "Dealing with Earthly Hells" in Life, vol. 57, no. 19 (Nov. 6, 1964), p. 110. I do not mean to cast aspersion upon this article by quoting it in this manner, for it is an admirably accurate and fair treatment of Sartre, considering the place in which it appears.
"future work" to this matter, but to this day nothing even remotely resembling "the ethics" of Sartre has appeared. Critics themselves generally make a passing reference to this fact, humorously enough often in chapters entitled "Ethics" where they proceed to set down detailed arguments against what they have just admitted does not exist. It is little wonder that Sartre has been led to exclaim that "most critics, having preferred to refute theses which I have not yet advanced and of which they know nothing at all, have introduced the most profound confusion in this matter." The problem about the ethics of Sartre, then, seems to demand another type of approach than the one which has usually been taken towards it. Thus, we may discard not only the approach which seeks a neutral ground for interpretation by drawing on points of agreement among previous critics but also any approach which immediately sets out to interpret before defining precisely what it is that is to be interpreted.

The critics are not entirely wrong, of course. In order to do justice to them, we must admit along with Henri Peyre that "no great writer has perhaps been more concerned with the formulation of moral values." The key concepts of Sartre's philosophy are, in fact, generally associated more with ethics

4Existentialism is a Humanism has sometimes been cast for this role, but it is definitely not a systematic work and its relation to the philosophy of Being and Nothingness is by no means clear. We hope to throw some light upon this problem in the course of our discussion.

5See Cranston, Jean-Paul Sartre, ch. VIII ("Sartre's Ethics").

6Sartre in a letter-preface to Jeanson, Le Problème Moral et la Pensée de Sartre.

7Peyre, op. cit., p. 31.
than with ontology -- such terms as "responsibility", "freedom", and "choice". Sartre himself is quite well aware of the ethical orientation of his ontology and makes no attempt to deny it. "Ontology," he says, "would not know how to separate itself from ethics." 8 This is just another way of saying that there can be no attempt to describe the essential structure of human reality without taking into consideration the structure of value which defines that reality. If "human reality is that by which value arrives in the world." 9 and if "the for-itself (or human consciousness) can not appear without being haunted by value," 10 then any ontology which does separate itself from the question of value is woefully incomplete. On this view ethical implications are certain to abound in whatever Sartre writes. They do, and, insofar as critics have contented themselves with suggesting what importance for ethics these implications may have, they deserve serious consideration.

However, a good number of critics, as already mentioned, are not so easily satisfied. They plunge right into interpretation and do not define what they are interpreting. From the wide range of Sartre's writing they draw statements at random, lump them all together in one place, and call this hodgepodge they have constructed "the ethics" of Sartre. Typically, what results is an ethics which is fit either to be

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8Sartre's letter-preface, op. cit.
9Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 93. (This work will henceforth be designated by the abbreviation B&N.)
10Ibid., p. 96.
condemned outright or to be met with glowing words of praise, depending upon whether the critic in question likes or dislikes Sartre. Those who dislike him concentrate upon passages like these: "thus it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations"; "hell is other people"; and "man is a useless passion." Taking these statements alone, isolating them from their context, they come up with the hardly remarkable conclusion that a man who makes such remarks must be at the very least an out-and-out immoralist. Critics on the other side use the very same tactics, but, by concentrating on other passages, not infrequently those from Existentialism is a Humanism, they find Sartre to be a "stern moralist" who "has no comfort for adolescent nihilists." In either case the ethics such critics applaud or abhor is often one they have constructed themselves and foisted upon Sartre.

What rises out of this morass of conflicting opinions and doubtful approaches are two simple facts: 1) ethics is a matter of primary concern in Sartre's writing; and 2) he has not

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11 Ibid., p. 627.
12 Sartre, No Exit in No Exit and Three Other Plays, p. 47.
13 Sartre, B&W, p. 615.
14 This approach in its extreme form is typical of Christian critics especially, like S.U. Zuidema, and of men like Straelen, who is so thoroughly one-sided in his treatment of Sartre that he renders himself, rather than Sartre, odious. But even in a modified form this approach is taken by many critics, no matter how fair and impartial they purport to be. Every critic, it seems, has an axe to grind when it comes to discussing Sartre's ethics. No doubt many would like to use it to cut off Sartre's head.
15 Cranston, op. cit., p. 11.
written the ethics which he promised to write. The facts suggest the approach. Taken in conjunction, they naturally lead to the question: why has Sartre not written an ethics? Indeed, there must be some reason he has failed to carry out his promise. It is not as though he has not had time enough. Since 1943 when he made the promise, he has produced an enormous body of writing, including plays, novels, and essays. He has projected and partially completed a multi-volume Critique of Dialectical Reason and has published the first portion of an autobiography, The Words. But still no work directly bearing on the subject he promised to write about has appeared, and there are no indications that it ever will. He has never since repeated the promise and, we may assume, would prefer that people forget about it.

To forget about it, however, is to pass over one very reasonable approach to the whole problem. To discover, or perhaps more accurately, to guess at the reason Sartre has for not fulfilling his promise is to find out something both about the ethics he can produce, given the central tenets of his philosophy as set forth in Being and Nothingness, and about the ethics he would like to produce. Since he has not produced an ethics, these are really the only two matters which are open to discussion. An approach which studies Sartre in this light should, moreover, be able to avoid the general confusion which plagues this topic. Most critics end up by taking

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16 It should be noted, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that what is meant by "ethics" here is an ethics, a morality defined by what is considered its highest value, and not ethics as a body of knowledge about morality. In the latter sense, of course, much of Sartre's philosophy that cannot be subsumed under our two categories is relevant to ethics and is open to discussion.
as "the ethics" of Sartre either what he can produce -- in which case they generally condemn it -- or what he would like to produce -- in which case they generally praise it. 17 We shall do neither. By keeping the two as distinct as possible and by suspending any judgment on their respective merits, we hope to be able to tread on relatively neutral ground while still contributing something to the discussion which rages around the ethical thought of this controversial figure.

17 Actually, this is a bit of an overstatement. Most good critics look at Sartre's ideas from both points of view and try to separate out what is laudable from what is damnable. Nevertheless, they ignore the distinction we have made and treat his ethical thought as though it were embodied in a single work on ethics, thereby uniting what, as we shall see, cannot really be united.
CHAPTER II
AMBIGUOUS FREEDOM

In formulating our approach to the problem of Sartre's ethics, we have noted a fundamental duality in his thought. On the one hand, there is the ethics that seems to be implied by the ontological analyses of Being and Nothingness; on the other, there is the ethics that such notorious statements as those which appear in Existentialism is a Humanism seem to support. Here we no doubt have the explanation for the wide disagreement among critics on the nature and content of Sartre's ethics. But, while most critics aim only at getting some general, unified ethics from these disparate ethical thoughts, our aim goes one level deeper. We take the duality as fundamental and seek to find its source and explanation. The first step is to uncover the source.

If there is a duality in Sartre's ethical thought which is so fundamental that it cannot be overcome, it is not unreasonable to conclude that what it rests upon must lie at the very heart of Sartre's moral-ontological philosophy. Is there anything this basic in his thought? When it is a question of his ethics, the answer should be obvious. The concept of "freedom" undoubtedly forms the core of whatever any critic identifies as Sartre's ethics. In Being and Nothingness it is the condition of the possibility of all value, for it is no less than the being of man himself. "What we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the being of 'human reality'. Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently;
there is no difference between the being of man and his being-free." And, of course, as we noted above, "human reality is that by which value arrives in the world." In Existentialism is a Humanism this fundamental sense of freedom as condition remains, but there it is supplemented by a sense of freedom as goal as well:

...When I declare that freedom in every concrete circumstance can have no other aim than to want itself, if man has once become aware that in his forlornness he imposes values, he can no longer want but one thing, and that is freedom, as the basis of all values. That doesn't mean that he wants it in the abstract. It means simply that the ultimate meaning of the acts of honest men is the quest for freedom as such. A man who belongs to a communist or revolutionary union wants concrete goals; these goals imply an abstract desire for freedom; but this freedom is wanted in something concrete. We want freedom for freedom's sake and in every particular circumstance.

Sartre goes on to explain that my own freedom also requires the freedom of others, that "I am obliged to want others to have freedom at the same time that I want my own freedom." Given this passage, one might well wonder whether Sartre's ethics needs anything but this one concept. Freedom is the condition of all value, and all value is freedom. Is not that an ethics by itself?

Now that it is quite obvious what constitutes the nucleus

---1--- Sartre, B&N, p. 25.
---2--- Ibid., p. 93.
---3--- Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions, pp. 45-6.
---4--- Ibid., p. 46.
of Sartre's ethical thought, the question remains whether this may be taken as the source of that duality already mentioned. There is, to begin with, an unmistakable ambiguity about the word "freedom" as Sartre uses it. The passage just quoted from *Existentialism is a Humanism* is a case in point. A revolutionary is said to desire freedom embodied in a concrete structure; he does not want it "in the abstract". But at the very basis of this desire for freedom lies that abstract structure of human reality which permits the revolutionary to transcend his present situation toward the future state of the world he envisages as his ideal, and that, too, is freedom. Is there not some change in meaning which this word has undergone? Must not Sartre have performed some sleight-of-hand in order to derive something concrete from something abstract? Are there not rather two meanings of "freedom" here which Sartre does not bother or does not wish to distinguish?

In truth, there are two meanings. Iris Murdoch, among others, takes note of this fact: "Sartre connects in an equation freedom as a general attribute of consciousness... and freedom in the sense it has acquired in the politics of contemporary social democracy." 

5 From "the characteristic par excellence of human awareness" Sartre moves by means of what another critic aptly describes as "a warmed-up mess of Socratic reason and 

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5 Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 67. Miss Murdoch notes in addition an intermediary sense which, she says, appears from Sartre's use of the term in *What is Literature?* (Literature and Existentialism). Since this is of no immediate relevance here, we have taken the liberty of omitting any reference to it in our quotation from her book.

