



The
Saint &



The
Atheist



Thomas
Aquinas



& Jean-Paul
Sartre

JOSEPH S. CATALANO

The Saint and the Atheist

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THOMAS AQUINAS AND JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Joseph S. Catalano

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Since then happiness is to be gained by means of certain acts, we must as a consequence consider human acts in order to know by what acts we may obtain happiness . . . those acts are properly called human which are voluntary.

THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*

I have tried to do the following: to indicate the limit of psychoanalytical interpretation and Marxist explanation and to demonstrate that freedom alone can account for a person in his totality.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, *Genet*

We should have soared
Like voices in a song
But we roll on the ground here
Like balls of yarn

HENRIK IBSEN, *Peer Gynt*

We move on, the path must have direction, it must have purpose and the journey must be filled with a joy of anticipation, for the boy today, hating the world, creates a hateful world and then tries to destroy it and sometimes himself. We have succeeded in what our fathers prayed for and it is our success that is destroying us.

JOHN STEINBECK, *America and Americans*

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Introduction

The deck we writers and readers play with always has jokers and wild cards, and I do not think we can ever perfectly dispose of them. I suppose that most of us who read and write are relatively well-fed and somewhat decently educated. As such we are separated from a good part of the world, even as we would write and read about that world. What gives this situation a distinctive relevance today is that for the first time in history we have at hand the means to eliminate most of the world's poverty, and we have had this ability for at least fifty years. There will always be natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes, and when these occur, we frequently do our best to bring aid. But there is a vast segment of humanity whose daily existence is in question.

We thus write and read in the shadow of the oppressed and ill-used of the world, and I claim that from the perspective of helping the poor and the marginalized, the distinction between a theist and an atheist is not relevant in our present day. There are many starving people who are being given bread to survive by religious organizations, and there are many atheistic ones who ignore the starving for they are not the stuff of those moving up politically to guide the world. Yes, we can reverse these claims, atheists helping the starving, and theists concerned only with those with money. But help is

needed and required of us, for each and every person is born to be a philosopher. A degree will never be required for those who are now nourished so that they can think for themselves. Rather, let us simply recall the endless “whys” of our original wonder at the world. Does that wonder still exist? Or has it faded? Have we forgotten that we are unique, one of a kind, irreplaceable? A saint and an atheist may help us understand this miracle of life, this great happening. Aquinas (1225–74) and Sartre (1905–80) are separated from each other by several hundred years, but I invite you to let their thoughts recall our original wonder that there is a world and that we are in it.

Before we begin, it is appropriate for me to clarify my comparison of Aquinas with Sartre. I will not, for the most part, attempt to “correct” either, even if some of their social and political opinions may need correction. Paul E. Sigmund summarizes some of these in regard to Aquinas, namely, a preference for monarchy, a qualified acceptance of slavery, the prohibition of taking interest, and his belief in the natural inferiority of women, noting that they were either historically condoned or the result of an uncritical acceptance of Aristotle. He concludes this part of his discussion with these words: “the modern reader can still share Aquinas’s central belief that man should use his intellect critically to resolve human problems of individual and social conduct.”¹

Just as I am not interested in updating Aquinas, at least not as this is usually understood, so too I am not concerned with correcting Sartre. For example, at first, he accepted Joseph Stalin (1878–1953), but he later rejected Stalinism with the invasion of Poland.² My goal is completely different in regard to both thinkers. In respect to Aquinas, my quest is to enhance the positive aspects of his thought that were conditioned by his time, without diminishing their fundamental orientation. This claim is not easy to express correctly. Still, my point is simple: Either the history of philosophy is real or it is a useless fiction. Retrospectively, even the most timid Thomistic scholar would agree that the Aquinas we now have would not have been possible without the existence of Aristotle (384–322 BC) and his philosophy. Indeed, without Aristotle, it is difficult to imagine what form the thought of Aquinas would have taken. Perhaps it would have

been a more naturalized view of Augustine (354–430 AD), whose own thought is impossible to imagine without the prior existence of Socrates (c. 470–399 BC) or Plato (c. 427–347 BC). And, again, it is impossible to conceive of Plato’s thought without that of his slightly earlier contemporaries, Parmenides and Heraclitus (c. 515–450 BC; 535–475 BC). Thales (625–546 BC) is usually given credit for starting Western philosophy, with the desire to find out the one basic substance that underlies all things. Thales came up with a refined notion of water.

My question then is this: Has there been a “happening” in philosophy since the existence of Aquinas that he could not have foreseen and that turns his own thought deeper into itself, so that it becomes clearer and more precise? My answer is “Yes,” the thought of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), granting all its various meanings. In a technical sense, this becomes an Aristotelian-Thomistic question whether first to consider individuals or their classifications, what is called the “population versus the definitional approach,” highlighted in Aristotle’s example of the snub as distinct from the curved. For the snub describes *a* nose and is thus an aspect of an organic being, whereas curvature can be an aspect of a table or a glass.³

Sartre is very much concerned with how we can each be unique and yet belong to the class of humans; but he does not approach the question from the perspective of Aristotle or Aquinas. Rather, he begins with the singular and then shows how it can be both itself and more, a universal. This is Sartre’s notion of the *universal singular*. In each human birth, *this infant emerges from this mother, bearing the characteristics of its birth, and yet unique*.

Once one mentions the relation of Husserl to Aquinas, it is fitting to call attention to the work of Edith Stein (1891–1942); for she first thought of comparing Aquinas with Husserl, approaching my own comparison. She was a contemporary of Sartre, with no contact or I suspect much interest in him. On the other hand, besides their relation to Husserl, they both have a connection to Hitler’s horrendous attempt to exterminate the Jews, Sartre by his essay “Anti-Semite and Jew,” and Stein, more drastically, with her death in a concentration camp after she had become a Catholic and a nun. I will be referring

to Stein now and then. Although I have read much of her work, I do not have a mastery of her thought, and what I grasp from the English translations, I frequently only half agree with.⁴

I am well aware that some would think that Sartre's predecessor Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) has more to contribute to the thought of Aquinas than Sartre. I think this is a big mistake. For all Sartre's atheism, he is better suited than Heidegger, or even Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61), to aid us in understanding our world and our lives.⁵ If Sartre were a determinist, that is, if he maintained that we only seem to be free because we do not fully understand the causes of our actions, or if he believed that we are guided by our “unconscious mind,” or if he held that we are controlled by the social order, or if he insisted that we are the necessary product of some specific evolution that demeans human existence, or, finally, if he believed that the selfish advancement of the few at whatever cost to the poor is simply the necessary order of things—if Sartre held all of these or any one of them, then his atheism would be substantive. *But the opposite is true—all of Sartre's philosophy is centered in the reality and force of human freedom* to create a world within which all can live meaningful lives.

But we live in a busy world within which leisure is sometimes mistaken for laziness, and thus I assume that you would like to know as soon as possible in a little more detail just what this essay is all about. I have hinted, but now I will be a little more explicit. Here then is the substance of my essay, first, most generally: *The philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre can further the naturalization of the philosophy of Aquinas that was initiated by the introduction of Aristotle into Christian thought. In general, I see Sartre as tightening the bond that exists between the human thinking body and the world.* In particular, Sartre gives us a decisive break from comparing our external senses, such as hearing and sight, with our internal faculties, such as intellect and will, which Sartre understands that we forge through our actions. This simple but important outlook on our human bodies gives us a way out of the dilemma of how something can belong to a general category, such as humanity, and still be unique, as is true of Socrates and Plato, and

you and me. On the other hand, I will attempt to show that Aquinas was approaching this Sartrean notion in his own development of what he terms “synderesis,” where the distinction between the intellect and the will seems to break down.

In the concrete, the collapse of the comparison between the internal and the external senses, where freedom pervades the whole body, brings us to Sartre’s notion of good faith, which again I understand Aquinas to be approaching in his notion of conscience. All of this may seem very far from the meaning of our lives, and yet, to be brief, what is the difference between Hitler and Gandhi except how their freedom was one with their bodies, and how each interpreted and willed the world, through their speech, their gestures, and the ways their bodies fitted within the world. As I proceed, this view of the human body imbued with freedom becomes the Sartrean notion of the universal singular. The universal singular as the Ariadne thread will guide us in our comparison of Aquinas and Sartre.

Finally, as for me, the reflecting thinker, my comparison of Aquinas with Sartre reflects my own personal philosophical background. I wrote a doctoral dissertation, “The Education of Substantial Forms,” based on Aquinas’s rethinking of the physics of Aristotle. I was not particularly interested in the topic, but my new mentor was, and he thought that I should begin there rather than with a study of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which a previous mentor had approved. I said, “Yes, sir, indeed, sir, you are absolutely right.” I wanted my degree as quickly and as easily as possible. That was a long time ago and I have forgiven myself for getting my degree on the cheap—not to the extent of retaining a copy of my dissertation, but of happily accepting Aquinas as part of my permanent outlook on the world. On the other hand, for more than thirty years I have been concentrating on the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. How this event happened shows that sometimes reality goes beyond fiction; but I mention it in a note in chapter 13, “The Battle over the Sex of Angels,” for what happened is not far removed from that event.

I have provided introductory discussions of Aquinas and Sartre, with a few words about Stein, and thus the informed reader can begin with chapter 3.

1

The Cast

THOMAS AQUINAS

Aquinas was fortunate in having as his teacher Albertus Magnus, popularly known as Albert the Great (1193–1280). Albert outlived Aquinas and defended his pupil's thoughts, well aware and happy that in many areas his pupil had surpassed him. Still, it was Albert who initiated the general attempt to integrate Aristotle's view of matter into the Christian tradition. It was not an easy task, for it was Plato's thought rather than Aristotle's that seemed tailor-made for Christianity.

Plato did not deny that our life was connected to a body, which was obviously living in a material world, with animals, trees, and stars; and, further, he did not deny our emotions. But, for Plato, our real self was our spiritual soul, which happened to be here and now joined to a body. Thus, the physical world was for him not our natural home; we seemed to belong to another world. Plato did not have a notion of creation; but in his attempt to understand how the soul became immersed in matter, wandering on this earth in search of truth, he referred to a "myth" in which the soul, in a previous life, committed some fault and was banished in matter. Nevertheless, lest the soul forget its true home, the things of this earth were made to

reflect the true natures of the things that existed in its previous life. Thus, when we think of justice, for example, we can know only imperfect forms of justice here on earth, but these lead us beyond to realize that we must have known true justice in a previous life. Indeed, for Plato, true knowledge is a form of recollection; we do not discover truth in this material life, but merely recall what we knew in our previous life. Mathematics seemed to confirm Plato's view of our path to truth, and he insisted that all his students reflect first on its wonder. For we seem to have exact notions that have no basis in reality; for example, the sum of angles of a triangle equals 180 degrees, and yet every triangle on earth can only approximate this truth.

In the *Meno* he gives a more elaborate example to illustrate that we are born with all our important notions already within us. There are very few times when in teaching philosophy one can justify having a little fun, but the episode in the *Meno* is one of them.

Socrates is speaking—Socrates did not write anything, but Plato frequently has Socrates describe his own philosophy. Socrates asks a “slave boy,” that is, a young lad who has had no formal education, to construct a square whose area is eight square feet. We must recall that he does not have the use of the extended number system of square roots and irrational numbers. The boy knows that one gets the area of a square by multiplying the dimension of the sides—if the sides are two inches, the area is four units, if three, nine units. Nothing in between seems to work and the boy gives up. But Socrates asks him if he can construct a square whose area is sixteen units, and the boy grants that this is easy if the sides are each four units. Can he divide each of the sides? “Yes.” He is asked if he can connect the divisions, dividing the big square into four smaller ones, and the boy agrees, being led to see that each area is four units. Now the boy merely has to be shown that he can divide each of these squares of four units in half by a diagonal line, leaving two units in each of the four sections. It is now easy to connect each of these divided squares, creating a new square within the larger one, with each segment two units. The boy now agrees that this new square is eight units. Socrates asks if he taught him anything he did not know, or was it not true that he knew every step of the way but merely had to have it pointed out to

him. The boy agrees that he indeed did know it all. But I think that it is equally clear that the lad was taught every step of the way. Indeed, in order to break from this notion of innate ideas, it was necessary for Aristotle to stress that at birth our minds are blank. We acquire all that we know by using our senses and faculties, such as memory and imagination, which we share with higher animals, and powers of intellect and will, which are unique to us.

When Augustine converted to Christianity, or, perhaps, just prior to his conversion, he became acquainted with the philosophy of Plato. Later he identified Plato's notions concerning true justice, goodness, as well as mathematical truths with ideas in the mind of God, aware, of course, that these ideas cannot be separate in God. Moreover, although we were indeed composed of body and soul, the soul was itself the true substance of a human. Death is easily explained as leaving the garment of the soul, the body, behind as one enters the spiritual realm. Thus, for Augustine, when Socrates drank the hemlock that stopped the functioning of his body, causing him to die, he, the full Socrates, still survived and is in heaven; but, for Aquinas, only the soul of Socrates is in heaven, and he must await the last judgment for the union of his soul with his body. Indeed, for Aquinas, each human soul is so tightly joined to its body that, without its unique body, with its senses, it can know God only through a special divine gift. All of this is a gross simplification, but I think it is sufficient for our present purposes.

One thousand years separated Augustine from Aquinas, and the philosophical dialogue was different. Following an Arabic tradition, led first by Avicenna (980–1037) and then Averroes (1126–98), Christian theologians were invited to take a closer look at Plato's student, Aristotle. Albert and Aquinas embraced the invitation. Their attitude is interesting for my claim in this comparison between Aquinas and Sartre. For Albert and Aquinas did not allow the Arabs' interest in Aristotle to deter them from learning about Aristotle. Indeed, on the contrary, they themselves studied Aristotle in depth and used his thought to develop a theology that saw a tighter union of the soul and the body, giving more credit to our material laws that arrive from human behavior.

Both Albert and Aquinas had to overcome the initial difficulty of conceiving each separate thing on earth as tightly composed of matter and form. Each material thing, each mineral, plant, or animal, was what it was not only because of its form but also because of its matter. With the background of Plato and Augustine, this was a difficult insight to keep returning to and to keep insisting upon. From one perspective, this Aristotelian view did not, at first, seem far from Plato; a natural thing, such as *this* apple tree, seemed to be placed in the category of apple trees by its form, which seemed to be the same in all apple trees. And yet we all are familiar with the great variety of apples, and those who plant specific orchards are very much aware of the specificity of matter. Indeed, the difference between a vineyard whose vines are laden with grapes that will bring thousands of dollars and one whose grapes may sell for only a few dollars is the gravel, the earth from which the vines spring.

In living things, the form is called a “soul,” so that plants, animals in general, and humans in particular all have souls. Aristotle granted that the human soul was unique—the highest of all souls—capable of absorbing the forms of all natural things lower than itself; and beyond this, the human soul was, through reason, able to touch the divine. I will be returning to all these claims, and they will, I hope, gradually become clearer while I also point out some difficulties with this Aristotelian view.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

From a philosophic perspective, there is no direct path from Aquinas to Sartre, but the notion of intention is a bridge of sorts. The German thinker Franz Brentano (1838–1917) inherited this notion from Thomas Aquinas, or at least from what is loosely referred to as the Thomistic tradition. Nevertheless, I am not sure that Brentano’s notion of intention is the one that I approve of and that I will be using.¹ Very simply, the notion of intention that I think is correct is simply this: We first go out of ourselves to the world before we reflect upon ourselves. We do indeed reflect upon ourselves, but first and foremost our consciousness is directed to the world, to a mother or guardian

who may have nursed us and later to other people and to the things of this world. Both Aquinas and Sartre embrace this outwardness of consciousness, and one might say that, for Sartre, intention and freedom are his religion. Confusion arises because Brentano and Husserl use the notion of intention to mean that we are first aware of some content of our consciousness, some impression, such as red, without affirming that we are first aware of a red *thing* such as an existing rose. The existing rose is, after all, out there in the world, and you are in your room looking at it. True, and yet what Sartre, Aquinas (with a little push), and I assert is that we do know existing things as existing, through their relation to our sensuous lived body. Philosophers tend to forget their own fleshy, bony bodies.

Having completed his formal philosophical education, Sartre failed the exams because he gave his own answers rather than those expected. Told he had better play the system if he wanted a degree, he took the advice to heart, passed first in his class with Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86), his lifetime companion, just following. Sartre was then introduced to the thought of Husserl, while sitting in a café—what else? (but then they were warm and friendly). The story is that his friend Raymond Aron (1905–83) told him that Husserl had the key to knowing how to philosophize about everyday objects such as the cocktail that he, Sartre, was about to drink. Whether the tale is true or not, it does reflect Sartre’s use of Husserl. Indeed, there is a sense in which Sartre turns Husserl on his head. Husserl’s recommendation was that we are best equipped to learn the essences of things if we suspend our natural attitude toward them, that is, if we suspend our commonsense beliefs about objects, such as a cocktail we are about to drink. Sartre, on the other hand, would have us reflect on the degree to which our attempt to know the essences of things is tied to an uncritical acceptance of the scientific views the world. For example, Sartre would ask you to look at a tree and attempt to see it *as this particular thing* before you classify it as plant, lower than animals but higher than minerals. Or to see the cup from which you are about to drink your coffee as if it were the only cup in the world, as a unique *this* before you classify it as a general artifact made to drink

from. The same applies to us humans but with far more complexity; you and I are human, yes, but first and foremost we are each this unique person, we each deserve a long biography.

Sartre has indeed given us a long biography, his most massive work, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857*, bulging in three thick volumes in French and five in the dedicated English translation by Carol Cosman to which I will be referring.² I might mention that although Sartre is an atheist, this long work is not concerned with atheism at all. Sartre’s detailed study revolves about two main themes: The first is the tremendous power adults have over children, for better or worse, for Gustave’s family regarded him as an “idiot,” good for nothing but scribbling words, and far below his father, who was an eminent doctor. The second directly concerns Flaubert and his writing of *Madame Bovary*; it also indirectly concerns the relation between value and beauty in a work of art, which Sartre claims those who control museums try to separate by their appeal to art for art’s sake. For Sartre, all art should be committed in the sense that every work of art reveals the creative force of the artist, which should awaken the creative force of the viewer or reader. *Madame Bovary*, Sartre claims, attempts to misdirect the reader by having the reader slowly believe that the beauty of a written work is above truth, the truth that we are free. Thus, no matter what we do our lives are lost, but for Gustave Flaubert, that is acceptable, because language can raise this futility to its own level, the level of a beauty that is beyond value. I will return to this in chapters 7 and 9. Indeed, I will devote considerable space to *The Family Idiot*; but I should say here that while I have no reason to doubt Sartre’s knowledge of the life and works of Gustave Flaubert, I am not an expert in this field. I approve of this work as a general study of the ways even middle-class adults can harm their children and the ways that each human life both reflects and influences its entire age.

A CASUAL NOTE ON EDITH STEIN

Stein first thought of comparing Aquinas with Husserl, and thus in my comparison of Aquinas with Sartre, it seems fitting to acknowl-

edge her earlier effort. She was born into a relatively Orthodox Jewish home and for a good part of her life considered herself an atheist, until she read a work by Saint John of the Cross (1542–91). Her conversion was almost immediate, and as a new Catholic and a philosopher, she decided that she must acquaint herself with the thought of Aquinas. She produced a German edition of Aquinas's long tract *The Disputed Questions on Truth*.³ Also, in honor of Husserl's seventieth birthday she was invited to contribute an article to a commemorative volume, and she composed a dialogue between Aquinas and Husserl. The editor was the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who suggested that she revise her dialogue, and there thus exist two versions, the original and the one accepted; both are given in volume 8 of her collected works, *Knowledge and Faith*.⁴ Although very little of Stein's work was appreciated during her short life, she produced twenty-nine volumes in German, many of which have been recently translated in critical English editions, on which I depend, my German having faded with the years.

Both Stein and Sartre were influenced by Husserl, but only Stein worked directly with Husserl for years. In her long but easily readable and (perhaps fortunately) unfinished autobiography *Life in a Jewish Family, 1891–1916*, in which she is moved to reveal the foibles of the whole family, including herself, she writes:

Dear Göttingen! I do believe that only someone who studied there between 1905 and 1914, the short flowering time of the Göttingen School of Phenomenology, can appreciate all that the name evokes in us.⁵

Indeed, because Stein was Jewish and also a woman, she suffered from double prejudice. Husserl, also a converted Jew, admired Stein, but he was reluctant to recommend her for teaching in a university even prior to Hitler's laws preventing Jews from teaching in Germany. Women did teach in other disciplines, but Edith would have been the first women professor in philosophy. It is difficult to excuse Husserl. Stein wrote many letters denouncing the denial of her own application to teach philosophy on the university level and the general prejudice against women. Ironically, when Heidegger removed Husserl's

name from the original dedication of his important *Being and Time*, Husserl himself then felt the effects of anti-Semitism (although for some Heidegger was simply making it easier for his own work to be published).⁶

Although Stein was discriminated against, she was nevertheless able to immerse herself in Husserl's philosophy. What is of particular interest is that Husserl's later writings—Stein was personally working on much of this with Husserl—seemed to indicate an abandoning of the realistic direction of the early works. What had been exciting about Husserl's early work was that it seemed to invite us to take seriously our actual contacts with the world. The prevalent philosophy was neo-Kantian to the extent that we were encouraged to take notice of the innate limitations of human knowledge, specifically the way our minds organize the world so that what we perceive is not the “thing-in-itself” but the “phenomenon,” the thing as tailored to fit our consciousness.⁷

Stein actually confronted Husserl with the way his later thought seemed to be going back to Kant. She had an occasion to elaborate all her objections in great detail, and Husserl understood her objections (and apparently the objections of many of his best students); he was simply not convinced by them! Husserl seemed intent on continually applying his descriptive methods to new issues, and probably regarded the question of whether he was an idealist or a realist as missing the point of his unique stance of knowing the essences of things, existing or not.⁸

2

Becoming Acquainted

Having met the cast, we must now become acquainted in such a way that the whole picture is before us at least in outline. I agree with those who have said that if you know something very well, you should be able to explain it simply and briefly, granting all that may later follow. I know that I can do this with the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. I think I can do the same with Thomas Aquinas, and I am aware that I cannot do the same with the thought of Edith Stein, and so my references to her will be brief and “casual.”

AQUINAS

When Aquinas began his philosophical and theological thinking, the spirit of Plato was ever present, and the spirit of Aristotle initially seemed more a hindrance than a help for Christian thinking. But the situation is confused. At first, the presence of Aristotle gave no problem to early Christian thinkers, since for the most part only the logical works of Aristotle were known in the West. Moreover, Aquinas had to make a special effort to acquire reliable texts of the major portion of Aristotle’s writings. And, beyond this, it was a question of how one was to read these texts. Anton C. Pegis, in his excellent

introduction to the two-volume edition of the *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Random House, 1945), notes that “Aquinas had to learn how to become a philosopher,” with the implication that Augustine was first a theologian and only secondarily a philosopher.¹ This is an interesting thought, which invites reflection.

It was appropriate for thinkers of Augustine’s time to write and hold discussions in monasteries, whereas in the thirteenth century there were universities, with houses of study within these universities. Aquinas thus worked in a different setting than Augustine. On the other hand, surely Augustine had a philosophical understanding of Plato, and so what is the difference? I think that Aquinas had to learn how to think only as far as a philosopher would go without the aid of faith. This is particularly true in his commentaries on Aristotle’s physics, but it is also true throughout Aquinas’s thinking, particularly against the Arabic and Jewish philosophers. For example, in a short work, *On the Eternity of the World*, and in the *Summa of Theology*, Aquinas admits that God could have created the world for all eternity, still sustaining it in being so that without his presence things would fall into nothingness. Thus, Aquinas admitted that creation in time is a matter of faith and cannot be proved by reason, “Hence that the world began to exist is an object of faith, but not of demonstration or science.”²

Aquinas wrote two *Summas*, or Summaries, one addressed directly to students of theology, variously titled in Latin *Summa Theologica* or *Summa Theologiae*, and in English frequently simply as *Summa*. The other “summary” was written in reply to Jewish and Arabic commentators on Aristotle who had initiated a dialogue with Aristotle before Albert and Aquinas. The early Latin texts give it a long and short title, but it is generally now known as *The Summa Contra Gentiles*, with no easy English reference, except perhaps the *Contra Summa*.

To repeat, the general conditions of thought were different for Augustine and Aquinas. Formal universities were not in existence in Augustine’s time, discussions being held in monasteries or small semiprivate groups; but much of Aquinas’s writings were part of an academic setting where colleagues were present and could frequently voice their opposition, allowing him to clarify his thought. Vernon J. Bourke in his introduction to the English edition of the extensive

tract *On Truth* provides us with a nice description of this academic atmosphere: “On the day of the first session of the disputed question, all early-morning classes in the house of studies were dismissed. . . . A bachelor under the direction of the master presented the question under discussion and outlined the position to be taken in answering it.”³ All of this might take place in one day; soon after the master, for example, Aquinas, would then summarize the results, answering objections and giving his final opinion. Bourke notes that *On Truth* contains 253 disputations, each of which would have filled two days of discussion in the university.

Gradually, these spatial conditions for thinking led to a transformation of Christian thought. The natural world was seen to be real, filled with a natural ordering of beings, so that the highest of one type almost reaches the lowest of the next grade, plants that catch insects. In all this gradation, the senses are crucial. First and foremost, all living bodies must have the sense of touch. In book 3 of Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s *On the Soul*, we read:

First, then, he observes that the necessary universality of touch in the animal world can be clearly shown. . . . Whence he concludes to the necessity, for the preservation of the bodies of animals, that they be endowed with touch. . . . Hence, unless the animal were able to touch, and touching to discriminate between, object harmful and congenial to it, it could not avoid the former and accept the latter, and so preserve its existence.⁴

Advancing from the sense of touch to sight, hearing, memory, and imagination, complex animals almost touch humans who have intellect and a free will. This hierarchical ordering of nature, rising from minerals to plants, to animals, including human animals, is, to repeat, accomplished in nature by the union of matter and form; it is termed “hylomorphism,” matter (*hylē*) and form (*morphē*). Still, one must never forget that it is only the composite that comes into being. The ability of things to change one into another, a grain of wheat into wheat, and coal into a diamond, is one of the bases for hylomorphism. In truth, it is not easy to clarify just what kinds of things change into other kinds of things. Aristotle is very cautious and cir-

cumspect. There are a few natural elements, earth, air, fire, and water, and there is the broad division of minerals, plants, and animals. Most obviously, there is change from plants and animals to minerals, since when these die, they become an assortment of minerals. It is a kind of loose evolution as long as we do not attempt to specify a specific mechanism, and there is also a loose teleology.

On the other hand, Aristotle was honest enough to see a problem in his view of the world. An apple seed seems to work for a purpose, and yet the seed cannot know this purpose. One might see here the workings of the First Cause, God. Nevertheless, in his hierarchal ordering of beings, Aristotle saw the need of beings between physical things and God, what we call angels but what were for him separated substances that guided the purposeful movement of plants and animals on Earth. It seems, however, that these separated beings had to work through matter, namely, the other planets, which were composed of incorruptible matter, unlike our Earth. It has never been clear to me to what extent Aquinas went along with this view. Nevertheless, Aquinas's general view is clear, namely, the directive force in nature is ultimately due to God, Aristotle's prime mover. Aquinas moves beyond Aristotle's hierarchal view to a supernatural realm, and here we know that we were created and sustained in being by a personal God who cares for us. Human reason cannot reach this God, but it is possible to prove that no argument can disprove the existence of this supernatural realm. Thus, while reason cannot prove the beliefs of faith, our reason can show that these beliefs are not repugnant to reason.

SARTRE

Sartre finished his formal philosophical training in 1928. By 1931 we know that he was studying Husserl in Germany with a grant, limiting himself to the *Logical Investigations*, the 1905 *Lectures on Inner Time Consciousness*; *Ideas*, part I, *Experience and Judgment*; and the *Cartesian Meditations*. These Cartesian meditations were delivered in French, and Sartre may have heard about them from Merleau-Ponty, who had attended the lectures. Probably, we will never know the exact catalyst, and I am not sure it is important. To repeat from chapter I, the tale that remains vivid is of Raymond Aron describing

Husserl's phenomenology to Sartre and Beauvoir in a café, stressing Husserl's claim that philosophy must examine the concrete things of the world, and Sartre proclaiming something like, "Now I can philosophize about a cocktail!"

And this cocktail was the very cocktail Sartre was drinking—not merely an object but an existing thing precisely as existing. This is the major break with Husserl, and it centers in the force of the notion of intention, whether it is merely to the essential feature of an object or to an existing thing, which is Sartre's contention (and, I think, it is true for Aquinas). Moreover, I completely agree with this notion of intention, and it is this that separates Sartre from Stein and, indeed, from Husserl and Heidegger. Indeed, Sartre reverses Husserl's procedure. Husserl advises us to "bracket" or suspend our conviction about the concrete existence of a thing in order to concentrate on its essential features; Sartre focuses on the concrete existence of a thing and recommends that we "bracket" or suspend what we take to be our understanding of its essential characteristics. Sartre wants us to recognize the degree to which quasi-scientific and cultural norms have invaded our understanding of things, and he refers to Charles Darwin's "delicious" law of survival of the fittest, which fits the needs of our oppressing and repressing social orders. And Sartre has the same view of Sigmund Freud's notion of the unconscious, namely, that it puts a veil over our responsible acts. Yes, we may have an unconscious mind; but, if we do, we have forged it for our own benefit.

After reading Sartre for more than thirty years, I have tried to understand why my understanding of his philosophy is so very different from that of others who claim to have also read Sartre. I have come to the following conclusions, which may not only help answer this "psychological" question but also help in understanding how I see Sartre developing his philosophy. There are two main issues, namely, *Sartre is a writer who is also a philosopher*, and second, *Sartre (almost) never defends his philosophy*, especially when anyone asks him a question about it. Theoretically, the first is the most important; but the second has led to almost as much misunderstanding. I will begin with Sartre the writer.

