

AN ANALYSIS OF FREEDOM IN JEAN-PAUL SARTRE'S  
CRITIQUE OF DIALECTICAL REASON:  
VOLUME I --- THEORY OF PRACTICAL ENSEMBLES

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**An Analysis of Freedom in Jean-Paul Sartre's  
Critique of Dialectical Reason:  
Volume I – Theory of Practical Ensembles**

by

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A thesis submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

The Department of Philosophy  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

October 1997

St. John's

Newfoundland



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0-612-36101-2

## Abstract

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume I -- Theory of Practical Ensembles, sets out to determine the significance of history for human action. Sartre commences his inquiry by investigating an abstract individual satisfying her original need in nature and proceeds to analyse the concrete social formation of which the individual finds herself a part. The tools which Sartre employs for his analysis include both existentialism and the historical materialism of Marx and Engels.

Sartre's modified Marxism, as exemplified in the Critique, seems to correct the notion of freedom which he attributed to individuals in his earlier work, Being and Nothingness. According to the later Sartre, historical circumstances do have a direct bearing on what the individual will be, or more specifically, what choices the individual will make. Consequently, the individual's task, according to the Sartre of the Critique, is to look back upon history and determine both when it has been an impediment to freedom and when it has been conducive to freedom.

As we shall see, one of the keys to understanding Sartre's modified Marxism is his use of the expression, 'practico-inert'. This expression is a modification of the being-in-itself from Being and Nothingness. The being-in-itself is inert in the sense that it is dependent upon the being-for-itself for its meaning -- without the being-for-itself the being-in-itself simply 'is'. In the Critique, the practico-inert is not dependent upon a subject to bestow meaning on it. Rather, because it is the result of the past actions of humans, it is already endowed with

meaning. As we will see, Sartre maintains that history demonstrates that for the most part we are unfree, as our choices are dictated to us by the forces of the practico-inert. But, according to Sartre, specific historical situations can arise which perpetuate the formation of what he terms fused groups. Fused groups consist of individuals who seek to overturn the forces of the practico-inert and as a result seek to see themselves in a more humane way. Further, a fused group has the possibility of evolving into a pledged group, a group whose members pledge themselves towards freedom.

As we shall see, Sartre's analysis of the resurrection of freedom in the Critique hinges on the experience of the fear of death. It is not until death literally threatens the well-being of individuals that freedom can be achieved, as the fear of death compels individuals into a new way of looking both at the forces of the practico-inert and themselves. The conclusion reached in this thesis is that it is the fear of death which distinguishes Sartre's Marxism.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Peter Trnka, for his patience and encouragement during the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank all the professors of the Department of Philosophy at Memorial University who helped guide me during my course work. I extend a special thanks to Dr. James Bradley for his constant encouragement and advice. Further, I would like to thank Jennifer Dawe, secretary of the department, and the rest of the faculty and fellow students of the Department of Philosophy and also, friends made outside of the department, who all combined in making my stay in St. John's a memorable one.

In addition I wish to acknowledge the School of Graduate Studies for awarding me a fellowship during the 1996-1997 term, as well as the Department of Philosophy and the Office of the Dean of Arts for providing me with an assistantship during the 1996-1997 term.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Dr. Claude and Ann Brown, for their proud and continual support over the years.

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## Abbreviations

- 'AIWJPS' = 'An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre'. Leo Fretz.
- BEM = Between Existentialism and Marxism. Jean-Paul Sartre.
- BN = Being and Nothingness. Jean-Paul Sartre.
- BT = Being and Time. Martin Heidegger.
- C = Capital. Karl Marx.
- CBN = A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being And Nothingness*. Joseph S. Catalano.
- CDR = Critique of Dialectical Reason. Jean-Paul Sartre.
- CL = The Constitution of Liberty. F.A. Hayek.
- CM = The Communist Manifesto. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.
- E = The Elements of Law. Thomas Hobbes.
- EH' = 'Existentialism Is a Humanism'. Jean-Paul Sartre.
- EPM = Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. Karl Marx.
- EEL = Four Essays On Liberty. Sir Isaiah Berlin.
- GI = The German Ideology. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.
- HCC = History and Class Consciousness. Georg Lukacs.
- HDV = History and the Dialectic of Violence. Raymond Aron.
- HN = Hope Now. Jean-Paul Sartre.
- IRH = Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Alexandre Kojève.
- 'IWJPS' = 'An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre'. Michel Rybalka, Greste F. Pucciani

and Susan Gruenheck.

- L** = Leviathan. Thomas Hobbes.
- MFP** = Modern French Philosophy. Vincent Descombes.
- NFE** = Notebooks for an Ethics. Jean-Paul Sartre.
- PA** = Praxis and Action. Richard Bernstein.
- PM** = The Phenomenology of Mind. G.W.F. Hegel.
- PV** = The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World. Carl Leiden and Karl M. Schmitt.
- R** = The Rebel. Albert Camus.
- S'** = 'Seriality: A Ground For Social Alienation'. Ingbert Knecht.
- Sbh** = Sartre by himself. Jean-Paul Sartre.
- SFM** = Search for a Method. Jean-Paul Sartre.
- SM** = Sartre's Marxism. Mark Poster.
- S&M** = Sartre and Marxism. Pietro Chiodi.
- SMWW** = The Structure of Marx's World View. John McMurtry.
- 'SPH'** = 'Sartre and the poetics of history'. Thomas R. Flynn.
- SPT** = Sartre's Political Theory. William McBride.
- STE** = Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity. Thomas Anderson.
- TGF** = The Great Fear of 1789. Georges Lefebvre.
- TITP'** = 'The Individual And "The Public"'. Søren Kierkegaard.
- TMO/PS** = The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre. Wilfred Desan.

## Introduction

F.A. Hayek, in The Constitution of Liberty, explains that we cannot "fully appreciate the value of freedom until we know how a society of free men as a whole differs from one in which unfreedom prevails" (CL 6). Because freedom is defined as 'the absence of coercion', Hayek explains that "our definition of liberty depends upon the meaning of the concept of coercion, and it will not be precise until we have similarly defined that term" (CL 20).<sup>1</sup> A definition of freedom 'will not be precise' until we know what it is to be unfree. According to Hayek:

coercion occurs when one man's actions are made to serve another man's will, not for his own but for the other's purpose. It is not that the coerced does not choose at all; if that were the case we would not speak of his "acting". ... Coercion implies ... that I still choose but that my mind is made someone else's tool, because the alternatives before me have been so manipulated that the conduct that the coercer wants me to choose becomes for me the least painful one. Although coerced, it is still I who decide which is the least evil under the circumstances (CL 133).

As we can see from Hayek's definition, coercion does not entail that the individual does not have the power to act or the power to choose. Rather, coercion implies that our actions or choices will take place within specific boundaries which have been manipulated by another. Coercion is inherently wrong because it eliminates the individual as a "thinking and valuing person" and instead renders the individual as a tool to be used for the ends of another (CL 21).

Hayek claims that coercion is 'unfreedom', as it enslaves the individual to the will of

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<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, Hayek maintains that the terms 'freedom' and 'liberty' are synonymous and therefore interchangeable.

another. Freedom pertains to the condition of individuals in which coercion of some by others is reduced as much as possible (CL 21). Hayek explains that coercion "cannot be altogether avoided because the only way to prevent it is by the threat of coercion" (CL 21). We can see that for freedom to prevail, on Hayek's view, it will be necessary for individuals to submit to some form of restraint. Restraint will be necessary, as it will minimize the conditions under which coercion occurs. But any form of restraint will be publicly known, and therefore, an individual need never be coerced, unless she willingly places herself in a position where she knows she will be coerced:

provided that I know beforehand that if I place myself in a particular position, I shall be coerced and provided that I avoid putting myself in such a position, I need never be coerced. At least insofar as the rules providing for coercion are not aimed at me personally but are so framed as to apply to all people equally in similar circumstances (CL 142).

With freedom comes the notion of responsibility, as the individual "will bear the consequences of his actions and will receive praise or blame for them" (CL 71). The individual must act in a way which is conducive to freedom. If she acts in a way which is unfree, she must be prepared to accept punishment for her actions.

At a first glance, F.A. Hayek and Jean-Paul Sartre make strange partners. Although freedom is central to the thought of both men, Hayek's conservative libertarianism and Sartre's radical position on freedom seem to be incompatible. Yet on a theoretical level there is not much difference between Sartre's conception of freedom in the Critique and Hayek's. Sartre, like Hayek, maintains that in order to be free we must know both what it is to be unfree and why unfreedom is wrong. Freedom, as recognized by Sartre, also implies the

absence of coercion. In Sartre's terminology within the Critique, freedom is the absence of coercion from the practico-inert and the imperatives which it imposes upon us. According to Sartre, coercion weakens a crucial component of the individual -- it takes away from the possibilities of what the individual will be in the future. Further, the freedom which Sartre envisages also entails some form of restraint upon the individual's actions. But as we shall see, what differentiates Sartre's conception of freedom, from both his earlier conception in Being and Nothingness and Hayek's, is that Sartre, in the Critique, explains freedom not on a theoretical level but rather in light of material, historical circumstances.

The aim of this thesis is to provide an analysis of Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of freedom, as found in his Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume I -- Theory of Practical Ensembles. Within the Critique I trace the thought of Sartre up until *The Statutory Group of 'Book II: From Groups to History'*. I stop at this point because it is the 'pledged group' which Sartre claims to be "the origin of humanity" (CDR 436). As we shall see, the 'origin of humanity' corresponds with the resurrection of freedom.

In chapter one of this thesis I first give a brief sketch of the 'power of circumstances' which leads to Sartre's remodification of his 'existential' freedom, as found in Being and Nothingness. Next I provide an outline of the methodology which Sartre seeks to employ in the Critique. Sartre's methodology, incorporating primarily the thought of Hegel, Marx and Engels, seeks to address the questions: How have individuals made history? And how in turn has history made individuals?

In chapter two I outline Sartre's analysis of our fall into the practico-inert world.

Sartre maintains that in a world of 'scarcity' we are all subservient to the practico-inert and its imperatives. Within the practico-inert world we find our future actions conditioned, as we take cues from the matter which we interact with. In this chapter I show how Sartre reformulates the Hegelian conception of master and slave, as one where both master and slave are guilty of attending to the 'necessities' of the practico-inert. As we shall see, this reformulation of Hegel's conception of master and slave is a result of Sartre reworking Marx's notion of fetishism.

In chapter three I examine two of Sartre's conceptions of social groupings, namely, the 'series' and the 'group'. The series is a social outgrowth of individuals who derive their destiny from the practico-inert. Although the series has an appearance of unity, this appearance is only such, as its members are not organised in light of any specific goal. The members of the group, on the other hand, are organised in light of a specific goal, namely, to escape from their unfree serial mode of being and attain freedom.

In chapter four I concentrate on the specific role that Sartre attributes to the fear of death and how it motivates individuals towards free common *praxis*. I conclude with an assessment of why Sartre, unlike Marx, attaches so much importance to the 'fear of death'.

## Chapter One

### Freedom and the Power of Circumstances

#### 1.1 Introduction

Freedom is always at the heart of both Sartre's literary and philosophical discussions, the Critique of Dialectical Reason being no exception. In 1945 in Being and Nothingness Sartre had stated: "I apprehend myself as totally free and as not being able to derive the meaning of my world except as coming from myself" (BN 78). By 1972 this position had changed somewhat, as in an interview from this year Sartre explains:

there are things I approve and others I look upon with shame. Among the latter -- and I've already gone on record on this point -- is what I wrote in 1945 or thereabouts to the effect that, no matter what the situation might be, one is always free. ... There's no question that there is some basic change in the concept of freedom. I still remain faithful to the notion of freedom, but I can see what can modify its results in any given situation (Sbh 58).

The reason for this change in position is the result of what Sartre terms "*la force des choses* -- the power of circumstances" (BEM 33). Sartre admits that "*L'Être et Le Néant* itself should have been the beginning of a discovery of this power of circumstances, since I had already been made a soldier, when I had not wanted to be one" (BEM 33). Further, Sartre adds that "after the war came the true experience, that of *société*" (BEM 34). In the Critique Sartre recognizes that society bears a great influence upon the choices that an individual makes. The task in the Critique is to determine both how the circumstances of society are capable of coercing individuals into making certain decisions and how such coercion can be avoided.

## 1.2 Freedom in Being and Nothingness

Freedom in Being and Nothingness is defined as "the very being of the For-itself which is 'condemned to be free' and must forever choose itself -- i.e., make itself" (BN 803). This notion of freedom is associated with the 'death of God'. The advent of God's death signifies the death of everything which we have held to be normative and objective. From this follows the notion that because we no longer have any immutable source for appeal, we (the being-for-itself) are therefore the masters of our own destiny, as we are nothing else save that which we make of ourselves -- "man is free, man is *freedom*. ... We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free" ('EH' 353).

A person's being-for-itself is never a fixed entity; it is, rather, a combination of both *facticity* and *possibility*. Facticity relates to the brute facts of our lives such as our past and only influences the future in so much as we allow it. Sartre claims that "the For-itself is present to being in the form of flight; the Present is a perpetual flight in the face of being" (BN 179). Because existence involves self-construction, we are *never* finished, as we are *always* fleeing both the past and present and moving towards the possibilities of the future or not-yet. Because existence precedes essence, in the future we will be nothing else, except that which we decide to make of our self. Here it is crucial to note that our flight towards the future is an attempt to achieve unity, but it is an attempt that will always fail, as we are our future in the constant perspective of the possibility of not being it: "The Future is not, it is *possibilized*" (BN 186).

Sartre's philosophy as found in Being and Nothingness presents what can be termed

a *radical* view of freedom. It is radical in the sense that it is meant to be applicable *carte blanche* – no matter what the situation may be the individual, as described by Sartre, is free to move beyond her circumstances and make herself into whatever she so desires. Within Being and Nothingness neither anything internal nor external can interfere with our actions, as our actions are entirely 'up to us'. Sartre recognizes only two hindrances to freedom. First, he claims that "no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free", as:

no factual state whatever it may be (the political and economic structure of society, the psychological "state," *etc.*) is capable by itself of motivating any act whatsoever. For an act is a projection of the for-itself toward what is not, and what is can in no way determine by itself what is not (BN 562).

And second, "the other's existence brings about a factual limit to my freedom" (BN 671). It is the second limitation in light of Sartre's remodification of the first which takes on a grander scale in his philosophy within the Critique.

In Being and Nothingness Sartre maintains that the other's existence brings a factual limit to my freedom as "my Self exists outside as an object for others" (BN 800). Sartre exemplifies his conception of being-for-others with the example of the 'peeping Tom'. For some reason or another -- jealousy, curiosity or vice -- Sartre hypothesizes that we have decided to look through a keyhole and:

all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! What does this mean? It means that I am suddenly affected in my being and that the essential modifications appear in my structure (BN 349).

In such an instance, Sartre maintains that we have two options. Either we can attempt to see ourselves as an object for the other, or we can assert our subjectivity and render the other an

object. Both of these projects will inevitably fail. Why? Because "while I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me" (BN 475). "Conflict", according to Sartre, "is the original meaning of being-for-others" (BN 475).

Sartre's analysis of the 'peeping Tom', or more specifically 'The Look', serves to exemplify how we come to know others in the world. Sartre observes:

I am in a public park. Not far away there is a lawn and along the edges of that lawn there are benches. A man passes by those benches. I see this man; I apprehend him as an object and at the same time as a man. What does this signify? What do I mean when I assert that this object *is a man*? (BN 341).

According to Sartre, when we assert that 'this object *is a man*', we recognize that our perception of 'man' is fundamentally different than our perception of other objects in the world such as park benches (CBN 160). We apprehend 'man' as both an 'object' and a 'man', because we recognize that 'he' sees what 'we' see. He is a subject like us. This recognition entails the realization that we, the subject, understand that while we see him as an object, he also sees us as an object. As a result, we understand that we can only become an object through the eyes of an other.

The subject in Being and Nothingness finds herself involved in a world of bitter struggle unto death; Sartre fails to provide an explanation or basis for the origin of this conflict: why do we continually attempt to objectify the other? A reason for this lack of explanation is, as Sartre himself admits, that "the people in BN lack a foundation" ('IJPS' 237). This lack of a foundation coincides with Sartre's failure in Being and Nothingness to ground the individual in any realm besides that of interior experience. Such a myopic view

results in a failure to explain how the individual interiorizes her exterior experiences, or, in other words, how anything external may influence our internal decisions. Sartre himself eventually recognized this problem, as he observed that:

the individual interiorizes his social determinations: he interiorizes the relations of production, the family of his childhood, the historical past, the contemporary institutions, and then he re-exteriorizes these in acts which necessarily refer us back to them (BEM 35).

The Critique of Dialectical Reason is Sartre's attempt to determine how both our historical and social settings influence our view of reality. The basis for this view explains why and how conflicts between others arise.

### 1.3 Freedom in the Critique of Dialectical Reason

In the Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume I -- Theory of Practical Ensembles Sartre still wishes to claim that humans are free in the sense that they are active subjects. But, by supplying a foundation for human acts, Sartre desires to show that we are active products of the social situation in which we find ourselves existing.

One crucial aspect of the social/historical foundation that Sartre provides in the Critique is the notion that the other is seen as a source of my freedom, not a hindrance to it. Sartre, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapters, claims that it is because we dwell in a world of 'scarcity' -- "the contingent impossibility of satisfying all the needs of an ensemble" (CDR 829) -- that the other becomes a threat to my freedom. Scarcity is the foundation for our objectification of others which Sartre failed to provide in Being and

Nothingness. In order to avoid putting the cart before the horse, at this point it is sufficient to note that it is scarcity which seeps into the being of everyone and affects their outlook on reality. The goal which Sartre presents in the Critique is to overcome the inhumane relations which scarcity perpetuates, as when this is accomplished, we will not see others as 'Others', but rather as humans.

#### 1.4 Sartre's Project in the Critique

As dense and obscure as the Critique of Dialectical Reason may appear to be, it has a simple project, namely, to examine the Marxian inspired claim that "men make history precisely to the extent that it makes them" (CDR 97). Sartre maintains that to accomplish such a task, a union between existentialism and Marxism is necessary, as this union will scrutinize the *praxis* of humans throughout history -- it will put the individual back into history, something that Marxists have failed to do. Existentialism provides the "concrete approach to reality" while Marx's historical materialism furnishes the "interpretation of history" (SEM 21).

