

Hope Now and Then - Sartre and the Ethical End of History.

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Abstract

This study examines the theme of 'hope' in an ethical end to History as expressed by Sartre in his final thoughts in the dialogue *Hope Now* shortly before his death. It first examines in detail Sartre's thinking in the controversial text of *Hope Now* and then proceeds through a close examination of two relatively neglected texts from the two major periods of Sartre's work. These are the *Cahiers* of the late 1940s and his lecture notes for his undelivered talk at Cornell University in the mid-60s entitled '*Morality and History*'. The aim is to establish the development of Sartre's thinking concerning the relationship between ethics and history and ultimately to consider how far his final 'hope' in an ethical 'end' to history can be justified in terms of his own thinking. A secondary aim is to provide the basis for a reconsideration of the status of *Hope Now* within the overall context of his thinking. What emerges from Sartre's texts considered here is a subtle and complex relationship between ethics and history which well exemplify Sartre's great merits as an ethical thinker. The study concludes that there is indeed genuine scope for 'hope' within his thought and that his views in *Hope Now* are plausibly and illuminatingly related to the ground he had already covered in his search for an ethics.

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Introduction

This study begins at the end in that it starts with Sartre's last recorded thoughts before his death in 1980. These thoughts take the form of a record of his conversations with his 'secretary', Benny Levy. Levy was a former radical from the protests of '68 with whom Sartre had collaborated in the '70s. Levy had since repudiated his radicalism and re-discovered his roots in Judaism. Sartre was almost completely blind and in very poor health yet he continued to work with Levy acting as his amanuensis.¹ Indeed, in the text Sartre talks of embarking on a new philosophical project in the time that remains to him of developing a 'third ethics', the beginnings of which emerge in the discussions. The publication of a section of these discussions, edited by Levy but corrected by Sartre, as '*L'Espoir Maintenant (Hope Now)*' caused great controversy among Sartre's circle. Many considered that an enfeebled Sartre had been manipulated into outright contradictions and repudiations of the basic philosophical positions that defined his thought. The validity of this judgement is something that the study seeks to address.

There is a wider aim which is to use what is, initially at least, a vague notion of 'hope' as a unifying theme for a close analysis of three texts which are each, in their own way, relatively neglected in the academic literature in English. We start with *Hope Now* which, perhaps precisely because of the controversy surrounding it, has not received the detailed attention it deserves. Once we have established, at least provisionally, what Sartre seems to mean by 'hope' at the end of

¹ For a helpful summary of the background to the text see Aronson's introduction in *Hope Now*, trans. Van Den Hoven (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996)

his life we can then follow the trail back into two texts. One from the period 1947/48 - *Cahiers pour Une Morale (Notebooks for an Ethics)* - and the other from the period 1964/65 - *Morale et Histoire (Morality and History)*. Of course the *Notebooks* have been discussed in a variety of contexts, often very perceptively, but, as might be expected of such a long, diffuse and unfinished text, it tends to get picked over as a kind of 'treasure trove' to suit a particular focus. Indeed, as far as this writer is aware, there still remains only one book length treatment of the text in English by Gail Linsenbard.² Whilst her discussion has many merits she tends to read it back into *Being and Nothingness* rather than forward into the *Critique*. This risks losing the real richness and significance of the text.

The final text considered in this study is the transcript of Sartre's notes for a lecture to be given at Cornell University in the USA in 1965. Sartre withdrew from this commitment at the last minute because of the escalation of US involvement in Vietnam. The text was worked up and corrected by Sartre up to the point that he withdrew from the lecture. It therefore has a coherence and structure which is not always the case with Sartre's unpublished texts. The notes were published in French in *Les Temps Modernes* as '*Morale et Histoire*' in 2005 but there exists no English translation of the entire text although a small portion of the first section has been translated by Elizabeth Bowman.³ Again, therefore, this text has received relatively little detailed discussion in English and for that reason it is worth attempting a detailed treatment here. Moreover, the text itself relates to a key period in Sartre's ethical thinking linked to the ontology of the *Critique* and the lecture that Sartre gave in Rome to an audience of 'Euro-Communists' at the Gramsci Institute in 1964. Alongside the notes for that latter lecture there also exist over 500 pages of manuscript which represent Sartre's work on Ethics in the period of the early-mid 60s. Only a few pages of this other material have so far been published but taken collectively they form the basis of what is often referred to as Sartre's 'Dialectical Ethics'.⁴ In the context of this study a major part of the interest of '*Morality and History*' lies in its intended audience. One must at the very least suppose that Sartre adapted his discussion to the intended audience - the students and faculty

² G. Linsenbard, *An Investigation into Sartre's Posthumously Published Notebooks for an Ethics* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press 2000)

³ See R. Aronson and A. Van Den Hoven, (eds.), *Sartre Alive* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1991) pp. 37-52

⁴ For a helpful overview of Sartre's ethical writings of this period see T. R. Flynn, *Sartre, A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: CUP 2014) pp. 355-381

of Cornell University rather than a group of European Communists! One effect of this is to allow Sartre's thinking about the ethical dimensions of praxis to emerge in interesting ways - the same ground is covered in one respect but with a certain kind of clarity. For this reason too, the text merits close study.

Overall then this study is unashamedly based on a close examination of these three relatively neglected texts. We will follow the twists and turns of his writing on ethics from these key periods of the development of his thinking with the aim of discovering what content we can give to 'hope' itself.

Hope Now - 1980

Sartre's initial claim in the discussion is that 'everyone lives with hope,' and that, 'hope is part of man.'⁵ This is because of the temporal structure of human action where the past and the present situation is surpassed in an attempt to realise a future. The end is realised in the future and therefore, 'hope is in the way man acts.' This in itself might seem disarmingly simple and 'hope' a vague and naive attitude from which to act. But it is the attempt to work through the details of the relationship between the inertia of the past, the situated freedom of the present and the potential openness of the future that is the core theme of Sartre's work. This attempt takes on a rich complexity and is characterised by a deep honesty as Sartre develops his thinking beyond the ontological isolation of the absolutely free consciousness of his earlier writings towards an individual necessarily situated in a wider collective context against the background of a shared history and society. The question essentially became, 'what can we be?' in such a situation and underlying it is the question of what we ought to be. This fundamental ethical theme is entwined with the ontological and existential situation within which it must be developed. So situation, society, action, temporality and history are what need to be understood and this is the basis of a 'concrete' ethics. The issue that concerns us here is whether 'hope' is where this ethical theme leads.

⁵ J. P. Sartre and B. Levy, *Hope Now*, trans. A. Van Den Hoven (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996) p.53

Sartre tells us that he originally 'saw despair merely as a lucid view of the human condition', and that 'despair' is simply the recognition that our most basic projects of self-justification are condemned to failure.⁶ This is the 'useless passion' of *Being and Nothingness*, where we can never fully *be* what we aim to be in the sense of establishing a fixed, solid, justified essence for ourselves; but despair 'is not the opposite of hope.' Despair is awareness of failure at the most fundamental level, the ontological impossibility of the realisation of our most constitutive ends. Certainly the evolution of the notion of 'failure' is an interesting feature of Sartre's thought and *Being and Nothingness* is in many ways an analysis of 'failure'. In the dialogue of *Hope Now* Sartre does correct Levy's attribution to him of the thought that 'all hope leads to disappointment' by responding, 'I didn't say exactly that...I said that they never attained exactly what they had searched for.'⁷ Hope, Sartre says, developed 'gradually and only later', and it is, 'one manner of grasping the goal I set myself, as something that can be realised.' It is clear from what he goes on to say, in this respect at least, that the attitude towards the goal is essential to hope and that he still believes that behind all concrete and relative ends 'everyone has a goal that I would call...transcendent or absolute.'⁸ This then is a certain kind of 'original project'; the fundamental, constitutive choice which unites desires, choices and action into a meaningful, intelligible whole. Hope relates to this absolute goal from which our actions derive their meaning. Yet failure still afflicts this absolute end adopted in hope and gives rise to, 'a contradiction I've not yet resolved.' This is because one potential conclusion from Sartre's analysis of situated consciousness is that our ends and their realisation are mediated in such a way that 'man's life manifests itself as failure'.⁹ Not only is there always a lack of coincidence between existence and essence at the individual level -we can never fully be what we are in the classic existentialist sense - but our choices and actions are formed and realised in a natural and inter-subjective world which we do not control. The counterpoint to this 'absolute pessimism' is not a guarantee that the ends will be realised as they have been conceived but rather the necessary presence of hope 'in the very nature of action.' So this lies not outside the action but in the ac-

⁶ *ibid.* p.54

⁷ *ibid.* p.54

⁸ *ibid.* p.56

⁹ *ibid.* p.56

tion itself because the action contains within it 'a realisation of the goal posited as future.'¹⁰ Hope is 'the relation of man to his goal' - even in failure.

It is hard to know what to do with this kind of hope as it stands. It is both everything and nothing and in so far as it is bound up with our conception of our fundamental ends it needs a context to give it content. Implicit in this is a reconsideration of our fundamental projects and a shift towards social and ethical contexts. It is as if we ask, 'what kinds of projects are worthy of hope?' This emerges from the discussion in the text of Sartre's fundamental project as a writer. 'This choice of choices', Levy asks, 'has it been a failure?' Certainly from the perspective of *Being and Nothingness* it must have been. After revealingly shifting between different levels of failure and success the discussion settles on, 'what distinguishes the desire for being of a cafe waiter...from Sartre's desire for immortality?'. Sartre is quite prepared to admit that he is guilty of certain kinds of 'bad faith' as we all are but his actual practice as a writer, '...was different. It was clean, it was ethical...'¹¹ It was ethical because it operated in 'a modality other than the primary modality of the spirit of seriousness.'¹² This 'spirit of seriousness' is the assumption that there is a fixed, objective order of values that can ground and justify our existence and that we can absolve ourselves of the perpetual need to create who we are. The ethical modality is rooted in a different fundamental project and therefore a different orientation than that of the futile 'desire to *be*'. Here 'we stop wanting to have being as a goal, we no longer want to be God... We're looking for something else.'¹³ This is the level of 'Working toward society', of generosity and the 'gift' and also of hope. Here then is the 'desire for society' as the fundamental project or 'the choice of choices'.

All this certainly represents an 'escape from the dialectics of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness*', as Levy puts it to Sartre. The shift to an 'ethical modality' does represent a kind of conversion that opens up a range of ethical possibilities. The core relationships are those between individuals situated within society and history but this demands a clear understanding of 'society' which Sartre refuses in *Hope Now* to identify with either liberal democracy or the kinds of socio-economic relationships described by Marx; 'It's an altogether different relationship among

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.57

¹¹ *ibid.* p.58

¹² *ibid.* p.59

¹³ *ibid.* p.59

men.’¹⁴ It would have been easier if Marxism or some other theoretical framework could have demonstrated ‘the meaning of history’ and have revealed ‘the true social ends of ethics’, but the failure in this respect of *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* demands that we ‘look somewhere quite else.’ What remains is the connection between ethics, sociality and history. Sartre speaks of ‘a slow movement, in history, of man’s becoming conscious of his fellowman.’ This development of a fraternal consciousness is ultimately what will reveal the true meaning of the movement of history and ‘everything will assume its true value.’¹⁵ This also is hope, in progress.

So the isolated individual of *Being and Nothingness*, trapped in bad faith, refusing to accept the potential and responsibility of its freedom, in necessary conflict with other freedoms, striving in futility to ground and justify itself as freedom becomes an agent that has shifted its fundamental project to work collectively and fraternally in society, within history, to realise ‘the true social ends of ethics.’ The ethical end is then to be found within society and the kind of humanity it makes possible. Ethics and politics overlap because it is ‘a question of finding a future for society.’¹⁶ This is not something that can be achieved by isolated individuals, instead, as Sartre says, ‘one must imagine a body of people who struggle as one.’¹⁷ Such collective action for change brings together a number of key themes and involves a theoretical understanding of not just the group but society as a whole and of social development within history. It also, of course, involves an evaluative dimension to determine and give meaning to the ends adopted and the form of humanity we might strive to achieve. As Sartre says, if ‘society is to stop being the shitty mess it is...’, we must identify social forces that are ‘trying to move forward’. Sartre’s own experience well illustrates that this is not always easy! This leads us back again to the ‘end’ or meaning of history as a human enterprise and the notion of progress. In the context of a discussion of the failure of *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* to ground an ‘ultimate end’, Sartre talks about an understanding of progress as being ‘a series of failures’ that contain within them ‘something unforeseen and positive’.¹⁸ Progress here is ‘partial, local’ and implicit in failure. This, too, is hope.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.60

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.61

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.65

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.65

¹⁸ *ibid.* p.66

There is, however, another possibility for revealing an end towards which to strive and that is, as Sartre says, 'via man'. Our ontological condition is such that, lacking a fixed, determined essence, what we are is up for grabs. We 'are struggling to establish human relations and arrive at a definition of what is human.' For Sartre what counts is the form of the struggle 'to live together like human beings.' It is the struggle for a human definition that is 'our effort and our end.' The goal is to form a society in which the individuals and the collectives reflect this 'complete' humanity. Such humanity, Sartre claims, is beyond 'humanism' at least in the sense of 'a certain way man has of admiring himself.' Yet the active striving towards a condition of complete humanity is quite clearly a humanism albeit one that, once 'man truly and totally exists', becomes simply 'man's way of being' rather than a value.¹⁹ Up to this point we are 'submen' and humanism is 'the act of thinking about the relationship of man to man' on the basis of the potential 'submen' possess to go beyond that condition. Sartre goes on to say that it is this potential for complete human being that gives moral value to 'submen'. 'Ethics', he says, 'begins at exactly that point'. We, who exist as 'submen' cannot be used merely as means or 'raw material' for the achievement of the ultimate end of humanity as complete human being. In reaching beyond our current condition 'through our best acts' we begin to sketch out a 'society of human beings'. Only these complete humans can realise humanism. For our part, 'We experience humanism only as what is best in us.'²⁰ Yet since we 'prefigure' these complete human beings and it is *our* acts that in some way will create the conditions for such beings given that we are the active basis for their potential existence - what we are and what we do matters.

This is hardly a detailed prescription for the perfection of humanity but it does hint at the core ethical themes that had developed in Sartre's work. Ethics is a creative project working with what we have towards a future in which we can be more than we are. It is not an individual project where all we seek is self-perfection; rather there is a mutual relationship between the individual and the collective. This mutuality is an aspect of human existence that Sartre had been working through in a variety of forms since he shifted his focus from the sovereign individual of earlier writings and 'discovered society'. Discovering society is a matter of discovering other consciousnesses and it is the manner and context in which

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.68

²⁰ *ibid.* p.69

these others are discovered that counts. Certainly other consciousnesses featured in *Being and Nothingness* but there they were encountered rather than discovered. They were limits and threats to the 'For-itself' as the 'absolute upsurge' of freedom in the world. The idiom was ultimately one of theft and possession where my freedom is utterly mine and yours yours. Closed and isolated in this way it was hard to see how an ethical dimension of the kind Sartre outlined in *Hope Now* could ever be experienced by such a consciousness. In one of the most powerful and significant sections of *Hope Now* Sartre addresses precisely this issue.

Levy asks him what he now understands by 'ethics'. He responds by referring to a 'dimension of consciousness' that he calls 'obligation'.²¹ Initially it is not entirely clear exactly what this is supposed to be other than 'a kind of requisition that goes beyond the real' resulting in an aspect of consciousness that is 'a kind of inner constraint' which accompanies thought and action. 'Any objective that consciousness has,' he says, 'presents itself as something in the nature of a requisition.' This aspect of consciousness is, he claims, 'the beginning of ethics'. The awareness of 'inner constraint' is, then, the basic resource within consciousness upon which to build an ethics. Freedom is both constrained and justified by this constraint. Sartre responds to Levy by saying that a 'mandated' freedom is the same thing as a 'requisitioned' one - it is the requisition that supplies the mandate as if, in the end, the ethical constraint justifies and empowers our freedom. The issue is the nature and source of this 'inner constraint' and this is linked to a question Sartre raises, 'Where does one place ethics in the human consciousness?'²²

This is not a question that can satisfactorily be answered from the perspective of an isolated consciousness whose only value can be their pure freedom. In this case everything is ethical in the sense that there is a value but, because the only value is the pure freedom of the For-itself or individual consciousness, it is also the case that nothing is ethical because there is nothing outside of that value to give it form or meaning. Sartre admits that in his early work he made the mistake of 'looking for ethics in a consciousness that had no reciprocal, no other.' But now, he says, his thinking has developed to the point that he believes that all that consciousness experiences is 'necessarily linked to...the existence of another.' At the core of its constitution, Sartre claims, consciousness is 'simultaneously'

²¹ *ibid.* p.69

²² *ibid.* p.70

awareness of itself, the other and its relationship with those others.²³ There is therefore a resource available from the very 'constitution-in-the-world' of consciousness itself for a rich and real ethical experience based on relationship and mutuality. This is, Sartre says, 'ethical conscience'. Moreover, since we exist in a situation where other consciousnesses are continuously present not necessarily in person but in the networks of objects and meaning within which we live then, 'the other is always there and is conditioning me' and how one lives and how one responds to the presence of the other within the world in this sense is, Sartre says, 'of an ethical nature'.²⁴ From this perspective - that of a consciousness that is no longer isolated but mutual and reciprocal at its very core - everything is ethical or potentially so but not formless or meaningless because it no longer has to do with a single undifferentiated freedom within itself but with a multitude of freedoms all situated on a common ground.

This commonality, mutuality and reciprocity is at the heart of the ethical theme as it develops in Sartre's works and one key issue with it is how to engender and sustain such commonality. Once again, it would have been useful if the structured movement of history could have solved the problem over time; but that does not seem to be the case. For one thing freedom itself remains stubbornly irreducible. Our mutual dependence might be a feature of our condition but for Sartre this dependence remains free. The constraints that appear within consciousness in the experience of the presence of others described above must themselves be chosen and adopted freely. 'What is surreal', he says, 'about this constraint is that it does not determine; it presents itself as a constraint, yet the choice is made freely.'²⁵ Furthermore, there are features of our social and material situation, as Sartre so amply demonstrated in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, that act counter to the formation and endurance of common bonds. The human world is such that it is the product of an amalgam of successive rounds of human activity upon nature to meet our needs. This situated, purposive activity Sartre calls 'praxis'. The action of human praxis upon the material world creates an environment which is neither pure human agency nor pure, objective materiality. It is a product of the two which Sartre terms in the *Critique*, the 'practico-inert' field. Being at root human activity ordering and inscribing itself onto the material world, the

²³ *ibid.* p.71

²⁴ *ibid.* p.71

²⁵ *ibid.* p.72

'practico-inert' has a range of significant features. First it has a tendency or a kind of agency of its own with the capacity to divert and distort our praxis; our ends and goals are actualised in the 'practico-inert' in ways we did not intend. Secondly, the 'practico-inert' has the capacity to order and structure our relationships in certain ways that are not conducive to the kind of collective unity and common action Sartre believes is so necessary to the achievement of 'complete human beings'. In this case our most direct relationship is not with each other but with the 'practico-inert' structure as in the classic example of a line of individuals waiting for a bus. Thirdly, and finally for our purposes at this point, the 'practico-inert' is characterised by what Sartre terms 'scarcity'. There is the constant danger of there not being enough to go round whether that be seats on a bus or work or whatever. This feature raises the continual possibility that our relationships will be based on conflict and violence.

It is evident that if things are as Sartre had portrayed them to be in the *Critical* then the kind of collective, mutual action necessary to create the conditions for 'complete humanity' will be hard to effect. At the very least there would need to be a social, political and theoretical basis on which to act and some end in view. In a kind of recounting of his political disappointments in this next section of *Hope Now* Sartre bemoans the fact that 'the unity of the left... is now shattered.'²⁶ What was once a 'great mass movement' is now split into parties that lack a deeper, unifying principle and people vote for them 'without hope' as one votes 'for any other party'. The situation is no more encouraging when he considers 'the insurrectional aspect of leftism'; that too lacks the capacity to effect real change. A demonstration might occur, people might march, there might be violence but it all ends by 'everybody running away and breaking windows.'²⁷ So what is it that makes 'the very idea of a great and total change, the idea of revolution, quite impossible.'²⁸ Sartre believes that the answer lies in the absence any longer of 'faith in a general political and human principle' upon which to act. However obscure or implicit, this principle, Sartre believes, was the very identity of the left as a force for radical change up to the beginning of the twentieth century. This principle united a left that subsumed and went beyond Marxism itself. The issue then is how to rediscover this principle as a basis for reviving the possibility of radical social change. This is one

²⁶ *ibid.* p.76

²⁷ *ibid.* p.76

²⁸ *ibid.* p.75

of the sections of the dialogue where Levy makes significant contributions. He frames his questions to invite certain kinds of answers from Sartre but nonetheless the latter seems quite capable of maintaining his side of the discussion which now begins to revolve around the interlinked issues of 'fraternity', radicalism or insurgency and violence.