Sartre won the Nobel Prize for literature, not for philosophy (there is none given); he refused the prize, but that is another mat-

ter. The point is that Sartre wrote novels and plays that are highly regarded as literature. Sartre is a writer, a compulsive writer, filling pages several hours a day, even when on vacation. No philosopher has had this stature. The presence of Sartre the writer affects readers of his philosophy in several ways. The most usual is to begin with the attitude that his major philosophical works cannot be that serious. Kant (1724) and Heidegger, yes, they write philosophies; you will not find them writing novels and plays. Besides, Sartre is an atheist and he is clear about it, whereas Kant is not, and if Heidegger is one, he is not clear about it. Sartre is always clear—at times very difficult, but always clear. He is after all a writer, a great writer.

But Sartre does like a telling phrase; to give two of the most famous in his *Being and Nothingness*: “The look” and “Man is a useless passion.” But when understood in their proper context, these and others take on nuanced meanings, regardless of whether one agrees with them. Unfortunately, they too frequently act as black holes, absorbing all critical awareness. Still, Sartre is not in favor of “clever” writing in philosophy. He consistently states that unlike fiction, expository writing should simply aim to be clear. But then, the man *is a* writer, and for Sartre, this means that there is a formal difference between the spoken and the written word (Kierkegaard and Derrida were in their own ways also aware of this difference). The issue is especially clear in *Being and Nothingness* in which many thinkers refer to a “scandal”—“Sartre,” they will inform us, “doesn’t discuss the body until part 3 and even there only in the second chapter!” The criticism is totally unjustified, and it merely proves the degree of illiteracy among many “scholars.” Sartre is very clear about what he is doing. Thus he concludes part 2, with the comment:

Perhaps some may be surprised that we have treated the problem of knowing without raising the question of the body and the senses or even once referring to it. It is not my purpose to misunderstand or to ignore the role of the body. But what is important above all else, in ontology as elsewhere, is to observe strict order in discussion.⁵

Before commenting upon these words, we must note that we still have to wait until the second chapter of part 3 before we commence the for-

mal discussion of the body. As if aware of our impatience, Sartre again puts his cards on the table: “it is most important to choose the order of our bits of knowledge.” And what is this order? Sartre writes, “If we wish to reflect on the nature of the body, it is necessary to establish an order of reflection which conforms to the order of being.”⁶

Still, we may rightly ask, what is the order of being that Sartre has in mind? It is simply that in our normal healthy use of our body and its senses, we “pass through” our organic constitution. When I am absorbed in watching a sunset, I am not aware of my eyes or of the position of my body. Of course, without sight and without a correct positioning of my body, I could not be watching this sunset; but in my engaged action, I “pass through” my organic constitution in my enjoyment of what I am watching. As part of a rather long discussion of the relation of the order of being to the order of knowing, Sartre writes: “In short, consciousness (of) the body is lateral and retrospective.” He continues, “the body is the neglected, the ‘passed by in silence.’ And yet the body is what this consciousness is; it is not even anything except body. The rest is nothingness and silence.”⁷ But then, let us not forget that “nothingness” and “silence” are what distinguish a living body from a corpse.

Thus, in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre’s written words attempt to reflect the very order in which we know ourselves. Merleau-Ponty and others use the more familiar approach of beginning with what our adult experience has taught us about the body and then proceed to examine it. Nothing wrong with a different approach; but then one would think that they would not miss what Sartre is doing.

Finally, I should draw attention to the use of commonsense terms such as “consciousness” and “body.” Sartre does use technical terms, such as the “for-itself” and the “in-itself,” but wherever possible he prefers to lead his reader to a new understanding of human nature by familiar terms. Again, this frequently leads to misunderstandings as readers are impatient to follow him as he deepens these commonsense notions. We here meet two diverse ways of writing philosophy, each admittedly with its own disadvantages. I think of Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) and Martin Buber (1878–1965), who were more or less contemporary with Sartre. They had their differences, but they both attempted to rethink the notions of God, human nature, and the

world, while incorporating non-Western views. Jaspers preferred to “invent” terms, such as the “encompassing,” so as to almost force his readers away from notions that have become part of the vocabulary of Western philosophy. Buber, on the other hand, preferred to use commonsense terms such as “I-Thou” and lead his readers to rethink the relation. In this respect, I favor Buber, and for the most part Sartre follows the same path, except when he feels that an issue is so connected with our past philosophical thinking that it is best to begin there; for example, one might mention the “dialectic.”

The second issue I wish to consider—here I can be brief—is Sartre’s own comments about his writings. I would not even mention this except that it occupies so much space among some of his interpreters. The simple fact is that Sartre cannot be trusted in the least about anything he says in an interview about his philosophy. It is not that he wishes to deceive but, rather, that he constantly attempts to align himself with any criticism in his attempt to “think against himself.” For example, regardless of his seeming rejection of claims he made in *Being and Nothingness* in response to questions about this work and his later views, all of *Being and Nothingness* is present, especially “the look,” in *The Family Idiot*. It is deepened but not rejected as Sartre reminds us that philosophy is not only written by adults but, too frequently, always from an adult perspective even when the subject is infants.

Perhaps a final introductory word about Sartre’s atheism is due. It is unique in that it does not attempt to reduce humanity to a mechanism but, rather, consistently reminds us of human freedom, which he neatly summarizes in his work on Jean Genet:

I have tried to do the following: to indicate the limit of psychoanalytical interpretation and Marxist explanation and to demonstrate that freedom alone can account for a person in his totality.⁸

3

Introducing Good Faith

Aquinas wrote a great deal; they say that he kept several scribes working at full pace. Sartre is not far behind, unwilling to see a single sheet of paper remaining blank; he wrote several hours every day, even on vacation. I claim that if we could compare the entirety of their writings, they would mesh in a remarkable way, particularly in regard to the Sartrean notion of “good faith.”

Still, good faith is a rather contemporary notion, and, to be honest, Sartre mentions it only while explaining bad faith, which is interesting.¹ For the present, let us accept as part of enlightened common sense that if we are to live a meaningful life, we must have good faith relations with both ourselves and others. I will not at first attempt a careful description of good faith, but let me begin with some examples, starting with Aquinas. Toward the end of the *Summa of Theology* Aquinas discusses private property, approving Aristotle’s claim that the possession of external things is natural to man. He also affirms that it is in keeping with the Old Testament, where it is written in Genesis, “Let us make man in our own image and likeness and he shall rule over the fish of the sea,” etc.² Aquinas then asks, “Is Private Property Legitimate,” and here he makes it very clear that the possession of things is a question not of natural law but of human agree-

ment: “peace is better preserved among men if each one is content with his property.” But he adds, “Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy, ‘Command the rich of this world to be ready to share and to give.’” And moving along in this same section, Aquinas asks, “Is Stealing Allowed in a Case of Necessity?” He answers, “In cases of [strict] necessity everything is common property. . . . Strictly speaking such a case is not theft or robbery.” And, in the same article, he adds, “whatever a man has in superabundance is owed, of natural right, to the poor for their sustenance. . . . It is also to be found in the *Decretum Gratiani*: ‘The bread which you withhold belongs to the hungry; the clothing you shut away to the naked; and the money you bury in the earth is the redemption and freedom of the penniless.’”³ I understand Aquinas to be here writing in the spirit of good faith, and to continue when he writes:

Hence, the first practical principles bestowed on us by nature, do not belong to a special power but to a special natural habit, which we call *synderesis*. Whence *synderesis* is said to incline to good and to murmur at evil, inasmuch as through first principles we proceed to discover, and judge of what we have discovered.⁴

Christian theology is so immersed in the fight between good and evil, in the freedom to choose God or the Devil, to win salvation or lose it, that the point hardly needs to be mentioned. Aristotle also believed in freedom, in prudence, and in the ability to control our desires as we aim for the nobler things in life. But we must have some direction, and for Aristotle and Aquinas we have these in both the speculative and the moral orders; that is, we have quasi-intuitive grasps of certain truths that require no validation other than their correct formulation. For example, in the speculative order we grasp that the whole must be greater than its parts; in the moral order we grasp that freedom for ourselves and others is better than constraint. Or, to return to *synderesis*, we know that it is better to do good than evil. *Synderesis* is simply a conjunction of intellect and will so that when we understand the good we wish to do, we easily will that same good. Normally for Aquinas the actions of our intellect and will are

separated somewhat in time by our reflections. To repeat, Aquinas, following Aristotle, understood that we possess internal faculties that are somewhat like our external senses. Our eyes do not hear and our ears do not see; in a similar way, our intellect does not will the good we wish to do, and the will does not understand the good we wish to do. Thus, a young person might be attempting to decide a vocation, whether to become a lawyer or a teacher. This choice may itself have been preceded by earlier reflections, for example, how important it is to have a very good income. Once a general decision is made, to become a teacher, other choices and reflections will follow. All of this is obvious and easy to understand, regardless of how we understand the workings of our mind. Indeed, we seem to be on the level of normal human behavior, except that we should note the possible influence of parents and guardians, who may attempt to sway a young person's choice of vocation.

In the long tract *On Truth*, Aquinas expands upon the notion of synderesis.⁵ He also considers conscience, asking whether it is a power, a habit, or an act. He reflects that words frequently have many meanings; for example, sight may refer to the ability to see or to actually looking at something. The same is true of conscience, which may refer to a person's being old enough or healthy enough to use his or her conscience. Thus infants do not have a conscience, nor do the insane. To say that something accords with one's conscience or is against it presupposes that the individual has already made use of prior habits and acts of understanding. Aquinas writes:

These are the habit of synderesis and the habit of wisdom which perfect higher reason, and the habit of scientific knowledge, which perfects lower reason. Of these, either all are applied at the same time, or only one of them is applied.⁶

It is interesting that the habit of scientific knowledge perfects lower reason. This, in fact, almost anticipates Sartre's view. But let us continue with synderesis. Again in the long tract *On Truth*, Aquinas asks, "Can Conscience Be Mistaken?"⁷ Aquinas answers that conscience is "nothing but the application of knowledge to some special

act.” As we think about things, Aquinas notes that we use our general knowledge mistakenly in two different ways. Either we start with faulty general principles, or we use correct ones but apply them to a concrete situation erroneously. For Aquinas, however, *synderesis* always gives us a true starting point; Aquinas here refers to not doing anything that offends God. More generally, we can say that *synderesis* informs us that good is to be done and evil avoided. But as we apply *synderesis*, we might be misled in regard to what we judge is good or evil; for example, we might have an incorrect view of civil norms. On the other hand, Aquinas makes it clear that we must always follow our conscience, whatever the cost.

Let us continue with our indirect approach to the strict meaning of good faith. Much earlier than Sartre’s own examples, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, when writing about the “underground man,” described the condition of bad faith perhaps better than Sartre himself. The “underground man” says of himself: “Oh if I had done nothing simply from laziness! . . . It would mean that I was positively defined, it would mean that there was something to say about me. ‘Sluggard’—why it is a calling and vocation; it is a career.” And he continues: “I knew a gentleman who prided himself on being a connoisseur of Lafitte. He considered this as his positive virtue, and never doubted himself. He died, not simply with a tranquil, but with a triumphant conscience, and he was quite right, too.”⁸

Nevertheless, strictly speaking, good faith is a Sartrean notion; let us begin to reflect on what Sartre has to say about it. First, as frequently happens, we become aware that evil is easier to describe than good, and Sartre is vivid in his descriptions:

But it must be understood that the original force here is *need*. Need is the primary drive. It feeds ambition. Why? Not because there is a *need* for the rich man. But underpinning his being as a rich man there is his need which can be satisfied only because he is *among the scarce people* who have rare products in their possession. . . . A system of constraints and myths is already needed, to deter the majority (the *non-scarce*) from demanding sufficiency: in short, exploitation, oppression and mystification are needed. In a word, violence.⁹

Moreover, in *The Notebooks for an Ethics*, written after *Being and Nothingness*, but published only posthumously, we read, “One does not make use of the oppressed as a machine, contrary to what is often said, but as a limited freedom”; and “Oppression does not fall from the sky. . . . oppression is a human fact.”¹⁰ And, later in his life, Sartre writes:

The man of scarcity, seeking his abundance, seeks it as a determination of scarcity. Not abundance for all, but his own, hence deprivation of all. . . . He is exceptional because he owns the scarce. And that exceptional value is recognized by society. Within himself the man feels like a jewel.¹¹

Sartre here plays on the notion of scarcity; it is a crucial concept in his thinking. But for the present, my main concern is simply to note that either we respond more or less positively to what Aquinas and Sartre wrote about poverty and oppression, or we judge the poor and unfortunate of the world to be lazy and deserving of their condition. That some may indeed be lazy is not the point; but our abundance is to a great extent due to our using others as “limited freedoms.”

From a more optimistic and positive perspective Sartre indirectly points to the good faith in our play. In play, we acknowledge that we are responsible not only for the way we play the game, but for the rules themselves. Play also reveals our knowledge of the world, for in play, we realize how our existence distinguishes one thing from another, yet without altering each thing. To use Sartre’s example, snow becomes for the skier both a support and the revelation of snow itself. In the concrete, the skier changes snow by being on it; but if we could imagine an ideal skier touching the surface of snow without altering it, we would have an insight into the truth of knowledge.

Thus, in our primary awareness of things, we do not alter their basic constitution; rather, we reveal their fundamental bond to our organic body. The very differentiation of the world into “things,” with their own colors, sounds, odors, bitters and sweets, textures, temporality and spatiality is the way matter relates itself to each fleshy, thinking, sensuous, free organism. Of course, given this world-

making, things then have their own secrets. Nevertheless, we are *the event* in matter. The event of our existence within matter is beyond utility, for it is through us that all utility enters the world. This is the general spirit of a good faith outlook on the world. It is now proper to unveil good faith in its more technical formulation.

4

Good Faith

For Sartre, the task of giving meaning to our lives gives rise to anguish; for, in truth, we are responsible for our lives: “It is certain that we can not overcome anguish, for we *are* anguish.”¹ It may happen that, attaining a fleeting glimpse of this anguish, we then make an implicit vow to keep it from appearing on the level of reflective attention. That is, we may attempt to flee our anguish by passing over it, thereby allowing our attention to be fixed only on our daily concerns. Sartre terms the consistent attempt to flee anguish, “bad faith.” He writes, “*I am anguish in order to flee it.* This attitude is what we call *bad faith.*”²

On its most primary level, bad faith is an attempt to escape our freedom and appear to ourselves as something determined in the world, accepting no responsibility for our own actions and for our behavior toward others. We tend to abandon responsibility for thought by yielding blindly to so-called experts. Also, if we are comfortable in our lives, we attempt to hide from the human hierarchy, collectively forged and now sustained in existence, which places many people in poverty, despite their best efforts to live a fruitful life. But let us briefly consider the “mechanism” by which we restructure our freedom into patterns of either good or bad faith.

Our freedom and our beliefs are closely connected. In bad faith, we freely forge a specific structure to belief, namely, what Sartre terms an “ideal” of belief, which is impossible to achieve and which the person in bad faith claims is necessary. It is a way of saying to oneself that anything goes. Thus, bad faith can “work,” precisely because it sees itself as good faith; that is, there arises in bad faith a bad-faith notion about good faith, and this is precisely what allows a person in bad faith to continue in self-deception. Sartre writes about this bad-faith notion of good faith, “The ideal of good faith (to believe what one believes) is, like that of sincerity (to be what one is), an ideal of being-in-itself.”³ We may wonder why Sartre rejects sincerity, but he has a specific view of what the term implies. A person may say, “Oh yes, I am selfish,” or “Oh yes, I have a bad temper, but I admit it. That is the way I am. I am sincere; let me be.”

In true good faith, the person should in each instance say rather, “That is the way I freely choose to remain.” The reference to bad faith as “being-in-itself” arises because bad faith is a *fixed ideal*, resembling something existing in the natural order. For example, the racist thinks that his belief reflects the nature of things: certain people are subordinate to others by nature, and exceptions only prove the rule.

Obviously, however, we cannot and should not attempt to question everything, every situation every time. This is not the issue. Our good-faith task is to forge an honest, open-ended relation between our actions and our ideals. There will always be ambiguity, but in its proper context, a certain ambiguity is the condition of human life. A person in good faith is always willing to gamble on results and to use mediation to settle differences by discussion. It is Sartre’s claim that our present deplorable social condition is due to our continually refusing to mediate. Moreover, true good faith is aware that it must always prove itself by new acts: “The love which is lived cannot be named without being reinvented.”⁴

To all of the above one might say, “True, but how does one in good faith know that he or she is not lying to oneself? What about Freud’s notion of our unconscious mind?” I would say that if you are wondering whether you are in good faith, you are probably in good faith. More specifically, Sartre rejects the Freudian notion of the

unconscious, considering it a vain attempt to lie to ourselves. In this attempt, our unconscious “knows” the truth of the way we behave and successfully lies to the conscious self by putting this “truth” in symbols. Sartre rejects the notion of an unconscious, for it implies a directive power within us that we did not put there through our own actions. Further, if our unconscious “knows” the truth of our condition, then it is more intelligent than we are, and our personality is split at birth, prior to all actions.

On the other hand, Sartre’s own views seem embarrassing, since he affirms the “lucidity” of consciousness in opposition to Freud’s notion of the unconscious. But are we truly clear about the motives of all our actions? And if our attempts to lie to ourselves are part of the lucidity of our consciousness, how can a person in bad faith successfully lie to himself or herself? A preliminary observation may be useful before attempting to answer this Sartrean dilemma.

Although Sartre rejects the notion of the unconscious, he does accept Freud’s general description of a certain commonsense human experience, namely, that we frequently act for motives of which we seem unaware. Sartre has not abandoned his phenomenological perspective—appearance is real on its own level. Thus, there is no *a priori* reason to assert that a person who appears not to know the reasons for an action knows the reasons. But may not this present state of ignorance be itself induced by the person’s own past behavior? Indeed, for Sartre, we gradually manufacture the very evidence to believe in our own lies to ourselves; and thus what is said here about the distinction between good and bad faith as well as the difference between the Freudian and the Sartrean notion of our unconscious mind will be continued in chapter 8, “Lying to Oneself.” Nevertheless, a few more words may be appropriate here.

The key to understanding the difference between Freud and Sartre lies in recalling Sartre’s distinction between the prereflective and the reflective consciousness. These terms may appear heavy, but the notions are clear to common sense. On a prereflective level, we become so engrossed in what we are doing that *explicit* self-awareness is merely part of the background of our behavior. If you are enjoying a walk, *you* are enjoying the walk. But if you constantly say to yourself,

I am enjoying this walk, you will soon stumble and end your pleasure. This notion of being aware of who we are but on a prereflective level is crucial to Sartre's thought. Complexity arises when the activity we are concerned with is not something like walking, but rather reflecting upon ourselves. Still, the same distinction holds: The effort of reflecting upon oneself is like walking, that is, it is a particular human activity. Consider an instance when you went walking when you should have waited home for an important call. After all, it was such a beautiful day and you felt that it was just the right thing for you to do. But then you come home, and you realize that you have missed that important call. You reflect, "How could I have done that?" In good faith, I may realize, "Why, yes, I just did not want to receive that call and have to talk to that person."

We will see in chapter 8, "Lying to Oneself," that Sartre uses the example of a flirt holding hands. The hand may not be offered to be held, but it is not refused. For this woman her hand is simply there, and she will not see herself as a flirt. No doubt others flirt, and no doubt another might look upon *this* holding of hands as a flirtation on her part. But they would be wrong, for she alone knows the truth—her hand happens to be held by the other. She is innocent.

This innocence is in bad faith *precisely as it is a flight from self-knowledge*. The actual situation (transcendence) is used by the person in bad faith to mask the self-deception—"this situation that seems evil would be true if another did it, but it is not true of me." More generally, in bad faith, distractions from self-knowledge become the explicit goal of one's behavior, and thus bad faith can continue as a way of life. Again to anticipate a fuller discussion in chapter 7, we will see that Gustave Flaubert would not allow his hatred of his family to surface to the level of reflective awareness. He went to great pains to keep his hatred from becoming an object of his introspection, allowing it always to slide into suffering and passivity or into the discourse of writing about another. Flaubert thereby became neurotic: Flaubert entered "neurosis the way one enters a convent."⁵ The neurosis was a vow to keep the hatred of his family on a prereflective level, no matter at what cost to himself.

5

Our Twofold Birth

Every infant needs milk, love, and the names of things. Without milk an infant dies, and without love it survives in bitterness, and without the names of things it faces the world in stupor. Who gives milk, love, and the names of things to children? Good parents, guardians, teachers; indeed, the good people throughout the world give these wondrous gifts to infants and to children. And who rob them of these riches and who allow 15 to 25 thousand children to die each day before they reach the age of five? We adults do all these good and terrible things to children.

HOW ONE BIRTH SLIDES INTO ANOTHER

No human life begins with a neutral outlook on the world. The infant's clothes, religious artifacts on the walls or the colored objects floating above the crib, the smiles, the frowns, the touches, the feeding and care—all this comes to the infant as from some heaven, transcending and enveloping its budding freedom, inclining it to develop in this way rather than in another way. This is normal and healthy. And thus a child who is loved *for itself* will later begin to think for itself, moving forward in life on the memory of its early days in the paradise of love. Sartre observes, "Let a child once in his life—at

three months, at six—taste this victory of pride, he is a man.”¹ But too often the opposite happens, even in middle-class homes, as, for Sartre, was true of Gustave Flaubert, and is clear in the many examples of slavery, racism, and sexism, where infants are too often blamed for their untimely birth. Thus, writing about Genet’s early life, Sartre writes:

But when children are subjected from their earliest days, to a great social pressure, when their Being-for-Others is the subject of a collective image accompanied by value judgments and social prohibitions, the alienation is sometimes total and definitive.²

Of course, accidents happen for which we are not responsible. The parents of Helen Keller (1880–1968) were not responsible for her being deaf, blind, and lost in the world without the names of things. They simply did not know how to teach Helen. These good parents gave her milk and love, but without the names of things, Helen lived in a world darker and more silent than the one caused by her loss of sight and hearing. Then Anne Sullivan (1866–1936) arrived, and with great perseverance she used the connections between touch and language to awaken Helen from her linguistic slumber. These efforts worked, and Helen learned not only the names of things but how to read and write.³

We can say that Helen Keller was born from the look of Anne Sullivan, even though Keller entered language through the sense of touch. Indeed, we are all born into the world twice, once from the womb of our mothers, and a second time from the attention given to us by our parents and guardians. Sartre terms this second birth “the look.” *The look signifies our total and absolute dependence upon others for our humanity.* This is not an exaggeration. Self-confident adults do not “look” at each other in this technical sense of the term. Furthermore, the look is not limited to the eyes; the whole body looks. Even when we use our eyes, the force of their physical presence disappears, and what remains is a dependence that seems to come from another world. This dependence is clearest in the infant-adult relation; for an infant “looks” upon an adult as the fulfillment of all its needs, as a

sort of god. Thus Sartre writes, “The Other’s look is not an appearance *in the world*—By the Other’s look I effect the concrete proof that there is a ‘beyond the world.’”⁴ To an infant, an adult appears as some heavenly being, ready to supply all its needs.

ONE’S WHOLE BODY LOOKS AT ANOTHER

Although the eyes are just a symbol of looking, nevertheless, in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre does begin with an example that seems, at first, limited to sight. He invites us to reflect upon how we become aware of ourselves if we are caught spying on someone: “Here I am bent over the keyhole; suddenly I hear a footstep. I shudder as a wave of shame sweeps over me. Somebody has seen me. I straighten up. My eyes run over the deserted corridor. It was a false alarm. I breathe a sigh of relief.”⁵ It is interesting to note that even in this example, it is hearing and not sight that is important. Suppose, however, that I actually see a blind person approaching. Am I saved from embarrassment? Yes and no. Yes, I realize that I have not actually been seen, but then again I now also realize my fundamental *visibility* to others: I can be seen. Also, this blind person might bump into me as I am spying. What shall I say? Let us grant that I have a good excuse for my spying. Suppose that a sick person is sleeping in the room, and having heard a noise, I wanted to see if the person needed help in some way. Whatever I say, I am at that moment of giving my excuse vulnerable to the person who catches me spying.

I could attempt to reverse the situation. I might ask the person who catches me spying, “And what are *you* doing roaming the corridor?” But this implies a self already secure in its worth. But frequently the relation of one person to another is not equal, as in the infant-adult relation, within which we were all born. Thus *vulnerability* is an essential aspect of our primary contact with another.

Granting our dependence upon others for our humanity, the look, for Sartre, is a contingent event; the contact may never occur—as with a child abandoned in the wild—and even if it occurs, it may not be directed to inducing in the other a true human quality. This claim requires a brief clarification.

Both Hegel and Heidegger claim that we have an essential relation to others. Indeed, this seems to be Aristotle's own perspective in calling attention to the social character of our humanity. The general implication is that we are born with a primary and wholesome orientation to others and that the actual contact merely awakens this dormant relation. The problem with this view is that it reduces actual experience to a secondary status—what we *actually do* to another is not crucial, because the other has a primary orientation to the fully human already within its budding consciousness. For Sartre, our power over others is such that those in a position of relative power can mold the inner consciousnesses of those who are vulnerable away from a true humanity toward subhumanity. Of course, we are not responsible for all defects in the human condition. A person is born deaf usually through no fault of the parents or doctors. However, to speak of the deaf and dumb is to give this biological lack a human dimension. It is easy to do this even when we pretend that our research is neutral.⁶

The Sartrean look bespeaks our total dependence upon others for our very humanity to such an extent that we can convince the vulnerable that they are born to serve others and to be beneath ordinary humanity. Sartre writes, “The Indian untouchable thinks he is *actually untouchable*. He internalizes the prohibition of which he is the object, and makes of it an inner principle which justifies and explains the conduct of the other Hindus toward him.”⁷ The slave is free; but his or her freedom is limited by the white owner.

BACK TO AQUINAS

To what extent is Sartre's view of our dependence upon others compatible with the thought of Aquinas? Strangely, although their reasons are different, their views practically converge. For Aquinas, we are handicapped because we inherit the fallen nature of Adam and Eve who disobeyed God. Nevertheless, over and over Aquinas affirms our free will and our responsibility to accept the way we mold our lives. Thus, the first part of his *Summa of Theology* proceeds from questions about God, Creation, and angels, to man and divine government. All

of section 6, questions 75–89, discuss the human body and human freedom. After explaining the tight union of the soul to the body, he writes in question 83, “Man has free choice, or otherwise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions would be in vain. . . . And, in that man is rational, it is necessary that he have free choice.”

Thus, our fallen state does not rob us of our basic humanity; it simply makes it difficult to follow what our conscience reveals is the good we should do. And, in the same *Summa*, Aquinas writes about obedience,

A subject is not obliged to obey his superior if he commands something over which he has no authority. As Seneca says, “It is wrong to think that slavery applies to the whole person. The better part is unaffected by it, for the lower bodily elements are subject to a master but the mind is free.” Therefore in matters that relate to the internal movements of the will a man is not obliged to obey man, but God alone.⁸

A slave is not bound to obey a master in matters that concern his basic freedom, “but God alone.” But Sartre would ask whether the slave always has the ability to be aware of his inner humanity. I do not think that Aquinas gives us a clear answer to this problem, since at that time the diabolical means of restructuring the inner consciousness of the weak was not fully developed by the evil people of our world, or, at least, not that well known. True, there was the inquisition, threats of torture, and saints who were sinners, or who thought they had been sinners, would frequently claim that they deserved to be misused by others. And, of course, Christ did say that we should turn the other cheek and not respond to violence with more violence; but Sartre is referring to something different, to someone believing that they were born to be subhuman. I don’t think that Aquinas would agree that the slave can be deprived of the ability to be aware of his inner humanity; but here I believe he would have to go outside the natural order of the world, for example, to the fact that we each have a guardian angel. On the other hand, Aquinas does admit that we can be misled by our conscience and that we are still obliged to follow its dictates.

Let me admit that the comparison between Aquinas and Sartre is here not clear; but I think that our awareness of how slavery affects people is more detailed today than it was during our earlier history. I do not think that we can ever sufficiently reflect upon the institution of slavery, particularly here in the United States of America. It is an error to think that people were enslaved merely for cheap labor, for indeed, slaves were frequently sustained at a financial loss. The Southern white middle class and rich had a deep need for slaves. These “blacks” were inferior by nature to them, and in their “use” of them they saw reflected back their own supposed superiority. Thus, no matter what the Southern blacks accomplished, they were regarded as inferior. The history of American music bears this out clearly. Although many black musicians could read music, the white audiences wanted to believe that their kind of music—blues and jazz—was natural to them in their inferiority. Thus, black musicians had to practice hard and memorize tunes so that they could play before their white audiences without music and seemingly from nature.

Our culture makes this kind of thinking possible. In truth, the general direction of our world is such that we *need* inferiors and forms of subhumanity. On the other hand, we awake each morning and every action we perform carries the weight of our past history as well as our future intentions. If we choose, we can become aware of the basic structures of our lives and choose to keep on our present course or radically alter the meaning that we are giving to our lives.

6

From Child to Adult

We each form projects or ways of life as we mature. Change is possible but frequently difficult. Aquinas would have been very familiar with the conversion of Augustine, who kept putting off his half desire to dedicate his life to God. Still, I am not familiar with any detailed study of early childhood in Aquinas. On the other hand, Aquinas was very aware of the tension between belonging to a general category, such as humanity, and yet being unique and capable of total change. Aquinas highlights the philosophical issue when he claims that each and every angel is its own species. Still, Aquinas gives three general hierarchies of angels, and each hierarchy has three divisions, giving nine orders of angels, namely, Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. Thus the name “angel” can mean either the entire order or the lowest degree, which is capitalized, Angel. The church teaches that we each have a guardian Angel.

It is not fruitful for this essay to go deeper into the mystery of how angels can be uniquely different from each other and yet fit into a category in a hierarchy, and yet it leads to the fundamental division between an essence and the things belonging to an essence. Each oak tree is both an oak and distinct from every other oak. We are

thus able to identify a specific kind of tree and individual trees. A unique problem arises, however, when we try to apply this common-sense knowledge to our own human existence: How can we each be a unique person and still be a human being? Let us say that we wish to compare the physical existence of Socrates with that of Aristotle. Our common sense asserts that these two physical bodies not only look different but are in some way truly different. We can make the same observation about each one of us when compared with any other human being. Still, Plato and Aristotle would have totally different ways of explaining both the difference between two people and what makes them each be humans rather than plants or brute animals such as dogs and cats.