*Praxis* as defined in the Critique is "the activity of an individual or group in organising conditions in the light of some end" (CDR 829). *Praxis* is the actions of individuals that combine to make-up our reality. *Praxis*, or what Sartre also terms 'project', is similar to freedom in Being and Nothingness, as it corresponds to our activities in the light of the future or not-yet. But the one crucial difference between the two is that *praxis* corresponds to our activities within a world where we are involved with others and matter.

In Search for a Method, the companion piece to the original French edition of the Critique, Sartre states:

man defines himself by his project. ... Man is, for himself and others, a signifying being, since one can never understand the slightest of his gestures without going beyond the pure present and explaining it by the future. Furthermore, he is a creator of signs to the degree that -- always ahead of himself -- he employs certain objects to designate other absent or future objects (SEM 152).

The notion of the human as a subject who is never a perfect unity but is involved in a perpetual flight towards a unity is of crucial importance in the Critique, as Sartre will maintain that history, like the individual, is never a completed process, but rather an open-ended one. The reasoning here is simple: it is humans who make history, as we are active participants within our history. Without humans there is no history. Further, because we are active participants, we can reflect on how we have historically arrived at where we are. Within the Critique we are still masters of our destiny, but we must first answer to history and determine how we have made it, and how in turn it has made us.

### 1.5 Sartre's Structural Anthropology

In the preface to Search for a Method Sartre poses the following question: "Do we have the means to constitute a structural, historical anthropology?" (SFM xxxv). Sartre's reply is that yes we do, if we accept that "if such a thing as a Truth can exist in anthropology, it must be a truth that has *become*, and it must make itself a *totalization*" (SFM xxxv).

A totalisation, as defined by Sartre, is "the constantly developing (*en cours*) process of understanding and making history" (CDR 830). Sartre asserts that Marx recognized and realized the validity of such a claim: Marx showed in opposition to Hegel that history is in development and further "he preserved the dialectical movement *both in Being and in knowledge*" (CDR 23). Marx's conception of history:

shows that history does not end by being resolved into "self-consciousness" as "spirit of the spirit", but that in it at each stage there is found a material result: a sum of productive forces, an historically created relation of

individuals to nature and to one another ... It shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances (GJ 59).

Marx, according to Sartre, recognized that we as individuals are not only continually transforming ourselves (our Being), but we are also continually transforming our reality (our circumstances). Or in other words, we progressively produce the conditions of our lives and because we are constantly producing these conditions, we can never attain complete knowledge: we change our reality which in turn implies changes to the conception of ourselves.

In the Critique the dialectic is defined as "the intelligibility of *praxis* at every level" (CDR 828). Sartre maintains that the followers of Marx failed to establish the nature of dialectical truth, as they failed to recognize that thought is both Being and knowledge of Being. According to Sartre, "the dialectic is founded in existence, is concerned with existence, and renders existence comprehensible" (S&M ix). Sartre claims that for any structural anthropology to be successful, Marxism must be first freed from its idealism and further, the dialectic must be restored to everyday existence.

Idealism purports to explain the dialectic as a process which is divorced from the actions of humans. The problem with this formulation is that any knowledge of the dialectic is presumed to derive from a dialectic that is static and unchanging. As we shall see, Sartre desires to explain history as a totalisation. Because history is a totalisation we can never reach an end point where we possess complete knowledge. History does not come to a halt, because as long as there are individuals, history is in process. Accordingly, Sartre claims that idealism

denies the possibility that dialectical knowledge is itself something that is continually developing. Sartre maintains that Marxism has erred by accepting the Hegelian claim that Absolute knowledge can be attained and in the process has prioritized knowledge over being. Because Hegel explains history in terms of the unfolding of the spirit or the Absolute, he maintains that history reaches a point where the spirit unfolds completely and as a result, absolute knowledge can be attained. Sartre notes that the strength of Hegel's dogmatism resides in its idealism<sup>2</sup>:

for Hegel, the dialectic had no need to prove itself. In the first place Hegel took himself to be at the beginning of the end of History, that is to say, at the moment where truth is death (CDR 21).

According to Sartre, Marx and Engels demonstrate that 'truth' is not dead, but rather is in process. In the German Ideology, Marx and Engels, in opposition to idealism, explain:

we set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development of their ideological reflexes and the echoes of this life-process. ... men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking (GI 47).

Marx and his followers, by recognizing that we are not at the end of history, as "History is in development" and "that Being is irreducible to knowledge", cast doubt on Hegel's notion; yet Sartre claims that those like Engels who have attempted to explain the dialectic as existing in nature have committed an error similar to Hegel's.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that when Sartre labels Hegel an idealist, he is doing traditional sense. Richard Bernstein in '*Praxis: Marx and the Hegelian Background*' from Praxis And Action puts forth a convincing argument that Hegel is not an 'idealist' in the traditional sense.

The belief that a dialectic exists in nature stems from Engels' claim that we exist within a natural history and therefore our human history is simply one *particular* aspect which partakes in the *universal* natural history. Natural history intends to explain nature as being the cause of everything. Humans therefore are only a particular part of the whole of nature. Because this is so, the best way that humans can attain knowledge of themselves and of nature is through scientific laws that attempt to explain or mirror the laws of nature. Consequently, we can arrive at an understanding of the world as nature unfolds before us. What results is a conception which maintains that knowledge is derived from nature, it is something that is external to the *praxis* of humans, and therefore, external to the dialectical activities of humans themselves. The result of this view is that:

there is no longer *knowledge* in the strict sense of the term; Being *no longer manifests itself* in any way whatsoever: it merely evolves according to its own laws. The dialectic of Nature is Nature without men. There is therefore no more need for certainty, for criteria; even the attempt to criticise and establish knowledge becomes useless (CDR 26).

In such a scenario, nature is given priority over humans and by the same token *knowledge* is given priority over Being. Humans are no longer active participants within history, but rather they are reduced to passive participants within nature. Sartre claim that there is "no longer any knowledge in the strict sense" because knowledge, abiding by a naturalistic view, is subservient to nature. Such a claim amounts to the notion that the *praxis* of humans does not affect the outcome of events, as humans are simply one part of nature, evolving with the whole of nature. Accordingly, the dialectic is not the "the intelligibility of *praxis* at every level", but it is rather the intelligibility of nature. But for Sartre there is a paradox here -- how

does a dialectic that is discovered in the "social world" end up in the natural world? The reason is simple, according to Sartre: it is "foisted" upon it, not deduced from it. Fittingly, Sartre concludes that "the only dialectic that one will find in nature is a dialectic that one has put there oneself" (CDR 31). Here the assumption behind Sartre's argument is that the social and the natural worlds are radically different in the sense that we do not create the natural world but we do create the social world. As a result, Sartre maintains that *praxis* is not reflected in nature, but it *is* reflected in the social body.

In The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Marx states:

in creating a *world of objects* by his practical activity, in *his work upon* inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious being, i.e., as a being that treats itself as a species being. ... man reproduces the whole of nature (EPM 113).

This claim of Marx's is of crucial importance for Sartre, as it is representative of the gist of Sartre's central claims in the Critique. Marx recognized the notion that humans are dynamic entities, but his followers failed to recognize the implications of such a claim. One of the major implications that has been overlooked is the notion that we, as conscious beings, are free to negate our environment and because we negate our environment, we recognize that we ourselves are not our environment. Further, our negation of our environment corresponds to how we are free to "*work upon*" or change our environment. Sartre states:

freedom implies therefore the existence of an environment to be changed: obstacles to be cleared, tools to be used. Of course it is freedom which reveals them as obstacles, but by its free choice it can only interpret the *meaning* of their being (BN 650).

We bestow meaning upon our world; the world does not on its own bestow meaning upon

us. In the Critique, this claim can be re-stated to read that *praxis* is divorced from our environment (nature) in the sense that the environment has no command on its own over us, but we can command it.

Sartre does not deny outright the possibility of a dialectic in nature -- he just thinks it is impossible to prove. The task, according to Sartre, is not to engage in a metaphysical debate concerning the possibility of a dialectic in nature, but rather to establish the "limits" and "scope" of "dialectical certainty". The "limits" and "scope" of "dialectical certainty" will pertain to *our* social environment, as this is the environment which we create out of nature. And because *it is our* environment, we must acknowledge that:

if there is such a thing as a dialectical reason, it is revealed and established in and through human *praxis*, to men in a given society at a particular moment of its development (CDR 33).

Here we have the first formulation of Sartre's structural anthropology, as the *praxis* of human existence can reveal to us the societal structures which we have historically created.

### 1.6 History in Development

After having established the abstract groundwork for the existence of a dialectic, Sartre proceeds to claim that the basic intelligibility of dialectical reason, if it exists, is that of a totalisation. As previously mentioned, a totalisation is "the constantly developing process of understanding and making history" (CDR 830). Sartre notes that it is important not to confuse totalisations with totalities.

A totality is a being which "while radically distinct from the sum of its parts, is present

in its entirety, in one form or another, in each of these parts" (CDR 45). Totalities are entities that have an appearance of closure. This sense of closure is due to the fact that totalities are the embodiment of past *praxis*. Totalities are what Sartre in the *Critique* will eventually term *practico-inert*: "matter in which past *praxis* is embodied" (CDR 829). Examples of totalities are: creative works, machines, tools, consumer goods, *etc* (CDR 45). Totalities are inert in the sense that they are created out of matter, but the fact that they are 'created' entails that they have an activity of their own – they communicate their possible present and future use.

A totalisation has a similar structure to a totality, in that each part is an expression of the whole and "relates the whole to itself through the mediation of its parts" (CDR 46). But the one crucial difference between the two is that a totalisation is a "*developing activity*". A totalisation is never complete, but rather is continually building upon the sum of its parts. But, just because a totalisation is in a continual state of development does not mean that we cannot possess knowledge of it. Rather, we can attain knowledge of how every part is momentarily connected with the others within the 'movement'.

The notion that any knowledge of the dialectic derives from a totalisation coincides with Sartre's attempt to demonstrate how the individual is inextricably linked to history. Sartre maintains that reflexively we can grasp the notion of dialectical bonds that render intelligible to us human development as a whole. Reflexivity pertains to the notion that we can comprehend that we are cultural agents. We are agents who are related to both past and present history. Sartre notes:

as soon as I reflexively grasp this bond of interiority which links me to the

cultural totalisation. I disappear as a cultivated individual and emerge as the synthetic bond between everyone and what might be called the *cultural field*. ... I find myself dialectically conditioned by the totalised and totalising parts of the process of human development : as a 'cultured' man (an expression which applies to *every* man, whatever his culture, and even if he is illiterate) I totalise myself on the basis of centuries of history and, in accordance with my culture, I totalise this experience (CDR 54).

The dialectic is a human activity which renders us conscious of how all our separate individual acts combine to produce our social reality. Sartre maintains that human actions can only be understood in terms of totalisations, as they are how we understand both our past and present actions. Here it is important to note that the individual who reflects upon her situation does not take a privileged position outside of the domain of dialectical activity. Rather, she discovers that she is an individual who is currently participating in the process of history and this is an open-ended process.

### 1.7 The Plan for the Rest of the Critique

Sartre's plan for the rest of the Critique is to examine individual *praxis* and investigate how it leads to various forms of human ensembles. By commencing with the individual Sartre does not desire to return to the individual from Being and Nothingness who is condemned to be free. Rather, Sartre, by using the individual as his starting point, wishes to show how the individual's *praxis* when taken in the context of the societal totalisation she exists in, can reveal how the human ensembles of which she is part, either create or hinder her freedom.

Sartre terms the method that he will employ the progressive-regressive method. This method is exemplified in Search for a Method by Sartre's example of an individual who opens

a window in a room. Sartre observes:

if my companion suddenly starts towards the window. I understand his gestures in terms of the material situation in which we both are. It is, for example, because the room is too warm. He is going "to let in some air". This action is not inscribed in the temperature; it is not "set in motion" by the warmth as by "stimulus" provoking chain reactions. There is present here a synthetic conduct, which, by unifying itself, unifies before my eyes the practical field in which we both are (SEM 153).

Here on a progressive level we can view the individual's action of opening the window in terms of her going beyond the too warm present in order to cool the room in the future. On a regressive level we can understand that the window was opened because in the past it was too hot. But the situation in the apartment room is more complex than the simple act of opening a window. Sartre claims that "within the room, doors and windows are never entirely passive realities; the work of other people has given them their meaning ... But my companion's movement makes explicit the crystallised indications and designations in these products ... His conduct *unifies* the room, and the room defines his conduct" (SEM 154). The practical field, the apartment room, is itself a totalisation, as it is not only representative of the owner's socio-economic standing, but the room itself has become a room through the historical actions of humans who have through *praxis* created apartment rooms. The various totalities which combine to make the apartment room an 'apartment room' actually circumscribe certain actions to the individual within the room.

The example of the apartment room is analogous to Sartre's larger project in the Critique. In the Critique, by employing the progressive/regressive method, Sartre begins with a phenomenological description of things on the general level. This is the progressive stage

and it is used to reveal the essential structures of human reality ('SPH' 238). The regressive stage moves from the facts of reality to the conditions of their possibility ('SPH' 238). This stage seeks to determine what makes reality what it is. The overall goal of the Critique is to progressively/regressively trace the actions of humans within the material field in order to determine how we have structured our field as we have. By starting with *praxis*, Sartre seeks to demonstrate how "man makes history" by investigating the structures which humans create via their *praxis*. By progressing regressively the goal of the Critique is "to reveal and establish dialectical rationality, that is to say, the complex play of *praxis* and totalisation" (CDR 39).

For Sartre the "complex play of *praxis* and totalisation" means that we are all active participants within our social milieu. Further, we are all linked to history, as even in the present we are making history, as we are moving towards the future. The goal of the first half of the Critique is to proceed by means of the progressive/regressive method in order to view how we have situated our environment as we have. Sartre maintains that we can start with the individual -- any individual -- because all individuals are active participants in history.

## 1.8 Conclusion

The intent of this chapter was to give a brief exposition of the 'power of circumstances' which led to Sartre's rethinking of freedom, as presented in Being and Nothingness, and to introduce the reader to the methodology which Sartre seeks to employ. In the Critique, Sartre maintains that individuals are free in the sense that they are continually projecting themselves towards the future. But the individual's future is influenced by her

circumstances. In order to understand how circumstances influence individuals, Sartre incorporates the materialism of Marx and Engels into his existential theory. As we saw in this chapter, Sartre explains that any understanding of circumstances must remain within the realm of human experience. The basis for such a claim is Sartre's belief that it is humans who create circumstances. But as we shall see, these circumstances are created on the basis of prior conditions.

## Chapter Two

### The Fall into the Practico-Inert World: Reification and Alienation

#### 2.1 Introduction

In The German Ideology Marx and Engels observe that "we must begin by stating the first premise of all of human existence and, therefore, all of history, the premise namely that men must be in a position in order to be able to 'make history'" (GI 48). In order to see how humans make history Marx and Engels claim that we must recognize three conditions of social development. First:

life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is a historical act, a fundamental condition of all of history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life (GI 48).

The first 'historical act' corresponds to our original needs in nature, as in order to survive we recognize that we must go to nature to satisfy these needs. And as soon as we satisfy these needs we set in motion our 'material life'. Second, "the satisfaction of the first need (the action of satisfying, and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired) leads to new needs" (GI 48). Upon satisfaction of our original needs, we do not remain content, but rather we create new needs and new means to satisfy these needs courtesy of our productive activity. And third, Marx and Engels note that "men, who daily remake their own life, begin

to make other men, to propagate their own kind" (GI 48). When we remake our life we remake ourselves, as we change our material circumstances. And because we do so in a social context, we also lay the foundation for the future material reality of others:

as individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production (GI 42).

Marx's and Engels' three conditions of social development combine to affirm that throughout history we produce our material reality. According to Marx and Engels, because we are productive animals, we produce our material conditions which in turn produce our historical reality.

Sartre is in complete agreement with Marx's and Engels' three conditions, as he himself states: "My formalism, which is inspired by that of Marx, consists simply in recognizing that men make History precisely to the extent that it makes them" (CDR 97). As we saw in the previous chapter, Sartre's goal in the first volume of the Critique is to "reveal and establish dialectical rationality ... the complex play of *praxis*<sup>3</sup> and totalisation"<sup>4</sup> (CDR 39). Sartre, like Marx and Engels, desires to explain history as an ongoing process which is influenced by the activities of individuals in light of some specific end. Sartre, along the same lines as Marx and Engels, desires to determine what our interaction with matter can inform

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<sup>3</sup> From the glossary of the Critique *praxis* is defined as: "the activity of an individual or group in organising conditions in the light of some end" (CDR 829).

<sup>4</sup> In the glossary a totalisation is defined as the constantly developing (*en cours*) process of understanding and making history (CDR 830).

us of ourselves.

Sartre maintains that Marxists have misinterpreted Marx's notion that "men make History" by explaining history as a process which produces the material foundations of society which in turn produce us. At the heart of such an interpretation rests the belief that we are solely determined by the economic structure which we find ourselves in. Sartre states, contrary to this view, that "it is evident that we do not conceive of economic conditions as the simple static structure of an unchangeable society" (SFM 31). In addition Sartre notes that "today's Marxists are concerned only with adults; reading them, one would believe that we are born at the age when we earn our first wages" (SFM 62). Economic determinism is analogous to saying that the childhood activities of an individual play no role in the shaping of the adult or, more specifically, the *praxis* of individuals plays no role in the formulation of the material conditions of their history. As Richard Bernstein explains, "the image of man that emerges" is that of:

a class animal swept along by a web of impersonal forces that have a law-like regularity -- laws that determine what man is and over which he has no control (PA 57).

This interpretation of Marx derives from what John McMurtry describes as being the most "critical, puzzled and celebrative" doctrine of intellectual history, namely, Marx's 'alleged' conception of "economic determinism" (SMWV 157). As McMurtry points out, Marx himself never used the term 'economic determinism'. Rather, it evolved from Marx's use, in his later works, of terms such as 'economic structure', 'economic base' and 'economic form' (SMWV 157). But Marx was not using these terms to imply that economics was the sole determining

factor in historical development. Rather he was using them to serve as an explanation for one of the forms which our activities has taken, namely, 'economics' (PA 58). Economics unto itself is not the 'exclusive' sphere of human activity. Economics is a combination of various human actions. Bernstein points out that:

economy, or to use Marx's term, "political economy" is not a single, selective dimension of human life; it is a congealed or crystallized form of human activity – of *praxis*. To think of economic categories as referring to a single, abstract dimension of human life is to be guilty of what Marx himself called "fetishism" (PA 58).

