

# COMMUNITY: THE DIALECTIC OF ABANDONMENT AND HOPE IN LIGHT OF SARTRE'S LAST WORDS

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In his responses to American critics as reported in the volume edited by Paul Schilpp, Sartre claimed that his philosophy did not become properly dialectical until after the publication of *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>1</sup> I was originally skeptical of Sartre's self-reporting on this point, having felt, like Robert Cummings, whose critical essay was the basis of this exchange, that there is a heavily dialectical overlay to Sartre's earlier thought: after all, the categories of "being" and "nothing" are the first two categories of Hegel's *Logic*. However, after reading the posthumously-published *Cahiers Pour une Morale*, portions especially of the early parts of which document Sartre's close reading of and coming to grips with Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, I began to understand better what Sartre meant about his having become a dialectical reasoner only later on. For what he began above all to come to grips with during the period when he was writing the *Cahiers* was an idea that is almost entirely absent from his earlier work but that becomes a central underlying concern in the two volumes of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and throughout much of the rest of his later writings: the idea of progress, or sequence, through oppositions, as distinguished from the idea of mere opposition or conflict as such. And it is this additional idea that is needed to make one a truly dialectical thinker.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1981), p. 9.

But it is important to clarify what is to be understood by "progress" in this context. I have proposed as a synonym "sequence," which, despite its appalling colorlessness, avoids the obvious implication of the word "progress" that there is a definite, predetermined goal towards which the succession of conflicts and their resolutions is directed. I shall be assuming throughout this presentation, and shall be providing plenty of illustrations of this assumption as we proceed, that Sartre's lifelong commitment to the reality of human freedom simply precluded him from ever adhering to the notion of progress in the strong sense, progress towards a predetermined goal, that I have just defined. But of course the temptation to discern progressive patterns in human history always remains, especially since the apparent empirical evidence for it in the domains of science and technology, if nowhere else, appears so persuasive. One has only to consider, for instance, the excitement that pervades Lyotard's account of the high-technological aspects of the "postmodern condition," despite all postmodernist suspicions of totalizing thinking and even of the very idea of dialectics. Sartre was not immune to this general temptation, reinforced as it was in his case by his interactions with Marxist ideologists who had distilled—somewhat illicitly, I would argue, but that would be another story—a prophecy of progress in the strong sense from the writings of their master thinker.

Profoundly dialectical thinking, even when it is undertaken by a believer in progress, is never unshaded, never ebulliently optimistic. Consider, for a moment, the dialectic of Hegel, both in the *Philosophy of History* and in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The former, as everyone who has read it must recognize, is deeply pervaded with tragedy throughout. As he says at one point in it:

When we look at this display of passions, and the consequences of their violence; the Unreason which is associated, not only with them, but even . . . with good designs and righteous aims, when we see the evil, the vice, the ruin that has befallen the most flourishing kingdoms which the mind of men ever created; we can scarce avoid being filled with sorrow at this universal taint of corruption. . . . History [is] the slaughter-bench to which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been brought as victims.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The *Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), pp. 20-21.

In other words, the progressive realization of God in the world, the theodicy that Hegel considers his entire *Philosophy of History* to be, does not come cheap!

But the deep-structure message of the *Phenomenology*, despite its "happy ending" in the brief, almost perfunctory discussion of the standpoint of Absolute Knowledge, is no different from this. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, it will be recalled, Hegel characterizes the sequence of intellectual stances that he is about to describe as a "highway of despair," and the text proper bears this out. If the famous treatment of the "Unhappy Consciousness," which attempts to recreate a medieval mind torn between unattainable Transcendence and an earthy corporeality in which it is thoroughly enmeshed even while trying to disavow it, occurs early in the narrative of spirit, some of the later dialectical interactions in that same narrative appear to come even closer to bringing Spirit to utter shipwreck; only "we," Hegel's philosophical observers, can clearly see that they do not do so. For example, what can be more desolate, more despairing, more abandoned, than the last words pronounced by the founder of the Christian tradition, himself regarded as incarnation of divine Spirit and hence reconciliation of the Transcendent and the earthly, on the occasion that that tradition commemorates on this very day, Good Friday: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" ("My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?")? It is this scene that inspired, as Hegel notes in his usual highly allusive and inexplicit fashion, Martin Luther's profoundly religious hymn, "Gott Ist Tot," which is equally susceptible to the profoundly post-religious interpretation that was given to it by Nietzsche. But notice that this moment of utter abandonment comes almost at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Indeed, as we move onward through this very quirky but nevertheless enormously thought-provoking work of Hegel's, the self-destructive excesses of which Spirit is seen to be capable do not at all diminish in their intensity. The outcome of the dialectical opposition between the spirit of Enlightenment and the spirit of religious insight or "superstition," for example, is the espousal of Absolute Freedom and the ensuing reign of Terror. Finally, we reach the phase known as "the Beautiful Soul," in which evil, as it were, attains new heights or depths. The Beautiful Soul is the epitome of hypocrisy, preening itself on its supposed superior virtuousness while refusing forgiveness to the erstwhile transgressor who asks for it. The resolution of this dialectical impasse comes,