Simply put, for Plato, we are each very much like the Angels described by Aquinas. What makes us humans is that while we walk the Earth, our spirituality happens to be joined to a body, and that body is different for each one of us. Thus, we have differences, but these do not touch our natures, which are each a unique and distinct spiritual substance, very much like angels. Of course, Plato did not refer to angels as such, but he did view us as fundamentally spiritual beings, who happened to be banished to Earth for committing some fault in our earlier existence in a spiritual realm. As we have noted, Augustine was able to fit Plato's view easily within the Christian view of the relation of humans to God. Nevertheless, Augustine was able to distinguish us from angels, for we did not have a previous existence but were each born from a woman, flesh of her flesh; although our purely spiritual soul was distinct from that flesh, it depended upon the body for knowledge, growth, and salvation during our worldly journey. Still, once freed of our body, we were each complete spiritual beings, and thus the soul of Socrates was Socrates. But as we have seen, the union of body and soul for Aristotle was such that complete existence belonged only to the composite of matter and form, so that the soul of Socrates is not Socrates but only the form now separated from the matter and, as such, an incomplete being. Granting the Aristotelian view, how do we explain the true uniqueness of each individual, since our resemblance to each other appears to diminish our uniqueness?

Let us review: We grasp the essence of humanity from Socrates

and Aristotle by realizing that they are both humans. This essence is the composite that makes Socrates Socrates and Aristotle Aristotle. There will be many differences that the intellect will note and take into consideration: shapes, colors, speech patterns, etc. But can these superficial differences distinguish these two beings as each uniquely different from the other? In brief: *Is the unique existence of Socrates “accidental” to his being this human being?* The issue is brought out clearly in *On Truth*, where we read: If *man* and *to exist as man* did not differ in Socrates, *man* could not be predicated univocally of him and Plato, whose acts of existing are different.¹

There are times in our lives when we want to say, “Yes, we all have much in common,” and there are other times when we want to say, “What planet do they come from?” Both perspectives are true. (I should mention that some Thomists try to see in this distinction between nature and the act of existence an early use of “existentialism”—I think that claim misses the uniqueness of existentialism in which natures or essences are reflective constructs following existence.)

In his six-hundred-or-so-page study of Jean Genet, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, and in his massive study of Flaubert, Sartre has detailed the tension between being human and being *this* human. I will be returning to these studies below; but first I wish to describe briefly how Sartre lays the foundation in his early study of ontology, *Being and Nothingness*. Here he notes that our attempts to discover the meaning of life lead to a gradual formation of a general outlook on life, what Sartre terms “our project.” Our project begins slowly. As an infant we are the embodiment of needs. If our needs are somewhat satisfied, we begin to act for ourselves. Our early actions gradually become both an answer and satisfaction to our basic bodily needs and the birth of new needs and new questions. We hold a bottle and drink milk, and then we learn to ask for milk. We begin to “sense” the freedom of the parent or guardian who gives us milk, and we begin to respond in like manner, demanding milk at this time rather than at another.

Without our willing it or wanting it to happen, we also thereby question all that is or can be. When Sartre is looking for a starting point in *Being and Nothingness*, he finds it in our unique position as

questioners of all reality, “Now this very inquiry furnishes us with the desired conduct; this man that *I am*—if I apprehend him such as he is at this moment in the world, I establish that he stands before being in an attitude of interrogation.”² We question not for the sake of questioning but because we are looking for answers: “If my car breaks down, it is the carburetor, the spark plugs, etc., that I question.”³ We seek answers, and the answers to the most important issues of our life are frequently before us, facing us.

Our questions don’t stop, although they may be stopped. Thus, no matter how narrow our outlook on life may become, we begin with and indeed carry within us (although we may try to smother it in bad faith) our unbelievable nobility as the interrogators of all that is and all that can be. “Being” is Sartre’s term for all that exists, namely, reality. We are then born to question all existence; that is to say, we are each born to be philosophers. Of course, we are each born within a particular family and within a concrete social order, and our ability to question will always reflect those conditions. Still, whatever others may try to do to us, however they may attempt to mold us to their will, we can always respond in some way, however small: If we are put in prison, we may not be able to escape, but we may be able to give some meaning to our confinement.

True, a question appears harmless. Is it not merely an ordering of spoken or written words directed by one person to another? Yes, but these are its secondary manifestations. The nature of a question is revealed when we ask, “Who and what am I?” or “What is this world in which I live?” Here, we begin to encounter the true nature of a question. To be able to question implies a certain separation between the questioner and what is questioned. Sartre refers to this separation as “nothingness,” a nothingness that is not an empty space but rather an “elsewhereness,” a sliding of the self from its selfhood, a lack of identity between the questioner and what is questioned. This nothingness is born from the act of questioning and it is one with our freedom.⁴

This “elsewhereness” is most evident when I question myself: The *I* questioning cannot be identical with the *I* that is being questioned, for in that case the question could not occur. And yet these two are also not completely separate, as occurs when one person questions

another. Rather, in the very act of questioning, the I being questioned *slides* from the questioning self, but does not escape from it. If I ask myself, “what was I thinking of when I said that?,” I am at one and the same time the questioner and that which is being questioned. Yet I never face myself across an empty space. I glimpse myself as the underside of the self that I have been, the old self to which I can always say, “Yes, I will continue as I have been” or “No, I wish to change my way of life.” Sartre writes, “My ultimate and initial project—for these are but one—is, we will see, always the outline of a solution of the problem of being. But this solution is not first conceived and then realized; we are this solution.”⁵

As we mature, we each outline the meaning of all human existence, and beyond this, the significance of all existence. This happens whether we wish it or not; it is the fate of being human. Sometimes our actions are just casual, with no deep meaning; at other times even the most insignificant behavior can reveal our entire outlook on life. A look, an embrace, an indifferent brushing aside of someone as if he or she were a lamppost may reveal who and what we are. These daily actions accumulate and gradually tune our body to the world so that we mesh with the world. This bond to the world is indeed our solution to the problem of existence. It is us—as we are now. We can change, but it may not be easy. Sartre describes climbing a mountain with a friend, who goes bouncing along and who doesn’t seem to notice the effort in climbing. Sartre himself becomes increasingly tired and finally stops, unwilling to continue. Sartre then asks, since I am free could I not also have continued with my friend to the top? He replies, “I *could have done* otherwise but *at what price?*”⁶

Sartre’s point is that the difference between two people is not always immediately evident. Let us return to Sartre’s example and assume the same basic bodily conditions and age between Sartre and his friend. Granting this more or less physical equality, Sartre’s friend is one of those people who enjoy the feeling of fatigue, who embrace it as part of their knapsack—he might collapse from exhaustion but he would never stop just because he is tired. On the other hand, he walks this way, talks this way, and lives his whole life as an effort to conquer obstacles. But for Sartre (in his example, and probably in

life), exercise is just that, an activity one does for health, avoiding it when it is either too strenuous or not required. Sartre may climb a mountain, but more for companionship than to conquer it.

NOT THE BRAIN ALONE BUT THE WHOLE BODY QUESTIONS

It would be thus wrong to imagine the ability to question as a capacity residing only in the mind or the brain. For the most part, our contemporary philosophical milieu tends to make a distinction between the brain, which thinks, and the rest of the body, which is directed by the brain. Indeed, the whole body, including the brain, is frequently viewed as a complicated machine. Given our philosophical heritage, the choice seems to be between a dualistic view of human nature in which the soul thinks and the body is a machine, and a monistic view in which the whole body is a machine, with the brain directing the rest of the mechanism. Aquinas and Sartre both give us a *living and thinking body at one with all its limbs and senses*. For Aquinas it is the tight union of *this matter with this soul*. Sartre, as a materialist atheist, takes a different view. *Only matter exists; but the human body is not a mere mechanism but imbued with freedom, that is to say, a unique "nothingness."* "Being" is stable, gold is gold; but we at one and the same time *are* what we are (fleshy body) and what we are not, our freedom. Our freedom is indicated by our ability to question ourselves and the world, and it is also indicated by our "anguish" before our freedom, namely, our ability to change, facing ourselves and the world either in good faith or in bad faith.

Again and again we come upon the tension between the truth that we are all human and the truth that we are each unique. Let us make a new start, beginning with Aquinas and then moving to Sartre, who wrote volumes about this very question.

CONVERSIONS

A radical situation may arise any day at any time requiring us to reconsider our project. Aquinas, of course, would have been famil-

iar with the conversion of Augustine, and much earlier than that, of Saul, who persecuted the early Christians who became Paul, the great defender of the faith. Sartre too recognizes that a person can change their fundamental orientation. An individual alters his or her entire outlook on everything, and yet individuating characteristics frequently remain.⁷

Every conversion involves a change of time in the sense that what was previously important in one's life now appears different, and so does the future. I am not sure that either Aquinas or Sartre had a conversion, but Stein certainly did, moving from an atheist to a Catholic, then to becoming a member of a strict religious order, finally dying in a German concentration camp—more of this in appendix 1. I said that Sartre did not have a conversion, and yet he refers to something like a conversion, when he gave up the dream that by writing books one achieved a kind of immortality. I think he regarded this as a form of bad faith. Ironically, he received the Nobel Prize for his 1963 book *Les Mots (The Words)*, which he said was a farewell to literature, but which the critics completely misread. Also, he claims that he was always fighting to come down from his apartment into the streets with the common man. A colleague of mine who does not particularly like Sartre admits that Sartre taught intellectuals to become involved. Indeed, Sartre passed out leaflets, and although he was not a member of the Communist Party, he defended it when it was being unjustly condemned.

Whether or not Aquinas or Sartre had a real conversion, Sartre has given us a very detailed account of such in his studies of Gustave Flaubert and Jean Genet to which we now turn.

7

Sartre's Studies of Flaubert and Genet

The descriptions given in *Being and Nothingness* about the relation of our daily actions to our general outlook on life are given more detail in his studies on Gustave Flaubert and Jean Genet. I wish to begin now a more detailed study of these works, but only with our present concern in mind, namely, how their message helps us lead more meaningful lives.¹

Sartre's work on Flaubert began in *Being and Nothingness*, with a relatively brief observation; but his work on Genet has a specific history in Sartre's own life.² He had known Genet and had been instrumental in obtaining recognition for Genet's works. He also joined Cocteau, Picasso, and others in securing Genet's release from a lifetime sentence for thefts. Sartre must thus have been pleased to accept Gallimard's invitation to write an introductory volume to a projected "complete" works of Genet. The six hundred pages that emerged were no doubt startling to Genet, but he seems to have been very influenced by them.

I have already considered both Gustave Flaubert and Jean Genet, but now I wish to focus on their conversions. Let us begin with Sartre's study of Gustave Flaubert.

THE FAMILY IDIOT

According to Sartre, Gustave had a major wound, brought about strangely through the plan his upper-middle-class parents had for his life. Gustave's father, Achille-Cléophas Flaubert, was an eminent doctor, and Sartre notes that he had a real adventure in his life, moving up the social ladder and acquiring respect from all who knew him. One might think that he would have been open to his children's new adventures with life. But he had plans, and Sartre observes that when parents have plans, their children have destinies. Achille, the firstborn son, fulfilled his destiny by becoming a doctor like his eminent father, and Caroline, the only daughter, made a good match like her mother for whom she was named. Only Gustave, the second son, did not seem able or willing to conform to the family plan. He paid a price for his resistance. Sartre does not mince words: "Gustave's relationship with his mother deprived him of affirmative power, tainted his relationship to the word and to truth, destined him for sexual perversion; his relationship with his father made him lose his sense of reality."³

Do parents have this much influence over a child? Usually parental presence is tempered by the influence of relatives and friends, but when the family structure is tight, as it was with the Flaubert family, the infant can enter the real world only through the family. But if through lack of love this door to the real world is closed, frequently the road of the imaginary beckons the child. Thus, the infant Gustave Flaubert chose the imaginary. Too young to put a bundle of clothes over his shoulder and leave a home in which he felt unwanted, he found a way—as do many others—of keeping his fragile body at home, while daily living elsewhere in his dreams. In this way, from his earliest years until he was about seven, Gustave Flaubert gave himself over to his daydreams and seemed always to be in a stupor. He was incapable of that quick learning which characterized his older brother and was later true of his younger sister. In comparison, Gustave seemed to be a dunce. Nevertheless, by ten or eleven years of age, he who could not read was already writing with exceptional competence. "Indeed, let us not forget," Sartre writes, "that from his thirteenth year the cards were on the table, Gustave wrote books and

letters, he had permanent witnesses. It is impossible to take liberties with facts so well known.⁷⁴

Sartre claims that in his daydreams Gustave reinvented language so that it had a personal relationship to his own free will. Children invent things particularly when there are deep family problems and they are turned into themselves for the support lacking in the world. The words that Gustave heard did not have any meaning for him. Did he sense his “idiocy” in the family conversation that surrounded him? No doubt, and thus he gave to those same words that he heard a new relation to himself (he didn’t invent his own language as another might do). When he was ready he arose from his seeming stupidity to a world of reading and writing. His parents refused to take any of it seriously. Childhood scribbles, they thought, even though he was writing plays and acting them out with his sister.

Without wavering from the destiny they thought proper for a true Flaubert, they persisted in trying to make him study to be a doctor, and when this failed, at least a lawyer. Gustave would not openly object; it is strange, Sartre notes, that he could never bring himself to reject his family. So he became sick whenever he had to study. But Gustave’s father suspected that his son was evading his responsibility to live up to the norms of the family: “From morning to night, entering at whim, he stares at his son, takes his pulse, casts that ‘surgical gaze’ upon him that detects all lies. . . . But the practitioner’s scrutinizing gaze shakes him to the core.”⁷⁵ And Gustave carried the weight of this look throughout his life:

What Flaubert cannot tolerate in 1870 is the surgical gaze of the Prussians, inherited from the paterfamilias, which is fixed on naked France writhing in the mud, *reducing it to what it is*. When Nature imposes her reality on us, we hardly have occasion to feel shame because *it does not think us*. But, as in his childhood, Flaubert *realizes himself* through the gaze and the manipulations of others; beneath the eyes of the Other—who is at once Bismarck and Achille-Cléophas—the great choices of his life are revealed to him as *Other*.⁶

But Sartre concludes his study by returning to empathy—without which it is impossible to study a life—calling our attention to Gus-

tave's overly stern parents, whose look became the parceled-out love that was supposed to make him strong, enabling him to carve a place for himself in the world as an important person, but that kept him constantly in need of love. Gustave wanted a different childhood, one in which the caring look was at one and the same time a caring touch: "He wanted to return to his early childhood, to that nursing baby kneaded, manipulated, made passive by hands that were too expert, not tender enough."⁷

SAINT GENET

The very early life of Jean Genet was different from that of Gustave Flaubert. Genet was an orphan, but that life does not seem to have affected him. At seven, Genet is adopted by a Morvan peasant family. Genet is grateful for his adoption and wants to have the same respect for owning things as they do. At first, he is very happy, good at school, and pious. He has a secret desire to be a saint. For the first two years, he gets along well with his guardians. Still, it is true that he is adopted, and his guardians are never quite sure what he will do. They watch him closely. Genet, in fact, has been engaged in "saintliness and pilfering": that is, imagining he is already capable of owning things, he takes small objects and puts them in his pocket. But one day he is caught in the act. Sartre writes:

A drawer is opening; a little hand moves forward.

Caught in the act. Someone has entered and is watching him. Beneath this gaze the child comes to himself. He who was not yet anyone suddenly becomes Jean Genet. . . . A voice declares publicly: "You're a thief." The child is ten years old.⁸

Of course, Jean Genet had always been called by his name; but now the name truly meant "Jean Genet, the orphan!" And what can the world expect of an orphan, except to be a thief?

Still, what is most interesting is that Genet does not blame his foster parents. If he were angry at them, his life would be easy to understand. Genet, in fact, accepts the judgment of his adopted parents—

yes, if these “good people” see him as a thief, then he must *be* a thief. He, Genet, does not realize that he is a thief, but that lack of insight must be his own fault: He must become the thief he is seen to be. And to make the entire situation even stranger, Genet chooses not to abandon his piety; rather, he will become not merely any thief, but the “saint of thieves,” whatever that may imply. Sartre notes that the child is lucid beyond his ten years.

As Genet matures, we witness the dialectic—the give and take—between his own awareness of himself and his attempt to become a real thief. Genet is not stupid. He knows, or at least suspects, that his guardians’ judgment about him may not have been true in the abstract, but, nevertheless, they and their friends understand the ability to own things as the sign of a “good person,” and who is he to object?

Indeed, the more Genet thinks about it, the more he realizes the extent to which the world is run by the idol of owning property. And this same world needs a police system to protect itself against thieves. Private property and thieves are bonded together. Genet comes to the conclusion that the world needs evil, but this same world refuses to believe in its own need for evil. This “good” world hides from its own creation of unfortunate people, judging *them* to be evil by nature. Genet gradually understands where the real evil exists, and he now accepts his role as becoming the thief who will reveal to the world its own evil.

But with all his lucidity and his willingness to reflect upon himself and judge himself properly, he still cannot escape that early judgment of his innocence as an evil:

Paralyzed by men’s gaze, marked by man in his very depths and transformed by man in his perceptions and even his inner language, he encounters everywhere, between him and men, between him and nature, between him and himself, the blurred transparency of human meanings. Only one question confronts this *homunculus*: man. The child Genet is an inhuman product of which man is the sole problem. How to be accepted by men?⁹

How to be accepted by men? The dream is impossible, and the impossibility arises from two sources—from Genet himself and from

society. In short, Genet will require that he be “accepted” as a thief *and* that the social order recognize its own need for thieves to keep itself in proper working order: “Bandits,” Sartre observes, “have always been the best collaborators of the wealthy.”¹⁰ Genet merely wishes us to acknowledge the bond between owning property and being able to steal it; he does not seek our approval for his actions. Catch him stealing and put him in prison—he deserves it. He will, of course, attempt to escape; that is the task of a true thief.

Genet does not wish to change the social order, not in the slightest. He desires merely our recognition that, as the saint of thieves, *he* defines property owners as *the just*. Or rather, he doesn't want any recognition, for that would be a kind of success. He is intelligent enough to realize that society would never recognize a “role” for evil, and even if it did, his saintliness would reject that form of success. He, Genet, merely wishes to *be* evil, and to suffer all the defeat of evil by good. But the gaze originating with the foster parents follows him throughout his life:

Pinned by a look, a butterfly fixed to a cork, he is naked, everyone can see him and spit on him. The gaze of the adults is a *constituent power* which has transformed him into a *constituted nature*.¹¹

The good opinion of *oneself—the gift* we give others—was denied Genet, and wherever he turns, outward toward the world or within toward his own consciousness, he encounters rejection. On the other hand, although Sartre does not believe that Genet's original life goal of being a saint among thieves succeeds, Genet is fortunate in discovering how to write, and he undergoes a conversion away from evil to good—and yet the original wound remains. Genet saves himself by a conversion to becoming an author. True, he keeps the memory of his early life alive, but now he no longer needs the approval of his guardians; he is on his own, the author of books and plays, such as *The Thief's Journal*, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, and *The Balcony*.

Thus, in the studies of both Genet and Flaubert, we are back to the look first elaborated in *Being and Nothingness*. The look is not altered in these later studies; but its power now becomes manifest,

particularly, in the child-adult relation (extending also to our individual and collective ability to forge subhumans for our use). We are all free, but perhaps our most diabolical use of our freedom is the ways we stunt the freedom of our children from birth. Still, except in extreme conditions of poverty and oppression, one can always respond to the way the world attempts to mold one's life: "For us man is characterized above all by his going beyond a situation, and by what he succeeds in making of what he has been made."¹²

Each person uniquely interprets the task of being free, and in our everyday behavior we frequently have to make a decision about how much in our minds we should communicate to others. Gustave Flaubert and Jean Genet each had a very special problem not only about telling the truth but about deciding the truth they should reveal. Sartre interprets Flaubert as one who decided to become an author but would never admit this to his parents. He achieved his purpose by becoming so sick that his parents agreed that he was no good for anything else than to write stories. There is a deep sense in which Gustave lied to himself and was successful in that lie. Genet, on the other hand, was very lucid, and his decision to accept his guardian's opinion of him as a thief, and to try to become the "saint" of thieves, may not have been lying or lying to oneself, but it was strange; it proves that biographies sometimes broaden our categories.

8

Lying to Oneself

In discussing lying, Aquinas asks, “Is Every Lie a Sin?” and he answers, “Words are natural signs of thoughts and therefore it is both unnatural and improper for someone to signify in words what he does not have in his mind.”¹ And, he adds, “A lie has the quality of sinfulness not only because it injures others but because it is disordered in itself.”² He notes here that you can’t tell a lie to help someone, just as you cannot steal in order to give alms to the poor, “except in cases of necessity when everything becomes common property.” He concludes in the same place, “One may however prudently conceal the truth by some dissimulation, as Augustine says.” Indeed, there are distinctions upon distinctions, officious, jocose, mischievous, and again these are divided into eight types. When all is said and done, I think that a person in good faith knows that lies are evil, but that there are times when we may need advice whether to “prudently conceal the truth by some dissimulation,” for example whether to tell a person about cancer or such.

A TRUE LIE AIMS TO BE BELIEVED

Sartre adds an interesting dimension to the usual definitions of a lie: the intent with which the lie is told. Telling an untruth with a wink

of the eye, informing another that you don't expect to be believed, is not, for Sartre, telling a lie. One must go out of the way to clear the ground so that your lie will be believed. "What I am telling you *is the truth!*" So a real lie will be often believed. But that is not the real issue. The mystery is that we successfully lie to ourselves—"Don't *you* see . . . !" And, for Sartre, we lie to ourselves in full realization of what we are doing, with the full lucidity of consciousness; for Sartre denies Freud's claim that we have an unconscious mind guiding our behavior.

FREUD AND SARTRE

As we have seen in chapter 4, there are several aspects of agreement between Freud and Sartre, but some repetition as I expand on this comparison may be useful. Sartre agrees with Freud that at a certain time persons may have so convinced themselves of their lies that they need help. Moreover, Sartre agrees with Freud that we are adventurous beings, growing in meaning and history. Sartre acknowledges that Freud and his followers also try to reconstruct human behavior from all objective information. And, most important, Sartre agrees that Freud also looks for some fundamental attitude that characterizes the individual and is often not known by the individual. Thus both agree that the subject is not in a privileged position to understand his or her problem.

Sartre develops his relation to Freud in *Being and Nothingness*, in the last part, part 4, titled "Having, Doing, and Being." The general motif of this last part is whether our important behavior (not the growth of our toenails) comes from some nature within us or from our freedom. Sartre's answer is clear: All our knowledge, all the actions that flow from our knowledge, everything we own and cherish, every attitude toward ourselves and our neighbors, all the ways freedom pervades our living bodies reflect our fundamental choice of existence. The most general claim one can make about our choice of existence is that it flows from the way we have chosen the free relation of freedom to itself. This may sound redundant, but it is the heart of Sartre's philosophy, namely, that our freedom is not real unless we

can choose how our freedom is related to itself. For Aquinas, this is after all the difference between virtue and sin; and, for Sartre, it is our choice of good or bad faith. It was always intuitively clear to me that although Sartre referred mostly to bad faith, that bad faith made no sense unless it could be avoided by good faith. The problem is that bad faith is easier to describe than good faith, which is open to the new, unforeseen development of our humanity.

SUCCESSFULLY LYING TO ONESELF

The distinction between bad faith and good faith exists in *Being and Nothingness*, part I, chapter 2, “Bad Faith,” especially section 3, “The Faith of Bad Faith,” within which Sartre distinguishes two fundamentally different ways of believing in our own freedom. The distinction revolves around faith and the ideal of faith. Simple faith is good faith. This pervades our lives; for the most part it is based on evidence of another’s behavior, and it can change. If it doesn’t change, it then must grow with daily and repeated acts.

On the other hand, the ideal of faith is a bad-faith way of believing in faith itself, because one forges an impossible notion of faith, requiring complete evidence, and since this is impossible, anything goes. By itself the ideal of faith would collapse into mere cynicism, for we would be aware of what we are doing to ourselves. What makes bad faith “succeed” is that it is half true; we can always question our beliefs and our attitudes. The person in bad faith chooses to believe first and then look about for evidence. The classic example, for Sartre, is the anti-Semite who has chosen to believe that Jews are the source of the world’s evils.

But let us reflect a little longer on what Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness*, before we turn to later works. In chapter 2, “Bad Faith,” Sartre uses the example of a flirt, who pretends that her hand just happens to be held by a man. This can happen. Many reasons can account for her hand being in his, and while she admits to herself that for another person this holding of hands could be a sign of flirting, she keeps telling herself that it is not true of her. Or consider the man with an inferiority complex. An inferiority complex can be a

secret project to be superior. A person does not work because he sees his efforts doomed to failure in advance of trying. He would work, but this “complex” hinders him. He needs self-confidence. Perhaps this is indeed so; but there is nothing to be gained from constantly seeking advice and not getting down to work. Bad faith can be a relatively isolated behavior, but what interests Sartre most is bad faith as a way of life, as a way of attempting to flee from the burden of being free. In this sense, bad faith is a way of believing in our own lie to ourselves about our free and responsible nature. We now have to move from the early part 1 to the last part, section 2, number 1, “Existential Psychoanalysis,” in which we have a closer look at the difference between Freud and Sartre. For Sartre, a person’s actions are not symbols for some deeply hidden motives but are on the surface, there for all to see, including the person in bad faith and the therapist. For example, consider a kleptomaniac. Perhaps at some point he stole a useless thing, half aware and half unaware of what he was doing. “It’s a joke on myself,” he says. The person is a little bored with life, another visit to the department store, another object, another joke. It gets to be a habit, and one forgets about the joke on oneself. “I always have these stupid objects that I don’t need, why am I doing this?” Suddenly, the person awakens to the fact of being a kleptomaniac. “I better get help; no wonder my life has been so messed up.”

The existential psychoanalyst now has the difficult task of having the person admit to the gradual steps leading to his belief in his own kleptomania. Indeed, kleptomania can be a bad-faith way of being different from others. How many kleptomaniacs are there in the world?

We have already seen the beginning of an answer in our discussion of good faith, namely, the distinction between consciousness and knowledge, especially between prereflective consciousness and explicit knowledge. On a prereflective level, we can become so engrossed in what we are doing that *explicit* self-awareness is merely part of the background of our behavior. Indeed, normally, this is a very healthy experience; if you enjoy doing something, you become lost in the activity itself, whether it is a walk, riding a bike, or reading a novel. But suppose one’s behavior is itself an effort not to allow the

“self” that is the background of our daily activities to move into the foreground?

Thus, this wholesome ability to lose oneself in one’s activity can be in bad faith, and, in that case, consciousness and reflection are reversed. The anti-Semite seeks to define himself by enlightened recognition of the source of the great evils in the world, the Jew. He says that he is open to evidence to the contrary, and now and then he may admit that this or that Jew is an exception. In truth, however, nothing changes this person’s mind, and he constantly perceives himself as innocent. This innocence is in bad faith *precisely as it is a flight from self-knowledge*. The actual situation (transcendence) is used by the person in bad faith to mask the self-deception. The person reflects, “this situation that seems evil would be true if another did it, but it is not true of me.” More generally, in bad faith, distractions from self-knowledge become the explicit goal of one’s behavior, and thus bad faith can continue as a way of life. Nevertheless, in rare circumstances, bad faith, especially of a child, can be salvation.

R. D. Laing has used some of Sartre’s insights to cover psychosis. A child brought up among parents that make it known that he is unwanted may, particularly if he has no real friends, find the real world unbearable. There are only a few options. The child might find the strength to hate his parents, but this is unlikely. It is more likely that he will conceive of himself as something unwanted in the world. A kind of “bad faith” can now arise as a “moral choice.” All children like to daydream, and the child now creates an imaginary world that is real for him and becomes insane. Laing’s therapy consists in treating the insane child as someone who has made an intelligent choice in a tragic situation. As Laing notes, the path back to sanity is a long and difficult one.³

Gustave Flaubert avoided the insanity mentioned by Laing, because much of his family life was “sane” once one accepted his parents’ plans, as his brother and sister did. Still, for Sartre, Gustave hated his parents, but he would not allow his hatred to surface to the level of reflective awareness. He went to great pains to keep this hatred from becoming an object of his introspection, allowing it always to slide into suffering and passivity or into the discourse of

writing about another. Sartre gives repeated observations that exemplify the distinction between good and bad faith. Early in his study, he writes, “The love which is lived cannot be named without being reinvented.”⁴ And later:

Filial love can be sincere, that is, felt. Filial piety, by contrast, is a “show.” The child lends himself to it willingly, he says what the parents expect of him. . . . But when the parents respond to this “show” with another “show” and cover the little ham with kisses, the role tends to disappear—everything takes place in the context of the intersubjective truth of familial experiences. For the truth of my love is the love the other bears me.⁵

And the deep neurosis arises from lying to oneself; “Flaubert,” Sartre writes, “entered neurosis the way one enters a convent.”⁶ That is, the neurosis was a vow to keep the hatred of his family on a prereflective level, no matter the cost to himself.

9

On Being an Author

If an alien who communicated by telepathy and had no notion of writing visited us, I think that they would understand our skyscrapers, our moving vehicles, flying or on the ground, but they would be in wonder at our reading.

I am not an alien, and yet I had such an experience. I was walking up the east side of Second Avenue in Manhattan, between 88th and 89th Streets. It was early evening and I was returning from teaching my philosophy courses. As I was approaching my five-story walk-up apartment—which had the great advantage of not requiring me to join a gym—I spotted a very young girl reading a book on the steps of my local “wash and dry” establishment, only a few yards from my apartment. Second Avenue was then and still is a busy thoroughfare, even that far uptown, with buses, trucks, taxis, and cars all attempting to move along without running into pedestrians, who, like myself, think of Manhattan as mainly a city for walking. This child was, I suppose, waiting for a parent or guardian to finish the laundry. She was neither impatient nor distracted nor even interested in the world around her. She was so totally absorbed in her book that when people were leaving with their laundry or bringing it in she gracefully moved aside without taking her eyes from her book.