To see how we make history, Sartre advocates we commence with the *praxis* of the individual and progress to the social ensemble of which she is a part. This is analogous to saying that if we want to know what makes an adult individual an adult, we start with their childhood and progress to their present. Sartre states that he:

intends, without being unfaithful to Marxist principles, to find mediations which allow the individual concrete -- the particular life, the real and dated conflict, the person -- to emerge from the background of the *general* contradictions of productive forces and relations of production (SEM 57).

Sartre, as we shall see, will go to great lengths to show that history is a 'social development'. History is the direct result of the activities of individuals and because this is so, the only way to understand history is to start with the individual. As we shall see, Sartre will start by examining the individual in nature, proceed to examine the individual in relation to matter (which expresses the *praxis* of the individual), and, finally, he will conclude by examining the individual's relation to the social formation to which she belongs. As mentioned previously, Sartre will stress that history, like the individual, is an open-ended process -- it is never

finished, but rather constantly develops. The specific goal of this second chapter is to examine how Sartre maintains that we as active participants in history formulate our material reality. By looking upon history, Sartre maintains that we can see how our relations with matter have come back to haunt us, as they have taken on a reality of their own. We are still active agents, but our activities are restricted. This chapter will focus on two related aspects of Sartre's argument for how *praxis* becomes restricted. The first is Sartre's conception of scarcity and how it both undermines our relation with matter and others. The second pertains to how socialised matter, the practico-inert, dictates imperatives to us.

I begin my analysis by providing an overview of Sartre's conception of negation or, more specifically, *lack*, from Being and Nothingness. This concept is important because, as we shall see, lack corresponds with *need* and *labour* in the Critique. Sartre maintains that negation is a fundamental aspect of being human. Sartre, by stipulating an existential structure for the act of the human agent, provides a strong foundation for Marx's claim that humans are the 'conscious' producers of their material life. I then examine Sartre's categories of need and labour. I show how on an individual level we negate and organise our world. Then I explain how Sartre demonstrates that we come to recognize our fellow humans through their labouring actions. I conclude by showing how scarcity and the practico-inert combine to produce an alienated world.

## 2.2 The Origin of Negation

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, one of the crucial components from Being and

Nothingness which Sartre retains in the Critique is the notion of the human being as an agent who is both constantly fleeing the past and present and moving towards the future. Human reality, as recognized by Sartre, is an attempt to achieve a completeness that can never be achieved. In order to exemplify this conception of human reality, we will proceed to examine Sartre's notion of negation.

Negation pertains to 'identity' and 'difference', or respectively, two regions of what is specific to human being: being-in-itself and being-for-itself (MFP 50). As explained in Being and Nothingness, being-in-itself is in complete identity with itself, as it lacks nothing: "it is a plenitude, and strictly speaking we can say of it only that it is" (BN 800). Being-in-itself is neither created by God, nor self-created. It is simply a full positivity of being which contains no non-being (STE 12). As we shall see, being-in-itself does not change on its own. Unlike an individual's being-for-itself, the being-in-itself does not project itself into the future.

An individual's being-for-itself is similar to the being-in-itself, as the latter too finds herself being in a world. But what distinguishes being-for-itself from being-in-itself is that the former has this specific ability to 'discover' herself as existing in a world. This discovery entails that being-for-itself is 'different' from the things which she finds in her world. This discovery of difference hinges on the notion that being-for-itself possesses consciousness.

Experience, according to Sartre, is the point of contact between consciousness and its object (being-in-itself). Sartre, like Husserl, claims that all consciousness is consciousness of something and further, a reciprocity exists between consciousness and its object. An object depends upon consciousness for its meaning and consciousness requires an object to be

conscious of. Without consciousness, things simply 'are'.

At this point we can see how being-for-itself creates or bestows meaning upon the things of the world. Originally, the world appears to us as a full positivity of being. But as we approach it, we break up its fullness, by bestowing meaning upon what 'we' attribute to be its component parts. For instance, 'A' appears as 'A' because we tear it away from the fullness of the world and provide it with such a meaning -- we negate it. As a result, we are able to distinguish that 'A' *is not* 'B'.

Being-for-itself's ability to recognize 'nots' or non-being is crucial to Sartre's philosophy, as he maintains that "man is the being through whom nothingness comes into the world" (BN 59). Being-for-itself has two levels of consciousness: the pre-reflective *cogito* and the reflective *cogito*. Sartre explains the fact of two levels of consciousness as follows. On a pre-reflective level our consciousness is 'intentional', as it is always flowing outward towards a thing that is an object-other-than-consciousness (CBN 32). At the same time, because we can reflect upon our self, on our pre-reflective-*cogito*, we become aware that we are different than our intended object of consciousness. For instance, on a pre-reflective level of consciousness, when engaged in the activity of counting cigarettes, our intentions are so engrossed in the activity itself, that we have only a 'fleeting' awareness of ourselves. But if someone were to ask -- "What are you doing?" -- our reply would be -- "I was counting cigarettes". At this point, we have reflected upon our actions, as we have made the activity of counting cigarettes an object of consciousness. At the same time, because we have reflected upon our activity, we have also moved beyond it. Being-for-itself's reality

corresponds with its recognition of a gap in its structure of being. Sartre, borrowing from Heidegger, explains that "the characteristic of selfness (*Selbstheit*), in fact, is that man is always separated from what he is by all the breadth of the being which he is not" (BN 51). Being-for-itself both 'is' (being) and 'is not' (nothingness).

To be a conscious being, a being-for-itself, is to endlessly bring nothingness into being. Sartre maintains that the principle attitude being-for-itself takes to the world is one of interrogation. We exist in a world where we not only question such things as our ideas of the world, but also the external world itself. We ask for example, 'Is Pierre in the cafe?'. And the reply that we expect is either 'yes' (positive) or 'no' (negative) -- "Yes, Pierre is present in the cafe" or, "No, Pierre is absent from the cafe". It is important to note that such conceptions as absence and presence are brought into being through an individual's being-for-itself. In the Critique Sartre will claim that "it is through man that negation comes to man and matter" (CDR 83). The search for Pierre serves to exemplify how we bring absence (nothingness) into the world:

I have an appointment with Pierre at four o'clock. I arrive at the cafe a quarter of an hour late. Pierre is always punctual. Will he have waited for me? I look at the room, the patrons, and I say, "He is not here." ... It is certain that the cafe by itself with its patrons, its tables, its booths, its mirrors, its lights, its smoky atmosphere, and the sound of its voices, rattling saucers, and footsteps which fill it -- the cafe is a fullness of being. ... But Pierre is not here. This does not mean that I discover his absence in some precise spot in the establishment. In fact Pierre is absent from the *whole* cafe; his absence fixes the cafe in its evanescence; the cafe remains *ground* (BN 40-42).

Just as the world prior to the arrival of an individual's being-for-itself is a fullness of being, so too is the cafe, as it is the ground where we 'expect' the figure of Pierre to stand out. We

enter the café and start negating it -- Pierre is not at the table by the door ... Nor is he at the table by the bar ... Finally, Pierre is nowhere to be found in the café. Because Pierre is absent, his absence serves as a double event which affects the being of the café. First, the ground, the café, is annihilated, as Pierre who was expected to be present is not. And second, the central figure, Pierre, is a no-thing, as he refuses to exist in the café and as a result his nothingness stands out from the ground of the café. Nothingness permeates the café.

Sartre claims that of all negations, lack is the most penetrating, as it is the very essence of the being-for-itself. In an important passage in Being and Nothingness Sartre states:

human reality is its own surpassing toward what it lacks; it surpasses itself toward the particular being which it would be if it were what it is. Human reality is not something which exists first in order afterwards to lack this or that; it exists first as lack and in immediate synthetic connection with what it lacks. Thus the pure event by which human reality rises as a presence in the world is apprehended by itself as *its own lack*. In its coming into existence human reality grasps itself as an incomplete being. It apprehends itself as a being in so far as it is not, in the presence of the particular totality which it lacks and which it is in the form of not being it and which it is. Human reality is a perpetual surpassing towards a coincidence with itself which is never given (BN 139).

Through being-for-itself's structure of consciousness we have seen how we lack unity, as a distance exists within consciousness itself. To exist as being-for-itself is to be aware that we are not identical with anything which we come across -- including our self. But this lack of identity means that we can reach beyond ourselves and relate all things to ourselves for our own purposes (CBN 43). Human reality, as recognized by Sartre, is analogous to a being that is always lacking something and must fill itself in the hopes of achieving a completeness that it will never achieve.

### 2.3 Need

In the Critique Sartre states:

everything is to be explained through *need (le besoin)*; need is the first totalising relation between the material being, man, and the material ensemble of which he is part (CDR 80).

Need is the pure event by which human reality rises as a presence in the world, as it is our original lack – it is how we first negate our reality (SM 52). Prior to the advent of need, nature exists as a fullness of being; but because we exist as lacking something, we therefore turn to nature to fill this lack. For instance, the individual in nature who experiences hunger must reach beyond herself, as she must interrogate the natural environment in order to discover what can fulfill her need. When she discovers something that can fill her need she now views her environment in a new light. At this point the natural world is “no longer simply a world of natural objects. Instead it is divided into objects that can satisfy the need and those that cannot” (SM 52). Further, the ‘natural’ world now becomes a ‘material’ field, as it has received *praxis* – it has been negated in terms of need.

Sartre states that “it is through need that the first negation of the negation and the first totalisation appear in matter” (CDR 80). Need is a ‘negation of the negation’: it is revelatory of something which we lack and therefore need in order to function as a human organism. Need may only be negated by turning to the natural world. Need is a positivity in the sense that as soon as it appears “surrounding matter is endowed with a passive unity, in that a developing totalisation is reflected in it as a totality” (CDR 81). We, the projecting beings, are the developing totalisation which is reflected in matter. Because the world harbours the

possibility of our *non-being*, we negate it in terms of what can satisfy our needs. And because we can preserve ourselves through certain things, we bestow a sense of purpose upon these specific things, *i.e.*, 'A' stands out in the world as something which can satisfy hunger.

We have seen that Sartre, like Marx, maintains that once we act upon need, we set history in motion: we transform the natural world into our material field. Further, Sartre, again similarly to Marx, agrees that we as beings in need must go outside of ourselves to satisfy these needs. For instance, Marx in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts claims that "hunger is an acknowledged need of my body for an object existing outside it, indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential being" (EPM 181). Sartre explains that "the man of need is an organic totality perpetually making itself into its own tool in the milieu of exteriority" (CDR 82). 'The man of need' must reach into the world in order to preserve himself. As we shall see, the fundamental difference between Sartre and Marx resides in Sartre carrying over, from Being and Nothingness, his formulation of consciousness.

As noted earlier in this section, Sartre explains that "need is the first totalising relation between the material being, man, and the material ensemble of which he is part" (CDR 80). Sartre is led to term the human agent a material being "because everything points to the fact that living bodies and inanimate objects are made of the same molecules" (CDR 81). At the same time:

these statutes contradict one another, since one of them presupposes a bond of interiority between the whole as a unity and molecular relations, whereas the other is purely external (CDR 81).

Although not explicitly stated, what we have here is as close to a 'biologicalization' of the human agent as Sartre will allow for. Sartre claims that "the basic behaviour associated with need for food reproduces the elementary processes of nutrition: chewing, salivation, stomach contractions, etc." (CDR 80). Sartre explains also that "discharge and excretion ... are just opaque and biological forms of negation" (CDR 85). The body is described as a 'function' because it is specifically fitted to process food and discharge its waste. But, according to Sartre, even on a 'biological' level we never possess a completeness, as we destroy our food by chewing it and then proceed to discharge it in the form of excrement. We discover the body as a 'function' due to our conscious, reflective being.

In *Search for a Method* Sartre states:

we do not hold that this first act of becoming conscious of the situation is the originating source of the action; we see it as a necessary movement of the action itself (SEM 32).

Our original existence is related to our discovery of ourselves as existing as lack. For instance, we reflect upon ourselves and discover that because we are hungry, in order for our body to function, we need to fill it with food. Consequently, we interiorize the external environment in terms of that which can fulfill our lack. This is the 'necessary movement of action itself'.

Marx states that "in creating a *world of objects* by his practical activity, in *his work upon inorganic nature*, man proves himself a conscious species being" (EPM 113). Sartre is in complete agreement with Marx, but he takes this notion one step back and claims that because the human agent consciously recognizes herself as lack, she therefore recognizes that she needs to create an objective, material world.

## 2.4 Labour

Sartre's conception of need serves as an abstract prelude to the discussion of labour, as labour itself is the concrete development of need. Labour is more concrete in the sense that we literally leave behind traces of *praxis* in the things which we create from matter, as we express *praxis* in concrete matter. Our *praxis* becomes practico-inert -- worked inertia. As we have seen, we are beings of action: we act upon our original needs in nature and then proceed to continually transform ourselves and in the process turn the natural environment into a practical field.

Sartre notes that "man is a material being set in a material world; he wants to change the world which crushes him" (CDR 112). The human agent desires 'to change the world' because she realizes that she lacks a lucid awareness of her material world. She feels threatened by her environment and as a result, she desires to organise her surroundings by constructing tighter and tighter relations within the material field, as these relations allow her to know her world (CDR 91). Sartre explains that:

man, who produces his life in the unity of the material field, is led by *praxis* to define zones, systems and privileged objects within the inert totality (CDR 89).

We establish 'zones', as the things which we introduce or organise are a result of *praxis* in light of some 'new' specific end, namely, the project of increased efficiency in the material world. For instance, within Zone 'Z', 'A' can satisfy need 'A'. Further within Zone 'Z', tool 'B' may facilitate the satisfaction of need 'A'.

Sartre explains that there is a price to be paid for crafting tighter relations within the

world, as:

the meaning of human labour is that man is reduced to inorganic materiality in order to act materially on matter and to change his material life (CDR 178).

In transforming the world which crushes us, we reduce ourselves to inorganic materiality, as we must constantly make ourselves into tools. This applies to both the individual who must use the weight and force of her hands in order to extract things from the ground and equally to the individual who must exert weight upon a shovel. In both cases it is the inertia of the individual's body which is directly responsible for the transformation of the material world.

Labour implies that we transfer *praxis* unto matter. But although matter does receive *praxis*, it at the same time retains its inertness. Nevertheless a peculiar thing occurs when *praxis* and matter are united. To further illustrate this notion we can hypothesise how we might construct a ladder in order to reach things that are beyond our realm of extension. On one hand, the *praxis* inscribed in the ladder is extension, as it allows us to reach new heights. On the other hand, we ourselves become an extension of the ladder, as in order for its project to function, we must climb it. Unlike us, the ladder is a static object, as it is simply a material thing which has come into being via *praxis*. A strange phenomenon occurs when we become an extension of the ladder, as we ourselves absorb its inertia and make ourselves a material extension of it -- we become literally an extension of the ladder and 'its' project.

The ladder's project is representative of the mediation between the practico-inert and humans. Although worked matter is static in the sense that it is inert, it is at the same time 'dynamic', as it is the result of past *praxis*. Sartre maintains that because worked matter is a

result of *praxis*, it unavoidably communicates a project -- its use. As we shall see, Sartre claims that the relation between the practico-inert and humans becomes problematic when the project which the practico-inert communicates becomes an imperative -- an imperative that shapes our future.

### 2.5 The Labourer Within Society

Up until this point we have been considering Sartre's conceptions of need and labour primarily on an abstract and individual basis, as we have been concentrating on the relation between the 'individual' and the natural/material world. This is only part of the story, as Sartre recognizes that "to consider *an individual* at work is a complete abstraction, since in reality labour is as much a relation between men as a relation between man and the material world" (CDR 91). Labour, for Sartre, is a social activity. But what does this activity tell us about ourselves?

Sartre makes an important point about labour when he notes that there is no such thing as a labourer in isolation -- labourers do not exist outside of the totalising *praxis* of humans. Sartre recognizes that "isolated labourers, in fact, exist wherever the social and technical conditions of their work require that they work alone" (CDR 95). But here we can see that the 'isolation' which the labourers experience is a direct effect of "social and technical conditions" which are in turn a part of the totalising activities of individuals.

Sartre makes the point that there is no such thing as a labourer in isolation in order to strengthen his subsequent claim that human relations are a direct result of *praxis*, *i.e.*, how

we totalise our world (material field) plays a direct role in both how we know our self and others. For example, Sartre observes:

from my window, I can see a road-mender on the road and a gardener working in a garden. Between them there is a wall ... I can see them without being seen, and my position and this passive view of them at work situates me in relation to them: I am 'taking a holiday' (CDR 100).

From his hotel window Sartre explains that we can recognize two important points about the labourers. First, the on-looker recognizes that although she does not belong to the same class of the labourers she observes, her very understanding of this difference enables her to comprehend that she, like the workers, exists against an "undifferentiated background consisting of synthetic relations" (CDR 101). By 'observing' the *praxis* of the workers, we can see that their respective actions define them in the world, e.g., she is a road-mender who shovels asphalt onto the road. Sartre states that "I come to conceive myself, and in making myself what I am I discover them as they make themselves, that is, as their work produces them" (CDR 101). Sartre recognizes that he, a vacationing intellectual, belongs to the same world as the labourers, but he has his own specific project which is recognizable and which he carries into the world. Instead of a shovel, his tools are pens and paper.

The second point which Sartre observes is that "the reality of the *Other* affects me in the depths of my being to the extent that it *is not* my reality" (CDR 101). Here Sartre makes the point that while he sees his world being mended and gardened, he is not able to penetrate the reality of the labourers without objectifying them. He can only observe their *praxis* -- how they interact with the world -- but he cannot reflect upon their actions in the same way that

he can his own. Sartre states:

each of the two men is re-conceived and located in the perpetual field by my act of comprehension; but with each of them, through the weeding, pruning or digging hands, or through the measuring, calculating eyes, through the entire body as a lived instrument, I am robbed of an aspect of the real (CDR 102).

The "aspect of the real" which is robbed is that nobody appears simply as 'man' but only in the role which their *praxis* takes with matter. We recognize the other by her project in the world. As a result, "everyone recognises the Other on the basis of social recognition to which his clothes, his tools, etc., passively bear witness" (CDR 110).