dramatically, through the initiation of the spirit of *community*, which puts an end to the selfish, individualistic isolatedness of the Beautiful Soul:

Through this relinquishment of separate selfhood, knowledge which . . . is in a state of diremption, returns into the unity of the self. The reconciling affirmation, the 'yes', with which both egos desist from their existence in opposition, . . . is God appearing in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear from the context that the community so formed is to be identified as the *religious* community.

There follows, in what I regard as something of an anti-climax, the whole section on "Religion" in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the last except for the concluding treatment of Absolute Knowledge that I have already mentioned. Religion itself is shown to have various instantiations, beginning with the most crudely sensual, and Hegel's main message here concerns the need for religion, in the interest of spiritual progress, to overcome picture thinking, including even the picture thinking that places supreme importance in such material objects of veneration as a cross or in particular human incarnations of the religious spirit, such as Jesus Christ. It is a little hard to say, therefore, whether for Hegel it is more important, as the *sequence* of the discussion seems to imply, to view the rise of the phenomenon of community as pointing to the importance of religion in the broadest sense, or rather to view religious phenomena as demonstrating that the human spirit can be fully realized only in community. I myself am inclined to the latter interpretation.

Let me now try to relate this back, or rather forward, to Sartre. In an overview of his philosophy up to that time that was published in 1967, I subtitled my presentation of his ultimate stance in the world "La Belle Ame."<sup>4</sup> This was not meant maliciously nor with the intention of identifying his philosophy with the precise details of Hegel's very intricate and difficult account, and it was in part just a way of completing my presentation of that philosophy as incorporating, through a fascinating logic of reversal, the four

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<sup>3</sup>*The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J. Baillie (London: George Allen and Unwin, 2nd ed., 1931), p. 679.

<sup>4</sup>"Jean-Paul Sartre: Man, Freedom, and Praxis," in George A. Schrader, Jr., ed., *Existential Philosophers: Kierkegaard to Merleau-Ponty* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), pp. 320 ff.

so-called "transcendentals" of medieval, *philosophia perennis*, thinking: truth, unity, goodness, and beauty. But one point that I did intend to bring out was the sense in which Sartre, even in the Marxist and therefore socially-oriented era into which he had fully entered by that time, was always insistent on retaining his individuality and independence, as evidenced by his refusal to enter the Communist Party. At the same time, he had by this point fully understood the centrality and, when they are directed towards the promotion of freedom, positive *value* of human communities; this is, in a sense, what Volume One of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is about. He had also, by this point, achieved the *self*-understanding of his earlier stance that he conveys to us in the dramatic language of the conclusion of *Words*:

Writing was for a long time [a way of] asking Death and Religion, under a mask, to wrench my life away from chance. I was of the Church. Militant, I wanted to save myself by works. . . .<sup>5</sup>

It is not at all far-fetched, it seems to me, to see this text at once as the self-description of an erstwhile beautiful soul, self-conceited and intransigent in its sense of perfect negation, and as a request for forgiveness from the larger human community of readers and admirers. Nor is the reference to an *ersatz* or substitute religiosity in the earlier writings a mere literary flourish or accident: nausea and anguish, it could be said, had been among the dominant pictures—sense-references to help convey the intellectual content—of that earlier thought, and by the time he wrote *Words* Sartre had begun to question those metaphors. In other words, to set aside the Hegelian references now, Sartre had good reason to ask just what nausea and anguish had to do with socialism, the name that marked the imagined community of free individuals, purged of relationships of dominance and subordination, that was his future project and that of like-minded individuals in a world whose historical totalization was becoming increasingly One even as differences multiplied and intensified.

