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N81
No. 509

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SARTRE'S FICTION

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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December, 1975

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Duran, Richard G., From Theory to Practice: An Analytical Study of Sartre's Fiction, Master of Arts (French), December, 1975, 99 pp., bibliography, 33 titles.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the major aspects of the theoretical structure of Sartrian existentialism and to examine the portrayal of these in Sartre's fiction. The theoretical investigation is based largely on Sartre's L'Être et le néant and L'Existentialisme est un humanisme. The fictional works are La Nausée, the trilogy Les Chemins de la liberté, and Le Mur.

The study is prefaced by an examination of the term existentialism and a brief historical comparison of essentialist and existentialist philosophy. The aspects of Sartrian existentialism discussed are: the question of the existence of God and its importance to Sartre's philosophy; the premise of existence preceding essence; the fact of contingency on absurdity and its attendant nausea; the doctrines of freedom and responsibility; the dilemma of choice, anguish, and commitment; and the themes of authenticity, transcendence, and death.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Jean-Paul Sartre, philosopher, dramatist, novelist, and political activist, has been one of the most influential minds of the western world in the twentieth century. Not only is he largely responsible for affecting or at least popularizing a certain mode of thought and conduct, but, in so doing, he has drawn on his diffuse literary talents and has excelled in several genres. Perhaps best known for his connection with the existentialist movement which gained popularity in the post-World War II years, Sartre is the author of the philosophical foundation of existentialism L'Être et le néant, as well as several works of fiction, numerous dramas, and various other literary pieces which portray existentialist thought. In the opinion of Henri Peyre, scholar, writer, critic, and educator,

> There are possibly a few, a very few novelists, dramatists, essayists, or moralists in the present century who, in their chosen medium, may have proved greater than Sartre as creator of a world or practitioners of a technique. But neither Europe nor America has had, between 1935 and 1950, a man of letters of such towering universality, a thinker of such honesty and courage, a writer whose influence has affected philosophy, ethics, politics, and three or four literary genres as deeply as Jean-Paul Sartre. His position in the middle of our century is only comparable to that of Diderot two hundred years ago; his literary kingship today is not unlike that of Voltaire

> in his day; but he has been a more finished artist, in fiction and in the drama, than the former, and a more profound, if less deceptively clear, thinker than the latter.[1]

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre was born in Paris on June 21, 1905. His mother was Anne-Marie Schweitzer, a cousin of the renowned Albert Schweitzer, and his father was Marie-Jean Baptiste Sartre, who died when Jean-Paul was two years old. Sartre's early education consisted of a series of ill-paid tutors and occasional periods at various private academies. It was not until the age of ten that Jean-Paul was enrolled in the junior lycée Henri IV. In 1924, Sartre entered the École Normale Supérieure. In 1928, he failed at the Agrégation de Philosophie, but he was received first the next year, followed by Simone de Beauvoir, who was to begin a life-long relationship with Sartre. In 1931, he began a five year tenure at a lycée in Le Hâvre, and in 1936, he was moved to the lycée Pasteur in Paris.

Sartre's literary career began in 1938 with the publication of his first novel La Nausée, which was immediately successful and which made its author famous in France. During the war, Sartre was active in the resistance movement, publishing frequent articles in the resistance press. In May, 1944, Huis Clos was first staged in Paris and its production established Sartre as a major dramatist.

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[1] Henri Peyre, Jean-Paul Sartre (New York, 1968), p. 3.