As we have seen, in order for the individual to change the material world she must make herself into a tool -- she must objectify herself in the world. And it is through this objectification that we come to know our fellow human. We know them not as a human, but rather through the roles their *praxis* (project) takes in the world. The objectification of each other is not a set goal, but rather a consequence of every one following their own project in the world.

Sartre explains that because everyone is a project in the world, perfect reciprocity demands the fulfilment of four conditions:

first, that the Other is a means to the extent that I myself am a means, that is to say, that the Other is the means of a transcendent end and not *my* means; second, that I recognise the Other as *praxis*, that is to say, as a developing totalisation, at the same time as integrating him as an object into my totalising project; third, that I recognise his movement towards his own ends in the same movement by which I project myself towards mine; and fourth, that I discover myself as an object and instrument of his ends through the same act which constitutes him as an objective instrument of my ends (CDR 112-113).

We come to recognize the other as being both the 'same' and 'different' than us. The other is the same, as she, like 'me', has a specific project which identifies her in the world. She is different from 'me', in the sense that even though her project entails an end, it is a different end than mine. The reciprocal recognition of others as projects suggests that reciprocity can either be positive or negative. We can either accept the project of the other, or we can refuse to recognise the other's project. In the latter situation the refusal of recognition "is not to use Hegel's idealist language", a struggle to death (CDR 112); rather, it is the result of a "concrete antagonism" which exists in the material world.

## 2.6 Scarcity

We have seen through Sartre's analysis of labour how the mediation between humans and matter structures our recognition of others in accordance with their roles, as opposed to their purely human status. But, according to Sartre, the basis of history does not pertain specifically to materiality, but rather to scarcity. As noted in the previous chapter, scarcity is defined as "the contingent impossibility of satisfying all the needs of an ensemble" (CDR 829).<sup>5</sup> With respect to the role that the concept of scarcity plays in his philosophy of history,

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<sup>5</sup> Such a claim, as Raymond Aron recognizes, deserves more consideration. Aron notes that "a species that must labour to survive -- to hunt, cook, cultivate the soil, or raise animals -- is under the sway of the law of scarcity, scarcity of time and space or even of non-renewable resources. It is possible to conceive of a society that may have triumphed over scarcity ... But even then, it is only upon one condition: the voluntary, conscious, and rationally organized restriction of population size" (HDV 221). Interestingly enough, and this point will be examined in the final chapter, Sartre terms 'scarcity' as being a fact and not a necessity. Here the implication is that because scarcity is 'contingent', it is possible that it can

Sartre states:

for a historian in 1957, scarcity is not the basis of *all* History. We have no way of telling whether, for different organisms on other planets -- or for our descendent, if technical and social changes shatter the framework of scarcity -- a different History, constituted on another basis, and with different motive forces and different internal projects, might be logically conceivable (CDR 125).

While scarcity is not the basis "of *all* History", it is, according to Sartre, the basis of all history up to the present. Scarcity is not an attitude that we as a social body have taken towards our material field. Rather, it "is a very basic human relation, both to Nature and to men" (CDR 123).

Sartre maintains that "it is *always* scarcity":

as a real and constant tension both between man and his environment and between man and man, which explains fundamental structures (techniques and institutions) -- not in the sense that it is a real force and that it has produced them, but because they were in the *milieu of scarcity* by men whose *praxis* interiorises this scarcity even when they try to transcend it (CDR 127).

Scarcity is the *grand organiser*, as no one escapes its wrath: "scarcity is everywhere present but appears nowhere by itself" (HDV 37). It points its 'inert finger' at everyone and becomes "an objective social structure of the material environment" (CDR 131). The 'social structure' which scarcity fabricates is one where we see the resources of the world as being in limited supply and as a result we internalize this notion into how we see both our self and others.

At this point we can see a parallel between the thought of Sartre and what Hobbes, in the *Leviathan*, says about life in the natural condition. Similar to the parallel between Hayek

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be overcome.

and Sartre, the parallel between Hobbes and Sartre appears to be an oddity as Hobbes, the father of modern liberalism, is usually a target of Marxist social analysis. Nevertheless, the parallel between Hobbes and Sartre rests upon both men's conviction that prior to the formation of any 'artificial' social organization, life is a bitter conflict with others. For instance, Hobbes claims:

if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delection only,) endeavour to destroy or subdue one another (L 87).

Unlike Hobbes, Sartre does not imply that life prior to any social organisation is one of explicit 'general warfare'. But nevertheless, Sartre maintains that life under the guise of scarcity is one of implicit violence and coercion. Sartre explains:

nothing – not even wild beasts or microbes – could be more terrifying for man than a species which is intelligent, carnivorous and cruel, and which can understand and outwit human intelligence, and whose aim is precisely the destruction of man. This, however, is obviously our own species as perceived in others by each of its members in the context of scarcity (CDR 132).

Scarcity resides in our original need, as it is under the context of scarcity that need originates. For instance, when we act upon an original need such as hunger, we do so in the context of there not being enough for everyone. In this situation we are indirectly fulfilling our need against everyone else, as we internalize the other as a surplus in a scarce environment. The other is a threat to our existence because her very presence threatens the satisfaction of our needs. We do not recognize the other as the only threat:

this constant danger of the annihilation of myself and of everyone is not something I see only in *Others*. *I am myself* that danger in so far as I am

Other, and designated by the material reality of the environment as potentially surplus *with Others* (CDR 130).

Sartre maintains that "I am Other" because I am myself that excess individual who is potentially expendable. 'I' am an excess individual in a material world where there is not enough for 'me', let alone 'you'.

It is important to note that Sartre, unlike Hobbes, does not claim that we are 'naturally' inclined to view the other as a source of conflict. As we have seen, Sartre explains that reciprocity can be either positive or negative. In both cases we recognise the other as being the same, but also 'other-than-me'. But within the context of scarcity, the other like 'me', becomes a *non-human man*: "everyone is a non-human man for all Others, and considers all Others as non-human men, and actually treats the Other without humanity" (CDR 130).

Further, Sartre explains:

these remarks of course must be understood in a proper sense, that is to say, in the light of there being no such thing as human *nature*. ... It must therefore be understood both that man's non-humanity does not come from his nature, and that far from excluding his humanity, it can only be understood through it (CDR 130).

Here it is implied that it is only through *praxis* that we can understand how scarcity seeps into our relations, as scarcity directly pertains to our projects in the world. As we shall see, scarcity is what designates us as candidates for specific social roles.

## 2.7 Matter as Inverted Praxis

We can recall from the section on labour that Sartre recognizes a strange occurrence

which takes place when *praxis* becomes reflected in matter. For instance, a created object, such as a ladder, actually dictates its use to us. Further, when we follow the commands of the ladder, we ourselves become an inert extension of it. The recognition of this phenomenon is not original to Sartre, as it has also been recognized by the likes of Marx and Lukacs and explained under the heading of 'fetishism'. For instance, Marx in Capital states:

a commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour (C 83).

Marx maintains that our labour, or in Sartre's terminology, *praxis*, is actually imprinted in the objects which we create and appears as an objective factor. And Lukacs in 'Reification And The Consciousness Of The Proletariat' from History and Class Consciousness claims:

the transformation of the commodity relation into a thing of 'ghostly objectivity' cannot therefore content itself with the reduction of all objects for the gratification of human needs to commodities. It stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man (HCC 100).

Lukacs likewise recognizes that the commodity is not simply a thing for our consumption, but that it also possesses a strange activity of its own. We can see from both men's use of *pathetic fallacy* in their descriptions that they recognise that the commodity is not simply a passive thing. Rather it is explained as being a 'mysterious thing', or a thing of 'ghostly objectivity' because it "proposes itself to men and imposes itself upon them; it defines them and indicates to them how it is to be used" (CDR 161). It is almost as if a commodity can communicate on its own.

While Sartre acknowledges that fetishism does occur within capitalism, he is at the

same time hesitant to limit it to any one specific economic or political system. The main reason for this is that Sartre wants to talk about fetishism under the more general heading of reification. The nature of reification "is not a metamorphosis of the individual into a thing, as is often supposed, but the necessity imposed by the structures of society on members of a social group" (CDR 176). Reification pertains to *praxis* being objectified in matter and in turn dictating imperatives to us.<sup>6</sup> This phenomenon is problematic when it seeps into our very being and allocates us for a specific social situation. This is crucial to Sartre's thought in the *Critique*, for remember in the section *The Labourer Within Society*, it was observed that we do not recognize the other as being human, but rather we recognize the other by their project in the world. As we shall see shortly, Sartre maintains that alienation is a constant companion of reification.

### 2.8 Alienation and the Practico-Inert

Sartre explains that "it is important to be clear what it means by saying that a society designates its undernourished producers and selects its dead" (CDR 153). Further, Sartre claims that "Engels was right to say":

when two groups engage in a series of contractual exchanges, one of them will end up expropriated, proletarianised and, often, exploited, while the other concentrates the wealth in his own hands. This takes place 'in violence', but not 'by' violence: and experiencing exchange as a duel in this way is characteristic of the man of scarcity (CDR 153).

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<sup>6</sup> The specific term which Sartre employs for this phenomenon is *exigency*.

As it has already been noted, scarcity perpetuates relations of non-humanity between humans. The 'man of scarcity', moreover, is doomed to failure; even though he may try to remedy it, his remedy usually causes the disease to be more far reaching than before (TMOJPS 95). Such a notion is exemplified by the emergence of industrialization in late eighteenth and nineteenth century society. In this specific historical situation, the discovery of coal and iron entailed the creation of new tools and new machines which in turn created vast amounts of wealth. But at the same time, poverty still remained and in some areas was more rampant than before.

Sartre explains that "the future comes to man through things in so far as it previously came to things through man" (CDR 178). The case of coal exemplifies this claim, as coal was "derived from vanished vegetable matter" and was therefore "capital bequeathed to mankind by other living beings" (CDR 154). But the mining of coal, as we shall see shortly, had far reaching influences in future society. Sartre notes:

from the point of view of intelligibility the important thing is to comprehend how a positive fact, such as the large scale use of coal, could become the source of deeper and more violent divisions between people within a *working society*, a society which was also seeking to increase its social wealth by all available means (CDR 155).

The large scale use of coal "gave rise to steam transport, railways (which are very directly linked to mining since their original function was to serve it), gas-lighting, etc." (CDR 154). Steam transport and railways were created with the intended goal of speeding up the process of mining. Under the guise of scarcity, such means were necessary, as "mines are not inexhaustible" (CDR 154). But:

the undeniable result of what has been sometimes called the 'palaeontechnical'

period was the partial destruction of the structures of the old society, the proletarianisation of certain groups and their subjugation to the two inhuman forces of physical fatigue and scarcity (CDR 154).

Industrialisation, by bringing about a shift of fortunes, became a very real "social future". It became a lived project which influenced many, even if they had no hand in the original project.

The social future which industrialisation perpetuated was one where a segment of the population was viewed as being disposable. Sartre explains:

the first people to work in factories and mines in England were *paupers*, that is to say, peasants who had been designated, sometimes from father to son, as dispensable surplus population as a result of the complex movement of agricultural economies and the hard policies of bourgeois land-owners (CDR 155).

The *paupers'* vulnerability to industrialization could probably be explained by a previous mode of scarcity. But nevertheless, the pertinent thing to note is that the discovery of coal literally corralled those who had previously made their living off the land into industrialized cities. But these peasants were none the better off than they were prior to the discovery of coal. Before their projects consisted of harvesting the feeble remains of the land. Now their project consisted of the mining of coal in sub-human conditions for others. The discovery of coal and its subsequent production of "the iron coal men" is representative of how a material thing, through the interpretation of *praxis*, is capable of structuring and re-structuring a society into those who have and those who have not. The example of industrialisation serves to show how classes of masters and slaves, in a world of scarcity, are inevitable.

What are the similarities and differences between Hegel's and Sartre's conception of

master and slave? In The Phenomenology of Mind Hegel states that "an individual makes its appearance in antithesis to an individual" (PM 231). Such a claim is a logical conclusion of Hegel's philosophy, as it maintains that we originally satisfy our selves by mastering things which will curb our bodily desires. Because 'originally' objects are pure undifferentiated matter, Hegel maintains that we desire to negate or destroy them. Kojève explains Hegel's position as follows:

born of Desire, action tends to satisfy it, and can do so only by the "negation," the destruction, or at least the transformation, of the desired object: to satisfy hunger, for example, the food must be destroyed or, in any case, transformed (IRH 4).

It is characteristic of our activities that we desire to master the things which we come in contact with. Further, we do not only desire to master the inert things which we encounter, but also the other.

Hegel explains that each self-consciousness "is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other, and hence its own certainty of itself is still without truth" (PM 232). In order to gain truth, Hegel maintains that when we encounter an other, we engage in a struggle with the intended goal of objectifying the other. In regards to the struggle Hegel explains:

they must bring their certainty of themselves, the certainty of being for themselves, to the level of objective truth, and make this a fact both in the case of the other and in their own case as well (PM 232-233).

The certainty of being for itself can only be achieved when one individual enslaves the other by objectifying herself in the other. Here we have the emergence of a master (one who is seemingly independent of the other) and a slave (one who is dependent on the other). In a

master/slave relation, the master controls the state of existence of the slave. The master, by providing the slave with her objective reality, views the slave both as an object which works upon things and also as a being that is dependent upon her existence. Everything that the slave does is an activity of the master (IRH 18). Hegel claims:

the master, however, is the power controlling this state of existence, for he has shown in the struggle that he holds it to be merely something negative. Since he is the power dominating existence, while this existence again is the power controlling the other (bondsmen), the master holds, *par consequent*, this other in subordination (PM 235).

In Being and Nothingness Sartre states that "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" (BN 475). Being-for-others is defined as:

the third ekstasis (*q.v.*) of the For-itself. There arises a new dimension of being in which my Self exists outside as an object for others. The For-others involves a perpetual conflict as each For-itself seeks to recover its own Being by directly or indirectly making an object of the other (BN 800).

Sartre, as we can recall from the first chapter, illustrates the notion of being-for-others with the example of the 'peeping Tom'. In this situation, 'I look at you' and 'you look at me' and we engage in a battle where we attempt to objectify each other. In this scenario one of us will emerge as the victor. Sartre in Being and Nothingness borrows heavily from Hegel's conception of the master and slave relation. But in the Critique Sartre modifies his position from Being and Nothingness and in turn modifies the Hegelian conception of master and slave.

In an interview with Leo Fretz, Sartre describes Being and Nothingness as an abstract, general philosophy. The Critique on the other hand, is described as being concerned with the

social and concrete ('AIWJPS' 225). In the Critique Sartre repeatedly charges Hegel with idealism and subsequently disagrees with Hegel's conception of the master and slave on two fundamental points.<sup>7</sup> First, Hegel did not account for the role which scarcity plays in structuring relations between others (CDR 158). And second, Hegel failed to recognize that masters do not derive their identity solely from slaves, but also from fellow masters.<sup>8</sup> Masters according to Sartre, seek recognition in the eyes of fellow masters, as they justify their actions by the actions of other masters. Hegel, according to Sartre, failed to firmly ground his conception of master and slave in the concrete plane of the social world.

As mentioned previously, Sartre maintains that because existence precedes essence, there is, therefore, no such thing as a human nature which fabricates relations among humans.<sup>9</sup> We can recall from the previous section that Sartre claims that it is scarcity which is responsible for relations of non-humanity. Sartre in an interview states:

I consider that scarcity is the phenomenon in which we live. It is impossible

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<sup>7</sup> Sartre's argument for why Hegel is an idealist has already been presented in the first chapter of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> Sartre states that "in reality, the plurality of masters and the serial character of every society cause the Master as such, even in idealist terms, to find *a different truth* within the ensemble of his class. Slaves are the truth of masters, but masters are also the truth of masters" (CDR 158n).

<sup>9</sup> This claim of Sartre's rests upon his belief that the social world and the natural world are radically different. Such a claim rests upon the assumption that we as 'social' animals are divorced from nature and nature therefore has no power over us. Sartre explains that "the real problems of the human species today, the problems of class, capital, and so on, are problems that have no relation to Nature. They are posed by the human species in its historical movement, and that leaves Nature outside of them" ('IWJPS' 29).

to suppress it without changing the conditions of existence, of what is real ('IWJPS' 30).

In the social world, scarcity is the origin of conflict between others, as scarcity "makes the passive totality of individuals within a collectivity into an impossibility of co-existence" (CDR 129). Scarcity is the explanation which Hegel failed to provide (as did Sartre himself in Being and Nothingness) for how conflicts between others originate.

We have already seen, courtesy of the example of industrialization, how the discovery of coal inadvertently entailed the reorganization of society. Further, we can hypothesize how, after the initial coal rush, machines were invented in order to facilitate the extraction of coal. Just as we have seen how it is possible for a material thing such as coal to inadvertently structure social relations, so too can we speculate upon how a material thing such as a machine can become the lived reality of its servant.

Sartre claims:

the machine defines and produces the reality of its servant, that is to say it makes him a practico-inert Being who will be a machine in so far as the machine is human and a man in so far as it remains, in spite of everything else, a tool to be used: in short, it becomes his exact complement as an inverted man (CDR 207).

The machine is *practico-inert* – it is the result of *praxis*. Its project pertains to its owner and her previous lack of an efficient means for quickening the process of extracting coal. Once the machine is in place, it becomes an *exigency* – "it demands to be kept in working order and the practical relation of man to materiality becomes *his response* to the exigencies of the machine" (CDR 188). Even though the machine is not the result of her *praxis*, it influences

her future project. The machine becomes her lived reality, as it defines her livelihood. She is a superfluous labourer and without the machine she will not be able to survive, as she will be without employment and wages. As a result, she succumbs to the machine and allows it to project itself upon her. She becomes a practico-inert Being, as she becomes a machine for operating machines (CDR 207).

In Hegelian terms this situation can be explained as follows. First, the labourer is representative of the slave, as she has lost the battle, and consequently has been reduced to the status of a thing: she is a practico-inert being. In such a scenario, Hegel explains that the slave becomes the master's reality. An interesting situation arises, however from these circumstances. On the one hand, the slave derives her reality from an other (the master) -- she is subservient to the master's imperatives. On the other hand, because the master has reduced the slave to being a thing, she, unlike the slave, has no other from whom she can seek recognition. In this specific situation Hegel maintains that it is actually the slave who is free, as she has the ability to go beyond herself, whereas the master does not. Kojeve explains:

the slave knows what it is to be free. He also knows that he is not free, and that he wants to become free. ... The Slave, in transforming the given World by his work, transcends the given and what is given by that given himself; hence he goes beyond himself, and also goes beyond the Master who is tied to the given which, not working, he leaves intact (IRH 22-23).