'Fraternity' as a term to refer to a unifying principle is a problematic one - as Sartre says, 'It was never sufficiently developed...there's something in the very idea of fraternity that prevents one from developing the principle.'²⁹ In terms of Sartre's ideas in the *Critique*, Fraternity has a close association with violence. A group with the kind of internal unity that might be called 'fraternal' forms in response to a common threat and responds to that threat as one. The threat having passed, the bond is held together by also directing that external aggression back into the group itself to create what Sartre calls 'Fraternity-Terror'. This ambiguous relationship with violence is a significant theme in his political and social thinking and features here in *Hope Now*. It arises in connection with the notion of 'radicalism'. Radicalism here means direct action for change that seeks to realise its guiding principle in the most complete way possible, the kind of revolutionary insurgency associated with the *Sans Culottes* and the '*Journées*' of the French Revolution or the students and their allies of '68. This is a path that Levy himself has repudiated but Sartre's response is interesting. Radicalism in some form is still, he believes, an 'essential element' of the left. The real issue is what kind of 'radicalism' are we talking about here. An inflexible radicalism that sees itself as some absolute end, Sartre seems to be saying, is 'nonsense'. Because radical action occurs 'in the context of other actions that naturally are going to modify it'; radicalism must in turn 'modify itself' and 'compromise'.³⁰ What counts, Sartre says, is that 'it is the intention that must be radical' and this allows flexibility as to the means and does not imply a necessary hostility toward other individuals or groups. In this respect then, there is an attempt here to avoid a necessary connection between radical fraternity and violence. This is not entirely convincing and nor is Sartre himself entirely convinced, 'we will have to come back one day', he says, 'to fraternity-terror.'³¹

²⁹ *ibid.* p.78

³⁰ *ibid.* pp. 79-80

³¹ *ibid.* p.80

As the dialogue continues it appears that by making a distinction between radicalism as 'the intention itself' and not the 'goal as such' it is possible for there to be different 'truths' within what would otherwise appear to be a movement animated by a 'common goal'.³² There is always the possibility of a lack of fundamental unity at the level of the way in which the goal of radical social change is intended as a fundamental project. There might be temporary unities and commonalities at the level of action as such but 'little by little it becomes clear that they are pursuing very different goals.' In this sense then the necessary unity for a consistent and effective radicalism must come from a certain way of intending or of understanding the radical goal. As Levy says, 'We're looking instead for a real conjuncture of intentions. To be radical, then, would be to pursue in a radical way the bringing together of scattered intentions to the point where they achieve an adequate unity.' Sartre agrees, with the caveat, 'insofar as that is possible.'³³

The task becomes how to specify and grasp the correct, unifying understanding of the radical goal apart from the superficial unities based on 'misunderstanding' that have frequently been a feature of radical social movements. Whilst as Sartre says, 'seizing power was a historical end' - in specific circumstances the 'historical moment' gave rise to specific unities and specific actions - behind this lies the question, 'what have insurgents or revolutionaries always had as their ultimate goal, the thing they wanted without being able to name it?' Such a goal or such a radical intention of the goal, Sartre claims, 'appears in history but doesn't belong to history'.³⁴ This 'transhistorical' intention of radical change is what links progressive social movements through time but is itself not something that is the product of the development of specific historical circumstances, although it is always present in them. It is the 'obscure' principle, not openly or consciously 'articulated' that had given the left its unity and force as a common movement but had been lost as a feature of common action for change in a welter of parties and 'scattered intentions'. Articulating such a principle, in giving a definition and a content to 'fraternity' such that it would contain within it a genuine basis for common action, would be also to reanimate the left and progress towards 'complete humanity'. It would also provide a means of moving from what Levy calls the 'hot' and the

³² *ibid.* p.81

³³ *ibid.* p.81

³⁴ *ibid.* p.82

'cold' sectors of society.³⁵ This is essentially raising again the problem of violence with the 'hot' being the urgency for progressive change and the 'cold' being those elements and forces that remain indifferent or resistant to it. The problem is both how to transfer the heat from one sector to another - how to spread and actualise wider change - and how to maintain the heat in the progressive sector sufficiently to sustain the movement for change. Both of these problems might well be solved by violence with some of the obviously deleterious and distorting consequences to which history attests. It is not that Sartre himself adopts this idiom of hot and cold and Levy, as a kind of repentant radical, has his own agenda here; but in the context in which Sartre is making his replies it is clear that the general problem was one of the central issues that continued to bother him until the end. Obviously if a wider, more inclusive, more flexible basis upon which to effect change could be found; if fraternity could be given real life as an idea and if it could animate and unify social and political movements that could then spread into society as a whole, all the while remaining radical or 'hot' in some sense, then this would indeed be something significant.

So fraternity needs some articulation and it needs a connection with wider political action and movement. In the dialogue this is advanced by a discussion of democracy. As Sartre says we need to 'take it as a whole and see what the relationship is between democracy and fraternity'. In the spirit of the preceding discussion this is not a specific historical form of democracy, either direct or indirect, but one that is animated by the 'primary principle' of fraternity. This then is a wider conception that is not merely a legitimising mechanism that delegates power but 'a life, a way of life.'³⁶ It is clear that Sartre differs from Levy here and the political and conceptual gap between them is at its most acute. Sartre begins by pointing out the fact that politically democracy is no longer what it was originally intended to be - government *by* the people. This is because 'the people' no longer refers to a common body in modern democracies. Such a term can no longer describe our existence in industrial society where we are 'entirely individuated by the division of labour.'³⁷ Without a common basis we relate to one another through a series of mediations that keep us atomised and isolated. Modern democracy reflects the fragmentation of modern life where voting has 'no connection with one's work or

³⁵ *ibid.* p.80

³⁶ *ibid.* p.83

³⁷ *ibid.* p.83

with the totality of one's personal concerns.³⁸ What is missing, he seems to feel, is a connection between the political act and the whole of our lives as members of society. In this sense the vote at certain times in the past has been an expression of the totality of our existence. Levy then picks this up in an interesting way. In terms of his idiom of hot and cold, he wonders whether universal suffrage is one means of going from 'the hot to the cold sector.' It has, Levy says, 'at least one merit - it points to a numerical unity, a complete series: it doesn't conjure away the category of "everyone".' He challenges Sartre with the idea that the struggle for suffrage is exactly an example of the sort of 'good' radicalism that they have been discussing and that modern democracy is, in effect, the best means of giving 'more effective meaning to the notion of "everyone".'³⁹ Sartre responds by pointing out that such a series is precisely that - simply 'everyone' voting. What we have to ask is what kinds of deeper relationships would give the vote meaning. People, he says, 'have an original relationship among themselves that exists prior to the vote.' Their vote expresses a situated network, a 'milieu' within which they exist 'along-side others.'⁴⁰

This is one of the most significant sections of the dialogue and touches on a central theme that runs through Sartre's political and ethical thinking as it develops through the 1940s into the 1960s. At its core is, as Sartre says in the text, the 'primary relationship of individual to individual.'⁴¹ The focus of Sartre's criticisms in *Search for a Method* on the kind of 'lazy Marxism' that subsumes the individual within the social 'totality' and reifies that 'totality' as an inert, objectively analysable structure to which all action must conform is echoed here. Sartre denies that the 'relationship of production is the primary one'. Instead, Sartre is interested in a more fundamental praxis based in shared humanity rather than socio-economic relations as such. Indeed, he says significantly that a purely political understanding of society - one that interprets society in terms of the institutional relationships between 'collectives' defined purely by socio-economic interests - is a kind of dead end. We need to understand society as being 'the result of a bond among people that is more basic than politics.'⁴² The problem, of course, is to specify what this 'relation' is and how it can in some way be the basis for an ethical transformation

³⁸ *ibid.* p.84

³⁹ *ibid.* p.85

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p.85

⁴¹ *ibid.* p.86

⁴² *ibid.* p.86

of political and social structures. This problem is particularly acute given that any 'fraternal' praxis will itself be actualised within and mediated by the existing political and social structures. This, one might argue, is the central problem of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Commenting retrospectively on that text here, Sartre says, that he went 'looking for' fraternity and struggled to find it.⁴³

Certainly Levy challenges Sartre to explain what he means by 'fraternity' in exactly these terms by asking, 'how to practice fraternity?'⁴⁴ The danger is that 'fraternity' - in so far as it is anything more than a banal biological concept - becomes little more than a 'myth' of common origins. Sartre's response is that, whilst myths can portray and to some extent articulate 'fraternity', the basic relation precedes the 'invention' of the myth. It is the myth that explains what people feel as a prior commonality. It appears to be important to Sartre that this relationship is inherently pre-political -or perhaps *trans-political* - and derives instead from the basic ontological and existential structure of a human being. He rejects an abstract notion of 'equality' as its basis and locates fraternity in the commonality of the 'affective' and the 'practical'.⁴⁵ What Sartre seems to mean by this is that we are all mutually comprehensible in some fundamental sense because of our shared condition. This, of course, is a central feature of his thought but here it means that there is the potential to rediscover a kind of original commonality of needs and ends. This is a matter of experiencing our 'common humanity' as being part of a common project to realise Humanity. As Sartre puts it, 'They have a common origin and, in the future, a common end...that's what constitutes their fraternity.'⁴⁶ In this respect the achievement of 'Humanity' will require some kind of common praxis based on a common goal. The problem, as always, is that the realisation of 'humanity' requires the kind of fraternal praxis that already presupposes a common humanity for its sustained efficacy. This is an aspect of the 'paradox of ethics' that appears in Sartre's work time and time again, as we will see. Here in this text Sartre looks forward to the eventual achievement of 'humanity' and 'true fraternity' and tells us that we might, at least, hope for this because 'there is an ethics'⁴⁷ In other words, 'ethics' is the paradoxical praxis of attempting to humanely realise Humanity on the basis of conditions that are 'subhuman'. There is a strong sense

⁴³ *ibid.* p.86

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.88

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.89

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.90

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.90

here of the paradoxical 'necessity/impossibility of Ethics that appears in the *Cahiers* of the 1940s. As Sartre puts it in *Hope Now*, 'Ethics is indispensable, for it signifies that men or submen have a future based on principles of common action, while a future of materiality - i.e on the basis of scarcity - is simultaneously being sketched around them.'⁴⁸ 'Scarcity' is a central concept from the *Critique* and it has a number of facets. In one respect, as Sartre indicates here, it is a necessary feature of our materiality. We have a basic relationship with nature as material to be consumed. In this way there is what we might call an 'objective scarcity' which is a function of our overall productive capacities. But production in any kind of complex society takes place within a socio-political system which in turn produces what we can call 'relative scarcities' which is a function of the distribution and allocation of resources and can establish, define and reflect class interests. This sense of scarcity is also a key part of the discussion in the *Critique* and it is clear that scarcity can both unite- 'We must unite against them to save ourselves' - or it can divide - 'I must compete with you for survival'. Then we have scarcity in its most fundamental but also its most empty sense - it is simply a constitutive feature of having any desires at all or of any kind of affective/practical relation to the world. In *Hope Now*, it is clear that Sartre is thinking of the central tension between 'the effort...to create Humanity', and 'the struggle against scarcity.' As he says, 'both are human but seem not to be compatible.'⁴⁹ In this context Sartre raises the ethical paradox yet again by saying that, 'we must try to live' the ethical end of 'creating' Humanity in the future alongside the practical need to overcome scarcity given our current condition now. The ethical problem is how to achieve this *simultaneously*. This is the basic task of achieving 'Integral Humanity' from the condition of 'subhumanity'. Moreover, this is always a task undertaken in a social and political context and a practical field where our ethical praxis and absolute ends are distorted and diverted by 'counter-finalities' and the 'practico-inert'.

Scarcity, of course, also provides the basis and inspiration for violence. Ultimately, violence becomes the response to the scarcities that render our humanity or our very lives impossible. Such violence appears in a variety of contexts in Sartre's work but here we need to focus on the way in which violence illustrates an aspect of the 'ethical paradox' that Sartre faces. This is best seen through a notion of 'redemptive' or 'creative' violence. If the ethical goal is the realisation of some

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.91

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.91

kind of 'common' or 'integral' humanity and this common humanity is in some way primary and 'outside of history' as Sartre has claimed, it is difficult to see how violence as a 'local', historically conditioned response can reach it. We can see here something of the problem Sartre will face in the *Critique* of thinking through how a united praxis that is genuinely transformative can be sustained in the context of all the features of the practical field that divide and oppose us to each other: scarcity, oppression, alterity, seriality and the practico-inert. In *Hope Now*, Levy challenges Sartre by referring to Sartre's previous endorsement of certain kinds of violence, particularly in the colonial context. 'Can violence really have the redemptive role, the constituent function, you attributed to it at that time?'⁵⁰

Given our discussion so far, Sartre's response is illuminating. In circumstances where there is an entrenched social and political structure that supports and perpetuates oppression, Sartre claims that violence is unavoidable. Sartre addresses the necessity of violence in a number of ways within his work. Here the emphasis is on the way in which structures of oppression consolidate 'absolutely opposed points of view' in the form of 'interests' which have already passed into the 'practico-inert'. This is simply another way of saying that a structure like colonialism already conditions the relations within it. Within a colonial system we are either 'colonisers' or 'colonised'. The fact that the oppression of colonialism could not be overturned by some 'ideal' act of will or moral conversion is a feature of his writings on the Algerian situation in the 1950s. Sartre had also raised rather wistfully in the *Cahiers* and elsewhere the possibility of an ethics of spontaneous conversion where we all become 'ethical at once'. This is a feature of the 'idealism' in his ethical writings of second half of the 1940s that he dismissed as his thinking progressed yet it never entirely disappears. In *Hope Now*, he claims that the violence of the colonial struggle is not something that, in itself, realises some further, transcendent ethical end. 'Violence', he says, 'is not going to speed up the pace of history and draw humanity together.'⁵¹ But it is also clear that, if the structure of oppression constitutes the practical field and - in the absence of some miraculous ethical conversion - if the oppressive structure is held in place by 'interests' that are themselves partly 'practico-inert', then violence will be necessary to dismantle

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.92

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.92

'a certain state of enslavement that was making it impossible for people to become human beings.'⁵²

This may well seem like a pretentious way of saying simply that if you oppress people sufficiently they will fight back! But violence in Sartre's thinking is, as we have seen, a product of scarcity and of antagonistic interests. It is also a product of the way in which group unities can be constituted under the threat of some danger external to the group. Obviously, this is a core feature of Sartre's analysis in the *Critique*. In the context of *Hope Now* it is worth considering the way in which Sartre characterises violence and the kind of common praxis that underlies it as something that clears a space for the possibility of truly ethical ends. However uncomfortable we might feel discussing violence of this kind in an ethical context, it is important to recognise Sartre's intellectual honesty in attempting to address what seems to be a sadly evident feature of human relations under conditions of scarcity and imbalances of power. The problem, as always, is to try to understand how we can reach ethical ends from concrete conditions of violence in all its forms. In *Hope Now*, it is not the violence that realises the ethical end. Instead, it leaves all the ethical work still to do but it breaks down the closed cycle of violence and counter-violence that makes ethics in its fundamental, absolute sense impossible. This clearly has the air of a paradox: How can violence overcome the cycle of violence?

From what Sartre has to say in *Hope Now*, it appears that he remained unsure about how violence as such relates to any kind of common praxis that is capable of positing an absolute ethical end. In other words how violence can actively promote fraternity. As he says, 'I still don't see the real relationship between violence and fraternity.'⁵³ For our purposes here all we need to note is that an essential feature of any group that shares a common internal relation - in other words any group that is not simply ordered by each individual's relation to a common external structure, what Sartre calls a 'serial' collective in the *Critique* - will be the incentive to unite together against a common threat, either real or imagined/manufactured. In this way some of Sartre's writings suggest that commonality and ultimately 'fraternity' comes about in and through violence in response to the threats inherent in 'scarcity'. As Levy puts it to Sartre, 'Does the experience of fraternity

⁵² *ibid.* p.92

⁵³ *ibid.* p.93

appear through the activity of killing one's enemy?'⁵⁴ This would also have a paradoxical air - we begin to realise our humanity when we are at our most inhuman and desperate. Not only this, but unity would also depend on a wider separation and division. We only unite against others external to our unity who threaten us. In *Hope Now* Sartre denies that he any longer believes that fraternity is the experience of common violence; but he is clearly aware that he now needs some explanation of how fraternity can be reached beyond and independently of violence and opposition.

One implicit issue is whether fraternity or what Sartre refers to in his thinking of the 1960s as 'integral humanity' is an original relation between us that has in some way been disrupted or broken. The other is the way in which fraternity as an ethical end supposes a universal scope that includes within it all beings capable of realising their 'humanity' or of being prevented from doing so. In other words, is fraternity rediscovered or created anew? We have already discussed above Sartre's claim that humanity has a 'common origin' and a 'common end'. At this point in his conversation with Levy, Sartre puts it like this, 'To have an ethics, you need to extend the idea of fraternity until it becomes the manifest, unique relationship among all human beings. At first it's a relationship within a group...'⁵⁵ He suggests that there is an original relation of kinship 'bound in some way to the idea of family.' This basic group relation is always defined in distinction to 'others' external to it. Violence, he says, is a response to others transgressing 'the frontier binding fraternity within itself.' Such violence, he now believes, is 'the very opposite of fraternity.'⁵⁶ Needless to say, this hardly clarifies things!

All these ambiguities feature in the section of *Hope Now* entitled 'Unity through Insurrection'. Here Levy takes the lead and Sartre confines himself to commenting on Levy's summary. Essentially, Levy sets out a theoretical summary of violence and fraternity. Levy puts this in the context of his claim that revolutionary or insurrectional praxis is only 'meaningful' if we 'do away with the concept of fraternity-terror.'⁵⁷ What this would boil down to is finding a way to sustain fraternal unity beyond the externally directed violence of the initial formation of the insurrectional group which is internalised within the group. In the *Critique*, Sartre had de-

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p.93

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p.93

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p.93

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p.96

veloped the concept of fraternity-terror in his analysis of the tendency of the insurrectional group to sustain its unity by internalising its violence against its own members. As Sartre discovered, it seems difficult, to say the least, to reach the kind of ethical fraternity that would represent the realisation of a common humanity in such a way. Under these conditions, the initial opening onto a new future closes back on itself and the possibility of attaining a universal transformation of our ethical condition disappears. Levy employs the rather heavy-handed metaphor of birth to illustrate this but his meaning is clear enough. 'Fraternity', he says, 'appears at the end of a long maturation, the birth of a relationship lived as human experience.' Continuing the metaphor he says, 'the use of certain forms of violence is akin to a cesarean section: we are dealing with the removal of an obstacle to birth.' To see continuing violence as necessary to the maintenance of unity would be, Levy concludes, to focus exclusively on 'the use of forceps.'⁵⁸

So far we have the notion of some process of development which might or might not lead to what Levy calls 'the unity of the human enterprise.' This he links to 'the ideal of a human totality' and the revolt or the insurrection becomes 'an appeal to an ethical order.'⁵⁹ The problem is that the moment of revolt which clears the way for this possibility tends to shift focus away from an open future based on an appeal to universal humanity to a concentration on the confrontation itself. Drawing on his experience as one of the leaders of the student insurrection of 1968, Levy then goes on to describe a transition from the moment of 'birth' where all men are potentially 'brothers' - for example, the soldier or the policeman is potentially just another 'brother' - to a moment in which the insurrectionary group defines itself precisely in and through its confrontation with the 'other'. Sartre's comment at this stage is that this transition is 'provoked' by the 'enemy' and the activity of this enemy obviously shapes the development and scope of the insurrectionary group. Levy's response is to suggest that this unity within confrontation may not be simply a contingent feature of how the insurrectionary situation happens to develop but an integral part of how these kinds of groups function. As he says, 'It is, in fact, the violence of the repression that gives the insurgents the necessary unity... Is it the adversary who confers unity, or have they undertaken a positive unification?'⁶⁰. As far as Levy is concerned, the positive and the negative facets of 'unity'

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p.96

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p.96

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p.97

cannot be disentangled and this leads inevitably to 'bad radicalisation' in the form discussed earlier in their conversation where unity is held together by confrontation and directed forms of violence. As Levy puts it, 'The positive enterprise toward unification is halted, and resorting to this form of negative unity, brought about by the former power, serves to camouflage the standstill.'⁶¹

We have dwelt on this section of the conversation at some length because, although it is Levy who is supplying the analysis of the insurrectionary group, the implications of his analysis have a clear resonance within the wider context of Sartre's work. What Levy refers to as the 'perversion' of revolutionary politics, is also, of course, a feature of Sartre's analysis of group structure in the *Critique* - the group 'in fusion'; the 'pledged', 'statutory' group; and the 'institution'. All we need to note here for our purposes is simply that Sartre is being confronted with the basic problem of how to articulate and implement an ethical end that aims at the 'totality of humanity' from within situations and structures that constantly tend to reduce some momentary experience of 'positive unity' into 'negative unity' defined by conflicts of interest and incipient or actual violence and institutionalisation. Levy's analysis draws on this as he runs through 'the process of insurrection.' There is the moment of 'uprising' itself where it seems 'everything is possible', then the moment of 'rupture' where people 'become brothers against the other'⁶². At this point revolutionary politics can be institutionalised in the form of some 'ironclad' negative unity which Levy here exemplifies with 'Leninism'. Sartre indicates his agreement with this 'account of the three phases in which violence appears' but defers his reservations to a further work on ethics that he was planning with Levy.⁶³ This, of course, was never realised.