I had seen similar sights numerous times. But, for some reason, I was now awakened as from a dream to the marvel of reading. That child was reading as if she found her story *in* her book. Could that be true?, I asked myself. Or is it merely that we appear to live in our books when their written words capture our consciousness? What then is the grace of literacy? And, yes, *where* is it? Where is Madame Bovary? Does she exist only in our minds especially when we are reading that book, or does she exist in the words written about her? I think that Sartre holds that Madame Bovary exists mainly in the words Gustave Flaubert forged to embody her. Still, his query about the marvel of literacy is more specific than my interest, which I have developed in a yet to be published work, *One with a Book*.

Sartre is concerned about the difference between being a “committed writer” like himself and moving in the strange direction of Gustave Flaubert and Jean Genet, namely, toward “art for art’s sake.” Sartre claims that art for art’s sake is a form of bad faith. Sartre’s argument is long and involved, even for one like me who is used to reading his arguments. I will therefore first summarize his conclusion and then back up to the support of the argument: *It is Sartre’s opinion that art for art’s sake masks the union of value and good*. Those in power wish us to believe that a work of art can be beautiful for its own sake but that it cannot have social value. Let us begin with a beautiful quote from Flaubert. At fourteen years of age Gustave writes:

To write, oh to write is to seize the world, its prejudices, its virtues, and to sum them up in a book; it is to feel your thought being born, growing, living, standing on a pedestal, and remaining there for ever.¹

For Sartre, this wondrous conversion to writing by Gustave Flaubert will lead to a concern not for the real world but only for the way language writes itself. The actual conversion happens when Gustave slowly but surely uses words not only to signify things in the world but mostly for their internal relations among themselves. This strange internal relation brings us to a notion that seems correct but that for Sartre hides a deep demeaning of the human creative spirit, namely, art for art’s sake

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Aristotle praised the sense of sight as the most immaterial of all the senses and the one that most reveals things as they are, untouched by human presence. On the other hand, all vision is always from some perspective. According to Sartre, a true believer in art for art's sake thinks that all human presence sullies a thing of beauty. But what is Sartre getting at? Let us be patient and first consider the following words: "The poet's ambiguous situation lies in taking God's creation in reverse: he puts the Word at the end. To absorb the universe into language is to destroy the universe, but it is to create the poet."²² Sartre is referring not to poets such as our American Robert Frost, but to French poets such as Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–96). I am not equipped to judge; but let us continue. For Sartre, the real tension arises between the creative act and the social need to be accepted. In the abstract, this is normal; it implies that the ideals reflected by the work of art are both within a social structure and beyond it—an ideal would not be an ideal if it did not include the possibility of its own surpassing.

The artist can thus work against the ideal of acceptance. But where shall we discover this "different" art? Why, in a museum, among the "accepted" art. Nevertheless, the artist's effort is real and in good faith. The point, however, is to be aware of the trap; once crowned, the artist tends to repeat, wishing to remain crowned. Thus Sartre writes, "What chiefly repels Genet in the man of letters is that he remains, regardless of what he does, on the right side of the barricade."²³

All of the above is fairly obvious, and it only touches the surface of Sartre's reflections. Let us continue. The professional critics, the very wealthy—all those who wish to keep the established order—are implicitly aware that art has an imaginary structure. For example, an architect's plan reaches imaginatively toward the building and the building toward the city. A completed painting, while it does not formally point to anything other than its own beauty, still fixes what was in the artist's imagination on canvas or on other material. However one interprets a poem or other work of art, the artist's imaginary effort is embedded within it. And the power of the poet's or artist's

imagination may reach out to the reader or viewer, awakening his or her imagination, with unsettling results for the established order. In order to contain the power of the imagination harmlessly within the work of art, value is made to appear more on the side of the beautiful than on the side of the good. The art critique insists that anything we might refer to as “value” is only *in* the painting. This may seem harmless and, indeed, proper to a work of art. But in the practical course of the relation of art to the possibility of social change, we notice that the human imaginary power is now placed harmlessly on the side of the beautiful rather than on the side of the good: Let the citizens be absorbed in contemplating new and unsettling values—values now fixed and stable in the works of art displayed in the museums supported by the wealthy.

THE CONTINUING DIALECTIC

Still, these paintings might spark of blaze of freedom. Any creative action points to a creator, and citizens watching the painting may begin to think of themselves as new centers of action: “There can be a causality of the imaginary. Nothingness can, without ceasing to be nothingness cause real results.”⁴ There arises a new effort of containment of that “nothingness,” which is clarified in *Being and Nothingness*, as freedom. But can human freedom be so contained in the work of art that it does not awaken a spark of freedom in the viewer? The effort here is for the art critique to have viewers believe that a work of art points to nothing real within the real social structure, not even to the artist. This mystification can work because it is partly true. When value and beauty meet, the work of art is itself a value. The painting on the wall or the poem on paper are each a thing of beauty *and* an embodiment of value—true, but only half of the truth. The other half is the creative effort of the artist.

Thus, a deeper movement of the dialectic is again needed to mask the social significance of value. This new effort grants that beauty may be socially real but that value is only personal. If *you* see a social value in a work of art that is fine for you, but it is not true of the work of art itself, which is concerned only with beauty. Sartre considers this view of art to be in bad faith.

Thus, when Gustave is referring to seizing the world and putting it in a book, what he means is the world of language. It is language itself, speaking to itself that is to be totalized and captured in a book. If this language also seems to apply to the world, that is secondary. Sartre writes, “When words symbolize as much as they signify, they refer only to words.”⁵ In short, the union of art for art’s sake and writing reflect the whole person—Gustave Flaubert—and, particularly in his writing of *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert is tangentially aware of his strange identity with language:

What struck him above all in April 1835, when he had reread the story of poor Marguerite, was that he had captured the world and human society in his vignette, and that at the same time he had gained his own person: the book-becoming of the world could not be accomplished, in effect, without the world-becoming of his thought—which must be taken here in the largest sense (sensibility, affections, imagination, understanding).⁶

Madame Bovary is thus about everything and this everything is the union of Language-World-Flaubert. But the Word thereby spoken is “Defeat.” Defeat, not by some powerful enemy, but by man himself—whose dreams, hopes, passions, and understanding are doomed in advance, not because they cannot be fully realized in the world, but because they have already been perfectly realized in an imaginary world, where beauty conquers all, that is to say, in the world of books.

What we may note here is first the discovery of the supreme and continual effort of literature to free itself from external social or religious constraints and to establish its own norms, thereby gradually attaining the goal that good writing justifies any content. For Sartre, however, this quasi literary imperative hides a contradiction. The writers are bourgeois and as such they are the new self-made persons defined against the inherited landowners—yet they firmly believe in private property. They are men of property who think they speak for all men. Also, the imperative to pure style is “a commandment: to seek glory.”⁷ Thus elitism arises, different from and yet related to that of the nobles, which supposedly arose from their pure blood. This new elitism claims that the fully developed human owns property.

Granting all of the above, the young author will wish to write something that is not cherished by his parents; he will wish to write a new literature. On the other hand, even as the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century is reading, the social reality of the practico-inert is altering. Thus, by 1830, the bourgeoisie are in power and can now explicitly require a literature reflecting their own beliefs, namely, a radical individualism based on private property and the right to make money, with no rules or hindrances. Referring to Gramsci's notion that the bourgeoisie aim to establish hegemony over all society, Sartre notes that the aim is such "that the exploited classes, having internalized the ideology of the ruling class, will invent reasons to accept the exploitation and become its accomplices."⁸

For Sartre, our biggest danger is that we have accepted defeat. We act as if we want to live in a world without evil, but we need our thieves and our wars, for these define our good. And, if we turn to constructing good, we are tame and hesitant, afraid to assert the creative aspect of our humanity, "Our species has set out upon the road of no return toward self-domestication."⁹

10

The Value of Universals in Our Lives

In an essay, “Determinism and Freedom,” Sartre writes about a poll taken in a girls’ school, in which they were asked two questions about lying. First, “Do you tell lies?” Fifty percent said, yes, often; 20 percent responded, “very often”; another 20 percent, “sometimes”; and 10 percent, “never.” But, when they were asked whether lying should be condemned, 95 percent answered, “Yes.”¹ Sartre claims that their ethical attitude is not hypocritical. These girls may break the moral law, but they want the law to exist, for life would be impossible without it. Indeed, Sartre is very clear and insistent on the necessity of moral laws, and, further, he accepts that our world is filled with true good and true evil. In his reflection upon the strange life of the French writer Genet, Sartre writes:

For the specialist, magistrates, criminologists, sociologists, there are not *evil* acts: there are only punishable acts. For the man in the street, there are evil acts, but it is always the Others who commit them. Genet wants to reveal to the former that Evil exists and to the latter that its roots are to be found in themselves.²

Although Sartre does not approve of every aspect of Genet's moral outlook, for example, Genet's desire to be the "saint of thieves," Sartre does agree with Genet's condemnation of our making an idol of private property, and the erroneous moral laws that we construct to grant almost unlimited wealth to a few while millions die of hunger that could be prevented.

Aquinas would also uphold the need for general moral principles to guide us, and here I am concerned with moral laws that flow from our nature, apart from revealed religion. But now I wish to take advantage of this being an essay, and while I think I remain close to Aquinas and Sartre, I would like to unfold briefly how I see the making of universals in our world.

ON THE UNIVERSALITY OF TENNIS

When I was younger, I played tennis. I was never very good at the game, but I enjoyed it for what it was, a sport, requiring the movement of legs and arms, indirectly exercise, which I hated to do for its own sake. Indeed, tennis playing is a purely physical phenomenon. There is nothing in the game that is not matter: There are fleshy human bodies moving about courts, holding rackets with which they attempt to put a ball over a net so that it stays within the court and so that an opponent cannot return the ball with the same restrictions.

Still, precisely as a game, tennis playing has a history and a constituted universality. Tennis games are unified not merely because a group of people happen to think that they are unified, but rather because these games are played in accordance with rules that are codified in books. These rules lead to a practiced eye being able to train the body and the way one swings a racket. That is why one takes lessons from a coach. And yet without a coach, in a short time, one can tell how good a player is in relation to other players. If one wishes competitive fun, even where there is no professional money (we always betted on the side), it soon becomes clear how to pair persons more or less equal in their performance.

Thus, whether one is aware of it or not, the moment one begins to play tennis, one enters a practical hierarchy of tennis playing that

exists throughout the world. Even if no one is actually playing tennis, as long as the game is a viable and active sport, there are plans and discussions about it, and books and magazines are being written and read about the game. All of these activities and efforts keep the practical hierarchy that is tennis in existence. The moment one begins to play tennis, one enters into this hierarchy: One plays as having “promise” or not, and this is true even if one is determined merely to enjoy the sport, with no or little desire to compete. Competition, in fact, is part of the sport, and as one continues to improve, regardless of one’s personal intentions, one can theoretically be ranked.

Indeed, there exists a practical sense in which *this stroke* of hitting the ball during a tennis match is ranked the moment it takes place. Unless one is a professional playing a crucial game, this ranking is not going to be done. Still, in a world gone mad about tennis, in which people had no other sport and a great deal of leisure time, it could be done. Or a good computer could, in principle, compare this stroke with every other stroke that is now taking place throughout the world and that has ever taken place. This ranking does not have to be actually performed for a “universal” meaning of tennis to exist within the world: The web of material structures provides the condition for the possibility of such ranking and thus the basis for universality.

I think my interpretation of how individual actions may lead to real universality existing in the world is consistent with the claim of both Aquinas and Sartre that only individuals exist in our world and yet that their actions can lead to the existence of real universals. If tennis ceased to be a lived sport, then the universality would exist in retrospect as part of history.

Moreover, this example of tennis helps to illustrate how both novelty and causality enter into the world. For example, given the game of tennis, certain shoes and material for courts are “better” than others; different sizes and shapes of rackets become possible. On the other hand, there are certain limits to what can be done. Some of these possibilities and limits arise from the rules of the game, but matter itself makes certain demands. Far from being unknowable, these possibilities are part of the “stuff” of which the game of tennis

is constituted. The precise difference between grass and clay arises from matter; but a grass court and a clay court come into existence as part of the game of tennis, and this player now wins because she can play on a grass court better than her opponent. Indeed, the game of tennis is meaningless apart from a relation to an organism that has legs, arms, eyes, ears, as well as a brain; and it is also meaningless apart from the way collective actions have historically forged matter to have the ambiguous but real unity of the universal game of tennis.

From a broad historical perspective, one could make a case that a more complex interaction exists between the game and one's social standing. Dress and codes of behavior may tend to level class distinctions but also may bring these very distinctions back into the game in the difference between the teachers and courts available to the rich and to the poor.

ON ZERO AND STARS

I further suggest that the kind of universality that exists in tennis provides sufficient foundation for our general mathematical and scientific claims. As soon as a scientist begins an experiment or attempts to formulate a theory, there exists throughout the world a milieu of scientific practices and writings that either adumbrates the theory or makes it appear radically "new." Similarly, mathematicians work within the practical hierarchy of the work of other mathematicians—although, with mathematics, I suspect that writing, and particularly the world of books, play crucial roles. Here I simply wish to note that if we put the emphasis on pure mathematics as a craft, then the debate between formalism and intuitionism seems not so extreme: The formalist view that mathematical truths can be reduced to "scratches" on paper is untenable if these scratches are divorced from their historical formation. However, within a historical context that would relate the mathematical symbols to their historical formation, these symbols are seen to be not arbitrary but conventional. I thus suggest that mathematical symbols embody meanings in a way that is not too dissimilar from the manner in which tennis dialectically embodies the meaning and the universality of the game.³ Further, insofar as any artifact retains the history of human efforts in a way that does

not require us to know this history in order to use or understand the artifact, one can also be said to “intuit” a mathematical truth. That is, insofar as one now sees the meaning of the symbol apart from the historical practices that have won this meaning for us, the meaning has the appearance of being a priori true. Writing $2 + 2 = 4$ hides a long history of human practices that make the writing of the symbols possible and their meaning easily grasped. I will expand on this in my discussion of truth in chapter 14, where the invention (discovery?) of zero made many complex mathematical formulas easy for all to understand, whereas previously one needed advanced degrees simply to divide or multiply in the Roman numerical system.

My reference to historical practices is meant to illustrate our collective forging of universals. Crafting universals would be a mysterious process if it were not merely a particular aspect of the collective making of artifacts. It took a great deal of effort and dedication of purpose to make *this* fork *a* fork. Indeed, in retrospect, it seems that an aspect of our crafting was always directed to making the unique common. The history of how a throne became a chair is probably similar to the history of how a noblewoman’s knife and fork became everyone’s knife and fork. At first, a fork was so unique that noble persons carried their own to a feast, and they were distinguished as noble partly by their possession and use of a fork. In general, much of this history is in our books. But the history of how grunts and gestures that signified “come here” slowly became the elegant, meaning sounds “come here” is lost to us in prehistory.

To give another example: A can of “diet coke” can be viewed as resulting from our interest (some would say obsession) with our weight. But that does not interest me. I would want to point to the existence of the can and its fluid as an artifact that can be reproduced relatively easily and that, as such, is the objective foundation of our universal notion of “Diet Coke.” For the most part, everyone who purchases diet coke gets Diet Coke. Each can of diet coke is also the archetype Diet Coke. This universality is both objective and remarkable: It is obviously objective, because we made it to be that way. And it is remarkable, for although it took a great deal of effort on the part of thousands of people to make it work, the effort is hidden in the workability of the artifact.

A star is not a can of coke. But relational objectivity is in them both. A star is objectively in space because that is how matter is arranged about our fleshy organic body and in relation to our fleshy astronomical practices—theorems and instruments designed by fleshy hands. True, we do not mold stars, and it is also true that there is more mystery to the nature of a star than in a can of coke. Nevertheless, a star is a star because of matter's relation to our organic body, and whatever mysteries exist about the relation of a star to the universe are present only because we have localized that part of matter to study and not some other. The relation of matter to our body does not dissolve matter into a relation. Rather, through its relation to our fleshy body, matter is differentiated into things, things which we examine and wonder about. Every gust of wind, every snowflake, every subatomic particle that enters into our lives each day is unique; but they disappear too quickly in comparison to the stars we see each night. We live in a world within which established universal structures have already been constituted by the past practices of our fellow humans.

For Sartre we live in a world that reflects how our freedom has molded the planet for good or evil. And although Aquinas would call attention to God and the Devil, he would also agree that human freedom is real, producing good and real evil. We arise within this world penetrated through and through with history. Synderesis for Aquinas is our general guide, do good and avoid evil; but conscience tells us how to interpret this, and one should never act against his or her conscience. For Sartre, we are each a member of the human race and yet unique. Each of us could be the object of an exhaustive biography that, no matter how long, would only touch upon the way we fit within our time and our place. Sartre writes:

For a man is never an individual; it would be more fitting to call him a *universal singular*. Summed up and for this reason universalized by his epoch, he in turn resumes it by reproducing himself in it as singularity. Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by the universalizing singularity of his projects, he requires simultaneous examination from both ends.⁴

Universality and Personality

Let us recall that Aquinas wrote two “summaries.” One was written primarily for students of theology and is referred to in Latin as *Summa Theologica* or *Summa Theologiae* and in English frequently simply as the *Summa*. The other was written in answer to those outside the church, mainly the Arabic and Judaic commentators on Aristotle, whom he frequently agrees with, and it has a long and short title but is mostly referred to by the short title, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, with no easy English equivalent. In the first part of the theological *Summa*, Aquinas begins his discussion of personality.¹ He gives us an interesting observation about the different types of a relation (a crucial notion throughout Sartre’s thought). Aquinas notes that a relation can be purely mental, signifying nothing real within a thing. The example that he gives is interesting: “for instance, when reason compares man to animal as the species to the genus.”² Aquinas is here claiming that although our minds classify things by putting smaller classes into larger ones, this relation does not signify anything real but is purely the way our minds organize things. For Aquinas as for Sartre, only individual substances exist in nature, and we make classifications with our mind in our efforts to understand the world.

It is thus important to distinguish the individual and how it is related to other individuals and to our attempt to understand their relations among themselves. For Aquinas, each thing has a nature and these natures are objectively related to each other before our minds try to understand this relation. For example, on a primary level our judgment “We are animals” is true; nevertheless, it does not explicitly put us in the category of being animals but merely affirms that we are made of flesh and bones. For Aquinas, the explicit judgment “Man is an animal” is the result of reflection and not our primary grasp of our animality. This notion of simple apprehension acknowledges the relation that individuals have to each other while they are still very different. I think in retrospect we can say that this is Sartre’s notion of the universal singular awaiting to be made explicit. But let us continue with Aquinas’s discussion of how individuality, universality, and being a person differ.

IS AN INFANT A PERSON?

Aquinas continues, “But when something proceeds from a principle of the same nature, then both the one proceeding and the source of procession communicate in the same order; and then they have real relations with each other.”²³ Aquinas develops this into the real relations of the Three Divine Persons among themselves. But soon Aquinas considers in some detail what it means to be a person, and here his discussion is explicitly related to human personality. The precise and difficult issue that I am focusing on is the difference between the individual characteristics inherited from one’s parents together with the historical circumstances of one’s birth, and one’s personality. “Valéry is a petit bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about it,” Sartre writes. And he adds, “But not every petit bourgeois intellectual is Valéry.”²⁴ We are each unique, and interestingly Aquinas focuses on the uniqueness of birth to explain the mystery of what we have in common and what distinguishes each of us.

From the perspective of the distinction between our individuating characteristics and our personality, human birth is unique. Aquinas notes that although each angel is unique and yet can be put into a

category, archangels, seraphim, etc., one angel is not born from another. Only humans are born from other humans, and we thus have the unique question of what is inherited and what can be unique. True, this issue exists for all animals, but, for Aquinas, animals do not have the full notion of personality. “Therefore, individuals of a rational nature even have a special name among other substances; this name is *person*.”⁵

True, indeed, but if an infant is born as a person, it would seem that the infant’s freedom is caged at birth. Still, this cannot be Aquinas’s view, for he admits that we each are free to develop our lives as we choose, for good or evil. We inherit individuating characteristics, but do we inherit the personalities of our parents? Let us proceed slowly. Aquinas writes, “For soul, flesh, and bone belong to the nature of man; whereas this soul, this flesh, and this bone belong to the nature of this man.”⁶ And, a little later, “*I answer that, Person* signifies what is most perfect in all nature—that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature.”⁷

But does this soul, and this flesh and bones, lead to what it means to be a person? It seems not, for if personality were inherited, one human would be a rubber stamp of another. I know that Aquinas saw the difference between individuation and personality, and he may have thought that a precise description of what personality adds to individuation was implied by his general conception of human freedom, and thus did not require further development. Whatever the reason, I, and others, such as the eminent Thomistic scholar Jacques Maritain, have not found a clear distinction between individuation and personality to exist in his works.⁸

A BLOSSOMING PERSON BUT WHAT WILL APPEAR?

But let us do a little interpretation. Let us go back to the notion of relation. It is true that relations of a substance to itself are real only in God. But then Aquinas would be the first to admit that all our best terms apply to God first and foremost, and exist in us only by analogy. Indeed, let us recall that this is the very reason why Aquinas predicated Person of God. But why can’t we extend the analogy to

the way a free being can have a real relation to itself? Let us also recall that Aquinas also makes a distinction between a human soul and this human soul. For parents give birth to a living human organism, that is, an organism with a singular soul. The infant is thus fully human; absolutely nothing needs to be added to distinguish the infant as being the infant of these parents. But if their child is to have a human adventure, a destiny of its own, it must be free to develop what is best in it, namely, its personality. Aquinas is well aware that we cannot consider personality as something accidental to a growing infant; personality must be essential to a rational being, and yet it must be different from all the inherited qualities. *On the other hand, it would seem that an infant is a person, or at least a budding person. Perhaps, we can compare it to a bud that may develop into a rose, a lily, or something strange and thorny.* Sartre implies that granting a mother's or a guardian's proper love, an infant will inherit this love throughout its life.

The valorization of the infant through care will touch him more deeply the more this tenderness is manifest. . . . Let a child once in his life—at three months, at six—taste this victory of pride, he is a man, never in all his life will he be able to revive the supreme voluptuousness of this sovereignty or to forget. But he will preserve even in misfortune a kind of religious optimism based on the abstract and calm certainty of his own value. We shall say, in any case, that an adventure begun in this fashion has nothing in common with Flaubert's.⁹

An infant matures into an adult under a mother's care, through her touch, her smiles, or her unconcern. The infant will be free, but will develop differently depending upon this early care. I think that Sartre has a good description of how this happens. We begin with the important distinction between our ego and our personality. Our ego is in the world for all to see. Our ego is that aspect of the self—the *I*—that comes to us from our past reflections upon ourselves and from the ways others regard us. Our friends or even strangers may know our ego better than we ourselves do, especially if we live in self-deception. Thus, in the blessedly short monograph *The Transcendence of the Ego*, we read these remarkable words: “My I, in effect, is

no more certain for consciousness than the I of other men. It is only more intimate.”¹⁰

I may be shouting at someone, who may politely request that I stop being angry. I may reply, “I am not angry!” But, of course, my anger is in the world for all to see. At this time, others know more about the self that I think that I am than I do. Still, there could be a difference between my anger now and my general attitude toward people. Perhaps I was very tired, and my anger was, in a sense, a “slip.” In this sense, being angry may not be an aspect of my personality. And yet, even here others may have recognized the truth of the situation before we ourselves became aware of it.

In a more technical sense, the awareness of our personality as distinct from our ego arises from a specific type of reflection. Sartre terms this a special presence to oneself, and I think he is right, “for what confers personal existence on a being is not the possession of an Ego—which is only the *sign* of personality—but it is the fact that the being exists for itself as a presence to itself.”¹¹ Usually, when we reflect upon ourselves, we sort of stand apart from our self and examine our actions. In this sense, we might reflect upon our past, or we might attempt to capture our present action, even as we are doing it. The general type of reflection in which we examine our past, or attempt to keep one part of our self fixed while we examine it, is the normal way we reflect upon ourselves. This type of reflection occurs, for example, when, enjoying a sunset, I stop looking and think to myself or say to another who is with me, “This *is* beautiful!”

Aside from these normal reflections, Sartre points to a more subtle type of reflection that can occur while we are acting, and in such a way that it allows the action to continue. Usually, these reflections cannot be sustained for long. For example, while enjoying a sunset, I do not turn from watching it or even stop my pleasure, but a slight movement comes over me, hardly in explicit words, “Yes, this is beautiful.” These fleeting reflections are difficult to focus upon, for they collapse into an object of study as soon as we attempt to examine them. Nevertheless, these fleeting reflections can reveal to us our true freedom and personality: “Why am I wasting time watching a sunset, when I am needed elsewhere?” Still, I continue to watch—“Let them

wait!” Sartre describes this unique reflection as a certain separation from my action (a “nihilation”) that nevertheless allows me to become aware of my ego and my personality.¹² This “separation” of our self from our self could with a little interpretation become Aquinas’s soul. Still, I have made a promise of sorts to let Sartre remain the atheist he chooses to be.

12

My Time, Your Time, the World's Time

For me, the single great contribution that the German philosopher Martin Heidegger gave to human thought was his distinction between clock time and human time that he put forward in his first major book, *Being and Time* (1927). For Heidegger, clock-time is based upon the more primary kind of time termed “temporality.”¹ Temporality is, as it were, the very time of consciousness, namely, a “temporal spread” of past, present, and future existing all at once. Every thought and deed arises from a past through a present to a future. Every gesture we make is a temporal spread. We project this onto a clock, and the past then becomes the minutes gone; the present, the impossible now; and the future the minutes yet to be reached by the clock. For consciousness (Heidegger would not allow us to use this term), the temporal spread of past-present-future is what we are at “any time.”

In *Being and Time*, the notion of temporality unfolds within a broader context of our relation to the time of the world. The specific context is what Heidegger termed the “Mitsein,” that is, “being-with.” For Heidegger, our primary orientation to the world is to be

its “care-taker”; it is through us that concern for the welfare of trees and the earth itself arises in the world. Nevertheless, Heidegger admits that at this time in our history, we have essentially turned from our true caring path. At present, our fundamental relation to the world is one of a “technological” or “calculating” spirit of which our actual technology is a mere expression. We are thus lost. Nevertheless, the path back to a proper relation to reality is deep within us, and it can be awakened by keeping ourselves poetically open to reality.²

Sartre finds all of this hard to swallow, and so do I. Indeed, he regards it as a form of bad faith, and again I join him. *It is all too passive!* From what possible source could human relations acquire a nurturing bond to others and to the world? If one puts forward God as the source of this nurturing bond, then we must ask, “why doesn’t Heidegger simply invoke God?” No doubt the term “God” for him is too Western to signify the Divinity. All of this may be true; but it could be dealt with in good faith—as Martin Buber, in fact, handled the issue—with all the cards face up on the table, affirming an I-Thou relation, where the “Thou” incorporates insight from both Western and Eastern notions of the Deity. If we are to have hope for changing the world, the power to change it must lie in us. Yes, Aquinas would recommend prayer, but he would agree that the world is the way it is because of collective free decisions, and it can be changed in the same way.

Granting the validity of Sartre’s critique of Heidegger, why does Sartre seemingly go to the other extreme, affirming that our relations to others are built upon “conflict”? First, let us examine Sartre’s own discussion of Heidegger—in the above reflections, I took some liberties based upon the later works of Heidegger, whereas Sartre is basically reflecting upon Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Sartre writes: “The empirical image which may best symbolize Heidegger’s intuition is not that of a conflict but rather a crew.”³ What is wrong with the image of a crew as a symbol for our relations with our fellow humans? Simply this: we work together as a crew only when we agree to do so; and, more important, a crew can function as such only if the boat is itself made to work in this way—with proper seats and slots for the oars as well as for the rowers. But cannot a similar objection

be brought against Sartre's notion of conflict? If we are essentially related to each other in conflict, then wars are the normal course of history. On the other hand, it is clear that this is not Sartre's view of history. Over and over he reminds us that oppression is a human fact; it is something that we do to each other and that we do not have to do: "Oppression does not fall from the sky. . . . oppression is a human fact."⁴

I think that Sartre's notion of conflict brings us back to the look, insofar as we are always vulnerable before the other for our very humanity. Still, I have no hesitation in admitting that Sartre should not have used the term "conflict" in this context. In fact, unlike so many other crucial terms in *Being and Nothingness*, which continually reappear, such as the look itself, "conflict" is never used again in the same way. In his later writing, conflict is always something specific, for example, the normal relation between the colonized and the colonizer, even where there is no violence. Thus, apart from this Heideggerian context, Sartre uses the more neutral term "existence" to point to the source of interpersonal relations. In referring to Genet's ability to rework his foster parent's judgment of him as a thief into his own project of being a "saintly" thief, Sartre writes: "We know what this creative consciousness is: it is existence."⁵

FREEDOM AND TEMPORALITY

Sartre accepts the general notion of temporality from Heidegger, but he roots it in our freedom. In the concrete, there is a relation between time and temporality in each of our lives. For example, consider the two statements "Last year I visited Paris" and "I have never been the same since my trip to Paris last year." We might be tempted to separate these two by claiming that the first simply refers to some past that is gone and the latter to my present memory of an event. But they are two aspects of one temporality. That is, I am the person whose past of going to Paris is so important to me that I keep it as altering, to some extent, my whole outlook on life. For, after all, how many events of my past have I let slip out of awareness?

But given this distinction between time and temporality, the

two meet in our understanding of both our own lives and the age of the world. We grow old, and clock time measures what is, in effect, the aging of our body. The world grows old, and clock time measures the changes in the structure of the earth, planets, and stars. Nevertheless, without our existence, there would be only a succession of phases of the infinite whirling of matter, with no relation to each other. Aquinas would ultimately turn to God; but he would agree with Sartre that the world is filled with natures that have value in relation to our own existence. A single raindrop is a world unto itself, at the mercy of wind and temperature. If we need rain, we are attentive; but like the millions of movements of air and light, they pass quickly, or they stay too long, too quickly or too long in relation to the temporality of our fleshy and bony bodies.