Kantian moralism"⁷ to the demand for "a modified form of socialism."⁸ This juxtaposition of the two senses of "freedom" clearly reveals the wide gap which separates them. It is difficult to see what they have in common besides the name "freedom". Between the structure of the mind and a particular concrete ordering of things in the world there can be no relation of equivalence or of necessary connection. Only a philosophy of absolute idealism could establish such a relation, and Sartre's philosophy, however much it is indebted to Hegelian thought, cannot be equated with idealism.⁹

There is, moreover, something very peculiar about a freedom

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⁷ Usher, Journey Through Dread, p. 94.
⁸ Murdoch, op. cit., p. 69.
⁹ This is not to deny that many elements of Sartre's philosophy bear the marks of idealistic thought -- e.g., the stress on the mind (for-itself) as active and creative as opposed to the passivity of matter (in-itself). Sartre's debt to Hegel is, indeed, greater than is generally supposed. There are similarities between their terminologies (being-for-itself, being-in-itself, etc.), between their notions of spirit (Hegel) and consciousness (Sartre) as sources of negation and change, between their views of the master-slave relationship (Hegel) and being-for-others (Sartre), between the "cunning of reason" (Hegel) and "counter-finality" (Sartre), and, most important, between their views of freedom -- to name but a few. Yet, owing to the stress he places on the individual as opposed to consciousness or spirit in general (Hegel's "world-spirit"), Sartre cannot provide as smooth or plausible a transition from the structure of mind as freedom to the actualization of freedom in a particular political and social world-order as Hegel can. Sartre does speak of consciousness in its original upsurge as being impersonal (see The Transcendence of the Ego, pp. 98 and 106), and perhaps, though this is at best simply a guess, it was this notion which in its similarity to Hegel's suggested to Sartre a connection between the freedom of consciousness and the freedom of the perfect state. Note and the change in the original wording of the text which it accompanies follow upon a careful reading of the proofs of a new book by Allen Kaufmann on Hegel, to be published by Doubleday in April, 1965.)
which already exists yet must be won. If men are free, what sense does it make to say that they "want freedom"? "Want" is just another name for "desire", and, if we are to take Sartre at his word, desire as human reality is "its own lack of ___."\(^{10}\) Now how can what is freedom lack freedom? Admittedly, it may be possible to imagine a freedom which does not recognize itself, which hides from itself the fact that it is freedom, and in this sense freedom taking itself as a goal could be construed as a freedom which aims at constant self-awareness. Something of this kind is, in fact, what Sartre seems to take as the way out of bad faith. But the issue at stake here is clearly not the recognition of freedom by itself, or at least not only that. Freedom is said quite explicitly to "want itself".

How does Sartre explain his way out of this dilemma? Francis Jeanson, Sartre's well-known friend and critic, cites the following incident as a possible clue:

Sartre addressed to us one day a remark which appeared very enlightening to us: it is not necessary to say that, if man is free [libre], to free him no longer makes any sense; but, on the contrary, this liberation [libération] cannot be understood unless he was free to begin with. Only a being free in his very essence can envisage freeing himself.\(^{11}\)

In other words, the project of freeing oneself can only be conceived on the foundation of a prior freedom.

\(^{10}\) Sartre, B&N, p. 88.

\(^{11}\) Jeanson, op. cit. (see footnote #6, ch. I), p. 310.
On the surface of it this seems to be a thoroughly satisfactory answer, but, in fact, it is no more satisfactory than the paradoxical statement that freedom "wants itself". What gives it the appearance of a convincing argument is the intolerable ambiguity of the words Sartre uses. What does "essence" mean? And, again, what is this freedom Sartre speaks of? Fortunately, we do not have to rely on our own interpretation of these words to reveal the flaw in Sartre's argument, for this time he gives it away himself. "If man is free" becomes "unless he was free to begin with." The change in tense is crucial. Clearly, at the time the project of "liberation" is conceived, man is not free. He was originally free, and that is what gives meaning to his project: he wishes to regain his freedom. Now we see the role which the word "essence" plays. "A being free in his very essence" means that man can only be fully human when he is free; his essence demands freedom. Something of a liberalist's theory of natural rights seems to be implied here. It must mean something of the sort, or else the claim that "if man is free, to free him no longer makes any sense" does seem to be a valid one. Sartre's denial of its validity becomes plausible only when the "free" in this statement is interpreted as "free in his very essence."

We are back where we began, faced with the puzzling notion of a freedom which desires to be free. However, there is no need to remain puzzled. What we have already said in regard to the ambiguous meaning of the word "freedom" suffices.
Sartre includes in one word two distinct entities. Thus, the freedom which wants and the freedom which is wanted are similar only in name. The first is the being which desires, the "being-for-itself" which Sartre identifies with human consciousness; the second is the being which is the object of desire, the "being-in-itself" of things, or, more precisely, the being of whatever is not "being-for-itself". That there are two separate types of being here may be easily demonstrated. The for-itself is a freedom: so Sartre defines it. Now a freedom which desires is a freedom which constitutes itself as a lack of being because, as Sartre says, "desire is a lack of being."  

But this being which it lacks is not itself; if it were, then this freedom would be "a lack of a lack of being", which makes no sense. On Sartre's terms, therefore, it can only be being-in-itself which freedom or the for-itself lacks. Indeed, this is what Sartre himself says: "the being which the for-itself lacks is the in-itself."  

Freedom wanting itself thus can only be understood as one kind of freedom (freedom which is "for-itself") desiring another and wholly distinct kind of freedom (freedom which is "in-itself").

At first glance this interpretation may seem somewhat radical since Sartre has, admittedly, never made mention of any "freedom-in-itself". Actually, it is not. It is implied, for instance, by this passage from "Materialism and Revolution":

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12 Sartre, B&N, p. 88.
13 Ibid., p. 565.
...it is not true that a free man cannot hope to be liberated. For he is not free and bound in respect to the same things. His freedom is like the illumination of the situation into which he is cast. But other people's freedom can render his situation unbearable, drive him to rebellion or to death.14

Sartre here speaks of being "bound". To be bound in respect to something is to be not free in respect to that something. From the passage it is clear what that something is -- the "unbearable" situation created by the hostile freedoms of other people, a situation of political and social oppression (since it is, in fact, the revolutionary Sartre is talking about). In other words, the situation is one where political and social freedom do not exist and where men, in that sense, are not free. For such freedom to exist there must also exist a particular type of situation, a particular structuring or arrangement of things, i.e., of the in-itself. Certain material needs must be met, certain social and political arrangements realized; only then can this type of freedom come into being. What we have here, in short, is the recognition of a second type of freedom, a concrete freedom which exists as the desired goal of the freedom which all men are, the freedom which "illuminates".

So the duality which we have sought at the core of Sartre's ethical thought does exist. That it is also the source of that duality we have said earlier may be found in his ethics as a whole remains to be demonstrated.

14 Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution" in Literary and Philosophical Essays, p. 245.
One preliminary matter must be settled before any progress can be made, however. If we are to avoid the error which Sartre commits, we must not use the same term to describe both the notions of freedom we have distinguished. What may we call them, then? Sartre's critics provide several suggestions. Hazel Barnes in the afterword to her book, Humanistic Existentialism, speaks of the "practical freedom" which Sartre in his latest works seems to consider more important than "his original statement that men are psychologically free."\(^{15}\) May we take as the two terms of the polar structure of Sartre's ethics a practical freedom and a psychological freedom? Perhaps, but, if we do, we must recognize that Sartre himself rejects Bergson's notion of a purely "'inward freedom'... which," he says," simply amounted to recognizing in the slave the independence of the inner life and of the heart in chains."\(^{16}\) Simone de Beauvoir, too, distinguishes Sartre's idea of freedom from the Stoic idea of a kind of spiritual freedom achieved through indifference.\(^{17}\) For these reasons the word "psychological" as a descriptive modifier seems inadequate and is apt to produce a misleading impression. But there are many other possibilities left. Mlle de Beauvoir, herself noticing a peculiar duality in Sartre's concept of freedom, contrasts a "natural freedom" with an "ethical freedom". This seems to parallel (or to be paralleled by) Francis Jeanson's juxtaposition

\(^{15}\)Barnes, Humanistic Existentialism, p. 403.

\(^{16}\)Sartre, B&N, pp. 549-50.

\(^{17}\)de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 29.
of a "liberté de fait" and a "liberté-valeur". These terms are probably closer to the meanings of Sartre's two freedoms than any others, including both those Miss Barnes suggests and the ones we have implicitly proposed by using such terms as "abstract", "concrete", "social", "political", etc. However, since we wish to emphasize the political overtones of this "liberté-valeur", we shall fix upon a word which, in English, is generally more closely associated with political ideas than the word "freedom" -- namely, "liberty" -- while reserving for the first meaning of freedom that word itself, which is the usual English translation of Sartre's "liberté". "Liberty" and "freedom" are, also, somewhat easier to handle than the multi-word expressions generally used.

The ethics of freedom and the ethics of liberty, then, are what we must contrast. A separate examination of each should suffice to reveal their differences while avoiding the confusion which might, and usually does, result from treating them together. From the two we hope to show not only that there are two ethical doctrines implicit in Sartre's writing -- the one he can produce and the one he would like to produce -- but also why Sartre cannot logically or consistently deduce one from the other. Thereby we hope to arrive both at what remains the possible conclusion to be drawn from Sartre's ethical theory and at the answer to our original question: why Sartre has not written the ethics he promised to write.

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18 Jeanson, op. cit., p. 308.
CHAPTER III
THE ETHICS OF FREEDOM

Freedom and Fact: the Phenomenological Method

The first important point to be noted in regard to what we have chosen to call "the ethics of freedom" is that, at least as Being and Nothingness presents it, freedom is taken to be a fact about human reality rather than a specific goal of human endeavor. In other words, freedom exists as already given. It does not first have to be acquired in order to be, it already is -- though it is in a peculiar way and with a mode of being all its own. Whether it is recognized is, also, incidental to its existence: man is free regardless of how aware he is of his own freedom.\(^1\) He can escape it neither through ignorance nor through denial. As Sartre says, "man is condemned to be free."\(^2\) Freedom is a fact which nothing can change or destroy, including the most extreme oppression. "Man can not be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all."\(^3\)

To establish this "fact" Sartre uses what is commonly known as the "phenomenological method" -- hence, the subtitle of Being and Nothingness: "An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology". The purpose of this method, as Maurice Natanson

\(^1\) There is an interesting parallel here with Kierkegaard's notion of despair in The Sickness Unto Death which he, too, says exists whether or not anyone is aware of it. This parallel could be extended even further to include the analyses of the different behaviour patterns which result from the realization of the existence of despair (Kierkegaard) and of freedom (Sartre) and the attitudes taken towards them.

\(^2\) Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions, p. 38.