Ever since the war, Sartre has maintained a vacillating relationship with communism. He has also been engaged in the fight against colonialism, criticizing the French presence in Indochina and Algeria in the fifties and United States policy in Vietnam during the sixties. In 1964, Sartre became the first author to refuse the Nobel Prize for Literature. Of late, Sartre has apparently turned away from literature and has produced only numerous articles of a political nature. Currently, Sartre is living in Paris and resides in a modest apartment in Montparnasse.[2]

Most of the tenets of existentialism are found in Sartre's voluminous work, L'Être et le néant and in L'Existentialisme est un humanisme. Briefly stated, L'Être et le néant, published in 1943, attempts to examine the relationship between what Sartre terms the pour-soi and the en-soi. The pour-soi corresponds to human consciousness and the en-soi refers to things-in-themselves, or the objects outside of human consciousness. L'Existentialisme est un humanisme is the text of a lecture given by Sartre to a capacity audience at the Club Maintenant in 1945. Not at all as philosophically rigid as L'Être et le néant, it is an explanation of existentialism in layman's terms. Both

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[2]For a brief sketch of Sartre's life and works, refer to André Maurois' From Proust to Camus (New York, 1966), pp. 299-324. For a more detailed biography, see Philip Thody's Sartre, A Biographical Introduction (New York, 1971).

of these works will be used extensively for purposes of reference in the course of this study.

Existentialism, however, is such a subjective, living philosophy that any attempt to define it results in its objectification, and it becomes essentialist. This is one of the major criticisms of Sartre's theoretical works, particularly L'Être et le néant. Nicholas Berdyaev has said that "it is in subjectivity that one may know existence, not in objectivity. In my opinion, the central idea has vanished in the ontology of Heidegger and Sartre."[3] Therefore, as Simone de Beauvoir says, ". . . si la description de l'essence relève de la philosophie proprement dite, seul le roman permettra d'évoquer dans sa réalité complète, singulière, temporelle, le jaillissement originel de l'existence."[4]

Thus, Sartre's fiction is indeed paramount to his philosophy. The two, in fact, are inseparable. There can hardly be a discussion of Sartre's philosophy without reference to his literature; and, similarly, one can hardly examine Sartre's literature without some understanding of his philosophy. The purpose of this study, then, is to ascertain the major aspects of the theoretical structure of

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[3] Nicholas Berdyaev, as found in Jean Wahl, A Short History of Existentialism, translated by Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron (New York, 1949), p. 31.

[4] Simone de Beauvoir, as found in Paul Foulquié, L'Existentialisme (Paris, 1961), p. 36.

Sartrian existentialism, and to examine the portrayal of these in Sartre's fiction. The works of fiction are: La Nausée, published in 1938; the trilogy Les Chemins de la liberté, which consists of L'Âge de raison, published in 1945, Le Sursis, also published in 1945, and La Mort dans l'âme, published in 1949; and Le Mur, a collection of the short stories, "Le Mur," "La Chambre," "Érostrate," "Intimité," and "L'Enfance d'un Chef," which was published in 1939.

Certainly, no attempt will be made to consider every possible aspect of existentialism, and no effort will be made to investigate every possible instance of existentialist implication in Sartre's fiction. Only the major tenets of existentialism as portrayed in the fiction, and only the most relevant and most important illustrations in the fiction, will be considered. These principles will be presented in a logical sequential order, as outlined later in this study. Should this method seem at times constrained, it is due to the fact that existentialism is admittedly at times illogical and irrational.

In light of the importance of Sartre's philosophy in any discussion of his fiction, an intense effort will be made to assure a proper understanding of existentialism. Instead of discussing it in a void, it has been deemed propitious, even necessary, to study existentialism against some sort of background. In this case, a brief philosophical and

historical comparison of existentialist philosophy to its antipode in essentialist philosophy would be in order. Such a comparison, especially for the individual with a traditional philosophical background, will render existentialism and its basic doctrines studied here appreciably more comprehensible and more distinct.