All this is hardly a resounding and detailed basis for hope. On the face of it, at least, it seems that we are separated from the realisation of 'complete humanity' by the inevitable 'perversion of revolutionary politics'. It may well be the case that the 'uprising' is, as Levy puts it, 'one moment in the long enterprise of human unification, only one facet of the fraternal experience.'⁶⁴ But without a concrete understanding of either the goal or the means by which to achieve it, it seems difficult to undertake the enterprise at all.

⁶¹ *ibid.* p.98

⁶² *ibid.* pp.97/98

⁶³ *ibid.* p.99

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p.99

This brings us to the closing and most controversial section of *Hope Now*. Levy, the former radical and student leader of '68 who has now reasserted his Jewish identity, steers Sartre towards a discussion of Judaism and Jewish cultural and religious identity. Obviously, Levy has his own agenda here and he asks Sartre a range of challenging questions related to his earlier writings on Judaism and Jews. However, our concern is not directly with this aspect of the conversation but rather with the bearing of what Sartre has to say on the issue of 'hope' and the ethical context within which it might be realised. In this respect we need to focus on the notion of 'messianism' which emerges from the conversation. The interest lies in part in the way Sartre responds to Levy's suggestion that 'the Jew is doubly concerned by our problem.'⁶⁵ By this Levy means the ethical ambiguity at the heart of revolutionary activity. In other words the relationship between that moment of openness and universal brotherhood and that moment of 'sacred violence' that negatively defines the group against the 'other'. The messianic element is the possibility of redemptive transformation in an open or 'pure' future. In this sense, of course, it obviously has an affinity with revolutionary action. Equally obviously the 'perversions of this idea' are the ways in which such ideals of universal humanity can degenerate into division, discrimination and violence.⁶⁶

In response to Levy's challenge that Sartre's previous views amounted to a denial of any intrinsic Jewish identity, Sartre replies, 'I now think there is a Jewish reality beyond the ravages that anti-semitism has inflicted on Jews...' In this context, the way that Sartre begins to divert Levy's intentions in the service of his own is interesting. 'The Jew believes he has a destiny,' Sartre says.⁶⁷ Again, the notion of 'destiny' appears in a variety of guises in Sartre's work. In the context of the *Critique*, 'destiny' can be written into the practico-inert structures in the sense that certain outcomes for individuals are already rendered inherently more probable or even necessitated by the way in which our past activity or praxis has structured the practical field. This is the sense in which it is the 'destiny' of the poor to die younger or for some member of a minority to face discrimination and disadvantage. It is also a feature of the practico-inert that the 'destiny' it contains need not be the result of any direct intention although it is still due to our activity. So in this sense, it may well be the destiny of all of us to face environmental catastrophe al-

⁶⁵ *ibid.* p.99

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p.100

⁶⁷ *ibid.* p.101

though, one hopes, very few of us have made such a future the deliberate object of our activity. Here, in this section of *Hope Now*, Sartre is working with a notion of 'destiny' that emphasises the seminal, intentional, creative and imaginative sense of positing a certain kind of ultimate end to our activity. Such an end is constitutive and underlies our praxis a little like the 'original project' of Sartre's earlier work. Moreover, the act of positing such a destiny is an inherently ethical one and, as such, 'metaphysical' in the sense that it is not simply the product of a practical response to the material conditions of any particular condition.⁶⁸ The interest of this passage in the discussion lies in the way in which Sartre attempts to bring out this notion of the 'ethical' and the 'metaphysical' in his discussion of Jewish identity and 'messianism'. For example, part of what Sartre is saying is that his previous characterisation of Jewish identity saw things negatively in that the Jew 'is constantly being dragged down on all sides by anti-Semitic ideas, which are trying to devour him, to take over his thinking and capture him at the core of his being...I confined the existence of the Jew to that...'⁶⁹ What Sartre is now concerned with is a more positive sense of how individual and group identities can be constituted. In this respect, although Levy is clearly interested in discussing Jewish identity as such, Sartre has in mind the implications for humanity as a whole; the Jewish community is an example of a wider and deeper point.

A fundamental aspect of Sartre's point emerges from the way in which he indulges in a certain kind of self-criticism. This is worth quoting directly. Referring to his earlier work he says, 'There was a consciousness of self that I stripped of all individual characteristics that might have come from within and that I then made it rediscover from the outside. Once the Jew was deprived of metaphysical and subjective characteristics, he could not exist as such in my philosophy. Today I see men differently.'⁷⁰ Of course, the allusion here is to all the various ways in which Sartre had seen the being of the individual as constantly threatened by other subjectivities or as becoming the object of the praxis of 'the other'. So the 'look' of another individual can fix us in our being as can the hostile activity of 'the enemy' or the past praxis of 'the others' which becomes embodied in the practico-inert can condition us. It was in this sense that Sartre had seemed to claim that the Jew was, in Levy's provocative formulation, 'an invention of anti-Semites.' In any case,

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p.101

⁶⁹ *ibid.* pp.101/102

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p.102

the deeper issue is, as we have said, not Jewishness in itself but how far a certain kind of common identity can be constituted and sustained in a way that depends on a common ethical end and not on a relation or reaction to the external 'other' in whatever form. We can start to see then that Sartre is using the discussion of Jewishness as way of articulating his understanding of the deeper ethical problem that has run through the interview as a whole. This also allows us to better understand the otherwise puzzling nature of this section of the discussion.

From what Sartre says it is clear that what interests him is the 'metaphysical link of the Jew with the infinite.'⁷¹ What then follows is a fascinating exchange where Sartre is at his most animated and resolutely resists Levy's attempts to steer him in the desired direction. Sartre says that it is not the religious aspect of Judaism as such that he is concerned with but rather the way in which the metaphysical character of the relationship with God implies an absolutely transcendent end; a 'destiny'. In Sartre's words this means that there is the belief that, 'this world will end and, at the same moment, another world will appear - another world that will be made of this one but in which things will be differently arranged.'⁷² Such a new world will redeem all the dead of the past in a rebirth into a new world. This is the metaphysical end that reunites and defines. Such an end, Sartre goes on to say, 'is at bottom social as well as religious...' At this point Sartre is interrupted by Levy with a clear invitation to relate his interest in Messianism to his previous espousal of Marxism as the only philosophical paradigm within which to understand social transformation. Sartre's response is, again, worth quoting. He is interested in it 'precisely because it contains no Marxist element...it is not an end that is defined in terms of the present situation and then projected into the future, one that will be attained by stages through the development of certain facts today.' Sartre goes on to explain that what appeals to him is the aspect of absolute transcendence or rupture with how things are in favour of a new beginning: 'the appearance of the ethical existence of men who live for one another.'⁷³ In this way, Sartre claims, the 'search for an ethics' is exactly the search for a particular kind of metaphysical end. As Sartre puts it here, it is the metaphysical structure of a Messianic belief in the possibility of a total, redemptive transformation of our ethical condition that attracts him. 'Non-Jews', he says, 'are searching for an ethics too,'

⁷¹ *ibid.* p.104

⁷² *ibid.* p.105

⁷³ *ibid.* p.106

and this search is a quest for ‘the ultimate end, the moment when ethics will be simply and truly the way in which human beings live in relation to each other.’⁷⁴ Again, as we will see, the relationship between our particular situation and an ‘ultimate end’ is a constant theme of his attempts to think through the ethical problem in the most fundamental way. The basic issue is easy enough to articulate and we have already had occasion to raise it. It is simply how to move from a practical field that is characterised by divisions of ‘interests’, negative definitions of identity and group membership, imbalances of power within the social structure, scarcities of material and other goods and so on, to one in which ‘ethics’ is simply the totality of our ‘relation to each other’. In this way we could think of it as being a matter of two different levels of ‘transcendence’ of our situation. Obviously, we might then have different kinds of ends or might, in Sartre’s idiom, seek to ‘surpass’ our situation in different ways and common dangers and common needs can unite us under a common end. For example, we may well join together to fight this particular injustice or unite in response to some intolerable oppression which makes our life impossible. At one level there is *this* obstacle to be overcome and *this* fight to be won. So we act together in common against the ‘enemy’. If we can sustain our unity and deploy the right kind and level of force we might even win. But what have we won? At the particular level, we have merely won the possibility of taking on the next struggle or dealing with another enemy. Of course, it is not that Sartre wants to say that whatever specific end we might have at this level is in some way wrong. So it was right to fight against colonialism in Algeria or it may be right to take direct action against climate change or whatever; but these kinds of more limited ends cannot be the ‘ultimate’ ethical end. This ultimate end is the transformation of human relations such that the totality of human relations *is ethics*. An implication of this is that at the level of the particular struggle there is a kind of ‘sub-ethics’ where our limited ends might well have an ethical dimension but these ends are formed and realised within a situation that is in itself not ethical in the sense that the totality of human relations have not yet been transformed.

There are a range of further implications of this that we will need to explore as we track the theme back into Sartre’s major works but here we can simply examine the way Sartre develops his final thoughts in this closing section of the interview. As far as Sartre is concerned, the advantage of messianism is that it might

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p.106

allow us to rethink the relationship between revolutionary activity and an ultimate ethical end. This has to do with how revolutionaries might conceive of their more ultimate goals. On the plausible assumption that revolutionary activity is driven by some values relating to human well-being, then 'revolution' will involve 'doing away with the present society and replacing it by a juster society in which human beings can have good relations with each other.' Sartre points out that 'a society of this kind is not a *de facto* society; it is, you might say a *de jure* society. That is, a society in which the relations among human beings are ethical.'⁷⁵ It is not the case, in other words, that the ultimate ethical end can be realised simply by dealing with and overcoming one obstacle after another and certainly not by supposing that it is in some way inherent in the objective structure of society or history or whatever other force might be adduced. Rather, the ethical end is a metaphysical commitment to developing a totality of relationships within which we can realise our full humanity. Such a goal envelops and conditions what we actually do in specific conditions but is not itself an immediate surpassing or response to this obstacle or that danger. As Sartre puts things here, '...it's through a kind of messianism that one can conceive of this ethics as the ultimate goal of revolution. There will be immense economic problems, of course, but...they are not the essential problems. Their solution is, in some cases, a means of securing a true relationship among men.'⁷⁶

The interview closes with Sartre directly discussing both hope and despair. He says he has been 'tempted by despair' twice in his life. Once during World War II where he found himself 'confronting a world of suffering, evil and despair.' His recourse was to ally himself 'with friends who were not despairing, who believed you could fight for a happy future although there was no possibility whatever that this future might come into being. One had to resist, no question about it, but the true fortunes of war were out of our hands...'⁷⁷ Despair tempts him, too, in 1980 as he considers the contemporary political scene characterised by 'the triumph of rightist ideas', the possibility of a third world war, division between rich and poor and 'the wretched mess our planet has become.'⁷⁸ His final, poignant words are worth quoting in full. 'Despair,' he says, 'has come back to tempt me with the idea

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p.107

⁷⁶ *ibid.* pp. 107/108

⁷⁷ *ibid.* p.108

⁷⁸ *ibid.* p.109

that there is no end to it all, that there is no goal, that there are only small, individual objectives that we fight for. We make small revolutions, but there's no human end, there's nothing of concern to human beings, there's only disorder.⁷⁹ Referring to his death which he imagines approaching in five or ten years, he goes on, 'the world seems ugly, evil and hopeless. such is the calm despair of an old man who will die in that despair. But the point is, I'm resisting, and I know I shall die in hope. But this hope must be grounded.'⁸⁰ Sartre was hospitalised and died just a few months later.

So, at this point, it might be worth noting the sheer range of themes that *Hope Now* raises. The contention being advanced here is that, within the confines of the interview and the limitations of his state of health, Sartre is genuinely attempting to continue his ethical thinking. What he has to say, far from being some radical and aberrant reversal of his previous intellectual trajectory by an enfeebled and confused old man, can instead fruitfully be seen as a critical summary of his 'search for an ethics'. Even though the contemporary world may be 'horrible', as he tells us, this situation is only 'one moment in a long historical development'.⁸¹ In this way 'hope' is the culmination of his thinking and to understand what it might mean and how it might be grounded we need to track back into the development of Sartre's thought and follow the evolution of the central ethical themes contained in his last thoughts.

How, then, should we summarise what *Hope Now* gives us to work with? There is the notion of the 'goal' or the 'project' and how far we could ever adopt some absolutely transcendent end of 'total' or 'integral humanity' as a single, all-encompassing ethical end. There is clearly the continuing issue of 'failure' or the way in which our project can be diverted or the 'open future' it posits closed off. There are a variety of ways in which this can happen but the result is, in Sartre's pithy phrase, that the 'whole shitty mess' starts up again. But then why should 'hope' ever be our 'conception of the future'? Part of the issue here is how far we should see 'hope' simply as what McBride calls 'a mental attitude and not a philosophical position'.⁸² As far as McBride is concerned, what the philosophy can establish about our condition is one thing and how we feel about that another. On

⁷⁹ *ibid.* p.110

⁸⁰ *ibid.* p.110

⁸¹ *ibid.* p.110

⁸² W. L. McBride, *Sartre's Political Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1991) p. 205

this view, Sartre's philosophical arguments show that a transition to 'integral humanity' will be difficult to say the least and he faces a choice of 'hope' or 'despair'; he chooses hope after vacillating between the two. This is 'normal in a very thoughtful person.'⁸³ We might already want to take issue with this and grant 'hope' a more substantial and integral role in his philosophical thinking. For example, we might see hope not merely as an attitude but as a fundamental basis for action or even a *necessary* basis. This would be hope as a feature of *praxis*. It might be said that the tenor of Sartre's remarks in *Hope Now* support this more substantial view. The search for the place of ethics in consciousness takes us from the problem of the 'spirit of seriousness' into a re-examination of the context of the ethical choice. This is 'generosity' and the 'gift' and the experience of the other as the source of 'obligation'. As Flynn remarks, the experience of the other as a source of 'ethical requisition' has 'a distinctly Levinassian mark'.⁸⁴ In this way there is strong sense of a 'conversion' to 'fraternity' through a certain kind of recognition of the 'other'. Yet any such recognition and any such realisation of our humanity is never simply an 'ideal' moment outside of the temporal and material conditions of history. It must also be conditioned by them and attempt to condition them in turn. This is the basic tension in Sartre's search for an ethics between the 'ideal' and the 'real'. He might have dismissed his 'first' ethics as 'idealist' but the 'real' in the form of the materiality of history also appears in what he calls the 'curious dialectic of ethics and history'. It is to the *Cahiers* that we now turn to explore this further.

⁸³ *ibid.* p.205

⁸⁴T. R. Flynn, *Sartre, A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: CUP 2014) p. 379

Hope then...The Cahiers. 1947/48

The *Cahiers* is a frustrating text. It is thematically diverse, partial, transitional and unfinished. But, in part because of these features and because of its place within the overall context of Sartre's work, it is a rich and important one. Sartre may have dismissed his thinking in the *Cahiers* as 'idealist' - and what exactly he might have meant by this will be something we will need to consider as we proceed - but there is also a clear attempt to relate his ethical thinking to historical, social and collective structures and contexts. In this respect, there is much in the text that prefigures the dialectical analysis of the *Critique*. Furthermore, the text contains the fundamental basis of the 'ethical paradox' that Sartre grappled with intellectually and practically until the end of his life. In understanding his conception of this paradox we can also come to understand and appreciate the sense in which he ended his life in 'hope'. So despite its limitations and frustrations, the *Cahiers* repays close study.

It is instructive to note that the *Cahiers* opens with Sartre raising the basic distinction between a transcendent ethical end, hypostasised as the being and will of God, and a moral praxis rooted and focused on our existence in the world. On the one hand, in perfecting ourselves we 'serve', 'praise' and 'aid' the divine creation. We are 'egoists' concerned with our own perfection because this is also to reflect the perfection of the divine 'other' in us. As far as Sartre is concerned this is a 'subordination of doing to being.' We are Hegelian 'beautiful souls' whose ethical end is 'a certain mode of ontological being' - *being moral*. Such a morality has only itself as embodied in the individual as its end. It has no real connection with the world and with others. Such a morality is both an 'ontological individualism' and an alienation since our 'perfection' as individuals is always the perfection of the divine in us. Sartre contrasts this with a morality that 'transcends itself toward an end that is not itself.' Morality is a form of praxis and is characterised by its substantive ends. As he says, 'It must be a choice of a world, not of a self.'¹

This opening passage of the *Cahiers* presents in its most basic form the ethical problematic that Sartre sets out to address in this text and beyond. The ongoing tensions between these two fundamental forms of what it might be to have

¹ J. P. Sartre *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. D. Pellauer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992) p.3

ethical ends or a 'morality' necessarily involve a sustained investigation into the ontological basis of any genuine or substantive ethics. At this point Sartre puts the issue in terms of an idiom of 'inside and outside.'² This relation of interiority and exteriority appears in a variety of guises and increasing complexity as his investigations proceed. Here we have the basic notion of the tension in ethics between what we might call living the 'Good' as the posited end of activity and knowing the 'Good' as some kind of universal essence. As Sartre puts it in the notes included as an appendix in the *Cahiers*, 'The Good cannot be conceived apart from an acting subjectivity, and yet it is beyond this subjectivity. Subjective in that it must always emanate from a subjectivity and never impose itself on this subjectivity from the outside, it is objective in that it is, in its universal essence, strictly independent of this subjectivity.'³ The issue as always is how these two aspects can be reconciled. As Sartre says, 'One must be ethical from within one's desire not from outside. Yet on the other hand would there be any morality without the universal?'⁴ The Kantian flavour hardly needs emphasising here.

What is interesting about Sartre's thinking at this stage is that he is clearly desperately trying to work through all the implicit oppositions here. For example, any 'morality' worthy of the name must be more than subjective desires writ large. Yet, 'the one and only basis of moral life must be spontaneity, that is, the immediate, the unreflective.' In other words, any process of ethical reflection must begin with *this* life, *this* situation, *this* humanity. Yet, of course, ethical reflection must also withdraw in some way from *this* situation to evaluate it and to posit an ethical end that transcends it. Finally, ethical reflection must return back to *this* situation armed with some conception of how things ought to be - such a conception will have an *universal* character but will relate to and be applied in concrete circumstances. Working with this structure, which superficially seems simple enough, there are number of significant ideas that Sartre begins to develop. In fact, it might be said that it is the way in which Sartre works through the underlying complexities ontologically and phenomenologically that gives his ethics such honesty and depth. Here in the *Cahiers*, Sartre begins that process.

One implication is that, if ethics starts with and returns to the concrete situation then 'Ethics must be historical: that is, it must find the universal in History and

² *ibid.* p.4

³ *ibid.* p.556

⁴ *ibid.* p.5

must grasp it in History.’⁵Already we find ourselves in a more Hegelian idiom. The ethical end may be universal but ‘possible man comes from the concrete one. We are such that the possible becomes possible starting from us.’ Ethical thinking about ‘the deepest ends of existence’ must always return to ‘the finite and historical source of possibilities. To this society.’⁶ At this stage, Sartre appears genuinely unsure what to do with the implicit contrasts between these features of the ethical: The concrete and the universal; the actual and the possible; self and other; the spontaneity of freedom and the inertness of nature; the finite historical and the infinite transhistorical; the immediate and the mediated and so on. These are all ways of thinking about the fundamental ethical paradox in terms of interiority and exteriority. Sartre’s problem is that he is looking for some way of establishing a kind of dynamic dialogue between ‘the inside and the outside’ whilst still working initially with the largely static ontological structure of *Being and Nothingness*. This is clear in how he initially tries to think through the ethical in terms of the various levels of ‘reflection’ that form part of the structure of consciousness in his earlier ontology. Such a process of ‘reflection’ is always fraught with the dangers of ‘inauthenticity’ and ‘bad faith’ and the doomed project of the For-itself-in-itself. What all this amounts to is that our primary mode of being is to be ‘unreflectively’ engaged actively in the world. Yet because we lack an ‘essence’ there is a tendency, in what Sartre calls ‘accessory reflection’, to take ourselves as the object for consciousness. In this way we grant ourselves an ‘essence’ and reify a self/ego which we then can take as our *being*. Sartre sees this as a denial of our fundamental ontological freedom and therefore a denial of our concomitant responsibility for our being. As Sartre puts it in the *Cahiers*, ‘The origin of reflection is an effort by the For-itself to recuperate itself, in order to arrive at a For-Itself that would be Itself.’⁷ In theory at least, we can come to understand ourselves in a non-objectifying way such that we realise that no substantial self/ego exists and we are pure ‘spontaneity’ or active freedom in the world, responsible for and ‘condemned’ to make our *being*. Sartre terms this ‘pure’ or ‘non-accessory’ reflection. The problem, Sartre realises, is how to reach the ethical through reflection. One possibility is simply to *be good* as an act of will. I determine myself as good.