Sartre maintains that the master and slave are both fallen in the practico-inert world, as they derive their respective 'interests' from matter. Interest is a specific form of exigency which pertains to one "being-wholly-outside-oneself-in-a-thing in so far as it conditions *praxis* as a categorical imperative" (CDR 197). Interest is "a certain relation between man and thing

in a social field" (CDR 197). Interests pertain to how everyone, be they a master or a slave, is victim to the practico-inert. In Sartre's world we all see ourselves as other, as we are both victims of scarcity and victims of our freedom being embedded in the practico-inert.

Sartre claims that the master is not simply at an impasse failing to achieve recognition (SM 58). On the contrary, he holds that the master seeks recognition "from other masters who reinforce the ideology of the ruling class" (SM 58). For instance, if a French industrialist "introduces English machines, it is because the factory requires it in a particular competitive field, and therefore, already because it is Other and conditioned by Others" (CDR 200). Sartre states:

in a given sector of industry, each manufacturer determines the interest of the Other to the extent that he is an *Other for this Other*, and each determines himself by his own interest to the extent that this interest is experienced by the Other as the interest of an Other (CDR 201).

On one level we can see how scarcity encourages the industrialist to acquire the English machine -- it is in limited supply, as is the coal which it will process, and, therefore, it is *urgent* that 'I get one before you'. On another level, because the industrialist's being-outside-herself is her factory, she derives her destiny from it, and it becomes a categorical imperative which dictates to her what she must do: because my competitor has gotten a machine, it is necessary that I *counter-attack* and therefore get one myself.

Sartre makes an interesting point when he states that "the machine could *never* be the particular interest of the worker" (CDR 208). The machine cannot be the particular interest of the worker because, as we have seen, the machine defines the worker, as it is her

livelihood. It defines her as "a practico-inert being, deprived of any particular interest (and of all possibility of having one), it also designates him as a general individual, that is, as a class individual" (CDR 209). For the industrialist the machine is her particular interest, as it is a part of how she sees herself via her factory. But as opposed to the labourer, it is not her livelihood, as she does not have to face the following dilemma: "increase the number of machines or go begging" (CDR 200). But this does not mean that the industrialist is immune to the imperatives of the practico-inert. On the contrary, as we have seen, the industrialist herself succumbs to the necessities which are imposed by her very belonging to a society of industrialists.

Sartre's vision of the world is one where everyone is contaminated by the practico-inert. Sartre defines the practico-inert individual as:

the man who looks at his work, who recognizes himself in it completely, and who also does not recognize himself in it at all; the man who can say both: 'This is not what I wanted' and 'I understand that this is what I have done and that I could not do anything else' (CDR 227).

We recognize ourselves in our work, as it is the result of *praxis*. At the same time, we can realize that we could not have done anything else, as the 'context' for our *praxis* has been defined in advance. Sartre explains that "as a 'cultured' man (an expression which applies to every man, whatever his culture, and even if he is illiterate) I totalise myself on the basis of centuries of history" (CDR 54). As a 'cultured' man we find our reality pre-fabricated in the mode of pure materiality (CDR 232). We discover that the previous projects of others -- how, in the past, they have interacted with matter -- directly pertain to how we, in the present and

future, will project ourselves upon the world.

Sartre poses the question: Should necessity as the destiny in exteriority of freedom be described as alienation? And his answer is both 'yes' and 'no'. Alienation for Sartre, unlike Hegel, does not result necessarily when we exteriorise ourselves, as we are wont to do to sustain ourselves, in an environment that is different than us. Alienation, according to Sartre, results when we cease to view ourselves as being different than our environment and the things which we produce within it. In this scenario, *praxis* that is embedded in matter -- the practico-inert -- commences to re-produce us. As a result, we find our future as being partially projected for us, as we obey the exigencies of the practico-inert. Sartre explains:

there can be no doubt that as soon as man begins to designate himself not as the mere reproduction of his life, but as the ensemble of products which reproduce his life, he discovers himself as *Other* in the world of objectivity; totalised matter, as an inert objectification perpetuated by inertia, is in effect *non-human* or even *anti-human* (CDR 227).

We are 'Other' in the sense that we become 'products' among products. This entails that we conform to the 'projects' of the practico-inert. Further, Sartre states:

what contemporary Marxists have forgotten is that man, alienated, mystified, reified, etc., still remains a man. When Marx speaks of reification, he does not mean to show that we are transformed into things but that we are men condemned to live humanly the condition of material things (SEM 104n).

At this point we can see why Sartre does not want to discuss alienation in terms of fetishism. Sartre wants to maintain that it has been our historical interaction with the material world which has led to fetishism. According to Sartre, fetishism does not entail that an individual metamorphoses into a thing -- an individual does not metamorphose into the

practico-inert. Rather it entails that an individual obeys the imperatives of a thing -- the individual obeys the dictations of the practico-inert. Fetishism is simply a logical conclusion of following the imperatives of the practico-inert. And these imperatives hark back to our original need under the context of scarcity. Here we can see that Sartre's conception of alienation borrows from both Hegel and Marx. It borrows from Hegel in the sense that Sartre maintains that we originally see the other as an enemy. Sartre uses Hegel's notion of conflict as a lead in to Marx's conception of fetishism -- it is because of the scarcity of the material world that we structure human relations according to the structure of master and slave which in turn leads to alienating structures.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

The intent of this chapter was to provide an exposition for how Sartre claims that we find ourselves existing in an alienated world. On an abstract level we saw Sartre's explanation for how an individual, satisfying her original need in nature, transforms the natural world into a material one. More importantly we saw the consequences of how a materiality perpetuated by scarcity structures society into groups of masters and slaves. In the next chapter, we shall further see the consequences that materiality, as driven by scarcity, has on social groups. Further, we shall see how Sartre maintains that this inhumane structure can be overcome.

## Chapter Three

### From the Practico-Inert Field to the Pledged Group: The Resurrection of Freedom

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen how the material things we produce take on a 'ghostly objectivity' of their own. A strange occurrence takes place when *praxis* is expressed in matter: the material thing dictates its use to us. As a result, we become the passive recipients of its instructions, as we abide by the exigencies of the practico-inert.<sup>10</sup> In the preceding chapter we saw also how scarcity and materiality render everyone subservient to the 'practical unities', or what Sartre specifically terms the *exigencies* of the practico-inert. In this scenario we are fallen in a reified world, as we are slaves to the practico-inert.<sup>11</sup> We are alienated in the sense that we can only exercise our *praxis* within the limits of the practico-inert. The exigencies of the practico-inert become our imperatives, as they prescribe to us our future. Further, reification does not come to a halt with the creation of material things. Rather, it also encompasses abstract things such as 'class being'. In a reified world, class being itself becomes a practico-inert weight:

this is clearly reflected in our language, when an individual is said to be born into the working class or to have *sprung from* the proletariat (if he has

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<sup>10</sup> From the glossary of the *Critique*, practico-inert is defined as: "matter in which past *praxis* is embodied" (CDR 829).

<sup>11</sup> Reification, as explained by Sartre, pertains to the necessities which are imposed by the structure of society on members of a social group (CDR 176).

emerged from it) or to *belong* to it, as if the class as a whole was a matrix, a milieu and a sort of passive weight (CDR 252).

Just as we have seen how we become subservient to factories and machines, so too do we also become slaves to our mode of class being. Class being is itself a 'practical unity' which has mysterious powers analogous to those of a material thing like a machine.

In this chapter I will first analyse Sartre's conception of materiality as class-being. I will then examine what Sartre terms to be the most common relation between humans, namely, the *series*. I will demonstrate how Sartre maintains that seriality can be overcome by examining his analysis of the *group in fusion*. I will then conclude by examining what Sartre terms "the origin of humanity", namely, the creation of the *pledged group*. We shall see that the pledged group is 'the origin of humanity', as it is within this group that freedom is resurrected.

### 3.2 Materiality as Class Being

In Sartre's early essay, 'Existentialism is a Humanism', he states that "in life, a man commits himself, draws his own portrait and there is nothing but that portrait" ('EH' 359). In Sartre's early philosophy, because existence precedes essence, one makes oneself into whatever one desires: "the coward makes himself cowardly, the hero makes himself heroic" ('EH' 360). Sartre, in the Critique, states that "there can be no doubt that one *makes oneself* a bourgeois. ... But in order to make oneself bourgeois, one must be bourgeois" (CDR 231). In the Critique we still draw our own portrait, but we discover it as partially in progress:

individuals find an existence already sketched out for them at birth; they have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them at birth (CDR 232).

Individuals find "an existence already sketched out for them" because they are born into circumstances which have been created by others. How others have interacted with the material world has a direct bearing on an individual's development in the present.

Class, according to Sartre, corresponds to the situation which we are born into, as it is from this situation that we inherit our 'interests'. We have seen how interests<sup>12</sup> pertain to everyone, be they a master or a slave, as they are both victims of the practico-inert. Further, courtesy of Sartre's analysis of industrialisation, we have seen how interests are capable of structuring and re-structuring a society. Interests pertain to how the practico-inert organizes us as candidates for certain class formations. Sartre maintains:

class-being, as practico-inert being mediated by the passive synthesis of worked matter comes to men through men; for each of us it is our being-outside-ourselves in matter, in so far as this produces us and awaits us from birth (CDR 239).

Before our very birth the previous projects of the other will influence what our future projects will be, as the other's project will 'produce' us in the sense that we will produce ourselves within the realm of the other.

According to Sartre, our class being corresponds to a certain 'way of life' which we are assigned. Sartre elaborates about the individual and the class being to which she belongs:

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<sup>12</sup> Interests pertain to being-wholly-outside-oneself-in-a-thing in so far as it conditions *praxis* as a categorical imperative (CDR 197).

what is 'assigned' to them is a type of work, and a material condition and a standard of living tied to this activity; it is a fundamental *attitude*, as well as a determinate provision of material and intellectual tools; it is a strictly limited field of possibilities (CDR 232).

Here we can see that Sartre recognizes that some individuals are born into situations which are more conducive to freedom than others. Even though we are all subservient to the practico-inert, the practico-inert organises us in terms of the context that structures our choices. Our awareness of the class to which we belong corresponds to what our future possibilities will be. As a result, Sartre recognizes:

it would be quite wrong to interpret me as saying that man is free in all situations, as the Stoics have claimed. I mean the exact opposite: all men are slaves in so far as their life unfolds in the practico-inert field (CDR 331).

Because our 'life unfolds in the practico-inert field' our being becomes "the prefabricated Future as a negative determination of temporalisation" (CDR 245). The pure materiality of the practico-inert field is capable of determining our 'life', as it is within this mold that we must project ourselves. Our future becomes "like an iron wall in translucidity", as it appears that in the future, we will not be able to project ourselves out of the situation into which we were born. The iron wall "restricts certain possibilities and provides a certain content on the future towards which it is transcended" (CDR 235). We appear to be predetermined to occupy the class position into which we are born. But the 'iron wall' is not impenetrable, as the possibility of going beyond it *does* exist.

Before introducing the context under which Sartre maintains that we can go beyond our prefabricated Being, it is necessary to examine, courtesy the deepening of Sartre's

dialectical investigation, what he deems to be the most common relation among humans.

### 3.3 Seriality

Sartre explains seriality as the "most obvious, immediate and superficial gatherings" which appear in "everyday experience" (CDR 252). Seriality corresponds to the notion that although individuals frequently find themselves in similar situations with others, they at the same time find themselves isolated from others. Sartre distinguishes between two types of seriality -- the direct and the indirect gatherings -- which both share the common alienating characteristics of isolation and impotence. The direct serial gathering is characterised by presence while the indirect is characterised by absence.

In order to exemplify a direct series, Sartre reports his observations of a queue which is waiting for a bus. Upon first sight, the queue seems to have an appearance of unity. This is only an illusion since the appearance of unity is due to accidental factors. The accidental factors pertain to the notion that the members of the queue are united insofar as their interests reside in boarding the bus. Their 'unity' comes from an object, as the bus is the instrument which will satisfy each individual's need to get to where they desire to go. Sartre explains:

the bus they wait for unites them, being their interest as individuals who *this morning* have business on the *rive droite* ... At this moment of the investigation, the unit-being (*etre-unique*) of the group lies outside itself, in a future object, and everyone, in so far as he is determined by the common interest, differentiates himself from everybody else only by the simple materiality of the organism (CDR 259).

The common interest pertains to the fact that the bus (future object) will arrive at a certain

time and will make stops at specific intervals. But any notion of commonality stops here, as other than boarding the bus, it is for purely accidental reasons that the members of the queue are 'united' as they are. For instance, the queue for the eight o'clock Monday morning bus may consist of fourteen individuals. It may include Pierre the waiter and Marie-France the lawyer. Tomorrow at eight o'clock the queue may consist of twenty individuals. Pierre may be there. Marie-France may not be. Sartre claims that "to the extent that the bus designates the present commuters, it constitutes them in their *interchangeability*" (CDR 259): 'anyone' can enter the queue without affecting it in any important way, as it exists specifically for anyone.

Sartre explains that the individuals of the queue have no common goal, as they "do not care about or speak to each other" (CDR 256). Although the individuals of the queue are physically present to each other, they interact minimally: "Every person is very much alone" (CDR 257). The individuals of the queue are 'very much alone' because they represent the city and its project. They are representative of an instance of social massification. For example, an individual's getting to work for nine o'clock in the morning becomes dependent upon her boarding the eight o'clock morning bus. We can see how an individual becomes subservient to the social system of which she finds herself a part. On a work day her itinerary is partially planned in advance, as she 'must' go to work and she 'must' board and depart the bus at specific places and at specific times, in order to reach her place of work.

On a broader level we can recall from the previous chapter how the emergence of industrialization in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries drew the peasants from the

country to the cities. The peasants were not hand chosen; rather the very project of industrialization suggested that 'anyone' could perform the tasks which the peasants were given. The queue waiting for the bus is a twentieth-century example of how the city and its project affects and structures individuals. Just as the factories brought the peasants from the land to the city, so too does the bus bring its passengers from their dwellings to the bus stop. The individuals do not wait in the queue with the expressed intention of socialising. Rather they enter the queue with the purpose of taking the bus and allowing it to carry them off to their respective destinations. All the individuals of the queue take their commands from the 'practical unities' of the city. Be it the bus they wait for, or the job which they will go to, they all follow the imperatives of the practico-inert.

The queue waiting for the bus is an example of what Sartre terms a direct serial gathering. It is direct because the members, although 'socially' isolated from each other, are still in the 'physical' presence of each other. We shall now proceed to examine Sartre's notion of an indirect gathering. This form of the series is characterized by absence, as opposed to presence.

Sartre's main example of an indirect gathering is a radio broadcast. This gathering is characterized by the fact that the radio broadcaster is not within the proximity of her audience and the members of the audience, unlike the queue waiting for the bus, are physically separated from each other. As a result, there exists a relation of passivity between the broadcasters and listeners. For instance, if I am listening to a certain broadcast and I disagree with it, I can turn the radio off or switch to another station. Yet I fail to silence the voice of

the broadcaster, as it still reaches those who opt to continue listening to the broadcast: "it will continue to echo through millions of rooms and to be heard by millions of listeners" (CDR 272). Here arises the situation that if I have a disagreement with what the broadcaster is advocating and I desire to make this disagreement public, I am confronted with the nearly impossible option that to do so, I would have to sit down one by one with each listener in order to make my disagreement known:

as soon as I imagine some practical action against what the broadcaster says, I can conceive of it only as serial: I would have to take the listeners one by one (CDR 273).

In a direct gathering if I have a disagreement and I desire to make it publicly known there exists the possibility that I can make it known, as I am in the physical presence of the others. But in the indirect gathering, because I am not in the physical presence of the others, I cannot reach out and communicate with them. Hypothetically the possibility exists that I could phone the radio station, or even get a show myself in order to respond to the broadcast. But I would never be able to know that my voice was being heard by the others who listened to the 'original' broadcast, as I do not know who they are. Further, they may have turned off their radios while I was on the air, or they might not have had their radios on when my radio show, in response to the original broadcast, came on the air. Sartre, in regards to the indirect series, explains:

my impotence does not only lie in the impossibility of silencing the voice it also lies in the impossibility of convincing, *one by one*, the listeners all of whom it exhorts in the common isolation which it creates for all of them as their inert bond (CDR 273).

The voice of the radio broadcaster becomes *vertiginous* in that it becomes a collective entity much like the bus -- it is practico-inert, as it is the embodiment of *praxis*. The voice is advocating a specific agenda:

it appears as a social result of political *praxis* (of the government, in the case of a state radio station) and as *sustained* in itself by a different cross-section of listeners -- those who are already convinced, and whose opinions and interests it expresses (CDR 274).

We have already seen how we are powerless to make known any disagreement we may have with the broadcast. As we have seen, this is a near impossible task, as "what I actually experience is *absence* as my mode of connection with the Others" (CDR 272). The very existence of the radio broadcast assumes that I am an individual who will passively receive its agenda, as I am physically separated from others who are listening and consequently, I cannot reach out and communicate with them. In lieu of this, I can place myself in the position of the other, as someone who identifies with the political agenda being put forth. Here arises a violent contradiction, as "I become, in effect, both someone who knows how to refute such nonsense, and someone who is liable to be convinced by it" (CDR 274). I am liable to be convinced by the agenda of the programme, because I arrive at the realization that the agenda is reaching and affecting others and as a result, the opinion which is being formed, will in the future affect my destiny. The opinion will become an exigency which I must abide by. And as a result, I will become "dominated by the way things are publicly interpreted" (BT 264).

Sartre's analysis of the direct and indirect series respectively serves to exemplify how

we are both 'socially' and 'physically' isolated from others. Sartre maintains that it is 'alterity'<sup>13</sup> which characterises seriality and according to Sartre, alterity as found in the indirect series is the one which has the great dominance in the "social practico-inert field" (CDR 270). What is crucial to and characteristic of the series is that impotence manifests itself in the fact that the future is not shaped by the individual's goals, but by the series ('S' 199).

Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, explains the 'they' as follows:

in utilizing public means of transport and in making use of information services such as the newspaper, every Other is like the next. This Being-with-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of the Others; in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more (BT 164).