The paucity of citations of secondary sources is due to the fact that extensive research has uncovered nothing which treats the subject in a similar fashion, and only a few works which have anything original or perspicacious to contribute to the subject at all. For example, Robert G. Olson's excellent An Introduction to Existentialism treats existentialism in a thematic manner but is concerned with the philosophy in general, and references to Sartre's fiction are very limited. Paul Foulquié's L'Existentialisme from the University of France's Que Sais-je? series is perhaps one of the best introductions to existentialism, especially for one somewhat familiar with the basic aspects of traditional philosophy. Yet, again, the references to Sartre's fiction are minimal. Indeed, the major portion of material relevant to the topic is composed of either works concerning Sartre's philosophy with specific but all-too-infrequent references to the literature, or either works treating the literature with only occasional, unspecific references to the philosophy. Some other examples of the former are

Alfred Stern's Sartre, His Philosophy and Existential Psychoanalysis, Réné Lafarge's Sartre: His Philosophy, and Hazel E. Barnes' Sartre. Some examples of the latter are Leo Pollman's Sartre and Camus, Literature of Existence, and Iris Murdoch's Sartre, Romantic Rationalist. Other works whose contributions were minimal because of the divergent purposes of the authors include Germaine Brée's Camus and Sartre, Crisis and Commitment, Benjamin Suhl's Jean-Paul Sartre, The Philosopher as a Literary Critic, and George Howard Bauer's Sartre and the Artist.

Perhaps two of the best secondary sources found for the purpose of the topic are Joseph H. McMahon's Humans Being, The World of Jean-Paul Sartre and Philip Thody's Jean-Paul Sartre, A Literary and Political Study. McMahon's approach is philosophical but he makes ample references to the literature. Thody's is primarily a literary approach, but one marked with a considerable understanding of the philosophy.

In conclusion, it should be understood that these works are judged only in reference to the specific purpose of this study. No judgment is presumed on whether those works fulfill the intentions set by their authors.

CHAPTER II

ESSENTIALISM VERSUS EXISTENTIALISM

In order to begin a study of the significance of the word existentialism, one might begin with an examination of the word itself. Following Paul Foulquié's[1] approach in his excellent introduction to the subject, the neologism existentialism is derived from the substantive existence, from which comes the adjective existential, to which is added the suffix ism. This suffix generally indicates a certain priority. The word socialism denotes a program that theoretically promotes the interests of society before those of the individual. Individualism, on the other hand, establishes the individual as the center of concern. Existentialism would thus appear to indicate the primacy or priority of existence.

The question then naturally arises, "The primacy or priority of existence in relation to what?" The answer is, "In relation to essence," for, ontologically speaking, essence and existence are the two metaphysical principles which compose Being.

Essence indicates what a thing is. This thing I am sitting on is a chair. Its essence is chairness. It shares

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[1]Foulquié, op. cit., p. 5.

this essence of chair-ness with all other individual chairs. The characteristics which all these chairs have in common constitute the essence of chair. In the same manner, what I am is a man. I have a human essence. The human essence is composed of the characteristics which all men have. The concept of essence, however, is relegated to the realm of idea. I can entertain the concept of a chair, or imagine something with all the characteristics of chair-ness without there being before me an actual chair. I can conceive of a unicorn or of a similar fantastic creature without the fact of existence of such a creature.

The fact of existence which gives reality to essence is the second metaphysical principle. Existence indicates that this chair is, and it is the chair in which I am sitting at this moment in this room. The chair is an existing fact. Existence thus no longer refers to a universal concept but to a particular existent. If essence answers the question what I am, existence answers the question who I am, referring to a particular existing individual.

Therefore, existentialist philosophy is one whose premise is the primacy of existence over essence. But in order to obtain a more lucid understanding of such a philosophy, it may be propitious to first examine its direct opposite--essentialist philosophy--and arrive at a precise distinction between the two.

Traditional philosophy is for the most part essentialist. The most essential of essentialist philosophies and thus the very antipode of existential thought is found in the doctrine of Plato. For Plato, it was the realm of essences or Ideas, which was the true reality. The non-material Ideas or forms were the perfect, changeless, and eternal patterns of which existents were only poor copies. Thus the individual existent horse trotting across a field is only an imitation of the idea Horse, which exists in the realm of Ideas and which was the perfect model of horse-ness. Existence, then, according to Plato, is a vitiation of the perfect Idea. In the famous allegory of the cave, human beings in the world are compared to prisoners chained in a cave who can see only the shadows of the real objects which are behind them.[2]

Aristotle, to a certain extent, pragmatized his mentor's idealism. He rejected Plato's realm of ideas or essences which existed apart from individual phenomena. Aristotle determined the true reality as "the essence which unfolds in the phenomena themselves."[3] Yet Aristotle retains the idea of essence as being the object of knowledge. To know is to have knowledge of the universal and necessary and not of the particular existents. Science is confined to the realm of

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[2]Plato, The Republic, translated by Allan Bloom (New York, 1968), pp. 193-196.