\(^3\) Sartre, B&N, p. 441.
explains it, is "to examine consciousness directly, to appreciate its contents and structure quite apart from prior scientific commitments or from philosophical judgments, and... above all, to regain the immediate experiential world we have forgotten, denied, or bartered away."\(^4\) It is, in short, "the discipline concerned with the descriptive delineation of what presents itself to consciousness as it presents itself and in so far as it presents itself."\(^5\) This means, among other things, that it "does not attempt to analyze questions of the ultimate origin, purpose, or meaning of reality,"\(^6\) nor, we might add, does it concern itself with the value of the reality it describes. All these questions belong to the realm of metaphysics which Sartre, along with most other modern philosophers, wishes to avoid.\(^7\)

Freedom, then, is not posited as a value in Being and Nothingness but is discovered or, rather, having already been discovered, is described by Sartre as a fact. Using this method he inherited from his German predecessors, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger,\(^8\) Sartre sets about to describe

\(^4\)Natanson, Literature, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences, p. 9.
\(^5\)Ibid.
\(^6\)Ibid., p. 212.
\(^7\)See Sartre, B&N, pp. 619-21.
\(^8\)Sartre uses the method in a somewhat modified form, admittedly, but the modifications he makes are of no consequence to the point made here. For an excellent discussion of these modifications, see the chapter on "Phenomenology and Existentialism" in Natanson's book.
a certain class of phenomena he calls "négatités" -- phenomena like distance, destruction, absence, etc., which, as he puts it, presuppose that "nothingness lies coiled at the heart of being -- like a worm."\(^9\) "What," Sartre then asks in a typically Kantian manner, "must man be in his being in order that through him nothingness may come to being?"\(^10\) We know his answer: man must be free. The existence of "négatités" presupposes in man the possibility of withdrawing himself from the causal order of the world, of detaching himself from Being, in order to question it. What is not subject to causality is freedom. Therefore, man (or human reality) is freedom. Having come to this conclusion by deduction from one particular set of empirical (or, possibly, pseudo-empirical) phenomena, Sartre goes on to build up an imposing case for the existence of freedom by adducing as evidence a wide range of experiences which, he holds, can only be explained on the basis of this freedom. Among the more notable experiences Sartre mentions are anguish, bad faith, and conversion. The latter he even claims "to furnish the clearest and most moving image of our freedom."\(^11\)

Not all parts of this argument are equally convincing. A devout Christian, for instance, might well interpret the fact of conversion as the revelation of God's omnipotent will.

\(^11\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 476.
at work, as the act of grace by which man's complete dependence upon God and the failure of his own freedom to bring about this conversion himself are made manifest to him. Other grounds could be found for explaining anguish, too. Freud, for example, would no doubt point to a conflict between the repressive force of the super-ego and the spontaneous drives of the id as the origin of anguish -- a constant anxiety, perhaps, over the possibility of the ego uncovering its own unconscious motivations; and, unlike Sartre, Freud would view it as something harmful from which man ought to be delivered by psychoanalytic therapy.\textsuperscript{12}

Finally, it might well be that, as Hazel Barnes points out, "Sartre has simply chosen one horn of the dilemma."\textsuperscript{13} From the individual's own standpoint his acts appear to be entirely free and self-determined since his immediate feeling in relation to the choice which at present lies before him is the sense of his own absolute freedom. What other people see, however, and what the individual himself sees in reflecting upon his own past actions is a certain deterministic structure binding past and present, a certain probability founded upon a knowledge of the individual's character and past history which enables one to predict which choice he will make. Freedom and determinism are simply two poles of the same act: which one is emphasized more depends upon which point of view is taken. Like Descartes, to whom he owes much, Sartre bases his philosophy upon a method

\textsuperscript{12}See Stern, \textit{Sartre: His Philosophy and Psychoanalysis}, p. 185.

\textsuperscript{13}Barnes, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 286.
whose starting-point is essentially subjective and thus arrives at a view of the world which takes freedom as its most important, most irreplaceable concept.

It is not necessary, however, to follow through all the intricacies of Sartre's thought and even less necessary to criticize it in order to be able to grasp the fundamental point we wish to convey by pointing to Sartre's use of the phenomenological method: that freedom exists as a fact about the structure of human reality and not as a value for which men ought to strive. *Being and Nothingness* does not attempt to put forward goals or to issue moral imperatives. "Ontology itself can not formulate ethical precepts. It is concerned solely with what is, and we can not possibly derive imperatives from ontology's indicatives." Such is Sartre's claim. There are, of course, definite ethical implications to his work.

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14 The relation of Sartre to Descartes is a complex one which demands a lengthy analysis in itself, but, to avoid any misunderstanding which this statement might occasion, we must set down these points: 1) Descartes's method of "methodical doubt" is undeniably subjective, taking as it does the *cogito* for its starting-point; 2) Sartre differs from Descartes in rejecting solipsism, not by reference to the goodness of a God who would not deceive man, but by reference to the Husserlian notion of the "intentionality" of consciousness and to the immediate experience of the Other through his Look; 3) Sartre claims Descartes's idea of an absolute freedom (which, for Descartes, belonged only to God) as spiritual forebear of his own (see Sartre's essay, "Cartesian Freedom", in Literary and Philosophical Essays); 4) Descartes's penchant for science and mathematics drove him towards a deterministic-mechanistic view of the world and even of man (as is evident in his *Passions of the Soul*), and it is only in the sense that God may be taken as Descartes's highest idea that we mean to imply that freedom was his "most important, most irreplaceable concept."

15 Sartre, B&N, p. 625.
which Sartre neither tries nor wishes to hide. He formulates
several leading questions in this regard at the very end of
his book and, to judge from the manner in which he asks them,
evidently believed at the time that he could construct an
ethics which would answer them on the basis of his previous
philosophical discussion. We have already cast doubt on the
possibility of this undertaking. In order to change freedom
from a fact into a value without at the same time changing
the meaning of the word, something more is necessary than
Sartre with his tools can provide. We must now try to show
why on the basis of Being and Nothingness this attempt must
fail.

Freedom and Negation

The nature of freedom as described in Being and Nothingness
has been partially treated already in the preceding section.
There it was seen to be equivalent to that nothingness which
man brings into the world through his very being and which
causes those phenomena known as "négatités" to arise. This
preliminary sketch must be broadened considerably before we
may proceed to find out what it would mean on this view for
freedom to take itself as an end.

Freedom, insofar as it is identical with the being of
human consciousness (the for-itself), is primarily the act of
negation. This is not to be taken in a moral sense. What it
means is simply that it is only by effecting the "nihilating"
withdrawal from the being of the in-itself that the for-itself comes into existence. If the for-itself ever ceased this constant activity of disengagement, it would immediately cease to exist and would then merely be, as a part of the in-itself, like any other thing. The for-itself is really this: no-thing. It brings itself and the world into existence by its conscious- of the fact that it is not the thing of which it is conscious. Thus the for-itself is nothing, but it is an active nothing which sustains itself through the perpetually repeated act by which it distinguishes itself from the world and the objects of which it is conscious. Paul Valéry once described man in a way which very succinctly sums up Sartre's own view of the for-itself and freedom. "The spirit," he said, "is the indefinite refusal to be anything whatsoever. That which is not fixed is nothing; that which is fixed is dead." Sartre would agree even with the last part of this definition. Once it has ceased its negating movement, the for-itself collapses into the in-itself and becomes "fixed" there, with its meaning and destiny henceforth determined by those for-itselfs (for- itselfs?) which remain. Death is the revenge of the in-itself on the rebellious for-itself which burst asunder its original identity by introducing the element of determinateness into its midst. The for-itself, whose being it is to negate, is itself negated in death.

Freedom is, also, the condition of the possibility of an

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16 Paul Valéry, quoted in Stern, op. cit., p. 123.
imagining consciousness. It was in a study of the imagination, in fact, that Sartre first set forth the view of freedom and its negating activity which later achieved its full-blown theoretical formulation in Being and Nothingness. Near the end of this book, The Psychology of Imagination, Sartre sums up his argument:

To posit an image is to construct an object on the fringe of the whole of reality, which means therefore to hold the real at a distance, to free oneself from it, in a word, to deny it. Or, in other words, to deny that an object belongs to the real is to deny the real in positing the object; the two negations are complementary, the former being the condition for the latter... For a consciousness to be able to imagine it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature, it must be able by its own efforts to withdraw from the world. In a word it must be free.17

What here appears in embryonic form is none other than the major thesis of Being and Nothingness: man, in order to exist, must continually negate and, in order to negate, must be free. The only difference is that in the later work freedom as negation becomes the condition of the possibility not only of a consciousness which imagines but of any consciousness at all which exists. If freedom did not exist, not only would man not be able to imagine — he would not even be able to exist.

There is no necessity to go further into the detailed arguments of Being and Nothingness. They provide further

applications of this basic notion -- especially interesting in the case of temporality -- but they do not change the notion itself in any way. Freedom throughout Being and Nothingness is considered only in its capacity as a nihilating force. Freedom which affirms is noticeably lacking -- a fact which may account for the undue pessimism of Sartre's presentation of interpersonal relations. The consciousness which withdraws itself, which detaches itself from the world, is held to be the free consciousness par excellence. Again, it is necessary to insist that this is not a moral notion. Sartre would hardly be the person to recommend any sort of Buddhistic detachment from the world. Negation as he describes it is simply what makes possible the very existence of human consciousness. It is, no less significantly, the foundation of the world. In order for there to be a world at all, negation must "explode" at the heart of Being and constitute itself as something different from the world which it constitutes at the very same time it constitutes itself; otherwise, there would only be a massive, solid, undifferentiated plenum, like the Being of Parmenides, and no "world" at all.\(^\text{18}\) Freedom, then, is the essential structure of human reality -- it might even be called the "nature" or "essence" of man if Sartre were not so averse to using those terms in that way -- and its power is the power of negation. It is not an ethical concept; that much

\(^{18}\)It should be clear from this description that Sartre uses the term "world" to refer to the differentiated structure human consciousness brings into being, not just to a geographic body like the earth.
is certain. But what about its implications for ethics? That, we shall soon see, is an entirely different matter.

**Freedom and Facticity**

One more task remains before the full implications of Sartre's notion of freedom can be drawn out into the open, and that is to emphasize the absoluteness of this freedom. In a way this is just a restatement of the basic idea of freedom being a fact about human reality and not something to be won or lost. But it has a unique importance of its own because, in stressing the absoluteness of freedom, it is necessary to bring in the notion of "facticity".