Heidegger claims that when Dasein makes use of a public means she loses her individuality, as she becomes one of the 'they'. The 'they' is an abstract power which generates the opinion that 'I' must do what the 'they' think is important. As a result, the concrete individual becomes dominated by the group-think mentality of the 'they'.

Sartre, in regards to the queue waiting for the bus, explains that it "expresses *the degree of massification* of the social ensemble, in so far as it is produced on the basis of given conditions" (CDR 257). The 'given conditions' correspond to what the 'they' think is important. 'They' think we should wait for the eight o'clock bus. 'They' think we should live and work in the city. According to Sartre we all become a 'they', or more specifically an 'other', as we are all "effectively produced by the social ensemble" of which we are a part

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<sup>13</sup> In the glossary alterity is defined as: "a relation of isolation, opposed to reciprocity" (CDR 827).

(CDR 259). We all follow the imperatives of our 'social ensemble'. We are all mass produced.

As a result:

the truth becomes obvious for everyone not only in so far as it is negative and relates to the Other, but also in so far as it is transmitted by an Other in so far as he is Other. These are the rules of belief: what everyone believes of the Other is what the Other conveys in so far as he is Other (or in so far as the news comes to him already from an Other). In other words, it is negative information in that neither the person who receives it, nor the one who gives it, could or can verify it (CDR 298).

'Massification' is Sartre's term for Heidegger's the 'they'. Both Sartre and Heidegger agree that once one succumbs to the public they become an 'anyone'. The exigencies of the bus stop or any other public thing exist for 'anyone' and do not specifically address the individual. Rather, their very existence is designed to perpetuate massification or 'theyness'. Seriality according to Sartre, pertains to how, in Heideggerian terms, we prevent ourselves from achieving an authentic life. Further, seriality is Sartre's bridge between Heidegger's the 'they' and Marx's notion of 'fetishism'.

Pietro Chiodi, in Sartre and Marxism, notes that Sartre's conception of seriality serves as a bridge between the philosophies of Heidegger and Marx. Chiodi, in regards to seriality, explains:

Marx and Heidegger encounter each other here because all Heidegger's investigations -- and those of existentialism generally -- on the subject of banality, levelling and de-personalization are seen by Sartre in a light that suggests a Marxist origin in that he regards these phenomena as the consequence of the alienated relationship between man and the products of his activity (S&M 64-65).

Further, as Ingbert Knecht <sup>14</sup> points out, Sartre's conception of seriality is an attempt to broaden Marx's notion of fetishism ('S' 188).

Marx, in regard to 'producers' and 'values', state:

the character of having a value, when once impressed upon a product, obtains fixity only by reason of their acting and re-acting upon each other as quantities of value. These quantities vary continually, independently of the will, foresight and actions of the producers. To them, their own social action takes the form of the actions of the objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them (C 86).

Marx recognizes that in order for something to have a value, we must act as if it has a value: we must place a value upon something. But what happens is the value which we place upon something has unforeseen consequences, as it becomes an object of competition which starts to 'coerce' those who originally bestowed value upon it. Knecht states that "Sartre is not concerned with the description of concrete phenomena such as the constitution of price and the process in capital" ('S' 196). Rather, Sartre desires to read the above passage from Marx and Engels in the light that we are *all* producers of values. We all contribute to the production of the exigencies which end up coercing us within the practico-inert field.

Seriality corresponds to finding ourselves within a social setting which has specific social imperatives. We passively conform to these social imperatives and consequently, lose our 'self' in the everyday exigencies which we encounter. We become 'their thing' (CDR 323).

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<sup>14</sup> Sartre himself makes this point in Search for a Method when he states that "Marxism remains uncertain as to the nature and origin of these 'collectives'. The theory of fetishism, outlined by Marx, has never been developed; furthermore, it could not be extended to cover all social realities" (SEM 77).

Heidegger claims:

Dasein's absorption in the 'they' and its absorption in the 'world' of concern make manifest something like a *fleeing* of Dasein in the face of itself -- of itself as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-its-Self (BT 229).

Sartre, like Heidegger, maintains that our freedom is hindered, as we find ourselves within a collective that sees its future possibilities as already actualised. But Sartre claims that something positive can derive from seriality, as within the series there are members who attempt to overcome the inhuman serial structure of the series and attempt to posit a group on a more humane, authentic level: one where intelligibility does not derive from the exigencies of the practico-inert, but instead from freedom.

### 3.4 The Group in Fusion

We have seen the two fundamental characteristics of seriality: the predominance the practico-inert can have over our social reality and the resultant feeling of impotence or passivity which accompanies it. Sartre makes a distinction between the series and the group. The distinguishing mark between the two is that the former is relatively unorganized (it has no structured common purpose) while the latter is tightly organized (it has a structured common purpose). The series has no common purpose because it is loosely organised and its 'unity' comes from without, *e.g.*, a bus or a radio broadcast. The group on the other hand, as we shall see, is tightly organised and its unity comes from within.

A group in fusion is "a newly formed group, directly opposed to seriality, and unstructured" (CDR 828). A group in fusion is unstructured because it is still tied to a serial

mode of being. But as its name suggests, the group in fusion is a group that is in the process of liquefying seriality. The group in fusion is in the process of structuring itself towards a common purpose.

In order to exemplify the characteristics of a group in fusion, Sartre provides an analysis of the events which led to the storming of the Bastille during the French revolution of 1789. In this specific situation "on the morning of Sunday 12 July, the city was full of posters 'by order of the king' announcing the concentration of troops around Paris was intended to protect the city against bandits" (CDR 353). Georges Lefebvre, in The Great Fear of 1789, explains:

the idea that there were brigands in and around Paris was a fairly general one and indeed the king had lent it support in order to justify his calling of troops; the bourgeoisie too needed the threat of brigands as a legitimate excuse to form their militia. These brigands, whose existence was so desperately needed for political reasons, were in fact the floating population of Paris, mainly the local unemployed (TGF 125).

Rumours began to circulate that the presence of the troops was not to deter brigands, but actually to quash the possibility of any rebellious activity within the city. Sartre states that "the deployment of troops and the beginning of the encirclement bore their objective meaning in themselves ... they designated the Parisian population as the unique object of a systematic and synthetic extermination campaign" (CDR 353). Although the government did not specifically command the troops to exterminate "the floating population of Paris", the very act of deploying troops suggested that such an order was a real possibility. This very threat of extermination opened the door for the future possibility of moving beyond seriality. Although

still in a serial mode of being, the members of the group in fusion, under the threat of death, recognize in the other what they recognize in themselves, namely, 'you' like 'me' are a potential victim.

Sartre notes:

by threatening to destroy seriality through *the negative order of a massacre* the troops, as practical units, provided the totality, which was experienced by everyone as a negation, or a *possible* negation of seriality (CDR 354).

Because it was possible that the troops would literally destroy a certain segment of the population, and in the process negate seriality, the members of the series (the totality) began to see themselves and each other in a different light. Prior to the threat the notion of reciprocity which existed was one which entailed separation: remember that Sartre states that the members of the queue waiting for the bus are 'very much alone' (CDR 257). They are alone because they fulfill their 'common' need, to catch the bus, in solitude. In the series each member excludes the other directly while at the same time joining with the other in the impersonal act of catching a bus ('S'I' 320). But with the advent of the threat of mass death, or what Sartre terms the Apocalypse, the previous reciprocal relations are modified. Sartre explains:

everyone continued to see himself in the Other, but saw *himself*, that is to say, in this case, as a totalisation in himself of the Parisian population, by the sabre blow or the rifle shot which would kill him (CDR 354).

In an Apocalyptic scenario what everyone sees in themselves and in the other is violence and death. Because death is near, everyone attempts to defend themselves. Here we have the origin of a common purpose, as everyone has the 'need' to avoid death.

Sartre notes that the situation that gives rise to a common purpose is sometimes mistakenly called 'imitation' or 'contagion', as it is presumed that a snowball effect perpetuates the actions. For instance, someone is running to arm herself, so I, therefore, must copy her actions and arm myself. But what is mistaken about such an explanation is that it fails to take into account the notion of *self-discovery*. Even though we may mimic the actions of the other, we ourselves become aware that it is 'our' actions, as combined with the other, which are contributing to a shared future:

*imitation is also self-discovery through doing one's own action over there in the Other, and through doing the action of the Other here, in oneself, fleeing one's own flight and that of the Other, launching a single attack both through the Other and with one's own fist, without either understanding or agreement (it is exactly the opposite of an understanding), but realising and living alterity on the basis of the synthetic unity of an organised, future totalisation of the gathering by an outside group (CDR 354).*

Just as when we are counting cigarettes, we only have a fleeting awareness of our activities, so too does the rebel only have a fleeting awareness of herself when initially engaged in an uprising. But if she were to stop and reflect upon her actions she would discover that she is engaged in a rebellion.

One of the prime differences between the series and the group in fusion resides in the distinction between 'observing' versus 'acting' ('S'I' 322). For instance, we can recall from the previous chapter that Sartre, by observing two labourers at work, arrives at the conclusion that his observation deprives the situation of an aspect of its reality. By observing the labourers, Sartre is only able to comprehend what distinguishes him from them and them from him. Sartre, by gazing at the workers, establishes a unity between himself and the workers,

but it is a loose unity, as he is only observing and reflecting upon his own and the workers' *specific projects* in the world, as together they have no *common purpose*. Sartre, by gazing out of his hotel window, arrives at the realization that he is a vacationing intellectual who is observing both a gardener and road-mender at work. In this specific example, Sartre the observer, takes on the role of the third, as it is his gaze which unifies the two workers with himself (the two workers cannot see each other, as they are separated by a wall). As we have seen, Sartre cannot avoid objectifying himself, or the two labourers, as they do not share any common purpose. As we shall see, the third within the group in fusion does not view the other as an 'objective' end, but rather as an 'active' subject involved in a common end.

Sartre, with regards to the group in fusion, states:

the group in fusion tears everyone away from his Other-Being *in so far as he is a third party* in relation to a certain constellation of reciprocities; in short, it frees the ternary relation as a free inter-individual reality, as an immediate human relation (CDR 367).

In the group in fusion we no longer recognize the other by the objective roles their *praxis* takes in the world. Under the threat of an impending death what our previous projects were in the world is of no significance, as the significant task at hand is to save our lives: at this moment we are freed from the coercion of the practico-inert. The group in fusion ensures that we recognize other individuals as being the same as we are -- individuals united in a common cause.

Sartre states that "flight, conceived as a common *praxis* reacting to a common threat, *becomes flight* as an active totality" (CDR 370). Flight becomes an active totality because it

is "a common, organised action" (CDR 370). Sartre, like Camus, maintains that "every rebellion implies some kind of unity" (R 125). When engaged in flight, the individual is fleeing from death and consequently, the group becomes the individual's common reality, as the actions of the group are the individual's concerns. I depend on your actions to save me from death, just as you depend upon my actions -- "I rebel, therefore we exist" (R 250):

in this practice, this means that I am integrated into the common action when the common *praxis* of the third party posits itself as regulatory. I run with all the others; I shout: 'Stop!'. everybody stops. Someone else shouts, 'Let's go!' or, 'To the left! To the right! To the Bastille!' And everyone moves off (CDR 379).

The third party is anyone within the group, as *praxis* no longer belongs to the other, but rather it partakes in the common unity of the group. Within the group everyone is the same as we are:

the original structure of the group derives from the fact that free, individual *praxis*, can objectify itself, in everyone, through the totalising situation and in the totalised object, as free, common *praxis* (CDR 395).

The battle in progress' becomes the objective structure of the group, as it is the 'totalising situation' of the group. It is 'free, common *praxis*', as individuals are no longer fulfilling their individual projects but cooperating together towards a common project.

We have seen how the individual from the group in fusion, under the threat of death, is motivated to a common action against the practico-inert which enslaves her. The individual joins the group in order to partake in the common flight from the fear of death. Sartre explains that "the essential characteristic of the fused group is the sudden resurrection of freedom" (CDR 401). Previously, the other was a source of conflict, but here in the fused

group the other is now a source of freedom. We can see how Sartre moves away from the sado-masochistic relations of Being and Nothingness, as under the threat of oppression, the group in fusion entails a more genuine inter-subjectivity. Within the fused group freedom is resurrected, as the individuals of the group are able to rise above the impotence of their previous mode of serial being. They are no longer indifferent to each other, as they are able to bond together and structure themselves towards a common goal.

It is important to note that Sartre claims that the fused group is the result of 'certain historical circumstances', namely, "the danger of death" and "violence" (CDR 401). It appears that Sartre, along the lines of Heidegger's analysis, maintains that it is the fear or anxiety of death which motivates the individual towards an 'authentic' life.<sup>15</sup> In the specific case of Sartre in the Critique, the fear of death compels individuals to break out of their serial mode of being. For instance, Sartre claims:

the explosion of revolt, as the liquidation of the collective, does not have its *direct* sources in alienation revealed by freedom ... there has to be a conjunction of historical circumstances, a definite change in the situation, the danger of death, violence (CDR 401).

This appears to correspond with Sartre's earlier statements about the Apocalypse in Notebook for an Ethics, where Sartre states:

the human moment, the ethical moment of liberation is that of the Apocalypse, that is of the liberation of oneself and of others in reciprocal recognition. It is almost often -- paradoxically -- the moment of violence (NEE 414).

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<sup>15</sup> We can see also how the fear of death corresponds with Hobbes' belief, namely, it tears individuals away from a brutish state and leads to their socialisation.

According to Sartre, the individual can recognise her alienation, but she cannot do anything about it, until she and others are confronted with death. But what happens to the group after the 'danger of death' has subsided? How does it become permanent?

### 3.5 The Statutory Group

One of the first things which the group must accomplish in order to ensure its survival is to establish some degree of permanence:

the problem of the *surviving group* (for it begins by surviving its original *praxis*) suddenly becomes connected for us with the problem of *being*, that is to say, of *permanence* (CDR 414).

The surviving group, according to Sartre, must establish permanence because it faces both an external and an internal threat. On one hand, there is the external possibility that the enemy may return and as a result, the group must be prepared for a future call to arms in order to defend itself. But the major threat to the fused group resides in the possibility that its individuals may defect and return to a serial mode of being. Individuals may join the ranks of the enemy and attempt to suppress the fused group and as a result, quash the group's common purpose. In order to prevent both seriality from reoccurring and individuals from defecting, Sartre maintains that the members of the group must take an oath.

Sartre explains that "when freedom becomes common *praxis* and grounds the permanence of the group by producing its own inertia through itself and in mediated reciprocity, this new statute is called *the pledge (le serment)*" (CDR 419). The members of a group, by taking the oath, recognize that they have attained freedom and further, that they

will strive to preserve it. The oath takes the form of the practico-inert, as it is the embodiment of *praxis*. Sartre maintains that although the oath can take various forms, the universality of all oaths pertain "to a surviving group's resistance to the divisive tendency of (spatial-temporal) distance and differentiation" (CDR 419). The members of the surviving group take the oath in order to sustain the close bonds which came into being between its members in conjunction with the Apocalypse.

By taking the oath the members consent to their group relationship and agree to maintain it as common *praxis*. The oath becomes an exigency, as it imposes necessities upon the group. Sartre claims:

exigency, as we saw in our discussion of the practico-inert, is a claim made on some *praxis* by an inorganic materiality (CDR 426).

Exigency, in the context of the pledged group, "has the same characteristic, but it is the agents themselves that are inorganic inertia" (CDR 426). The members of the group who take the oath are 'inorganic inertia' because they all agree upon the same project and further agree that they will project themselves within the agreed project:

in so far as the same project becomes, through my free pledge, a complete response, deliberately given by me, to this claim in the third party, it returns to me through the third party: as faith sworn to the Other -- and in the Other -- it is, therefore, a limitation to my freedom (CDR 426).

The oath is 'a limitation to my freedom' because by taking it, I agree that I will confine my project to the common project of the group, and the other will do the same.

According to Sartre, the oath has a two-fold purpose which he describes as 'fraternity' and 'fear'. As we have seen, the oath unites the group with the common goal of sustaining

common *praxis*. The members of the group realize that they do not desire to return to a serial mode of being. As a result, when the members of the group take the oath, they unite themselves as 'brothers':

everyone lives *group-being* as a nature. ... [T]he relations of common individuals within the group are ambivalent links of reciprocity (unless they are governed by the resumption of the struggle and the total objective): he and I are brothers (CDR 437).

'He and I' are brothers because we are members of the same species and see ourselves as such. We are no longer the 'carnivorous' and 'cruel wild beasts' whose aim is the destruction of man (CDR 132). No longer do we see the other as a stranger. Further, no longer are we alone. Rather, we are beings who are united and co-operate together. The oath unites me with my fellow 'brother' in so far as I agree that I, like he, am united in the common cause of preserving freedom. Further, we are united in so far as when I take the oath, I as a "common individual" agree that "you must kill me if I secede" (CDR 431). I agree to the constraint that if I act in an unfree way, I will forfeit my life. Sartre explains:

what matters is that no usurpation of violence (or conquest of power) can be intelligible unless violence is initially a particular, real, practical bond between freedom within common action -- in other words, unless this violence is the kind of action on itself of the pledged group, in so far as this action is re-created, carried out and accepted by all (CDR 431).

Sartre claims that because the pledged group is born out of violence, it must in the future be nourished by violence. Here the reasoning is that because it was the fear of death which originally motivated the individuals into a group in fusion, this fear must be maintained in order to keep the cohesion of the group. According to Sartre it only makes sense to discuss

freedom in conjunction with the fear of death, as it is not until these specific circumstances arise that individuals will gravitate from their serial mode of being towards freedom.

### 3.6 The Birth of Humanity

Sartre's conception of freedom resembles Isaiah Berlin's. Berlin, in his essay 'Two Concepts Of Liberty'<sup>16</sup>, maintains that to coerce an individual is to deprive her of her freedom. When an individual is coerced, she is not free, as her actions are not her own. Berlin maintains that any discussion of freedom must take into account both a positive and a negative side. The negative side addresses the question: in what realm should an individual's actions not come into interference with an other's? The positive side seeks to address the issue: when is it necessary to impose some sort of control or restraint upon an individual's actions? (FEL 122-123). Berlin, as we shall see, will stress the notion that any discussion of liberty will prioritize the negative side over the positive, as it will maintain that the positive is simply a derivative of the negative.