⁵ *ibid.* p.6

⁶ *ibid.* p.7

⁷ *ibid.* p.5

There are a number of potential problems with this. One is that if 'the one and only basis of moral life must be spontaneity, that is the immediate, the unreflective,' then my moral choice will always be a 'choice in immediacy' as Sartre puts it.⁸ In other words, how can we move from a 'choice of *self*' to a 'choice of *world*.'? Furthermore, a certain kind of determination of myself as ethical would be the Kantian one where I universalise my own self-determination. This would be a separation from 'spontaneity' and the concrete situation to create an abstract and formal universal ethical structure. Despite its universality, it is still a choice of self, not of world. Indeed the choice of oneself as universal subject in the Kantian sense is to choose myself as *the other* which, in Sartre's terms, is a kind of alienation and self-oppression. Additionally, there is always the danger that any ethical self-determination becomes simply an 'accessory reflection' and we take ourselves as the object of an act of will in such a way that we fall into bad faith and what Sartre terms, 'the spirit of seriousness'. Sartre is aware of these difficulties but is not sure of how to redefine the ethical problem in such a way that it can be further pursued. Part of the fascination of this opening section of the *Cahiers* is that we can see his mind at work as he tries to do this. He appreciates that he needs to work 'toward a *concrete* ethics (synthesis of the universal and the historical)'; but he is not sure of how to move from self to world. If 'ethics is an individual, subjective, and historical enterprise', it is also 'all the broader and all the more profound if it has to do with a larger group.'⁹ Indeed, if it is to be anything more than the story of an individual path to self perfection there will surely need to be a wider dimension of 'humanity' or 'society'. Already we have some tentative hints at what we might call the 'search for a dialectic.' Here this means understanding the 'universal' as historically situated in the 'concrete - that is, social - situation' and Sartre claims that 'Kantianism teaches nothing on this subject'.¹⁰ Then, there follows an interesting passage in which Sartre develops his theme. It gives a form of summary of the various elements of the ethical problematic that will engage him to the end and its inherent ambiguities and tensions. It is his plan for the work on ethics that the *Cahiers* never quite became and it shows a really honest and perceptive thinker 'on his way'.

⁸ *ibid.* p.5

⁹ *ibid.* p.7

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.7

Ironically this plan is prefaced by the remark, 'don't wait for an ethics filled with hope. Men are ignoble. We have to love them for what they might be, not for what they are. Sketch out a *tough* ethics.' Such an ethics will have to address the 'absurdity and necessity of an ethics'. We have already had occasion to advert to this paradoxical formulation and we will need to bear it in mind as we proceed and consider just what it might mean. Of course one way of approaching such a paradox is to emphasise the necessity of making *some* judgement and of realising *some* value in our action and the problem of securely grounding that value. Sartre points to 'an oscillation between an ethics of inwardness...and an ethics of the transcendent.' The former is value as taste and the latter value as objective knowledge. On the subjective side the intention is 'cut off from the act' and on the objective side the results are 'cut off from the intention.'¹¹ Whether this is the best way to characterise things is not the issue here rather the contrast between a subjective ethics as groundless and empty 'gratuitousness' and an objective ethics 'as oppression' is important to how he wants to discuss ethics in terms of freedom.¹² The point here is that in the subjective case all we have are whatever affective impulses occur to us at any given time. In the objective case, all the obligation and value comes from the exterior, from a source that is beyond our being and we must just come to 'know' and 'to know it is to do it'. There are clear implications here for relation between freedom and ethics and this will involve a focus on interiority and exteriority, self and other and self and world. It also, of course, reflects the two aspects of 'bad faith'. Either I am 'gratuitous' subjectivity or I am already transcended and objectified by a set of values that are not my own. This is a development of the 'spirit of seriousness' which sees objective values in this sense as 'posited by a consciousness that is not mine'. In this way 'my initial situation is to have a destiny/nature and exist in the face of objectified values.'¹³ So the problem of an 'authentic' ethics is exactly the problem of reconciling these two aspects, our pure freedom and our being-for-others. In other words how can my freedom become the source of an ethics that *freely* binds myself and others. It hardly needs to be stated that this is a form of Kantian rational autonomy. But, crucially, Sartre recognises the need to bring this rational, universal self-determination into the concrete situation of society and history - to 'dissociate the universal (understanding) from

¹¹ *ibid.* p.8

¹² *ibid.* p.8

¹³ *ibid.* pp.8/9

its infinite extension.’¹⁴ The ‘concrete universal’ is always a situated determination. The problem is that, as Sartre sees things at this point in his thinking, a key feature of our situation is exactly that we always find ourselves as ‘a transcended objectivity for another’.¹⁵ In other words, if we must reach the ethical universal from a concrete historical condition then we will always be trying to create an authentic ethics of freedom from an alienated condition of oppression. ‘Oppression’ is a key concept for Sartre but at this stage all it refers to is the potential for our subjectivity to be conditioned from the ‘exterior’ by ‘the other’. Interestingly Sartre refers to ‘the privileged position of the ethicist’. Such an individual, might occupy an ‘historical position’ which could give some critical distance on the framework of oppression. But such an individual would still be both ‘oppressor’ and ‘oppressed’ and thus able ‘to conceive of the necessity of an ethics without oppression, hence to conceive of conversion.’¹⁶ ‘Conversion’, therefore, is Sartre’s term for the shift in consciousness towards an ethics which would be neither empty subjectivity nor oppressive objectivity.

By this point we should already have a good sense of the terms in which Sartre is framing the problem. ‘One cannot be converted alone’, he writes, conversion ‘will imply not just an internal change in me but a real change in the other.’¹⁷ This reciprocal change is something that would have to happen within the historically conditioned social process. Without such an ‘historical change, there is no absolute moral conversion.’ We have, therefore, yet another version of the ethical paradox. ‘Conversion’ is not an act of will on the part of some pure subjectivity but instead involves a particular kind of consciousness of and communication with another or the ‘others’. Of course, Sartre wants to understand this relationship in terms of freedom but inevitably if, before ‘conversion’ at least, our freedoms are inherently in conflict then the kind of communication necessary to build an authentic ethics of freedom will be difficult to achieve. Nevertheless communication, he tells us, ‘does not exist - it must be brought about.’¹⁸ We might try, for example, to overcome the barriers to communication through ‘Love’ where, here at least, Sartre tells us, we feel our ‘own freedom with respect to every gesture of the other person as a beginning and as an absolute.’ But even if this is the case, this is only

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.7

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.8

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.9

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.9

¹⁸ *ibid.* p.9

a specific relation that takes place in the wider context of 'the presence of a third observer and under the sign of oppression.' In this way the absolute communication in love can be 'poisoned' from outside the immediate relation. Another possibility is, he notes, 'The Appeal'. In Sartre's terms this must mean something like the Hegelian demand for recognition but with a twist. Both I and the other are 'detotalised totalities'.¹⁹ There are a number of ways of understanding this Sartrean term. It's essential point is simply that in any inter-subjective, social field there will be an irreducible component of freedom. The way in which I, as an active being-in-the-world, constitute my world - this is what I'm doing, this is the way the world is, this is what it means, this is what you are etc. - can always be overturned or 'nihilated' by your freedom. The way I constitute my world is my 'totalisation' and that totalisation already includes you and your acts but any totalisation I make then becomes the basis for your further, free totalisation which in turn...and so on. In other words, our fundamental relation as mutual freedoms is such that our totalisations are constantly de-totalised and if we *are* the totality of our being-in-the-world, as seems plausible, then we are 'detotalised totalities'.

The notion of detotalized-totality is a key element of Sartre's thinking as he moves into an overtly dialectical approach and we will have occasion to discuss this further in that context. Here in the *Cahiers* he is still working his way out of the more limited and static ontology of *Being and Nothingness*. He is still not sure how to connect and reconcile individual 'freedoms'. Certainly, if almost by magic, our freedoms are mutually compatible in some pure 'Kingdom of Ends', then the exercise of my freedom is always the same as its full realisation. Moreover, in such a common Kingdom of Ends my freedom and yours are essentially the same - we both share in the universality of rational autonomy. Sartre puts this in terms of how 'my ideas and acts pass over into the objective.' In other words what I do ends up out there in the world and to that extent 'I am responsible for this.'²⁰ In a world of mutual recognition and respect for free beings as 'ends in themselves' ethics is possible because 'everyone is ethical.' In such a world the 'values reveal freedom at the same time as they surrender it.' In a situation of 'pure communication' like love 'any ordering of values has to lead to freedom' because all values are subsumed within the mutual recognition of each other's freedom.²¹ It is clear that, if

¹⁹ *ibid* pp.9/10

²⁰ *ibid.* p.10

²¹ *ibid.* p.9

we can genuinely experience each other as 'pure', free subjectivity in this way then 'objectivity disappears'.²² What Sartre means by this is that everything depends on how the action that embodies and realises our freedom is received by the other. As he puts it, 'if freedoms willing to be free recognise my act as issuing from my freedom and take it up in freedom, I will my act both with my freedom and theirs too.'²³ The objectivity disappears in the sense that my act and the freedom it embodies is no longer an object for another to be confronted and overcome in some way. It is not a command or a proscription or a definitive value that is separable from my free activity. The problem is that the nature of the intersubjective relation is such that my act can be 'taken up by consciousnesses that make it an object and make themselves objects in relation to it.' In this way our acts pass over 'into the objective' and our freedom escapes us and acquires what Sartre calls here a '*pseudo-causality*'.²⁴

This is just one example of the deeper and more complex issue of the ontological relation of one freedom to another and of our freedom itself. Sartre is surely right to see any genuine search for an ethics as being intimately bound to this basic ontological problem. So the issue becomes, 'how do I experience the other in relation to my own freedom?' If we are 'detotalized totalities' and ethics is a matter of the relation of one freedom to another and 'freedom' is the ultimate value then we can see another aspect of the ethical paradox that Sartre is grappling with. How can your freedom act as a 'requisition' on mine? This paradox is expressed in Sartre's phrase, 'To have the other in myself as another and yet as a free source of my acts.'²⁵ Part of the problem with any ethics of 'transcendence', in other words an ethics where the values are exterior to and 'surpass' our freedom, is that our freedom becomes 'inessential'. At best our freedom becomes the means to attain ends which are not our own. In this way, 'the other in me' can be a source of oppression and we are objectified. An alternative is an ethics of 'inwardness'.²⁶ This, Sartre thinks would be the ethics of 'tastes' and 'subjective dispositions' which, in so far as these 'dispositions' are 'natural', would 'transform us into ob-

²² *ibid.* p.10

²³ *ibid.* p.10

²⁴ *ibid.* p.10

²⁵ *ibid.* p.10

²⁶ *ibid.* p.12

jects ourselves.' Our natural dispositions 'are written in Nature just as the value-objects were in heaven.'²⁷

We might ask at this stage what 'conversion' is supposed to achieve. Conversion, Sartre tells us, leads to a recognition 'of the spirit as detotalized-totality.'²⁸ As we work through the levels of reflection on our own freedom from 'impure' to 'pure' reflection, we are forced to recognise our own contingency and responsibility. However, pure reflection 'is already too late' because 'another element interferes here, which is the Other.' The Other has the capacity to objectify my freedom and in this way to negate it. The only way out of this is to appeal to the other as 'a pure, free subjectivity.' But for this appeal to succeed the other must reciprocate, but this reciprocation is not something that I can compel 'and can only be the result of *chance*. For his bad will is fate for me and his good will chance.'²⁹ Conversion is then the result of following through the process of reflection on our ontological condition. In the attempt discover myself as free subjectivity, I also discover myself as 'detotalized-totality', in other words I discover myself as object for the other. In this way, 'Pure reflection is good faith and as such an appeal to the good faith of the other person.'³⁰ As we have seen, 'one cannot be converted alone'.

From what has already been said it should be apparent that the *Cahiers* open with some rich reflections on the problem of ethics that defy a glib summary. But the core theme is surely the paradox of 'absurdity and necessity'. If ethics must 'lead to freedom' then the ethical imperative binds us as contingent freedoms. Yet freedom can always overturn any particular ethical determination. Ethics operates in an atmosphere of 'failure' and 'mystery'. 'Mystery' because 'absolute knowledge is impossible', as our actions pass over into the objective our activity in changing the world comes back to us as a 'discovery'. 'Failure' because either there is an empty, abstract determination of pure subjectivity or we are already objectified by the values of the other. Ethics is always too 'early' or too 'late'.³¹ In this way Sartre sets out the problem of developing an ethics of authentic freedom in which there would be the right kind of relationship between 'interiority' and 'exteriority'. In other words, between the two aspects of our being-in-the-world ; the spontaneity of free consciousness and the inertia of the world. An authentic ethics

²⁷ *ibid.* pp.12/13

²⁸ *ibid.* p.10

²⁹ *ibid.* p.11

³⁰ *ibid.* p.12

³¹ *ibid.* p.12

of 'conversion' would be able to reconcile self and Other in a way that preserves freedom.

What interests Sartre is the notion of ethics as the 'idea' of humanity. The dangers of 'bad faith' and objectification here are obvious. As Sartre puts it here, 'I look at people passing by: I say, "human beings." All at once I am a human being. But I have objectified my subjectivity, at the same time I have projected all my subjectivity upon them.'³² The problem is that any ethics worthy of the name must in some way be 'idea'. In Sartre's phrase, it is 'objectified subjective'. It is that idea of ourselves that we interiorise as a demand that comes from the other. 'To place it within ourselves, to take it up again, is to place the objective within ourselves, to objectify ourselves within the heart of our creative subjectivity.'³³ The ethical idea is then also an 'historical movement' since our 'creative subjectivity' then re-exteriorises the idea through action. There can then be a 'peculiar action of the objectified-subjective'. In other words, the idea can then be taken up again as an object and act as a cause that determines our subjectivity from outside even though our subjectivity is at the heart of the idea. The idea oscillates between interiority and exteriority. I might first encounter it 'as an object' but as I take it up it 'becomes once again a subjective project; my free project.' But then 'the idea closes in on me. It is objectified for others, it is an aspect of the in-itself.'³⁴ The idea can thus define me and, to the extent that the idea can be 'thought and lived by others', a shared idea can unify us. However, it is a problematic unity in that the fact that we all think the same idea as a 'plurality' introduces 'external sides' within the unity. Furthermore, the idea can also become an object in that it exists for others who 'observe it from outside', who 'refuse to make the effort to enter into it.'³⁵ The danger is that my free project falls into bad faith as I assume the idea as a 'shell of exteriority'; the idea becomes 'my *character*, my nature' and my free project is alienated. The key issue is how far there can be a genuine 'communication of subjectivities in the idea.' The problem thus applies to the 'idea of *man*'. If the idea of man is an 'ethical idea that one makes of oneself what man has to be' we fall into the same trap whereby the idea becomes 'character'. But the idea of humanity cannot be an object in this sense because it is 'a deep-lying basis of absolute subjectivity

³² *ibid.* p.15

³³ *ibid.* p.13

³⁴ *ibid.* p.14

³⁵ *ibid.* p.14

upon which our knowledge is determined.’³⁶ The consequence of this is that we need to think in terms not of a ‘pseudo-objectivity’ of humanity but a veritable collective subjectivity’. If we are detotalized-totalities, then we are ‘one’ in the sense that we all are subjectivities but not ‘unifiable’ in the sense that there can be no definitive exterior determination of that subjectivity. As Sartre puts it here, ‘Man is the fundamentally unjustifiable basis of all justification.’³⁷ Yet, we must act. ‘There is no abstract ethics. There is only an ethics in a situation and therefore it is concrete.’³⁸

With this Sartre makes the leap into ‘The Ambivalence of History and the Ambiguity of the Historical Fact’.³⁹ Sartre’s treatment of history in the *Cahiers* is remarkably illuminating, which isn’t to say that it is completely systematic and clear. However, it is precisely the transitional and exploratory nature of his discussion that gives it its significance in the wider context of his work. The core theme remains the ambiguities of freedom/necessity, interiority/exteriority and detotalized-totality. The ‘idea’ of History also has the ‘peculiar action of the objectified-subjective’. Were History to be the product of an absolute subject - Hegelian ‘Spirit’ - then History would have a single meaning and direction. As the product of multiple freedoms each surpassing their situation History is itself a detotalized-totality. To the extent that any ‘agent thinks about History... [their] representation of History (ideology) becomes a historical factor.’ As soon as our attempt to unify our situation in terms of History - this is who we are and this is where we have come from and where we are going - is taken up by others, the totalisation of History as idea ‘passes over to the objective’ to be yet again re-totalized and so on. In this way Sartre can broach different ways in which we can attempt to understand the nature of the unity of ‘Spirit’ that would constitute History. Certainly, if we ‘start from the absolute spirit containing within itself a diversity of facts’, then History is a matter of the ‘interiority’ of a ‘deciding spirit’ that ‘is entirely itself’ and there can therefore be direction and progress as the ordered unity of that absolute subject.⁴⁰ Yet even for an ‘absolute spirit’ there is ‘scission’ both from within and without. The interior unity of judgement is also ‘part of the totality as one active element within it’, in other words, one moment of the absolute subject can judge another ‘historically’.