[3]Wilhelm Windelband, A History of Philosophy, translated by James H. Tufts (New York, 1895), p. 139.

essences, for the aim of science is to make known not individuals, but species--mice, violets, man. It is not concerned with a particular mouse, a specific violet, or a certain person. Aristotle's objective was not to attain contemplation of Plato's separately existing realm of essences, but rather to observe existing beings and detach the essential characteristics in order to gain knowledge. Morality is therefore based on a science of man thus derived. Man's conduct is judged according to a certain essence which has been determined to be the human essence, or human nature.[4]

In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas adopted Aristotelian philosophy and attempted to make it consistent with Christian belief. Traditional Church philosophy has been thus, for the most part, essentialist. Thomist reasoning follows Aristotelian lines in conceiving of a human essence abstracted from individual existents. But, in addition, this essence is found in a perfect manner in the mind of God. It is this more consummate state which is the basis of Christian morality. In creating man, God has imposed on him a moral obligation of conforming to his nature, of living according to reason, thereby participating in divine reason itself, in order to realize the human ideal conceived by God.[5] Therefore most philosophers who admit the idea of God as creator

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[4] Foulquié, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

[5] Ibid., p. 22.

are essentialists. For, following Sartre's reasoning, if one accepts the fact that the will follows understanding and that God knows what He is creating when He is creating it, it follows that God creates man according to a certain conceived notion or essence. Or, as Sartre has stated, "Ainsi, l'homme individuel réalise un certain concept qui est dans l'entendement divin."[6]

Yet even in the enlightened age of the eighteenth century, with the suppression of the notion of a Deity, the French thinkers known as the philosophes retained the idea that essence precedes existence. Sartre finds this tendency almost everywhere--with Diderot, with Voltaire, and even later with Kant[7]--for the concept remains that man possesses a certain human nature and this human nature is found in all men. Each individual is thus only a particular example of a universal concept--mankind. The image of man as a rational being was idolized by the philosophes. The idea of progress was predominant, for one believed that man's reason would eventually solve all of mankind's problems. The wants and desires of the individual were sacrificed on behalf of the whole of humanity. Satisfaction for the individual humanitarian lay in his identification with the whole of mankind

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[6] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme (Paris, 1960), p. 20.

[7] Ibid.

and in the hope of happiness for future generations. Perhaps the best example of such faith in mankind is the Marquis de Condorcet's Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain which he wrote while in hiding during the French Revolution.

In the philosophy of Hegel which achieved renown in the nineteenth century, the status of the individual is reduced almost to a state of neglect. In Hegel's system, the notion of progress of the human spirit remains central. The process is termed dialectical and is accomplished by opposition of thesis and antithesis, and eventual resolution in a synthesis. The synthesis in turn becomes a thesis which generates an antithesis. The individual existent is only a very minor participant in Hegel's scheme. The individual's thoughts and feelings have meaning only in that these are moments that take place in a history and a state at a specific epoch in the evolution of an Absolute Spirit. This Absolute Spirit is "not only the sum of all these evolutionary moments, but also the principle which 'mediates' or reconciles the conflict of life as expressed in theses and antitheses."[8] Anything that happens in our inner life must be understood in terms of the totality which is the human species and finally the totality which is the Absolute Spirit.[9]

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[8] Robert G. Olson, An Introduction to Existentialism (New York, 1962), p. 12.

[9] Wahl, op. cit., p. 3.

The foregoing shows only some of the most dominant figures and some of the most important ideas in opposition to existentialism; they afford an appropriate backdrop for a discussion of existentialism.