"Facticity" is Sartre's word for the in-itself considered in its necessary connection with the for-itself. It is the "factness" of the for-itself having been born in a specific place, living within a certain environment, having a certain past and certain relations with other people, and realizing its ultimate annihilation in death. In a sense, it is what may be called "the human condition". However, it does not exist merely as a brute datum. Facticity is revealed only through the free choice which the for-itself makes of its end. Facticity is not apprehended except as a certain "situation" which the for-itself transcends by its free project. Freedom and facticity are, indeed, inseparable. "Without facticity freedom would not exist -- as a power of nihilation and of choice -- and without freedom facticity would not be discovered
and would have no meaning. ¹⁹

What this notion entails is that whatever man perceives and whatever obstacles he runs up against he is always free to do something, even if it is only taking up a certain attitude towards those things. Facticity is what is there; freedom is what gives meaning to what is there as something to be overcome, accepted, fought, etc. Freedom constitutes the meaning of facticity and by the same token constitutes the meaning of its own project by the attitude it takes towards its facticity. If a man is born into slavery (his facticity), he may choose to accept passively his role in society or he may rebel against his master and his condition or he may commit suicide. Each choice gives a different meaning to the basic "fact" of slavery. More important, these choices do exist. There are always possibilities open to any man — though the number and type may vary considerably from person to person — and, as long as there are possibilities (i.e., as long as man exists), he is entirely free to choose between them. Thus the slave in chains is as free as his master in Sartre's sense. Both have possibilities before them to be realized, and both are absolutely free in regard to their own possibilities. ²⁰ Where it is a question of a

¹⁹ Sartre, B&N, p. 55.

²⁰ This differs from the purely "inward freedom" Sartre repudiates by its close association with some form of external action. However, this absolute freedom must exist for the slave as well as for the master, or else Sartre's notion of man's total responsibility has no foundation and no meaning. It would become, as one critic thinks it is anyway, as ridiculous as "to maintain that a half-witted infant in Iceland is responsible for a rough-house in Peru." (Ussher, op. cit., p. 132.)
freedom which is absolute, degree has no meaning.

Facticity, of course, is essential to freedom. If nothing is there to choose between, freedom cannot exist, for it is only in choosing that freedom exists. But something is always there, if for no other reason than that being-in-itself is ontologically prior to being-for-itself in Sartre's philosophy, and, hence, freedom cannot escape from the necessity of choosing, of being free. This very fact -- "of not being able not to be free"21 -- is another way of expressing the facticity of freedom. It is a fact in relation to which freedom must choose itself.

In a sense, it is this last choice which is of the greatest consequence to the ethics of freedom. There are two alternatives once man has recognized that he is "condemned to be free": acceptance or flight. It is around this choice that Sartre develops his doctrine of "bad faith", to which he turns his attention in the greater part not only of Being and Nothingness but of his writings as a whole. Whether an authentic choice of freedom is even possible, in fact, depends to a great extent upon the nature of bad faith. If man cannot escape from bad faith, then the choice of freedom would seem to have no meaning for an authentic ethics. On this question hangs the fate of the ethics of freedom.

21 Sartre, B&N, p. 486.
Bad Faith

"An exercise in the art of misusing the verb 'to be'"\(^{22}\), so might bad faith be defined. Whether it is fair to extend this definition to encompass all of existentialist philosophy -- such was its original application -- is open to debate, but it is certainly true of the phenomenon of bad faith that it seems essentially to be little more than a play on words. The duality at the heart of Sartre's philosophy, the separation of all being into either being-in-itself or being-for-itself, gives rise to ambiguity wherever the word "being" is used in any of its forms. Is the being referred to for-itself or is it in-itself? Such is the ambiguity which allows for the possibility of bad faith.

Sartre distinguishes three means which men employ in order to maintain themselves in bad faith.\(^{23}\) First, there is the double nature of human reality as at once transcendence and facticity. We have already seen in discussing the relation of freedom and facticity how inextricably connected these two elements are. Man is his facticity insofar as he possesses a body, has a past, lives in a particular environment, etc., but he is also at every moment the freedom which allows him to transcend these facts toward a future which he chooses as the meaning of his facticity. This duplicity in human reality leads


into the second underlying condition of bad faith -- the temporal structure of human existence. Man has both a future and a past. He is his past insofar as he is defined by his past behaviour, but he is not only that. His future is always there, too, and, as long as he is alive, he can change the meaning of his past by choosing a future which constitutes a new pattern of behaviour and, hence, a new life for him. Sartre sums up this idea in his paradoxical definition of human reality as "a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is." Translated into comprehensible language, all this means is that man is his past but is not only that since he constantly transcends it and is not yet his future but is it from the standpoint of what his present acts mean. Again, as with the problem of freedom and determinism, it is the point of view which is crucial. To define a man as what he might be is to ignore the man he has been; but to define a man as only what he has been is to make of him a corpse, a being which has lost its future and exists now without reprieve, like a thing. Finally, there is that game of deception the man in bad faith plays by alternating between his being-for-himself and his being-for-others. The point here is that a man's existence as subjectively lived and his existence as objectively apprehended through the "Look" of others open the way to two very different modes of being.

24 Ibid., p. 58.
On the one hand, a man can try to coincide with his being as an object for others, in which case he will aim at submerging his subjectivity in the role which he plays: Sartre's well-known example of the café waiter is a case in point. On the other hand, he can retreat into his subjectivity and try to ignore his being-as-object for other people. In either case his attempt is doomed to failure since neither his own subjectivity nor the "Look" of others can be suppressed entirely. What results is a constant oscillation, "a perpetual game of escape from the for-itself to the for-others and from the for-others to the for-itself." 

In the last analysis these three polar structures are reducible to the one basic polarity we noted at the start. Facticity, the past, and being-for-others are all rooted in being-in-itself. They are obstacles in relation to which the for-itself must choose the meaning it gives to its life. But precisely the fact that man is never entirely one or the other but a synthesis of the two, and an unstable synthesis at that, allows for the possibility of his ignoring one in favor of the other. He can escape from the burden of the in-itself by appealing to his being as free transcendence, or he can escape from the anguish of an open future by denying his freedom and accepting the comfort of a "serious" world. Whichever path he chooses, his way is the way of bad faith.

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25 See ibid., pp. 59-60.
26 Ibid., p. 58.
An example may help to illustrate this point further. Sartre's literary works are filled to overflowing with studies of men in bad faith. They could, in fact, without exaggeration be described as variations on a single theme—bad faith. There is one, however, which surpasses all the rest, if not in literary quality, at least in its dramatic juxtaposition of the two general forms of bad faith: the multi-volume Roads to Freedom.

The central figure of this group of three novels is Mathieu Delarue, a middle-aged professor of philosophy who leads the life of a common bourgeois intellectual. His bad faith consists precisely in denying this description of himself. What he wants to see is only his freedom, and consequently his life is a vain attempt to escape definition and to hold himself aloof from any commitment. His brother Jacques tries to point out the contradiction:

"... you condemn capitalist society, and yet you are an official in that society; you display an abstract sympathy with Communists, but you take care not to commit yourself, you have never voted. You despise the bourgeois class, and yet you are a bourgeois, son and brother of a bourgeois, and you live like a bourgeois."

Mathieu is not, of course, ignorant of the facts about his life and about the way he acts. He realizes the accuracy of Jacques's description in an abstract sort of way but refuses to accept it.

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as a description of his own being. As Marcelle, his mistress, says:

"When you look at yourself, you imagine you aren't what you see, you imagine you are nothing. That is your ideal: you want to be nothing."  

Holding himself in readiness for a future which does not yet exist, Mathieu chooses to be just this: nothing. He detaches himself from the world in order not to compromise his freedom in bad faith, but, in doing so, he removes all meaning from that freedom and falls into bad faith just the same. The freedom which is his is not that freedom which gives life meaning by taking up facticity in the act of transcending it; rather is it a freedom which in ignoring facticity loses the very ground for its existence and ends in sterility. As Mathieu finally realizes, "I am free for nothing."  

In contrast to Mathieu are Daniel and Brunet. Their bad faith is of the opposite type. Instead of giving primary allegiance to their freedom, they seek to lose it and try to become like things without any possibility of being other than they are. Brunet finds his identity in the Communist Party. He hides from the fact that his every action is a free one by seeing his life as a role determined by the Party. In the words of Mathieu:

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28 Ibid., p. 11.

"Brunet was right, his life was a
destiny... He had joined up, he
had renounced his freedom, he was
nothing but a soldier." 30

Daniel, on the other hand, spends his life in a frantic
attempt to coincide with his being as a pederast, to sub-
merge the spark of consciousness which continually tortures
him with the realization that he is not by necessity what he
wishes to believe himself.

Why can't I be what I am, be a pederast,
villain, coward, a loathsome object that
doesn't even manage to exist?... He was
sick of thinking what he looked like,
sick of looking at himself -- especially
as, when I look at myself, I am two peo-
ple. Just to be. In the dark, at ran-
dom! To be homosexual just as the oak is
oak. To extinguish myself. Extinguish
the inner eye. 31

Daniel, like Brunet, wishes to renounce his freedom, to become
nothing but what he has done, to merge with his facticity in
denying the possibility of acting otherwise.

Thus, in Roads to Freedom the two possibilities of man
in the face of his dual nature come to light in a very striking
contrast. On the one hand, he may like Mathieu emphasize his
freedom at the expense of his facticity and insist that he is
not what other people think he is; or, on the other hand, like
Daniel and Brunet he may hide his freedom under the cover of

30 Sartre, The Age of Reason, p. 133.
his facticity and insist that he cannot be other than he is. But these projects can only be sustained because they contain within them the seed of their own failure. Bad faith is possible only because it is realized to be a "bad" faith. Man cannot entirely escape from either his freedom or his facticity.

This seed of failure which lies at the heart of every project in bad faith is of crucial importance for the ethics of freedom. If there is to be an ethics of authenticity, not every project man undertakes can be doomed to failure beforehand. The possibility of an authentic project depends upon the possibility of escaping from the over-arching ideal of human existence in bad faith, the ideal of the in-itself-for-itself. It is to an examination of this ideal we must now turn our attention.

The Ideal

In taking up the question of the ideal we are approaching the heart of our discussion of Sartre's ethics, for this ideal is none other than the transcendent value and meaning of all human freedom engaged in its project to attain being. Sartre himself calls it "the truth of freedom, ... the human meaning of freedom."\(^{32}\) What, then, is the nature of this intimate connection between freedom and the ideal?