³⁶ *ibid.* pp.14/15

³⁷ *ibid.* p.15

³⁸ *ibid.* p.17

³⁹ *ibid.* p.20

⁴⁰ *ibid.* pp.22/23

Equally, any judgement that can be made on the 'closed totality' of the absolute subject '*at the end of history*', is necessarily an external judgement on that totality and its 'lived history' is 'transformed into a history-object' by 'another History from whose point of view one judges this Spirit.' In this way, 'whether from the inside or outside, in lived History judgement is historical.'⁴¹

In essence the problem is the relationship between unity and freedom. If there is to be a 'history' there must be a certain kind of unity and the issue is how we can pass over to the universal. It seems as if the unity must either come from the interior unity of some kind of universal subject or the exterior unity supplied by some kind of 'objective law' derived from the 'repetitions' of activities where the 'identity of circumstances leads to almost the same reactions.'⁴² Neither of these extremes properly captures 'the reality of inter-subjective temporality.'⁴³ This is so because 'historical action is efficacious only if the idea becomes a thing.'⁴⁴ Each attempt at giving a unity to History in turn becomes an object for another. Yet this attempt to freely 'make history' relies on others to 'provide its value'. The fact that 'every human being...can take up a separatist view of history and talk about universal History' means that 'at the heart of History, each historical being is at the same time an ahistorical absolute.'⁴⁵ But, in so far as we are all part of a detotalized-totally, then we are all 'absolute' within History itself. This means, as Sartre puts it, that 'the existence-in-relationship of each person makes this absolute relative from a certain point of view.' So freedom is irreducible at the heart of History but there is never an identity between individual consciousness and History itself. History is always also the activity of 'the other'. Not only can another free subjectivity take up my totalisation as their own and in their own way but there is also the operation of 'chance' in the form of the 'historical threshold' that allows one action to affect another and the 'physical aspect' of history.⁴⁶

There is always the possibility therefore that there is no History in the sense of a single, unified direction and meaning that results in a single totalisation and yet there are still *historical ideas* and these themselves are attempts to synthesise a unity out of multiplicity. Our representations of History itself in terms of its nature

⁴¹ *ibid.* p.23

⁴² *ibid.* p.23

⁴³ *ibid.* p.21

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.24

⁴⁵ *ibid.* pp.25/26

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.26

and ends, or what Sartre calls here the 'historical myth', 'is itself History'. The idea of History can then undergo a series of developments and become 'the whole set of acts by which mankind decides about the essence of man for itself and for others in and through History.'⁴⁷ The problem with this is that Sartre, at this point at least, denies the possibility of a dialectical movement towards the realisation of a 'unique and collective historical consciousness'.⁴⁸ This is because, at this stage, he understands any true dialectical process as already supposing a prior unity. In other words we might seek to act historically by putting forward an image of what humanity can be or *is* to be and yet, if such an idea is to have an historical action, it must be taken up by other freedoms who objectify the idea and make themselves passive objects in relation to it or surpass it towards their own ends. Given the way in which Sartre understands the historical at this stage, History is a deeply ambiguous context that reflects the underlying scission in consciousness itself but also goes beyond it. As the product of free activity taken up by the other, diverted and distorted by the 'peculiar action of the objectified-subjective' and the materiality of the world, History itself is 'subjectivity without a subject'.⁴⁹ Every historical fact 'is a situation' and every historical event 'always leaves a residue.' Historical action is always a 'concrete transcendence' - in so far as 'each consciousness is an agent of History, it *'historicises itself'* but we act in the world of *others* and the efficacy and concrete reality of our action depends on the other.⁵⁰ Each act is 'a proposal' therefore and every historical fact, event or historical object contains within it 'the inertia of the exteriority of nature'.⁵¹

It is under these conditions that we need to think about values and ethics. In some ways this is the same as considering the notion of 'progress'. This, too, 'springs up within History'. If this is so then for 'progress to be one of the meanings of History', it must also be lived - 'sought for and suffered'.⁵² In other words, progress might be thought of as some order inherent in the externality of the 'eternal'. But the notion of progress is itself an historical factor and in this way 'progress' is 'really recovered as progress by the progressive project.' Thus 'progress' is also a 'proposal' and this applies too to any form of 'partial progress'

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.33

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.37

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.45

⁵⁰ *ibid.* pp.40/41

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.38

⁵² *ibid.* p.42

which is 'absolute within its own domain' like science and technology.⁵³ Historically speaking, we might say, scientific progress is a kind of paradigm since it is concerned with the 'real' in the sense that technological competence and the means it grants us for overcoming our practical difficulties has a certain kind of universal reality - this is what we *can do*. But here again, we see that scientific progress is still a 'proposal' to 'human subjectivity' to be surpassed in a variety of ways. One only needs to think of the current forms of anti-scientism to see this whether it be the 'anti-vaxxer' movement or the promise of AI or whatever. In this way, the moment that is totalised as progressive is 'deprogressivised' and we end up with 'deprogressivised-progress'.⁵⁴ This is simply a product of the basic ontological structure of the 'detotalised-totality'. There are profound consequences for ethics in all this. Every idea is an active proposal towards unity but must always be realised under conditions of multiplicity and separation. In other words, we might well attempt to realise a set of transcendent, eternal values but 'if concrete human life is an undertaking within History' then ethics necessarily operates at the level of the concrete and unites and gives meaning to the total project. Ethics is therefore at the heart of 'the historical and historicising goal [which] is always *the unity* of consciousnesses.'⁵⁵ The problem is that this unity cannot be kind of abstract event within the compass of a single subjectivity that posits itself as universal in the Kantian sense; this is pure abstraction and idealism. But nor could it be dialectical movement towards unity by a universal subject overcoming its own internal negations in the Hegelian sense and this is because 'History is not the history of *one* freedom but rather of an *indefinite* plurality of freedoms.'⁵⁶ Nor, too, could it be the simple operation of materiality and the 'economic' since the historical event could never be reduced to pure materiality in its foundation - 'the action of what is economic is total and action on what is economic is likewise total.'⁵⁷ The implication is now that 'an historical ethics' must address 'the nature of action' and the 'ambiguity' of the historical event and the historical collective. At this point Sartre therefore shifts his analysis towards a range of themes that will preoccupy him into the *Critique* and beyond.

⁵³ *ibid.* p.43

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p.44

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p.50

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p.59

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p.45

The problem is how to find a 'unity' that preserves freedom within the 'opacity' of History. Part of what this means is that for any freedom that is in the process of 'making History' there is always an indeterminate future simply because any historical agency is always subject to the activity of the 'other'. In other words the idea is a proposal to the 'other' and there is the requirement that the 'idea' be inscribed in some way in 'materiality' and the 'chance' that this introduces simply because the intention necessarily becomes separate from the actualisation of the idea. Furthermore, in this way, any proposal of unity itself becomes what Sartre calls 'the myth of unification'⁵⁸. But, as he has made clear, History itself operates at the level of 'myth', if this means that any idea can unite in some provisional way as long as it is taken up by other freedoms in such a way that it can be inscribed in materiality. Yet, of course, merely doing so introduces another element of distortion which is the operation of any further round of free adoption of the situation as exigency. In this way Sartre approaches more and more closely the concept of the practico-inert. At this stage everything is moving towards a certain kind of irresolvable dialectic of inside and outside. Every determination of situation is a product of freedom but freedom is always situated in the sense that it must be a relation to its situation and therefore a relation to the other. This relation is necessarily a form of 'alienation' since my 'surpassing' of my situation is in turn 'surpassed'. Again, this simply another way of characterising the detotalised-totality. I interiorise my externality and re-exterorise this through my agency which then becomes a proposal for others which then becomes a further externality for me to further re-interiorise. It is in this context that Sartre begins his extended engagement with Hegel and with Marxism - although at this point it is Historical Materialism more specifically. The problem as Sartre sees it is that, in Hegel's case, there is the prior unity of Absolute Spirit overcoming divisions within itself; 'For Hegel, the negation comes from within the thesis and it is united to that thesis that it negates by an internal relation.'⁵⁹In the Marxist case, there is 'a materialistic monism' where the economic substructure subsumes all else and History is simply the 'repetition' of the economic producing the economic. Of course, Sartre does not deny that there can be both internal and external unities and an associated dialectic within each. His point is rather that in each case the dialectic operates within a partial, closed totality that can be surpassed and detotalised. For example, 'if we conserve *both* human free-

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p.86

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p.82

dom and the primordial importance of the economic [then] lived History has no outside, but every essential invention retrospectively communicates an outside and an external passivity to it...We are therefore in the untenable situation that nothing comes *from the outside* to cut off our efforts so long as they are lived in freedom, and yet these efforts have their destiny outside themselves.⁶⁰ This irreducible contradiction between unity in interiority and external, structural unity has the consequence that any 'historical myth' that aims at *totality* will itself contradict 'historical reality' because 'all historical action can only be *finite*...and that it presents itself with a goal situated at *infinity*.'⁶¹This is the source of all the various ambiguities and contradictions that Sartre highlights - the discontinuous-continuity, the non-historical historical, the subjectivity without a subject, objectivity in the subjective, subjectivity through objectivity, the universal in the singular, the singular in the universal. History becomes a kind of pseudo-subject that can never be identical with itself, it is always 'other'.⁶² This pseudo-subject shares in the freedom of the individual subjects that make it through their free agency. In this way History is 'invention' and creativity but because we are dealing with 'a plurality of freedoms' and the operation of materiality, separation and 'chance', as we have seen, then History always 'gets alienated from itself in becoming conscious of itself.' History 'envelops its own myth and true History gets made through the myth of History.'⁶³

In this way Historical action is the search for a unifying, transhistorical idea that itself gets drawn back into History. In so far as History shares some of the characteristics of the 'plurality' of the freedoms that make it and in so far as History can have an end state then History can also share something of the contradiction of the in-itself-for-itself. 'History is inhabited by the myth of unification, therefore it makes itself into another. But precisely *other than unification*; that is, it is the projection on the not-one of the one in the process of becoming, everything gets organised towards unity (dictatorships, authoritarian parties, One World) and everything fails.' This failure is bound up with the fact that 'every Totality is a totality *for subjectivities*...one makes man into an object for himself.' Sartre then goes on to raise and consider a range of ways in which we might seek to realise this totalised humanity historically. For example, there is the 'American way': this is the unity of

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p.82

⁶¹ *ibid.* p.84

⁶² *ibid.* p.46

⁶³ *ibid.* pp.84/85

'the majority' whereby each individual is an interchangeable part of the 'representation of the majority'. The individual is alienated into the 'general', 'average' totality of public opinion unified in the mass media and 'written in the statistics'. In Sartre's pithy phrase, 'each American is a potential Rousseau'.⁶⁴ There is the 'Dictatorial way' whereby the unity is expressed through the 'symbolic totality' of the party and the leader. Yet here the 'single consciousness' of the leader renders all other subjectivities 'inessential' in relation to the totality and we must discover our thoughts as objects in the leader.⁶⁵ Whatever unity we might propose collapses back into some form of objective separation once it falls back into the 'trough of history'. In this way, Sartre thinks, the driving force of History once it is 'discovered' by a 'multiplicity of freedoms' is to 'intend its end'. In other words to incarnate within it a total unity of humanity. 'Our epoch by hypostatising the historical Project that it uncovers and extends to the infinity of the Future, uncovers the meaning of History in its *end* (in both senses of this term); that is, in the realisation of the Totality.'⁶⁶ Thus the 'end' of History is both the cessation of a certain kind of progressive movement - in the sense of the completion of the development of order within a system - and the achievement of a final end state as a goal. As we have seen, the problem is that we are dealing with a detotalised-totality and not a single, absolute subject becoming conscious of itself. In this sense, the only 'Totality, as Hegel saw, would be the Absolute/Subject. But this means exactly *one subject* or, if you will, the *real* and ontological fusion of every consciousness into one.' The consequence of all of this is that the History of a plurality of freedoms is always the product of 'an inequality between the Totality and the individual'⁶⁷

The implication for ethics is that 'if the end of History is supposed to be the advent of Ethics' then Ethical unity as a transhistorical end cannot be directly constructed 'from within History'.⁶⁸ Instead 'it requires that *everyone* be moral at the same time, which presupposes an infinite chance relative to each individual consciousness.' In other words, each free being must choose itself as an ethical absolute from within the 'density' and 'opacity' of their historical situation and in their 'concrete singularity as a concrete end.'⁶⁹ And they must do this in the same way,

⁶⁴ *ibid.* pp.86/87

⁶⁵ *ibid.* p.87

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p.88

⁶⁷ *ibid.* p.88

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p.88

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p.89

at the same time and in such a way that they both preserve and transcend their freedom and the freedom of the other whilst also being concretely *within* History. Sartre's issue with the Kantian self-determination as a universal subject is essentially that such a universal freedom is ahistorical all the way through and in this way History has an end before it has even begun. His engagement with Hegel is much more complex and sustained simply because there is 'movement' within Hegel's Absolute Spirit and, in one sense, 'if there is a History, it is Hegel's'⁷⁰. Yet the movement in Hegel is always internal to the Absolute subject as it comes to complete self-understanding. As far as Sartre is concerned, the Hegelian system is bounded by 'contemplation' and all the 'activity', 'suffering' and 'existential attitudes' are merely 'moments in the system'. Within the system each 'absolute' individual subject is merely 'relative' to the whole. But man 'is absolute insofar as he acts -in the world and among others, in *his* moment - he is precisely absolute in so far as he historicises himself in History.'⁷¹ Yet, as we have seen, we are all absolute in relation to each other within History itself. In this way, 'this absolute is relative', since our freedom can be transcended by the other and so on.⁷² 'Spirit' is therefore the product of individual consciousnesses 'engaged in multiple relationships with other consciousnesses'. As such, Spirit is always the 'activity of all the others' and what each one of us must surpass in surpassing ourselves towards our ends. If individual subjectivities are ontologically foundational then 'the Hegelian dialectic will immediately be falsified' since Spirit can never be 'for-itself'.⁷³

The *Cahiers*, whilst being a complex and diffuse text is programmatic to the extent that Sartre does indeed set out the context of his thinking in the first portion of it. As always with Sartre, the ontology underlies and conditions the discussion. The search for an ethics is also a search for its ontological ground which is surely as it should be. The problem is that the ontology suggests that ethics in the sense of an 'infinite end' must appear within the 'detotalized-totality' of history. The absurdity and necessity of ethics is exactly that it is always finite action towards and infinite end and always under the condition of being 'other than itself'. In a sense Sartre is working in the *Cahiers* in a space between Kant and Hegel but also be-

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p.25

⁷¹ *ibid.* p.89

⁷² *ibid.* p.90

⁷³ *ibid.* p.93

yond them. As we have seen, both of these thinkers posit a unity that is, in their different idioms, still a kind of unity of interiority. That is to say, that there is a choice of 'self', either as the universal subject or as the self-realisation of Absolute Spirit; either way, we are always inside. Sartre's great merit as an ethical thinker is to seriously attempt to address what he calls the 'quasi-dialectic' of interiority and exteriority. The great paradox of ethics is that it is the necessarily free choice of self in a world that is already the concretion of choice. In so far as we might talk about ethics as purely abstract in the sense that it is defined by 'the purely formal recognition' of the 'universal personhood' of another then this is ethics outside of 'real history.'⁷⁴ It becomes 'the goal without a goal'.⁷⁵ But any 'concrete goal that the historical agent proposes' already contains within it 'a certain conception of man and of values'.⁷⁶

What Sartre does here in the *Cahiers*, to a surprising degree for those who might still be approaching his thinking largely through the lens of *Being and Nothingness* and the lecture '*Existentialism is a Humanism*', is to place the discussion firmly within the context of society and history. He focuses on the ambiguity of collective subjectivity held together by the 'social idea' which is created as an 'idea object'. However, a social idea is always 'guaranteed' by others and 'I enter into' this idea.⁷⁷ Since freedom is ontologically irreducible and we are dealing with a plurality of freedoms, then the 'idea' is 'internal objectivity' but also 'external subjectivity'; it is 'me inside outside' in the realm of the other. Freedom is both creative and alienated since for it to become concrete it must always 'be inscribed' in the world and taken up by others. The darker side of this is, of course, that my work in the world always returns to me as exteriority, as the image of myself in the other, as 'destiny' and 'objective necessity' and we become 'a situation' for ourselves.⁷⁸ To some extent then we are still the victims of the 'look' and a 'society looks as me as society'; as the 'undifferentiated gaze of others'.⁷⁹ On the positive side, if freedom is ontologically basic then freedom is always also 'creation'. What returns to me as exteriority is also an occasion for a 'new beginning'. Yet since we are already being-in-the-world then creation is always the creation of myself 'in the di-

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p.104

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p.103

⁷⁶ *ibid.* p.104

⁷⁷ *ibid.* p.115

⁷⁸ *ibid.* p.122

⁷⁹ *ibid.* p.111

mension of the world' and 'human reality is the creation of itself outside of itself.' We create ourselves outside by 'creating the world' but this is not something we can do by ourselves as individuals; we must necessarily 'make recourse to the other'.⁸⁰ In this way Sartre enriches his treatment of freedom as a process of reciprocal 'incitement' and 'proposal' to the other through the 'gift' of our freedom. Through creation, invention and affirmation, we 'grant being in giving it' but such creation always runs the risk of failure and can be 'placed in danger by another freedom'.⁸¹ Since we are always forced to realise our freedom through the 'intermediary' of the world we are not discussing a formal, abstract freedom here, instead we must give 'our freedom as the foundation of the being that manifests itself to me'.⁸² The issue is how we should 'give' our freedom in the light of the freedom of the other. As Sartre puts it here, 'the problem is to rediscover the concrete in the universal.'⁸³ The kind of abstract recognition we might grant to another as 'pure, universal freedom' fails to recognise their concrete particularity and therefore pushes into exteriority the very freedom it seeks to recognise. Instead 'a freedom is an infinitely concrete and qualified enterprise that has to be recognised *in its enterprise*'.⁸⁴ The demand for recognition becomes an appeal to 'help me in my concrete operation because it is this operation that is my freedom.' As far as Sartre is concerned true creation follows from a non-accessory reflection that 'just as the world is the intermediary between the For-itself and the Me, so too it is the required intermediary between two freedoms in search of each other.'⁸⁵ The 'work of art' is an appeal to the other to collaborate in the process of creation by recognising my concrete creative act both as value and as freedom.⁸⁶ At this point we are in a position to see the curious mixture of themes that are further explored in the rest of the text.

Inevitably we must confront 'violence' and 'oppression' and both derive from the ontology of freedom or rather they depend ontologically on freedom. Violence is not force as an operation on an inert world or merely the treatment of another freedom purely as an object but is always concerned with the relation between

⁸⁰ *ibid.* p.127

⁸¹ *ibid.* p.158

⁸² *ibid.* p.157

⁸³ *ibid.* p.143

⁸⁴ *ibid.* p.139

⁸⁵ *ibid.* p.148

⁸⁶ *ibid.* p.141

freedoms as freedom. In this way violence is intimately connected with oppression as Sartre understands it. Violence is a 'choice of means', a value and a 'conception of the world'.⁸⁷ Essentially violence is the imposition on another freedom of an external end to which their freedom becomes merely the inessential means. As Sartre puts it, 'to make use of the facticity of another person and the objective from the outside to determine the subjective to turn itself into an inessential means of reaching the objective.'⁸⁸ As such violence is a specific form of the more general intersubjective condition of oppression - 'oppression is an internal metamorphosis of my freedom which is brought about by another's freedom.'⁸⁹ Of course, given 'the dialectic of freedoms' then violence and oppression are always a possibility in human relations. The implications of this for Sartre's treatment of ethics are profound. If ethics operates at the level of the universal then the ethical demand always appears to us as the demand of the universal 'other' which then imposes on my particular freedom as what I must be - it is always the 'other in me'. The key issue as always for Sartre is the status of the individual's particular and concrete freedom. His fundamental point in his critical engagement with both Hegel and Kant is that each thinker in their different ways alienates particular freedoms into the universal which then returns to those freedoms as the Other and oppresses them. The problem, as we have seen, is that neither the Kantian universal subject nor the Hegelian Absolute Spirit is a genuine totality, instead we are always dealing with an abstraction from or a universalisation of concrete freedoms. In either case the freedom of the individual becomes the 'inessential' means to an end that is not their own. The 'ethics of duty' is considered by Sartre to be alienated and oppressive in this sense. Duty is 'obligation' and 'demand' and as such is a universal and unconditioned freedom which turns back on my particular freedom to condition it. In this way obligation is 'the look that cannot be looked at' and it is 'not freedom as a choice to be made in some situation, but freedom as a choice already made.'⁹⁰ Part of Sartre's point is that wherever there is a 'hierarchy of freedoms' there is the possibility, or perhaps even, the inevitability of oppression. In the case of duty we are oppressed by freedom itself as the unconditioned freedom that cannot be surpassed. Duty is always the demand of the absolute other but

⁸⁷ *ibid.* p.185

⁸⁸ *ibid.* p.204

⁸⁹ *ibid.* p.329

⁹⁰ *ibid.* p.254

crucially, since we are not dealing here with some other particular freedom which fixes us in the 'look' but can itself be surpassed, it is the other as universal freedom itself. Duty is the 'freedom behind my freedom' and it subsumes my concrete, situated freedom 'from behind' by a kind of paradox whereby my freedom freely chooses freedom already chosen by the universal other. There is freedom 'everywhere' yet our particular freedom is 'mystified and alienated' and our particular freedom is merely the inessential means to the realisation of the 'absolute end' as freedom.⁹¹ His point is still that there is a hierarchy of freedoms and that the basis of the heteronomy here is not freedom determined from the outside by the causal inertia of the world but of a particular freedom allowing itself to be surpassed towards another freedom. If our concrete freedom chooses absolute freedom as 'the other in me' and therefore adopts the absolute end of the other as its own then, he suggests, this is my freedom affirming its autonomy 'at the moment of total heteronomy.'⁹² This is also 'mystification', 'alienation', 'force', 'violence' and 'oppression'.