13

Half-Time

The Battle over the Sex of Angels

What is the best attitude to have toward possible change in the world? We are not here concerned with the psychological feelings of optimism or pessimism. Rather, Sartre is concerned with these as collective projects; for example, in optimism, we might attempt to control future events, or, in pessimism, we might not even try to do a good deed because we lack the confidence that it would come to fruitful completion. But what then is the correct attitude toward trying to make the world a better place in which to live?

Sartre's view centers in his discussion whether our struggles for freedom are intelligible. Do we understand what we do to ourselves and the world or are we at the mercy of forces beyond our control? It should be clear that Sartre's general answer is that, yes, for the most part, we understand our conflicts, even when they seem strange enough to come from some alien intervention. Let me gamble on expressing his view, before we actually reflect upon it in some detail. I would say that our moral attitude should be an effort to fight

evil, while avoiding useless dialogue with those who really have no intention to change the world for the better. But let us reflect with Sartre on a strange occurrence, which I will expand upon somewhat, namely, the Byzantine debate over the sex of angels, a debate that actually did occur.

The Byzantine Empire was the continuation of the Roman Empire in its eastern provinces. The capital city was Constantinople, and the city and the empire finally fell in 1453 under the reign of Constantine IX. The reason for the fall is almost impossible to believe: It concerned the sex of angels. Until the fourth century, about 325 AD, the church had depicted angels with wings and their sex as usually male. Further, when they appear in the Bible, they appear as men. On the other hand, angels can have no sex, for they are spiritual beings, and this theology is very clear and never in question. Thus, a real debate should never have arisen—but, it did arise.

Sartre does not go into details surrounding the debate, but the more one examines them, the more absurd the entire situation appears. Constantinople was surrounded by Ottoman armies, but the Byzantines did not seem worried and were not getting prepared. The affair was so strange that the sultan sent spies to find out what was really happening. What secret weapon was being prepared to stop the invasion? The truth was difficult to believe. The city was split by a debate that canceled out all other concerns, “Do angels have sex, and is it male?” The debate was concluded, and there was a victory of one side over the other: “Angels have no sex.” With *this* victory, Constantinople fell without any resistance. Sartre writes:

People could kill one another over the sex of angels—and that reflected a deep malaise of Byzantine society. But it is precisely one of the meanings of that malaise that people could kill one another—at Byzantium and at the moment of its history—*over the sex of angels*: i. e. that a theologians’ dispute had to be burdened with all the real divisions sapping the city and the empire, or else contradictions be allowed to fester beneath that overstratified society. The polarization of practical forces by symbols must of necessity entail a partial loss of energies: in that case, the victory remains intelligible—but its meaning is as confused as that of the conflict. . . . Even in the Communist Party, people struggle over the sex of angels.¹

OUR PRESENT DEBATES ABOUT THE SEX OF ANGELS

Sartre is directly concerned with Stalin's relation to the challenge from the West. The Communists under Stalin allowed themselves to become involved in a debate that should never have arisen, namely, "How to protect themselves against the West." But the West was not going to invade Russia during the early years of the revolution, and the West was not going to invade any of the countries allied to Russia. Nor was the West going to drop atomic bombs on any of these countries—any such attempt would have destroyed the West along with the East. The true challenge for Russia at this time was the building of an infrastructure that would enable it to survive. Unwilling to face this continuing good-faith challenge, Stalin chose to become involved in the false danger of the West, forging a uniform block of countries tied to Russian Communism, reflected in the slogan "socialism in one country." The attempt to force this unity destroyed Russian Communism and created more harm, pain, and killings, that is to say, murders, than any looming threat from the West.

What should have been the correct attitude of Russia toward its own problems and the danger of the West? The proper attitude would have been to allow socialism to arise in a way that respected the free development of peoples, focusing on building infrastructures where needed, and "gambling" that this would enable Russia to withstand the attempt of the West to destroy it. "It was necessary to tell the Russian people simultaneously: 'We *must* hold out' and 'We *can* construct' and 'It is by constructing that we shall hold out.'"²

LESSONS FOR OUR TIME

I believe that this lesson also lies closer to home. I honestly did not know that we are officially a capitalist country until I recently went to witness someone's becoming an American citizen. The event, which was in Manhattan, was rather large, about one hundred people from twenty or thirty different countries. It was impressive to hear representatives from each group rise and briefly describe or at least mention their native countries. I felt that this is what America is about.

On the other hand, I was surprised to hear the repeated claim that

we are a capitalist country. Well, I was born in Brooklyn and have spent all my life in America, and I know we are a capitalist country. But I didn't think it was dogma. I knew that we were against communism, but I thought that was more political than economic. Social Security, which I think is a very good thing, is not the act of a capitalist country. Moreover, I think that if we didn't waste money on unnecessary military advances, we could all be put on a guaranteed income. I have always thought that our failure to tax properly was the core of our capitalism. If we let people have fun accumulating as much money as they wished, but then at the end of the year took most of it away to spread among those in need, we could change the face of our country without adhering to any dogmatic form of socialism.

But besides these personal reflections, something else bothered me, namely, the repeated statement that one must be ready to die for one's country. I say repeated, for I stopped counting after six or seven announcements—ten or fifteen would be closer to the truth. I could not help wondering just what we expected of these new citizens—to live happily in their new country, or to die for it. But we have enough weapons to destroy the world many time over, and much of the world's armament is made in the United States and is being used against us. Are we also debating the sex of angels?

Still, we have to act. I agree with Sartre that our moral challenge is to fight against evil, no matter how small or how unimportant our resistance may seem to be. He calls this doing the necessary within the impossible. We may not have at hand the means to alter the general direction of our country, at least not easily, and not at a particular time when our immediate help may be needed elsewhere. Still, we can and should unite in some small way with those who are trying to change our national priorities for the better.³

14

On Truth

A First Glance

Our common sense delivers to us a world filled with diverse kinds of matter, most generally, gases, liquids, and solids. In relation to our perceptions and our practical usages, matter never appears to us as a purely quantitative thing. We don't drink H_2O . How could we? We can't see H_2O ; we can't feel it or taste it. We drink water; we drink that which quenches thirst and nourishes and refreshes. True, water is also H_2O ; that is, in relation to the intentions, formulas, and instruments of chemistry, wetness resolves itself into a molecular structure. We can go further in our attempt to find out what things have in common and reduce water to its subatomic parts. Water could be reduced to the equations that explain the movements of its subatomic particles. In each reduction water manifests a different aspect of its nature. We are concerned therefore not merely with different meanings of the term "water," but with diverse facets of the thing we designate as "water." If we should feel uncomfortable with such diversity and demand a transcendental view that unites all facets of water, or if we should wish to discover the single most important aspect of water, we would no doubt be able to produce such a perspective. Indeed, it

has been done, most notably by the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650).

THE DREAM OF DESCARTES

Before turning to Descartes, I wish to discuss first a more recent British philosopher, Bernard Williams (1929–2003), who clears the path to my more detailed view of Descartes. Williams writes:

If knowledge is what it claims to be, then it is knowledge of a reality which exists independently of that knowledge, and indeed . . . independently of any thought or experience. Knowledge is of what is there *anyway*.¹

At first, this claim seems true. Williams is saying that if we make a claim about something, then that claim has to be true of the thing, regardless of whether anyone is thinking about it or is having any experience with it. If water is a wet substance, then it is a wet substance regardless of what you or I think about it. Williams gets to the heart of the way Descartes thinks about truth; but both he and Descartes are wrong. Aquinas and Sartre both claim, correctly, that truth is a relation, and what Williams and Descartes miss is that the claim that truth is “what is there *anyway*” does not state to whom or to what this is related. Let us consider the issue in more detail.

Descartes was a brilliant mathematician, and his view was that philosophy had erred in not following the path of clear and distinct ideas that guide mathematics and science. He writes, “Reflecting too, that of all those who have hitherto sought after truth in the sciences, mathematicians alone have been able to find any demonstrations—that is to say, certain and evident reasonings—I had no doubt that I should begin with the very things that they studied.”² Descartes’s absolute conception of reality demands acquiring the kind of certitude that one has when one knows that a triangle is a three-sided plane figure; that is, the predicate, three-sided plane figure, must be seen clearly and distinctly to contain the subject, triangle. But what must knowledge and reality be like if such pure enquiry is to be possible for humans? We must be capable of having clear and distinct ideas, and reality must be able to mesh with such ideas.

But it certainly seems that we do have clear and distinct ideas. The idea of a triangle as a three-sided plane figure seems both clear (we know exactly what it means) and distinct (we know how it is distinguished from other ideas); for example, a triangle is not a square. Is this knowledge that clear? What exactly do we mean when we speak about a plane figure? The surface of a three-dimensional physical object is not a plane as such. Mathematics may refer to a three-dimensional object as being composed of an infinite number of planes, but as far as clarity goes, that seems to make matters worse. And if we forgo these kinds of objections to the status of mathematical objects, we can still question to what extent this knowledge is natural rather than the result of a historical process of refinement that led to the formation of geometry.

Indeed, we have only to reflect for a moment on our mathematical zero. The simple notation “0” is the embodiment of years of inventiveness. Mathematics existed for a long time without zero, and because of that mathematics was very cumbersome. In the Roman numeral system, one needed advanced degrees to multiply and divide. How does one divide III into XV to get V? The simplicity of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., made both the representation of numbers and their operations simple, “The discovery of the modern positional numeration did away with these obstacles and made arithmetic accessible even to the dullest mind. . . . Thus, the same digit 2 has different meanings in the three numbers 342, 725, 269: in the first case it stands for two; in the second for twenty, in the third for two hundred.”³

This “invention” or “discovery” was born of need. The evolution began with the Indian term *sunya*, which meant a blank and not zero. Collectively, we found it almost impossible to grasp zero as a way of beginning the number system. It seemed more appropriate to begin with 1, 2, 3 than with 0, 1, 2, 3. But use made zero work; that is, in our practical handling of mathematical operations, we were approaching the discovery of positional numbers, and thus the blank became zero. Indeed, we waited long enough to realize this possibility of zero, and we could still be waiting—in such a history, “we” would not be “we.” The invention of zero has about the same place in the furniture of the universe as an electric bulb. The electric bulb exists as the end of a long search to separate light from heat, and zero, precisely as the

emptiness that moves arithmetic operations along, is the inventive termination of the long search to simplify these operations and to acquire truth.

Descartes lived before Gödel's incompleteness theorem, which established that the truths of arithmetic cannot be logically established, and before the indeterminacy of quantum physics, although it is not clear how these would have affected him. But his fundamental error was his insistence that we begin our reflections about our life and the world by first examining the ideas that are in our mind. Descartes thus advises us to try to think about ourselves and the world as if our mind were not essentially bonded to our physical body, and once this attempt is made, the union with our body can never be reestablished. Husserl's epoché is a suspension and not a break, although I grant that particularly in his later works he seems to be too close to Descartes to avoid Idealism, the belief that our material world exists only in our mind.⁴

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Pursuing Truth

I claim that the real error of Williams and Descartes is the failure to recognize that truth is a relation, and on this claim both Aquinas and Sartre agree. We might imagine that things would be just as they are if they were not related to a consciousness viewing them. For us, a tree is an important thing because it can last for hundreds of our years. But for a fly, a gust of wind is more important than a tree. Both Aquinas and Sartre agree that without a relation to a consciousness, there would be no way of distinguishing one thing from another. Yes, Aquinas would claim that the primary relation of things is to the mind of God, but he would also agree that, given this truth, things still have a relation to the human body with its senses. Sartre refers only to the human, fleshy body. Still, the importance of the relation is present in both thinkers. More specifically Aquinas held to a correspondence theory of truth, which involves a relation. For me, the valid complementary ways of looking at truth are (a) the correspondence theory, (b) that of internal relations, and (c) that of the dialectic.¹

THE CORRESPONDENCE THEORY

Let us begin with Aquinas's clear formulation about truth, given in several places, but most notably in his extensive work *On Truth*. Aquinas asks the question "What is truth?" After giving certain distinctions that will be discussed later, Aquinas formulates the classic correspondence theory of truth as follows:

The first reference of being to the intellect, therefore, consists in its agreement with the intellect. This agreement is called "the conformity of thing with intellect." In this conformity is fulfilled the formal constituent of the true, and this is what *the true* adds to being, namely, the conformity or equation of thing and intellect.²

An apple is simply an apple, dangling from an apple tree or lying in a fruit bowl; it is simply that which it is. This same apple can be said to be true when someone judges it to be a real apple. For example, if an apple-looking thing is in a fruit bowl, one might indeed question whether it is a wax imitation of a real apple. One might need to reach out and touch it. We use our senses and our whole body to know that what we think is real is real, and we then have truth. On this level, the correspondence theory of truth is simple and clear.

But to bring out the force of the correspondence theory of truth, it is useful to compare Plato's version of the theory and Aristotle's. Recalling what was said in the previous chapter that truth adds nothing to what is known except a relation to the one knowing, we must recognize that Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Sartre would put forward a relation of things to a mind. On closer examination, however, the correspondence theory of truth is fundamentally different for Plato and Descartes than for Aristotle, Aquinas, and Sartre. For Plato, the correspondence theory of truth does not work in relation to the material world. You perceive a tree, and what you perceive is not the real nature of a tree but rather a participation of matter in the essence of a tree that exists in another world—the world of pure forms. (Plato, of course, would prefer to use a notion like justice—but the example is still relevant.) Plato would rightly call attention

to the inequality that exists between your perception of a particular apple tree and the nature of what it means to be an apple tree—the former is singular and concrete, the later universal and free from accidental features; for example, your apple tree may be dying, another just blooming, and a third in full healthy growth.

Aristotle, Aquinas, and Sartre would agree to the discrepancy between the individual things we experience in the world—for only individuals exist—and the true judgments that we can make about their natures. For Aristotle and Aquinas we *abstract* the general from the singulars, the nature of apple tree from this apple tree. Still, one might rightly ask how this abstraction is done and how we are to understand such general claims as “This tree is an apple tree,” for the subject is singular and the predicate universal. Very briefly, for Aquinas, abstraction occurs through the ways our various impressions are unified by our imagination in a singular representation of the object being known. Our intellect works through this complex to grasp the natures that are before us, *this tree as an apple tree*. On this level, we have not formed an explicit universal category of apple trees until we reflect on the various apple trees we have known. This singular apple tree can mesh with the nature of apple trees because Aquinas affirms that a “nature” is, of itself, neither singular nor universal, but can equally exist in both states.

TRUTH AS INTERNAL RELATIONS AND THE DIALECTIC

Let us now turn our attention to internal relations, particularly as put forward by Sartre. (Some claim that Heidegger’s later philosophy is one of internal relations; it may be so, but Sartre put forward a clear notion of truth as an internal relation in his *Being and Nothingness* as well as in his *Critiques*.) Briefly, the doctrine of internal relations draws our attention to the tight bond between knowledge and the things we know. For example, while the faculty of sight does not produce color, it does discriminate color within a reality filled with a virtually infinite number of qualities, a reality that Sartre calls the “in-itself.” Thus we can say that there is color because there is sight and we have sight because there is color in the world. This is one notion

of truth that Sartre has in mind when he declares, “It is impossible to get away from the problem of Truth.”³³ The other notion that interests Sartre is the dialectic.

The dialectic has a philosophical history, and this is recognized in the title Sartre gives to his major work on the dialectic, *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, which clearly announces that Sartre is aiming to forge his own notion of the dialectic. It is sufficient for our purposes to note that the historical context is that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) and that of Karl Marx (1818–83). Briefly, Hegel’s view was that we have arrived at a time in our history in which we can understand that all history is guided by an unfolding world spirit in which and by which the human person becomes aware of the ways life and history are unfolding so that we understand how we are part of the “world spirit.” For Hegel, the so-called evils of history, such as wars, are simply a necessary part of the maturing of the world spirit. No brief summary can do justice to Hegel’s claim, and while he did father a critical understanding of history, his optimism, particularly now in the wake of two world wars, is disconcerting.

One simplistic way of understanding the Hegelian dialectic (although Hegel apparently seldom used it) is to see a movement between a certain happening (thesis), its negation (antithesis), and its resolution (synthesis). The classic example is the Roman master (thesis) who owns a slave who does the real work (antithesis), and the synthesis in the medieval master-craftsman, who owns the work he does. Indeed, this dialectic held for certain limited times in our history, but Sartre rightly rejects it as a general movement of history.

While Sartre in general rejects Hegel, he does in fact reinterpret the notion of the spirit of an age: “In fact, the Objective Spirit—in a defined society and in a given era—is nothing more than culture as practico-inert.”³⁴ The term “practico-inert” points to the “weight” of the social structures that give the context of our actions—the forms of art and architecture, the codification of laws that attempt to regulate our behavior and that also reflect our beliefs, as complex and as contradictory as these may be. We develop our freedom within this web, sustaining it or challenging it. And, again, we are back to the importance of individuals, “*The Objective Spirit*, while *never* on the

side of pure lived experience and free thought, exists *as an act* only through the activity of *individuals*.⁵

Sartre's dialogue with Marx is subtle; it occurs in several stages throughout the *Critique*. Sartre generally agrees with Marx that the social means of production of a society form the basis on which laws and institutions are formed. For example, how much of our American society is structured by our capitalistic division between the worker and the employer, a division that affects not only the workplace but the entire society? Our unemployed are free, yes, but their freedom frequently confronts a barrier to self-fulfillment not of their own making. The dialogue becomes specific in a note in the section "Scarcity and Marxism" in the first volume of the *Critique*:

It must be clearly understood that the rediscovery of scarcity in this investigation makes absolutely no claim to oppose Marxist theory or to complete it. It is of a different order.⁶

What is this "different order"? It is the order of freedom, which is one with the efficacy and value of individual efforts, and thus again, "The only practical dialectical reality, the motive force of everything, *is individual action*."⁷ Then too, this "different order" is that of Being and Truth, and thus Sartre writes, "But my remarks, though they are possible only on the basis of this reconstruction [Marx's *Capital*] . . . belong logically, *before* this reconstruction, at a higher level of indeterminacy and generality."⁸

Perhaps, the deepest tension between Marx and Sartre arises because Sartre views Marx to have held to a classical realist notion of truth, despite Marx's use of the dialectic. To repeat, the traditional correspondence theory of truth implies that we have truth only when we know how things would be independent of our existence. And, for Sartre, this correspondence theory underlies Marx's dialectic of history *to the extent that our awareness of the dialectic reflects the necessary evolution of history*. For Marx, capitalism was thus a necessary historical development from which socialism would then arise. For Sartre, on the contrary, neither capitalism nor socialism is a necessary aspect of human history; rather, each is a distinct human adventure in which

“subjectivity is neither everything nor nothing; it represents a moment in the historical process.”⁹

Granting all this, Sartre praises Marx for his emphasis on concrete history over Hegel’s grand enterprise in which History is developing on its own, uniting us with the World Spirit:

Marx’s originality lies in the fact that, in opposition to Hegel, he demonstrated that History *is in development*, that *being is irreducible to Knowledge*, and, also, that he preserved the dialectical movement *both in Being and in Knowledge*. He was correct, *practically*. But having failed to *rethink the dialectic*, Marxists have played the Positivist game.¹⁰

Again, Sartre praises Marx for doing what was possible for his time. The dialectic is not a completed task but a continuing one; it is a task for people in good faith. Thus, for Sartre “living Marxism is heuristic; its principles and its prior knowledge appear as regulative principles.”¹¹ And then, also, to repeat, there is Sartre’s continual emphasis on the individual: “The only practical dialectical reality, the motive force of everything, *is individual action*.”¹²

AN AFTERTHOUGHT: TRUTH AND PREJUDICE

I recommend two fascinating and exciting books, John Chadwick’s *The Decipherment of Linear B* and Michael D. Coe’s *Breaking the Maya Code*.¹³ It is interesting to note both the similarities and the differences in the unraveling of Egyptian hieroglyphs, Linear B, and the Maya Code. In each case, there was a certain collective mental block that delayed the decipherment, the longest for Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, and the most needless for the Maya Code.

Athanasius Kircher (1602–80), who had made some notable efforts in deciphering Coptic, delayed the proper deciphering of ancient Egyptian. For Kircher, reading hieroglyphs supposedly consisted in cultivating the proper frame of mind to be able to intuit their messages, just as one needs to be in an informed state of mind to recognize the country represented by a flag. But, as Coe notes, Kircher was a product of his times, and in other areas he made real linguistic advances.

With Linear B, there was the prejudice against viewing the script as an early form of Greek, despite the fact that the locations of the tablets should have raised this possibility. But the archeological perspective was against seeing Greek culture to have arisen that early, prior to 1400 BC, and with a script unlike classical Greek. The classical Greek script is alphabetic and of Semitic origin; but this script is not alphabetic at all, and it is now termed Mycenaean Greek. The deciphering was accomplished by an architect, Michael Ventris (1922–56).

In the Maya Code, however, the mental block was a form of racism, an unwillingness to grant that South American cultures could have had true writing. The moving force that delayed work on the Maya script was the great Mayan expert Sir Eric Thompson. Thompson could not bring himself to believe that the Mayans could use writing for anything more than making calendars and recording calculations. We now know this to be completely false. According to Coe, the Spanish burning of the Maya codices was an unparalleled catastrophe for human history.

A second stumbling block to the actual decipherment was that a crucial initial step was provided by a Soviet Russian, Yuri Valentinovich Knorosov, and, apparently, Thompson despised the Soviet Russians as much as he demeaned the ancient Mayans. Thompson effectively held back work on the Maya Code for decades; eventually, the cumulative evidence simply bypassed him. With all his prejudices, everyone acknowledges that Thompson was, nevertheless, one of the great pioneers in Mayan research.

The main point of these examples is that a truly objective view that aims at acquiring truth is itself a good faith adventure of freedom. That is, the search for truth can never forget the knowing subject, despite the history of attempts to do just that.

THE UNIQUENESS OF TRUTH, TODAY

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of Sartre's use of the dialectic is his claim that it is something unique to our present time, and thus could not have been available to Aquinas. "Thus when we claim *anyone* can carry out the critical investigation, this does not mean it could happen

at any period. It means anyone *today*.²¹⁴ One of our unique abilities in our present generation is our ability to foresee bad results from good actions, and thus refrain from doing them. Sartre uses the example of Chinese peasants who, in order to make their land arable, deforested it and were thereby themselves the cause of floods. Floods, of course, are also caused by nature; but the point here is that the very intention to plant crops hid the counterfinality of a land barren of trees. While it was impossible for the Chinese peasants to foresee the result of deforesting their land, *the message of the Critique is that we are now capable of such foresight and consequent control of our actions*. We live in a world in which scarcity rules as the accepted norm; that is to say, we live in a world within which we are not supposed to question why many are well fed and many more starving or the victims of abuse. Let us examine this scarcity.

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The Truth of Our Present History

Scarcity

THE MEANING OF SCARCITY

If scarcity simply means that there are not enough of the necessities of life for everyone on the planet, then it would seem that scarcity always reigned throughout our history. Indeed, the Bible is filled with the requirement that workers be paid what is due them. And if we turn our attention to the Roman Empire, when there were more slaves than free persons, then again we appear to have a condition in which scarcity is the truth of our history. On the other hand, Sartre insists that in his sense of the term, *scarcity* is something relatively new, namely, dating to the past two hundred years or so, since the so-called industrial revolution. The simple point is that until the industrial revolution we did not have the means or the knowledge to eliminate poverty and slavery. We tend to forget how the long history of our tool-making came to fruition in the invention of machines that could do the work of many individuals. Even if we grant that there

was an earlier agricultural revolution that gave farmers the ability to produce higher yields per acre without machines, the existence of machines, railroads, and trucks increased this ability a hundredfold and made it possible to get food where it was needed. Sartre's point is that for the most part this technology was not allowed to bring help where it was needed. Those in power freely and collectively manipulated the advantages of technology for their own increase of wealth, leaving the poor in many cases even poorer than they were before the industrial revolution. We must clarify that it is not the possession of wealth that is evil but the specific relation of wealth to poverty. There is nothing wrong in a capitalist having more money than a worker, nicer homes—two, three, four, whatever—boats, fancy cars, gold and diamonds. All of the above may be greed, but it is not the social evil about which Sartre is concerned. This social evil arises from at least three sources. First, superexploitation, the “extra dollar,” beyond the profit justly called for by an honest capitalistic system. Second, there is the political use of wealth, to control elections and the tax system in favor of the rich. And, finally and most importantly, there is a deep hatred of the common people, which, to repeat, not merely does not hesitate but hastens to bring about large-scale deaths (murders).

As for communism, it also is not intrinsically evil. Of course, there are frequently oppressions, particularly religious; but then there is less elitism and poverty. In a sense, these oppressions are more stupid than evil, and probably would have been eliminated. (We might recall our own early puritan oppression.) As we have seen, the real destruction of Russian communism came from within, in Stalin's evil attempt to make all countries imitate Russian Communism. Then too, Sartre mentions the insane attempt to compete with the United States, when the people needed the necessities of life. But there is another failure that I did not mention when considering the strange affair of the discussion of the sex of angels. First, Sartre recognizes that the factories were owned by the workers, and this was a real advance over capitalism as it is *de facto* practiced. Nevertheless, the workers were not allowed to choose what to manufacture. The in-built weakness of the Soviet model of socialism was that the government told the workers what they had to manufacture, with the result

that more weapons and items for space travel were produced when food was needed. Those in authority advanced scarcity: *Scarcity is the conscious withholding of the necessities of life from the underprovided when these could be given with no great financial loss to the wealthy.*

SCARCITY AND VIOLENCE

Ultimately scarcity is a form of violence. Sartre illustrates this with his example of professional boxing. Sartre was an amateur boxer, but he sees a deep difference between amateur boxing and professional boxing. In professional boxing, “Everything is given in that last punch. . . . And if everything were not present and transcended, the singular invention—the unique concrete reality that is *this* punch, delivered on *this* day, in *this* hall, in front of *this* audience—would not even be possible.”¹

The boxing match does not merely symbolize our society; it singularizes the struggles that are latent within every level of our social existence; or better, it *incarnates* for the here and the now the struggle that is pervasive throughout our societies. An analytic or pluralistic view would grant that boxing has interconnections with some aspects of our society, but for the most part, it would claim that the event is an independent happening, with its own distinctive history. Sartre would grant both the uniqueness of the event and the distinctiveness of its history—in another country, bullfighting or even cockfighting would take the place of boxing. Furthermore, each fight is a distinctive adventure for each of the fighters. Sartre’s point, however, is that the pervasiveness of these violent events and the way they are accepted in our societies mean that any actualization of conflict—insofar as it is more than a sport but a national and, indeed, international performance crowned with monetary rewards—singularizes for the here and now the large-scale latent violence that we have embedded in our laws and institutions, what Sartre terms the “practico-inert.” Everything good one might say about sports can be said to hold on the nonprofessional level, if it is done for enjoyment and with proper safety regulation.

But the individual professional boxer is not to blame. He is usu-

ally poor, and boxing is his only way out of oppression. Indeed, he reflects the struggle that is pervasive in society, the driving force of *need*, not merely his need for the necessities of life, but the need of the rich to own and to exhibit the boxing champion as one shows off a precious jewel.

A HEALTHY STRUGGLE

Nevertheless, there is a healthy form of struggle, which is simply that we must work to mediate our differences if we are to live together in peace and fulfillment of our lives. On this good-faith level, struggle and mediation combine, each person accepting that he or she is a universal singular and recognizing their responsibility to mold their internal faculties of intellect, will, memory, and imagination on the threefold level of individual, family and friends, and the common good. *Indeed, mediation is one of the most important aspects of Sartre's entire philosophy; it is the underside of all our free actions.* We have simply not practiced it, and this refusal has kept us in our social evils. Indeed, Sartre writes that Flaubert's contemporary writers, who he says were caught in a dilemma of whether to write for a public that hated the common person or not write at all, could have written without any hope of being read, and thus they would have followed the path of Socrates, putting forth real effort to break from their contradictory relation to their public, and "a long movement could have begun, leading to acquired truth. . . . That movement did not occur."²² Our predecessors failed to take the first steps toward the truth of acquiring and sustaining good faith, of recognizing that each person is a singular universal, having a needed place in the world.

WHY ARE WE SO HELPLESS?

Aside from bad faith, which is the unwillingness to use our freedom properly, Sartre points to several facets of our everyday life that make change for the better difficult. Sartre's general answer is "seriality."

Seriality is our Western social notion of privacy. Seriality does not refer to an individual's choice to have privacy for a particular rea-

son; rather, it points to the numerous ways we are kept from uniting with others to bring about political change. In the first volume of his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre gives several examples of seriality: the bus line, the radio broadcast, the job market, the Great Fear, and class. Briefly, Sartre's point about the bus line is that the elderly have to wait while the young and strong board first. I think he would have approved of the way bus drivers allow those disabled to board first. His objection against the radio broadcast—which could now be extended to television—is that there is no easy way to voice your objections, and turning off the set does not turn off the speaker. I don't think that either of these are very telling choices to illustrate seriality; we are on firmer ground with the others, beginning with the job market. We are supposed to be able to trade our talents and training for a suitable job, but the equality of the contract is an illusion. At the moment of contract, we appear to have the choice of accepting the offer of wages or not, and thus we seem equal to our employer, who is also free to hire us or not. Anyone who has had to work for a living knows the inequality in this so-called equality. Usually hundreds of people are available to take your place, and this surplus of labor is itself produced by the market.

On the other hand, the inequality of the market does not seem to be of anyone's making; it appears to be the way things are at this time in history. That is, sometimes there is more opportunity to do what we would like to do, and at other times there are very few jobs of any sort. No employer seems to be at fault, and, in a sense, this is true. The inequality exists in the social order, but we retain it.

In his discussion of the market—and, indeed, throughout the *Critique*—Sartre insists that alienation, oppression, and repression do not result from a particular monetary system in the abstract, *including capitalism*. Our dealings with money are wrong, not only because of superexploitation—the extra dollar beyond a decent profit from investment—but because our relation to money participates in and deepens the separation of the poor from the wealthy.

Even though Sartre is not a Marxist, he still regards classes as a real division within our humanity. Sartre gives the example of the division between skilled and unskilled workers that existed in the nine-

teenth century, arising from the use of the lathe. The use of the lathe required skill, and those workers received more money and were regarded as above the unskilled. It is interesting, Sartre notes, that the unskilled accepted this division as natural, whereas, in fact, it arose from a talent that could be learned. The historical conditions were not present for the worker to be truly self-conscious as a complete person. Nevertheless, it is also true that both the skilled and the unskilled saw themselves on one side and the owners of the factories on the other side.