Berlin states in the introduction to Four Essays On Liberty:

the fundamental sense of freedom is freedom from chains, from imprisonment, from enslavement by others. ... To strive to be free is to seek to remove obstacles; to struggle for personal freedom is to seek to curb interference, exploitation, enslavement by men whose ends are their's, not one's own (FEL lvi).

Berlin thinks of freedom as a plane in which any obstacles to an individual's actions are

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<sup>16</sup> Berlin, like Hayek, maintains that the terms 'liberty' and 'freedom' are interchangeable.

removed, obstacles which coerce the individual into being a tool for others. This explanation corresponds with Berlin's notion of 'negative' freedom: "the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others" (FEL 122). But Berlin claims that we cannot ascribe absolute freedom to the individual -- "we cannot remain absolutely free, and therefore must give up some of our liberty to preserve the rest" (FEL 126). Accordingly, Berlin notes that the question that remains is: what then must be the minimum of liberty which we must sacrifice in order not to degrade our nature?

The minimum amount of liberty which we sacrifice pertains to a constraint that we must submit to in order to maintain freedom. Berlin explains constraint in terms of a positive freedom. Berlin states:

I am free because, and in so far as, I am autonomous. I obey laws, but I have imposed them on, or found them in, my own uncoerced self. Freedom is obedience, but 'obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves', and no man can enslave himself (FEL 136).

In a realm based upon freedom, obedience will take the form of self-recognition, as I myself will act in such a way that 'I' will promote freedom (the absence of coercion) because I know that 'you' will also act in such a way. Here is Berlin's constraint upon the activities of an individual, the minimum amount of liberty which we must sacrifice and which will not degrade our nature: each individual must abstain from acting in an unfree way both towards herself and others. As a result, Berlin states that "rational men will respect the principle of reason in each other, and lack all desire to fight or dominate one another" (FEL 146). In a society where freedom reigns, oppression in the form of coercion will be eliminated.

Sartre's conception of freedom, as exemplified by his discussion of the pledged group, is similar to Berlin's: freedom is the avoidance of coercion.<sup>17</sup> In the Critique Sartre is writing against anything that coerces us into being other than what we are -- humans. Further, Sartre, again like Berlin, claims that in order to preserve freedom, some form of restraint is necessary. This restraint takes the form of the 'pledge' in the pledged group. The one major difference between Sartre and Berlin is that Sartre attempts to show how unfreedom and freedom occur in a historical context.

### 3.7 Conclusion

The pledged group, or, as Sartre terms it, the Fraternity-Terror couplet, is the "birth of humanity", as it is within this group that individuals join together and turn their back upon the alienating structures of the practico-inert field. Within the pledged group the individual is no longer "a product of his product", as instead he is a "*product of the group*" (CDR 672). As we have seen, the fraternal relations which arise within the pledged group imply that each individual sees herself as a 'common individual'. No longer does the individual see the other as an other. Rather, she sees the other as an individual like herself who is participating in the common purpose of maintaining freedom. But relations of fraternity also coincide with terror.

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<sup>17</sup> William McBride notes that the Critique "contains a disproportionate share of the most memorable and interesting passages ... in which Sartre's clear-headed outrage against all kinds of so-called laws and other rules that are supposed to be iron, inevitable, and thing-like, and that are constantly invoked to block us from even thinking of acting for radical change, comes to the fore" (SPT 137).

Terror must be instilled within the group in order to prevent any of its members from collapsing into serial impotence, and also, to maintain the threat which originally led to the formation of the group.

## Chapter Four

### Freedom and the Fear of Death

#### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to trace Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of freedom as found in the Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume I – Theory of Practical Ensembles. We have seen how Sartre modifies his formulation of freedom from that found in his earlier work, Being and Nothingness. This modification hinges on Sartre embedding the individual from Being and Nothingness into the historical, concrete social realm. Still intact in the Critique is the conception of the individual as a free, projecting being, but what is missing is the absolute freedom ascribed to the individual in Being and Nothingness. The reason why such a notion is missing is simple. In the Critique, Sartre, equipped with the modified historical materialism of Marx and Engels, articulates that history demonstrates that the social realm in which the individual dwells does impinge upon the individual's freedom. Sartre argues that although individuals do make society, society also makes individuals. In the Critique, the individual's future, prior to the appearance of a group in fusion,<sup>18</sup> is pre-fabricated and the individual is forced to live this prefabrication as her destiny. She must follow imperatives which dictate to her what her choices will be and, as a result, her choices take place within a narrowly defined sphere.

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<sup>18</sup> In the glossary of the Critique a fused group is defined as: "a newly formed group, directly opposed to seriality" (CDR 828).

Sartre exemplifies this coercion in his discussion of a woman factory-worker who, upon becoming pregnant, seeks an abortion:

when the woman in the Dop shampoo factory has an abortion in order to avoid having a child she would be unable to feed, she makes a free decision in order to escape a destiny that is made for her; but this decision is itself completely manipulated by the objective situation: she *realises* through herself what she *is already*; she carries out the sentence, which has already been passed on her, which deprives her of free motherhood (CDR 235).

The woman's actions are made to serve another, namely, the owner of the factory. Further, her objective situation is defined in the sense that she earns a set wage doing a set job which in turn allocates her for a specific social situation. Her choice to have an abortion is a free decision within the context of her social situation. For instance, she realizes that she will not have a baby because she cannot afford to take time off from work, nor can she afford to feed a child. Her alternatives with regard to children have been defined in advance. Sartre explains that "freedom, in this context, does not mean the possibility of choice, but the necessity of living these constraints in the form of exigencies which must be fulfilled by a *praxis*" (CDR 326). The working woman is executing a sentence passed on to her (CDR 782). Here what Sartre means is that the social role which we inherit sets the guide lines for the role we will play in life, as we will fulfill our destiny within these guide lines.

In chapter one, by means of an introduction to Sartre's methodology, we saw that Sartre maintains that what is 'real' is 'human', as reality is a direct result of human activities,

or what Sartre terms *praxis*.<sup>19</sup> In chapter two we saw Sartre's analysis of how *praxis* becomes bogged down in the practico-inert.<sup>20</sup> In this situation, *praxis*, once expressed in matter dictates its use to us. We become alienated in the sense that we see ourselves as wholly outside in matter insofar as we take cues from the things with which we interact. Further, it is scarcity which structures our view of the world, which in turn influences our view of others. In chapter three we saw how Sartre's conception of 'fetishism' does not come to a halt with the things with which we interact; rather, it enters into our very Being, as we take on the characteristics of the social collective of which we find ourselves a part. As a result, Sartre is led to claim that "all men are slaves in so far as their life unfolds in the practico-inert field" (CDR 331). Further, we saw that with the appearance of 'certain historical circumstances', freedom can be resurrected, as individuals can unite together and form a social group that is not based on otherness, but rather upon humanity, *i.e.*, persons as thinking and valuing, free beings.

In this final chapter I demonstrate that Sartre's conception of freedom, as found in the pledged group, entails the necessity of two elements, namely, the fear of death and the specific material circumstances which perpetuate this fear. Further, I show that according to Sartre, freedom is dependent upon destiny, as without the specific circumstances of their

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<sup>19</sup> From the glossary, *praxis* is defined as: "the activity of an individual or group in organising conditions in the light of some end" (CDR 829).

<sup>20</sup> In the glossary of the *Critique*, practico-inert is defined as: "matter in which past *praxis* is embedded" (CDR 829).

choices, individuals cannot organise themselves towards freedom.

#### 4.2 Scarcity Revisited

In the Critique, Sartre notes that "scarcity must be seen as that which makes us into *these* particular individuals producing *this* particular History and defining *ourselves* as men" (CDR 124). Further, Sartre states:

in pure reciprocity, that which is Other than me *is also the same*. But in reciprocity as *modified by scarcity*, the same appears to us as anti-human in so far as *this same man* appears as radically Other -- that is to say as threatening us with death (CDR 131-132).

As we saw, pure reciprocity can be either positive or negative. We can, as in the case of the fused and pledged groups, recognize our fellow human as the same as us and, consequently, cooperate with her towards common goals. Or we can, as with the case of scarcity, recognise our fellow human as other than us and, consequently, see her as an impediment to our individual goals. In the latter case the other is 'anti-human' because we see her as an object that stands in the way of the satisfaction of our needs. According to Sartre, it the negative aspect of reciprocity which has coloured our history.

Raymond Aron remarks that "scarcity is everywhere present but appears nowhere by itself" (HDV 37). Scarcity is present everywhere, as it is what produces us as these individuals making this history. It is 'nowhere by itself' because, as Sartre explains, it is a "phenomenon of existence, a human phenomenon" ('IWJPS' 31). As we have seen, without humans there are no needs, and, therefore, without needs there is no scarcity. Within the Critique, scarcity

has an elusive-like quality and Sartre equivocates on the possibility of a world without scarcity. Sartre, in an interview in 1975, when asked if he foresaw in the future an end to scarcity, replies: "Not at the moment" ('IWJPS' 32). Aron, in regards to Sartre's conception of scarcity, states:

I think that it is *necessary* in the sense that every living species, in a natural milieu from which it borrows what it needs in order to live, must come up against certain limits (HDV 221).

Further, Aron adds:

it is not absurd to suggest, as Sartre does, that the aggression man has for man in part comes from the fact that individuals cannot all obtain goods that are, in essence, scarce (HDV 221).

If, as Aron suggests, (and Sartre towards the latter part of his life appears to suggest) scarcity is a necessity and cannot be overcome, what is the possibility of freedom, as envisaged by Sartre, ever being attained?

It appears that freedom, as envisioned by Sartre, will have to be a freedom within the context of scarcity. In order to entertain a notion of freedom within scarcity, we can see that Berlin's notion of positive freedom is of utmost importance. As noted previously, Berlin maintains that we must sacrifice a certain amount of personal freedom in order to preserve the freedom of the social whole. Berlin claims that no individual should act in a way which is unfree towards herself or others. In Sartre's terms we can read Berlin as claiming that no individual should act in a way that is inhuman towards the other. Freedom within scarcity implies that individuals relate to each other in such a way that they do not desire to 'fight' or 'dominate' one another, but rather cooperate with one another. Freedom within scarcity

implies that individuals seek the truth of their selves from fellow humans. But the questions which remain and must be further scrutinized are: How do the specific circumstances arise which allow freedom to prevail? And can freedom prevail once these circumstances fade away? The former question will be addressed in the next section while the latter will be considered in the conclusion.

#### 4.3 Sartre and Hobbes: Freedom and Fear

We saw in chapter three that certain 'historical circumstances' are prerequisites for the coming into existence of a group in fusion; the original form of the group, according to Sartre, is that:

it produces itself through the project of taking the inhuman power of mediation between men away from worked matter and giving it, in the community, to each and to all and constituting itself, as structured, as a resumption of control over the materiality of the practical field (things and collectives) by free *communised praxis* (The pledge, etc.) (CDR 672).

The fused group is a group that desires to avoid coercion, as it is a group that is in the process of rebelling against the necessities imposed by worked matter (the practico-inert). More importantly, the fused group has the potential to evolve into a pledged group. Sartre, in regards to the pledged group, notes:

the group defines and produces itself not only as an instrument, but also as a *mode of existence*; it posits itself for itself ... as the free milieu of free human relations; and on the basis of the pledge, it produces man as a free common individual, and confers new birth on the Other (CDR 673).

The pledged group is a '*mode of existence*' because it is a group which posits itself upon

freedom. As we have seen, the members of the group take the pledge because they agree that they want to structure themselves upon freedom and, further, they recognize that they do not want to return to their previous 'mode of existence', namely, their unfree serial mode of being. The individuals of the pledged group know what it is to be unfree and, as a result, they strive to preserve freedom.

Although the world which Sartre describes prior to the appearance of a group in fusion is not necessarily 'nasty, poor, brutish and short', it is, nevertheless, a world where conflict between others is a pervasive mode of existence. Hobbes' explanation of the escape from the natural state bears a close resemblance to Sartre's conception of the fused group -- a group which is seeking to escape seriality. At this point I will show that Hobbes' 'covenant', and its specific purpose, resembles the oath and the role that it plays within the pledged group. Within Sartre's modified Marxism the fear of death plays a crucial role, as it is at the heart of both these parallels.

Hobbes maintains that in order for individuals to escape the perils of the state of nature, they must bond together and take an oath. The oath, or the covenant, as described in the Leviathan, is submission to a sovereign body ('some common power') which insures the common well being of the group. Hobbes maintains that the motivating factor for individuals entering into the covenant is the fear of a short life in the state of nature -- the fear of a violent death. Hobbes describes death as "that terrible enemy of nature" which we at all costs seek to avoid (E 79). Sartre, in a similar vein, states that the "essential point" of the fused group is its "struggle against death" (CDR 403). Just as it is the fear of death that motivates those

in Hobbes' state of nature to take the covenant, so too is it the danger of 'death' and 'violence' which Sartre claims originally compels individuals into a group in fusion.

Hobbes, with regard to the consent of the covenant, states:

it remaineth therefore still that consent (by which I understand the concurrence of many men's wills to one action) is not sufficient security for their common peace, without the erection of some common power, by the fear whereof they may be compelled both to keep the peace among themselves, and to join their strengths together, against a common enemy (E 106).

Here a dual parallel can be seen between the covenant of Hobbes and Sartre's explanation for the oath which the members of the fused group must take. On one hand, this parallel rests on Sartre's assertion that:

the unity of the fused group lay quite simply in real common action, that is to say, in its own undertaking as much as in that of the enemy, and in the violent, dangerous, and sometimes fatal attempt to destroy common danger (CDR 413).

Even though the fused group has a 'common action', namely, to escape their unfree mode of being, this goal is not enough to confirm freedom according to Sartre, as he claims that the fused group after the passing of an impending threat cannot stand on its own. Consequently, Sartre states that "in the absence of any material pressure, the group *must produce itself as a pressure on its members*" (CDR 430). The group must erect some 'common power'.

Hobbes and Sartre differ greatly on the role of the sovereign which keeps the 'common power'. Whereas Hobbes discusses the sovereign as an individual, or group of individuals, who are responsible for keeping the peace, Sartre maintains that within the pledged group all individuals are united as 'common' individuals with a 'common' project.

There is no sovereign, or body of sovereigns, which controls the pledged group. The point is that Sartre, unlike Hobbes, does not see the need for an ultimate power (a sovereign), besides that of the oath itself, to which individuals must submit. But Sartre, similarly to Hobbes, does view the fear of death as playing a crucial role in both motivating individuals towards a group in fusion and also in maintaining the cohesion of the pledged group.

Sartre's conceptions of 'fraternity' and 'fear' within the pledged group resemble Hobbes' notion of 'sufficient security' for the 'common peace'. For instance, Sartre, like Hobbes, maintains that the pledge of the group serves to unite its members towards 'one' common action, namely, the goal of sustaining common *praxis*. As we have seen in the previous chapter, common *praxis* must be sustained, as the group faces the possibility that the enemy may return and, as a result, the group must be prepared to defend itself against the 'common enemy'. But more importantly, the pledge, again like Hobbes' covenant, functions as a fear which serves to keep the cohesion of the group. Sartre explains:

the fundamental re-creation, within the pledge, is the project of substituting a real fear, produced by the group itself, for the retreating external fear, whose very distance is deceptive (CDR 430).

Sartre, like Hobbes, claims that because it was the fear of death which originally enabled the group, it will be the fear of death that will preserve the unity of the group in the future. And this fear may be either real, or fictional.

At this point we have seen that the fear of death plays a fundamental role in the philosophies of both Hobbes and Sartre. In the Critique, it is the fear of death which tears us away from the coercion of the practico-inert and gravitates us towards free communised

*praxis*. But is the fear of death alone enough? Further, what are the circumstances which instigate the fear of death?

#### 4.4 The Elements Necessary For A Revolution

Sartre states that "in modern society, in effect, the alienation of the exploited and that of the exploiters are inseparable" (CDR 331). As we saw in chapter two, Sartre, contra Hegel, claims that the exploited (slaves) and exploiters (masters) are both alienated in the sense that they are both slaves to the imperatives (exigencies) of the material world (practico-inert). Both master and slave, according to Sartre, succumb to the coercion of the practico-inert. Sartre claims that Hegel failed to provide any persuasive explanation for why conflicts arise, as he failed to take into account the historical role of scarcity. Sartre claims:

the antagonistic negation is grasped by everyone as a scandal which has to be transcended. But at the level of scarcity its origin does not lie in this revelation of scandal: it is a *struggle for life* ... . Consequently the scandal is not, as Hegel supposed, the mere existence of the Other, which would take us back to a statute of unintelligibility. It lies in suffered (or threatened) violence, that is, in interiorised scarcity (CDR 815).

Presumably, Sartre would levy a similar charge against Hobbes. Hobbes, like Hegel, recognizes the psychological importance attached to the fear of death. But besides his explanation that humans, by nature, are inclined to view the other as a source of conflict<sup>21</sup>, Hobbes fails, in the eyes of Sartre, to provide any adequate grounding for how conflicts

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<sup>21</sup> Hobbes, in the Elements of Law, states that "since men by natural passion are divers ways offensive one to another ... they must needs provoke one another ... till at last they must determine the pre-eminence by strength and force of body" (E 78).

originally arise.<sup>22</sup> Hobbes, though, does provide a clue to this ground when he explains that conflicts originate when "any two men desire the same thing" (L 87). Hobbes recognises scarcity -- a concept latent in all the classical contractarians.

As we have seen, according to Sartre, conflicts between others arise because we dwell in a material world, a material world where there is not enough for everybody. In Search for a Method, Sartre explains that "exploiter and exploited are men in conflict in a system whose principal characteristic is *scarcity*" (SEM 127).<sup>23</sup> It is scarcity which is the foundation for human relations. In order to understand conflicts and how Sartre explains their origin, it is necessary to return briefly to the materialism of Marx and Engels and specifically to their discussion of the 'division of labour' and how it can be overcome. This is necessary because, as we shall see, Sartre's explanation for the resurrection of freedom hinges on the combination of the fear of death and specific material elements. At the heart of Sartre's explanation is the notion that the fear of death removes us from the everydayness of our present life and enables us to project a new future.

Marx and Engels, like Sartre, maintain that our relations with both the world and with

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<sup>22</sup> We saw in chapter two that Sartre maintains that humans by nature do not have a 'human nature' which fabricates relations among themselves. This claim rests upon the assumption that because 'existence' precedes 'essence', humans are nothing else except that which they make themselves. Therefore, any explanation for relations between humans must take into account how they have been made and specifically how they have been made in a material world.