This structure applies not just in the context of a Kantian notion of duty but in any circumstances where there is an alienation of or a hierarchy of freedoms. For example, any form of 'sovereignty' in the sense of a total unity capable of creating an order of duty and obligation will participate in the paradoxical 'circuit of freedom' whereby freedom alienates itself as 'other' which then returns to it as freedom in the other. As Sartre puts it, 'The ethics of duty is in fact a type of human and social relationship, that of alienation that spins in a circle, of slavery without a master, of the sacrifice of man to the *human*. The reason for it is the structure of humanity as detotalised totality.'⁹³ Everything rests, therefore, on the quality of how freedom is recognised within the context of the detotalised totality. If there is a unifying theme to the *Cahiers* then this is it. In fact, the major discovery of conversion through non-accessory reflection *is* the mutual relation of our freedoms as detotalised totality. It also lies behind Sartre's extended engagement with the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave. Ultimately the 'existential conditions of oppression' derive from 'its ontological conditions'.⁹⁴ Oppression can only exist under conditions of freedom, freedom is everywhere and 'there is complicity between the op-

⁹¹ *ibid.* p.255

⁹² *ibid.* p.255

⁹³ *ibid.* p.272

⁹⁴ *ibid.* p.325

pressor and the oppressed'. Between the master and slave Sartre sees what calls a 'lateral', 'horizontal' dialectic whereby each party is locked into a system of desire and a circuit of means and relative ends.⁹⁵ Under such conditions, any totalisation will necessarily involve a 'submission' of freedom to force. If freedom is everywhere then at any point that 'the plurality of consciousnesses' finds 'the union that will turn a detotalised totality into a true totality', it will in fact be based on 'the look' and what Sartre calls here the 'alienated cogito': the 'Sovereign-will' that unites is always built on 'the ruin of our personalities'.⁹⁶

This brings us to one aspect of the ethical crux of the *Cahiers*. In the context of an extended discussion of various forms of intersubjective ethical communication such as 'the prayer' and the 'demand', all of which involve some kind of abasement or alienation of freedom and as such some element of 'bad faith', we reach the 'appeal'. The 'authentic appeal' is an ethical communication between one 'personal freedom in situation' to another 'personal freedom in situation.' Crucially it involves both the 'full recognition of the detotalised-totality' and a non-alienating relation of 'comprehension'.⁹⁷ As always, everything comes down to the relation of one freedom to another and the relation of that particular freedom to itself. 'Comprehension' here means the experience of the other and the synthetic unity of their means and ends as a creative, practical agent in the world. If 'to explain is to refer to causes,' then 'to comprehend is to clarify by ends'.⁹⁸ Whilst Sartre's discussion here is not always as coherent as we might hope, it is clear that his overall argumentative purpose is to articulate a position beyond the basic conflict of freedoms where one 'closed off and subjective totality' confronts another and our only hope for a vindication of our individual freedom is to surpass the free agency of another freedom towards our own ends. In this way, 'the Other becomes *transcended transcendence* and the pursuit of his end becomes a *fact*'.⁹⁹ At this basic and antagonistic level, it is obvious that the only values that count are mine as the 'subjective totality' that unifies the situation with my 'look'. To use Sartre's classic example of the person running for the bus, which features again in the *Cahiers*, he tells us that we can simply 'see' this as something that is happening. As I look from my seat on the bus I can see this situation as simply 'someone run-

⁹⁵ *ibid.* p.356

⁹⁶ *ibid.* pp.269/270

⁹⁷ *ibid.* p.274

⁹⁸ *ibid.* p.276

⁹⁹ *ibid.* p.275

ning for the bus'. At one level I understand what they are doing - they are running for the bus - but at another level, and this is the level that concerns him now, I do not comprehend. Everything rests upon how I take up the end that is revealed by the situation. It is obviously not the case that just because I am on the bus that some sort of universal end of 'being on the bus' has been realised, although I am indeed on the bus and a bunch of others are too. The point is that the specific other person, in their specific situation, needs to be on the bus and the issue is how. At this basic level of reciprocity, 'the only authentic form of willing here consists in wanting the end to be realised by the other. And wanting here consists in engaging oneself in the operation. But not to do it oneself, rather to modify the situation so that the other can do it.'¹⁰⁰ I press the buzzer to alert the driver to stop the bus so that the other can get on!

On this disarmingly simple basis, Sartre goes on to outline an intersubjective relation that goes beyond the 'original conflict'. Inherent in the structure of 'the appeal' is a relation between freedoms that is mutual and non-alienating. The key is the way in which Sartre considers that one freedom can be the vehicle for the achievement of the other's end all the while as freedom. In responding authentically to another free agent 'in difficulty', whilst 'I am his instrument in my very facticity, and he surpasses me toward his end', because 'I want this end only as the other wants it' and 'I am a starting point' through which the other's freedom moves towards its end then there will be 'a structure that is mine' in the achievement of the end.¹⁰¹ In this kind of basic recognition of and response to the practical agency of another Sartre sees the possibility of a non-conflictual mutuality of freedoms by which 'the closed off and subjective totality', is replaced by 'an open diversity'.¹⁰² This is a consequence of how the other's freedom in the appeal and my free response to adopt their end as mine by wanting it *for the other* reflects both the 'prolonging of my freedom in the dimension of otherness' and how the other sees their freedom as operating through and 'emanating' from my own.¹⁰³ In this way Sartre claims that we need no longer think in terms of conflict 'where each For-itself denies that it is the Other and constitutes the other as an object'. Instead the 'negation no longer has the sense of going against but of going further'. Operating

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* p.279

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* pp.279/280

¹⁰² *ibid.* p.281

¹⁰³ *ibid.* p.280

through my free commitment to help, the other 'bears my will toward the end that he freely wants.' By helping the other, I have 'realised an operation in which I have projected myself'.¹⁰⁴

In the ethical structure of the 'appeal' as Sartre presents it there is therefore a developing notion of the 'City of Ends'. The maxim of my authentic choice to help the other is that 'the world have an infinity of free and finite futures each of which is directly projected by a free will and indirectly upheld by the willing of all the others, in that each wants the concrete freedom of the other.'¹⁰⁵ Central to how Sartre wants us to understand this notion is that we must always start from the concrete, particular, situated individual who, as creative freedom in the world, makes value exist. In Sartre's terms, the intention of an end is also the creation of value. Each end is a creative expression of a situated freedom as concrete operation to be realised. Freedom as an abstract, universal value is obviously what underlies the value of any particular end but that abstract freedom has no real existence apart from the operation of concrete, particular free beings in the world. Indeed, as we have seen, the reification of freedom as a universal, necessary absolute - as in the Kantian universal subject, for example - is, in Sartre's terms, both 'mystification' and 'alienation' and leads to oppression by conditioning the individual's freedom from the exterior. In the structure of the 'appeal' Sartre points to a particular kind of recognition and reciprocity of freedoms that attempts to avoid both the reification as universal absolute and the 'closed off subjective totalities' which are always in conflict. 'In every appeal there is a gift' and in every appeal there is also a 'proposition' and ultimately a 'request'.¹⁰⁶ There is a 'gift' of freedom on both sides in that the appeal is made by one free being to another as a situated freedom. In this way 'the true appeal is a risk' and 'a refusal to consider the original conflict between freedoms by way of the look as something impossible to surpass.' I freely give my end to the other in 'total gratuity, without shame'; in other words I do not attempt either to condition the other from the exterior by a moral 'demand' nor do I 'abase myself' by attempting to induce pity in the other as the object of a 'prayer'.¹⁰⁷ Reciprocally, the other can now freely adopt my end and engage their facticity in the world to complete it. This, too, is a gift. At the heart of the appeal therefore there

¹⁰⁴ibid. p.280

¹⁰⁵ ibid. p.280

¹⁰⁶ ibid. p.281

¹⁰⁷ ibid. pp. 281/282

are two fundamental principles. First that there must be mutual recognition of freedom, not in the abstract but 'in terms of its own ends, along with the difficulties it experiences and in its finitude.' Secondly, 'freedom exists only in *giving*, it devotes itself to *giving itself*.'¹⁰⁸

In this way, then, the appeal reveals a basic ethical condition that is neither a choice of self as a subjective totality nor a choice of world as an inert structure. It does, of course, whilst being at its core a 'promise of reciprocity' between one person and another, contain 'the outlines of a world where each person can call upon all the others.'¹⁰⁹ It does, also, run the risk of various forms of 'bad faith' and inauthenticity; not least the tendency of socio-economic conditions to confine the scope of reciprocity to 'ties of caste or class' and thereby reinforce them. Yet, crucially, there is always the underlying structure of the 'authentic appeal' which 'addresses itself to freedom' as the consciousness 'of being a surpassing of every inequality of condition toward a human world where any appeal of anyone will always be possible.' The goal is 'a supple and shifting unity in diversity, a diversity that will never be a transcended *given* but rather a conscious intention to unite, and that will itself be in question in its being.'¹¹⁰ Significantly, it is at this point that Sartre raises the issue of 'common ends'. Given that we can overcome the original conflict in the kind of authentic recognition contained in the appeal then we can also propose common ends, in other words I do not just appeal to the other to help realise my end as mine, 'rather I present him with the concrete content of an end.'¹¹¹ This can then become the basis of 'a transcendent unification through the common outcome of the operation and the creation of the We.' Here his discussion is obviously balanced on the cusp of a shift into a different register which is, of course, taken up in the *Critique*. For the moment Sartre postpones his treatment of issue to 'elsewhere' and embarks on an analysis of what he calls the 'ontological conditions of oppression'.¹¹²

As we have seen, 'oppression' is always the product of freedom - which is simply to say that you cannot oppress if you are not free and you cannot oppress what is not free! But oppression is also a reciprocal relation in which neither party correctly recognises both the freedom of the other and their own. This is the

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* pp.282/283

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* p.285

¹¹⁰ *ibid.* p.285

¹¹¹ *ibid.* p.289

¹¹² *ibid.* p.289

source of the 'complicity between oppressor and oppressed.'¹¹³ Yet Sartre is not claiming here that oppression is an inevitable and necessary consequence of freedom, although it can sometimes seem that freedom is merely 'free to choose the sauce with which it will be eaten', rather everything depends on how freedom is lived out at the concrete level of the situation.¹¹⁴ Indeed one key shift that Sartre is making here in the *Cahiers* is to address, however partially and hesitantly, the diachronic dimension of the social and the political rather than just the synchronic confrontation of one freedom with another. The worst form of oppression is the manipulation of another's freedom against them in the form of the 'trick', the 'ruse' and the 'trap' - another freedom uses our own, temporally structured agency against us. But social oppression is also an exclusion from possibility through the structuring of the situation by other freedoms. Sartre's long discussion of 'stupidity and ignorance' explores these themes.¹¹⁵ As we have said, everything comes down to how 'I grasp my freedom' in reciprocity with others and 'oppression is an internal metamorphosis of my freedom which is brought about by another's freedom'.¹¹⁶ As Sartre puts it, 'In a team where everyone has his place, there is no dumb fool'.¹¹⁷ So just as freedom can reciprocally oppress so it can reciprocally liberate. Oppression is both 'one moment in the dialectic of freedoms' and at the same time 'an historical fact'.¹¹⁸ Developing his theme, Sartre claims that the 'social world' is 'a perpetual dialectic of three concepts'. There is the immediate experience of the absolute freedom of the other in 'the inter individual emotions' - hate, love, recognition etc.; there is 'fatality or fate' which appears as we attempt to act through our facticity in the world and, finally, there is 'determinism'. This last is a key notion for Sartre in that the determinism he has in mind is, in fact, itself the product of freedom. It appears through 'the turning of one freedom against another' whereby the option preferred by the dominant group is interiorised as necessity for all. This is indeed 'bad faith' and 'mystification' through which 'determinism becomes a weapon of oppression.'¹¹⁹

¹¹³ *ibid.* p.325

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* p.331

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* 302-325 *passim.*

¹¹⁶ *ibid.* p.329

¹¹⁷ *ibid.* p.325

¹¹⁸ *ibid.* p.340

¹¹⁹ *ibid.* p.339

At this stage in his discussion Sartre launches into a detailed critique of a certain form of dialectical materialism using the debate between Engels and Dühring as a foil. The great merit of Sartre's criticisms is that he demands that oppression be seen not merely as a necessary starting point of an 'objective' dialectic but rather as the 'historical fact' of a 'choice to oppress'.¹²⁰ Oppression always 'takes place within a conception of the world', he tells us, and any 'objective dialectic' will still reflect the 'hidden presence of values'¹²¹. Without entering into the details, his fundamental point is that the kind of materialist perspective that he imputes to Engels will always move incoherently between a necessary determinism and the 'smuggling in of values'.¹²² The danger is that either 'man is an epiphenomenon' or we end up positing the end of a 'total society' the value of which can only be given by already 'assuming the point of view of totality'.¹²³ The incoherence stems, Sartre claims, from 'the absurd effort of joining together mechanism and dialectic into one synthesis'.¹²⁴ The question 'Why does man oppress man?' remains unanswered. The economic facts are 'mute' and the issue can only be 'interpreted from the perspective of interest'.¹²⁵ This leads Sartre naturally into an analysis of 'Desire' and 'Praxis'.

Sartre works his way up from the basic ontological analysis of 'primitive desire' and 'primitive society' where there exists an original 'diffuse oppression'. This is the product of both the way freedom relates to its object in desire - my freedom returns to me as other in the object - and the fact that in such an undifferentiated society we are all the same as the other.¹²⁶ With the introduction of more complexity both in terms of technology, property relations and social structure oppression can be 'transmitted'. At this level, 'oppression is an event, an act of human responsibility'.¹²⁷ It can take place only on the basis of both a material and an ontological condition. The tool does not itself determine the relation of oppression; instead the tool is what mediates an oppressive relation already chosen. Sartre's essential point is that behind all forms of oppression there is always a concrete relation which itself is situated within the wider social field. In this respect, every re-

¹²⁰ibid.. p.348

¹²¹ ibid. p.343

¹²² ibid. p.343

¹²³ ibid. p.347

¹²⁴ ibid. p.346

¹²⁵ ibid. p.350

¹²⁶ ibid. pp. 379/380

¹²⁷ ibid. p.381

sponse of the slave to the oppression of the master is a real expression of freedom in that it is an attempt to live out the impossibility of being human. In another sense, whatever the slave does is already alienated in the master as 'other' since the master can turn resignation back upon the slave as an ethics of slavery. If it be a question of a violent response then, at the limit, the slave's humanity can only be vindicated at the cost of their destruction.¹²⁸

Notebook II recapitulates a number of themes we have already discussed but also takes them further. History begins in 'primitive alienation' and then develops in terms of the 'idea as nature'. But freedom is always its source and can therefore 'burst apart ideology'.¹²⁹ This is the moment of pure, unconditioned freedom of the 'apocalypse'. This then falls back in its turn into alienation. The basic consequence of the de-totalised totality is that there is both 'recognition' and 'alienation'. Yet, as we have seen, 'only a freedom can be a destiny for a freedom'. History is the absolute within which a series of finite projects aim at 'infinite humanity'. Yet on the other hand, 'man makes a finite history through infinite projects'.¹³⁰ This is the essential problem of the 'meaning of history' in so far as it is not decided from the exterior by an extra-historical observer. It is also intimately connected with the question of how far each one of us can become the means for an absolute end. Certainly, as Sartre points out, if we 'bet on an infinite humanity' then we are justified in sacrificing a number of generations to that end.¹³¹ Essentially it is the question of progress and order again. Sartre's basic claim has always been that these are only relative to a particular project - even though that project could be a common one. The only other option is that progress and order would be inherent in an absolute project that is already given within single transcendent consciousness - God's for example or in the 'unity of the Spirit' in the Hegelian sense. All of this brings Sartre directly back to freedom. Everything returns to the fact that we are situated freedoms. We preserve in surpassing what we are and surpass by preserving. His point has always been that the content or the material of freedom is always its exterior or its facticity but its action is always its surpassing interiorisation.¹³² This action in turn, of course, creates a further situation which must itself be surpassed and also preserved. In one sense, we have arrived at the

¹²⁸ *ibid.* p.406

¹²⁹ *ibid.* p.413

¹³⁰ *ibid.* p.425

¹³¹ *ibid.* p.425

¹³² *ibid.* p.432

basic ontological structure that makes ethics both so natural for him and so, we might say, 'ontically' difficult. As he says in the *Cahiers*, 'there is something true in an ethics that places the greatness of man in his acceptance of the inevitable and of destiny.' But - 'I am perpetually condemned to will what I did not will, not to will what I willed, to reconstruct myself in terms of the unity of a life in the presence of the destructions that are inflicted on me from the exterior.' There is always a dialectic of spontaneity and facticity: 'Thus I can never rest - always transformed, undermined, flattened out, overthrown from the outside, yet always free, always obliged to take things up again, to take responsibility for what I am not responsible for.'¹³³ Additionally we might add that - on the assumption that history gets made by situated and temporal individuals and not by some supra-organism or some non-temporal subject - this is already the core of an historical agent.

The problem he faces is what it has always been: how to bring the individual within the scope of history whilst also preserving the basic value of freedom. In this respect what counts is the problem of the 'internal unity of the group'. As he puts it here, 'a historical group can only act given a certain degree of concentration, of integration, and of self-consciousness.'¹³⁴ In the light of his later focus on the 'historical ensemble' what Sartre has to say here about the group and the historical event is significant. If we take, as he does, the example of a group event like a strike then the problem of unity is tied up with what will later become the 'mediating third'. Here Sartre suggests that any third element that totalises will always remain outside the totalisation. This is a feature of retaining the structure of the 'look' which necessarily must operate from the exterior. Yet it is also clear that the group or the event has a certain kind of inward, dialectical unity which Sartre calls here 'the otherness of immanence'.¹³⁵ Essentially we have here the problem of the 'quasi-dialectic' of interiority and exteriority and the detotalised-totality once more. The strike 'is a subjective/objective phenomenon'.¹³⁶ Subjective in the sense that 'I make it exist through my project' but objective in the sense that 'I am inside it like an objective unity *made* by the strike.'¹³⁷ The unity of the strike is not a moment within a Hegelian absolute subject but a series of 'quasi-totalities' or a shifting process of de- and re-totalisation as others surpass the strike towards their

¹³³ *ibid.* p.433

¹³⁴ *ibid.* p.454

¹³⁵ *ibid.* p.456

¹³⁶ *ibid.* p.457

¹³⁷ *ibid.* p.457

own ends. Sartre calls this 'a dialectic with holes in it.'¹³⁸ The consequence of all this for humanity and history is that 'the dialectic, which has meaning only within the perspective of some totality, resolves itself into a plurality of dialectics.'¹³⁹ History, 'is dialectical, the surpassing of the dialectic, and the interference of between dialectic and its surpassing'. The problem then is how far there will always be 'an unsurpassable relation of exteriority' between one freedom and another'.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, how far can 'the total society of the future' be the goal of freedom and the end of History? Needless to say, these issues are the basis of his analysis in the *Critique*. Here, in the *Cahiers*, he takes issue with Hegel for already assuming that History is finite which produces a History 'turned towards the past' where each past moment is conditioned by the absolute necessity of the present moment. His criticism is that this is 'dead' history not active 'historialisation'. As far as Sartre is concerned, historialisation is the creative surpassing of the current moment and all it contains towards the future in 'ignorance, risk and uncertainty'. If we are indeed dealing with 'totalities' and not 'a totality' then 'this life of incertitude becomes an absolute'; it is the 'absolute of actual experience' and historical action can neither vindicate the past nor bind the future.¹⁴¹

Yet, as Sartre repeatedly asserts, there is a history and we must choose. He has already shown a certain kind of process at work in History, albeit a rather discouraging one: 'alienation - negation of alienation - new alienation.'¹⁴² But we have also seen that, under certain conditions, non-alienated inter-subjective relations are possible. In fact, one of Sartre's major points has been that the 'ethical' as such operates beyond the cycle of alienation. Or rather, that the conversion to the attitude of reciprocal freedom - which is simultaneously a self-understanding, an understanding of the other and a practical orientation (after all the gift is given and created) - breaks it apart. This is the moment of the 'apocalypse'. In one sense everything remains the same - there is still facticity, we are still finite, there is still work to be done, we are still mediated by worked matter etc. - but in another everything is different. All relationships are conditioned by and all activity undertaken in the context of a reciprocity of freedoms. This is indeed the 'Realm of Ends'. However, one of Sartre's many merits as an ethicist is that he sees that the

¹³⁸ibid. p.459

¹³⁹ ibid. p.462

¹⁴⁰ ibid. p.461

¹⁴¹ ibid. p.467

¹⁴² ibid. p.471

necessary conversion to reciprocal freedom cannot be achieved in abstraction from the situation. Equally, he sees that this is not something we can do alone. All of which points to the intimate connection between History and Ethics.