Social conditions changed when machines became easy to use in mass production. Even so, Sartre reminds us, no relation of man to machine need be alienating; the relation can always be worked out in a human way. But “Taylorism” preached that since machines made the work easy, if the worker did not produce enough and if he did not have a job, it was his own fault:

The bourgeoisie claims to be human by virtue of intelligence, culture, scientific knowledge, technical abilities, etc.; and while these powers must belong to everyone, the workers partly lack them.³

Perhaps the most interesting example that Sartre gives of seriality is the Great Fear that took place in France in 1789, in which the peasants were regarded as bandits, and the rule of thought was that evidence of their guilt was not needed. Indeed, the search for evidence was itself regarded as suspicious. We note here a characteristic of bad faith. Indeed, underlying all great fears is a bad-faith notion of obtaining evidence; the rule of thought is not to think very much about evidence. Sartre writes, “At this level, the Idea is a process; it derives its invincible strength from the fact that nobody thinks it.”⁴ Nobody thinks the truth, particularly those who have their own agenda. What *all* governments fear above all else is the union of ordinary people for truly democratic ends.

Of course, the Great Fear of 1789 had its own specific causes. The *power* of this fear—and of all such contagious fears—arose, however, not from specific causes, but from the implicit fear already latent within our established laws and conventions: keep your doors locked,

be careful of your neighbor for he may want to steal your goods, be careful of those who seem very different from yourself. Also, when a social fear occurs, time speeds up. On one level this is justified, for example, if an enemy is at our doorsteps, threatening our lives and our country.⁵

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Our World

We are bonded to the world. Aquinas holds this to be true, even as he claims that we each have an immortal soul. And Sartre deepens the bond, although he explicitly rejects notions such as abstraction, potency, and act, all of which are central to the thought of Aquinas. Let me here and now briefly repeat *my* answer to this tension. I understand Sartre to consider many of the aspects of Aquinas's thought to belong to the practical way we deal with the world, but not to be part of philosophy. That is to say, we once more come upon Sartre's unique understanding and use of the "bracketing" with which Husserl advises us to put aside our commonsense beliefs about the world as we attempt to deepen our philosophical understanding of the world.¹ In a limited and restricted sense, Aquinas had some understanding of this need, for he agreed that his contemporary Ptolemaic view of the movements of the planets, with all their cycles and epicycles, was not strictly speaking part of the philosophical understanding of the world.

For Sartre, our present commonsense understanding of the world is pervaded with culturally laden interpretations. We have Freud's notion that our free actions are governed by what he calls an "uncon-

scious” part of our mind, and Darwin’s interpretation of evolution as the survival of the fittest. We must thus put all such notions aside as we consider the bond of our fleshy body to the world. Sartre, like any sane person, believes that if you want an apple tree, you should plant an apple seed. You can thus claim that an apple seed is an apple tree potentially; but such a claim is, for Sartre, simply one practical way of trying to understand how an apple tree comes from an apple seed. Thus, it must be admitted that much of what Aquinas took to be essential to our philosophical understanding of the universe, Sartre accepts to be simply part of our practical understanding of it. How much do we lose in changing our philosophic outlook on the world from Aquinas’s to Sartre’s? We do lose something; but I think that what we gain is greater than what we lose, namely, the unique bond to the world that our freedom gives to our fleshy body. Still, searching for the essences of things can be a fruitful goal; certainly Marie Curie (1867–1934) wanted to find the essential reason why something seemed able to impress an image of itself even in a dark drawer. From this perspective, Aquinas’s search for the essential knowledge about things seems fruitful, and his search leads us to his notion of abstraction and analogy.

ABSTRACTION AND ANALOGY

Abstraction is a powerful notion that Aquinas refines from Aristotle. It answers many of the objections of Plato that our sensible world cannot embody truth, for truth is universal and our world singular. Moreover, in this world of ours, the universal is *in the singular*, and thus abstraction must be able to account both for knowing the universal and for knowing it in the singular. For Aquinas this is accomplished by the way our intellect works through the external senses and the internal senses, particularly the imagination, which produce a “phantasm” that is similar to the concrete thing being perceived in the world and in which, nevertheless, there resides a latent likeness (species) of a universal that can be abstracted by the intellect. We must presuppose an engagement on our part with something existing

in the world that we are attempting to understand, for example, what it means for an apple tree to be such a being. We abstract an essence, but we also know this essence as singular:

Therefore, inasmuch as our intellect, through the likeness which it receives from the phantasm, turns back upon the phantasm from which it abstracts the species, the phantasm being a particular likeness, our intellect gets some kind of knowledge of the singular because of its dynamic union with the imagination.²

We are back to the problem of how we know the uniqueness of individual things, of this apple tree as distinct from all others, and, more important, of this person as distinct from all others. As I have sketched it, Aquinas's view is simply an aspect of Aristotle's "hylomorphism," to repeat, the general view that natural things are composed of matter (*hylē*) and form (*morphē*), but it is only the composite that comes into being. This composite *exists*, and one can make a distinction between the formed matter and that which gives the composite existence (*esse*). Here, I think, we have to move cautiously, for it is both true and false that there is an important distinction between that which exists and "esse" in Aquinas's thought. I will just sketch the issue as I understand it. In the *Summa Theologica* (and indeed elsewhere), Thomas distinguishes Aristotle's view from that of Plato, who put the main emphasis on form:

But, as the philosopher [Aristotle] proves, what is made, properly speaking, is the composite; for this, properly speaking, is what subsists. But the form is called being, not as *that which is*, but as *that by which* something is. Consequently, neither is a form, properly speaking, made, for that can be made which can be, since to be made is nothing but the way to being.³

All of this is fine, and I think consistent with Sartre's thought, although he would never put it in these terms. But now we return to the problem hinted at above in *On Truth*: "If *man* and *to exist as man* did not differ in Socrates, man could not be predicated univocally of him and Plato, whose acts of existing are different."⁴ Indirectly, we

are back to Aquinas's notion of analogy, which combines with his notion of abstraction to give us an understanding of our world.

Analogy is an important philosophical notion that allows us to understand our relation not merely to God but to the rest of the hierarchy of being within which we are situated, below angels and above other animals. Indeed, if I am not mistaken, it is precisely in his use of analogy that Aquinas departs from Aristotle and exhibits his unique originality. Aquinas distinguishes between "the analogy of attribution," "the analogy of inequality," and "the analogy of proper proportionality." The first and the last are easy to understand; the second opens the door to interesting discussion, which again I will only touch upon.

In the first analogy (attribution), the quality being considered—"health" to use the classical example—exists in only one thing properly, animals, but can be said of other things that either bring about health or exhibit it: good food, exercise, etc. In the second analogy (inequality), the quality is supposed to exist *differently* in each of the things under consideration, and yet they are logically put in the same class. Aquinas, following the science of his day, uses the example of the planets that were supposed to be incorruptible when compared with other bodies such as plants and animals that pass in and out of existence. Today, we might refer to consciousness as it is attributed to humans and computers. The third analogy (proper proportionality) is analogy in its most proper sense; it allows us to get a glimpse of things that we would not otherwise know at all. Aquinas uses it mainly to understand God and angels, but in other areas as well. It is important, however, to understand its true nature. It is *not* exhibited in something like 2 is to 4 as 4 is to 8, since the relation is equal in both cases. A better example is the various ways a blind person "knows" colors. Those of us who have sight can recognize that the mellow sounds of a flute relate to the blasting of a trumpet just as a restful sky-blue is related to flashes of lightning. It is not much of a grasp of color; but for the blind it is all they can have.

Still, it is that second analogy that is disturbing, and it is difficult to understand just what is intended. Indeed, it leads us to the difficult issue of knowing how Socrates can both belong to the class of humans

and yet be unique. One answer (Thomas Cajetan) cleverly appropriates Aquinas's answer to how a predication can be truthfully made concerning the individual Socrates and the general class of humanity: The nature of a thing is neither singular nor universal, and thus the nature of being human precisely as a nature can exist *identically* in the individual Socrates and in each and every other member of the general class of humanity.⁵ True enough, for we must respect the humanity of each and every person. And yet each person is unique, and this is true for both Aquinas and Sartre. At his best I understand Cajetan to wish to explain this dilemma, although he seems to lead us out of the Thomistic system of thought; or, perhaps it is best to say that he points to an area that Thomas did not completely develop. But on reflection, I think that once again we come upon the philosophical impossibility of Aquinas to rethink the Aristotelian notion of internal senses. We are each fully human since we each have external senses such as seeing and hearing and because we each have internal faculties such as intellect, will, memory, and imagination, and yet there is for Sartre a fundamental difference between the external senses and the internal faculties, namely, the latter are freely forged by us through our daily behavior. Both Aristotle and Aquinas were led to see that all the human senses are different from those of the lower animals because to some degree they must participate in human freedom, and yet the eye and the ear are not forged by freedom but preexist freedom at the birth of every normal infant. And for Aristotle and Aquinas, the same is true of the intellect, will, and the other internal faculties. For Sartre, we can say that each human possesses the inclination to forge an intellect and will as well as memory and imagination, but that the actual forging is unique to every person.

SARTRE: OUR WORLD

For Sartre, we first and foremost know the individual things of the world, as well as our own persons, and only through reflection and with doubt are we aware of the relation of an individual to a general category. *Even after reflecting upon Sartre's philosophy for more than thirty years, I find it difficult to absorb the full implication of this insight.*

(Indeed, in some ways it becomes close to the later views of Edith Stein; see appendix I below.) Thus in his *Search for a Method* he writes:

Recently an essayist, thinking to refute existentialism, wrote: “It is not man who is profound; it is the world.” He was perfectly right, and we agree with him without reservations. Only we should add that the world is human, the profundity of man is the world; therefore profundity comes to the world through man.⁶

The natural objection that one might offer is, “But surely things existed prior to human existence! There were dinosaurs, trees, stars, and galaxies for example.” Yes, but also there were raindrops, gusts of air, billions of happenings with no order or hierarchy. Why should a snowflake that will never appear again be of less value than a star that lasts for ages of time? Order and hierarchy come to the universe only through our existence.

On this level our knowing is also a world-making. We effectively distinguish the world through our senses, which do not merely observe things but actively forge certain aspects of the world as “things,” as a tree rather than a bird. Suppose consciousness existed in the form of clouds of dust traveling through the galaxies as we walk our city streets or country lanes. What “things” would exist for such beings? The things of our world reflect our body, and we are as responsible for this world as we are for our own body. We can live healthy and fruitful lives or we can commit suicide.

Still, one might ask, “Why does the world mesh fortuitously with our bodies, allowing us to exist, at least for a time, with blessings and dangers? Are we back to the providence of God? For Sartre, the atheist, the answer is “No!,” we accept it as a happening, without which we would not exist. Aquinas, of course, would see in this the workings of divine providence, but if we suspend this insight, putting it, as it were, within Husserl’s famous “brackets,” neither denying nor affirming how the world fits our body, we are left with an understanding of the world that, while not explicitly in accord with the views of Aquinas, is not far off. Let us recall the wonder that we are born to question all of existence, and that God created us to rule

over the earth, taking responsibility for it. In the early part of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre writes:

Now this very inquiry furnishes us with the desired conduct; this man that *I am*—if I apprehend him such as he is at this moment in the world, I establish that he stands before being in an attitude of interrogation.⁷

“Being” is Sartre’s term for all that exists, namely, reality. We are then born to question all existence; that is to say, we are all born to be philosophers. Of course, we are each born within a particular family and within a concrete social order, and our ability to question will always reflect those conditions. Still, whatever others may try to do to us, however they may attempt to mold us to their will, we can always respond in some way, however small. If we are put in prison, we may not be able to escape, but we may be able to give some meaning to our confinement. Furthermore, for Sartre our questioning of the world and the world being questioned form a synthetic whole. We can question because in our own being we have a lack of identity between the self that we can question and the self questioning, and this lack imbues the world with the real negation that one thing is not another. We do not constitute trees and stars, but without us these would not be distinguished as two separate entities.

It is important to understand Sartre’s point here, for it permeates all his thinking. Being, Reality, is not a homogeneous whole but an almost infinite complex of happenings that of themselves have no order. A small gust of wind is not a “thing” for us, but it could mean life or death for an insect. Millions upon millions of “happenings” occur every day, each snowflake or drop of rain or gust of wind exists, and they exist independently of our being aware of them. But there is no order among them. Of itself, why should a snowflake that is for a second and then melts be more important than a dinosaur that roamed the earth millions of years ago or, indeed, a tree or cat that exists on earth now? *We* put order in things, and we do this by our very presence in the world. A tree is more important than a single snowflake because of the “internal” relation of both to our bodily consciousness. Thus, we are a “witness” to being, not in the sense of existing

external to being and then judging the relation among things, but in the sense of being joined to the world, fracturing the richness of what is into “thises” and “thats,” namely, altering Being into a World:

My body is co-extensive with the world, spread across all things, and at the same time it is condensed into this single point which all things indicate and which I am without being able to know it.⁸

18

Our One World

Many of our daily actions lead us to participate in more or less world-wide relations, whether we seek this participation or not. The simple act of buying a newspaper, turning on the radio, driving a car, flying an airplane, renting an apartment, buying a home, eating internationally produced foods and clothes—all these and many more such actions bring us into contact with a good part of history. For Aquinas, the implication of our contact with the culturally and historically laden artifacts that fill our lives surely would have gone back to the beginning of the Christian era, when Christ was asked by those who were trying to find fault with his preaching whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. The Jews did pay taxes, but it was a complicated procedure in which their money was converted into Roman coins by tax collectors whom they held in very low esteem. Thus if Jesus had agreed it was lawful to pay taxes directly to Caesar, he would have aligned himself with the tax collectors. Christ asked them to give the name of the head shown on the coin. They replied, Caesar. Jesus said simply, “Very well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar—and to God what belongs to God.”²¹ This was the seed that led to the view that a good Christian had to be a good citizen. By the thirteenth century it had developed into a complex question of the rights of

church and state, how much property and goods churches could hold independently of any obligation to pay taxes to the state. Or to what extent a church could censure a state for going to war, a topic that I will consider more in my appendix 2 below.

I am not aware that Aquinas was involved in considering the specifics of the relation of church and state. On the other hand, there are a number of questions that concern the duties of citizens to obey the rules of the state. We must obey our superiors “according to the order contained in the natural and divine law.” But we should not obey an authority when it is clearly unjust. One can command a slave to do appropriate bodily work; we must note that Aquinas is writing at a time when slavery was still accepted from Roman times. Nevertheless, Aquinas approvingly repeats the words of Seneca that slavery does not touch the mind, which is free: “Therefore, in matters that relate to the internal movements of the will a man is not obliged to obey man, but God alone.”²²

THE NEED OF THINGS

As interesting and as important as all of the above is, it is not what I have in mind in this chapter. Rather, following Sartre, I am here concerned with the ways the things of the world have their own needs that demand attention from us, and how these needs and our attention to them bring about the unity of our world. Aquinas was somewhat aware of this, even if he did not call attention to how artifacts draw us out of ourselves, for better or worse. Aquinas knew that he needed reliable Aristotelian texts if he was to think properly and become a philosopher. But did he think about the marvel of his pens and the alphabet within which he was writing? I think so, but, for Sartre, our own numerous artifacts have such needs that, if we are not careful, they so absorb us that we lose sight of the purpose for which they have been created. On the other hand, one of the positive results of our long history of crafting things is that now we can be in touch with almost the whole history of our planet as we use the things we have created; but how are we to explain this? The question that both volumes of Sartre’s *Critique* invite us to consider

is whether we must suppose a single person, or group, or even nation uniting all of this toward some end. Sartre's answer is "No!" We are indeed presently experiencing a grand totalizing of the entire planet, for which we are collectively responsible, and yet no particular person or group of persons is bringing all our actions into the unity of "One World." This unity has come about by the ways we have collectively forged our artifacts, our intuitions, and our laws so that no matter where we are on our planet, we are somewhat in touch with everyone.

THE UNITY OF THE WORLD

A totality exists when a whole thing exists in each of its parts and yet is distinct from them. On the organic level, the whole dog exists in the eyes, ears, nose, and feet. When a dog uses its feet to run, it is the whole dog that runs. On the other hand, a dog that loses a leg and can limp is still the same dog. Sartre, however, is interested not in organic totalities but rather in humanly made ones, namely, machines. A machine, such as an automobile, functions well when all the parts work as a whole. The wheels move, but it is the whole car that is moving. Although cars are made by us, they nevertheless have "needs" of their own, such as gas, oil, and space. Cars bring into existence a complex of roads, signs, gas stations, places to eat and sleep—an entire complex that keeps changing and growing. *Sartre calls our complex of machines open-ended totalities, and they reflect the kind of unity we have in our history. We encounter these open-ended totalities everywhere:*

I need only glance out of the window: I will be able to see cars which are men and drivers who are cars . . . *hundreds of exigencies* rise up towards me: pedestrian crossings, notices, and prohibitions. . . . These beings—neither thing nor man, but practical unities made up of man and inert things—these appeals, and these exigencies do not yet concern me directly. Later, I will go down into the street and become *their thing*, I will buy that collective which is a newspaper, and suddenly the practico-inert ensemble which besieges and designates me will reveal itself *on the basis* of a total field, that is to say, of the Earth as the Elsewhere of all Elsewheres.³

The Earth is the Elsewhere of all Elsewheres because it is in which and through which we are the guardians of our planet and of a good part of the universe. We are now thoroughly historical beings, and our actions reflect our history. Of course, the powerful and superrich of the world use this forged unity for their own benefits, and to a great extent they can direct this world unity to their own ends. Nevertheless, this forged unity of “One World” is not completely theirs. Our history also bears the weight of numerous past good-faith efforts to make the world a better place in which to live. The worldwide complex of our open-ended totalities constitutes the *practico-inert*. The practico-inert is not some dark residue within our individual or collective consciousness secretly directing our history. Rather, it is us in our daily use of things, a newspaper, a radio broadcast, or a simple cup of coffee. The cup and the coffee embody a long history of crafting; indeed, they may reflect a history of exploitation or good-faith enterprises. Nevertheless, when I am drinking a cup of coffee, it may happen that none of this history is important to me; or, indeed, I can stop and reflect upon it. Every day we use artifacts that would have amazed the world merely a generation ago. Either we just pass through the history of their discovery and manufacture, or we can make these inventions an object of reflection. In either case, the invention is, at this time in history, a part of our one world of use. Wherever you go in the world, people will understand you if you ask for a newspaper. Before the magical advent of printing in the mid-fifteenth century (“magical,” in the sense that printing may never have happened), you would not have been understood. Before the advent of printing, if you were wealthy, you might have asked a scribe to copy some manuscript for you, but the notion that world events of a day, if not an hour, could be yours for the asking would be beyond the comprehension of those living prior to about 1550, when something like our newspapers began to appear.

When we purchase a newspaper, Sartre terms this behavior praxis and not action; the next chapter considers this distinction in some detail. This Greek term praxis is usually defined as a doing. (Although the plural is praxes, Sartre uses the singular form throughout.) As praxis, our actions now encounter an ambiguity that does not arise

when we act in more local contexts, such as having dinner with our family or conversing with friends. Anyone who has suffered through traffic to arrive at a dinner appointment knows the feeling of relaxation at arriving safe to enjoy the dinner, leaving worries of traffic for the return trip.

Whatever mysteries we discover in the world are the result of decoding the relation of our body to the world, with its own needs and demands from us. Every science-fiction story is an interpretation of human bodily existence, even as it attempts to negate it and surpass the body and world we have. Sartre, however, is aware that we do surpass the world we have by our transcendence, thereby revealing our relation to the needs of things differently. Somewhat technically, our relation to the world is brought out in Sartre's notion of transcendence, which has at least two meanings, indicated by two different French terms,⁴ which apply to two levels of our existence, that of our body in relation to the world and that of our body in relation to others. In the first surpassing, each human act could be other than it is. At any moment, I could change what I am doing and reorientate myself. Frequently, this does not require any great altering of my lifestyle—what Sartre calls my project—but at other times it does. For example, I plan to go from New York to Boston, but the train I was expecting to take needs repair, and I first decide to take a bus. But no, the bus will not leave me where I wish to go, and it is very slow. Still my planned trip to Boston is important. I could work it out, or I might decide, “I will do something else with my life!”

In another sense of transcendence, the world is revealed to have new possibilities in regard to each life. A tall runner who decides to play basketball will now see new possibilities for his tallness in the world of sports. And from this new possibility, the world of basketball playing becomes organized in relation to him as a new source of possibilities.

Both of these senses of transcendence can also apply to the ways we might attempt to make our body appear to others. In bad faith, we might attempt to make it seem that our body just happens to be doing things that we are not aware of, or in good faith we take responsibility for our actions. Nevertheless, for Sartre, the most basic

meaning of transcendence is in the fundamental way we each face the world, with its own needs. We are a fleshy body with certain senses, all of which is imbued with freedom. We are intimately bound to the world, so much so that the world as we know it would not exist without us. Would sound exist if we did not have the sense of hearing? One might want to say yes, sound waves would still be in the world, even if we were not around to hear them. But then, so would a countless number of other waves. Thus, sound waves need an ear to become sound, and given the fulfillment of this need, music exists in the world. *Our world* arises from the relation of matter to our organic, fleshy body imbued with freedom.

19

Influencing the World *Action and Praxis*

J. Robert Janes's novel *Sandman* details the exploits of the French detective Jean-Louis St-Cyr and the German investigator Hermann Kohler. Both are intent on finding the murderer of schoolchildren in Nazi-occupied France. They work sometimes with the aid of the Gestapo, who kill at leisure but who do not give that "right" to others. The moral pursuit of these two investigators is, in Sartrean terms, both *necessary and impossible*: necessary, for murder is murder and the children are innocent; impossible, for murder is being committed all about them in the name of Nazi justice. Still, their good-faith pursuits effect a change in the general hellish atmosphere; for example, a few good deeds can be done by those willing to help, and these can and do accumulate for the common good.

This then is our moral challenge, namely, to do the necessary within the impossible. We must fight concrete evils whenever possible, even though our social order commits greater evils both here at home and elsewhere throughout the world. In order to explain the difference in our behavior between when it is mostly localized to our friends and neighborhood and when it more directly involves us

within our history, we again return to the distinction between action and praxis. Let us begin with action.

For example, it is a nice day, and I decide to walk to work rather than take public transportation. Nevertheless, this simple decision may have important consequences. Because I decide to walk, I meet a stranger who will become a good friend, and the bus that I would have taken is involved in a serious accident. Indeed, our actions can be crucial to our lives. Let us recall that Sartre's study of Gustave Flaubert is *The Family Idiot*. It was the actions of Gustave's father and mother that effectively kept Gustave within the family as an idiot. In a slightly more technical sense, in action, the end of my behavior is given either in nature or in the established order of things. Thus, while neither paved streets nor public transportation is given in nature, they are part of the established order of many cities.

On the other hand, the situation in praxis is different. For example, I am looking to rent an apartment or buy a home and the one that I prefer is within an all-white neighborhood. I may in truth be interested only in the house, but I cannot avoid supporting racism. The distinctive feature of praxis is that it introduces me to a counterforce that is not of my choosing. My behavior here takes me out of the normal order of renting or buying a home or apartment and presents me with a difficult choice concerning racism.

ALL FREEDOM IS IN A SITUATION

But let us back up and prepare ourselves for a deeper understanding of the difference between action and praxis. In *Being and Nothingness* the historical context is, for the most part, in the background, and this early work on ontology focuses mainly on our behavior insofar as it is under our control. Still, we should note that all freedom is situational. We each have a body that is born in a particular place, with a personal and family background, with these friends rather than others, and we will each die. Thus, toward the end of *Being and Nothingness*, in part 4, "Having, Doing and Being," in section 2, "Freedom and Facticity: The Situation," Sartre gives us a detailed discussion

with the subheadings “My Place,” “My Past,” “My Environment,” “My Fellowman,” and “My Death.”

These circumstances follow us throughout life, but frequently they affect only our personal life. Thus, the way each mother or father behaves toward their children is, for the most part, up to them, and their influence for good or bad is a personal matter. True, the socio-economic conditions of the family will make a difference. Nevertheless, the degree of a child’s well-being arises mainly from the specific family practices or those of guardians. This is the message both in Sartre’s study of Jean Genet and in his massive and detailed study of Gustave Flaubert. In both these instances, it was not poverty or outside forces that brought about the oppression of these two individuals, but the family context itself.

One of the distinctive features of action (as distinct from praxis) is that with the best of intentions we can never guarantee a good result, and at times we should not even aim at such. I may give money to a poor person, who uses my money to buy a gun with which he robs a store. An author may write a great book, but it may never be published, or even if published, it may be ignored. In both cases, the action of giving money to a poor person or the effort in writing a good book is praiseworthy, despite the results.

We act freely but with no guarantee of good results, and Sartre terms this “our anguish.” This anguish is not debilitating and is not meant to deter us from hope; for Sartre agrees that without hope, we cannot act. A good mother surely hopes for the best for her children, and frequently this hope is fulfilled, but it may not be. Still, she should give her children as much love as possible.

THE SITUATION AND THE PRACTICO-INERT

To return to my opening example of wanting to rent an apartment or buy a home in an all-white neighborhood, this racial situation existed prior to one’s personal search for a place to live. It was brought about by other people, and you are not responsible for it. Still, it exists. Assuming that you are a moral person who does not wish to contribute to any form of racism, your choice of a home is now made complex. The all-white neighborhood presents itself as a specific type

of situation that Sartre calls “practico-inert,” namely, a situation in which there is an antihuman element not of your own making. If you wish to fight this situation, Sartre recommends working within a group-in-fusion. Thus, while Sartre insists that only individuals exist and that no unity, whether that of a nation or any type of society, can ever eliminate the importance of individual freedom, there are times, however, when free individuals may join their freedoms with others so as to create and sustain (at least for a while) a unified result, beyond what any one person could affect.

In order to understand more fully the union of a group-in-fusion, I must here note that Sartre rejects the view that we have an innate, positive relation to other people, a relation that respects their humanity. The notion comes from Heidegger. Of course, we do frequently work together, and Sartre terms this relation the “us.” The main difference between the ontological “we” and the “us” is that the latter is created by effort, and no natural reciprocity exists without this effort. The “us” is constituted on a social level through the “look” of others; for example, Sartre’s look unites the gardener and the road mender. Still, the union between these two is objective—the look is based on the proximity that is given in the world. The unity of a group-in-fusion is also given in the world, with this important difference: it is there regardless of whether a mediator recognizes the unity. That is to say, on the level of “praxis,” in which our actions take place within the practico-inert, Sartre acknowledges that we can experience something resembling a genuine “we-relation.”

Thus, once an individual is in the group, the individual has a quasi-innate reciprocal relation to every other member. There are no outside mediators. Each member of the group is a mediator in relation to every other member. Thus, in a group-in-fusion, each individual shares in the freedom and power of every other individual; that is, each person mediates his or her action through the action of every other member of the group. I act here alone and yet not alone, for I know that if and when you can, you will be here to support me. I thus know that what I am doing here, you are also doing in your place in support of our common intention. There is no mystery or unconscious motivation in a group-in-fusion. Each member comprehends that they are bonded to each other through the mediation of

every other. They all trust you. You rely on them, and they rely on you. They will be here to help you, if at all possible, just as you will help each of them, if possible. In the meantime, each person does the best they can do.

One of the distinctive features of a group-in-fusion is that there is no leader. Once the group is formed, each person is a leader. Something may happen that requires the group to re-form about any one person, and then, at that time and place, that person is a temporary leader.

For Sartre, social change can come about only through the intercession of groups-in-fusion that oppose long-established oppressions. Indeed, we have seen that when large protesting groups can form, change for the better is possible. Here in the United States, the marches against the Vietnam War as well as those against racism have indeed effected social change. Knowing this, society attempts to prevent groups from forming.

In general, then, our individual freedom, precisely as it is individual, does not guarantee good social results, but there are exceptions. Sartre gives two examples, one of a football team in which a particular halfback both fulfills the general role of halfback and yet wins the game by his irreducible distinctness. Again, an airplane pilot may have to make a personal decision that may affect the lives of all the passengers, and in such a case, Sartre writes, "Here we encounter the organic individual as an isolated agent in the first moment of his concrete truth."¹

The halfback and the pilot fulfill their specific roles, and yet within these roles they do something that perhaps no one else could have done. The concrete truth of their action is the long history of preparation that is now revealed to benefit the common good. But then, in a lesser sense, this is true of everyone who desires to work for the common good; for one never knows when extraordinary action will be required of any citizen.

Thus, either "isolation" can be a defective mode of living our social condition, or it can appear out of our long history of being faithful to our tasks and reveal itself to be the act needed at this time for the common good.²

Intentionality and Methodology

ON INTENTIONALITY

Whatever Husserl may have had in mind when he referred to an intention, I here mean simply that we are first and foremost aware of an object of our consciousness rather than of our conscious state itself. For example, when we perceive a red apple in a tree or in a fruit bowl, we are aware of the red apple itself, rather than our conscious state about the red apple. In a subsequent reflection, we might wonder whether the apple is indeed as red and as ripe as it appears to us. Indeed, *later*, we might wonder whether the apple is truly *there* on the tree, or whether we are viewing only a reflection of it, or whether, in fact, we are asleep and dreaming about the apple.

How can we be sure that the red apple that we perceive is a real red apple in the world? In order to clarify this relation of consciousness to its object, Husserl recommends that we avoid deductions from general principles and use rather a descriptive process. Applied properly, this descriptive method can indicate the difference between an imagined red apple and a red apple that appears to exist in the world. Thus, if one follows the phenomenological method, existence itself can be revealed as an objective aspect of things.

Sartre agrees with Husserl's general notion of intentionality and the use of a descriptive method. Nevertheless, he strongly objects to the view that existence can be an object and a meaning. But let's begin with a brief clarification of Husserl's own perspective on existence.

Husserl considers existence to be a general quality of all things in the world. As a quality, existence can, for Husserl, be described. Of course, such a phenomenological description will not capture the empirical quality of a particular existing thing. Husserl is thus aware that his phenomenological method will not reveal to us the existence of this apple as distinct from every other apple. But, for Husserl, such a description would belong more to art than to philosophy.