In dealing with existentialism in general, a problem arises in regard to coherence and organization, for there are often vast differences and apparent contradictions among even the most representative existentialist thinkers. A short history of the development of existentialism leading up to its elaboration by Sartre will be outlined. Since the interest here is literature and not philosophy as such, the discussion will remain doctrinal and will not delve deeply into ontology or some of the more philosophically technical aspects of existentialism.

The realm of existentialist thought must be divided into two general categories: the theistic and the atheistic. The major figures among the first group include the nineteenth-century Danish writer Søren Kierkegaard; two French Roman Catholics, Gabriel Marcel and Jacques Maritain; two Protestant theologians, Paul Tillich and Nicholas Berdyaev; and Martin Buber, a contemporary Jewish theologian. Of the atheistic group, the chief spokesmen are Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Interestingly, other major philosophical and literary figures who some claim have been associated with the movement because

of existentialist attitudes and themes prominent in their writings include such seemingly diverse thinkers as Blaise Pascal; Friedrich Nietzsche; the Spanish thinker, Miguel de Unamuno; the French philosopher, Henri Bergson; the German philosophers, Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers; and the Russian writers, Tolstoy and Dostoievsky. Some of these existentialist figures will be mentioned in the course of this study in relation to the ideas germaine to their own thought.

It is with Søren Kierkegaard that the history of modern existentialism may be properly said to begin. His thinking was a reaction to the idealism of Hegel which, during his time, had become the accepted philosophy of the German and Scandinavian countries. Kierkegaard proposed a mode of reflection closer to the individual's concrete existence in opposition to the eternal Absolute Spirit of Hegel, whom he contemptuously referred to as "Herr Professor."

> How can it help to explain to a man how the eternal truth is to be understood eternally, when the supposed user of the explanation is prevented from so understanding it through being an existing individual, and merely becomes fantastic when he imagines himself to be sub specie aeternitatis? What such a man needs instead is precisely an explanation of how the eternal truth is to be understood in determinations of time by one, who as existing, is himself in time, which even the worshipped Herr Professor concedes, if not always at least once a quarter when he draws his salary.[10]

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[10] Søren Kierkegaard, as found in Olson, op. cit., p. 43.

Opposing the eternal objective truth of Hegel, Kierkegaard advanced the idea that truth lay in subjectivity. He believed that true existence was achieved by intensity of feeling. The existent individual, according to Kierkegaard, is he who has an infinite interest in himself and his destiny, who always feels himself to be in Becoming with a task before him, who is impassioned with a passionate thought. Choice and decision have a prominent role in the life of the existent individual.[11] Each decision becomes a risk for the existent, for his is filled with an anguish of uncertainty. Sartre explains:

> C'est cette angoisse que Kierkegaard appelait l'angoisse d'Abraham. Vous connaissez l'histoire: Un Ange a ordonné à Abraham de sacrifier son fils: tout va bien si c'est vraiment un ange qui est venu et qui a dit: tu es Abraham, tu sacrifieras ton fils. Mais chacun peut se demander, d'abord est-ce que c'est bien un ange, et est-ce que je suis bien Abraham? Qu'est-ce qui me le prouve?[12]

In the matter of Christianity, in which he was so deeply concerned, and to which he applied his philosophy, the choice was one between God or man. Yet the idea of an omnipotent God-made-man was absurd to human reason. Kierkegaard's final decision was a passionate leap of faith as the only way to Christ.[13]

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[11] Wahl, op. cit., pp. 3-5.

[12] Sartre, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

[13] Vincent Martin, O.P., Existentialism (Washington, D.C., 1962), pp. 11-14.