It is clear that the motivation to conversion has an ontological basis in the 'perpetual failure of the for-itself's attempt to be' and the oppressed can always become aware of 'himself as the foundation of every system of oppression'.¹⁴³ It is, however, the encounter with the other that motivates this experience and this is always concrete and situated. 'Comprehension' as the means of accessing the subjectivity of the other already presupposes that we are in a world of disparate and potentially common projects and that we share what Sartre calls elsewhere, 'a similarity of condition'. The supreme value of subjectivity, Sartre tells us, is 'generosity'.¹⁴⁴ The key feature of generosity is that I freely accept that my facticity be used as means to achieve the free ends of the other as we saw in the development of the intersubjective structure of the appeal. Recognition of the other in conversion is recognition of them as free means and end. They become the value of my project because I will it through them. In this way, the authentic man never pursues ' "the good of humanity," but rather in such and such particular circumstances, with such and such means, at such and such historical conjuncture, the liberation or the development of such and such concrete group.'¹⁴⁵ Generosity is therefore the evaluative attitude that reveals 'like a light...freedom properly speaking.'¹⁴⁶

Notebook II tails off with a consideration of 'creation' which well illustrates the way in which the overall scope of Sartre's thinking in the text moves away from the ontology of *Being and Nothingness* towards an expanded social ontology. On the one hand we have the 'vicious circle' of the original project to found myself as a necessary being on the basis of my own contingency - on this individual level, the 'relation of one consciousness to the world founders..', we are condemned to failure. On the other hand, 'as soon as there is a plurality of consciousnesses the accent shifts.' In the context of the detotalised-totality, 'it is always to others that I am necessary'.¹⁴⁷ Yet the problem remains that I cannot found my necessity on my

¹⁴³ *ibid.* pp.471/472

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.470

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.507

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.470

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.* pp.540/541

necessity for another contingent being!¹⁴⁸ He seems to be suggesting that we need to modify our understanding of 'creation'. 'Man creates for man' by means of the 'project' - and crucially we are talking here about the concrete project of working on the world.¹⁴⁹ The relation between 'Being' and the 'Project' needs to be reversed. 'It is not Being that has become being/project, rather it is the project, the way in which the existent exists, that has become *project/being*.' It is an 'idea realised in being'. We create 'significations' which reflect the entirety of society and its relations.¹⁵⁰ What he is describing here is, in effect, a totalising praxis. Yet everything retains the structure of alienation - 'My idea takes on being, closes in on me, escapes me, becomes public.'¹⁵¹ It becomes, in a word, *historical*. Here we are already in the territory of the *Critique*.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.541

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.543

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.543

¹⁵¹ *ibid.* p.544

Hope Then - *Morality and History* 1965

In *Morality and History*, Sartre attempts a regressive/progressive analysis of 'the curious dialectic of the Ethical and the Historical.' The ontological categories and concepts are directly those of the *Critique* but his treatment takes up and, to some extent completes, the themes already adumbrated in the *Cahiers*. At the most superficial level of investigation we find that 'the imperative arises everywhere'.¹ He uses a range of examples to suggest that whether we find the imperative in the news media or the advertising industry or, indeed, in the various cultural and social exhortations and interdictions we encounter in everyday life, every imperative presents itself ultimately as categorical. What he means by this becomes increasingly clear as the text develops but for the moment the notion is that, once we move from the abstract to the concrete level of the normative, the context - from which the hypothetical derives - is already assumed and the norm commands categorically. From the perspective of his social ontology, it appears that the normative is the mediating force in the dialectical development of serial collectives and fused groups. In other words, 'to live in a community is to live under a normative pressure and to contribute directly (group) or individually (series) to imposing that pressure on others.'²

However, the regressive investigation demands that the action of the 'moral norm' as a 'specific factor' be demonstrated. His essential point is that, whilst it may well be the case that the normative appears as a structure of our experience as social beings, does it have the capacity to produce 'real determinations' at the most basic level of history? In this way, Sartre launches into his investigation of the potential dialectical relation between Morality and History. He embarks on this through the famous discussion of Kennedy and West-Virginia. We will not dwell on this in any detail here simply because it is well-known and indeed only the beginning of the investigation. Sartre uses the example to suggest that we have here 'a curious dialectic' of the 'political and the normative'. Fundamentally, Sartre's purpose is to show that Kennedy, in his political praxis, shifts to another level of ac-

¹J. P. Sartre, *Morale et Histoire*, in *Les Temps Modernes*, Numbers 632-633-634, July/October 2005. (Paris 2006) - p.274 (All translations are my own.)

² *ibid.* p.285

tion. As a Catholic, in presenting himself to the Democratic electors in the primary as an ethical demand for tolerance, he moves beyond simply offering a practical programme of concrete solutions to the socio-economic problems of the state to the level of what Sartre comes to refer to as 'Ethos'. He turns himself into what Sartre calls, '*L'homme de l'exigence*' (The man of the demand). He makes the race for the Democratic candidature about a single question - will there be tolerance or not?³ Furthermore, he transforms himself into the incarnation of the 'unconditional demand' that tolerance be the meaning (*sens*) of their choice. In the unconditional demand at the level of Ethos, Sartre sees an appeal to overcome all the actual conditions- historical, socio-economic, personal etc. - which might otherwise condition the choice. The ethical demand/appeal is an invitation to determine the choice solely on the basis of the future as tolerance.⁴ In the unconditionality of the demand and the response to it, Sartre sees 'invention' on all sides behind which lies freedom. In so far as Kennedy 'invents' himself as the ethical demand he posits a hierarchy of values and by the normative choice 'the agent realises who he is the moment that he separates himself from being to produce himself in freedom'.⁵ Of course, politics still exists and the ethical choice is still political. The 'curiosity' of the dialectic between ethics and politics lies in the fact that it is only by moving to the ethical level that the political end is achieved and it is only through a political expression that the ethical end is attained.

In this way, Sartre introduces the basic structure of the relation between what he comes to call the 'pure' and the 'impure future'. Everything comes down to the way in which our situated facticity in its widest sense conditions our choice or not. The pure future represents the 'ethical absolute - that is to say the moment when the historical agent denies their conditioning'.⁶ Yet Sartre is careful to point out that any historical agent is always in a dialectical relation to their wider situation. In his terms these are relations of interiority/exteriority. This leaves plenty of scope for the absolute choice of the pure, unconditioned future to be diverted and 'mystified' as it 'falls back into history' as part of the wider totalisation within the historical ensemble. The absolute choice of tolerance itself finds an exterior limit given the contemporary conditions of society and their historical depth. In this

³ *ibid.* p.288

⁴ *ibid.* p.290

⁵ *ibid.* p.295

⁶ *ibid.* p.299

case, Sartre claims that the 'formal' end of the choice of 'tolerance' is a 'type of human relations...of unconditional reciprocity' yet the agent has already 'interiorised' an 'exterior limit' which prevents the practical extension of reciprocity to racial minorities, for example.⁷ In other words, the unconditioned choice is still to that extent conditioned by the practico-inert and the socio-economic structure. In fact, the choice of the ethical absolute can even operate as a conservative force in that by demonstrating that the conditions can be 'formally surpassed' at any time by an act of 'moral will' the underlying facts of oppression can remain largely as they were.⁸

Sartre certainly feels he has shown that 'ethics is a specific factor in history' but also that history, to some extent, is 'made against ethics'. The task remains, however, of determining at which level of historical reality ethics is capable of operating and to what extent.⁹ To support this he sets out an interesting and perceptive phenomenological investigation of the different forms under which the 'norm' can appear. This cannot detain us here since, although the norm 'can appear in many ways', every appearance of the normative in whatever guise shares a common basis. This is that norms 'propose determinate ends for human conduct and present the attainment of these ends as unconditionally possible.' It is the 'unconditional possibility' that needs to be investigated all the while bearing in mind that the possibility only has a meaning in so far as we must realise some 'rigorously defined' conduct. What interests Sartre is how an unconditional possibility can appear in a 'historical world where every possibility for action seems to be rigorously conditioned by the state of the practical field and the practico-inert.'¹⁰ The task then is to show how the unconditional possibility can have a real historical impact. He uses the example of a survey of schoolgirls whose answers imply that they both lie and uphold, in the abstract at least through their absolute condemnation of lying, the categorical imperative of telling the truth. He begins to make a distinction between what he calls 'moral casuistry' and 'ethical radicalism'.¹¹ In so far as norms operate as 'indices of integration' within historical ensembles there is a tendency to operate at the level of 'casuistry' simply because a radical ethic of unconditionality can threaten the integrity of the group. Casuistry is 'a morality of lim-

⁷ *ibid.* pp.295/296

⁸ *ibid.* p.297

⁹ *ibid.* p.300

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.322

¹¹ *ibid.* p.323

ited circumstances' which is designed to make relations 'liveable'.¹² Casuistry, therefore, is an attempt 'to condition the unconditional' by adapting it to the concrete and historical context in which the norm is applied. It is not that the radical level of the unconditioned possibility disappears - it is simply that we operate on both levels and uphold the unconditional which remains a permanent possibility of our ethical praxis whilst living out a compromise between values which serves to cover over their ethical contradictions as unconditional ends.

This ethical compromise operates at all levels. The social ensemble as a whole integrates 'partial ensembles in the course of development' by conditioning the norms rather than accepting radical change.¹³ Individuals, in so far as they belong to different ensembles at different levels of their social existence, must also live according to 'several ethical systems at once.'¹⁴ In so far as these compromises can be sustained, we live within what Sartre calls a condition of 'moral comfort'.¹⁵ Any shift in our situation can quickly disrupt this comfort and reveal the radical purity of the ultimately unconditional basis of ethics and its scope. Sartre uses the example of a young couple where the husband must decide whether to lie to his wife about her terminal condition of which she remains ignorant. Sartre entangles the young man within a complex interplay of values and imperatives full of contradictions and reversals. In refusing the imperative to tell her the truth, the husband in one sense develops an ethical stance based on an 'ideal humanism' which his 'affectivity' reveals.¹⁶ At the level of the couple a certain kind of 'historical production of human relations' is being lived out which indicates that one should not 'reduce another human being to despair' and also, of course, a certain kind of response to the particular historical situation the couple are in which had previously been lived in 'moral comfort'.¹⁷ The moral radicalism of the unconditional demand to tell her the truth threatens to overturn all this. Yet the decision to lie to her - the refusal of ethical radicalism - swiftly turns 'humanism' into 'inhumanity'. By lying to her he has reduced her to an object and denies her the 'chance of a practical totalisation' of her own life.¹⁸ Moreover the lie now demands strange kind of

¹² *ibid.* p.324

¹³ *ibid.* p.325

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.331

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.334

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.340

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.341

¹⁸ *ibid.* pp.341/342

moral commitment of its own to continue lying despite the temptations to tell the truth - the 'situation is lived in moral uneasiness'. The possibility of opting for the radical path 'of realising the ethical possibility of integral sincerity' remains at any moment but it requires an 'invention' that goes beyond the conditions towards the unconditional.¹⁹

All this obviously requires Sartre to address the relationship between 'invention', 'conditions' and the 'unconditional'. He does this through an examination of the structure of praxis itself. Praxis is marked by the dialectical unity of means and end. It temporalises itself as a totalisation '*en cours*'. Its objective presents itself as the totalisation of the means and demands some kind of work on the world. In so far as the objective of praxis 'absorbs human labour' it appears as 'interiority exteriorised' and reflects the activity of the agent as 'a passive unity of an exterior ensemble'. This is the practico-inert, Sartre tells us.²⁰ The ends at which praxis aims arise through need and desire and reveal the practical field as containing non-being 'to be brought into being' through the 'lines of possibility' the practical field contains. Action is a response to what Sartre here calls, '*une impossibilité de fait*', by which he means that the completion of the action, however simple, involves some kind of intentional 'destruction and restructuration' of the practical field.²¹ In effect what Sartre does is to define 'invention' and 'condition' in particular ways so that 'invention' becomes a fundamental feature of praxis which 'invents' a new unity of the practical field by the 'transformation of the impossible into possibility by the modification of the present conditions of possibility starting from the end to be realised.'²² 'Condition' then becomes that feature of the practical field that can either be surpassed towards the end through restructuration or that cannot - in which case praxis discovers its 'internal limit of exteriority'.²³ At this point praxis must either 'reaffirm the unconditioned end' by proceeding to further restructuration or proceed to a new invention entirely. The end, considered purely as end, remains unconditional!²⁴ Superficially it might seem that Sartre has conjured away the 'conditioning' by a kind of sleight of hand. Indeed, a consequence of what he has to say is that praxis itself is defined in relation to its conditions - 'The motion of

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.346

²⁰ *ibid.* p.351

²¹ *ibid.* p.352

²² *ibid.* p.353

²³ *ibid.* p.353

²⁴ *ibid.* p.354

praxis is to pose itself as unconditionally possible and to unveil from there its conditions of possibility' - but, in so far as it is also an unconditional end, it remains what it is as 'being which ought to be'.²⁵ We need to remember that, in this context, Sartre is in the 'regressive' phase of his investigation. Essentially, the purpose is to uncover the basic ontological structures in their 'purity'. What he thinks he has uncovered is a dialectic of the unconditional and its '*conditions of possibility*'. Praxis as invention of itself in the unconditional end structures itself as 'a hierarchical and temporalising relation of means' and in so far as it uncovers its own conditions of possibility by positing the end 'unconditionally' it creates the practical and temporal field which otherwise would just have inert being in what Sartre calls the 'inertia of indifference'.²⁶ In so far as this is so, it allows Sartre to claim that 'Everything happens as if praxis - whatever its objective - affirms itself ethically and finds itself historically.'²⁷ This is crucial to the progress of Sartre's investigation and implies that praxis - which is now his primary term for the activity of freedom in the world - always contains an element of unconditionality and therefore of the ethical. Equally, it always discovers its 'conditions of possibility' within the temporal field of the world as potential means. This plunges the free praxis back into History.

This means that Sartre now needs to consider in more detail the relationship between free praxis and its historicity as he is now defining it. This allows Sartre to bring into play the entire diachronic structure of totalisation and de-totalisation which includes all the features of his developed ontology from the *Critique*. 'The past of the historical agent', 'the material givens' such as 'scarcity', the 'worked matter' and the 'action of others'. This is the dialectical relation between interiority and exteriority that underlies his thinking; it is a perpetual process of integration and disintegration.²⁸ In an important passage Sartre illustrates how he thinks this reveals a key feature of our historical existence. 'The exterior as a whole ends up passing through (*traverser*) the interior and by becoming its limit and, in so far even as it is worked matter, the universe of inert resistance tends to scatter the practical unity or divert it insensibly: Without the appropriate means, if the agent is not careful, the pursued end will be substituted by the end of the means that he has.'²⁹ This 'action of the means' is a key part of how Sartre charac-

²⁵ *ibid.* p.354

²⁶ *ibid.* p.354

²⁷ *ibid.* p.355

²⁸ *ibid.* p.355

²⁹ *ibid.* p.355

terises the paradoxical situation of free praxis in the world. He frequently uses the example of some kind of external perspective on the operation of a free praxis as it releases a cascade of counter forces which divert and potentially destroy its end. In this case he uses the example of the car driver who unwittingly attempts to drive across a weakened bridge - but the context of the 'trap', the 'ruse' and the 'disaster' allows him to illustrate what he calls 'praxis process'.³⁰ His point is that our free praxis is always conditioned by the very conditions it must employ to realise itself. Even at the very simple level of the driver on the bridge, the free praxis can be seen both as the operation of freedom and the unfolding of an exterior 'fate' and 'destiny'.³¹ In this way our praxis returns to us through the exterior medium of the inert as 'counter-finality' - the fundamental principle remains the same whether we are talking about the material weakness of the bridge or the complexities of the 'worked matter' of the practico-inert field more widely considered. Praxis always brings about and reveals its own conditions which can then return to it as counter-praxis. In this way, Sartre tells us, destiny reflects 'that necessity for a praxis to realise the conditioning of man as the future result of a freedom which posits, by inertia, its end as unconditioned'. Yet, to the extent that the future of praxis never simply appears as a 'simple future state of phenomena in exteriority' but as 'counter-praxis', then that future is never neutrally 'a-human' but negatively 'inhuman'.³² Ultimately, this is the 'ruse' and the 'trap' of History. As Sartre puts it here, 'this can put forward an image of man that is often discouraging.'³³

So far, Sartre thinks that he has shown that 'ethos' is possible dialectically since it is 'the moment when freedom attains itself before losing and alienating itself in objectivisation.' From the side of praxis there is certainly an attempt to 'condition its conditions' and give itself 'a moment of absolute power to submit the world to human beings', it is thus an 'affirmation of human capacity'.³⁴ What is in question is how far 'ethos' can operate as the 'refusal of the trap of history'. Given that we are already and always in history our ethical praxis will be a response to and conditioned by our historical situation. Our inventions will reflect what Sartre calls the 'heuristic liberty' to invent practical solutions to specific problems based

³⁰ *ibid.* p.356

³¹ *ibid.* p.356

³² *ibid.* p.356

³³ *ibid.* p.357

³⁴ *ibid.* p.358

on the conditions of past praxis and our facticity.³⁵ To address this Sartre develops the distinction between the 'pure' and the 'impure' future. As we have seen, everything comes down to how free praxis relates to its conditions. Through a series of examples drawn from the experience of tortured resistance fighters during the occupation Sartre attempts to show how the 'unconditioned reveals its true temporal dimension'.³⁶ Under the extreme conditions of a subject facing torture all 'conditions' themselves become 'deconditioned' by the absolute end of remaining silent under torture. Sartre recognises that the resistance fighter is part of a larger historical ensemble but his purpose is to show that, at the limit, the agent can only maintain their silence by inventing themselves as 'pure subject of interiority' by surpassing all conditions, including their own facticity, as means toward the end that they posit in the 'pure future'. In such a way, Sartre thinks that the 'pure future' reveals the possibility of 'conditioning the past by the future through the present.'³⁷ Ethical radicalism is the invention of ourselves as subjects of interiority through 'a restructuring of the practical field by putting our facticity in question'³⁸. Through the upholding of the unconditional end, Sartre claims we can 'effect a rupture of contact with being (that's to say being-past) and return to it to take it up again in the context of the norm.' The choice of the pure future is therefore a totalisation of the entire temporal structure of our existence which acts 'contrary to destiny' in that, by reconditioning the givens of the practical field, we can 'give the given another meaning (*sens*)'³⁹

Sartre's investigation has therefore revealed two levels or regions of praxis, both defined in terms of their temporal structure as totalisations and the way in which they relate to their conditions defined as the state of the practical field from which and through which these praxes operate. Essentially, 'historical praxis' operates as an 'heuristic invention' conditioned by its conditions as past being - it is the exterior passing through the interior and, to that extent is subsumed by praxis-process and 'destiny'. It works towards an 'impure future' which is conditioned by its past.⁴⁰ The moment of radical ethical praxis is the moment of the 'absolute invention' of oneself as 'pure subject of interiority', it aims at the realisation of an ab-

³⁵ *ibid.* p.360

³⁶ *ibid.* p.367

³⁷ *ibid.* p.367

³⁸ *ibid.* p.365

³⁹ *ibid.* p.367

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p.368

solutely unconditional end which is posited in a pure future which is thus not conditioned by its past and present conditions. In holding to the end 'unconditionally' the agent 'destructures' the entire practico-temporal field and restructures it as means to be surpassed toward the absolute end. One consequence of this, Sartre thinks, is that the outcomes of 'heuristic', historical praxis are 'foreseeable'. He means this in the sense that, if the end and its realisation are conditioned by their conditions, then we can talk in terms of how the operation of the exterior conditions on our interiority make a particular result more or less likely. He sees this as a certain kind of historical 'comprehension'.⁴¹ If, on the other hand, the moment of pure invention as subject of interiority is an absolute conditioning of its conditions, then the realisation of the end cannot be extrapolated from its historical conditions. In so far as all conditions become surpassable means to the end then, for that moment at least, the deepest aspects of our facticity are destructured and reconstituted as means. In terms of the extreme examples he uses to illustrate this, the 'twin poles' of our facticity - birth and death - themselves can be surpassed in totalising our lives as the means to realising an unconditional end.⁴² The resistance fighter chooses suicide rather than talk under torture or the concentration camp inmates uphold the unconditional end of life itself by maintaining 'bare life itself' even when life is conditioned such that it contains no 'good'.⁴³

Sartre thinks that these extreme occasions where 'the historical agent faces the moment of invention' reveal the particular character of radical ethical praxis. The attempt at the realisation of an ethical end, posited in the pure future, is 'comprehensible' - it has determinate content, it aims at something and there is a comprehensible relation of means and end - but it is not foreseeable in the sense that historical praxis, considered in itself, is. This, of course, is because the realisation of the unconditional ethical end is not a function of its 'probability' based on its anterior conditions - the anterior inertia of the statistical fact that 'most people hold out for 24 hours before speaking' or even the inertia of the fact that the individual held out yesterday cannot condition the absolute commitment to holding out 'now'.⁴⁴ As we have seen, the structure of the absolute praxis of the unconditional end is that the future conditions the past and the present. Sartre is careful to point

⁴¹ *ibid.* p.368

⁴² *ibid.* p.367

⁴³ *ibid.* p.375

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.369

out that it is not that no 'means' come to us from the past to support the end - so for example, we may have been trained to resist torture or we may have engaged ourselves within the ensemble to remain silent through the 'pledge' (*serment*) - his point is rather that, if every aspect of our condition can serve as means and be surpassed towards the 'pure future', then the realisation of the unconditional end is not foreseeable or analysable as an object of knowledge (*un savoir*).⁴⁵

Once again, we need to remember that we are at the regressive level of the investigation here. Sartre is attempting to show that 'the ethical dimension is a real structure of praxis'.⁴⁶ In so far as he defines history as the total structure of all anterior conditions, then radical ethical praxis has an interesting and paradoxical relation to its past. The radical ethical praxis is clearly a response of a certain kind to its historical situation. If the agent responds to their historical condition by pushing to the limit the conflict between 'an absolute conditioning in exteriority' and 'the ethical destruction of facticity' then Sartre sees at work both the operation of freedom as the 'pure praxis' of the invention of oneself as 'subject of interiority' and the operation of the historical conditions as what is surpassed towards the end. In inventing themselves as the subject of an ethical praxis, Sartre points out that we are also acting historically. For example, we can only attain the historical end of maintaining the resistance group and its politico-historical goals by operating at ethical level of the unconditional end of remaining silent.⁴⁷ Sartre sees this revealing the 'curious dialectic' of ethics and history. The danger remains that by inventing ourselves as a 'subject of interiority' the moment of freedom and transcendence remains, as it were, on the side of the agent. As our free praxis must necessarily pass over into the practico-inert and return to us as 'the other' if it is to have some kind of historical efficacy, we thereby become the 'subject/object' of history once again. This is the heart of the 'ethical paradox' whereby the moment of freedom is real as, of course, are the historical conditions and the action of the 'other'. The paradox reduces to the point that whilst ethical praxis conditions its conditions, it is in turn conditioned by them. In other words, radical ethical praxis seeks to act outside of history, simply because it transcends all its anterior conditions towards the unconditional end, but at the same time it seeks to realise itself historically by restructuring the practical field, whatever its historical configuration

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.380/381

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.381

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.371

might be. The paradox stems from the fact that we posit an ethical end that we can only reach historically, yet at the same time the ethical end remains unconditional in the sense that it seeks to give history another 'meaning'.