To give another example, measles is a real disease with properties that can be generally described so that a physician can distinguish someone who has measles from one who has smallpox. If, from examining *this* person with measles, a physician discovers a new characteristic, then that new quality must either be added to the general features of measles or dismissed as something peculiar to this person and not related to the disease. That is to say, for Husserl, the distinctness of *this* sick person disappears in the quest for objective characteristics.

Sartre, however, sees another way of looking upon the empirical existence of things. The person who appears to have measles is a person not only with spots but with these spots. True, the spots can be identified as measles and treated as such, but one person may die and another live from the same medical treatment of these spots. Of course, in an epidemic of measles, the universal characteristics will be treated hastily, but this is itself a historical event that calls for a particular application of the universal.¹

ON METHODOLOGY

Every good methodology is refined in use; that is, every method is simply a reflective elaboration of the reasoning process that takes place as we attempt to understand the world and ourselves. Unlike Descartes, Sartre gives little credit to a detailed clarification of a method prior to its actual use. True, there is a "Scholastic Method," namely, objections first, the body of an argument, and then answers

to the objections. But this method does not prejudice the results of an argument in the way that clear and distinct ideas guarantee our own thoughts but little else. On the other hand, Descartes's philosophy and the following philosophies of Hegel and Marx suggest that a discussion of methodology is appropriate. Sartre gives a rather detailed discussion of a methodology that he follows, and I think it makes sense. In Sartre's *Search for a Method* he gives a friendly example.

READING IN A STUFFY ROOM

I am reading with a friend in a library. I notice my friend getting up from his chair and going toward the window, which he then opens. His bodily movement is intelligible to me; it has a purpose, which I easily and naturally understand—he is letting fresh air into the room. But then I realize that although the room was stuffy, I did not notice it and neither did he until a few moments ago. This new awareness reveals our project, that is, our purpose in the library: If he had not opened the window and we had both stayed sweating and reading, another person entering might have called us both library rats, thereby illuminating “us to the depths of our being.”²

But now let us reflect on the method itself, introducing the terminology of progressive and regressive. Sartre attributes the outline of the progressive-regressive method to Henri Lefebvre: “Lefebvre proposes a very simple method employing auxiliary techniques and comprising several phases.” Quoting Lefebvre, Sartre gives these phases as

- (a) *Descriptive*. Observation but with a scrutiny guided by experience and by a general theory . . .
- (b) *Analytico-Regressive*. Analysis of reality. Attempt to date it precisely.
- (c) *Historical-Genetic*. Attempt to rediscover the present, but elucidated, understood, explained.³

Let us consider each stage separately. Sartre terms the initial descriptive aspect “progressive,” or, at times, “lateral,” or then again “synchronic.” This is the most obvious phenomenological aspect of the

method, and one sees its presence in Sartre's constant use of examples. It is our spontaneous awareness of an action as purposive, as is clear from Sartre's own example. Let us recall that I see my friend opening a window. Why is he opening the window? Does he wish to call to someone? No, he opens the window and goes back to his seat. Obviously, he is letting fresh air into the room. All this is the first, progressive stage.

But now I also realize that the room *has been and is now* uncomfortably hot. This vertical, diachronic, or regressive movement now leads to a new and deeper progressive movement, in the sense that I now understand my present situation in a new light: I was so engrossed in my own reading that I had not noticed that I was and am now sweating. This historical-genetic phase is a new progressive understanding that can now be repeated on different levels. For example, I may now become aware of the specificity of my friend's freedom; that is, he might also have continued to read while sweating, or he might have flung the window open, creating an unnecessary disturbance.

INTENTIONALITY, METHODOLOGY,
AND *THE FAMILY IDIOT*

In his massive study of Gustave Flaubert, Sartre makes explicit the joining of intentionality with the progressive-regressive method. The discussion proceeds only after all the research has been done and the fundamental direction of the entire study is clear. Methodology is, after all, an aspect of the act of writing. Thus, the very title of the work, *The Family Idiot*, gives us the main progressive movement of the study, namely that, no matter how Gustave Flaubert matures, he is always the idiot of the Flaubert family:

Flaubert lived within the domestic group and never left it. From one end of his life to the other, the younger son regarded himself as an inessential accident: the essential thing for him would always be the family.⁴

Our attention is thus drawn to the distinctness of this family drama, which accounts for the length and complexity of Sartre's study of

Gustave Flaubert: “Certain universal circumstances might be found if we could compare lives. But this doesn’t concern me; what is important here is little Gustave’s choice. He wants glory so that he can dazzle and punish his father.”⁵

But this claim deserves greater attention. Stein claims that a human life is a mystery, and she is right. On the other hand, Sartre’s three-thousand-page study of Gustave Flaubert reveals the truth that, with effort, we can learn a great deal about a single human life, and that such knowledge can help each of us to live a more meaningful life. None of us will have a Sartre to reflect on our lives, but we each have a life that uniquely fits within the order of things. There will always be those special deeds that if we do not do them, no one will.

Conclusion

The Meaning of Life

My essay has been an elaboration of three Sartrean notions about our relation to all that surrounds us, notions that I see deepening Aquinas's own views. These three notions are good faith, the claim that we are each a universal singular, and the insistence that freedom so pervades us that we are not born with interior faculties that resemble our external senses. Connecting all these three notions, I understand that we are born to nurture and protect the water, plants, animals, and, with our atomic energy, perhaps the solar system and beyond. And we must add our duties toward infants, children, the infirm, and all the abused of the world.

As we approach Sartre's view of the universal singular, let us recall the very purpose of creation in the Judaic-Christian tradition, namely, God created humans to rule the earth. Indeed, the simple words written in Genesis are remarkable, and deserve repeating, "Let us make man in our own image and likeness and he shall rule over the fish of the sea," etc. Moreover, one further observation about Aquinas is fruitful before we advance to Sartre. Following and developing Aristotle, Aquinas consistently affirms that creatures have true natures

capable of doing all that pertains to their existence. In regard to us humans, the ability to act in accordance with our natures is given in the way freedom is united to our fleshy bodies; but in regard to plants and animals the question arises how they can be ordered to act according to their natures. In pursuit of the answer to this question, both Aristotle and Aquinas are led to postulate the existence of spiritual beings, “separated substances” for Aristotle, angels for Aquinas. Their existence is arrived at by Aristotle, since nature frequently works for a purpose, and this implies knowledge that the individual beings of nature lack. We can each think of numerous examples, pollination of trees by bees and insects, our growing awareness that we must keep regions where animals can live undisturbed by us, allowing them to hunt each other, and now we know that even naturally caused forest fires further the growth of trees and plants. What is the origin of this harmony? For Aristotle, and for Aquinas, with some doubts, nature was directed by the planets which were considered to be unlike Earth, made of a purer, unchangeable matter; but these were still not thinking substances able to direct nature. Thus each planet was guided by a separated substance, as the planet directed nature. In two long articles (question 5, articles 8 and 9) in *On Truth*, Aquinas asks, “Are All Material Creatures Governed by God’s Providence through Angels?” and then “Does Divine Providence Dispose Bodies Here Below by Means of Celestial Bodies?” Aquinas carefully answers “Yes,” to both questions. “Angels move the higher bodies, and these motions cause the motions of the lower” (article 8). “Thus, these heavenly bodies are instruments in the work of governing, but not in the work of creating” (article 9). Thus, while God is the author of all creation, making all things good, each nature can do only what is fitting to it. For Sartre, however, we act on the world as the separated substances were supposed to act; that is to say, we are *now* in a position to guide the development of the things of the world. But we have been given a gift that makes all of this possible and that is usually taken for granted, namely, the magic of our artifacts, their unique continuity over time. If the earth were a more gaseous planet, our crafted objects would have no continuity over time, even if we could imagine ourselves to be present. As I am typing, there is a cup

of coffee on my desk, to the left of my computer. It is what it is; it is a demitasse of dark espresso of a particular brand that I do not notice when I make it, and the cup is this piece of china inherited from my aunt—and yet none of this would exist if it had not been properly crafted using correct materials. Clearly, however, trees and stars are not artifacts, and yet what is a star to an ant? And what is the real diversity of snows to a city dweller? We in the city distinguish only a few kinds of snow, perhaps, wet or dry snow, snow that will stick to the streets or melt. The Eskimos distinguish many other kinds of snow, and we might claim that however we distinguish them, all these different snows exist. But consider: Each snowflake is different, each gust of wind that carries the snow is different from every other, and each grain of sand is different from every other. How many “things” shall we claim exist in the world? Sartre writes:

The world is human. We can see the very particular presence of consciousness: being is everywhere, opposite me, around me; it weighs down on me. . . . there is being and *nothing* more; that rock, that tree, that landscape—being and *nothing* else. I want to grasp this being and I no longer find anything but *myself*.¹

Both aspects of this quotation must be given equal weight, namely, that there *is* being and that my existence adds nothing more to an existing thing than distinguishing it as *this thing different from other things*. Each thing will have its own surprises; for, to repeat, all we do is give the world an ordering and a hierarchy related to our existence. We may be in awe at whales and galaxies, but we can also be in awe at a simple snowflake. Without us, all these would exist, but they would be lost in a universe so filled with billions upon billions of happenings that whales, galaxies, and snowflakes could not be distinguished or named.

Furthermore, on this level, Sartre understands our bond to the world to be knowledge of the world, and simultaneously a transcendence of that knowledge. When I differentiate a tree as something distinct and more important to me than a gust of wind, I give each their relative existence. I can also do something with this knowledge; for example, use the tree as a source of fruit or the wind to turn a

windmill. Of course, without a specific philosophical reflection revealing the bond of the world to our body, we merely accept trees and gusts of wind as part of our normal universe. We encounter here the important role of mediation, and I think this is true for Aquinas as well as Sartre. Still, Sartre is perhaps more explicit. He writes, “It should be recalled that the crucial discovery of dialectical investigation is that man is ‘mediated’ by things to the same extent as things are ‘mediated’ by man.”² And later in the text, Sartre notes even more explicitly, “Social facts *are* things insofar as *all things* are, directly or indirectly, social facts.” If our greed for money despoils forests, it is because forests have become for us a tool like a hammer with no planetary purpose.

In truth, the world in which we live is the body’s garment, but we may each wear that garment differently. We are thus back to good faith, the fact that we are each a universal singular, and to the way we forge our intellect, will, memory, and imagination, and the way all of this affects our relation to other people.

First, good faith: Good faith is a certain way of believing in our freedom, an openness that does not consider morality to be something fixed, like a table or chair. A person in good faith heeds the ways they appear to the world, listens to mediations that attempt to resolve and incorporate differences, and then makes a decision as a free, responsible person. Sometimes this is quick and easy, but in an extended family a decision on what is best for all may be difficult. We may wish to remember Sartre’s advice to avoid the extremes of optimism and pessimism, that is, not to insist that people do what we expect them to do, and yet not to abstain from a decision and from helping because everything looks hopeless. Moreover, with all their personal problems, persons in good faith are keenly aware of their obligations to do something no matter how small for the betterment of the poor and oppressed of the world. There are numerous organizations with good ratings for efficiency and honesty. Aquinas, the Saint, would agree to this, but also Sartre, the Atheist. It is a question not so much of joining with the Left or the Right, but of providing bread for those whose hope is to live until tomorrow.

Second, the universal singular: We are each a universal singular. However we choose to relate ourselves to our freedom is how we

think all humanity should be. No matter how important or unimportant we are in the social order, the way we live our life is a statement about all humanity.

Third, the relation between our external senses and our internal faculties: Sartre claims that our internal faculties do not imitate our external ones. We have external senses, such as seeing and hearing done through eyes and ears, and Aquinas claimed that our internal faculties such as intellect and will imitate these. For Sartre, we are not born with internal faculties; rather, we forge our intellect, will, imagination, and memory in such a way as to distinguish each person from every other. It is in this internal forging of our internal faculties that we achieve a distinct presence to our consciousness that is our personality.

It would, to repeat, have been impossible for Aquinas to develop and connect these three notions in a way that I see Sartre to do, for the historical circumstances and intellectual tools were not present. Indeed, if Aquinas had attempted to develop good faith, the universal singular, and the uniqueness of our internal faculties, he would have been misunderstood as moving away from his general acceptance of Aristotle toward Plato, viewing the soul of Socrates to be the complete person. Aquinas did all that he could have done in his time and place. Aquinas used Aristotle to become the philosopher that he was. I understand the thought of Sartre to make him more truly the philosopher he aimed to be. This claim for me is nothing but the admission of the reality of philosophical development.

Being in *good faith*, accepting that we are each a *universal singular* by accepting that what we do is in fact what everyone should do in similar circumstances, and recognizing that we *forge all our internal faculties such as our intellect and will*, puts us on the path of leading meaningful lives. Why? Because we recognize that freedom pervades our whole body of flesh and bones and that we are responsible for our own actions and how we relate to others and to the world. Yes, our toenails grow undirected by our freedom, but whether we have the leisure, desire, or need to cut them properly, especially when others can think only of having food to stay alive until tomorrow, concerns our freedom and who we are.

Appendix I

Edith Stein

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Life in a Jewish Family 1891–1916 is, indeed, a large but readable book.¹ The ten chapters of the book are divided by dates, from chapter 1, “My Mother Remembers: 1815–1891,” to chapter 10, “The Rigorosum in Freiburg: 1916 (note 183 explains that this refers to the difficult oral and written examination required to qualify for the doctorate, one of the few academic references given that I can understand with my American schooling).

It was to be a long trail before Edith came to study with Husserl. Gradually, the family became aware that Edith was exceptionally bright. Even as an infant she was impatient when she thought that she was not being treated properly. Stein gives us a glimpse into her powers of recollection (much better than mine) when she describes how, as a somewhat complaining young child (“Within me, however, there was a hidden world” [74]), she decided to become “reasonable.”

The first great transformation took place in me when I was about seven years old. . . . I cannot explain it otherwise than that reason assumed command

within me . . . I was convinced that my mother and my sister Frieda had a better knowledge of what was good for me than I had; and because of this confidence, I readily obeyed them. (75)

It becomes clear that indeed Edith could have thought this way. She knows that she is gifted. She is not sure what she wants, but it will be something important, and she will have it. Her mother gives her permission to start at a higher level of school when she is very young, and then approves when she decides to drop out and take an extended leave from study. “I became an ‘independent person,’” she writes, and the translator retains the quotation marks around “independent person.” Edith is only in the middle of her fourteenth year when, “Deliberately and consciously, I gave up praying . . . I was destined for something great” (148). There is a very nice photograph on page 121 of her with several people with whom she was in contact at the time, and it reveals an attractive and a very determined young woman.

Edith mentions that for a while her mother had weekly meetings with Richard Courant. But Edith doesn’t stop with the simple observation. Typical of the writing, we are informed of the competitive nature of the other Courant brothers and of the efforts of the sisters to ease tensions. It is clear that her mother held a respected position even with Richard, who already perceived their dangerous situation. We are told that she died before the Nazis rounded up even very elderly Jews. (At the time that Edith, already Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was writing her autobiography [1933], Richard was preparing to go to America, where he helped establish what is now called *the Courant Institute* at New York University in 1935—I studied mathematics there for several years.)

As we read, we become aware of the long road that Edith had to travel before she became Husserl’s assistant. It wasn’t clear to the family, especially Edith’s mother, just what Edith had in mind for her future. Richard Courant came to question her about her “impractical ideas”; he was probably sent, Edith suggests. But Richard had also been urged by his uncles to give up his interest in mathematics and become a doctor or lawyer, because they would not support a profession in which they saw no profit. After a few questions, he approved

of her choice, and Edith notes that her mother protected her in her choice, even if she did now and then mention that she would be pleased if Edith studied law (173).

Edith was in the pursuit of truth, even if she wasn't quite sure what that meant. Gradually she learned about Husserl and Göttingen from a student who had studied with Husserl and who painted her this picture: "In Göttingen that is all you do: philosophize, day and night, at meals, in the street, everywhere. All you talk about is 'phenomena.'" Richard had obtained a position in mathematics at Göttingen, and he had married a school friend, Nelli Neumann, who had also obtained her doctorate in mathematics. Nelli wrote to Edith's mother telling her of her many male companions, but adding that she had few woman friends, and suggesting that Erna and Edith might wish to go and study there. Edith jumped at the invitation, and her mother agreed, reluctantly.

I am not going to continue with this family discussion, but let us consider Edith studying with Husserl. She notes that Husserl admitted that an objective encounter with the outer world could be had only if a plurality of individuals compared their insights, and thus one needed an experience of others (269). Husserl called this "empathy," but he had not developed the notion. Edith now stated that she would like to develop the notion, and Husserl approved. This actually did develop into her doctoral dissertation. But Edith went through difficult times: "For the first time, I encountered here what was to be, repeatedly, my experience . . . books were of no use to me at all until I had clarified the matter in question by my own effort . . . I lost the art of sleeping" (277).

As difficult as the academic life was, it was "placid" compared with the approaching war, occasioned by the assassination of royalty (we are given a note, 144, explaining that this was the assassination of Crown Prince Ferdinand, successor to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife, on 28 June 1914). As terrible as this was, from what little I know of the affair, including the opinion of a very knowledgeable colleague, it seems a mystery that this could have led to the terrible First World War. Indeed, it took a while before the full danger of war became clear. Edith continues her study, passes her exams, receives

the highest award, although she does not as yet have her doctorate. She then attends Husserl's seminar, which now had few students. Husserl was at first in a bad mood, because she had failed to see him immediately after her exams. He suggested that perhaps she should get her doctorate in either history or literature since she had done so well in those subjects. Edith was taken back, informing Husserl that she didn't want an easy doctorate: "I want to prove to myself whether I am capable of an independent achievement in philosophy" (317)." Husserl, we are told, became a different person, smiled, and told her first to get some relaxation.

Edith heroically, and against her mother's wishes, decides to serve in a dangerous hospital, with not only wounded soldiers but those having contagious diseases. She keeps up her academic correspondence, particularly with Husserl, who appreciates her decision to serve as a nurse, since he had two sons who had become volunteers. Moreover Edith was working in Moravia, his homeland (368). As her nursing duties end, Edith learns that Husserl has been transferred to Freiburg, and she begins to wonder about her final exams for the doctorate, which she had not yet received. She also learns that she is needed as a teacher, and she agrees to teach and prepare for her doctoral exams. In the meantime, Edith sends Husserl her extensive doctoral thesis on empathy. We are told that the master opens and closes the ties holding the pages without reading a single page (400).

But later Husserl did read the dissertation, noting his complete satisfaction with it, remarking that perhaps it could be published along with the first part of his *Ideas*, preparing the way for his second part. Edith jumps at the opportunity, noting that she knows that he is in need of an assistant, and that she would like to be the one: "Yes, with you, I would enjoy working!" (411) Edith does become his assistant, not only editing Husserl's work but contributing many original insights.

Edith receives the doctorate, *summa cum laude*, "Husserl beaming with joy" (414), and here the manuscript ends. On pages 416–17 we have the account of conferring of the degree "on the most learned woman Edith Stein, resident of Breslau." The degree mentions the dissertation "On the Problem of Empathy." The degree was given

30 March 1917. As Husserl's assistant, Stein edited the manuscript of Husserl's *On the Phenomenology of Consciousness of Internal Time* and organized many of Husserl's manuscripts. According to Alasdair Macintyre she was responsible for many original thoughts included in her editing and organization. Also, Edith had numerous important philosophical acquaintances, which are discussed at length by many scholars, particularly by Macintyre. According to Antonio Calcagno, Stein was at least as competent in Husserl's thought as his male colleagues Eugen Fink and Ludwig Landgrave, but she was never accorded the same respect.

On page 432 of her autobiography, we have the document affirming that Edith Teresa Hedwig STEIN is considered to have died on 9 August 1942 in Auschwitz.

FINITE AND ETERNAL BEING

The introductory first chapter of Stein's *Finite and Eternal Being* is generally a brief but nuanced reflection on the historical study of the "Problem of Being in History." Stein's competence in Greek and Latin are evident. Still, I encounter here a problem that, for me, runs throughout the text. Referring to the Greek and medieval reflections on the meaning of being, Stein writes, "While the Greeks were led to this enquiry in view of the natural givenness of the created world, for the Christian thinkers (and to a certain degree also for the Jewish and Moslem scholars) the problem assumed larger dimensions in view of the revealed truth of the supernatural world." (4). I would have left out "created" when referring to the Greeks, but I have a real problem with the implication of the last part of this sentence. Stein is familiar with Aquinas's work on Aristotle, but she doesn't see the real force of the break in learning that occurred when Christian learning changed from Augustine's reflections in a monastery and Aquinas's work in a university. Later we read, "People unfamiliar with medieval thought may find the subjects discussed by St. Thomas in his investigations on the nature of being quite beyond their reach. What, after all, do we know about God and the angels, and whence could such knowledge come to us" (35). (I think that all of this is carefully explained

by Aquinas, and besides this I have problems with her explanation of the relation of matter to form. Stein does not seem to recognize that there is a sense in which the matter about to be changed demands the form of the matter that is about to be induced in the new substance.)

I am not considering *Potency and Act*, for it does not reflect her mature thought. On pages 14 to 19, we have a clear formulation of Husserl's general theme that a triangle is meaningful as a three-sided plane figure and is thus independent of my thinking and yours. And yet Stein is aware that people of different languages think differently. Indeed, Stein does refer to the relation between the knower and the known as a "relation" in the strict sense; but there is no development of this insight, or we would then be closer to my own views and the relation I see between Aquinas and Sartre. Let us continue. Stein's perspective is again clear on pages 100–103. The problem concerns universals. The usual interpretation of Plato is that universals exist as such. Aquinas held to a moderate realism, that is, only individuals exist and universals as such exist in the human mind. Thus far, I follow her; but when in her chapter 12 she moves from Aquinas to Scotus, I think she comes too close to Descartes.

I would, nevertheless, agree with Husserl and Stein that the truths of our everyday experiences must in some way find universality in things, apart from books. In her discussion of universals, chapter 3, sections 10–12, pages 97–120, we come closest to our central concern of how we can know a universal truth in an individual thing. Stein gives us a brief history of some of the various ways of regarding the relation of individuals to universals, to give an example, this tree with leaves still green moving with the wind that I see outside my window, compared with our knowledge that all trees are plants, at least in the sense that they do not walk about as dogs or stay still as the ground from which they rise. She rightly notes that some have said that only names are universals and these names affirm no truth in things. They would agree that we have universal concepts in our mind, but they would claim that these are pure human constructs that have no relation to things in the world. Realists claim that universals do exist in some way outside our mind. She neatly notes that Plato (according to Aristotle) asserted that universals, all the great truths of mathemat-

ics and morality, exist in a special realm, and I mentioned that Augustine identifies this with the mind of God, with the awareness that there cannot be separate ideas in God's mind.

In chapter 8, "The Meaning and Being of Individual Being," we encounter clearly what is of main concern to Stein. She writes about the problem that troubles her:

It seems to me that the essence of Socrates is found in his being Socrates (which includes his human nature), and I hold that this essence differs not only numerically, but by virtue of a special particularity from the essence of any other human being. (478)

This English translation makes it seem that we are going to make each human being a distinct species as if they were angels. This is clearly not Stein's intention, and yet her discussion is difficult to follow. Basically, her argument again is that individuating matter cannot account for the difference between Socrates and every other human. This is true in the abstract, but the flesh and blood of Socrates is uniquely his, although every human has flesh and blood. Moreover, Socrates makes choices that are uniquely Socrates, and yet every human makes choices that are uniquely theirs. Referring to Joseph Gredt, Stein claims that matter is the ontological cause of individual beings. This is true, but not the whole truth. The flesh and blood of Socrates is his and his alone; and yet it is the *choices* that make Socrates Socrates. Indeed, Stein sees personality to be what distinguishes both angels and humans; but with Aquinas and Sartre, I would add flesh and bones, and choices that grow in a way that is not true of angels. Still it seems to me that, at her best, Stein gets very close to Sartre's affirmation that we are each a universal singular, this unique person and every person at one and the same time. I will close my casual study with that observation.

Appendix 2

Hitler, the Vatican, and Donald Trump

The admission of the presence of evil is part of any attempt to live a meaningful life. The atrocities committed by Hitler are among the most staggering that can be imagined. And yet, I suppose that one might also wish to consider our own dropping of atomic bombs, particularly the second, to end the war with Japan. But Sartre and Stein both lived during the Second World War, although only Stein actually died in a concentration camp. Sartre wrote *The Anti-Semite and the Jew*, which is a concrete study of his notion of bad faith. What is of continuing relevance in this work is the thesis that a just society should allow the Jew to be a Jew and not simply a citizen. But there is a special reason why I wish to reflect briefly on the relation of the Vatican to Hitler, namely, Aquinas and Stein have opened the door to Catholicism and it is appropriate to understand why the Catholic Church was so slow in condemning Hitler. True, when the bishops of Holland condemned Hitler, he then rounded up Jewish nuns and sent them to concentration camps. But this was late in July 1942.

Why not earlier? Peter Godman (*Hitler and the Vatican: Inside the Secret Archives That Reveal the New Story of the Nazis and the Church*) gives a nuanced study of the situation.¹ Let me admit, however, that I have not made a long independent study and that I here rely on his book. After summarizing some of his book, I will then give some reflections.

First of all it is clear that in the 1930s the church had written numerous condemnations of the racism advocated by Hitler; but the statements were not made public. We are told that Hitler was aware of the power of the church and that he hesitated to condemn it. Indeed, and I was unaware of this, Hitler claimed in *Mein Kampf* and in speeches that Jesus Christ was “not only ‘true God’ but also ‘our greatest Aryan leader’” (5). Godman notes that the next figure in this pantheon appears to have been Hitler himself. Still, for the most part, the church saw through this hypocrisy; but there was another issue of Hitler’s that carried weight, namely, that Hitler was against not only Jews but also “Bolsheviks,” and the continuing theme of the church’s relation to Hitler is that it was more afraid of Communism than of Hitler. Moreover, there was the problem that people in Germany voted for Hitler just as they voted for Fascism and Mussolini in Italy. Then too, the cardinals in the Vatican were divided on where the real danger lay. I do not wish to keep recalling the various cardinals concerned, since I am mainly interested in what we can learn for our present situation, particularly since many Catholics voted for Donald Trump to be president of the United States. I will therefore mention only some of the main cardinals involved.

Cardinals Pacelli and Gasparri were secretaries of state to Pius XI. Cardinal Gasparri, in a memorandum of 20 June 1933, recommended that the church not condemn Hitler as long as he did not declare war on the “Holy See or the Catholic hierarchy in Germany” (6–7). The model was the relation of the Catholic hierarchy to Mussolini. In that model, the clergy were prohibited from political action but were allowed to have complete freedom in their pastoral duties, hearing confessions, baptizing, confirming, etc. This seemed a good model to follow with Hitler, especially since he seemed to be legitimately elected. But again, it was the pope, Pius XI, who remained firm in his conviction that Communism was a greater threat than either Fascism

or the racist doctrine preached by Hitler. This divided the Vatican, and the poor priests trying to cope with the daily injustices of Mussolini and Hitler realized that “there was not one Rome but two” (9). Pius XI was a bookish person, comparing Rome to a great book that could not be lost to outside threats. More particularly, the church was to have its own schools, hospitals, even banks. In Godman’s view, the pope was a conservative and interested in approving anything that seemed to be advantageous to the church (14–15), even if in 1929 this meant recommending to Catholics that they support Mussolini. Nevertheless, deep tensions remained, since this same Pope condemned Mussolini’s views as “heretical and worse than heretical” (15). The Pope set himself against Mussolini, but perhaps in a too personal manner, the eternal Vicar of Christ against this secular upstart.

There were other deep currents, particularly the doctrine against modernism, which in its broadest sense was any view in opposition to the conservative views of Pius XI (24), but which expanded to a very blurred condemnation of “Nationalism, Communism, totalitarianism, racism” (94). In a more refined view, any ultranationalism was condemned (95). Properly defined, ultranationalism could, I think, have been justly spoken against; but the real problem was that nothing very specific was being said against the daily persecutions of Jews and, I would add, of any non-Aryans. There were too many talks, with the recommendation not to be either too general or too specific. Nevertheless, within all this confusion, a commission was formed to investigate Communism. In general, all modern heresies became forms of “social modernism” (97).

Within all this confusion, *Mein Kampf* was distilled by members of the Jesuit order, and the blatant racism made apparent: “What is not transmitted, in the austerity of their presentations, is the fanaticism with which the Führer wrote his racist gospel” (63). I think we should keep this in mind when thinking of our own relation to Donald Trump. But what was true of Germany under Hitler is not true of us under Trump, at least thus far. An archbishop in Germany wrote of the persecution of the Jews that “it was difficult to find a single non-Jewish German who dared to disapprove of the measures” (80). The letter was not forwarded to the Holy Office, which was examining this very issue.

In November 1936, Communism moved to the head of list of “errors of the age” to be examined (129). The church remained aware of the evils of Fascism and Nazism, but “Pius XI had chosen to turn his attention to Communism” (129). “Chosen” is the word to heed. The situation in Germany was made to seem mild compared with the evils of Communism, and yet there are records that indicate (Pacelli took pains to record what was said) that the German Catholic bishops were aware of the greater evils of Hitler (132–33). And yet the Concordat with Mussolini was still the model: pastoral freedom and nonpolitical action by priests and bishops. Godman reports some of the conversations of the German bishops with Pius XI, and while the bishops admitted that Hitler was their opponent (“All that he says and does is falsity and lies” [158]), the Pope still held firm to the Concordat. Godman notes, “Perhaps, the most remarkable feature of this audience is what was not said” (139). The condemnation of Hitler was not mentioned. And Godman adds, “Pius XI sacrificed on the altar of the Concordat the outright attack on the Nazis that, in 1937, Rome might have launched” (147). Still, the church did not hesitate to damn (twice in two years) atheistic Communism in forthright terms. Why then did it hold back on the Nazis and Fascists? Not only because these were regarded by Rome as allies against the “Bolshheviks,” but also because the Vatican had signed concordats with Germany and Italy (166).

Today, there is a great deal of discussion about the evils of sexism and the harm done to children by the Catholic clergy. It is a great evil, and transparency and admission are to be advocated. Still, I think that the greatest evils of the Catholic church are the way it has sided with those in authority and power, even when what these advocate is evil. The Catholic clergy should have spoken out against Trump when he was running for office. Here, a kind of concordat was present. Trump was against abortion, and too many were deceived by the hidden racism in this claim for the dignity of the unborn. Hitler was against abortion; he approved of Aryan births, and Trump approves of the birth of wealthy whites. Moreover, the fight against abortion is localized; that is, it concerns a relative minority, whose votes can be thus had, but it does not bring into consideration the millions of

children born into poverty that could be relieved. This latter concern calls into question the whole system of capitalism in a way that the fight against abortion does not. Fortunately, today we have a pope, Francis, who is determined not to repeat the laxity of his predecessors in World War II. Of course, he has his enemies.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On Politics and Ethics*, ed. and trans. Paul E. Sigmund (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), xxvi; see the entire excellent introduction.
2. I have written about this in some detail in my *Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's "Critique of Dialectical Reason"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 23–31. Briefly, this is what happened. At first, Sartre was sympathetic to the Russian Revolution in his speech and in his writings, arguing that the poor and the underprivileged were better off than they had been before the revolution, and that if people had to make sacrifices, they were at least for the benefit of their children. But then when Russia invaded Hungary in 1956 Sartre saw this as a complete rejection of all that the original revolution stood for, and he broke with his defense both in speech and in writings. It should be noted that even when he was defending the Communists, he never joined the Party.
3. This is an extremely complicated issue in Aristotle's thought, but I do not see how an elaboration would further the general direction of this essay. I have discussed the issue at some length in *Thinking Matter: Consciousness from Aristotle to Putnam and Sartre* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 180–88.
4. I can recommend two excellent and sympathetic books, Alasdair Macintyre, *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue* (London: Continuum, 2007), and also Antonio Calcagno's *The Philosophy of Edith Stein* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007); there are others, I am sure, but these I have read carefully.
5. Those familiar with the thought of Martin Heidegger may understand my separating it from the thought of Jean-Paul Sartre, but they may wonder about my view of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In general, I am in favor of much of what Merleau-Ponty writes, and here I can recommend the excellent books of Calvin O. Schrag. Still, on the main point of this essay, namely, the distinction in Sartre between the external

and the internal senses and the degree to which freedom imbues all that we know, Sartre is, for me, more radical.

CHAPTER ONE

1. For an excellent discussion of Brentano, see Macintyre, *Edith Stein*, 23–24, 40, 58, 105, but especially 53.
2. It was published by the French publisher Gallimard as *L'Idiot de la famille: Gustave Flaubert de 1821 à 1857*, appearing in three large volumes, the first two in 1971 and the third in 1972, with revised editions following in 1988. A projected fourth volume was never completed, and Sartre's notes on this volume—which were to discuss *Madame Bovary*—appear to be mere suggestions and not at all as complete as those he wrote for *Critique 2*. In *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857*, her excellent translations into English, all of which were published by the University of Chicago Press, Carol Cosman divided the three volumes into five—volume 1, 1981, is the same as the first Gallimard volume; volumes 2, 3, and 4 (published in 1987, 1989, and 1991) give her translation of the original second Gallimard volume, and volume 5 (published in 1993) is her translation of the third Gallimard volume. I have discussed all volumes at length in *Reading Sartre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3–20, 162–205. See also Hazel E. Barnes, *Sartre and Flaubert* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). I have read this work carefully, and I strongly recommend it. Barnes has particularly more perspective than myself in her evaluation of Sartre's interpretation of the writings of Gustave Flaubert, whereas I wisely avoid the issue. Still, we agree on the substance of my thesis. She writes in her conclusion, “As to the *purpose* of literature Sartre and Flaubert disagree radically. Demoralization is the intent of one and revolution the aim of the other” (388).
3. I have not read this work, and it does not seem to have been published by ICS Publications, which has published all her works in critical English editions.
4. Edith Stein, *Knowledge and Faith*, trans. Walter Redmond (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2000).
5. Edith Stein, *Life in a Jewish Family: An Autobiography, 1891–1916*, ed. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, trans. Josephine Koepfel (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1986), 239.
6. See Calcagno, *Philosophy of Edith Stein*, 1–20, for an overview of Stein's relation to Husserl and Heidegger.
7. I do not wish to pursue this matter here. See Macintyre, *Edith Stein*, chap. 4.
8. See Stein's own interesting discussion of this in *Life*, 250–51.

CHAPTER TWO

1. *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), xxxvi.
2. Aquinas, *Summa of Theology*, part 1, question 46, article 2. Here, it may be useful to mention the difficulty of translating works written prior to the invention of the printing press slightly after 1450, namely, the question of obtaining reliable texts to translate. To the extent that these early works are available to us, they are handed

down by handwritten copies, with all the ambiguity that this entails over many generations. Thus, Pope Leo XIII in 1879 initiated the critical editions of the Latin texts of Aquinas, named after him, *Editio Leonina*, a process that is still continuing, although all the important works have been completed. All of the works that I will be using are translations based on the Leonine editions.

3. Aquinas, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, translated from the definitive Leonine text—volume 1 by Robert W. Mulligan, volume 2 by James V. McGlynn, and volume 3 by Robert W. Schmidt, SJ, PhD (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952, 1953, and 1954) with an introduction in volume 1 by Vernon J. Bourke, who writes: “On the day of the first session of the disputed question, all early-morning classes in the house of studies were dismissed so that students and masters might assemble in the hall of the presiding master. The latter gave a short lecture, during which the audience, often including visitors, gathered together. A bachelor under the direction of the master presented the question under discussion and outlined the position to be taken in answering it. Objections and difficulties were proposed by those in the audience. The bachelor (*respondens*) endeavored to answer these criticisms and to develop the preliminary statement of the response. At intervals in the proceedings, the master intervened, but he was not the disputant; this role belonged to the bachelor. A record was kept of the discussion of the first day; this the master took away with him and he then prepared what is called the determination (*determinatio*) of the question. On the next day of class, the master gave an oral report of his determination, including the objections, his proof of his answer, and his resolution of the objections. In written form, such a determination constituted one complete disputed question. . . . apparently 253 disputes (each occupying two days) form the background of this series of questions” (xiv).
4. Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, trans. Kenelm Foster and Silvester Humphries, introduction by Ralph McInerny, rev. ed. (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1994), book 3, lecture 17, section 859, p. 254.
5. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 218 (hereafter *BN*). There is a later translation of this work, but I still prefer this early one.

Perhaps, a brief word about this work is appropriate here. This work can be effectively viewed as a reply to Martin Heidegger’s own first book, *Being and Time*, which also has at least two translations from the German to the English, but my concern here is so general that that the difference is not important; also, if one is not familiar with Heidegger, this is hardly a useful observation. Perhaps, then, it is best to simply note that the book was published in French by Gallimard in 1943 (*L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*) and that it was successfully translated by Hazel Barnes in 1956. Sartre’s association with Gallimard began with the publication of his earlier novel *La Nausée—Nausea*—in 1938, and for the most part, Gallimard remained Sartre’s publisher throughout Sartre’s life, putting into print both his literary and his philosophical works. The major exceptions are three of the four monographs that preceded *Being and Nothingness*. The first, published in 1936, concerned the imagination; the second, published in a journal dated 1936–37, concerned the ego, and the third, published in 1939, made the point that the emotions should be considered a free choice. The fourth, which Gallimard published in 1940, returned to the imagination, indicating Sartre’s continual fascination with the

subject. Sartre would remain faithful to his early notion that an image is not a mere inner picture of a thing but the thing itself as absent.

6. *BN*, 303, 305; that is, we have to wait more than eighty pages before we begin a real discussion of the body. I do not approve of impatient readers, but I sympathize.
7. *BN*, part 3, chap. 2, “The Body,” section 1: “The Body as Being-For-Itself: Facticity,” p. 330.
8. Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1963), 584. In his prefatory note Frechtman admits that his translation, “actor and martyr,” loses the allusiveness of the French *Comédien et martyr* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952): “Saint Genet evokes the memory of St. Genestus—the third-century Roman actor and martyr and the patron saint of actors. . . . In addition the word *comédien* (which means actor—not necessarily comic) is used familiarly to designate a person who shams or ‘puts on an act.’”

CHAPTER THREE

1. See my *Good Faith and Other Essays: Perspectives on a Sartrean Ethics*, foreword by William L. McBride (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), especially 77–99. For a somewhat different and critical perspective on my views of good and bad faith, see Ronald E. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre’s Early Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 78–85 and passim.
2. Part 2 of the second part. I here now rely on the translation of Sigmund, 72–73.
3. The first part of the quotation is given in the *Aquinas, On Politics and Ethics*, trans. Sigmund. There is an interesting note (7) that John Locke repeats in his *First Treatise of Civil Government*. For my present purposes, I consider Aquinas to be writing here in the spirit of good faith.
4. *Summa of Theology*, part 1, question 79, article 12; Pegis, 766.
5. Aquinas, *On Truth*. In vol. 2, all of the three articles of question 16 concern synderesis: Is Synderesis a Power or a Habit? Can Synderesis Err? Are There Some in Whom Synderesis Is Extinguished? (300–313). Indirectly, I will be considering most of these issues as I proceed.
6. *Ibid.*, 319.
7. *Ibid.*, 322–26.
8. Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, in Walter Kaufmann’s *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: World, 1956), 66. There are perhaps better translations, but I have a fondness for this early anthology, which I frequently used as a text in my introductory philosophy courses. I take Dostoevsky’s irony as referring not only to the general human condition of the thoughtful person who reflects upon life, but more specifically to the paradox of modern life, which offers the average middle-class person many benefits previously enjoyed only by the rich, only to exact the fee of a meaningless job for most of life.
9. *The Critique of Dialectical Reason, vol. 2: The Intelligibility of History*, trans. Quintin Hoare, ed. Arlette Elkaim-Sartre (New York: Verso, 1991), 423. See also Ronald Aronson, *Sartre’s Second Critique: An Explanation and a Commentary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). I have also considered this work at some length in *Reading Sartre*, 113–36.

10. Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 328, 347.
11. *Critique*, 2: 421–22.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. *BN*, 43.
2. *BN*, 44.
3. *BN*, 69.
4. *Family Idiot*, 1: 28.
5. *Ibid.*, 3: 60n48.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. *Family Idiot*, 1: 129–30n2.
2. *Saint Genet*, 34.
3. Helen Keller was not congenitally deaf and blind, but she was deprived of both sight and hearing before she was two. See Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1903), particularly the first three chapters. See also Joseph P. Lash, *Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1980), particularly chap. 4, “The Key Is Turned.”

See also Oliver Sacks, “It is true that the congenitally deaf only constitute about 0.1 percent of the population, but the considerations that arise from them raise issues of the widest and deepest importance. The study of the deaf shows us that much of what is distinctively human in us—our capacities for language, for thought, for communication, and culture—do not develop automatically in us, are not just biological functions, but are, equally, social and historical in origin; that they are a gift—the most wonderful of gifts—from one generation to another. We see that culture is as crucial as Nature.” Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), preface. Thus, sign—the generic term for all fully formed conventional sign languages such as American Sign Language—is the natural language of the deaf, which, even when they are prohibited from using it or ignorant of its use, they will invent in a personal and modified form. In effect, if they are kept away from developing sign, the deaf will be hindered from learning all forms of language. Thus, Harlem Lane in *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community* writes, “Most deaf students are illiterate in the national language because the systematic denial of their primary, manual language shuts out the most effective strategy for teaching them a second language in school” (176).

4. *BN*, 270.
5. *BN*, 277.
6. To recount a personal experience, I was for some time a member of a subgroup of philosophers that met as part of the American Psychiatric Association. Some years ago, the title proposed for the forthcoming meeting, for which abstracts were being

solicited, was the genetic origins of criminal behavior. My own abstract called attention to the impossibility of giving a neutral definition of criminal or violent behavior, and moreover, it pointed to the hidden racism in the very attempt to begin this reflection on genetic behavior. Indeed, some of the most violent people in the world are generals of armies, all armies. My abstract was not accepted and no reply was ever given to my arguments.

7. *Saint Genet*, 34.
8. *Summa of Theology*, second part of part 2, question 104, article 5; Sigmund, 75.

CHAPTER SIX

1. Aquinas, *On Truth*, 2, article 11.
2. *BN*, 4. *Summa of Theology*, second part of part 2, question 104, article 5; Sigmund, 75.
3. *BN*, 7.
4. See *BN*, Commentary, especially 64–77.
5. *BN*, 463.
6. *BN*, 464.
7. Macintyre discusses three conversions of people who were close to Stein, Adolf Reinach's to Catholicism in 1916, Franz Rosenzweig's to Orthodox Judaism in 1913, and Georg Lukás's to Bolshevism in 1918. See *Edith Stein*, chap. 15.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. On the other hand, taking advantage of the essay form of this writing, I will note that in the late 1990s I conducted a two-year study of this work at my apartment in New York, with six to nine scholars, some reading the English, others the French, meeting twice a month. I was retired and had decided to devote two entire years to reading the work, beginning as much as possible from the beginning to the sections we had assigned for our next meeting. I presented the fruits of this study in my *Reading Sartre*.
2. See chap. 2, n. 8, for a discussion of this translation of *Saint Genet*.
3. *Family Idiot*, 2: 69.
4. *Ibid.*, 1: 46.
5. *Ibid.*, 4: 119.
6. *Ibid.*, 5: 555.
7. *Ibid.*, 5: 545.
8. *Saint Genet*, 17. Sartre is aware that he is taking some liberties in his exhaustive analysis of Genet's early life. His answer is that his extensive research shows that something very much like what he describes must have happened. I am not aware that Genet offered any objections.
9. *Ibid.*, 46.
10. *Ibid.*, 579.
11. *Ibid.*, 49.
12. *The Search for a Method*, translated with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963), 91. Although published separately in English, this work

is part of the French edition of the *Critique*. The original French title is *Critique de la raison dialectique, précédé de Questions de méthode, vol. 1: Théorie des ensembles pratiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960; rev. ed., 1985). When the English edition appeared in 1976, it did not include a translation of *Questions de méthode* since that had been translated earlier in 1963 by Hazel E. Barnes and then the same translation was published in England under the title *Problem of Method* (London: Methuen, 1964). *Questions de méthode* was itself first published in the Polish periodical *Twórczo*, no. 4 (1957): 33–79.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. *Summa of Theology*, second part of part 2, question 110; Sigmund, 76.
2. *Ibid.*, in reply to objection 4; Sigmund, 77
3. R. D. Laing and D. G. Cooper, *Reason and Violence*, with a foreword by Jean-Paul Sartre (London: Tavistock, 1964). For a discussion of Laing and Sartre, see Gila J. Hayim, *The Existential Sociology of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 98–102.
4. *Family Idiot*, 1: 28
5. *Ibid.*, 2: 23.
6. *Ibid.*, 3: 60n48.

CHAPTER NINE

1. *Family Idiot*, 2: 245n21.
2. *Saint Genet*, 557.
3. *Ibid.*, 484.
4. *Ibid.*, 368.
5. *Family Idiot*, 2: 299.
6. *Ibid.*, 2: 301.
7. *Ibid.*, 5: 70.
8. *Ibid.*, 5: 77.
9. *Ibid.*, 1: 98.

CHAPTER TEN

1. *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, vol. 2: Selected Prose*, ed. Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, trans. Richard McCleary (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 242.
2. *Saint Genet*, 490.
3. Karl Popper distinguishes three worlds: the world of physical objects, the world of conscious experiences and the world of theoretical truths: “We can call the physical world ‘world 1,’ the world of our conscious experiences ‘world 2,’ and the world of the logical contents of books, libraries, computer memories, and suchlike ‘world 3.’” Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 74. While I do not agree with his tendency to give world 3 an

existence apart from the physical books that exist in our libraries, his notion that many of our abstract claims exist only in these books is correct. I have discussed this in *Thinking Matter*, 134–36.

4. *Family Idiot*, 1: ix.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. *Summa of Theology*, part 1, question 28, “The Divine Relations,” and continues in 29, “The Divine Persons.” I follow here the translation of Pegis, 282–98. What Aquinas writes here and elsewhere is of interest to our human notion of personality.
2. *Ibid.*, 283.
3. *Idem.*
4. *Search for a Method*, 56.
5. *Summa of Theology*, part 1, question 29, article 1; Pegis, 291.
6. *Ibid.*, article 2; Pegis, 294.
7. *Ibid.*, article 3; Pegis, 295.
8. Maritain does not quite admit this in so many words, and he may be right that at times we have an inordinate fixation on our own personalities. He turns to love and to God; and I have no objections, except that I would like to remain on the topic itself, one that I consider to be important, namely, do we inherit our personalities, and what is the precise distinction between an individual and a person? I do not find Maritain clear on this. See Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite, or The Degrees of Knowledge*, translated under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1959). See his reference to “subsistence,” 431. It is here that I think Sartre enlightens the tradition.
9. *Family Idiot*, 1: 129–30n2.
10. *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. Forest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), 104.
11. *BN*, 103.
12. I have discussed the notion of personality at some length in *Thinking Matter*, not only in respect to Sartre but in relation to other materialists. See 118–22, 125–27, 187–88. In general I appeal with approval to Sartre’s notion of free choice, especially our fundamental free choices that characterize our lives, as an appropriate explanation of what it means to be a person, apart from being born from these parents.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. I here use the translation of *Being and Time* by John McQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). Joan Stambaugh did a later translation, based upon her life work and personal association with Heidegger. But for my very general interest, the earlier translation is adequate. Every thought and deed arises from a past through a present to a future. We project this onto a clock, and the past then becomes the minutes gone; the present, the impossible now; and the future, the minutes yet to be reached by the clock. For consciousness (Heidegger would not allow us to use this term), the temporal spread of past-present-future is what

we are at “any time.” If one wants an image to help thought (although Heidegger does not give us one) one might view temporality, not as point in a line that itself represents time, but as a vector in space—a vector is by its very nature directional.

2. To repeat, I consider the basic insight of *Being and Time* to be directed to showing how clock-time, in which only the now is real, is derivative of a more basic temporal structure rooted in what Heidegger terms “Dasein.” “Dasein” is not merely a German word; it is a strange German word—roughly, “there being.” But what is Dasein? This is a difficult question to answer. But let us be patient. We must understand that Heidegger is unwilling to refer to “man,” the “human reality,” or the “human being,” for he views those terms as referring to an older philosophical tradition, which he wishes to avoid. In particular, Heidegger is attempting to break from the perspective that human beings are merely added to a world already filled with kinds of things.

The exact meaning of the term “Dasein” is disputed among Heideggerian experts—which I do not consider myself to be. I will say this, however: although it is clearly the case that Dasein points to what is most formal in all human reality—perhaps more to Kant than a proper rethinking of Aristotle—I still think we have to identify it with human consciousness. True, whenever one begins to speak in this commonsense way, one confronts the charge of lapsing into an old ontology, in which things are merely added to a world devoid of human existence. On the other hand, I think that this is where we have to begin our philosophical reflections; otherwise we fly too far above commonsense.

3. *BN*, 246.
4. *Notebooks for an Ethics*, 347
5. *Saint Genet*, 554. For a detailed discussion of Sartre’s views on conflict and violence see Ronald E. Santoni, *Sartre on Violence, Curiously Ambivalent* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 10–20 and passim.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. *Critique*, 2: 87.
2. *Ibid.*, 99.
3. All of which brings up a personal episode, which, considering that this is an essay, I will include here, while being brief. I was a tenured philosophy teacher at St. John’s University, a Catholic school in New York City. In the early 1960s, the university fired about fifteen tenured faculty members of which I was one, the letter arriving during the Christmas break. As I recall, there were no real charges, but later we were said to be inciting the school to riot—which was absurd, the hidden reason being that we were indeed attempting to form a union. Our efforts in forming a union were the result of a joke—which the university administration took seriously. In truth, all we wanted was some outside representation such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP); but those in power viewed this well-established and, one might say, conservative institution to be infused with a “Communist” spirit, or at least to be very dangerous to the faculty. “Well,” we said—we would meet mostly in the bathrooms—“if they think the AAUP is Communist, let us start a union!” I was one of about ten “ringleaders,” and I can assure you that not

one of us took our original efforts as anything but a big joke on the administration. Effectively the administration made the United Federation of College Teachers viable. Although only a few of us were actually fired, a major portion of the liberal arts faculty went on strike against the university. It was funny and sad, causing a great deal of unnecessary harm. Also, a great opportunity was lost. For a while, we had a very, very large philosophy faculty, and here I refer not only to Saint John's at that time, but to all Catholic universities. They should never lose sight of the great contribution they make to the social order by stressing philosophy. Nevertheless, this requires a certain openness and risk, a willingness to offer a wide spectrum of classes.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978), 64.
2. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), I: 114.
3. Tobias Dantzig, *Number: The Language of Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 90, also 19–35; and the more substantive work, Karl Menninger, *Number: Words and Number Symbols* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), 400–445. These works remind us of the tremendous effort and time needed to perform even the simplest calculation, until the Indian culture introduced the use of zero and until zero was recognized as an empty set. According to Menninger, the first mention of the empty set (*sunya*) was in Sanskrit sometime between the sixth to eighth centuries, but it took a long time for it to be recognized for giving numbers a place value, and longer still for this to be recognized for the great revolution that it was: “From all this we infer that the new numerals were adopted in the early Middle Ages not because of any conception of the advantages of place-value notation but merely as a new and exotic means of writing numbers” (424). But by the thirteenth century, Leonardo of Pisa had been introduced to the new numeral by an Indian calculator and wrote in his *Liber Abaci* (1202): “The nine numerals of the Indians are these: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1. With them and with this sign 0, which in Arabic is called *cephirum* [cipher], any desired number can be written” (quoted by Menninger, 425). Our present-day positional use of numbers, or what Menninger calls “place-value notation,” is thus relatively recent. The important anthropocentric question is whether zero was invented or discovered. I think it clear that it was invented, as was the entire number system. Indeed, Menninger's book, in particular, makes this clear. I recommend reading these histories as recounting our efforts in crafting marks into meanings.
4. Stein, in *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*, trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt, *Collected Works in English*, vol. 9 (2002), seems to me to move dangerously close to Descartes. We should first note with Stein that the “I am” is already in the “I think.” That is, Descartes attributes no reasoning here: when I am thinking, I know that I am thinking. On this intuitive level, this is naively clear to all of us; Sartre accepts it, I accept it, and I am sure Aquinas would accept it. But this naïve admission is far removed from Descartes's claim that we can

reason from the certitude of our own existence to the existence of the world and other people. Descartes would have us adopt a universal method of doubt about the existence of the world and other people and then see if we could reestablish all by reasoning the way we reason in geometry, with clear and distinct ideas. If the history of philosophy has proved anything, it is that if we doubt the existence of the world, no reasoning process can bring us back to affirm its existence. If the world you perceive through your senses is an illusion, then no reasoning will ever lead you to accept it as real. The Irish philosopher George Berkeley (1685–1753), frequently referred to as Bishop Berkeley, (bishop of Cloyne), reasoned from Descartes’s doubt about the existence of the world to the claim that the world must indeed exist in some mind. Descartes is right when he realized that he can be certain of his own existence only when he thinks about his existence. All reality, Berkeley claimed, is an aspect of thought; the things of the world are real but only as the thought of God. Is Stein heading in that Idealistic direction? The message I get from her text is yes and no.

Stein sees a tight connection between what Descartes wished to do and what Husserl recommends in his suspension of our commonsense beliefs so that we can attain a true knowledge of things. Nevertheless, Stein is aware of the danger of the road she travels, and she seems to guard herself with all her qualifications. She states that we are first certain not of ourselves but rather of the world. We learn of ourselves only late in life: “it takes a long time to learn to find oneself.” Nor is the certitude of our own existence a theoretical starting point from which we can deduce everything. Still, “It is a knowledge of that which is inseparable from me, and it is therefore a primordial starting point” (35). I am confused. I thought that Stein had objected to Husserl’s turn to Descartes. I think rather that we always find the world and others in our immediate awareness of ourselves: I am out there in the world as I type on this computer and look at the screen.

Sartre accepts the truth of our own existence on an intuitive level, a simple awareness without needing evidence. You happen to be engrossed in gardening, and you stand up, realizing that *your* back hurts. From a substantive perspective, Sartre’s philosophy is the opposite of that of Descartes, who thought that living bodies were complicated machines, granting that, in humans, this machine is joined to a spiritual soul. For Sartre, our “soul,” our freedom, our fundamental orientations to the world and other people pervade our entire body, every limb, every gesture, every look. Yes, our toenails grow by themselves, but if you have money to have them cut properly, and do not also help the poor, you are making a statement about how each person is related to all of humanity.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. I also approve of a pragmatic truth that teaches us how to get along with many of the everyday needs of our life; for example, how to brew a good cup of coffee. I have discussed this in my *Thinking Matter*, 8–10, 169–70.
2. *Summa of Theology*, vol. 1, question 1, article 1; Mulligan, 6.
3. *Critique*, 1: 29.
4. *Family Idiot*, 5: 35.

5. *Ibid.*, 5: 41.
6. *Critique*, 1: 152n35.
7. *Ibid.*, 1: 322.
8. *Ibid.*, 1: 216.
9. *Search for a Method*, 33n9.
10. *Critique*, 1: 23. See William L. McBride, *Sartre's Political Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 53, 74–77, 79, 126–29, and *passim* for a fuller discussion of Sartre's relation to Marx. I strongly recommend all of this author's works. See also Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Flynn writes, "We must admit that Sartre's Marxism is adjectival to his existentialism" (xiii).
11. *Critique*, 1: 26.
12. *Ibid.*, 1: 322.
13. Michael D. Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992); John Chadwick, *The Decipherment of Linear B* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958; 2nd ed. with final postscript, 1967).
14. *Critique*, 1: 50.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. *Critique*, 2: 48.
2. *Family Idiot*, 5: 214.
3. *Critique*, 1: 800.
4. *Ibid.*, 1: 300.
5. Let me try to be clear about this, and I will use the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City where I live. For a while this possibility that our lives were in danger existed, and on one level it continues to exist; but this level of danger does not merit going to war or turning the nation into a quasi-fascist state in which everyone is a potential enemy. As I ride the New York subways, I constantly hear the announcement "Protect yourself; if you see something suspicious, report it." In our own "Great Fear," the *possibility* of an enemy's presence becomes as real as its actual presence; and this ever-present possibility keeps us from examining carefully our own deep injustices, both to our own citizens and to those of other nations.

Our world seems to me to be reflected in the movie *2012*, in which the world is being destroyed by worldwide flooding, at least partly caused by human indifference to altering the environment. The governments of the world order gigantic arks to be built, filling them with the rich who have admittedly helped pay for the arks (although one might think the governments themselves could have done just that) and with certain important people picked out for talent and genetic advantages.

More people can fit on the ark, but the leaders fear overcrowding. They thus plan to prevent those who have managed to find the hiding place of the arks from entering. Nevertheless, one of the leaders gives a moving speech, noting that such inhumanity is not the way to save humanity anew after the floods have subsided. The doors are opened, and hundreds or thousands enter. But billions have died,

and while some of the disaster was inevitable, billions more might have been helped with proper warning. The leaders claimed to fear chaos, but in reality, they wanted to protect their own lives.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1. Paul Churchland claims that “our commonsense notions of hot, warm, and cold are empirically incoherent, in that they attempt to impose a one-dimensional continuum of properties where nature supplies three distinct and divergent continua—*degree* of heat energy, *amount* of heat energy, and *rate of flow* of heat energy—none of which corresponds adequately to commonsense conception. Our commonsense terms here are not just different in extension from the thermodynamic terms that displace them; they are entirely empty of extension, despite their usefulness in our quotidian affairs, since nothing in nature *answers* to the collected laws of ‘commonsense thermodynamics.’” *A Neurocomputational Perspective: The Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 285–86. It is difficult to take this notion seriously. Common sense works perfectly well without any scientific understanding of degrees or amount of flow of heat. The knowledge needed to start a fire to boil water is perfectly accurate in its own domain: one learns pragmatically just how long to leave water on a fire in order to boil it. I have discussed the reductive materialism of Churchland and others at some length in *Thinking Matter*.
2. *On Truth*, 1, question 2, article 6; 93.
3. *Summa of Theology*, part 1, question 110, article 2; Pegis, 1020.
4. *On Truth*, 1, question 2, article 11.
5. The discussion of analogy is repeated throughout the works of Aquinas, for example, *On Truth*, 1, question 2, all of article 11, especially 112–13. I have discussed analogy and the ambiguities in justifying our universal predications based upon our experience at some length in *Thinking Matter*, 175–96.
6. *Search for a Method*, 145.
7. *BN*, 4.
8. *Ibid.*, 318.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1. Matthew 22: 21.
2. *Summa of Theology*, second part of part 2, question 104, articles 1 and 5; Sigmund, 75.
3. *Critique*, I: 323–24.
4. The terms are *dépasser* and *transcender*. See my *Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre’s Critique*, 167.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

1. *Critique*, I: 453.
2. Ronald Aronson, *We: Reviving Social Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

2017), makes a good case for our collectively “reviving social hope” to change our world for the better.

CHAPTER TWENTY

1. See *Reading Sartre*, 92–93.
2. *Search for a Method*, 155
3. *Ibid.*, 52.
4. *Family Idiot*, 1: 71.
5. *Ibid.*, 2: 174.

CONCLUSION

1. *BN*, 218.
2. *Critique*, 1: 79.

APPENDIX ONE

1. All of Stein’s works have been translated by ICS Publications in Washington, DC (Institute of Carmelite Studies), 29 volumes thus far (2019). They are each numbered, and the first volume is *Life in a Jewish Family: An Autobiography, 1891–1916*, ed. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, trans. Josephine Koepfel, published in 1986. It is a thick book, more than 400 pages, with prefaces, a long and informative translator’s afterword, a chronology, notes, and at the end a folding map of Edith Stein’s world. Page references in parentheses in the text.

APPENDIX TWO

1. Peter Godman, *Hitler and the Vatican: Inside the Secret Archives That Reveal the New Story of the Nazis and the Church* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Free Press, 2004). Page references in parentheses in the text.

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