This turn of thought, in contrast to the romantic embracing of a kind of resolute abandonment that characterizes, by his own admission, the early Sartre, sounds remarkably hopeful; it sounds like a commitment to the possibility, if not to the inevitability, of progress. There are moments in various post-*Being and*

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<sup>5</sup>*Les Mots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 209, my translation.

*Nothingness* Sartrean texts that suggest an access, if not an excess, of hope as completely replacing the skeptical doubt of the old days. For example, in the *Cahiers*, where at one point he relegates the accounts of concrete relations with others to the description of a special case, the hell of the passions, as distinguished from the whole range of relationships, there are a few passages in which Sartre appears to treat a radical, even apocalyptic, top-to-bottom conversion of human society as a really conceivable possibility. There are also passages in which he takes very seriously the idea of progress. But the final upshot of these passages, at least as I distill them, is on the side of suspiciousness and skepticism rather than on that of unbridled hopefulness about progress; my favorite is the following:

The past becomes progressive through the hypothesis-project of present Progress, which is a decision to orient History. . . . It is quite obvious that we can't think that we are *happier* than the Romans (for the unhappy population is more numerous in absolute numbers), nor that our state is *more just*, but only that we are in a better position (even if more unhappy) to realize a happy and just society.<sup>6</sup>

What we are establishing here in Sartre's post—*Being and Nothingness* thinking, obviously, is a truly dialectical approach to the idea of progress, one that seems to me more accurately to capture the complexity of historical reality than either the early Sartre's and many others' love affair with anguish, or the hyper-optimism of the advocates of hope *malgré tout*, or the fashionable postmodernist rejection of the possibility of speaking in *any* sense of history as totalization. (I am assuming some familiarity with the philosophically crucial distinction, made by Sartre in the *Critique*, between "totalization" and "totality," a distinction that those who like to dismiss virtually every important modern theorist as a totalizing thinker find it convenient to overlook.) This dialectic is reflected very well in the pages of the two volumes of the *Critique*, which combine such texts as the progress-suffused paragraph at the end of the first volume concerning the importance of proceeding from the synchronic analysis of social ensembles previously undertaken to the diachronic one of History as totalization to follow, on the one hand, and the depressing discussion of the ultimately fatal "deviation," as Sartre calls it, of historical socialism in the

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<sup>6</sup>*Cahiers pour une morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 48, my translation.

U.S.S.R. that eventually comes to dominate Volume Two, on the other hand. This dialectic is also well captured, I think in the work of Ronald Aronson: in his book, *The Dialectics of Disaster*, sub-titled "A Preface to Hope," and in his ongoing manuscripts, of which I have been privileged to read portions, on progress. I would like to urge that a hearty dose of Sartre's unblinking realism and honesty in approaching the study of society and history, together with some of the conceptual and methodological machinery from the *Critique* and elsewhere in his writings, is needed now more than ever as we try to understand the rapidly unfolding events in Eastern Europe and the (former) U.S.S.R., events that mark the apparent severing of all vestiges of connection between the ideal of socialism as community and the historic "Socialisme Qui Venait du Froid," as Sartre called it, Soviet socialism.

But there is a potentially serious problem of interpretation for Sartre scholarship when it comes to assessing his ultimate position with respect to both the appropriate intensity of historical hope and, especially, the nature of human community. For we have the curious document to which the editors of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, in which it was first published, gave the title, "L' Espoir, maintenant," and which the editors of *Dissent*, in which a translation appeared, for their own purposes called "The Last Words of Jean-Paul Sartre"—a document that has seemed to some to constitute a repudiation, for better or worse, of his earlier thinking about these topics. It is to a consideration of some aspects of this document that I now wish to turn. (The original occasion of these reflections was the tenth anniversary, within roughly a month, of the original printing of these words and the actual tenth anniversary of Sartre's death. Since it was Good Friday, it was also an occasion for those with an interest, whether out of commitment or out of historical, literary, or philosophical curiosity, in the Christian narrative to recall those other so-called last words, previously cited, which in many senses turned out not to be that narrative's last words at all.)