Existentialism was rediscovered at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Spanish thinker Miguel de Unamuno, who wrote that

> philosophy is a human product of each product of each philosopher, and each philosopher is a man of flesh and blood like himself. And, whatever he may do, he does not philosophize with his reason alone, but with his will, his feelings, with his flesh and blood, with his whole soul and his whole body. It is the man who philosophizes.[14]

In A Short History of Existentialism, however, the renowned existentialist Jean Wahl states that the second major event after Kierkegaard in the history of the philosophy of existence occurred when the two German philosophers Jaspers and Heidegger adopted the ideas of Kierkegaard and translated them into more intellectual terms. The philosophy of Jaspers may be considered as a sort of secularization and generalization of the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Professor Wahl explains further in the following passage:

> In the philosophy of Jaspers we are no longer referred to Jesus, but rather, to a background of our existence of which we may glimpse only scattered regions. Humanity has multiple activities, and each of us has multiple possibilities. But we develop one, we sacrifice another, and we never attain to that Absolute which Hegel prided himself on being able to reach through the unwinding of the Idea to the necessary conclusion. . . . But in the awareness of defeat, which comes most vividly to us in situations in which we are strained to the utmost, we fully realize ourselves.[15]

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[14]Miguel de Unamuno as found in Alfred Stern, Sartre, His Philosophy and Existential Psychoanalysis (New York, 1967), p. 6.

[15]Wahl, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

Martin Heidegger was more concerned with the ancient problem of Being. He was a student of the German-Jewish philosopher Edmund Husserl. Husserl was the founder of phenomenology, whose primary objective was to suspend any unconscious assumptions or unexamined preconceptions in order to investigate directly phenomena as consciously experienced. Heidegger claims to use a phenomenological method inspired by his teacher although, in actuality, he "adopts only certain general features of Husserl's procedure rather than its detailed technique."[16]

In his ontological search for what Being is, Heidegger found his answer in phenomena as opposed to Kant's noumena or beings in themselves. It is man who is responsible for the existence of phenomena; but, reciprocally, it is the existence of this phenomena which constitutes the being, man. Following Husserl's reasoning, consciousness is consciousness of something. It is dependent on the apprehension of something. The being of consciousness is composed of nothing other than the phenomena which owes it its existence. Therefore, for Heidegger, it is only man who truly exists. Animals live, minerals subsist, tools remain at one's disposal, but these do not exist. However, in order that one might exist it is necessary to rise above the world of mere things. This is

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[16] Ronald Grimsley, Existentialist Thought (Cardiff, Wales, 1967), p. 40.

the world of *das Man*, or everyman, the equivalent of Nietzsche's Herd[17] in which, through laziness or social pressure, for example, one carries on a meaningless day-to-day existence. One achieves a genuine awareness of existence through certain intense experiences such as anguish. The experience of anguish, according to Heidegger, reveals man's true state in the world as one of forlornness and abandonment, with no reason or basis for his being. This existence is a limited one, for man's existence is *being for death*. Since, for Heidegger, God does not exist, transcendence is limited towards the world, towards the future, and towards other people.[18]

Like Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel centered his philosophy on the problems of Being. He believed that human existence derives its deepest meaning from the subjective affirmation of Being through fidelity. Fidelity is the means by which a person makes his life meaningful as he expresses his faith in whatever is other than himself. Fidelity is manifested in friendship and in love, where it is able to overcome the objectivity of the other in order to achieve a level of intimacy. In another sense, also, a person affirms being through fidelity by responding to the demands of the world

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[17] Refer to Charles Hirschfeld, editor, *The Modern World*, Vol. III of *Classics of Western Thought*, 3 vols. (New York, 1964), p. 405.

[18] Wahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-17.

and by assuming responsibilities.[19] Marcel found a spirit similar to his philosophy in the Christian faith, and he became a convert to the Roman Catholic Church at the age of twenty-nine. Marcel's existentialism, compared to that of Heidegger, was basically an optimistic philosophy.

Paul Foulquié attributes the pessimism of Heidegger's philosophy to the situation in Germany during the years following the defeat of 1918 which was the epoch in which Heidegger elaborated on his philosophy.[20] Similar origins, similar circumstances, and similar results would soon re-occur. In 1933 a young Frenchman arrived in Berlin to begin a year's study concentrating on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. His name was Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre was to return to France a consummate phenomenologist. He was to incorporate much of the philosophy into L'Être et le néant which he subtitled Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique. This work remains the philosophical basis for existentialist thought.