\(^{32}\) Sartre, B&N, p. 568.
We have already seen what freedom is. As the perpetual act of nihilating the being which it is not, freedom exists only as a lack of being: "freedom is really synonymous with lack."\textsuperscript{33} But what is only lack cannot be defined except by reference to the being which it lacks, and in order to attain being for itself freedom must exist as a project toward the being it is not. This is the same as to say that freedom is equivalent to the desire of being, for, "since desire, as we have established, is identical with lack of being, freedom can arise only as being which makes itself a desire of being."\textsuperscript{34}

The goal of freedom is, hence, being. At first glance it would seem that this being freedom desires is the being of the in-itself. After all, does not Sartre say that "the being which the for-itself lacks is the in-itself"\textsuperscript{35} and that "human reality is the desire of being-in-itself"?\textsuperscript{36} Yes, but he adds a qualification: "the in-itself which it desires cannot be pure contingent, absurd in-itself, comparable at every point to that which it encounters and which it nihilates."\textsuperscript{37} "Why not?", we are tempted to ask. Sartre provides the clue several lines later: "the for-itself, being the negation of the in-itself, could not desire the pure and simple return to

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p. 565.
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 567.
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 565.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., pp. 565-6.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 566.
the in-itself."^38 The reasons are obvious. First, if
that were its goal, freedom would not be the desire to
attain being for itself but would be the very negation of
that attempt. It would not only not gain any being but
would lose the derivative sort of being it already had as
the negation of the in-itself. Secondly, the "return to
the in-itself" is precisely the definition Sartre gives of
death. Freedom, in desiring to become mere in-itself,
would then simply be desiring its own death. Whether or not
there is any such thing as a "death-instinct", it is evident
that Sartre does not wish to fly so boldly in the face of
empirical evidence as to assert that human reality is the
desire to die or that the goal of freedom is death. Clearly,
the being which freedom wants is not just the in-itself.

Only one conclusion seems to remain. According to Sartre's
scheme, all being is either being-in-itself or being-for-itself.
If the being desired is not the in-itself, it must be the for-
itself. But this is manifestly absurd. It makes no sense to
say that the for-itself desires the being of the for-itself,
for that is the same as saying that the lack of being desires
the lack of being or that the for-itself wishes to become the
lack of the lack of being. Even Sartre would be hard-pressed
to find some meaning in that paradox.

Sartre escapes the difficulty by appealing to his admittedly

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^38 Ibid.

^39 Sartre does not himself provide these reasons, but they are
implied by the argument he gives and they help to make his post-
ulation of the ideal somewhat more understandable.
metaphysical account of the origin of the for-itself.

Everything happens, he says, as if the in-itself in its desire to found itself produced a decompression at the heart of its being which gave rise to consciousness, or the for-itself. 41 This attempt failed because the very nature of the for-itself is to be a rupture in the midst of the in-itself that destroys its unity. Yet this unity is precisely what the for-itself also desires. "The being which forms the object of the desire of the for-itself is then an in-itself which would be to itself its own foundation." 42 The for-itself thus retains in its desire for being the original desire of the in-itself to found itself. It takes the side of the in-itself, so to speak, in the upsurge of its original project to be its own cause. But it wishes to achieve this goal from itself as starting-point, not by first making itself the in-itself again. "It is as consciousness that it wishes to have the impermeability and infinite density of the in-itself. It is as the nihilation of the in-itself and a perpetual evasion of contingency and of facticity that it wishes to be its own foundation." 43 Thus, freedom does not desire the in-itself

40 It may be more fair to Sartre to say that it is his "guess at" rather than "account of" the origin of the for-itself since he explicitly denies that his statements are metaphysical, but for our purposes the distinction is not an important one.

41 See Sartre, B&N, p. 620.

42 Ibid., p. 566.

43 Ibid.
alone, leaving it to the in-itself to figure out later a better way of becoming its own cause. From the start freedom wishes by appropriating the being of the in-itself to become "in-itself-for-itself". This is its ideal. Another way of putting it is to say that "man is fundamentally the desire to be God." The "in-itself-for-itself" is, in fact, the Scholastic definition of God, the being who is to himself his own foundation, the ens causa sui. Freedom and the ideal, then, are inseparable. The very nature of freedom requires the ideal as the ultimate meaning of its being, and it is only in terms of this ideal that "man makes known to himself what he is."

Sartre's theory of the ideal is not complete, however, without one additional qualification: freedom can never attain its goal. The ideal of a being-in-itself-for-itself is impossible. Just as bad faith carries within it the seed of its own failure, the failure of those in bad faith ever to achieve a stable coincidence with the being they wish to be, and just as it is rendered possible by this very fact, so, too, the project of freedom to become in-itself-for-itself is only possible as a project because it can never succeed. Sartre sums up this view at the end of Part IV of Being and

44 Just speaking in this manner reveals a major weakness in Sartre's philosophy, the idea that something totally unconscious could be thought to "desire" anything at all. Perhaps that is why Sartre says "everything happens as if ... ."

45 Sartre, B&N, p. 566.

46 Ibid.
Nothingness:

Every human reality is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being and by the same stroke to constitute the In-itself which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the Ens causa sui, which religions call God. Thus the passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion.  

The conclusion to which the ethics of freedom seems to bring us could not be more aptly described.

Unlike most critics, however, we shall not ignore or cast away as irrelevant the last chapter of Being and Nothingness and those footnotes in which Sartre refers to "authenticity" and "the possibility of an ethics of deliverance and salvation." We shall try to see what, given the meaning of "freedom" as it is used in Being and Nothingness, may be achieved by taking freedom as its own value. In other words, it is not doing full justice to Sartre to consider only the ethics which is explicitly implied by Being and Nothingness, the ethics of the ideal and of the "futile passion"; we must also consider what he can produce without contradicting the doctrine he sets forth there and without changing the meaning of the words he uses.

47 Ibid., p. 615.
48 Ibid., p. 70.
49 Ibid., p. 412.
The Purifying Reflection: Escape From the Ideal?

Whatever ethics is possible on the ground Sartre lays
down in Being and Nothingness, besides the ethics (or anti-
ethics, perhaps) suggested by the doctrine of the ideal, must
evidently be rooted in the series of questions Sartre poses at
the end. These questions by the manner in which they are asked
point to the direction any such ethics must take. Sartre begins
by suggesting the possibility of escape from the dominance of
the ideal:

What will become of freedom if it turns
its back upon this value? Will freedom
carry this value along with it whatever
it does and even in its very turning back
upon the in-itself-for-itself?... Or will
freedom by the very fact that it apprehends
itself as a freedom in relation to itself,
be able to put an end to the reign of that
value? In particular is it possible for
freedom to take itself for a value as the
source of all value, or must it necessarily
be defined in relation to a transcendent
value which haunts it?...  
...What are we to understand by this being
which wills to hold itself in awe, to be at
a distance from itself? Is it a question of
bad faith or of another fundamental attitude?
And can one live this new aspect of being?...  
All these questions, which refer us to a pure
and not an accessory reflection, can find
their reply only on the ethical plane. We
shall devote to them a future work.  

This "future work", as we noted at the beginning, has not yet
appeared. Are we to suppose that Sartre cannot follow up the
leads he here puts forth? If he cannot, then what can he do?

50 Ibid., pp. 627-8.
The key, apparently, is provided by the distinction between a "pure" and an "accessory" reflection. Francis Jeanson in his study of Sartre's moral thought builds his whole case upon this distinction. The accessory reflection, he says, is the "reflection which bears only upon the secondary structures of action, deliberation on the means to be employed in order to attain this or that end -- but in the course of which one refuses to question himself on the existence and the significance of a supreme end, of a fundamental choice."\(^{51}\) The pure reflection, on the other hand, "manifests a new attitude in regard to freedom. The latter, in place of being merely lived and used in denying itself in order to avoid the anguish of the unjustifiable, will have to be assumed as the very essence of the person: this freedom-value \([\text{liberté-valeur}]\) will be transformed into a project that will accept only itself as foundation, that will renounce the reassurance of any justification through bad faith whatsoever."\(^{52}\) Clearly, Jeanson believes this distinction makes possible an ethics of salvation where freedom becomes a value for itself.

The question is, can this distinction between two different levels of reflection and the lives based upon them be justifiably extracted from Sartre's philosophy? It may seem that the casual reference to it Sartre makes in the closing

\(^{51}\) Jeanson, \emph{op. cit.}, p. 291.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 295.
passage of *Being and Nothingness* is hardly sufficient to construct an entire moral philosophy upon. Moreover, as one critic says, it may seem that "Jeanson's talk about 'levels' is hardly satisfactory as serious philosophy."\(^{53}\) Nevertheless, Jeanson is not making a mountain out of a molehill. Sartre employs this distinction on more than one occasion. In his chapter on "Temporality" in *Being and Nothingness*, for instance, the distinction between pure and impure reflection becomes the basis for the separation of time into what he calls "original temporality" and "psychic temporality".\(^{54}\) The existence and possibility of such a pure reflection is foreshadowed even earlier in *The Psychology of Imagination*, where Sartre speaks of the "reflective declaration" required to free the "'enchanted' consciousness" of the sleeper and bring him out of his dream.\(^{55}\) Similarly, in *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, Sartre talks about the "captivity" of consciousness in its world of emotion and prescribes this cure: "freedom has to come from a purifying reflection or a total disappearance of the affecting situation."\(^{56}\) Jeanson is not, therefore, making up something out of his own head.

Granted the possibility of this purifying reflection, how does it enable freedom to take itself as its own value? There

\(^{53}\)Cranston, *op. cit.*., p. 86.


\(^{56}\)Sartre, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, p. 79.
are two alternatives: either the moments or "instants", as Sartre calls them, at which this purifying reflection appears are themselves taken as the goal of freedom (and we must remember that Sartre himself avows these moments to be "the clearest and most moving image of our freedom")\(^57\); or else freedom takes its own activity of perpetual nihilation as the final end of its existence in recognizing that this is all it is and can be.

The first alternative is manifestly ridiculous. Sartre admits that it is not possible to produce such instants by choosing to reflect. There are no "reasons" for their occurrence. As he says, it is the "original choice which originally creates all causes and all motives which can guide us to partial actions; it is this which arranges the world with its meaning, its instrumental-complexes, and its coefficient of adversity."\(^58\) In other words, this choice is absurd: "it is absurd in this sense -- that the choice is that by which all foundations and all reasons come into being, that by which the very notion of the absurd receives a meaning."\(^59\) Consequently, the instant, "the absolute change which threatens us from our birth until our death remains perpetually unpredictable and incomprehensible."\(^60\) But what is this if not the definition of a gratuitous occurrence? Is not what happens without

\(^{57}\text{Sartre, B&N, p. 476.}\)
\(^{58}\text{Ibid., p. 465.}\)
\(^{59}\text{Ibid., p. 479.}\)
\(^{60}\text{Ibid., p. 465.}\)
reason, without cause, without motive just what is meant by "gratuitous"? Thus, to say that freedom takes itself as its own value is, on this interpretation, to posit the absurd, the gratuitous as an end-in-itself. No doubt it would be possible to spend a life waiting for incidents of this sort to happen. Sartre's hero, Mathieu, seems to live somewhat on this level:

... his sole care had been to hold himself in readiness. For an act. A free, considered act that should pledge his whole life and stand at the beginning of a new existence.61

What Mathieu does not see then is that the very idea of waiting for such occurrences contradicts itself if taken as the goal of freedom, for freedom is activity and what is active cannot wait for something to happen to it before it acts. Even Mathieu, however, rebels against the gratuitousness of the act which he waits to commit:

... what had restrained him each time on the brink of such a violent break was that he had no reason for acting thus. Without reasons, such acts would have been mere impulses.62

In any case, it is obvious that, whether or not it is possible to take the gratuitous as the goal of one's life, no true ethics can be founded on such a basis. If anything, such an existence

61Sartre, The Age of Reason, p. 54.
62Ibid.
would constitute an anti-morality.

What about the second alternative? Can freedom take its own activity of negation as its goal, and, if so, what would a life patterned on such a value entail? Again, the example of Mathieu is helpful. Freedom is his value. He exists in order to be free -- nothing more. His life is one of constant disengagement from everything around him that might, he thinks, compromise his freedom. He does not marry Marcelle whom he has made pregnant because he believes that freedom and marriage are incompatible. He turns down Brunet's offer to join the Party because he believes that submission to the Party line would require the renunciation of his freedom. Cannot it be said, then, that here at least freedom does take itself to be its own value? Yet we have already seen what such a life entails -- bad faith!

But, it will be objected, does not Mathieu in failing to recognize the true nature of his freedom misuse it? Is it not merely in misusing one's freedom that bad faith is incurred? Gabriel Marcel provides the answer to these questions:

It is true that a distinction can be made between freedom and the use of freedom, but this is out of keeping with the doctrine; for we must not forget that Sartre does not regard it as an instrument which is at the disposal of man and of which he can consequently make a good or a bad use; he regards it as man's very being -- or his lack of being.63

63 Marcel, The Philosophy of Existentialism, p. 86.
What Marcel says here is inescapable. It is true that, for
Sartre, man does not possess freedom but simply is freedom.
Man cannot use or misuse his freedom; he can only recognize
it. But what can simple recognition do to change the ethics
of bad faith into an ethics of salvation? First of all, the
recognition of freedom by itself is simply another way of
defining reflection. But reflection, as Sartre describes
it, "is a second effort by the for-itself to found itself;
that is, to be for itself what it is." Now, is not the
project to found itself precisely the ideal goal of freedom
we described before? And does not this project necessarily
result in failure? Then, the purifying reflection cannot be
of any help either, for it, too, results in failure. "This
effort to be to itself its own foundation ... inevitably
results in failure; and it is precisely this failure which
is reflection." At least as Sartre defines it, the purifying
reflection cannot be taken as the foundation for an ethics of
freedom. It is caught up with the ideal no less than freedom
itself.

The answers to the questions with which we began are now
clear. Freedom cannot "put an end to the reign of this value,

64See Sartre, B&N, p. 25.
65See ibid., p. 156.
66Ibid., p. 153. (There is no question here that Sartre is
treating of both pure and impure reflection; it cannot be objected,
therefore, that this statement is true only of impure reflection.)
67Ibid., p. 154.
the ideal. It must "necessarily be defined in relation to a transcendent value which haunts it." Finally, it is "a question of bad faith," and not "of another fundamental attitude." On the basis of *Being and Nothingness* alone the ethics Sartre promised to write cannot be founded. The meaning which is given there to the word "freedom" makes any attempt to interpret freedom taking freedom for its value as an escape from the ideal of the in-itself-for-itself impossible from the start. In order to put across the ethics he wishes to espouse Sartre is forced to introduce under the cover of the same word a second, and radically different, meaning. It is this second meaning we have labelled "liberty", and we must now turn to consider the ethics for which that is the highest value.
CHAPTER IV
THE ETHICS OF LIBERTY

There is much less to be said about the ethics of liberty than we have been able to say about the ethics of freedom. The reason should be fairly obvious. Sartre does not regard himself as having set forth two distinct ethical doctrines in his writing, and thus he makes no explicit attempt in his other writings to present an ethics which could be contrasted in any way with the philosophical principles of Being and Nothingness. He may, it is true, be aware of the difficulty of passing from the doctrine of Being and Nothingness to the doctrine he wishes to advocate and that may be the reason he has not written the ethics he promised, but nowhere does he ever make this admission or ever try to clarify the principles of this "second" ethics. It is our task to assemble the evidence there is to prove that such an ethics exists. Unlike the problem we encountered in defining the ethics of freedom, we have here no single, unified source on which to rely. It is no wonder, then, that not much can be done except to sketch in the bare outlines of this ethics of liberty.

Chronologically speaking, the first hint there is of the type of ethics Sartre would like to produce is contained in his play, The Flies. As Hazel Barnes points out, one level on which this play may be interpreted is that on which it becomes "a plea to the French people to have the courage to work for national freedom against their oppressors." ¹ Miss Barnes

¹Barnes, op. cit., p. 23.
even goes one step farther and claims that, "in a broader sense, it is also a manifesto for freedom against social or economic oppression."\(^2\) In the play itself, Orestes frees the people of Argos from the tyranny of guilt and remorse by slaying the king, Aegisthus. Already, then, we have something which is manifestly not the freedom spoken of in *Being and Nothingness*, which, incidentally, was published in the same year as the play (1943). The freedom of *The Flies* is, at least in one of its meanings, a freedom which must be won, i.e., liberty. Man is free—that theme is repeatedly emphasized throughout the course of the play -- but his liberty must be won. The people of Argos are oppressed; they are the victims of Aegisthus' tyranny. It is necessary, Orestes says, to free them from the "evil influence" of the king.\(^3\) Their liberty is presented to them by Orestes. The people *are* already free but need to be liberated. Possibly, this could be achieved by pointing out to them their own inherent freedom. This method is attempted by Electra who in her dance before the cave of the dead presents to the people of Argos an image of their freedom, the fact that they could take a very different attitude toward the superstitious beliefs perpetuated by Aegisthus to keep them in submission. No doubt this is the method by which

\(^3\) Sartre, *The Flies in No Exit and Three Other Plays*, p. 105.
Sartre himself wished to liberate the French, by revealing their own freedom to them. In the play, however, this method fails owing to the intervention of Zeus. Crestes must shake the society of Argos to its very foundations, must change the political structure of the city by killing the king, before the liberation of the people is achieved. In this case it is more obvious than ever that the liberty of men is a very different thing from their freedom.

The same point is made in another way that is equally indirect in Sartre's famous essay, What is Literature?. Sartre's chief purpose in this essay is to expound what has been called the theory of "committed literature". The act of writing, he begins, implies freedom as one of its conditions. But the freedom of the reader is also required. Thus, "since the one who writes recognizes, by the very fact that he takes the trouble to write, the freedom of his readers, and since the one who reads, by the mere fact of his opening the book, recognizes the freedom of the writer, the work of art, from whichever side you approach it, is an act of confidence in the freedom of men." This freedom is not, however, a purely formal freedom. The content of the work of art must, also, be freedom: "the writer, a free man addressing free men, has only one subject -- freedom." This is still somewhat

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4See Cranston, op. cit., p. 85.

5Sartre, Literature and Existentialism, p. 63. (This is the proper title. See the note on this point in the Preface.)

6Ibid., p. 64.
vague, however. Its meaning begins to become more clear when Sartre says that "the freedom of writing implies the freedom of the citizen."\(^7\) Obviously, political and social liberty is again the goal of freedom -- in this case, the freedom of the writer. "There is no given freedom. One must win an inner victory over his passions, his race, his class, and his nation and must conquer other men along with himself.\(^3\) It soon becomes clear that this "inner victory" demands along with it the "outer victory" of men over political and social oppression. As it turns out, literature requires for its fullest realization the establishment of a classless society. "Only in this society could the writer be aware that there is no difference of any kind between his subject and his public.\(^9\) Sartre's conclusion merely confirms this point:

Thus, in a society without classes, without dictatorships, and stability, literature would end by becoming conscious of itself; it would understand that form and content, public and subject, are identical, that the formal freedom of saying and the material freedom of doing complete each other, and that one should be used to demand the other, that it best manifests the subjectivity of the person when it translates most deeply collective needs and, reciprocally, that its function is to express the concrete universal to the

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 66.

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 67.

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 156.
concrete universal and that its end
is to appeal to the freedom of men
so that they may realize and maintain
the reign of human freedom. 10

It is hardly necessary to point out the two quite distinct
meanings of freedom Sartre includes in this passage. Between
the "formal freedom of saying" and the "material freedom of
doing" (which is, of course, liberty in our sense) there
exists a profound gap which Sartre does not even seem to
notice.

The emphasis which in What is Literature? is divided
rather equally between freedom and liberty comes in Sartre's
latest works to be placed almost solely upon the latter. We
have already made reference to Hazel Barnes' comment on this
change:

Sartre has never gone back on his original
statement that men are psychologically free.
Yet in the Critique this freedom seems to
count little with him. It is practical
freedom which matters, the freedom to live
beyond the mere production of life. 11

Indeed, the most noticeable difference between the Critique
of Dialectical Reason and Being and Nothingness, apart from
the invention of a new and equally complex terminology (concepts
like "praxis", "practico-inert", "counter-finality", "seriality",
and "alterity" are typical), is this very change in emphasis

10 Ibid., p. 160.
11 Barnes, op. cit., p. 403.
from freedom to liberty. Where "the fundamental relation in our history is the reciprocal of need-scarcity" and scarcity is the source of all conflict and oppression, the idea of a freedom which men are seems to be of only secondary importance. This is not to say that Sartre denies his former claim; on the contrary, that men are free is the condition of their making their own history and is precisely what Sartre wishes to bring out in Marxist doctrine. Yet liberty is undoubtedly his chief concern. The goal of freedom is the elimination of scarcity, the provision of the conditions for a "real freedom". It is in this light that Sartre views the purpose of Marxism:

As soon as there will exist for everyone a margin of real freedom beyond the mere 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.14

Marxism, in other words, is the philosophy which will enable man to attain liberty from the condition of scarcity which at

12 The opinion stated here in regard to the Critique has been formulated on the basis of a reading of the concise, impartial exposition of this work in Laing and Cooper's Reason and Violence. Whatever there is mistaken in this view may be traced to Reason and Violence and, also, to my own estimate of Search for a Method.

13 Laing and Cooper, Reason & Violence, p. 113.

14 Sartre, Search for a Method, p. 34.
present determines relations in the world and holds men bound to "the mere production of life." In the sense it is used here "liberty" is clearly not meant to be simply a political liberty; it implies forms of oppression which are rooted in economic conditions and are spread through all sectors of man's life, of which politics is only one. This is one reason we did not wish to limit the meaning of our term by connecting it with any restricting adjective, such as "political". But, whether it is more than political or not, liberty is certainly found here to hold a position of the first importance in Sartre's thought.

There is one other characteristic of the ethics of liberty which it is necessary to bring out even though it is not crucial for our argument, and that is the bond which the struggle for liberty creates between men. It would not be far wrong, indeed, to say that for Sartre the cogito could be taken in one of its essential forms as: "I revolt, therefore we exist." This idea is suggested in the following passage from "Materialism and Revolution":

But as he [the revolutionary] demands, within the oppressed class and for the entire oppressed class, a more rational social status, his freedom resides in the act by which he demands the liberation of his whole class and, more generally, of all men. It springs from a recognition of other freedoms and it demands recognition on their

15 The original form of this idea appeared in Camus's The Rebel as "I rebel, therefore we exist" (p. 22), the difference being that Sartre believes revolt to be sterile and ineffective and praises the revolutionary act instead.
part. Thus, from the beginning, it places itself on the level of solidarity. 16

This notion of solidarity, whether in the face of death, oppression, or torture, is a constant theme in Sartre's writing. Too many critics overlook or purposely disregard it, preferring rather to pin Sartre down to the isolationist, solipsistic implications of Being and Nothingness, where "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others." 17 But, despite their biased judgments, Sartre's feeling for human community shines through not a few of his works. It is noticeably present, as we have already seen, in the semi-Kantian doctrine of Existentialism is a Humanism. On a more limited scale it is embodied in the relationship of Goetz and Hilda in The Devil and the Good Lord, in the close-knit solidarity of the tortured victims in The Victors, and in the intimate comradeship of Brunet and Schneider in Roads to Freedom, especially in that part of the unfinished fourth volume published under the title, "A Strange Friendship", in Les Temps Modernes. 18 Finally, it is the inspiring motif of Sartre's famous article, "The Republic of Silence", a concise, poignant dramatization of the feeling of solidarity underlying the French Resistance. 19 In all these cases, of course, solidarity is achieved only in the common struggle against some sort of

16 Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution" in Literary and Philosophical Essays, p. 250.
17 Sartre, B&N, p. 364.
18 See Barnes, op. cit., p. 247.
19 See Heinemann, Existentialism and the Modern Predicament, pp. 113-4.
oppression. It is another question entirely whether Sartre believes human community to be possible where this almost forced unity does not exist. Yet the fact remains that the ethics of liberty includes as one of its central concepts the intimate connection between freedoms engaged in the fight for the conquest of their liberty.

It should be fairly evident at this point what constitutes the ethics of liberty. Essentially, it is an ethics which takes as its highest value the attainment of liberty for all men and which rests upon the sense of solidarity existing among human freedoms united in the common struggle to reach this goal. We have said before that it is an ethics which Sartre would like to be able to produce from the elements of his philosophical doctrine. It is clearly the one which he personally favors, for a good deal of what he has written since Being and Nothingness is developed around an appeal to men to open their eyes to the oppression which exists in the world and to take up an active role in the fight for the liberation of all men. As opposed to the individualistic ethics implied by Being and Nothingness, what we have called the ethics of liberty is right through to its very core a social ethics. That may be one reason for the difficulties encountered in finding a connecting link between them.

This is not to say that the individual is sacrificed to the concern for society; the individual is still the starting-point. It is just that since Being and Nothingness the relation of the individual to society has taken precedence in Sartre's thought.
CHAPTER V
THE CONNECTION

We come now to the crux of our argument. We have examined the ethics Sartre can produce on the grounds of his philosophy in *Being and Nothingness* and have found that what he can produce is no more than what he does produce there. The questions at the end of that book lead to no new ethics, no "ethics of deliverance and salvation", simply because there is no possibility of escaping the grasp of bad faith and of the ideal given the meaning of "freedom" that Sartre uses as his fundamental principle. Sartre's argument there is too good; he cannot even counter it himself with a more optimistic ethics. That is why, we have suggested, he turns in his later works to expounding an ethics of liberty which may be set in contrast to the gloomy doctrine of the ethics of freedom. It is clear that Sartre would like to give a theoretical justification of this ethics of liberty on the basis of his own philosophical principles. He does, in fact, attempt something of the sort in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, but it is all too obvious that the principles of justification used there are not the principles of *Being and Nothingness* and no similar attempt has appeared since, at least from his own hand. The attempts that have been made by others -- Simone de Beauvoir and Francis Jeanson, to name two of the more famous "apologists" -- interesting though they may be, are not really much more convincing than Sartre's own attempt. In this respect Sartre may be wiser than his followers
and may realize, after seeing his own attempt fail, that there are insuperable difficulties to be overcome which prevent the success of any such attempt. In any case, Sartre has not written the ethics he promised and has failed to provide any convincing connection between the two ethical doctrines we have spoken of as the ethics of freedom and the ethics of liberty. It is now time to see why this connection cannot be provided.

In the first place, it is contradictory of Sartre to set up any values at all for man. There are no a priori standards by which men's actions may be judged. Objective morality is the illusion of the "serious" world, whose faith in transcendent values is the faith of bad faith. Man makes himself and in making himself chooses the criteria by which he is to be judged. "Existence precedes essence"\(^1\): man first exists and then defines himself by the values he chooses as the meaning of the project he is. Such are Sartre's oft-repeated assertions about the question of moral values. But, as we have seen from studying the ethics of liberty, liberty is the end for which Sartre wishes all men to strive, the value which he proposes as the goal of all authentic human endeavor. Freedom in its second sense is taken as the criterion of the freedom which chooses its values; whatever does not recognize liberty as the goal of freedom is condemned as bad faith. Sartre here smuggles in under cover of the ambiguous meaning of "freedom" the very

\(^1\)Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, p. 13.
type of universal value which in the same breath he repudiates. E.H. Allen, in his book *Existentialism from Within*, catches Sartre up on this point:

... in the case of Sartre, to ask for a logical connection between his ontology [the ethics of freedom, in our sense] and his ethics [the ethics of liberty] would be to require him to abandon his initial philosophical standpoint. If all values are the work of freedom and freedom is the emergence of that which cannot be accounted for in terms of what preceded it, if it is man transcending his past towards his future, there can in the nature of the case be no deduction of values from some given principles. Their justification is where their origin is, in freedom. In the last resort, Sartre should say that he has chosen certain values, set up certain standards, and that is all that can be said. To those who choose otherwise he would then have no answer... It is to his credit as a moralist that he has not been content to do this. He has in fact offered a theoretical justification of morality itself and of the kind of morality he adopts. So doing, he has eased the position of his followers at the cost of his own consistency. As freedom is the source of all values, so it is their criterion. ²

The "theoretical justification" referred to is evidently the position Sartre tries to defend in *Existentialism is a Humanism*. We have already seen that the principles he uses there are decidedly not those he uses in *Being and Nothingness*. Thus, Sartre cannot claim any more than a personal, subjective, and limited value for liberty without contradicting his argument.

²Allen, *Existentialism from Within*, p. 75.
against universal values. The jump from freedom to liberty is more like a Kierkegaardian "leap of faith" than a rational argument.

This demonstration alone suffices to reveal the lack of any logical connection between the ethics of freedom and the ethics of liberty. But there is a second argument which is equally devastating. Given the fact that Sartre wishes to posit liberty as the goal of freedom, what sort of ethics results?

To answer that question we must first review the conclusion we reached in the chapter on "Ambiguous Freedom". There, in analyzing the nature of the second freedom we called "liberty", we found it to be necessarily in the mode of being of the in-itself. Freedom as the for-itself lacks being, and the being which it lacks is the in-itself. This is the only sense we could make out of the notion of freedom wanting itself. Asserting liberty to be being-in-itself is not really as far-fetched an idea as it might at first seem. It is in the nature of liberty to be something which men can possess and which they can lose. This quality of being able to be possessed is, in fact, what distinguishes it from freedom. Freedom, Sartre says, cannot be possessed; freedom is what men are. But liberty can be won or lost, and it is this which makes it meaningful to take liberty as a value. Now what can be possessed is obviously "some-thing". Liberty,
therefore, is a thing. But, if it is a thing, it necessarily belongs to the being of the in-itself since the for-itself is defined precisely as "no-thing" in contrast to the in-itself and since these are the only two kinds of being which really can exist (as opposed to the impossible ideal of the in-itself-for-itself which cannot exist). Moreover, liberty in its usual sense when taken as a value implies as its condition a certain structure of the political and social order and a certain level of material well-being -- if not in all cases, certainly in the universal way Sartre wishes to take it, as the liberty of all men in a classless society. Any such arrangement of things belongs, of course, to the in-itself, for once established it is essentially no more than the facticity of the for-itself, the situation in which the for-itself must choose itself. Thus, even if liberty cannot be taken to be a "thing" as a chair or a table is a thing, still, it is inextricably bound up with "things" in this material sense and belongs by nature to the being of the in-itself.

We have said that liberty is something that can be achieved, can be finally attained. Is this the case for Sartre? Does he in taking liberty as the goal of freedom believe that a stage can be reached where freedom and liberty both exist in stable equilibrium? To be more specific, does Sartre believe in the possibility of an end to history in the achievement of a utopian society where the free projects of men and the liberty of all can be maintained side-by-side without conflict? Clearly, his view of man as a perpetual nihilating freedom does not allow
him any such belief. If man were once to stop negating, detaching himself from the in-itself in order to throw himself towards the future, he would no longer exist as man. He would be dead, a mere in-itself. There is no end to history because man himself is his own historicity; as long as he lives, man continues to make his own history. There can be no utopian society which cannot be transcended toward a future society envisaged by man through his project. Sartre is committed by his own doctrine to the idea of a "permanent revolution":

... one is bound to try at any rate to envisage his free man in settings beyond the present one, to imagine him in the future that alone gives substance and significance to his freedom. And there one can see him only as a lost revolutionary: as one who has created by his free act the society embodying, as far as society can, the values in which he has chosen to believe, yet whose very nature as free demands that he once more deny these values in his transcendence, that he go beyond the very liberty for which he has lived his life and risked his death to something beyond liberty — and beyond that again, and so forever.

Liberty can never be finally achieved. Man by his very act of creating liberty must transcend it toward a future liberty. Liberty taken as the goal of freedom contains within itself the seed of contradiction and failure, "for here revolution for freedom implies revolution against freedom."

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3Greene, Introduction to Existentialism, p. 115.
4Ibid.
The conclusion is clear. A combination of freedom and liberty can only lead to the ideal. Freedom as for-itself lacks the being of liberty as in-itself. But freedom does not desire simply to become liberty and thereby lose its being as freedom. It wishes to become liberty but only while retaining its being as a free transcendence of liberty in a state of "permanent revolution". In short, it desires the being of liberty-freedom, or the in-itself-for-itself. This goal, however, is contradictory. If freedom becomes liberty, it no longer makes sense to say that freedom wants liberty. In other words, if man creates a truly free society, it no longer makes sense to say that he wants a truly free society. But this is precisely what Sartre's notion of freedom entails. The goal of freedom-liberty is, then, impossible; the two cannot co-exist on the same plane of being. Liberty can never be achieved without immediately being denied by the freedom which achieves it. At best, liberty can exist only as the ever-receding goal of freedom's efforts to attain it. We see here again in somewhat different form the ideal which makes of all human projects "a useless passion". Freedom wishes to attain a state of being, liberty, of which it is the conscious foundation. But it cannot do so without at the same time denying that it is this being which has been attained. The nihilating character of freedom does not allow it to found utopias.

Thus we see from two points of view that, whatever efforts Sartre may make to invent a link between the ethics of freedom
and the ethics of liberty, he can do so only at the price of open inconsistency or only by concealing the unjustifiable deductions he makes in the cloak of ambiguous terminology. The gloomy ethics of freedom, which is bound to an ideal value it cannot escape and which inscribes the mark of failure on every project man undertakes to attain it, cannot become the optimistic ethics of liberty and human solidarity without a radical metamorphosis of the philosophical groundwork of Being and Nothingness, a metamorphosis which Sartre does not seem willing to make. His reasons are understandable enough. What has attracted so much attention to his philosophy is first and foremost his radical view of human freedom, which has been called "the most extreme form of freedom the history of philosophy has ever presented." In order to remove the gap between the ethics of freedom and the ethics of liberty, this view of freedom would be the first thing requiring modification. To ask that of Sartre is to ask him to repudiate what has made him famous and won for his views a world-wide audience. Thus, we may expect never to see that work on ethics Sartre promised.

Sartre has not written a book on ethics. We began with that fact and took the search for an answer to the question "why not?" to be the guiding thread of our analysis of Sartre's ethical thought. We distinguished two meanings of freedom which Sartre uses and through an intensive investigation of certain crucial ideas and writings tried to show that freedom in one sense is the foundation for an ethics of freedom implied by the doctrine of Being and Nothingness while in another sense it is the basis for an ethics of liberty implied by his more recent writings. The former we regarded as the ethics he can produce, the latter as the ethics he would like to produce. It is evident from this last distinction that it is the ethics of liberty by which Sartre personally guides his life and to which he desires to lead other men. The ethics of freedom, apparently, is simply the unfortunate consequence of a philosophy which constructed arguments too strong for it to refute. Being and Nothingness, it seems, built its own prison.

What remains of Sartre's ethical thought besides these two irreconcilable moral doctrines? One important aspect, in fact, we have not recognized or discussed: the idea of salvation through art which plays an undeniably strategic role not only in Sartre's writings but in his personal life as well. Interestingly enough, this theme appears both in Sartre's earliest well-known work, Nausea, and in his most recent major
publication, The Words. Nausea is in part autobiographical, though a novel, while The Words is, of course, precisely that—an autobiography. This fact reveals how close to Sartre's private life this theme strikes. The attitude taken towards this idea, however, is quite noticeably not the same in the two books, and that is the essential point. Nausea, despite its title, ends on a note of hope. The hero, Roquentin, thinks that, possibly, he can escape the terrible feeling of the unjustifiability and superfluosness of existence by creating a work of art, a novel, which would enable him to accept himself and would justify his existence to himself. He desires the ideal being of a melody which, "behind the existence which falls from one present to the other, without a past, without a future, behind these sounds which decompose from day to day, peel off and slip towards death, ... stays the same, young and firm, like a pitiless witness." In The Words Sartre identifies himself with Roquentin and at the same time with that ideal being whose life is justified and who remains outside of existence in order to observe it:

At the age of thirty, I executed the masterstroke of writing in Nausea—quite sincerely, believe me—about the bitter unjustified existence of my fellowmen and of exonerating my own. I was Roquentin; I used him to show, without complacency, the texture of my life. At the same time, I was I.

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1 Sartre, Nausea, pp. 234-5.
the elect, chronicler of Hell, a glass
and steel photomicroscope peering at
my own protoplasmic juices.²

But since that time the illusion seems to have slowly been
shattered:

The retrospective illusion has been
smashed to bits; martyrdom, salvation,
and immortality are falling to pieces;
the edifice is going to rock and ruin;
... atheism is a cruel and long-range
affair: I think I've carried it through.³

This passage suggests that the idea of salvation through art,
too, is just another instance of that all-pervading "desire
to be God" which haunts the existence of man. The desire to
achieve immortality through the seemingly infinite durability
of words structured into a work of art, which at one and the
same time appears as a created thing and as the embodiment
of a living consciousness, is simply that same desire for the
ideal of the in-itself-for-itself which, Sartre claims, makes
of man "a useless passion".

Is this all that remains of Sartre's ethical thought --
a thorough disillusionment? Not quite. There is besides the
two ethical doctrines we have mentioned that abortive attempt
to combine the two which results in the idea of a "permanent
revolution". It is the culmination of Sartre's measured
optimism which allows him to believe in the possibility of

³Ibid., pp. 252-3.
progress without going to the ultra-optimistic extreme of utopian idealism. This idea might really be more suitably called political, but for Sartre as for the majority of great moral philosophers politics and ethics are inseparable.

In the last analysis, the ethical thought of Sartre, however much there is in it which it is well to remember, is after all only one of many ethical viewpoints that man can adopt. Since men are free, as Sartre would say, they are free to choose any moral attitude they wish on which to base their lives, and Sartre's own attitude is just the result of a particular way of looking at life that might not at all suit the temperament of another individual. One of the most striking presentations of this truth is found in the "postscript" to P.H. Nowell-Smith's Ethics:

Consider, for example, the reactions of two different people who are told that something they have done is wrong or immoral and who accept the criticism as just. For one of them the immediate effect of this criticism may be to make him think about the past. He thinks in terms of having broken a rule and his dominant emotion is shame, a sense of guilt or sin, a sense of his incapacity to live up to his ideals. Moreover it is almost certain that he will tend to think of the ideals he has failed to live up to and the rules he has broken as being not primarily his ideals and rules at all, but as being 'objective', as belonging to a special order of reality that he did not create but which is imposed on him. In this way it is easier for him to understand how he came to fail;

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4 For a fuller discussion of this idea and of Sartre's political thought in general, see Greene's Jean-Paul Sartre: The Existentialist Ethic.
and because it is easier for him to understand his failure in this way it is more comforting.

Another man will think primarily of the future; his dominant reactions will not be shame but a desire to put right the wrong he has done, if this is possible, and a desire to do better in future. For him morality is more a matter of what he ought to do now and in future than a matter of what he has done in the past. Shame and guilt, since they are concerned with a past that is dead and gone, will seem to him, not to be of the very essence of self-condemnation, but important only as spurs to future effort. And since he thinks more in terms of decisions for the future than of remorse for the past, he will not feel the same need to represent moral rules and ideals as imposed on him from without and will not derive the same comfort from so doing. Indeed it will seem to him to be a slavish attitude. For him rules and moral laws are important enough as guides in cases of doubt and as correctives for tendencies in his own conduct of which he disapproves in his reflective, self-critical moments; but they will not be so important as the policies and principles which he, as a free rational agent, chooses to adopt.\(^5\)

Nowell-Smith takes these to be two fundamental attitudes whose disagreement upon moral questions is irreolvable by rational argument. Indeed, does not the first present an exact image of the "serious" world Sartre condemns, and does not the second present a fairly faithful account of Sartre's own moral viewpoint? But, if these rest on a fundamental disagreement which cannot rationally be resolved, what becomes of the validity of Sartre's ethics? Is it not just one among others? To this we must, rather regretfully, give a positive answer. What Francis

\(^5\)Nowell-Smith, Ethics, pp. 315-6.
Jeanson has said of Sartre's existentialism in general is true of his ethics, also: "existentialism will teach the meaning of existence only to those who have already chosen not to ignore it, to search for it unceasingly, and who have assumed in advance the burden of its discovery."  

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6Jeanson, op. cit., p. 365.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The following bibliography lists all the books which have been either cited in the text or read directly in connection with the preparation of this paper. It does not pretend to provide an exhaustive cataloguing of reference works on Sartre, and even the list of Sartre's writings does not include all that he has published. Nevertheless, it should give some idea of the wide range of material that may be consulted by those who have some interest in Sartre.

The bibliography is divided into two major sections. The first part contains a list of Sartre's works ordered chronologically according to the publication dates of the original French editions. This arrangement should help clarify the argument in the text regarding the increasing attention Sartre is concentrating on "the ethics of liberty". The second part comprises works which fall under one of three categories: (1) criticisms and/or expositions of Sartre's thought; (2) criticisms and/or expositions of existentialism in general, most of which devote at least an entire chapter to Sartre; and (3) books cited in the text or footnotes of this paper and books which are not directly connected in the foregoing manner with Sartre's writing but which are nevertheless relevant to an understanding of his thought. (The classification here is not rigid: The Ethics of Ambiguity, for instance, could just as well be subsumed under categories (1) or (2) as under category (3).)

In all cases where an English translation of a book is listed along with the original French version, it is to be
understood that the translated edition was the one used in preparing this paper. Similarly, wherever a paperback edition of a work is cited, it is to this edition that footnotes and ideas refer. In all but a few instances, the translated and paperback editions, when available, were the editions used.
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