Let me briefly recall some of the circumstances of this document. It is a transcription of three short snatches of taped dialogue between Sartre and Benny Lévy, the aide and collaborator of Sartre's last years, whose own itinerary had already progressed from "Maoist" student activist to politico-religious thinker with a revived interest in his Jewish roots, and who has since become a leader in a religious commune in Strasbourg. At the beginning of the dialogue, Sartre (a) insists, against Lévy's attempted reconstruction of his past philosophy as one

of despair, that he has always thought of hope as a fundamental aspect of being human; (b) attributes his early talk of despair and *Angst* to the fashion of the day rather than to personal experience; and (c) asserts that he has been seeking to ground a social morality that would escape the impasse described in *Being and Nothingness* as the impossible desire to be God, itself based in the Christian tradition's definition of God as *causa sui*, and acknowledges that this and no other is the tradition out of which he has come and within and against which he must therefore react. Later, he expresses gratitude over the enrichment that his discussions about Judaism with Lévy have brought to his own thinking, in particular aspects of Jewish Messianism that he says non-Jews like himself would like to appropriate for other purposes, notably in support of a certain idea of revolution.

I do not wish here to dwell so much on the exact historical circumstances of this dialogue and especially of the publication, with which others are at any rate no doubt more familiar than I. As for the dialogue's construction, there is a clear sense in which, I think, it is Lévy more than Sartre who calls the tune; and it is Lévy who decides on the topics to be discussed, who usually (but not always) determines the thought transitions, and who on occasion preemptorily asserts the opposite of what Sartre has just maintained, before moving on. Lévy's tone is frequently very accusatory towards Sartre: he sees the latter, with whose works he has a considerable familiarity, as having been fundamentally wrong on a number of points, and he tries to get Sartre to admit this. Sartre, on the other hand, is generally compliant and conciliatory, apparently trying to concede as much as he honestly thinks he can, and on some points making no comment when this would have been in order, while still maintaining throughout that there are issues on which they simply disagree.

Does this contrast in stances, between an intellectually aggressive young discussion leader and a physically very feeble old man who is constantly being called upon either to renounce, modify, or defend previous positions, amount to a malicious manipulation, as some have claimed? Not necessarily. Sartre accepted this situation and, as we know, insisted on publication. He enjoyed at least some of the verbal sparring, appreciated what Lévy had given him by way of, for example, a greatly heightened understanding of Judaism, and made it clear that he regarded himself as an old man only because that was the way others labeled him. In their dialogues, Lévy did not treat him with the deference and special respect usually accorded to much older persons. But Sartre,



egalitarian to the end, seems not to have demanded or even wished such deference and respect, at least in this one relationship. While one might personally disapprove of Lévy's manner of dealing with Sartre in this dialogue, the charge of malicious manipulation seems fully sustainable only if we assume that Sartre was really "not in his right mind" during the recording periods. I admit to having once thought this myself, to having reacted with the standard, morally unacceptable ageist language of "senility" when I undertook a first, superficial reading of the dialogue. But reconsideration has long since convinced me that, while Sartre was at times slower here to challenge his interlocutor's assertions than he would once have been and hence makes errors of judgment in letting certain claims pass with which he is clearly uncomfortable, on the whole he was at that time still fully capable of serious reflective thinking even if many of his other faculties had deserted him, and hence merits being taken seriously in what he has to say.

At the close of the preliminary discussion of hope that I have already recounted, Sartre says that at any rate since 1945 he has believed in hope, although there is admittedly a deep contradiction between this belief and his recognition of the inevitability of failure in human affairs. Soon thereafter, he acknowledges that he has not always said quite what he has meant to say, particularly in support of the now-foundering Left, and that this points to the failure in his own work. On the other hand, he has always retained an admittedly naive belief in progress, so that he continues to anticipate some perhaps distant future time when what he has written will be able to be seen to fall into place within a larger general historical pattern. Finally, at the very end of the dialogue, he expresses discouragement over the dominance of Rightist tendencies everywhere—in the Soviet Union, in the United States, and even in Sweden, where the conservative party had just won an election—, over wars (especially that in Afghanistan) and rumors of war, and generally over the ugliness of "the world of today, which is horrible." Since 1975, before which he had still been a "sixty-eighter," imbued with the ideas of that banner year of hope, he says that he has been strongly tempted for the second time in his life to fall into deep despair. (The first time was the period of the German Occupation.) This would be easy to do, he adds, for someone who will die in five or ten years at most. However, he still wishes to construct a basis for hope after all, since "hope has always been one of the dominant forces of revolutions

and of insurrections," and to explain "how I still feel hope as my conception of the future."<sup>7</sup>

Before turning at last to the question of the nature of community in this dialogue and, by extension, in Sartre's thought as a whole, I would like to add a few final comments on this pervasive theme of hope. Hope is first and foremost, it seems to me, a mental attitude and not a philosophical position. It can enter into philosophical discourse in various ways, such as, as we have seen, through theology or alternatively through a secular "theology" that asserts some historical inevitability or other. But since it is above all an *attitude* that we are considering, my philosophical instincts are not at all disturbed by Sartre's obvious wavering, even within this one dialogue, over whether to be optimistic or pessimistic, for this is normal in a very thoughtful person and does not represent a genuine philosophical contradiction. Nor is there anything in Sartre's remarks about hope that should be found shocking by his public, at least by those who are familiar with the outlines of the long evolution of his political theory, despite Lévy's suggestion at the outset that it *is* astonishing. After all, as some of Sartre's own comments in the dialogue remind us, it would have made no sense for someone with an outlook of complete hopelessness or despair to have taken many of the political stances that he did over the years.

It is with respect to the domain of the nature of human relationships and community, rather than to such sensational but essentially unserious and ultimately unanswerable questions as those of whether Sartre ever personally experienced deep *Angst* and just how optimistic or pessimistic he "really" was in the final analysis, that this dialogue has the most interest for understanding his theoretical outlook at the end of his life. Already in an interview conducted by Michel Sicard in 1978, Sartre had claimed that the new ethical theory that he was in the process of working out with Lévy differed from his earlier ones at an ontological level (to the point that it "requires regarding the ontology that I have developed up to now as incomplete and false"), in that he now accepted the reality of an interpenetration of consciousnesses, in fact of a human community that is more integrated than the terminology of a confrontation of

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<sup>7</sup>*Le Nouvel Observateur* no. 802, le 24 mars 1980, p. 139, my translation.

"consciousnesses" implies.<sup>8</sup> He had contrasted this conception of what might be called internal relations among human beings with a more external perspective that he had attributed to Marx. But he had then proceeded to turn the interview in a new direction by observing that the matter was quite complicated and that it would need to be explained at great length. Here, in his dialogue with Lévy, he picks up on the latter's suggestion, made in response to Sartre's lament that the trouble with the vanishing political Left is that it never clearly spelled out its fundamental principles, that there is just such a principle, a broadly applicable one, to be found in the history of Leftist movements, namely, *fraternity*. Sartre then proceeds to reflect on just what fraternity might mean. These sparse reflections, interconnected as they are with other remarks in the dialogue concerning the importance of ethics, constitute, in my view, its core philosophical interest.

In "running with" Lévy's suggestion about fraternity, Sartre exhibits such enthusiasm that Lévy eventually feels obliged to caution him against falling into myth, comparable to Socrates' "Founding Myth" about the three types of citizens, all offspring of the common mother, earth, in the *Republic*. For Sartre goes on to say that Marx's theory of superstructures completely falsified the nature of human society by overlooking the importance of fraternity, that he himself had begun to work on the notion of fraternity in the *Critique* but had not gotten very far with it, that in fact fraternity is the first human relationship, and that he likes to think of every man he sees as sharing with him a common mother. Although he cautions that this principle of "fraternity" should not be taken in a biologically literal way, he nevertheless allows his excitement about it to lead him into exceedingly mythical formulations, including one about totemism that envisages all "brothers" as having a single, non-individualized mother who "can as well be a totemic bird." (The reader is reminded of Aristotle's letter from exile near the end of his life, where he says that he has begun again to read and to be attracted by the ancient myths.) But with the help of Lévy's sharp questioning concerning the literal, non-mythical, point of all this, Sartre finally arrives at a formulation of fraternity as a future possible experience, the realization of "the end that all men have in themselves, Man." And this can only be achieved in a regime beyond scarcity, through Ethics.

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<sup>8</sup>In *Obliques*, special issue, 1979, p. 15. Portions of the remainder of the present paper are to be found on pp. 206-208 of my book, *Sartre's Political Theory* (Bloomington; Indiana U. P., 1991)

This entire, frustratingly brief text can be regarded as a kind of Rorschach Test concerning Sartre's final philosophical position. Read in one way, especially in conjunction with the lines from the Sicard interview that I have cited, it amounts to a thoroughgoing repudiation of past positions. Read in another way, in light of its circumstances, it should be seen as an instance, if not of manipulation, then at least of "*complaisance*" towards Lévy on Sartre's part: that is, of giving Lévy the answers, at least within certain bounds of credibility, that Sartre anticipates (not always accurately) that Lévy will want to hear. Read in yet another way, it is merely a final (not logically or conceptually final, but temporally so) expression of a long, continuous evolution in Sartre's thinking about the "we," about community, that began with the widespread dissatisfaction, evinced by critics and even by de Beauvoir (in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*) and eventually felt by Sartre himself as shown in the *Cahiers* and in the *Critique*, over the excessively individualistic description of almost exclusively conflictual human relationships to be found in *Being and Nothingness*. (The passage in the *Cahiers* in which the earlier work is said to have confined itself to the hell of the passions, and hence not to have dealt with all possible human relations, must be recalled here.) Read in yet a fourth way, in light of Sartre's "laid-back" attitude concerning his own work and his insouciance, especially in later years, about criteria of consistency from one work to another, it is an affair of no great moment, to which some critics have, for the most diverse reasons, attached much more importance than it deserves.

There is surely some merit to all of these interpretations and no doubt to others that I have not articulated here. In "strictly ontological terms"—if, as I rather doubt, this phrase has an univocal meaning—, there is obviously a sharp contrast between the confrontational "*êtres-pour-autrui*" of *Being and Nothingness* and the interpenetrating fraternal consciousnesses of the Sicard interview and the Lévy dialogue. But on the other hand, the exploration of the phenomenon of the group in fusion in the *Critique* should be seen precisely as Sartre's careful, detailed way of bridging the gulf between these two maps of human community. Both, after all, are based in the lived experiences of virtually everyone. I still do not agree with Ronald Aronson's contention in his otherwise almost impeccable book, *Sartre's Second Critique*, to the effect that Sartre's account of society remains too individualistic and needs to be supplemented with an ontological notion that he calls "society," nor do I think that any or all of these late hints about community amount to an admission by Sartre that

Heidegger was right after all about the *Mitsein* as ontologically prior, or that human community has reality in any normatively interesting sense before human beings engage in hard struggle to create it.

By the same token, there is an apparent absolute opposition between the earlier Sartrean proposition that conflict is at the heart of human relationships and his statement in this dialogue that fraternity is or at least should be a first principle; but in fact, to the sensitive, dialectical mind, they may both be equally true simultaneously, as the old line of Latin verse, "*Odi et amo*," reminds us with classic simplicity. I am more disturbed by the unfortunate *continuity* between the male biases of Sartre's writings and his use of the term, "fraternity," in the dialogue than I am by any alleged rupture here, which to me would be very disturbing if it were true, with his earlier insistence on the centrality of conflict and potential conflict in human relationships as they have existed up to now.

In the remark that I have cited from the dialogue concerning "the end that all men have in themselves, Man," Sartre does indeed seem to be embracing an idealistic conception of a universal human nature, as well as an implicit Aristotelian philosophy of potentiality and final causality, that is strongly at odds with much of his intellectual evolution, culminating in his emphasis on the "singular universal" in *The Family Idiot*, as I see it. But the rapid-fire structure of the relatively brief interchange permits him no time to reflect upon this formulation or to qualify it, and so it would be a mistake to take it too seriously as a full-blown new worldview in Sartre's intellectual life. Indeed, within the terms of the dialogue as we have it, this remark has the force of above all expressing in the simplest, most straightforward language a deep Sartrean longing that can be discerned throughout his career, in isolated but significant earlier passages—in references, for example, to a "radical conversion" within a sociohistorical context in the *Cahiers*, to the possibility of "group *praxis* forever" in the *Critique*, and, less rhetorically, to our emerging "One World" in several writings.

It was, in fact, the longing, the conviction expressed in these "Last Words" of his, that somehow all men are at least in principle "brothers," or rather siblings, despite the overwhelming predominance of conflict in this world of scarcity, that underlay Sartre's commitment over three and a half decades to the political ideals of socialism and freedom. "Socialism" is, as far as I can ascertain, never mentioned as such, and freedom as a philosophical concept

receives no special emphasis, in the dialogue with Lévy, and yet these ideas inform the entire discussion. Even Lévy, who has obviously come to see great value in more traditional institutions, such as elections and religion, that meant little or nothing positive to him at an earlier time in his life, continues to feel a solidarity of opposition to the triumphant political Right, which he characterizes as "*salope*" (filthy) when in the dialogue Sartre refers to it as "miserable." For Sartre at the end of his life, then, the goal of a *community* of free human beings, freely entered into and maintained, remains *the* goal, even though the means for reaching it appear less clear than ever and even the very names with which it was once labeled, including now even that of "socialism," have come under suspicion by virtue of our shared historical experiences.

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