<sup>23</sup> As we can recall, in the glossary, scarcity is defined as "the contingent impossibility of satisfying all the needs of an ensemble" (CDR 829).

others are dependent upon material circumstances. Marx and Engels, in regards to history, explain:

at each stage there is found a material result: a sum of productive forces, an historically created relation of individuals to nature and one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessor; a mass of productive forces, capital funds and conditions, which, on the one hand, is indeed modified by the new generations, but also on the other prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it a definitive development, a special character (GI 59).

From Marx's and Engels' use of the terms 'modified' and 'prescribes' we can see how Sartre arrives at the realization of "*la force des choses* – the power of circumstances" (BEM 33). Marx and Engels, like Sartre in the Critique, claim that we find ourselves born in a world where there is already in place a 'special character', namely, our relation with the material world which in turn dictates our relations with others. What we will be depends upon the material circumstances which we are born into, as it is within these circumstances that we make ourselves. Marx and Engels claim:

each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood (GI 53).

In a similar fashion, Sartre notes:

to say what man "is" is also to say what he can be -- and vice versa. The material conditions of his existence circumscribe the field of his possibilities (his work is too hard, he is too tired to show any interest in union or political activity.) Thus the field of possibles is the goal toward which the agent surpasses his objective situation. And this field in turn depends strictly on the social, historical reality (SEM 93).

The 'exclusive sphere of activity' is what Marx and Engels term the 'division of labour'. This

division affects everyone. Just as Sartre, upon observing two labourers at work, arrives at the conclusion that he does not recognize himself or the labourers as humans, but rather he recognizes himself and the labourers via their respective projects, so too do Marx and Engels maintain that labour influences how we come to know both ourselves and others. The division of labour robs everyone, as it circumscribes to them their future projects. Consequently, what we will be is determined by the social location prescribed by a specific form of the division of labour which we are born into; our class being assigns to us material conditions and a resulting standard of living which is tied to these conditions.

In The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels state that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" (CM 488). Marx and Engels, borrowing from Hegel's conception of master and slave, divide classes within capitalism according to those who own the instruments of production and those who do not. Within latter-day history the bourgeoisie plays the domineering social role by constantly changing and revamping the instruments of production:

the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society (CM 491).

The bourgeoisie must constantly revamp their 'instruments of production', as they see themselves as continually needing to expand: "the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe" (CM 492). Changes to the instruments of production lead to changes within the whole fabric of society, as the changes directly affect the material reality of society, which in turn dictates new prescriptions

for its members. Consequently, the proletariat are confronted with the crisis situation that the introduction of new instruments of production will render them obsolete, as their 'labour-power' will be reduced. Marx, with regard to the labour power of an individual, explains:

the workman sells his labour-power as a commodity. Division of labour specialises this labour-power, by reducing it to skill in handling a particular tool. So soon as the handling of this tool becomes the work of a machine, then, with the use-value, the exchange-value too, of the workman's labour-power vanishes; the workman becomes unsaleable, like paper money thrown out of currency by legal enactment (C 470).

The proletarian worker fears becoming obsolete, because with the continual introduction of new instruments of production, her labour-power (her commodity) diminishes and, as a result, she faces the future possibility that her labour will no longer have any 'exchange-value' within the market. As a result, the proletariat live in a climate of "everlasting uncertainty" and "agitation" (CM 491). But, according to Marx and Engels, it is the very ability of the division of labour to breed crises which will eventually result in its revolutionary overturning.

It is crucial to note that the discussion of the division of labour in Marx and Engels pertains directly to the Hegelian conception of master and slave. Yet nowhere within the relevant discussions of Marx and Engels does one find any significant mention of death, or specifically the fear of death and the psychological precedence attributed to it in Hegel's formulation of master and slave relations: how the fear of death serves as a crucial factor in both the slave originally becoming a slave and the slave eventually transcending her

enslavement.<sup>24</sup> This is significant because Sartre, like Hegel, desires to explain any fundamental change to a situation as being perpetuated by a crisis situation which breeds the fear of death.

In The German Ideology Marx and Engels, with regard to the potential for revolution, claim:

these conditions of life, which different generations find in existence, decide also whether or not the periodically recurring revolutionary convulsion will be strong enough to overthrow the basis of an entire system. And if these material elements of a complete revolution are not present (namely, on one hand the existing productive forces, on the other the formation of a revolutionary mass, which revolts not only against separate conditions of society up till then, but against the very "production of life" till then, the "total activity" on which it is based), then, as far as practical development is concerned, it is absolutely immaterial whether this *idea* of this revolution has been expressed a hundred times already, as the history of communism proves (GI 59).

Here we can see that Marx and Engels entertain the notion that individuals can unite in a common cause in order to abolish the previous conditions of alienation and that specific conditions are necessary for this. In Hegelian terms this can be explained as the necessity of the slave breaking free from the master's grasp. Although Marx and Engels mention that a revolution is contingent upon certain 'material elements', unlike Sartre, they do not explain revolutionary circumstances in conjunction with the fear of death. This is important, because Sartre implies that the fear of death is the road towards freedom. It is the fear of death which

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<sup>24</sup> I have come across the mention of starvation leading to death in the writings of Marx and Engels, but nowhere have I found any explicit explanation of the fear of death as a psychological factor along the same lines of Hegel.

motivates individuals towards action against the forces of the practico-inert.

#### 4.5 The Fear of Death as a Gateway to Freedom

As we saw in chapter three, Georges Lefebvre in regards to the 'Great Fear' which led to the French Revolution, explains that "the Great Fear arose from the fear of the 'brigand', which can itself be explained by the economic, social and political circumstances prevailing in France in 1789" (TGF 210). Lefebvre, along the lines of Marx and Engels, implies that the events leading to the French Revolution were the result of certain "material circumstances".

For instance, Lefebvre notes:

in the spring of 1789, risings caused by famine like conditions were matched by a series of revolts against tax-gatherings and more particularly against the privileged classes. ... The prime cause was famine (TGF 40).

Further, Lefebvre explains:

the pattern of great peasant revolts was established by spring; they were preceded by a long period of simmering agitation which spread unrest far and wide (TGF 46).

We can see how the circumstances for a revolution in the France of 1789 were ripe, as the peasants were living under a state of 'uncertainty' and 'agitation' because under conditions of famine, they were literally anxious about where their next meal would come from. In The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World, Carl Leiden and Karl M. Schmitt note:

because violence seems so often to be connected with revolution, we tend to transfer its transient character to revolution itself. We are impressed by the sudden, orgiastic nature of violence and conclude that revolution has the same nature (RMW 4).

Sartre, as we can see, would agree that violence is not simply an attribute of a revolution, but rather it is the prime cause for the birth of a revolution. But here we must be careful about what we mean by violence. For instance, Sartre maintains that the individual of scarcity lives in a climate of 'violence', as scarcity "as a mortal danger, produces everyone in a multiplicity as a mortal danger for the Other" (CDR 735). In a climate of scarcity, the individual commits acts of violence against her fellow humans, as the satisfaction of her needs directly imperils the other. The individual, according to Sartre, will exist docilely in this environment, until circumstances become so great, that her life is in mortal danger. It is not until circumstances violently threaten the lives of individuals that they will make a move towards freedom. Sartre, in regards to the genesis of the group, explains:

the transformation therefore occurs when impossibility itself becomes impossible, or when a synthetic event reveals that the impossibility of change is an impossibility of life. The direct result of this is to make *the impossibility of change* the very object which has to be transcended if life is to continue (CDR 350).

The individual will not be awoken from her practico-inert nightmare until the forces of the practico-inert violently threaten her very life.

At this point we can see Sartre's reasons for how individuals will escape the coerced life of the practico-inert world. Prior to the appearance of a group in fusion Sartre maintains that we live in a relatively unfree world. The reason for this coercion is derived from our original need. Sartre states:

free *praxis* may directly destroy the freedom of the Other, or place it in parentheses (mystification, stratagem) through the material instrument (CDR 736).

When we act upon our original needs we freely do so in the context of sharing a world with others. Our first reaction is not to cooperate with the other, but rather to see her as an enemy, as she is a mortal danger to us. She has the same needs that we have in order to survive, and, therefore, she is in competition with us in a scarce world. As a result we structure a world which is based upon implicit and explicit social antagonisms. And these antagonisms become so deeply embedded in our social psyche that they can only be overcome by the fear of death.

#### 4.6 Heidegger and Anxiety

In chapter three we saw how Sartre's conception of *massification* resembles Heidegger's explanation of the 'they'. Both massification and the they pertain to the notion that we find ourselves outwardly absorbed in the everydayness of life, as we become dominated by the way things are publicly interpreted (BT 264). Heidegger explains Dasein's absorption into the 'they' as a state of fallen-ness:

this "absorption in ..." [Aufgehen bei ...] has mostly the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the "they". Dasein has for instance, fallen away [abgefallen] from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and has fallen into the 'world' (BT 220).

According to Heidegger, as long as Dasein remains absorbed in the everydayness of the 'they', she cannot live up to her 'authentic potentiality', as she takes her *existentiell* cues from the crowd and not herself.

Heidegger's existential predecessor, Søren Kierkegaard, recognized this phenomenon and explained it as a 'levelling process': "the levelling process is not the action of the

individual, but the work of reflection in the hands of an abstract power" ('TITP' 261). The 'abstract power' according to Kierkegaard is the public. And it is from the public that the individual seeks truth. As a result, the decisions of the individual are made by the public, as this is where the individual goes to seek truth. In this situation society is not dominated by individuals, but rather individuals are dominated by society, as they 'do' and 'say' what those in society 'do' and 'say'.

Heidegger explains that even though Dasein may be lost and fallen in the everydayness of the 'they', she can still interpret the world from an individual point of view. Heidegger explains:

in falling, nothing other than our potentiality-for-Being-in world is the issue, even if in the mode of inauthenticity. Dasein *can* fall only *because* Being-in-the-world understandingly with a state-of-mind is an issue for it. On the other hand *authentic* existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon (BT 224).

Dasein has the ability to recognize that although she does exist in a fallen, inauthentic state, she still has the potential for existing in an authentic mode of being.

We have already noted how Heidegger explains Dasein's inauthentic mode of being as "a fleeing *in the face of itself*" (BT 229). Dasein flees from herself, because she takes refuge in the banality of the 'they'. Although Dasein takes comfort in the everydayness of the world, Heidegger claims that there exists a specific mood in which Dasein can escape from the refuge of the 'they' and move towards an authentic life:

anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its *Being towards* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being -- that is, its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and

taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its *Being-free for (propensio in ...)* the authenticity of its Being, and this authenticity as a possibility which it always is (BT 232).

Anxiety, as opposed to fear, reveals to Dasein that what she is anxious about is no-thing. Unlike fear, in anxiety there is no specific region or object which is fearsome: we are not fearsome of any entity in the world. Rather, anxiety discloses to us "that entities in the world are not 'relevant' at all" (BT 231). In anxiety Dasein realizes that the world which she encounters in her everyday existence is foreign and alien to her, as she recognizes the mistaken meaning which she has attached to its entities.

Heidegger explains that the root of anxiety is Dasein's fear of falling towards death. Heidegger maintains that once Dasein accepts the possibility of her death she will be able to move beyond the 'they' and towards an authentic existence. Heidegger claims that "death is Dasein's *ownmost* possibility" (BT 307). Because death is specific to 'me' it wrests me away from the superficiality of 'the they' and towards the authentic possibilities of 'my' being. As opposed to fleeing 'myself', I confront 'myself'.

Between Heidegger and Sartre, circa Being and Nothingness, there exists a vast difference in opinion on what exactly 'freedom' is. This difference resides in Sartre explaining freedom in terms of choices or alternatives while Heidegger explains freedom in terms of authenticity. Sartre, in Being and Nothingness, maintains that nothing except the individual herself can hinder what she will be in the future. Heidegger, on the other hand, claims that the individual is always free in the sense that she can escape from the banality of the 'they' and lead an authentic life.

We can see that Sartre in the Critique, in a similar vein to Heidegger in Being and Time, maintains that the confrontation with the possibility of death can lead to a more authentic existence. Sartre explains this authentic existence in terms of the emergence of freedom within the fused and pledged groups. Sartre maintains that when a certain segment of individuals are threatened with annihilation, they will break free of the previous bonds of their inauthentic life and move towards an authentic life. They will break free from the inertia of the practico-inert. But Sartre, unlike Heidegger, does not explain the fear of death in terms of an anxiety about nothing in the world. Rather, the fear of death is explained in conjunction with real, objective material forces. In the Critique it is not the individual who confronts the fear of death. Rather the fear of death confronts the individual.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

In the Critique Sartre transfers Heidegger's notion of death from an individual level to a group level. This transfer corresponds with Sartre agreeing with Hobbes that in order for individuals to escape a previous life and in order for a group to function and maintain its cohesion, its members must be motivated by the fear of death. Why is fear so important for the group? Fear is of crucial importance because when we originally negate our world in order to satisfy our needs we do so out of fear. It is the role which fear plays that distinguishes Sartre's historical materialism from that of Marx and Engels. In Sartre's view we desire to change the world which crushes us (CDR 112). According to Sartre, we are beings who are born out of fear, as our original birth in the world corresponds with the

possibility that our lives will be changed from without. We realize that we must borrow from the material world in order to survive. Further, we also recognize that we are in competition with others for survival. Sartre attaches great importance to the specific fear of death, because as he sees it, the fear of death is what can inspire changes to the world, as it can bring individuals together. The fear of death is what makes us seek out social order, as described by Hobbes. Further, when the fear of death brings individuals together, this fear must be kept alive, as it will compel individuals to see themselves and others as humans.

As we have seen, Sartre maintains that it is scarcity which is the basis for antagonistic relations among humans. According to Sartre, scarcity is responsible for both the implicit and explicit acts of violence which we perform against one another throughout history and up until the present day. Can scarcity historically explain the millions of deaths resulting directly from the hands of other humans? Can it provide a rationale for the twentieth-century, a century that has witnessed two world wars and numerous other wars of conflict? Can scarcity explain the presence of world poverty and its striking presence in countries which are described as 'industrialised'?

William McBride, in regards to the Critique, asks : "What has happened, in this analysis, to human freedom?" (SPT 148). McBride responds:

in the *Critique* he [Sartre] has not repudiated either his earlier view that to be human is to be free, or his commitment to human liberation as a supreme and open-ended goal. What has altered greatly is his awareness, now vastly increased of the innumerable ways in which the dialectic of human freedom in the worlds of society, politics, and history in which we all exist constantly results in freedom's contravening itself in its very efforts at expression (SPT 149).

In the Critique we see Sartre walk a fine line between freedom and determinism. On one hand, Sartre maintains that we are 'free' in the sense that we always project ourselves into the future. But, as Sartre argues in the Critique, our projections occur within limits so defined that our future is 'destinized'. We are born into social situations which are not of our own choosing and on the most part we must make ourselves out of these situations. The only way to escape this destiny is, under the threat of death, for the individual to join forces with others. But the group in fusion and its subsequent sister, the pledged group, are themselves dependent upon destiny, as they cannot come into being until circumstances threaten the life of a collective of people.

In the Critique forever gone is the absolute freedom which Sartre ascribed to the individual in Being and Nothingness. Sartre, equipped with a modified Marxism, sets out in the Critique to see how 'circumstances' can modify our freedom. What he discovers is that freedom, as envisaged by him, has been modified for the better part of history. In the Critique Sartre only provides us with glimpses of freedom. Freedom has been on the short end of coercion throughout history. Further, there is no utopic vision of a society in the near future where freedom will reign. Why? It appears that Sartre maintains that individuals will always be individuals. And in a world of scarcity it seems nearly impossible for individuality to be transferred on to a group. As a result, freedom itself appears to be a near impossible achievement.

In conclusion a passage from one of Sartre's last interviews is worth quoting. Sartre, when asked about hope for the future, replies:

what with the third world war that can break out any day, and the wretched mess our planet has become, despair has come back to tempt me with the idea that there is no end at all, that there is no goal, that there are only small, individual objectives that we fight for. We make small revolutions, but there's no human end, there's nothing of concern to human beings, there's only disorder. A person can think something like this. It tempts you constantly, especially when you're old and think, "Well, anyhow, I'm going to die in five years at the outside" — actually, I'm thinking in terms of ten years, but it could well be five. In any event, the world seems ugly, evil and hopeless. Such is the calm despair of an old man who will die in despair. But the point is, I'm resisting, and I know that I shall die in hope. But this hope must be grounded.

We must try to explain why the world of today, which is horrible, is only one moment in a long historical development, that hope has always been one of the dominant forces of revolutions and insurrections, and how I still feel that hope is my conception of the future (HN 110).

Odd utterances from a man who once wrote that "whatever the circumstances, and whatever the site, man is always free to choose to be a traitor or not" (BEM 34). Perhaps not so odd when taken in the context of the historical circumstances which the Critique describes.

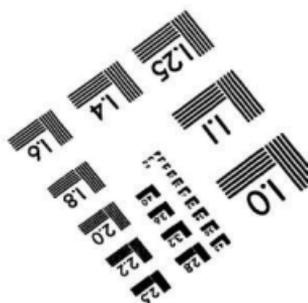
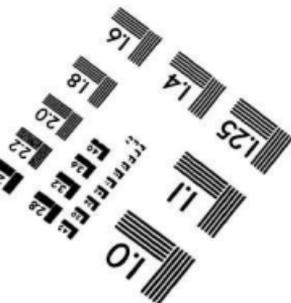
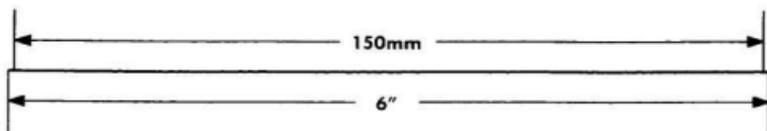
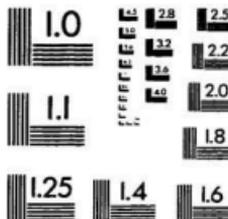
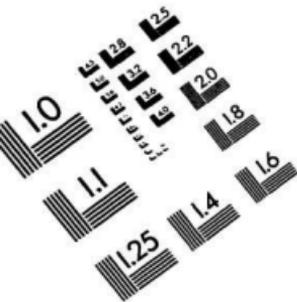
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