The major tenets of Sartre's existentialism which will be discussed relate to the primacy of existence; contingency, absurdity and nausea; freedom and responsibility; choice, anguish and commitment; authenticity, transcendence and death.

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[19] Samuel Enoch Stumpf, Socrates to Sartre, A History of Philosophy (New York, 1966), pp. 464-465.

[20] Op. cit., p. 51.

CHAPTER III

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND THE PRIMACY OF EXISTENCE

In Les Mots, the autobiography of his early childhood published in 1964, Sartre describes how one morning in 1917 he was waiting for some friends who were to accompany him to school. They happened to be late, and, not having anything else to distract him, the young Sartre decided to think of the Almighty, who promptly disappears:

> A l'instant il dégringola dans l'azur et disparut sans donner d'explication: il n'existe pas, me dis-je avec un étonnement de politesse et je crus l'affaire reglée.[1]

Whether or not such an event actually took place is not important. What is important is the resulting conclusion, for, although existentialism has already been defined as a philosophy whose premise is that existence precedes essence, Sartre evidently has posited a prior given, his own fundamental axiom. And that is that God does not exist, for, as he has stated,

> L'existentialisme n'est pas autre chose qu'un effort pour tirer toutes les conséquences d'une position athée cohérente.[2]

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[1] Sartre, Les Mots (Paris, 1964), p. 210.

[2] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, p. 94.

André Maurois, the noted historian, believes that Sartre's atheism is explained at least partially by the Catholic and Protestant schism in the Schweitzer family in which Sartre was raised.[3] For, Charles, Jean-Paul's grandfather, was Protestant and Louise, his grandmother, was Catholic. Philip Thody, in his biography on Sartre, also notes that Sartre himself pointed out how the conflict of religion in the Schweitzer household had already made belief impossible for him before he reached the age of eleven.[4] In Les Mots, however, Sartre says that it was not so much the conflict of dogmas, but the religious indifference of his grandparents that led him to disbelief.[5] Sartre went through a period of the usual childlike eagerness for faith, but then he lost all belief and never attempted to retrieve it. As he himself explains it,

> j'avais besoin de Dieu, on me le donna, je le reçus sans comprendre que je le cherchais. Faute de prendre racine en mon coeur, il a végété en moi quelque temps, puis il est mort. Aujourd'hui quand on me parle de Lui, je dis avec l'amusement sans regret d'un vieux beau qui rencontre une ancienne belle: "Il y a cinquante ans, sans ce malentendu, sans cette méprise, sans l'accident qui nous sépara, il aurait pu y avoir quelque chose entre nous."
> Il n'y eut rien.[6]

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[3] Maurois, op. cit., p. 301.

[4] Thody, Sartre, A Biographical Introduction, p. 8.

[5] Ibid., p. 89.

[6] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, p. 95.

Sartre's atheism, therefore, is not the type of atheism that is concerned with demonstrating that God does not exist.[7] The non-existence of God is simply taken as an *a priori* fact. It is from this position that Sartre argues for the primacy of existence over essence. There is no previously conceived human essence or nature because there is no God to conceive of it.[8]

In Sartre's fiction, God is either taken for granted as not existing, or else God exists merely for the purpose of fulfilling the role of a scapegoat.

As Mathieu Delarue, the principal character throughout *Les Chemins de la liberté*, prepares to leave for war, he meditates, as Pascal did, on the insignificance of man in the midst of the universe. This vast planet in a space of a hundred million dimensions cannot even be imagined by mere three-dimensional beings. But it is only by the individual free consciousness that the world can be perceived. The coming conflict thus can be understood only in a personal, individualized way. Even though the war is the totality of all Mathieu's thoughts, of all of Hitler's words, of all the acts of his revolutionary friend Gomez, there is no one there to comprehend this totality. Only God could comprehend

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[7] Sartre, *Les Mots*, p. 89.

[8] Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 22.

its universal import. The war exists only for God. But as Mathieu knows, "Dieu n'existe pas."[9]

If God is acknowledged, He is used only as an excuse or a scapegoat. Daniel, another major character in Les Chemins de la liberté, is a homosexual who is engaged in a constant effort to escape responsibility for what he is. It is finally God whom he is able to blame for his state. As Daniel says, "Me voilà, me voilà comme tu m'as fait, lâche, creux, pédéraste."[10] Thus he escapes all guilt, all fault, all responsibility, for he is only what God has made him to be; and he cannot change. "Me voilà, me voilà comme tu m'as fait, triste et lâche, irrémédiable,"[11] he exclaims.

In a similar situation, Lucien, the protagonist in "L'Enfance d'un chef," after having experienced his first homosexual encounter, places the responsibility for his conversion on God. "Mon Dieu," he pleads, "faites que cette histoire soit enterrée, vous ne pouvez pas vouloir que je devienne pédéraste!"[12]

And, in La Mort dans l'Âme, the defeat of France in World War II is seen as a punishment from God on a

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[9]Sartre, Le Sursis, Vol. II of Les Chemins de la liberté, 3 vols. (Paris, 1972), pp. 317-318.

[10]Ibid., p. 193.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Sartre, "L'Enfance d'un chef," Le Mur (Paris, 1939), p. 212.

materialistic society. A chaplain preaches this "good news" to some French prisoners of war--"good news" because it alleviates them of direct responsibility for the defeat. "'Ainsi mes frères,'" he declares, "'abandonnons l'idée que notre défaite est le fruit du hasard, mes frères: châtiment; voilà la bonne nouvelle que je vous apporte aujourd'hui.'"[13]

Sartre's atheism is fundamental to his existentialism. Even though he may claim that the existence of God would change nothing,[14] it would certainly mean at least that the primacy of existence over essence would have to be taken as an *a priori* axiom.

Unlike Daniel, Sartre was not able to find his scapegoat, his prefabricated essence, which would have freed him from responsibility. As he says in *Les Mots*,

> Dieu m'aurait tiré de peine: j'aurais été chef-d'oeuvre signé, assuré de tenir ma partie dans le concert universel, j'aurais attendu patiemment qu'Il me révélât ses desseins et ma nécessité.[15]

But Sartre did not believe, and he compelled himself to carry out the full consequences of his position. As he says,

> "L'athéisme est une enterprise cruelle et de longue haleine: je crois l'avoir menée jusqu'au bout."[16]

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[13]Sartre, *La Mort dans l'âme*, Vol. III of *Les Chemins de la liberté*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1949), p. 305.

[14]Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 95.

[15]Sartre, *Les Mots*, p. 84.

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 212.

In the opening pages of Sartre's La Nausée, a professor of history, who has come to the port city of Bouville to do research on a book he is writing, recounts an event which has made a deep impression on him, but which he cannot explain. One day, he happens to be watching some youngsters skipping stones into the sea. But then, when he attempts to imitate them, he cannot. He stops, lets the stone fall from his hand and he leaves.[17]

Thus begins the personal account of Antoine Roquentin's discovery of existence. He slowly begins to apprehend the true, brute existence of objects: a glass of beer in a tavern, mauve suspenders on a blue cotton shirt, even the seat on a bus. He presses his hand on the seat but he quickly takes it away. "Ça existe," he thinks to himself.[18]

Roquentin becomes aware of not only the existence of objects but also of his own existence. The book Roquentin is writing concerns M. de Rollebon, an obscure eighteenth-century figure supposed to have played a role in a plot to assassinate Peter I. Roquentin begins to realize that he can never really capture the existence of the historical figure Rollebon, for he is now a defunct object in whom Roquentin had been vainly searching for a meaning, or an excuse, for his own existence:

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[17] Sartre, La Nausée (Paris, 1938), p. 10.

[18] