A Man in Battle: The Atheism of Jean-Paul Sartre

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A MAN IN BATTLE:
THE ATHEISM OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

by
Lawrence M. Hinman

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Master of Arts

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PREFACE

This thesis is concerned with a very specific problem: the relation between Sartre's atheism and his description of relations with the Other. Yet such a formal limitation may perhaps obscure the concrete dimensions of the problem. The problem of God is not only larger than its place in the Sartrean framework. It overflows the bounds of philosophy, of life itself, spilling over the edge of life known as death. This is to say that the problem of God may be a problem at the core of life itself. Man has become the creature that battles with God.

To consider the problem of God within certain formal limitations is a necessary stricture, but necessary in the way that events are necessary to a whole life. An event brings into focus the development of a lifetime at a certain moment. The event is proceeded by a dialectic of previous events and will also be followed by more. Even the moment of the event is only an abstraction, for it is not self-contained. It has entanglements in the past in some areas; it other areas it has
already moved beyond itself into the future. This event, this thesis, exists with these characteristics.

As an event, moreover, it has an undeniable personal character. Although it focuses on a particular problem, it is only constituted as such within my own consciousness. This means that even the expository sections of this work will reflect the viewpoint of the author, although these will be made explicit whenever possible.

Finally, the character of this particular thesis is to be noted. It deals with the problem of God, a problem fundamental enough to define man. The fundamental character of this thesis as an event, the fact that it is concerned with a problem common to man as a whole, reveals its public dimensions. Although it happens within my own development and is written from my own viewpoint, the dimensions of the problem extend to all men. What at first appears to be a private consideration takes on public dimensions because it deals with an event which is by its nature common to many men.

This thesis then is an event, one which considers a most fundamental problem, which is by nature public, from a particular viewpoint which is itself in flux.

Before turning to the problem itself, I should like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance and encouragement of Rev. James J. Dagenais, whose understanding and patience allowed this thesis to become what it is.
INTRODUCTION

Our center, grandfather, the center which swept the visible world into its whirl and fought to elevate it to the upper level of valor and responsibility, was the battle with God. Which God? The fierce summit of man's soul, the summit which we are ceaselessly about to attain and which ceaselessly jumps to its feet and climbs still higher. "Does man do battle with God?" some acquaintances asked me sarcastically one day. I answered them, "With whom else do you expect him to do battle?" Truly, with whom else?

—Nikos Kazantzakis

Existentialism is not only an atheism in the sense that it would go to great lengths to demonstrate that God does not exist. It declares more: even if God would exist, that would change nothing: this is our point of view. Not that we would believe that God exists, but we think that the problem is not one of his existence; it is necessary that man find himself and convince himself that nothing can save him from himself, even a viable proof of the existence of God.°

—Jean-Paul Sartre

Even to the casual observer, it becomes evident that the twentieth century man does not know quite what to do about God.

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The subject of countless affirmations, contradictions, and negations, God has remained a central issue in contemporary thought, whether through his presence or absence. Susan Anima Taubes has caught the spirit of this absence of God quite well.

Atheism, which used to be a charge leveled against skeptics, unbelievers, or simply the indifferent, has come to mean a religious experience of the death of God. The godlessness of the world in all its strata and categories becomes, paradoxically and by a dialectic of negation, the signature of God and yields a mystical atheism, a theology of divine absence and nonbeing, of divine impotence, divine nonintervention, and divine indifference.3

It is to this paradoxical presence that both the authors cited above are considering. Yet that which Kazantzakis sees as the challenge to man is what Sartre rejects as irrelevant.

It is the purpose of this thesis to clarify, through an analysis of the many relevant texts, the precise attitude toward God found in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. This will be accomplished by first considering these factors in the background of Jean-Paul Sartre which would affect his position on God. This will be followed by a detailed consideration of his statements on matters concerned with religious experience. Then Sartre's more specifically ontological stand on the nonexistence of God will be analyzed. In the last chapter of the first part the problem of God and history in Sartre will be

presented.

In the second part of this thesis Sartre’s atheism will be criticized in terms of his doctrine of our relations with the Other. This will begin with an explication of his idea of the Other, his modes of presence and knowledge of his existence. This will be followed by a consideration of the experience of God as Other and the viability of this within the Sartrean framework. A detailed consideration of this idea of God as Other as found in Sartre’s The Words will conclude this part.

The third and final part of this thesis contains a series of reflections on the value of this idea of God as Other and its shortcomings. It asks, if indeed it is God with whom man does battle, does Sartre’s framework offer a viable and valuable way of talking about the problem of God today for theists as well as atheists?
PART I. THE ATHEISM OF

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE
CHAPTER I

THE SHAPING OF THE PROBLEM

The Sartrean Milieu

Without doubt, Sartre is the product of his age. Born on June 21, 1905, he was raised in a bourgeois milieu. Baptized as an infant, he lost his faith at the early age of eleven. At the university he was first of all interested in psychology and psychiatry, without losing any interest either in literature or philosophy. After his imprisonment during the war, he collaborated with the Resistance and then began his political writings. In 1945 he founded Les Temps modernes.4

Within the context of his age, there are a number of factors against which Sartre reacted. Fr. Emile Rideau distinguishes five of these which are of interest here. I shall consider each in turn.

Idealism.—The philosophy of idealism, which issues from Descartes and ultimately the Greeks, reflects on the objective world of science, of abstract knowledge, of essences and clear and distinct ideas. "This idealism is a dualism, which separates

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4For a chronological list of Sartre's major publications, see Appendix I.
entirely the body and the soul, matter and spirit, world and man." Although Sartre tried to escape this dualism, there is some doubt as to the degree of success he achieved.

Technology.—Sartre, moreover, reacts against the world of the technical, "the world where man objectifies himself by work, but risks losing himself in it." Present hand-in-hand with technology, the world of social organization appears as one which smothers liberty in impersonal conformism and which imposes precise functions on man. It is in the face of this that Sartre is compelled to assert the absolute freedom of consciousness.

Optimism.—The great optimism of the contemporary world revealed itself to Sartre as a faith in the progress of man and history, presuming that they are directed by infallible rational methods. Sartre, during his visit to America, was

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6 An excellent example of this is to be found in Sartre's chapter on "The Body" in Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), pp. 303-59. He writes, "Being-for-itself must be wholly body and it must be wholly consciousness; it cannot be united with a body," p. 305.

7 Wilfred Desan, for example, takes Sartre to task for this in his later writing. "The propinquity, even the actual interpenetration of mind and "matter"—terms which are not Sartrean, I admit—have become such that it is no longer possible to keep the concept of matter (or its corresponding term) out of the definition of man," The N sheer of Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1965), p. 231.
staggered by the false optimism and the flight before the tragic which he felt characterized Americans. 9

The Bourgeois World.—Finally, the world is bourgeois, dominated by a privileged social class and scarcely conscious of the injustice involved. It was this factor which undoubtedly eventually brought Sartre to a realization of the real values of marxism. 10

In addition to these factors that Fr. Rideau lists, there were such social problems as the condition of France after the war which undoubtedly had an effect on Sartre. Pierre-Henri Simon summarized the condition well.

Thrown into a universe without coherence or order, where instincts and brute force triumph, where individual destinies are twisted and reviled by vague, blind and irreversible historical forces, these men no longer either could or would believe in the ideal man, in a reign of the spirit, in the transcendent finality of a future promise of justice and happiness. 11

The tragic is the fundamental motif of men who find themselves

9Simone de Beauvoir gives us an excellent account of this visit. "Sartre was dazed by everything that he saw...the conformism of Americans, their scale of values, their myths, their false optimism, their flight before the tragic." La Force des Choses (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 45.

10Sartre himself indicates that it was not reading Marx that brought him to Marxism.
It was about this time 1925 that I read Capital and German Ideology. I found everything perfectly clear, and I really understood nothing....This reading did not change me. By contrast, what did begin to change me was the reality of Marxism, the heavy presence on my horizon of the masses of workers..." Search for a Method, trans. Hazel B. Barnes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 17-18.

11Pierre-Henri Simon, L'Homme en Proces (Neuchatel et Paris:
thrown into this kind of universe. The tragic is "the feeling of an obscure and insane resistance against which the force of liberty and reason which is in man is dashed to pieces." It is imperative to understand that this is the background against which Sartre must be set.

Finally, in this review of influences on Sartre, note should be made of the peculiarly French concern with le neant, nothingness. It came into prominence in the late nineteenth century, and can be traced through Flaubert, Mallarme, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and others. This nothingness is not an abstract category, but has the definite flavor of concrete experience. This has been clearly seen by Robert Martin Adams. After a detailed analysis of the idea of neant in late nineteenth century literature, he comments on the French concern for nothingness.

No combination of social factors or intellectual influences seems adequate to explain the number of respectable and established French men of letters who during the last half of the nineteenth century proclaimed their settled conviction that the cosmos did not exist. Some principle of mass reproduction seemed to have taken over, some principle of spiritual existence to have perished....It is not just that God has disappeared behind the screen of

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12 Ibid.

13 Sartre himself has written significant amounts on two of these authors. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, Baudelaire, trans. Martin Turnell (New York: New Directions, 1950). For his treatment of Flaubert, see Sartre, Search for a Method, especially pp. 140-50. The section on Flaubert is intended, however, as an example of Sartre's progressive-regressive method as well as a work of literary criticism.
his creation. The screen itself is felt not to exist any more. Sartre certainly stands as a prime example of this French feeling for nothingness, for it is in terms of this that he defined man himself.

In summary, we have seen many of the influences on the sartrean milieu: the philosophy of idealism, technology, the conformism of contemporary social organization, the optimism of the bourgeois world, the tragic situation of post-war man, and the French concern with le néant. To what conclusions can we come about the values to which Sartre will adhere?

First, the concern with the freedom of man emerges. The reaction against the bourgeois, technical world of conformism demands the assertion of the freedom of man, man's ability to rise above and transform his situation. It is to this purpose that the idea of nothingness is used: defining man in terms of his consciousness, which is the nothingness of consciousness, unties consciousness from the bondage of any things. Man is liberty.

Second, the use of nothingness is given a twist to combat false optimism. Consciousness, as a néant, must always be a negation. It can never become one with its object. Thus there is no ideal synthesis of consciousness, as one might find in

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the writings of Teilhard de Chardin. The tragic situation of post-war Europe cannot be hidden from view by a false optimism. Man's tragic, ontic situation will be reflected in the ontological structure of consciousness as a nothingness.

The force, then, of these particular influences on Sartre is to demand the assertion of his vision of man as tragic and free. Before investigating this problem in any greater detail, especially its bearing on the question of God and the Other, I shall show how this vision of man as tragic and free is one of the leitmotif of Sartre's ontological framework in Being and Nothingness. Through this I hope to show not only the ontological foundations of this vision of the tragic and free man, but also the way in which this vision prepares the way for Sartre's views on God.

The Ontological Framework

In Being and Nothingness Sartre gives us an essay in phenomenological ontology. He presents two types of being or, more precisely, one type of being and one type of non-being. There is being-in-itself (l'être-en-soi) and being-for-itself (l'être-pour-soi). Whereas being-in-itself is composed of all that which is the object of consciousness, being-for-itself is consciousness, negation of being-in-itself. Consciousness is a nothingness, a neant. It is always other than being. As such, it is not a thing. One cannot point to a pure consciousness. Consciousness, as relatedness, is always consciousness of something.
The most important implication of this view of consciousness as a radical negation is the Sartrean notion of freedom. Consciousness, as negation, is free because it can transcend (negate) anything of which it is conscious. Moreover, for Sartre, consciousness is liberty. It can transcend anything. Thus he writes, "freedom is actually one with the being of the for-itself; human reality is free to the exact extent that it has to be its own nothingness."15

Sartre distinguishes three ways in which consciousness is a nothingness, a neant.16 First, it temporalizes itself; it is far from itself by being either before or after itself. Second, it is consciousness of something, thus negating that of which it is conscious. Third, it is a transcendence, a project, directed toward its own end. All three of these structures express ways in which consciousness is a nothingness.

Consciousness is man for Sartre. Man is nothing but his consciousness. There is no human nature; there is not even a substantial ego formally admitted by Sartre. As M. Varet has put it, Sartre has exploded the ego.17 Yet this is not to deny

15Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 453.

16Ibid., pp. 31-32. This third nihilation, "the nothingness which is the condition of all transcendent negation," can only be elucidated in terms of the first two negations. Ibid., p. 34.

that there is a certain facticity present. Man may transcend his situation, any situation, but there is always some situation.

Man's relation to the Other is fully explored on the individual level. I may be made an object to the Other when he becomes conscious of me. There is nothing I can do to force a change in this, for his consciousness is also free. Moreover, I can make an object out of the Other. This structure will be more fully explored in Part Two. Suffice it to mention here that this same structure will be developed in Sartre's Critique de la Raison dialectique when it becomes explanatory of man's inhumanity toward man: when, because of scarcity or need (besoin), I make an object out of the other.

The adequate response to this situation emerges under the category of action. Simone de Beauvoir has again gives us valuable background for this. Sartre responded to the shattering effect of the war by the creation of a morality of authenticity: "...from the point of view of liberty, all situations are equally able to be saved if one assimilates them through a project."18 She notes that this is close to the stoic view, for often the only way a situation can be transcended is through submission. This demand for passivity concealed by verbal protestations was quickly rejected by Sartre

18Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des Choses, p. 15.
in favor of action in a transitory world.

Thinking, writing, his primordial concern was to know meanings; but, after reading Heidegger and Saint-Exupery in 1940, he was convinced that meanings come to the world by the enterprises of men: the practical takes priority over the contemplative. 19

Action is the adequate response to the changing human situation. 20

Yet Sartre never reaches the point where he allows any form of final satisfaction, for man is always separated from his own essence. 21 As negation, and as project, man desires to become that which he negates. This is why man is a futile passion: nothingness cannot be being. Man is always other than that of which he is consciousness, even his own work. It is here that we begin to discover the ontological roots of Sartre's atheism, in his vision of man as free but forever

19 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

20 Thus Sartre writes, "... we act before positing our possibilities and these possibilities which are disclosed as realized refer to meanings which necessitate special acts in order to be put into question." Being and Nothingness, p. 37. Thus it is action which brings meaning into the world.

21 In commenting on Hegel's statement, "Wesen ist was gewesen ist," Sartre explains how man is separated from his own essence. Essence is everything in the human being which we can indicate by the words—that is. Due to this fact it is the totality of characteristics which explain the act. But the act is always beyond that essence; it is a human act only in so far as it surpasses every explanation which we can give of it, precisely because the very application of the formula "that is" to man causes all that is designated, to have-been. Being and Nothingness, p. 35.
tragic.

In conclusion, we can see that there are many factors in Sartre's background which prepared him to see man as tragic and free. Moreover, we can see that the freedom and the futility of man has a clear place in Sartre's ontological structure in *Being and Nothingness*. What, then, is the precise sense of this "tragic motif" in Sartre?

It is, first of all, a tension. The tragic exists not as a given, but rather as the result of two previous forces. In general, these may be identified as man's desire to be fulfilled and his clear recognition of the futility of this desire. If the interception of these two forces produced a stoic resignation or a feeling of great humility before God, the result would not be tragedy. Only when the resultant is some type of passionate tension between these two forces do we have tragedy. For Sartre it is action in the human project which is expressive of man's tragic situation. It is this framework which will give the foundation for Sartre's atheism.
CHAPTER II

BEING AND NOTHINGNESS: THE CRITIQUE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

Sartre has much to say about both religious experiences and the ontological difficulties in speaking about God. The latter topic will be considered in the following chapter. It is the purpose of this chapter to consider in detail Sartre's critique of religious experiences. It will be seen that throughout this critique the dual values of man's freedom and tragic situation are central to Sartre's position. The tension between man's freedom and his futile hopes for reconciliation result in a tragic vision of religious experience which I shall here explicate.

The first question which must be faced is the justification of this order of treatment. The fundamental issue here is whether Sartre's critique of religious experiences issues from his logical problems with the existence of God or vice versa. Hazel E. Barnes, the foremost translator of Sartre's philosophical works, thinks that his stand rests ultimately on logical grounds.

The question has been asked as to just why since Sartre's whole interpretation of existence postulates the pursuit of God, he is not willing to go one step further and postulate a God who exists...or a valuable myth with
inspirational power?... I think he would reject the notion that God really exists because the idea appears to him false on logical grounds.22

The clear implication of this statement would appear to be that since God is a logical contradiction, he cannot exist and must be rejected.

I would suggest that in this respect Miss Barnes's analysis is perhaps too naive. It could be argued that, at least chronologically, logic follows upon the situation rather than determines it.23 To recast an old dilemma, does Sartre not believe in God because he is a contradiction, or does Sartre find God contradictory because he does not believe in him.24 Although Miss Barnes opts for the former alternative, the latter seems to me to be more probable.


23This is, of course, a very delicate issue. For support of this view, the reader is referred to Bruno Snell's The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (New York: Harper and Row, 196), esp. pp. 191-245. Snell here traces the origins of logic in Greek literature and philosophy.

24William Earle makes a telling point on this issue. "...on the most abstract dialectical level, he Sartre defines God as a contradiction; but we have just finished reading his defense of contradiction, in which he makes contradiction itself the very central core of consciousness! The conclusion in school logic would be that God exists as consciousness, but Sartre's contention is that there is no such thing at all." Christianity and Existentialism (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 107. The point is well taken: Sartre's logic follows upon some prior commitments.
If it is then conceivable that Sartre's atheism is based on some prior commitments, the next question to be asked is what these commitments are. The fundamental spirit of these commitments is the drive for man to know himself. That which is most central in man's vision of himself is his free and tragic situation, the nature of which has been discussed above. The manner in which Sartre approaches the topic of man's religious self-realization is through a critique of religious experiences. I shall consider first the experience of God. This will be followed by a consideration of various religious themes: original sin, death, and eternity.

The Experience of God

If one of the primary concerns of Sartre's philosophy is seen to be located in his vision of man as tragic and free, it appears that it is these two values which are in direct conflict with any experience of God. For Sartre, man does not just have freedom, he is liberty. This freedom must be preserved at all costs, especially in the face of God. After his discussion of *Les Mouches*, H. Paissac summarizes well the relationship between God and liberty.

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25 In writing about the problem of God's existence, Sartre declared that it made no difference whether God existed. "Not that we would believe that God exists, but we think that the problem is not one of his existence; it is necessary that man find himself and convince himself that nothing can save him from himself, even a viable proof of the existence of God." Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 95. Italics mine.
We see, in all these texts, the true nature of liberty is affirmed: to be capable of no longer having any dependance with regard to God. Such a liberty kills the gods.

And if God, in reality, were to exist, it is the liberty of man which would no longer have a place.26

It is above all the conflict between God and man in terms of freedom with which Sartre concerns himself. One of the roots of Sartre's atheism is in his demand for human freedom.

If this absolute conflict between the freedom and man and the existence of God is taken as a given, then the purpose of Sartre's ontology emerges as an attempt to explain human freedom. It is this point which Miss Barnes sees clearly.

Sartre's whole endeavor is to explain man's predicament in human terms without postulating an existent God to guarantee anything. Those who read him as religious are saying that one may be religious without any non-human absolute. This may be true, but Sartre says in effect that we must call such a position atheistic humanism.27

Miss Barnes implies that it is impossible to use the word "religious" without some non-human absolute. Although this may be true, there remains the more fundamental question to be answered: despite his protestations to the contrary, does not God function as some kind of absolute, even if it be an absolute threat?


To investigate this, consider first the relation between freedom and our desire to be God. In discussion the for-itself as a free choice, Sartre says that, "Thus my freedom is a choice of being God and all my acts, all my projects translate this choice and reflect it in a thousand and one ways, for there is an infinity of ways of being and ways of having."\textsuperscript{28} The term of my absolute freedom would be my becoming God. Thus it is that Sartre describes God in terms of man's ideal.

The fundamental aim found in the human project is to become the in-itself-for-itself, expressed by consciousness's desire to be the foundation of its own being-in-itself by pure self-consciousness.

It is this ideal which can be called God. Thus the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God. Whatever may be the myths and rites of the religion considered, God is first "sensible to the heart" of man as the one who identifies and defines him in his ultimate and fundamental project.\textsuperscript{29}

Here two fundamental notions of God appear. He is first an ontological concept which defines man. Moreover, he is also an ontic reality in that the concept of God expresses man's self-definition.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28}Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, p. 599.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30}The influence of Nicolai Hartmann is evident here and in other places. See Appendix II for a discussion of this.
Thus God emerges on both the ontological and the ontic levels as a limiting concept. God, value and supreme end of transcendence, represents the permanent limit in terms of which man makes known to himself what he is. To be man means to reach toward being God. Or if you prefer, man is fundamentally the desire to be God.  

In this manner God defines man while at the same time man defines God in a continuous dialectic.

Here the concept of freedom comes to the fore as a problem. It would appear that, if man is defined as the being whose project it is to be God, then this comes close to giving man an essence or human nature, and thus limiting his freedom in some ontological manner. Sartre saves himself from this dilemma by a distinction between the abstract meaning of desire and the concrete expression of it. "...while the meaning of the desire is ultimately the project of being God, the desire is never constituted by this meaning; on the contrary, it always represents a particular discovery of its ends." At this point in the text Sartre avoids the deeper issue implied here: If God does not exist, and if man is fundamentally the desire to be God, it would appear that man's existence is a fundamental contradiction.

31Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 566.

32Ibid., pp. 566-67. Italics in original. The validity of this distinction is open to question, for it would appear that the ontic concept of God indeed does constitute the meaning of particular projects.
In a well-known passage, Sartre follows out the implications of this position.

Every human reality is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being and by the same stroke to constitute the *In-itself* which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the *Ens causa sui*, which religions call God. Thus the passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man poses himself as man in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion.33

The thrust of this passage is that man is an eternal contradiction, of which God is the highest symbol. It should be noted here, however, that the equation of *Ens causa sui* and a religious God here is gratuitous. We shall return to this point below.

This condition, the absence of God, is not confined to man alone. It refers to the very structures of existence itself.

Everything happens as if the world, man, and man-in-the-world succeeded in realizing only a missing God. Everything happens therefore as if the *in-itself* and the *for-itself* were presented in a state of disintegration in relation to an ideal synthesis. Nor that the integration has ever taken place but on the contrary precisely because it is always indicated and always impossible.34

God then appears to function in a most unusual way in terms of human action. The image of God stands up against the human project as the representation of that which existence must

33 Ibid., p. 615.
34 Ibid., p. 623.
strive toward, but which it can never attain. Yet again there 
is an equivocation between the ontic meaning of God and his 
ontological status for Sartre as the impossible union of the 
in-itself and the for-itself. Moreover, it appears that the 
ontological concept is the primary referent for determining 
what the ontic meaning of God is.

Thomas J. J. Altizer has clearly seen the function of this 
missing God that Sartre presented in the previous passage. God, 
who is to be nihilated, is the supreme Other and definitely 
performs a function in defining man's freedom.

The act of nihilation is not simply a nihilation of 
being but depends upon a parallel and simultaneous 
nihilation of God: both God and being must be nihil-
ated by man's project of freedom. When Sartre says, 
"Everything happens as if the world, man, and man-in-
the-world succeeded in realizing only a missing God," 
he might more aptly say that man's freedom demands a 
missing God.

Thus in some manner God functions in this passage as an ab-
solute, the negation of which gives supreme expression to human 
freedom. Yet Altizer too avoids here the issue of the ontic 
and ontological concepts of God: man's freedom demands a missing 
God, but is it necessary that this missing God be an impossible 
union of the in-itself and the for-itself which therefore cannot 
exist?

Sartre addresses himself to this question when he defends

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35 Thomas J. J. Altizer, Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic 
p. 137.
himself against the charge of hypostatizing some type of God.

Let no one reproach us with capriciously inventing a being of this kind; when by a further movement of thought the being and absolute absence of this totality are hypostasized as transcendent beyond the world, it takes on the name of God. Is not God a being who is what he is—in that he is all positivity and the foundation of the world—and at the same time a being who is not what he is and who is what he is not—in that he is self-consciousness and the necessary foundation of himself? The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it, precisely because it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself. Human reality therefore is by nature an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state.\(^\text{35}\)

The line of the argument would appear to be somewhat shaky here. A transcendent God cannot be hypostasized because he is a contradiction within the context of the for-itself and the in-itself. Then this ontological concept is said to represent the dream which haunts man and reveals to him his own futility. The conclusion of the final sentence logically rests upon a non-existent and contradictory ontological concept of God. Just as in the passages above, Sartre does not consider whether this ontological concept is what we mean by God.

In summary, it can be said that Sartre's descriptions of our experiences of God are by and large based on an ontological concept of God as an impossible contradiction. Sartre then uses this concept to interpret experience to explain man's

\(^{35}\)Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 90.
unhappiness. This particular ontological concept of God appears necessary to maintain Sartre's view of human reality as a perpetual unhappy consciousness. Thus a certain view of human experience dictates Sartre's view of God, yet two alternatives have gone unexamined. First, is this the only description of experience which is adequate? Second, is this description of God adequate to our experience? The second question will be considered in Part Two of this thesis. At present let us turn to a consideration of the first question, but confined to the area of specific religious experiences.

Traditional Religious Experiences

In this section, I shall consider several "religious" themes that Sartre comments upon in Being and Nothingness. They offer to us some substantiation of his interpretation of human reality, especially in relation to religion. As such, they form an elaboration of his views on atheism. Moreover, the validity of much of what Sartre says here will reveal why his atheism has the popularity and relevance it does.

Original Sin and Guilt.—In his comments on original sin, Sartre attempts to present a picture of it in light of man's fundamental relation to the Other. In so doing, Sartre reduces original sin to our primordial relation with the Other.

If there is an Other, whatever or whoever he may be, whatever may be his relations with me, and without his acting upon me in any way except by the pure upsurge of his being—then I have an outside, I have a nature. My
original fall is the existence of the Other. Shame—like pride—is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such.36

Thus, "shame is the feeling of an original fall,"37 not because of any particular act, but because this is my fundamental condition of having "fallen" into the world. As such, it is in-escapable.

Nor is it possible to become cleansed of this guilt by any type of self-realization. My guilt stems from the fact that by my own self-assertion I constitute the other as an object and an instrument, thus bringing about mutual alienation. "Thus original sin is my upsurge in a world where there are others; and whatever may be my further relations with others, these relations will be only variations on the original theme of my guilt."38 No matter what I do to the other, I can treat him only as an object.39

Thus the structures of Sartre's attitude toward religious experience begin to emerge. God represents the ideal of the

36 Ibid., p. 263.
37 Ibid., pp. 268-89.
38 Ibid., p. 410.
39 Sartre's analysis here is again a mixture of psychological and ontological structures. There is, however, no fundamental conflict between the two. Original sin is a psychological reality indicative of an ontological rupture at the heart of being. For the purposes of this analysis it is not necessary to distinguish the two levels.
union between the for-itself and the in-itself. He is a contradiction, who is experienced as an absence. Man is seen as the being whose project it is to be God. Original sin is seen to represent the initial rupture between the for-itself and the Other. Man, as the striving to achieve this contradictory union of the in-itself and the for-itself, is nothing but the living out of this original contradiction under the mode of guilt. Man is a futile passion striving toward the highest contradiction, the union of the in-itself and the for-itself.

This leads Sartre to comment on several other religious notions. Eternity and death will now be considered here.

Eternity.—Sartre connects the notion of eternity with that impossible dream of becoming one with myself forever.40 "The eternity which man is seeking is not the infinity of duration, of that vain pursuit after the self for which I am myself responsible; man seeks a repose in self, the atemporality of the absolute coincidence with himself."41 It is implied here that eternity offers man a false promise of reality to come in another time.

This criticism of eternity is not far from that offered

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40 The interpretation here is concerned with Being and Nothingness. A critique of this notion of eternity is also quite evident in Sartre's "No Exit," wherein he shows that even in eternity one cannot recover oneself. C.f. Jean-Paul Sartre, No Exit and Three Other Plays (New York: Vintage, 1961).

41 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, pp. 141-42.
by Eliade in his critique of sacred time, when, "through the reactualization of his myths, religious man attempts to approach the gods and to participate in being; the imitation of paradigmatic divine models expresses at once his desire for sanctity and his ontological nostalgia." This same principle is extended to those eschatologies which attempt to place a final salvation in some future moment.

Periodic regeneration of the Creation is replaced by a single regeneration that will take place in an in illo tempore to come. But the will to put a final and definitive end to history is itself still an anhistorical attitude, exactly as are the other traditional conceptions.

Thus we can see more clearly the force of the objections of Sartre to the traditional idea of eternity. Eternity, if it means anything, would appear to relegate the value of the here-and-now to a position of secondary importance, subordinate to sacred time in either myths or the Parousia. As such, it is a structure by which man attempts to participate in the being of the gods. Such an attempt, according to Sartre, is doomed to failure and must be revealed as such.


44 Eliade, although he offers us a very useful framework in which to criticize certain conceptions of time as anhistorical, still has troubles himself with Christianity and history. He attempts to say that Christianity can save the historical event by having it both sacred and profane simultaneously. In criticizing this, Altizer points out, "by
Death.—In a similar manner, Sartre treats of the Christian idea of death. Writing in reference to the Christian idea of the "appointed time," Sartre says, "if it is the closing of the account which gives our life its meaning and its value, then it is of little importance that all the acts of which the web of our life is made have been free; the very meaning of them escapes us if we do not ourselves choose the moment when the account will be closed." Thus as long as death is not a free determination of our being, it cannot be seen as a completion of our own life. Death is thus imposed from without and, "does not appear on the foundation; it can only remove all meaning from life." Thus it is that death as given from another fixes my freedom, robs me of the meaning of my life.

"By his own principles, the sacred and profane are related by a negative dialectic, a single moment cannot be sacred and profane at one time." Thomas J. J. Altizer, Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred, p. 65. Altizer's answer to this lies in his notion of the coincidence of opposites, whereas Sartre resolves the problem by the elimination of one of the opposites, the sacred. The question of whether a unification is possible will be considered below, but no definitive answer can be given here.

45 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 538.
46 Ibid., p. 539.
47 It should be noted here that the proper concern of this section is the Christian notion of death as Sartre presents it. The concern is to show the logic of such a position, given this initial condition. The critique of the Sartrean idea of death given by Regis Jolivet in his Le Probleme de la Mort chez M. Heidegger et J.-P. Sartre (Abbaye Saint Mandrille: Editions de Fontenelle, 1950) is valuable, but not to the particular concern of this section.
Most fundamentally, however, in the idea of Christian death, is rooted the idea that death, besides nihilating my possibilities and destroying my projects, is the ultimate "triumph of the point of view of the Other over the point of view which I am toward myself." The implication, never made explicit, is that in a Christian view death is the ultimate triumph of God over what I am to myself.

Again we can turn to Eliade for confirmation of this fundamental structure of death as the triumph of the Other. In a discussion of the rites of passage, Eliade sees that death involves a change in both ontological and social status.

The dead person has to undergo certain ordeals that concern his own destiny in the afterlife, but he must also be recognized by the community of the dead and accepted among them. For some peoples, only ritual burial confirms death; he who is not buried according to custom is not dead. Elsewhere a death is not considered valid until after the funerary ceremonies have been performed, or until the soul of the dead person has been ritually conducted into its new dwelling in the other world and there been accepted by the community of the dead.

The point here, although Eliade does not draw it out, is the control that the Other exercises over the dead, whether this Other be those who perform the funerary rites or the community.

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48 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 540.

49 Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, p. 185. The coincidence is pointed out here to show the fundamental roots of the notion of death that Sartre is criticizing. It is certainly open to discussion whether this is a properly Christian notion of death or just a particular notion of death that may be found among various religions, including Christianity.
of the dead. Either way the dead person is at their mercy.

Moreover, this idea of death is the gateway to a clear conception of our relation with the Other. "The relation with the dead—with all the dead—is an essential structure of the fundamental relation which we have called 'being-for-others." 50

This would appear to be the case not only on the ontological level, but also in the realm of psychology. In this respect Norman O. Brown sees the basic implications of death to man.

Man is the animal which has separated into conflicting opposites the biological unity of life and death, and has then subjected the conflicting opposites to repression. The destruction of the biological unity of life and death transforms the Nirvana-principle into the pleasure-principle, transforms the repetition-compulsion into a fixation to the infantile past, and transforms the death instinct into an aggressive principle of negativity. And all three of these specifically human characteristics—the pleasure-principle, the fixation to the past, and the aggressive negativism—are aspects of the characteristically human mode of becoming, historical time. 51

Thus it is that death is revealed to us as that structure which most fundamentally elucidates our relations with the Other. To admit a death which comes from God is to admit, for Sartre, the fundamental control over myself by the highest Other, God. Consequent upon this is the denial of any real freedom to my project because of God's Otherness revealed in death.

There is, however, another side of this picture of death,

50Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 542.

one which Sartre naturally does not consider: the death of God. Insofar as God is Other, Sartre has succeeded in killing him. Nor does it end there. Sartre has personally assumed the responsibility for the funeral. The rites of passage have been laid down. God must die as the Supreme Other, as the one who was most guilty of hubris: the One who tried to rob us of our freedom, that precious freedom to which we have condemned ourselves. The choruses no longer lament the passing of a lover, indeed, the Other has no control over how we constitute him.

We can, then, see the point to which we have advanced. God has been portrayed as the one who stands over against man as the supreme Other. He represents to man the apotheosis of that contradiction, the resolution of which has been shown to be the fundamental and futile goal of human life and thought. This is Sartre's basic mode of being-toward God as explicated through an analysis of his statements on religious experiences in Being and Nothingness.

Yet Sartre does not stop here. His position has a most solid ontological underpinning. It is to the explication of this that we shall now turn our attention.
CHAPTER III  
Being and Nothingness: The Ontological Critique of God's Existence

In this attempt to understand Sartre's atheism, we have first surveyed the milieu within which Sartre came to his atheistic humanism and then we have examined his critiques of the experience of God and other religious experiences. In the process God has been revealed as an Other against whom Sartre is constantly fighting. Yet his atheism claims to rest on an ontological foundation which precludes the existence of God. We now turn to consider that ontology.

At first glance, there would appear to be two fundamental categories in the Sartrean framework: being-in-itself and being-for-itself, that is, being and nothingness. Consciousness, as we said in Chapter One, nihilates the being-in-itself and thus constitutes itself as a nothingness, a consciousness of something other than itself.

Yet the situation, upon closer examination, appears to be in need of a more precise distinction. Although being and consciousness are two fundamental components of Sartre's system, they are not yet sufficient to stand alone. The negation of any particular being-in-itself yet leaves consciousness only with a series of particular negations, not with the ontological
necessity that should belong to all being-for-itself.

Thus the ontological role of God begins to emerge. God is the third fundamental category of Sartre's ontology, and it is God that is the foundation of man's radical freedom. Altizer has seen this when commenting on "the paradoxical presence of the missing God." Nothingness, being and God are the primary categories of Sartre's philosophy.

God, of course, does not exist. Nevertheless, he is the necessary dialectical foundation of the system. Only through a dialectical negation of God does nihilation—the primordial act of human freedom—avoid an otherwise inevitable absorption of its act into the being of God... Both God and being must be negated in the authentic creation of human freedom; apart from the negation of God, man would no longer be a "useless passion," and hence, most deeply, would be. Again, Sartre's system demonstrates once more that the deepest affirmation of the profane demands a radical negation of the sacred, which is to say that a dialectical relation exists between the sacred and the profane, neither can become manifest apart from the negation of the other.52

Here I think that Altizer hits on the fundamental relation between God and man: God has become in Sartre's system the foundation of man's freedom through his negation. God's meaning for Sartre in contained in his negation of God and is expressed in the idea of a missing God.

Altizer goes on to take cognizance of the unacknowledged nature of this dialectical relationship. Although the dialectic is present, the consequences of it are not explored in a way that meets Altizer's approval.

Yet Sartre's thought has not succeeded in reaching a full dialectical expression, it has not succeeded in identifying negation and affirmation, despite the fact that Sartre's idea of nihilation so powerfully witnesses to the paradoxical presence of the missing God.53

Thus the force of Mr. Altizer's criticism lies in his showing Sartre's failure to acknowledge the affirmation that is contained in his negation of God.

Yet Altizer's taking to task of Sartre stops short. He fails to explore the further depths of his own criticism as well as to judge it within the context of the Sartrean framework. He fails, finally, to say that the negation of God represents for Sartre man's ultimate negation of himself in relation to any other. By denying the ontological union between being and nothingness, which is the import of Sartre's ontological denial of God, Sartre rejects the possibility of any real union with the Other. In Altizer's language, this means he rejects the coincidence of opposites.

More serious, however, is that Mr. Altizer neglects the relations with the Other as providing a key to Sartre's negation of God. It is the mode of being we assume toward the Other that forms the paradigm for Sartre's treatment of God. To more fully appreciate this, we shall first examine the ontological attitude of Sartre toward the problem of God. Then we shall be ready to turn to a consideration of the relations

53Ibid., p. 138.
with the Other to see points of comparison and advance our own criticism of Sartre's atheism.

We have seen that God represents for man the ideal union of the being-in-itself and the being-for-itself. God is thus the fundamental value which presides over the project of man.

The fundamental value which presides over this project is exactly the in-itself-for-itself; that is, the ideal of consciousness which would be the foundation of its own being-in-itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself. It is this ideal which can be called God.54

The point of this passage is that God is the ideal of the union of the for-itself and the in-itself. Yet it should be noted that the ontological concept, the in-itself-for-itself, is not necessarily God. The equation of this ideal and God is not without justification, but it is without necessity.55

The precise nature of this ideal of consciousness is the self-possessing and the self-creating being, that is, God. "The dyad, for-itself possessing and in-itself possessed, is the same as that being which is in order to possess itself and

54Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 566.

55This difficulty appears to be akin to the difficulties encountered in any argument for the existence of God. In his arguments for the existence of God, St. Thomas Aquinas concludes each argument with statements of the form, "...and this everyone understands to be God....it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God." Summa Theologica I. I. 2. 3. c. It is, indeed, open to question whether what people mean by God is actually the same as the conclusion of such an argument. On this point in relation to the teleological and cosmological arguments, see J. J. C.
whose possession is its own creation—God."\(^{56}\) This ideal represents my desire to possess myself in my own free foundation, but the same gratuitous equation of this ideal with God is to be found here also.

If Sartre fails to finally justify this equation of the impossible union of the in-itself and the for-itself with God, he does succeed in attacking several notions of God which are incompatible with his framework. Among these notions are those of God as a unifier, as a creator, as \textit{causa sui}, and as the Third. We shall consider each of these.

\textbf{God is not a Unifer.}—If one were to advance the hypothesis that God could be understood as some type of unifier, Sartre can show quite clearly the difficulties of this conception within his framework. He must be either within or outside the totality, which in either case is an impossibility.

The difficulty in speaking of God within the totality rests on Sartre's particular view of consciousness.

No consciousness, not even God's, can "see the underside"—that is, apprehend the totality as such. For if God is consciousness, he is integrated into the totality.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{56}\) Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, p. 592.

\(^{57}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 302.
God, as consciousness, could not be outside of the whole that is consciousness and being. Consciousness cannot stand outside of itself and look upon itself. It is always within the totality.

Nor is it possible according to Sartre to say that God is outside the totality, a non-conscious being.

And if by his nature, he is a being beyond consciousness (that is, an in-itself which would be its own foundation) still the totality can appear to him only as object (in that case he lacks the totality's internal disintegration as the subjective effort to reapprehend the self) or as subject (then since God is not this subject, he can only experience it without knowing it). Thus no point of view on the totality is conceivable; the totality has no "outside," and the very question of the meaning of the "undertide" is stripped of meaning. We can go no further. 58

God, within the framework of Sartrean being and consciousness, can be neither within nor outside of the totality.

To say, however, that we can go no further is perhaps unjust. There are several alternatives which Sartre does not go on to consider. First, it may be that, within the context of Sartre's division of being and consciousness, it is impossible to speak of God's relation to us in terms of subject and object. This does not mean that it makes no sense to speak of God in other ways. Second, it is quite possible that talk of the "totality" is logically extraordinary, for just what is this totality? It may, indeed, be only a totalizing process. It is not impossible, as Whitehead does, to talk about God in

58 Ibid., p. 302.
tems of process. Third, for the theist, it is possible that, if we can go no further, we must retreat to our original presuppositions, examine them, and possibly find that the view of all as being either being or Sartrean consciousness is inadequate. Finally, we can admit the inadequacy of fitting any traditional notion of God into a Sartrean framework, yet not reject the experience of God, and attempt to formulate a new language to speak of this experience which would not violate the canons of meaning for Sartre.

God is not a Creator.—The traditional idea of God as the creator is also put into question by Sartre. To speak meaningfully of creation, there must be a created thing which exists in dependence on the creator. This created thing must be for Sartre either the being-in-itself or the being-for-itself.

Consider first being-in-itself. If it exists as created by another, it is either existing subjectively or objectively. However, "if being is conceived in a subjectivity, even a divine subjectivity, it remains a mode of intra-subjective being."59 But such a conception does violence to any objectivity. "Such a subjectivity cannot have even the representation of an objectivity, and consequently it cannot even be affected with the will to create the objective."60 If it does not have this "will to create the objective," then it cannot be an adequate

59 Ibid., p. lxiv.
60 Ibid.
description of what being is as it appears to us.

Moreover, being cannot be considered as existing objectively and yet in dependence on God.

Furthermore, being, if it is suddenly placed outside the subjective by the fulguration of which Leibniz speaks, can only affirm itself as distinct from and opposed to its creator; otherwise it dissolves in him. The theory of perpetual creation, by removing from being what the Germans call Selbstständigkeit, makes it disappear in the divine subjectivity. If being exists as over against God, it is its own support; it does not preserve the least trace of divine creation. In a word, even if it had been created, being-in-itself would be inexplicable in terms of creation; for it assumes its being beyond the creation. Being-in-itself is thus either its own support and expressive of no dependence on God or else it is absorbed into the divine subjectivity, in which case it is not being as we experience it. In short, being-in-itself cannot be explained in terms of a creator.

Being-for-itself is also inexplicable in terms of a creator. First, this is so because consciousness arises as an unexplainable phenomenon. It surges forth from the in-itself as its pure nihilation. Sartre illustrates this in the following manner.

One may be reminded here of that convenient fiction by which certain popularizers are accustomed to illustrate the principle of the conservation of energy. If, they say, a single one of the atoms which constitute the universe were annihilated, there would result a catastrophe which would extend to the entire universe, and this would be, in particular, the end of the Earth and of the solar

61 Ibid.
system. This metaphor can be of use to us here. The For-Itself is like a tiny nihilation which has its origin at the heart of being; and this nihilation is sufficient to cause a total upheaval to happen to the In-Itself. This upheaval is the world. The For-itself has no reality save that of being the nihilation of being.62

The for-itself, as nihilation, is an inexplicable nothingness. If it were to be explained in terms of anything, it would be in terms of that which it nihilates, being-in-itself, which is itself inexplicable.

The deeper motivation for this position lies, I think, in the relation between creation and freedom, an issue not present in our consideration of the In-itself. The For-itself is freedom first of all because it is not a thing.

...the For-itself is not the foundation of its being-as-nothingness-of-being but it perpetually founds its own nothingness-of-being. Thus the for-itself is an absolute Unselbständig, what we have called a non-substantial absolute....If it would ever join with its being, then the otherness would by the same stroke disappear and along with it possibilities, knowledge, the world.63

The For-itself is thus not a substantial thing and cannot be explained in terms of the causality that could refer to things.

Moreover, the For-itself is not only not a thing, but it is freedom since it is a neant. If we were to say that this freedom or nothingness were created by someone, it would then rob it of its freedom for Sartre. In treating Leibniz's attempt to formulate a doctrine of human freedom, Sartre contends

62 Ibid., pp. 617-18.
63 Ibid., p. 619.
that any freedom of the for-itself given after creation by another would be relatively meaningless.

Thus it is true that the act committed by Adam necessarily derives from Adam's essence and that it thereby depends on Adam himself and no other, which, to be sure, is one condition of freedom. But Adam's essence is for Adam a given; Adam has not chosen it; he could not choose to be Adam. Consequently he does not support the responsibility for his being. Hence once he himself has been given, it is of little importance that one can attribute to him the relative responsibility for his act. 64

The For-itself, as expressive of human freedom, must not be created and thus defined by an essence, but rather must surge up and constitute itself through its fundamental choice of ends. This is the core of Sartre's argument against God as Creator: the apparently irreconcilable conflict between creation and freedom. 65

Thus far we have seen that God cannot be either within or outside of the totality, and consequently cannot be spoken of as the unifier of the totality. Nor can we talk meaningfully

64 Ibid., p. 468.

65 There are, it would seem, certain alternatives to this dilemma. We can, first of all, distinguish between creation "in the beginning" (en arche) and creation ex nihilo. This second concept, creation out of nothing, is not a biblical notion but rather a scholastic philosophical concept which arose as a reaction against gnostic dualism and eventually crowded out the former concept. The concept of creation "in the beginning" expressed in the Old Testament Yahweh's continuing dominion over the world. In St. John it seems to mean "in the pattern of Christ." It is the second concept, the idea of creation en arche, which Sartre appears to be fighting. It should be noticed, however, that the biblical origins of this are prior to any scholastic concept of creation, against which Sartre directs his attacks.
of God as the Creator, either in relation to the in-itself or the for-itself. The in-itself cannot exist as created either subjectively or objectively. The for-itself cannot be seen as created, for it is pure nihilation, not a thing, and freedom. To view it as created would contradict these values in Sartre’s eyes.

**God and Contingency.**—Sartre also argues against the existence of God at a point that touches the very heart of traditional natural theology: the notion of contingency. The reference point of this argument is the idea of God as *causa sui*. To speak of a being which founds itself is to refer to something which exists at a distance from itself, "and that would imply a certain nihilation of the being founded as of the being which founds—a duality which would be unity; here we should fall back into the case of the for-itself."\(^{66}\) Yet we know that such a being, the for-itself, is contingent.

In short, every effort to conceive of the idea of a being which would be the foundation of its being results inevitably in forming that of a being which contingent as being-in-itself, would be the foundation of its own nothingness. The act of causation by which God is *causa sui* is a nihiliating act like every recovery of the self by the self, to the same degree that the original relation of necessity is a return to self, a reflexivity. This original necessity in turn appears on the foundation of a contingent being, precisely that being which is in order to be the cause of itself.\(^{67}\)

In other words, if God exists, he is contingent, since existence

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\(^{66}\)Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 80.  
\(^{67}\)Ibid., pp. 80-81.
itself is contingent in Sartre's view. Yet it should be noted here that it is the structure of nihilation, which is the very foundation of Sartre's ontology, which dictates this notion of contingency. Apart from this radical idea of nihilation, the argument against contingency loses its absolute quality.

However, granting this concept of nihilation as the foundation of consciousness, we can begin to see the idea of God against which Sartre is here fighting. It is, fundamentally, an idea of God as unrelated to creatures, as outside of any of the processes of the universe. More precisely, it would seem that Sartre is fighting the idea of a uni-directional relationship between man and God, in which man is involved with God, but God is unaffected by this involvement.

It would appear that the Whiteheadian notion of God would be of no small relevance at this point, especially his discussion of the consequent nature of God. In speaking of God, Whitehead does not wish to present him as an exception.

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68There is some ground to believe that Hartmann may have been influential in this matter. See Appendix II.

69The apotheosis of this concept is probably best found in the theology of Plotinus. For a detailed study of this, see Rene Arnou's Le Desir de Dieu dans la philosophie de Plotin (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1921).

is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles....He is their chief exemplification."71 Thus it is that Whitehead will maintain that God's consequent nature is not complete, but awaits the further emergence of new actual entities,72 the content of which he then absorbs. Yet God does not perish in any way, and this content is not subsequently lost, as with other actual entities.

Thus it may be said (concentrating on his consequent nature) that God is temporal in the sense that development occurs within his being. But God is non-temporal in the sense that he never perishes. Further, God is non-temporal in that his primordial nature (the envisagement of eternal objects) is not characterized by process.73

In this way we could speak meaningfully of the contingency of God within a Whiteheadean context.

The immediate objection here, of course, is how valid is this point of view when referring to Sartre. At first glance, the two would appear to be unrelated. However, Robert C. Whittemore has, in a short but provocative article, suggested that there is indeed a common ground between Whitehead and Sartre, wherein Whitehead provides the metaphysical ground for Sartre's


72Ibid., p. 524.

ontology. He concludes that, "if Sartre has found in Whitehead his metaphysical ground, it may be that in Sartre as revised, Whitehead has discovered his epistemologist." Without going into the detail of Whittemore's argument, I shall concentrate on the phrase "as revised," which refers to the problem of God in Sartre.

Whittemore holds that God is "impossible" in the Sartrean context because Sartre gives a primacy to being over freedom. The impossibility can be overcome only by inverting that primacy and by eliminating the necessity for separating the in-itself and the for-itself. The result is a situation where "every for-itself is at once for-itself-in-itself, and God, far from being an impossibility, becomes what Sartre throughout his book admits God ought to be, namely, that total value, cosmic for-itself-in-itself wherein each finite for-itself secures the ground of its being, and man's purpose and desire finds both its origin and its realization." The conclusion, appealing as it may be, rests on the prior denial of Sartre's assertion that being is prior to freedom. On what basis does Whittemore deny this?

The fundamental assumption of this denial lies in the claim that the question of the priority of being over freedom is a

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75 Ibid.
metaphysical question, the answer to which is outside the domain of Sartre's ontology. The presupposition of the priority of either freedom or being must be thus grounded in a metaphysics, which Whittamore feels Whitehead offers. If so, then the Whiteheadean notion of God at least offers an alternative metaphysically expressed which offers a unification of the in-itself and the for-itself which Sartre's system seems to call for but refuse. Yet it does not rest in a notion as ens causa sui, for "the conception of God as ens causa sui, the existence of which Sartre declares to be impossible, is a conception rejected by Whitehead himself."76

Thus we can say that Sartre's objections to a concept of God as causa sui, his demand for contingency and relatedness, does not go beyond the bounds of any conception of God. It can, in fact, lead to a new interpretation of God in terms of process philosophy which could give full value to his objections while adding a coherence Sartre himself has not achieved.

**God as the Unrealizable Third.**—The final argument against the existence of God to be considered here is concerned with the idea that the presence of God is necessary to me for the presence of the Other to be. The presence of the Other, Sartre says, is simply given. "No witness, not even God, could establish that presence; even the For-itself can know it only

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76Ibid., p. 118.
if the presence already is."77 We cannot argue to this from the idea of creation, already rejected above, because such a theory would posit us as either united or absorbed in God, or distinct from Him and knowable to Him only as an object.78 "Under these conditions the notion of God while revealing to us the internal negation as the only possible connection between consciousnesses, shows the concept's total inadequacy: God is neither necessary nor sufficient as a guarantee of the Other's presence."79 Thus Sartre rejects God as the ground for the Other's appearance to us.

From this rejection Sartre draws out the significance of the figure of God in our relations with the Other.

This effort at recovering the human totality cannot take place without positing the existence of a Third, who is in principle distinct from humanity and in whose eyes humanity is wholly object. This unrealizable Third, is simply the object of the limiting-concept of otherness. He is the one who is Third in relation to all possible groups, the one who is no case can enter into community with any human group, the Third in relation to whom no other can constitute himself as a third. This concept is the same as the being-who-looks at and who can never be looked at; that is, it is one with the idea of God.80

77Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 122.

78Sartre here rejects the notion that we may be knowable to God only as objects, yet maintains that this is in fact the only relationship possible between consciousnesses. What he in one place describes as an apparent impossibility he in other places presents as the de facto state of affairs. Yet, as mentioned above, it may be in fact true that all that we allow to God is the knowledge of us as objects when we refuse him.

79Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 232. 80Ibid., p. 423.
Thus the idea of God as an absolute Third is representative of the desire for union with the Other, just as the idea of God as *causa sui* is representative of the desire of being-for-itself to found itself in union with the being-in-itself. Both conditions represent a contradiction, one toward which we strive but cannot attain.

More deeply, however, this idea of the third represents for Sartre a threat to his analysis of human reality. If he is the third, "in relation to whom no other can constitute himself as a third," then he becomes one who not only robs me of myself through the look, but also the one whom I cannot act upon in a similar manner. As such, this third would capture my freedom without my being able to capture his.

This relationship has been clearly seen by E. L. Allen in his consideration of the power of the look of the other.

To understand Sartre's position here, we must recall the significance for him of the other person's look. To know oneself observed is to lose one's status as a person and to be reduced to a thing. That would particularly be the case were there God, for his look would be absolutely inescapable. Before him, the omniscient and omnipotent, man is without defence. He is driven therefore to see himself through God's eyes, to renounce responsibility for his own life and accept the part God designed him to play.81

Thus within the context of Sartre's ontology, the presence of an absolute third is unnecessary to guarantee the presence of...
the other, but in actuality leads for Sartre to the elimination of my freedom and responsibility.

Yet the necessity of Sartre's position here is not entirely clear. If it be admitted that the presence of a third is not necessary to guarantee the presence of the Other to me, must it also be admitted that the presence of an absolute Other will in fact destroy my freedom and that this unrealizable Third must in the future also be nothing but a limiting concept? It would appear that Sartre offers us here an easy equivocation of the threat that an absolute Other poses and the impossibility of its existence. Yet this will be considered more closely below.

Summary.—This chapter has been an examination of the ontological critique of God's existence found in Being and Nothingness. The ontological meaning of God, the union of being-for-itself and being-in-itself, was revealed as contradictory and impossible, yet expressive of the goal toward which consciousness moves. Given this structure, it was then shown how it is impossible to see God as a unifier, for there is no possibility for God to be within or outside of consciousness and still retain his traditional status. Further, he cannot be seen as a creator of either being-in-itself or being-for-itself. Finally, God cannot be seen as causa sui, for this would imply a nihilation which would introduce a duality into what should be a unity. Nor is it possible to see God as an absolute
Third which guarantees to us the presence of the other.

Yet the conclusiveness of Sartre's arguments are open to further questioning. God has been presented as a contradiction, but contradiction is at the heart of Sartre's notion of consciousness. It is difficult to reject God on these grounds alone. Various arguments have been offered against particular descriptions of God: unifier, creator, causa sui, and absolute Third. Yet the force of each argument has been shown to be pointed toward the criticism of particular ways of conceiving God's being toward man: the thief of meaning, the determiner of essence, as unilaterally involved with man, and as the being-who-looks-at but is never looked at. It has been indicated that various alternatives are available to these objections.

The Sartrean treatment of a unifier is open to logical difficulties. The traditional notion of creation is not the only notion of creation within the Christian tradition. The notion of causa sui is only one way of conceptualizing God, and the Whiteheadian formulation offers a valid alternative to this formulation. Finally, the idea of the Third is not necessary to the presence of the Other, but does not in fact rob us of our freedom. It is the concept of the Third that will be considered in greater detail later in this thesis.

Sartre's critique of God's existence then is nothing more than that at this point. Various concepts of God are put to the test and judged to be inadequate and because of this
inadequacy the experience of God itself is rejected.

Let us now turn to a consideration of Sartre's second major philosophical work, *Critique de la Raison dialectique*, to see how Sartre's atheism will survive seventeen years of criticism in the contemporary world.
CHAPTER IV

THE SARTREAN VIEW OF HISTORY

The transition from *Being and Nothingness* to the *Critique de la Raison dialectique* covers seventeen years and a vast amount of literature. It is not the purpose of this thesis to recount all that happened during this period. This has already been done well by Wilfred Desan.\(^2\) The problem of Sartre's marxism in its many facets is also beyond our scope here except insofar as it relates to the more specific problem of Sartre's atheism. Thus the question whether Sartre's marxism is a rejection or an extension of his position in *Being and Nothingness*, and the problem of whether his marxism is a "true" version of Marx, will be considered only insofar as they bear on Sartre's treatment of God.

However, some introductory remarks will be necessary to understand how Sartre treats the problem of God and history. Therefore, in this chapter, I shall consider first Sartre's criticisms of Marxism, which reveal to us the values he is

attempting to uphold. This will be followed by a presentation of what Sartre thinks that history is. Then Sartre's idea of the philosophy of history will be presented. Finally, the criticisms of Levi-Strauss and others will be considered.

**Sartre's Criticisms of Marxism.**—The criticisms that Sartre levels against contemporary Marxists reveal those values which he feels must be upheld. Moreover, they show that many of his criticisms of Christianity can also be made of marxism. It raises the question that the faults he finds are indigenous to the human character in our age rather than a specifically Christian character.

The relationship between existentialism and Marxism is one of parasite to its source. Existentialism has become for Sartre, "a parasitic system that lives on the margin of knowledge to which it was first of all opposed and with which today it tries to integrate itself." At first glance it would appear that the claims of Being and Nothingness have been set aside.

Yet the continuity is present from two viewpoints. First, the basic principles of Being and Nothingness are present in the Critique de la Raison dialectique except under different names. Second, the changes which occur between the two works do not constitute a rejection but rather a dialectical

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83 Sartre, Critique de la Raison dialectique, p. 18.
transformation, the earlier position being incorporated into the later synthesis.84 This principle of dialectical development is at the very core of the reasoning of the Critique.

Sartre's first criticism of Marxism is the problem of the a priori. He complains that contemporary Marxists approach history with pre-conceived notions.85 "Concrete or real Marxists ought to deepen real men and not dissolve them in a bath of sulphuric acid."86 The use of the Marxist framework as a set of absolute norms rather than regulative structures is a common fault of contemporary Marxists which Sartre attacks. Belief in God, in a similar manner, can become an absolute and non-falsifiable proposition87 Any such a priori tends to limit man's freedom by fixing him with some form of essence. In this way it strikes at the very heart of dialectical reason.


85 Sartre, Critique de la Raison dialectique, p. 32.

86 Ibid., p. 37.

87 For a discussion of the manner in which such an a priori operates in any discussion of the problem of God, see Antony Flew et al., "Theology and Falsification," in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1965), pp. 96-130. In this discussion R. M. Hare presents the idea of "bliks" with which we constantly approach experience. The tenor of Sartre's criticism appears to be that, although we cannot get along without bliks of one kind or another, they are not to go unquestioned. In so doing, Sartre directs attention toward the fullness of human experience and the possibilities inherent in it but often unexplored because a blick goes unquestioned.
Second, there is not present in Marxism an adequate structure with which to connect the person and the group. Marxism "lacks a hierarchy of mediations to know the process which produces the person and his product at the interior of a class and of a given society at a given historical moment."\(^{88}\) One of the primary aims of the first volume of the *Critique* is to provide those mediating structures between individual, group, and history without having to refer to any transcendental point to found them.

Third, the Marxists tend to speak as if the totality were already achieved. For Sartre, there is no totality, properly speaking, only an on-going process of totalisation. "The totalisation is never finished and the totality exists at best only under the name of a detotalized totality."\(^{89}\) As we shall show below, this position eliminates the need for any type of Grand Totalizer, for a transcendent and all-encompassing God who gives meaning to history.

Fourth, the Marxist analyses tend to confine themselves to a consideration of their objects only in an economic context. However, we must open our horizons and consider objects in the totality of their relations. "This means the milieu of our own life, with its institutions, its monuments, its

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\(^{88}\) *Sartre, Critique de la Raison dialectique*, p. 44.

instruments, cultural infirmities...social temporality and its hodological space, all this must also be the object of our study."\(^{90}\) Behind all this is a demand for, "recognition of the role played by the personal involvement of the evaluating mind."\(^{91}\) It is the special task of existentialism, in Sartre's view, to bring the true role of the individual to light within the context of Marxism.

In addition to these differences, which Sartre brings out explicitly, there are two unacknowledged problems between Sartre and Marxism. First is that the treating of men as things is more than accidental with Marxism. Second, the stance of Sartre on God's impossibility is much more philosophical and perhaps dogmatic in juxtaposition to Marxism's almost tranquil negation, as Jean-Marie le Blond has shown.\(^{92}\)

We have seen Sartre's criticisms of Marxism. They reveal a most interesting attitude which can help us to better understand the values Sartre seeks to preserve. Marxism in

\(^{90}\)Ibid., p. 56.

\(^{91}\)Wilfred Desan, The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre, p. 52.

its own way is almost a religion like Christianity in that it offers to a large part of the world a new way of life. Sartre's criticisms reveal the values he prizes above any religion: the absence of a priori approaches to experience, the attempt to offer an achieved totality to man, the high value of the personal. We shall later ask how Sartre himself has lived up to these values he has placed so high, especially in his rejection of God. But first let us consider Sartre's positive ideas on history.

Sartre's Concept of History.—Man, as project, is the maker of history. We call the project the process in which, "the most rudimentary conduct determines itself at the same time in relation to real and present factors which condition it and to a certain object yet-to-be-realized which it tries to bring about." The structure of the project places man in his situation and yet ascribes real goals, true meaning, to his actions, insofar as this is possible within Sartre's context. Man may be the result of economic forces determining him, but he is not only the result of these forces. In this way the individual's value is put at the very heart of the making of history.

The project is the source of human creativity, for it is the foundation of freedom. "Only the project as mediation

93Sartre, Critique de la Raison dialectique, p. 65.
between two moments of objectivity can make sense out of history, i.e., out of human creativity." The fundamental reality of history, its most basic meaning, is put in the human individual's action in the present moment. The movement of totalisation is grounded in the real and yet human freedom and creativity have the highest place. We then find the dialectic of history, "in the rapport of man with nature, in the conditions of departure, and the relations of men with them." Yet this dialectic is discoverable by someone who has lived it, not through any type of objective inquiry. "The dialectic is discoverable only to an observer situated at the interior, i.e., to an enquirer who lives his inquiry at the same time as a possible contribution to the ideology of his entire epoch and as the particular paraxis of an individual defined by his personal and historical adventure at the heart of a history which conditions him." This results in the individual discovering the dialectic as, "rational transparency insofar as he makes it and as absolute necessity in as much as it escapes his action." In this way Sartre skillfully weaves freedom and necessity together to preserve a proper place to both, just as in Being and Nothingness he reconciled freedom and facticity.

94 Ibid., pp. 67-68.
95 Ibid., p. 68.
96 Ibid., p. 133.
97 Ibid.
The totalisation which results from this activity, "can be only a singular adventure,"\(^{98}\) not a universal. Dialectic is the totalizing activity upon the practico-inert, but it never results in an absolute totality. This practico-inert is akin to the in-itself of *Being and Nothingness*, just as the group is to the for-itself. It is composed of all that which is not the free activity of man as constituting himself. It is not only the objects upon which man must act to achieve his project, but also others insofar as they present a threat to the realization of this project.

The moving force of this dialectic is scarcity, rarity, lack or need. This need is the fundamental condition of man at this time.

Abstractly, rarity can be held as a relation of the individual to the environment. Practically and historically—that is, insofar as we are involved in it—the environment is a practical field already constituted, which refers to each of the collective structures (we shall see later what this signifies) of which the most fundamental is justly rarity as a negative unity of the multiplicity of men (of this concrete multiplicity).\(^{99}\)

Thus rarity is abstractly the relation of the individual to the environment and in the concrete it is one of the structures of the collective which serve as a negative unity to a particular group of men.

\(^{98}\)Ibid., p. 140.

\(^{99}\)Ibid., p. 204.
Translated into any particular situation, "the rarity realizes the passive totality of individuals of a collectivity as the impossibility of coexistence: the group in the nation is defined by its excesses; it is necessary that it reduce itself numerically in order to subsist."¹⁰⁰ Thus rarity becomes the source of conflict at the heart of society and the source of man's inhumanity to man. "The historical process is not comprehended without a permanent element of negativity, at once exterior and interior to man, which is the perpetual possibility in his very existence of being the one who kills the Other or whom the Other kills—in other words, rarity."¹⁰¹ Scarcity or rarity is then the source of intelligibility for the negation of man in man through matter, as man finds himself stolen by the world around him. But it is not in rarity that necessity is discovered.

If rarity defines the situation of man, it is matter (in and through man) that is the motive force in history.

Thus the worked matter, by the contradictions that it carries in itself, becomes for and by men the fundamental motor of History: in it the actions of all are united and given a meaning, that is, they constitute for all the unity of a common future. But at the same time, it escapes from all and shatters the cycle of repetition because this future—always projected within the framework of rarity—is inhuman.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 205.
¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 221.
¹⁰²Ibid., p. 250.
Thus matter serves as a receptacle for the action of individuals and then becomes an anti-environment\textsuperscript{103} which stands over against man and demands change of him.

Thus matter, as worked by human action, becomes the very embodiment of a culture.

It is at the same time the social memory of a collectivity, its transcendent yet interior unity, the totality made of a multiplicity of dispersed activities, the determined menace of the future, the synthetic relation of alterity that rejoins men. It is its own Idea and the negation of the Idea, in all cases the enrichment of all; without it, our thoughts and acts would disappear.\textsuperscript{104}

Thus matter embodies my action for the Other. It even makes me another for myself through the set menace of the future: the threat, for example, of a stockpile of atomic bombs. In this way, "the thing absorbs all human activity and restores it in materializing it."\textsuperscript{105} Thus man's destiny becomes determined, caught by matter and the praxis of the Other.

Scarcity, then, defines man's relation to his environment and matter is shown to be the embodiment of this relation and the foundation of the dialectic. That which allows of analysis as necessary \textit{a priori} are two forms of alienation, alteration and objectification, which we shall now consider.


\textsuperscript{104}Sartre, \textit{Critique}, p. 250. \textsuperscript{105}Ibid., p. 249.
The necessity that Sartre seeks here is not to be confused with an indubitable fact ("un fait indubitable") or with constraint ("la contrainte"). Sartre uses the former term when he refers to the fact that man makes himself dialectically in acting on matter. Necessity is possible only within the context of freedom. "Necessity is given in experience when the worked matter robs us of our action not in as much as it is pure materiality but in as much as it is materialized praxis." Necessity can refer only to the results of my action and can make sense only if I assume the responsibility of my actions.

If I assume the full responsibility for the operation, I shall discover the necessity as ineluctable. In other words, the elementary experience of necessity is that of a retroactive power that corrodes my liberty from the final objectification back to the original decision and which nevertheless is born of it.

Thus the necessity that Sartre seeks, that Kantian condition of possibility, is to be found in founded in the notion of alienation. "The necessity for man is to know himself originally as Other whom he is not and in the dimension of alterity." Thus necessity in found in objectification and alteration.

107 I.bid., p. 280.
108 I.bid., p. 283.
110 I.bid., p. 286.
The manner in which necessity then functions in history begins to emerge. Dialectic, as shown above, is a singular adventure of its object. There cannot be a part of it which belongs to some pre-established heavenly scheme and is imposed upon the singular adventure. "If the dialectic exists, it is because certain regions of the materiality are by structure such that they cannot not exist." These are, as we have seen, objectification and alteration; they belong to the very structure of experience. In alteration one is an Other for the Other, while in objectification one is outside in a Thing. Both of these forms of alienation are given as necessary in experience.

The result of this position of the necessity in the dialectic of history is to free human history from any meaning outside that which is created through praxis or stems from the apodictic structures of alienation.

The dialectical movement is not a powerful unifying force that is revealed as the divine will behind History: it is first of all a result. It is not the dialectic that forces historical man to live out his history across terrible contradictions, but it is men, such as they are, under the empire of rarity and necessity, who are confronted under circumstances that History or economics can enumerate but only dialectic rationality can render intelligible.112

In this manner Sartre is able to introduce the notion of some

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111 Ibid., p. 132.
112 Ibid.
notion of necessity into history without resorting to any form of transcendent "guarantee" of this necessity. Alienation becomes man's proper form of necessity, as inescapable as the very structures of consciousness.

The formal structures which express this movement of history in social terms can be only briefly outlined here. There are two dialectics: "that of the individual praxis, and that of the group as praxis, and the practico-inert field is the anti-dialectic of each, that is, the practico-inert social field is negated by individual and group praxis, and is the negation of both individual action and the praxis of the group."113 Sartre outlines the movement of these dialectics in the movement from mere seriality to groups in fusion in great detail, the elucidation of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. What is important here is the movement of history.

The movement of History itself for Sartre is concerned with the relation between groups and collectives (seriality). "The influence on the group on the collective (the first circularity) and the falling back of the group once more into collective (the second circularity) constitute the movement of History."114 The double circularity from the collective to the group and back into the collective embodies the terminal

113Laing and Cooper, Reason and Violence, p. 126.
114Desan, The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre, p. 201.
movement of the dialectical experience and also by the same fact the very structure of social life. All of history is shown to be a perpetual double movement of regrouping and petrification.\textsuperscript{115}

The Philosophy of History.—We are now in a position to discuss the precise meaning of the philosophy of history for Sartre. The practical understanding of this dialectical movement (\textit{Raison dialectique}) between the collective and the group in the working class is called the working class's "objective spirit."\textsuperscript{116} This belongs to the workers and yet the bourgeois (especially the intellectuals) can discover the objective spirit in the workers and by means of it discover themselves and their class as well. In so doing, in offering a critique of dialectical reason, the intellectual begins a philosophy of history.

Yet a philosophy of history can never be more than the view of a particular age. There is no global, transhistorical view. A philosophy of history must feed off the spirit of its age.

Thus a philosophy remains efficacious so long as the praxis remains living that engendered it, supports it, and is clarified by it.\textsuperscript{...Between the Seventeenth and the Twentieth centuries I see three periods that I would designate by famous names of each: there is the "moment" of Descartes and Locke, that of Kant and Hegel,

\textsuperscript{115}Sartre, \textit{Critique de la Raison dialectique}, p. 645.\textsuperscript{116}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 742.
and then that of Marx. 117
Marx is the philosopher of this age par excellence. A contemporary philosophy of history must offer a critique in Marxist terms of the movement of dialectical reason in the workers.

Objections and Clarification.—Perhaps the most significant treatment of Sartre's position in the Critique to come out of France is that given by Claude Levi-Strauss. His objections to Sartre's positions will be considered here because they shed important light on the problem of necessity and the autonomy of History in Sartre.

The fundamental force of the argument presented by Levi-Strauss is that Sartre's division between analytical and dialectical reason is untenable. "Sometimes he opposes dialectical and analytical reason as truth and error, if not as God and the devil, while at other times these two kinds of reason are complementary, different routes to the same truths." 118 Levi-Strauss maintains that the former conception of the two forms of reason discredits scientific knowledge, while the latter makes the distinction superfluous. Moreover, in the former conception, Levi-Strauss holds, the very idea of a critique of dialectical reason is discredited.

The position of Sartre can and will be explicated in a

117 Ibid., pp. 16, 17.
response to the objections of Levi-Strauss, but first it would be fruitful to probe deeper into the foundation for these objections. The central issue here is, I think, the nature and function of science.

First, Levi-Strauss assigns a different role to dialectical reason than Sartre does. For him, it is an instrument of analytical reason.

In my view dialectical reason is always constitutive: it is the bridge, forever extended and improved, which analytical reason throws out over the abyss; it is unable to see the further shore but it knows that it is there, even should it be constantly receding. The term dialectical reason thus covers the perpetual efforts analytical reason must make to reform itself if it aspires to account for language, society and thought; and the distinction between the two forms of reason in my view rests only on the temporary gap separating analytical reason from the understanding of life. 119

Thus analytical reason is reason in repose, while dialectical reason is nothing more than analytical reason in action striving to transcend itself.

Yet Sartre would seem to maintain a real tension and difference between dialectical and analytical reason, a qualitative difference. Writing of the rapport of material reciprocity between classes in their historical development, Sartre describes the rapport between dialectical and analytical reason in great detail.

119 Ibid., p. 245.
We know that the only intelligibility in their rapport is dialectical. Analytical Reason is, from this point of view, an oppressive praxis existing to dissolve them from the classes, and it has as its inevitable effect to arouse for the oppressed class the dialectic as rationality (on the basis of circumstances to be determined). The apparition of dialectical Reason in the working class as the dissolution of analytical Reason and as the determination of the bourgeois class from its function and its practice (exploitation, oppression) is induced; this is a fact of struggle between classes. But inversely, if the bourgeois class clings theoretically to the analytical Reason, dialectical Reason reappears in it as its proper fascination through its traitors (that is, its intellectuals) and little by little it becomes conscious of itself in the very class that it denies. The permanent but variable contradiction (tension between belief and disbelief) between these two types of rationality in the bourgeois wants to be described for itself in a cultural history.120

This passage speaks, I think, directly to the problem with which Levi-Strauss is ostensibly concerned: the interrelation between dialectical reason and analytical reason. We see here that dialectical and analytical reason are opposed, not complementary aspects of a single reason. Moreover, the priority of dialectical reason in both the workers and the bourgeois, in accordance with the criterion earlier enunciated.

We have seen that dialectical Reason, when one applies it to the sciences of Nature, cannot be "constitutive:" in other words, it is no more than an empty idea of totalisation project beyond by some rigorous and quantative laws that were established by positivist Reason. But in the totalisation where we are and that we are, that dialectical Reason ought to prove its superiority in all cases for the intelligence of historical facts: it ought to dissolve the positivist and analytic interpretation from the heart of its own totalizing activity....If dialectical Reason

120Sartre, Critique de la Raison dialectique, p. 743.
exists, it is necessary that it be defined as the absolute intelligibility of an irreducible innovation in as much as it is an irreducible innovation. 121

It is on that basis that Sartre is able to declare that, "precisely the new comes into the world by man: that is his praxis." 122 To reduce dialectical Reason to a division of analytical Reason would be to deny a true originality to Reason, the irreducible novelty of a situation.

Yet one asks, why does Levi-Strauss deny this originative function to dialectical Reason as its proper domain? The reason, as suggested above, lies in his conception of science. In acknowledging the charge that he is a transcendental materialist, 123 Levi-Strauss makes this explicit.

I am a transcendental materialist because I do not regard dialectical reason as something other than analytical reason, upon which the absolute originality of a human order would be based, but as something additional in analytical reason: the necessary condition for it to venture to undertake the resolution of the human into the non-human. 124

The final phrase of this statement is of especial interest: "the resolution of the human into the non-human." Thus Sartre would hold the reverse, that the fundamental purpose would be the resolution of the non-human into the human. One is not surprised when Levi-Strauss acknowledges the charge of aesthete. 125

121 Ibid., p. 147. 122 Ibid.
125 Sartre, Critique de la Raison dialectique, p. 183.
"So I accept the characterization of aesthete in so far as I believe the ultimate goal of the human sciences to be not to constitute, but to dissolve man." 126 Although he acknowledges that this must not involve the impoverishment of the phenomena and must accept the total overturning of any preconceived idea that one approaches the study with, the priority in Levi-Strauss's framework belongs to analytical or scientific reason.

The role of dialectical reason is to put the human sciences in possession of a reality with which it alone can furnish them, but the properly scientific work consists in decomposing and then recomposing on a different plane. With all due respect to Sartreian phenomenology, we can hope to find in it only a point of departure. 127

Analytical reason appears to Levi-Strauss as the fundamental instrument of human progress.

Perhaps a good part of the confusion and disagreement between Sartre and Levi-Strauss lies in the notion of objectivity. For Levi-Strauss it would appear that science is capable of constituting itself outside the realm of common experience, a not uncommon presupposition. Speaking of Sartre's analysis of the French Revolution, Levi-Strauss says, "This truth is a matter of context, and if we place ourselves outside it—as a man of science is bound to do—what appeared as an experienced truth first becomes confused and finally disappears altogether." 128

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127 Ibid., p. 250.
128 Ibid., p. 254. Italics are mine.
This stands in direct juxtaposition to Sartre's contention that the totalizing activity, "can be only a singular adventure," not a universal activity outside of the dialectic. The presumption of this view of science, that it exists outside of a context of involvement, is one that must be proven. That it can be is highly dubious.

The issue between Sartre and Levi-Strauss is then whether analytical reason can direct dialectical reason. To this Sartre would answer an emphatic, "No!" He would point to history and human experience itself, with its two necessary forms of alienation, as the foundation of his statements. The affirmative answer of Levi-Strauss would maintain that science can prescind from the dialectical structures of experience and go on to constitute itself.

The resolution of the issue, the point at which one must opt for one of the alternatives, appears to lie in the problem of necessity. Sartre offers alienation under the forms of objectivication and alterity as this necessary element, as we

129 Sartre, Critique de la Raison dialectique, p. 140.

130 Much contemporary work has been done showing that science does not, in fact, operate on the basis of what Levi-Strauss would call analytical reason. In particular, see: Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964); Michael Polanyi, The Study of Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Michael Polanyi, "The Republic of Science: Its Political and Economic Theory," a paper delivered at Roosevelt University on January 11, 1982.
have seen above. He has, I think, established it, even in the face of the objections offered by Levi-Strauss.

The question that remains, which will be considered in the next chapter, is what the implications of this standpoint on the meaning of history are for the problem of God and history. It is to this question that I shall now turn.
CHAPTER V

CRITIQUE DE LA RAISON DIALECTIQUE:
GOD AND HISTORY

In his work of history Sartre has done the same thing that we found in *Being and Nothingness*: establish a framework in which the problem of God's existence is irrelevant. There were difficulties with the framework in the earlier work which led us to conclude that Sartre had willingly dismissed the possibility of God's existence rather than conclusively disproved it. He had, however, destroyed several particular notions of God that were apparently a threat to human freedom or dignity. We shall find the same pattern in the *Critique de la Raison dialectique*.

God and the Group.—In the constitution of the group there is no idea of a right from God involved. This is not only so because Sartre formally denies the existence of God, but also because there is no particular group which possesses any type of ontologically permanent status. If it did, it would place ontological limits on man's freedom that Sartre is unwilling to admit. Thus the limitations that the group impose are de facto. They do not rest on any higher type of authority,
"every man is sovereign."^131 Thus Sartre's stance on the legitimacy of the state.

Thus, in a given society, the State is neither legitimate nor illegitimate: it is legitimate in the group since it is produced in a milieu of sworn faith. But this legitimacy is not really such in as much as its action is exercised on the collectives since the Others have sworn nothing either to the groups or to each other.  

The authority structures of the state are de facto and are not in need of any type of divine justification.

**God and Freedom.**—In addition to the removal of any ontological restrictions based on the authority of the group, Sartre holds that man must take over the freedom of God, the freedom to do, to create, both good and evil. This is the freedom of the Cartesian God.

Descartes ascribes total creative freedom—freedom to invent the good and the true—to God, along with His limitless power. And so Sartre says that Descartes has ascribed to God what should properly have been ascribed to man. However, Descartes should not be reproached for this; for his great contribution to the truth was to see that, whether one speaks of God or man, freedom is the "sole foundation of being," and that we must be aware of freedom in being aware that we exist.  

Yet for Sartre, as we have shown above, there can be no freedom if God exists as a limit on this freedom. The meaning of freedom is in the creativity of dialectic which is solely human. There is no need of a God to guarantee this freedom.

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^131 Sartre, Critique, p. 588. Also see Desan, The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre, pp. 176 ff.

^132 Sartre, Critique, p. 609.

Yet it should be noted that here, as in the arguments of Being and Nothingness, Sartre's position is negative: God is not needed to ground human freedom. That certain concepts of God would impinge on human freedom does not mean that no concept of God is compatible.

God and the Grand Totalizer.—The intelligibility of the historical process does not demand the existence of any form of Grand Totalizer as a foundation for its meaning.

If there ought to be a Truth of History (and not some truths—even organized in a system) it is necessary that our experience uncover to us that type of dialectic intelligibility previously described as applied to the human adventure as a whole or, if one prefers, that there is a totalizing temporalization of our practical multiplicity and that it is intelligible, although this totalization does not call for a grand totalizer.134

This truth of history was in fact discovered in its necessary elements under the two forms of alienation that Sartre presented. It is this intelligibility that Sartre claims as the foundation of the meaning of History and it needs no guarantee.

Moreover, there is an implicit argument here. The totality is the concern of the many involved in it. Just as there can be no one outside of the totality in Sartre's ontology, so also in his view of history there can be no unifier, no grand totalizer since there is no final totality to which he could bear witness, only the on-going process.

134Sartre, Critique de la Raison dialectique, pp. 151-52.
God versus Man.—There is a fourth, but not explicit, criticism of speaking of God in relation to history in Sartre. Desan quotes Sartre as remarking to him, "Je ne m'occupe pas de Dieu, je m'occupe de l'homme!" We can all agree with Desan that Sartre has followed out this rule to the letter in his work on history. Perhaps this is his deepest criticism of the meaning of God in human history: ignoring it.

What Sartre has substituted for talk of God is the portrait of struggling man: man, alienated from himself and others, struggling to create meaning in this world of human praxis. This struggle is founded in the two necessary forms of alienation presented in the preceding chapter. It needs no guarantee from without. As long as the alienation remains, it can accept no salvation from outside. Man historically is revealed as condemned to struggle. From this no one, no thing, can save him. Man battles alone, not even with the consolation of seeing the face of his opponent.

This is Sartre's vision of man.

135 Desan, The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre, p. 31.
PART II. WITH WHOM DOES MAN DO BATTLE?
CHAPTER VI

THE NOTION OF THE OTHER

The Fundamental Question

The purpose of this section of the thesis is not to prove Sartre wrong—for perhaps he is right. It is rather to attempt to formulate a personal response to the experience of following Sartre through the battle with God, a battle that each of us must resolve in his own way. For Sartre recognized not only that it was a battle, but the way the battle must be waged. In one of his most powerful and beautiful pieces, his obituary for Andre Gide, Sartre says it better than I ever could.

The problem of God is a human problem which concerns the rapport between men. It is a total problem to which each man brings a solution by his entire life, and the solution which one brings to it reflects the attitude one has chosen toward other men and towards oneself. What Gide gives us that is most precious is his decision to live to the finish the agony and death of God. He could well have done what others did and gamble on his concepts, decide for faith or atheism at the age of twenty and hold to this for his entire life. Instead, he wanted to put his relationship with religion to the text and the living dialectic which led him to his final atheism is a journey
which can be repeated after, but not settled by concepts and notions.136

Each of us, in his own way, must bring his total life to the problem of God. I shall try in this part to live out part of my own battle in relation to Sartre's atheism.

One of the fundamental difficulties for Sartre would seem to be knowing what to do with God. Consider first what Sartre had to live with. The influences outlines in Chapter One of this thesis clearly point to the experience of a world from which both God and real human meaning had apparently fled. A highly technical, bourgeois, indecently optimistic world which imposes its standards upon all those too conditioned to think for themselves—this is what the Frenchman, still caught up in World War II, saw around him. To this is added a particularly French taste for nothingness.

The result can hardly be a traditional theism—at least, a theism that in any way offers a set of answers to the human condition. The fundamental force of Sartre's experience seems to have led him to a view of man as both tragic and free, man as thrown into an absurd world, but yet capable of pulling himself by his own bootstraps. To invoke the providence of God to make sense out of this, to say that God eventually gives meaning to this absurd condition, is only to make it more

absurd, to steal away any human dignity left in the world. God, within Sartre's context, did not make any sense. Man was in a tragic situation, and anything that would say that this was not so was for Sartre only a form of bad faith, an attempt to hide man from himself, to avoid the burden of freedom and forget the presence of tragedy.

As has been shown, Sartre's whole picture of man postulates that man's entire existence is a pursuit of God, that man himself is the desire to be God. Yet it is precisely this which man cannot attain, for he is forever a futile passion. What he must do is, "find himself and persuade himself that nothing can save him from himself, even a viable proof of the existence of God."137 It is in this way that man must turn to himself, not to any false promises of a future salvation.

Yet the more fundamental question begins to emerge from this consideration: Is it possible to maintain a view of man as tragic and free here and now and yet not to rule out a priori the existence of God?

In his discussion of "Doing and Having,"138 Sartre points to a fundamental attitude which is manifest in his approach to the problem of God. Appropriation never fulfills my original

137 Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, p. 95.
138 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, pp. 575-600.
desire to become my own foundation. Of itself appropriation is a futile attempt. The result of the recognition of this futility is the desire to destroy the object. "The recognition that it is impossible to possess an object involves for the for-itself a violent urge to destroy it." \(^{139}\) It would appear that this might well be the attitude which Sartre has assumed toward the problem of God. He has made him into an object, found that it is impossible to possess that object, and decided to destroy that which he cannot possess.

Moreover, the result of the act of destruction offers its own form of satisfaction.

To destroy is to reabsorb into myself; it is to enter along with the being-in-itself of the destroyed object into a relation as profound as that of creation. The flames which burn the farm which I myself have set on fire, gradually effect the fusion of the farm with myself. In annihilating it I am changing it into myself. Suddenly I rediscover the relation of being found in creation, but in reverse; I am the foundation of the barn which is burning; I am this barn since I am destroying its being. Destruction realizes the appropriation perhaps more keenly than creation does, for the object destroyed is no longer there to show itself impenetrable... thus to destroy is to recreate by assuming oneself as solely responsible for the being of what existed for all. \(^{140}\)

Although this passage is not written to explain the foundation for his attitude toward the problem of God, it certainly does offer an interesting line of approach to Sartre's atheism, all

\(^{139}\) Ibid., p. 593.
\(^{140}\) Ibid.
the more revelatory because it was not consciously offered as a foundation. From this it would appear that Sartre might well be engaged in the task of the destruction of God. It bears closer examination.

The first point this passage makes about destruction is that it is an attempt to reabsorb into oneself the object of destruction. And so it is in Sartre's atheism: the denial of God results in man's taking over his functions. It is now man who creates meaning; it is man who must assume the freedom of the Cartesian God. Since the very idea of God is a contradiction, man in destroying God becomes the desire and embodiment of his contradiction.

Moreover, just as I am this barn since I am destroying its being, so also if God is an Other, I too become the Other who is God in that I am even robbing God of his being since I can constitute him with my look. I do not create God, I destroy him in his power by constituting then denying him as the supreme other.

Finally, to destroy God is to recreate him as a private responsibility rather than a public being. After destroying God, I recreate him by recreating myself as the destroyer of his being. It is in this way that Sartre's atheism becomes, as Susan Anima Taubes phrases it, "the religious experience of the death of God." Even the destruction of God defines me in my being.
Yet this leaves several questions unanswered. This passage on destruction opens the way for us to speak of God as that which Sartre attempts to destroy. Let us here bracket the question of the possibility of God's existence, for I think that Sartre's answer to it comes only after—and as part of—his attempt to destroy God. If we do so, we can then advance the hypothesis that God is the Other par excellence—a view that Sartre rejects during his attempt to destroy God, but an alternative perhaps too hastily disposed of.

Sartre does not want to consider God as the supreme Other because it would spell the end to human freedom. As we have shown above, Sartre holds this because such an Other would fix human freedom in its gaze, and it is this freedom which must be maintained at all costs.

Yet in fact could we not consider God to be all that which Sartre describes him as, including the logical impossibility, and still profess a belief in him? If we are to believe his statement in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* cited above, the fundamental point of his atheism is that man find himself and realize that nothing can save him from himself. If this is the case, then I would venture to say that a view of God as the Other would not be out of place, for in Sartre the Other does not prevent one from finding oneself. It is to the consideration of this topic that we shall turn after examining the mode of presence of the Other.
The Presence of the Other

In his concluding remarks in the chapter on "The Existence of Others," Sartre gives us the two forms under which we experience the presence of the Other. The Other's existence is, "experienced with evidence in and through the fact of my objectivity." The Other's existence is found in my experience of my own objectivity and the consequent fact that I am alienated for the Other. I react by grasping the Other as an Object.

In short, the Other can exist for us in two forms: if I experience him with evidence, I fail to know him; if I know him, if I act upon him, I only reach his being-as-object and his probable existence in the midst of the world. No synthesis of the two forms is possible. Thus we have two fundamental ways through which we may come to the Other. In the first, I experience the Other by finding my own objectivity. In this case, I do not know the Other, rather I have an experience of his existence, the evidence of which lies in my own objectivity. In the second case, when I think that I know the Other, but in fact what I know is his being-an-object-for me. This results in my alienation from him because I do not know him as subject, but only as object. His existence, that is, the existence of a particular Other, is given to me only with the probability of his being-as-an-

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141 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 302.
142 Ibid.
object. It is because of this second case, the Other's being-an-object for me, that I can never reach the Other as subject. It is because of this that these two forms of the Other's existence cannot be united.

Let us turn our attention a little more closely to this first case. Sartre uses the phrase, "with evidence." What we experience with evidence is not the concrete presence of a particular Other, but rather the ontological presence of the Other.

What appears to me then about which I can be mistaken is not the Other nor the real, concrete bond between the Other and Me; it is a this which can represent a man-as-object as well as not represent one. What is only probable is the distance and the real proximity of the Other; that is, his character as an object and his belonging to the world which I cause to be revealed are not doubtful inasmuch as I make the Other appear by my very upsurge.143

Thus it is that I can know the Other through a real, concrete bond, but there is no guarantee that the particular Other that I know as an object has any specific verifiable content given in objectivity.

Thus the objectivity that would at first appear to belong to Sartre's representation of the Other disappears.

...this objectivity dissolves in the world as the result of the Other's being "an Other somewhere in the World." The Other-as-object is certain as an appearance correlative with the recovery of my subjectivity, but it is

143Ibid., p. 280.
never certain that the Other is that object.\textsuperscript{144}
The only meaning in reference to the objectivity of the Other
can then be the structure by which the Other is present, not
the particular content of any specific instance. Any certainty
that we may claim about content can never really rise above
the level of probability.\textsuperscript{145}

In regard to the second case, here I have evidence of
the structure of the presence of the Other, but again there
is no specifiable content which is verifiable. that is, which
can be attributed to a subject. The proof for this condition
lies in the Look, not the fact of my "being-looked-at," but
first my looking at an object.

The proof of my condition as man, as an object for all
other living men, as thrown in the arena beneath mil-
lions of looks and escaping myself millions of times—
this proof I realize concretely on the occasion of the
upsurge of an object into my universe if this object
indicates to me that I am probably an object as present
functioning as a differentiated this for a consciousness.
The proof is the ensemble of the phenomenon which we
call the Look.\textsuperscript{146}

Thus the evidence of the Other is given to me in the appear-
ance of an object in my consciousness and upon that follows

\textsuperscript{144}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{145}This matter of objectivity, in reference to both sci-
ence and marxist history, is interestingly if somewhat incon-
clusively debated by Sartre and L. Naville in the "Discussion"
following L'Existnetialisme est un humanisme, esp. pp. 133-41.
Sartre remains true there to his views expressed in Being and
Nothingness and the Critique de la Raison dialectique.

\textsuperscript{146}Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 281.
the probability that this object is constituting me as an object. Thus the experience of the look.

Yet one may ask the grounds for the assertion that an object does indeed come into my world. The answer to this takes us as far back in Sartre's ontological structure as it is possible to go: the initial upsurge of the For-itself. This is simply given.

It is the For-itself which establishes this co-existence of things in the midst of the world by making itself co-present to all. But in the case of the Presence of the For-itself to being-in-itself, there cannot be a third term. No witness—not even God—could establish that presence; even the For-itself can know it only if the presence already is. 147

Thus it is that this presence becomes the very mode of existence of the For-itself, the basic starting point in any definition of it. "...originally the For-itself is presence to being in so far as the For-itself is to itself its own witness of co-existence." 148 Thus the presence of the Other rests upon the very ontological structure of the For-itself.

Moreover, the presence of the Other reveals struggle, which presumes the tragic and free components of man's situation, as a fundamental mode of our being in the world. In addition to the subjective reactions of fear, pride, shame, and the recognition of my slavery (alienation), I experience through

147 Ibid., p. 122.
148 Ibid.
the look of the Other my own precarious situation.

Through the Other's look I live myself as fixed in the midst of the world, as in danger, as irremediable. But I know neither what I am nor what is my place in the world, not what face this world in which I am turns toward the Other. 149

This living in danger is the foundation of struggle. The conditions of this struggle are the freedom and absurdity of my situation. This we find in the look of the Other. 150

We can, then, in summary see that the Other is present to us through the evidence of my own being-an-object and through the particular instances of the Other's being-an-object for me. Although I cannot unite these two modes, I can see that this presence of the Other is ontologically grounded in the very structure of the For-itself. This structure reveals itself to me subjectively in the experience of struggle.

Let us now turn our attention back to the problem of God. Can we speak of him as an Other?

149 Ibid., p. 268.

150 For a good discussion of this, see Francis Jeanson, Le Problème moral et la pensée de Sartre (Paris: Editions du Lyrte, 1947), pp. 135-57.
CHAPTER VII

A HYPOTHESIS: GOD AS OTHER

We are now in a position to ask the question, "What sense does it make to speak of God as the Supreme Other?" From the preceding investigation we can see that any such conception of God as Other would appear to present God as the absolute threat to human freedom, not only because it would do so through some form of Supreme Look, but also because of the threat presented by some forms of traditional religious experiences as Sartre analyzes them, especially Christian death, eternity and original sin. It would appear that, if God were the Supreme Other, he would ontologically prohibit man's freedom and these traditional Christian notions would be an expression of this.

But let us first suspend the ontological arguments against the existence of God, for these have been shown above to apply to a specific idea of God, not the experience of him. We can then test out the hypothesis that God is the Supreme Other. For this discussion, we can begin with a pertinent passage in Sartre's Being and Nothingness where he considers the problem of establishing the presence of God as the infinite subject for whom I exist.
...if I turn away from the look as the occasion of concrete proof and seek to think emptily of the infinite indistinction of the human presence and to unify it under the concept of the infinite series of mystic experiences of the presence of the Other, I obtain the notion of God as the omnipresent, infinite subject for whom I exist. But there two objectivations, the concrete, enumerating objectivication and the unifying, abstract objectivation, both lack proved reality—that is, the prenumerical presence of the Other. 151

Here Sartre himself presents a hypothesis: what sense does it make if we try to conceive God as an omnipresent, infinite subject? The sense, he maintains, is purely abstract and given only through the abstraction, not in concrete experiences.

Let the core of his argument is located in his idea of the Other. Locating it in the context of the previous analysis, we can say that we can have evidence of the Other through the analysis of Being-for-itself followed by the inference that some of the objects of my consciousness are subjects that grasp my own being-an-object just as I grasp theirs. Yet I find that I operate only in the realm of probability when I attempt to make particular, contentful statements about a specific Other.

The step that Sartre takes in the above quotation, where he says that the idea of God as an infinite subject contains two objectivations that lack proved reality, follows logically

151 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 281.
from this treatment of the Other. The first objectivation consists in thinking, "emptily of the infinite indistinction of the human presence." In so doing, we are trying to think first of all of a presence that we cannot know with evidence as an empty content, for all that we can ever know within the framework that Sartre has set up for the Other is a finite series of particular instances, the multiplicity of objects at which I look. As instances, I know them only in the concrete, not in infinite indistinction.

Even if this objectivation were admitted, which it is not, there is still necessary a second objectivation: a unifying and abstract one. This is the idea of the omnipresent, infinite subject for whom I exist, which is reached through abstractly unifying the series of mystic experiences of the presence of the Other. Such an abstraction is not given in experience, that is, it does not have the "givenness" of the upsurge of the For-itself, of the "prenumerical presence of the Other."

Let us stop for a moment, however, and examine this God as Other that Sartre has rejected. It is a God who is an infinite subject, omnipresent and unlimited. It is this God who is rejected—rather than as impossible, as lacking proved reality! Yet what else could the situation be, since in his analysis of the Other Sartre has shown that the particular content of the presence of the Other can never be determined with more than probability and that it can be known as an
object to me only in particular instances. For Sartre, not only can I not know the subject as such, but I cannot ever know the object in general but only through generalizations.

Yet Sartre has not posed the question: If, indeed, I do encounter God, is it as an omnipresent, infinite subject for whom I exist? Is this not rather the description which one attempts to apply reflectively to an experience after the fact and with certain preconceived notions about infinity and omnipresence? Is Sartre not saying here, not that one cannot have an experience of God as the Other, but rather that this experience cannot upon reflection be proven? All he has done here is deny the sense of trying to prove the reality of the experience of God as an Other. The attempt to prove the experience through the idea of an infinite and omnipresent subject is futile within the context of Sartre's idea of the existence of the Other, and thus the demand that it be proven would violate the very canons of proof that Sartre has established.

But what of the experience itself. If we claimed to experience God as the Highest Other, and wished to explicate this experience within the Sartrean framework, what could we say about it? First, that it could not be proven. But, then, neither could the experience of any other particular Other. This, then, would hardly be a valid criticism from Sartre's standpoint.
Second, we could claim that this introduces into our relation with God the same terms as our relation with man: we turn God into an Other and thus an object. To this I would say first of all that this often appears to be the case. God, indeed, is frequently made into an object, for we do not have to grasp him as a subject at all. Moreover, this is the only way in which we can experience an Other according to Sartre. Witness the manner in which Sartre has killed God and even attempted to bury the corpse—the objectified concept.

Furthermore, and this will be developed below, might it be possible that in the experience of the Other there is indeed some experience of the Other as subject, not just as object? Might one go further and say that this experience of the Other as subject is indeed, according to Sartrean norms, lacking in proven reality, just as the experience of God as a subject is also? Could not we go another step and say that the experiences of particular Others as subject and that the lack of proven reality present in the experience of God as subject indeed carries over to the experience of the Other in particular as subject? Thus Sartre's description of our relations with the Other is indeed the human way of so relating to the Other, but there is also an unprovable, faith-demanding manner of relating to the Other which is outside the confines of Sartre's ontology to handle? To the answer to this question one can, it would seem to me, turn only to one's own experience.
Third, the problem of freedom on the human level arises. God, says Sartre, captures my freedom. The freedom of God kills the freedom of man. Yet we can see that several difficulties with this are now beginning to emerge.

The first is that, if we do indeed have an experience of God as the Highest Other, it has not in fact robbed me of my freedom. This is so primarily because we experience God as an Other, even if the Highest Other, and thus I remain as free as I am in my relations with any other particular Other. I can still, in fact, manifest my freedom in the face of God.

Moreover, it is not that I am free to do evil but, when I try to do good, I must sheepishly follow behind the Lord, according to Sartre. Yet this is again not what the situation is in fact. Moral ambiguity still remains in any concrete situation, for we are not here dealing with a world of essences, natural law, or contentful moral imperatives. We are dealing rather with situations where the good is not found but created within them. The situations are human, and so is the creativity demanded by them, as we shall see below.

In regard to Sartre's ideas of original sin, death and the Christian concept of eternity in relation to human freedom, much of what Sartre says seems to be quite valid. As I have tried to show in the discussion of these concepts in Chapter II, Sartre's criticisms are playing a real part in contemporary Christian rethinking of these problems.
As we have seen, then, the manner in which Sartre's idea of the Other is structured opens for us a new way of speaking about the encounter with God, of man's way of being-toward-God that Sartre did not foresee. Let us approach this new alternative in more detail, exploring the meaning of our view of God as the Other in relation to the Sartrean criticisms of theism.

Sartrean Objections to God as the Other.—To have found one way in which the encounter with God may be expressed meaningfully is one thing. Yet two tasks remain before us. First, the theoretical structure must be defended within the Sartrean context, if we are to remain within the cannons of intelligibility chosen at the beginning of this thesis. Second, we must point to a concrete example of this experience. Then we can say not only is it possible that God is encountered in this manner, but here indeed is an example. This second task will be the proper subject of the following chapter. It is to the first question that I shall direct my remarks for the remainder of this chapter.

First, the hypothesis of the encounter with God as the Other is presented to account for a particular field of human experience which is meaningful. The explanation of experience is the basic task of phenomenology. This point, the basic task of phenomenology, is well put by Francis Jeanson, a disciple of Sartre.

*Phenomenology is a method of subjectication*/. It is its way (perhaps the only conceivable
one) to remain objective with regard to human phenomena, in refusing to submit them arbitrarily to the absolute domination of some theory—which would always be, itself, only a human phenomenon among others. When one addresses man, it is proper to allow him as least the power to reply. 152

In testing this hypothesis of God as the Other, it is first of all to this refusal to submit human phenomena to the absolute dominion of an atheistic theory that I appeal. Let us see at least what the phenomenon tells us.

It is for this reason that the interpretation of Manser on Sartre's atheism must ultimately be put aside. He holds that, "too much emphasis has been placed on Sartre's atheism." 153 Although he recognizes that Sartre has said much on the topic, Manser would seem to want to disregard it.

No doubt in his public statements about the subject he has assumed a polemical attitude... I am concerned with his philosophy primarily, and I think it is clear that on the view of consciousness that he is putting forward it does not make sense to talk of a Being who has the set of attributes which are usually attributed to God within the Christian world. 154

Mr. Manser's commendable aim, to be primarily concerned with Sartre's philosophy, is somewhat vitiated by his concrete application. As should be obvious by the length of this paper, Sartre has said much about God. To imply that this is in


154 Ibid.
general outside the realm of philosophy is somewhat presumptive.

The only philosophic content Manser seems to recognize in Sartre's atheism is Sartre's attempt to prove that God is impossible. Sartre attempts to see, "what God's existence would be like." In so doing, "Sartre finds Him impossible because inconceivable, though this does not prevent him from seeing the notion is one which naturally haunts mankind." In effect, Manser is saying that Sartre has rejected a particular notion of God ("a Being who has the set of attributes which are usually attributed to God within the Christian world") on the grounds that it is inconceivable, and that this is all there is to it. By restricting himself to Sartre's philosophy primarily, Manser glides over the question of the truth of Sartre's atheism, apparently not a question to be considered in a philosophic study.

Such an attitude toward the problem does not, it would seem, deserve the title of philosophy. The concern of phenomenology, as evident from Jeanson's statement above, is the human phenomenon. The dimensions of the problem of atheism for Sartre are quite obvious in the statement on Gide quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Within the Sartrean context,

155 Ibid.
156 Ibid., p. 71.
one both can and should consider the human experience as fundamental. It is on this basis that the hypothesis of God as the Other must be tested.

At this point we can then say that a certain concept of God has been rejected by Sartre, a concept of God as representative of the union of being-for-itself and being-in-itself. It has been suggested that there is a validity to these criticisms, but that this is not the only concept of God, and indeed it is possible that we experience God as the Other, even though it may be God as the union of the in-itself and the for-itself that we desire. It has been argued that it is the role of phenomenology to attend to the truth of experience and further investigate the experience of God as Other.

In this regard, Francis Jeanson again has some fruitful suggestions. Acknowledging that not even the religious choice dispenses man from a moral choice, and suggesting that the moral choice has often been left to the theologian, Jeanson says that even belief is always a free choice, the choice of an ideal.

Such is the profound truth hidden behind the scientistic excesses of the sociologists—when they are preoccupied in demonstrating the non-existence of God by the anthropological character of its notion: the God of each man is the God that he has chosen to serve.157

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The encounter with God as the Other would appear to me to be intimately related to this notion that the God of each man represents his ideal. God is encountered in experience not as the union of the for-itself and the in-itself, but rather as the highest challenge, as the highest Other who demands most fully my creative response. Two notions follow immediately from this: the moral value of God and the necessity of faith.

Jeanson brings out this first consequence clearly. After advancing the proposition that all value is a valorization, he applies this to the problem of God.

The perfect is entrusted to us only in refusing it, its only existence for us is that of a being to realize. In the idea of the perfect, there is not the evidence of a Being, but the experience of a vocation. "God exists," is an impossible proposition as a proposition. It would even be so as a theoretical supposition. It has value only under the form of an active position and of a practical valorization.158

Thus we see the structure of the problem of God emerge more clearly: it is not one of propositions or theoretical suppositions, but rather one of the active position one takes in regard to the choice of the ideal one wants to serve.

Yet the question of verification immediately arises. How do I know that such a choice is right. Such assurance is not given as an answer, but is found in self-questioning.

158Ibid., p. 333.
that is never-ending.

But the choice that I will have made, how do I assure myself of its value if I no more interrogate myself on its profound significance—if I refuse to let myself put it in question, if I accept blindly the risk of having chosen, under the pretext of an ardent faith, some abandonment, some renouncement, some anticipated appropriation of my salvation, some immediate justification for no longer discovering myself to be unjustified?159

Within this context, we can say that man encounters God as the Other, not once and for all, but within the framework of experience that continually demands self-questioning. Belief is not a release from struggle.

We can turn back to the epigraphs with which this paper began. Kazantzakis asks the question: With whom do we do battle? He replies, "the fierce summit of man's soul, the summit which we are ceaselessly about to attain and which ceaselessly jumps to its feet and climbs still higher."160

This is indeed the description of the God whom we have been attempting to describe here. He is the series of ideal that man chooses for himself, which call him forth to climb still higher. This is the ideal which, at its highest, calls forth love.

One may say that this view leaves us ultimately with perhaps nothing more than an anthropomorphic concept. Yet upon closer examination, I think that the above discussion

159Ibid., p. 332.
160Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 478.
reveals that, although in many respects the concept is anthropomorphic, it is perhaps more than that. The element of doubt, however, demands that one does not settle into an unexamined complacency, but rather constantly go out to do battle with God. The verification is in the process itself, not in any theoretical proposition. This process is a living, growing faith, the struggle of constantly renewed encounters, not a static assent to a proposition.

The significance of the second epigraph, Sartre's declaration on existentialism and atheism, becomes clearer. The proof for the existence of God is not what is important, rather it is the confrontation of man with himself that is of the first concern. Yet in the idea of God as Other, it is precisely this role which we find that God plays. He calls upon man to find himself and create himself—yet always in situation, in process. The call of God does not inhibit man's freedom, for the task of creative action still rests with him, as does the growth of the ideal.

Even God in his absence emerges as significant within this context. The very discovery of the absence of God puts into question man's ideal, makes him question himself ever more, invites him to purify his own ideals through creative action. Man emerges with all the freedom and tragedy that Sartre feels he must have. All the uncertainty and moral ambiguity remain for the Christian, for his struggle is as
real as that of the atheist. Moreover, his experience—the experience of the theist in the contemporary world—emerges as a real step in man's consciousness of himself. To this we shall return in the final chapter.

Yet there remains one question to be answered. Can we find a concrete example of the treatment of God as a Supreme Other that would admit any specifications that Sartre could establish? It is to this that we now turn our attention.
CHAPTER VIII

THE WORDS: GOD AS THE REFUSED OTHER

Until this point, the argument has concentrated on showing that within the Sartrean framework, it is possible to say that God may be considered as the Other. This has been shown through the analysis of Sartre's statements on the Other as well as on God. Admitting that there are structures within Sartre's framework which allow for this hypothesis of God as the Other, the question now must be raised: Can this actually be shown to be the case for Sartre? For the answer to this, I shall turn to a consideration of The Words.

We find here, in Sartre's autobiography, an account of his rejection of God. Although it is a rejection accomplished by an eleven year old boy, the account of it is given by a mature man who has lived out this rejection for fifty years. What we are considering, then, is not just the action of an eleven year old boy. Rather, it is the reflection of a sixty year old man making sense out of the origins of his atheism.

Speaking of his initial rejection of God, Sartre relates how a composition on the Passion was given only a silver medal at the Dibildos Institute and the subsequent great
disappointment drove him to impiety. Privately, his belief in God had disappeared.

But privately, I ceased to associate with Him. Only once did I have the feeling that He existed. I had been playing with matches and burned a small rug. I was in the process of covering up my crime when suddenly God saw me. I felt His gaze inside my head and on my hands. I whirled about in the bathroom, horribly visible, a live target. Indignation saved me. I flew into a rage against so crude an indiscretion. I blasphemed, I muttered like my grandfather: "God damn it, God damn it, God damn it." He never looked at me again. 161

There are several important points that can be drawn from this passage.

First, the confrontation with God as Other clearly emerges. He is the one that sees Sartre in his guilt, in his effort to cover up. Moreover, his gaze seems not so much to rob Sartre of his freedom, for his freedom is manifest in his rejection of God, as to put him in an indiscrete confrontation with himself.

Second, the confrontation is shockingly personal. It is not the meeting between an abstract concept and absolute freedom, but rather a personal, particular meeting in relation to a specific action of Sartre. God was not encountered as the union of the for-itself and the in-itself. He was present as an Other within a particular situation.

Third, there is an apparent desire to destroy the Other.

which results from this encountered. It is again the kind of reaction that it not directed toward an abstract concept, but toward a concrete encounter with an Other.

Fourth, there is the question of whether the rejection was made in bad faith. A good case could be made for the fact that it was in bad faith, for there is apparently a rejection of one's own actions here. Sartre was faced with not just the fact that God was looking at him, but that he was revealing his situation to him. It makes Sartre visible to himself, "horribly visible, a live target." It did not drive him to further self questioning, but to rage, a form of bad faith. He may have been rejecting self-knowledge at this point, as well as God.

Fifth, and last, the question of truth is not really raised. God could have really been there, but Sartre does not choose to recognize this presence, to press it further. Rather he flies into a rage.

Thus it would appear from this passage, one of the few autobiographical statements on the origins of his atheism, that Sartre not only encountered God as an Other, but that he also rejected him as such. The task of his later life, the long atheism that followed, was to make sense of this rejection, and to destroy that Other that he had rejected so early in his life.
The net result of this encounter is the break-up of a romance that might have been. It is in this way that Sartre summarizes it.

I have just related the story of a missed vocation: I needed God, He was given to me, I received Him without realizing that I was seeking Him. Failing to take root in my heart, He vegitated in me for a while, then He died. Whenever anyone speaks to me about Him today, I say, with the easy amusement of an old beau who meets a former belle: "Fifty years ago, had it not been for that misunderstanding, that mistake, the accident that separated us, there might have been something between us." 162

Thus it would appear that this "misunderstanding" took root, and after that there was little that Sartre could do, despite the freedom he attributes to the individual.

The closing pages of The Words163 give us a final view of the bemused atheist. They are almost impossible to quote from, for they have an elusive quality. The effect lies in the totality, not in any single component. Yet they are too long to quote here. I can only draw out a central theme.

Sartre admits that he has changed, mainly through the discovery of his own ugliness and his apprenticeship to violence. He no longer daily demonstrates that man is impossible and that he is the apostle to the absurd. "For the last ten years or so I've been a man who's been waking up, cured of a

162Ibid., pp. 102-03.
163Ibid., pp. 248-55.
long, bitter-sweet madness, and who can't get over the fact, a man who can't think of his old ways without laughing and who doesn't know what to do with himself. ¹⁶⁴ This awakening has brought about a change in his atheism from the militant stand of *Being and Nothingness* through the Marxism of the *Critique de la Raison dialectique* to the bemused attitude of *The Words*. Where it will go from here is yet to be seen.
CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTUS

Looking back upon what has been done, I can see that it is both a work in itself and a prospectus for future investigation. In this final chapter I should like to state briefly what has been done and what I feel remains.

CONCLUSION

The argument that has been put forth in this thesis is that there is room within the Sartrean framework for a particular approach to God. It has been developed as follows.

First, the historical factors that influenced Sartre's way of looking at the world were investigated. It was seen that they demand a view of God that would not rob man of his freedom and dignity and yet would not deny the real disorder and absurdity of the contemporary world. The values of freedom and tragedy were found to be at the core of Sartre's vision.

After explicating the ontological structures that formed the foundation of Sartre's ontology, a detailed consideration was given to his ontological arguments against the existence of God and his criticisms of traditional religious experiences.
In regard to the former, it was shown that Sartre's disproof applied to a particular notion of God, but did not direct itself to the problem of the experience of God. As to the latter, it was shown that many of Sartre's criticisms of traditional religious experiences carried much meaning and that they are in fact an important part of contemporary Christian discussions of the meaning of these experiences, even if these discussions draw the same ideas from other sources such as psychoanalysis, the history of religions, cultural anthropology, etc.

Then Sartre's views on history were examined closely. It became apparent that he was here defending the same values found in his earlier work, especially man's freedom and tragic situation expressed through the concept of alienation.

The problem of God and History within the Sartrean context was investigated, with the result that we found Sartre more interested in man than the problem of God. The meaning that is found in history was only that created by man. Any necessity inherent in its structures was only the necessity of alterity and objectification. There was no apparent need for God as a Grand Totalizer or source of authority within this framework.

In the second part of this thesis, the question of the meaning of God as Other was raised. After exposing the general notion of the Other in Sartre's framework, the notion
of God as the Other was advanced as a hypothesis. It was then established that there are no theoretical difficulties in this hypothesis within the framework that Sartre's ontology allows. At that point it was possible to say that God could be encountered as the Other. It still had not been established that God had been encountered in such a way and that this encounter would be admissable to Sartre.

The autobiographical remarks on his encounter with God in The Words gave us the final link in the argument. Here Sartre relates his encounter with God, and his description is of an encounter with an Other. It is this Other that Sartre then rejects and attempts to destroy in his anger. That this might well be an act of bad faith was presented.

I conclude, then, that there is room for speaking meaningfully of an encounter with God within the Sartrean framework. It not only does not violate the canons of intelligibility that Sartre has established, but it offers new directions to us in speaking about the problem of God.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are difficulties in talking about God within this context. The security of a pre-established notion of God is removed. The meaning of his existence is put into question. These are difficulties and dangers that are not to be lightly dismissed.
Yet these difficulties can only be weighed opposite another set of problems. These other difficulties can be summed up under the heading of the contemporary unbelief. The traditional concepts, whatever the reason, do not appear to be doing the job. The question to be considered carefully is not whether they are wrong, but whether they are the most adequate expressions possible. The answer to this lies in the future.

The more fundamental problem with admitting many of the objections that Sartre raises to fundamental religious experiences is the question whether he may not indeed be right. The accusation that religion often serves as a form of bad faith, allowing man to avoid confrontation with himself, is not to be taken lightly. Yet it is to be remembered that atheism can allow the same phenomenon.

To speak of God in terms of encounter, in terms of the way in which he actually enters our lives, demands many radical changes in our way of thinking. The attempts of Dewart and Novak and many others have been steps in this direction. Yet the work may hardly have begun.

The direction to be followed is difficult to determine. Yet I think that a fruitful approach may lie in the notion of God found in Whitehead. Some remarks have been made above to indicate my reasons for this. Let it suffice to say here that the way appears to be open. Only the years will tell what it
Finally, I would like to say that I think that struggle lies very close to the core of human meaning. Yet it is not just something that philosophy talks about after the fact. It is something in which philosophy itself is engaged. It is in advancing the struggle that the value of philosophy lies. It is my hope that this thesis has contributed in some small degree to that advancement which is our common concern.
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