We have here the possibility of what Sartre refers to as an 'ethical pessimism' and an 'ethical optimism'. Everything comes down to how far the ethical praxis can condition its conditions. Pessimism is simply the conclusion that the ethical is a real structure of praxis but, since it posits its ends unconditionally, it can fail historically, which is also to say practically. The ethical norm retains its unconditionality as a permanent, unforeseeable possibility but, in so far as it is 'not sustained by the real determinations of the practical field', the norm appears to exist only 'to be mocked (*bafouer*) and to mock (*bafouer*) us ceaselessly in turn by denouncing our real status as sub-human through the possibility without condition of making ourselves human, which is to say our incapacity *de fait* [*practical*], always revocable, never revoked, to surpass the exteriority interiorised, the totalisation detotalised, the unity disintegrated, the future-fate, in short our historical condition as subjects-objects.'⁴⁸ A key part of Sartre's point here is that ethical praxis potentially shares the fate of all praxis because its structure is fundamentally the same. What begins as invention by a 'subject of interiority' and an attempt to condition its conditions becomes a series of increasingly alienating and diverting compromises with the practico-inert, the action of which has, of course, been called into being by praxis itself. We are once again in the grip of praxis-process and the 'exterior is introduced into the interior' and 'ethics appears as a ruse of history'.⁴⁹ Yet there is the possibility of optimism which again stems from the structure of praxis itself. At the heart of all praxis is the moment of invention and, even as the ethical end is absorbed into history, the agent can 'posit the *vocation* of praxis to unconditionality: that is to say that the agent discovers the meaning (*sens*) of the action, which is the subjection of the world to man without reciprocity. This meaning, even though it dissolves into history, which is partially non-meaning (*non-sens*), remains as the indispensable affirmation of praxis by itself even in failure (*échec*).'⁵⁰ The optimism lies, Sartre thinks, in the way in which we might see ethical praxis therefore not just as positing an unconditional end and either finding its realisation immediately or 'against and through history - by an infinite progression.'

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.381

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.382

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.382

Sartre is referring here to what he calls, 'a circularity of reorganisations' of the practical field.⁵¹ However if we focus, Sartre thinks, on the moment of invention itself, we can see the possibility of what he calls 'pure praxis'. This is a praxis that totalises itself by taking its own unconditionality as an integral part of its end. As he puts it, 'there are ends which reveal themselves as only being attainable by a pure praxis, this defines its ethical moment.'⁵² Central to this is the way in which the ends pure praxis puts forward are 'selective', they 'reduce praxis to its ethical moment' by 'refusing to envisage the historical consequences of the action they call for.'⁵³ In this way it posits its own unconditionality as *unconditional*. The ends of pure praxis 'by their demand itself, posit that such praxis is possible and that the historical agent can always escape their condition as subject-object to make themselves subject of interiority.'⁵⁴ Sartre thinks that we can see here the '*eidos*' of pure praxis. The '*eidos*' of pure praxis is precisely the unconditional and permanent possibility of inventing ourselves at any moment as subjects of interiority and not objects of history.⁵⁵

At this stage, Sartre points out, we can say little about the content and real effect of these ends of pure praxis. It may be that they are just one more 'ruse of history'. It may also be that they 'can come to light across all historical ends as their true meaning'. What we can say is that in the radical ethical moment of pure praxis we can see an implicit demand for a 'total transformation' of ourselves as practical agents and our relation to the world and other agents.⁵⁶ The fundamental issue remains a matter of where we are to place the real significance and efficacy of ethical praxis. To address this Sartre needs to move from the 'abstract structure' of ethical praxis and consider the concrete historical conditions within which ethical praxis operates. Here the relation between ethics and history can appear in a number of forms. Certainly as 'subjects of interiority' ethics can be simply what is left to us when our historical action fails. 'Interiority remains the refuge' and we can exhibit a certain kind of 'ethical heroism' and thereby achieve a kind of ethical triumph through historical failure.⁵⁷ This is a theme Sartre returns to but here he also

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.382

⁵² *ibid.* p.382

⁵³ *ibid.* p.383

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p.382

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p.383

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p.383

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p.386

raises the question of what ends justify placing our 'facticity' unconditionally at risk. From one perspective he notes, the kind of ethical radicalism that puts everything at risk is itself a challenge to the existing normative structures which hold together the historical ensembles within which we exist. In so far as we are within these normative structures we relate to the various manifestations of the 'norm' heteronomously and, to that extent, inauthentically. This is Sartre's characterisation of the normative as the 'other in me'. Imperatives, for example, appear as the ends for which we are the means.⁵⁸ Ultimately we are in some way 'objectively designated' by the norms and they appear to us as 'tasks'. Yet at the same time ethical radicalism remains a permanent feature and possibility of praxis.⁵⁹ Ethical radicalism can reappear at those moments of extreme historical challenge when the ensemble faces 'disintegration'; but we live, for the most part, in normative cycles of 'repetition' and '*exis*'. At the level of the social ensemble, Sartre tells us, our normative structure is a 'nest of contradictions'.⁶⁰

Normative maxims are diverse both historically and within the same society, he says. To that extent they must be 'historically conditioned'.⁶¹ Yet they all demand the same structure of unconditional praxis. Secondly, historical societies must in some way move forward normatively. New values appear through the evolution at the deep level of society and its structures. Yet, these values tend to stabilise and form a repetitive normative system which, in so far as it is dialectically linked to the material and social conditions of that society, operate as unconditional normative support for those social conditions. Given, Sartre claims, that the hegemony - in the Gramscian sense - of the dominant class is never total and that the material conditions of society are also in evolution then there are always contestations of the dominant normative structure.⁶² Ultimately, Sartre thinks, the dominant ethic must prescribe a kind of permanence onto the underlying processes of evolution. The dominant ethic cannot 'recognise pluralism' and, although it can adapt to some extent through 'casuistry', it must eventually break. In this way, Sartre thinks that any dominant ethics is already 'expired'(*périmé*)- it is always behind the real evolution of society.⁶³ Moreover, its attempt to define the normative

⁵⁸ *ibid.* pp.386/387

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p.388

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p.388

⁶¹ *ibid.* p.388

⁶² *ibid.* p.389

⁶³ *ibid.* p.390

space forces the ethical challenge of the dominated class to present itself both as an 'ethical demand' and 'not just the radical negation of the dominant ethics but of all ethics'.⁶⁴ Yet the 'radicals' remain for all that in an 'ethico-historical' bind.

The way Sartre presents this is interesting. It seems as if the ethical radical cannot escape a certain kind of repetition. If they attempt to break free from history by inventing themselves as subject of interiority they must aim at an end outside of history. But the only way they can do this is by reconditioning the past. To do this they must draw on the available range of values considered historically. In other words, they must repurpose, as it were, the normative system of prior societies with a different historical condition to their own. This seems to be the most plausible interpretation of what Sartre means by his statement that, 'in making themselves ethical, the historical agent determines themselves according to a pure future which is precisely the social past.'⁶⁵ He gives the example of reluctant bourgeois revolutionaries of 1789 who invented themselves as classical heroes with the 'intention of transforming history into a normative order'.⁶⁶ The aspect of paradox derives from what Sartre terms the 'supra-historicity' of the praxis 'in its full development' and the 'hyper-historicity' since history itself is the basis of the praxis. His basic point is that you cannot reduce the paradox of ethics by either excising the historical dimension or the radical ethical praxis. It is as if, he says, 'ethical radicalism cannot preserve itself without developing into historical radicalism.'⁶⁷ Another way of putting this is to say that whatever norms we have available can be the basis of our ethical praxis but then also of our historical agency. Even if the norm is a product of the past, its historical action is toward the future. This leads Sartre to yet another formulation of the ethical paradox.

In any particular historical ensemble the norms in operation appear to the agents concerned as 'unsurpassable'.⁶⁸ They have what he calls, 'a being beyond being'. What he means by this becomes clearer when he claims that our relation to the norm as agents is such that all we can do is 'conform our conduct' to it though the ethical praxis of the 'pure future'. From this perspective, the norm can never be 'realised' in the sense that it can have 'an ontic incarnation.'⁶⁹ 'At this level', Sartre

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p.390

⁶⁵ *ibid.* p.391

⁶⁶ *ibid.* pp.391/392

⁶⁷ *ibid.* p.392

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p.393

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p.394

writes, 'the norm presents itself as supra-historical because it manifests itself in objectivity as a system of rules which could (unconditional future) if the rules are rigorously observed govern the course of history or render it useless (the reduction to repetition) without ever being incarnated in history.'⁷⁰ This is their 'being beyond being'. Yet, the normative systems which appear unsurpassable to the agents that live them are also surpassed by the movement of history itself. The evolution of society gives rise to competing normative systems and as a particular 'social ensemble is challenged, re-absorbed or destroyed by historical forces' its norms 'slip into the past'.⁷¹ At the level of history, therefore, it seems as if the attempt 'to negate history' ends up reducing the 'normative ends to passive determinations, carried along by history and without a direct action on the historical process.'⁷² However, it is also the case that an agent can uphold their normative system against history as 'counter-value' at exactly the moment that it is being surpassed by history.⁷³ Sartre thinks that, seen from the exterior, these normative cycles suggest 'ethical relativism'.⁷⁴ However this is just a function of the fact that we observe these norms from the outside and do not live them. From the perspective of life, the normative always appears as 'an absolute which necessitates that other absolute which is the enterprise in interiority or the absolute-subject.'⁷⁵ It is even possible for a particular agent to 'situate themselves reflexively at a distance from the normative ensemble' and thereby encounter a 'throng of facts'.⁷⁶ But this perspective only serves to 'mask' the radical aspect of the norm, which still remains.

Sartre's notes tail off with a shift into the register of 'Marxist structuralism'.⁷⁷ In his remarks which are clearly merely the preliminary to a further development, Sartre emphasises that the paradox appears in the form of the relationship between two modes of ethical transmission. Considered diachronically, as a child we receive the ethical norms as 'ideal' and later encounter them as 'mediated by worked matter'. He puts this in terms of the 'parent' transmitting to the child 'ideally' as 'an inert interdiction' that appears to come directly from 'man', a normative structure that, for the parent, is mediated by and a product of the material condi-

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p.393

⁷¹ *ibid.* p.394

⁷² *ibid.* p.395

⁷³ *ibid.* p.397

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p.398

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p.398

⁷⁶ *ibid.* p.399

⁷⁷ *ibid.* p.401

tions of society and the practico-inert. In this way, the child interiorises the norms without yet knowing their 'meaning' (*sens*).⁷⁸ In so far as we are both 'child and parent', the 'other' as a moral conditioning appears first as 'ideal' and then as 'material'. As an adult, the child 'recognises' in their historico-material condition what they have already internalised as '*habitus*'. As Sartre puts it, 'in this way morality, diachronically, is a *double conditioning*...' The individual 'is conditioned by same reality as son of man and as man.'⁷⁹ Yet history and the material conditions of society are themselves in movement which can introduce 'a slight disjunction' (*un léger décalage*) into the correspondence between 'these two forms of the same imperative. A part of moral "life" stems from this.'⁸⁰ This ambiguity between these two forms of the imperative is where 'ethics strictly speaking' can be found. Each form of the imperative 'masks the practico-inert character of the other', which appears both as 'the autonomy of the human will (as intersubjectivity) just as it is a rigorous heteronomy.'⁸¹

⁷⁸ *ibid.* p.401

⁷⁹ *ibid.* p.402

⁸⁰ *ibid.* p.402

⁸¹ *ibid.* p.402

Conclusion

It should be clear from this presentation of these three 'moments' from Sartre's work that his ethical thinking defies a ready and easy 'totalisation'. Certainly it can - and has been - periodised in a variety of ways linked ultimately to the development of his ontology. The problem with this approach is the same as the problem that Sartre himself faced. It is simply that the ontology does not, to say the least, directly deliver an ethics. This is, of course, the theme of the notorious concluding passages of *Being and Nothingness*. Yet even at this stage we are already talking about '*human reality in situation*'. The issue is how far 'freedom' can 'take itself for an end' and the relationship between this ontological freedom and its conditioned situation. As we have seen, the *Cahiers* develops this in a range of significant ways.

Not only is the 'subjective totality' of the 'For-itself' situated in the dynamic context of its historical condition but 'the other' can now appear not only as negation of our freedom but also, potentially, as an affirmation. Intersubjectively, then, there is a movement from confrontation to comprehension. But this itself is not enough - after all we can 'comprehend' the other as threat - there must also be a move towards the ethical structure of the 'appeal' and 'the gift'. Within this structure we can find a certain kind of reciprocity of freedoms and also, it might be said, a certain kind of praxis in that the 'generosity' that underpins the gift on both sides leads to the completion of the ends of the other, as the ends of both, in the concrete conditions that give rise to the end. Yet though we have moved forward ethically we are still at the intra-individual level here. The ends and the reciprocity they occasion arise and are realised within the wider conditions of history, are themselves conditioned by it and, to the extent that their realisation produces new conditions, make it. In this way, the *Cahiers* leaves us with hope in the possibility of isolated moments of recognition and reciprocity. However, if we place everything back into the 'trough of history', once more we are in the context of the 'plurality of freedoms' and the 'detotalised-totality'. The exercise of authentic, situated freedom becomes a 'risk' or is conditioned by ends that cease to be its own. Moreover, again as we have seen, in so far as Sartre is already in the *Cahiers* laying out the basic foundations of aspects of the practico-inert, our freedom becomes the inessential means of its own ends. This is already apparent in the structure of oppression. Ontologically our freedom is its source yet materially it conditions our

freedom. We live out oppression as if it were simultaneously a choice and a necessity. The basic problem is that the 'City of Ends' is inherent in the appeal and the gift but only as ideality not as materiality. In other words it cannot be merely a choice of self in relation to another self but a choice of ourselves in the world and a choice of the material conditions of that world itself. This inevitably implies a common praxis towards a common end. In one sense this is encapsulated in what is surely a key moment of the *Cahiers* : We must reverse the project of freedom - it is no longer a project to *be* as for-itself-in-itself but the project to be within our conditions. It is not being that is the end in some total, isolated and static sense, but the historical project becomes an end in itself.

We might say then that the '*sens*' of the *Cahiers* is towards an ontological investigation of the historical ensemble and the historical event. If, indeed, we are all implicated in the structures of oppression, alienation and the practico-inert then obviously the only hope we have of changing our condition is through some kind of 'conversion to reciprocity' through which we can develop a common praxis to re-condition our conditions. Yet the conclusion of the *Critique*, in so far as it has one, is that the 'pure praxis' of the group in fusion, just as that of the individual as such, will fall back into history. Their praxis will itself be conditioned by the ongoing development of the very conditions that they seek to surpass. The basic ethical paradox that he highlights appears here. 'Pure praxis' like praxis in general invents itself ethically yet finds itself historically. Ethics therefore appears both at the level of the pure future and at the historically conditioned level of the impure future. Sartre's analysis in *Morality and History* shows that rather than existing in parallel, these two levels of the normative are fundamentally and dialectically entwined. In this respect his analysis of the 'curious dialectic' of Morality and History is a powerful and pertinent one. In so far as politics can be conducted ethically then all the contradictions inherent in the paradox are in play. Kennedy invents himself as ethical as a means of operating politically against the background of a historically conditioned and structured society yet the radical unconditionality within the ethical remains. One wonders what Sartre would have made of the current populist politics which to some extent or another grip our societies. This politics presents itself insistently and categorically as an ethical demand. It can be 'lived' by its supporters with as much fervour and as absolutely as any other normative system of ends - it can produce, therefore, the praxis of ethical radicalism. Yet there is surely at

least a possibility that what we have here is the product of 'mystification' and manipulation driven by the underlying socio-historical process.

One of the great merits of *Morality and History* is Sartre's emphasis that the normative appears at all levels of our social existence. Equally, society itself, in its development, gives rise to values and normative structures which are linked to its underlying conditions of development or, as we saw, there is 'a slight disjunction' between the norms we internalise as children and the normative structure we encounter in the conditions of society as adults. There is already scope here for a kind of creative interplay of values from within the communities that we inhabit and from within our own normative experience as individuals. To some extent we can overcome the contradictions between the norms we encounter at different levels creatively - to that extent there is always a certain kind of invitation to invent. Equally, the contradiction can give rise to 'casuistry' and 'inauthenticity'. Fundamentally though Sartre assumes that behind all invention of values is also an invention of our humanity. We are sub-human in so far as our conditions do not allow the realisation of our humanity. In so far as the normative structure is itself a part of our condition then we are sub-human to the extent that our norms do not fully reflect the value of our humanity. Given that the normative structure itself is dialectically related to the underlying structures of society then an 'ethical radicalism' will involve an 'historical radicalism'. Certainly, one of the attractions of Marxism for Sartre was that it could deliver certain kind of historical radicalism - yet, for the Sartre of *Hope Now* at least, only by reducing the ethical radicalism to a function of the historical conditions. Ultimately for Sartre the fundamental contradiction arises not at the level of the historico-material conditions but at the level of the lived experience of the normative. It is not that there is no dialectic but his dialectic runs, so to speak, in an opposite orientation.

There is indeed a 'slight disjunction' between our ability to condition the conditions and the action of the conditions themselves. If pure praxis is dialectically possible then we can de-condition the practical field. We *can* posit our own humanity as subject of interiority unconditionally and this is so simply because the totality of our facticity becomes the means to end. Absolutely everything is put at risk for the unconditional end. In this way the 'ethical moment' *is* absolute. Yet precisely because this praxis confines itself to the 'ethical moment' it is the absolute within the relative. As always, the moment of autonomy passes over into the complex heteronomy of the detotalised-totally, the plurality of freedoms and the practi-

co-inert. But here, again, we can find hope simply because our own free praxis is part of the basis of the practico-inert and the heteronomy and conditioning is never *total*. Obviously then we need a common praxis that is also an ethically radical one in that it must seek to condition its conditions unconditionally. If the structure of the appeal and the gift at the intra-individual level that Sartre discusses in the *Cahiers* is a genuine feature of our experience, then there is surely some basis for hope here too. However, as the *Critique* so amply illustrates there is a further problem of understanding the reciprocity of freedoms at the level of the 'historical ensemble'. Here everything is structured in terms of 'interests' which themselves are the product of scarcity and the practico-inert field. A key part of the difficulty that the later Sartre had with the notion of the proletariat as the universal class was simply that however 'universal' its interest as a class might be, it is still just one more interest within a plurality of interests. The vindication of this interest is just one more way in which the 'whole shitty mess' can start up again. In this context we need to take Sartre's remarks about a 'deeper fraternity' in *Hope Now* seriously. If this recognition of a common humanity that lies outside of our historical conditions is possible then there is also hope here.

So, finally, what are we to make of *Hope Now* and its 'messianism'? It should be clear that what Sartre has to say in *Hope Now* is, at least, a plausible continuation of his ethical thinking as it had developed since the *Cahiers*. Indeed, his remarks in the discussion also provide the basis of an honest and critical self-assessment of his attempts at an ethics. We have seen that if 'hope' means a belief in the possibility of 'conditioning our conditions' in the light of some developed value of 'humanity' then there is scope for it in his thinking. 'Messianism' in the terms that Sartre is prepared to affirm in *Hope Now* is, in fact, an appropriate metaphor for the 'ethical paradox' that he has been grappling with all along. It is the radical proposition of an end to history that is also a new beginning where ethics will condition the totality of human relations through the reciprocal 'gift' of freedom. It is based both in our immediate experience of each other as sharing a common humanity and it is the invention of a 'historical myth' which can serve as a 'common end' in the pure future from within the historical conditions of the 'struggle against scarcity'. The 'slight disjunction' between the conditions and our ability to condition our conditions is the space through which both ethics and hope appear. What happens next is up to you and me and all the others. Ethics for Sartre

is therefore both the gift of freedom and the risk of freedom in reciprocity and in this way it is always and absolutely, *hope*.

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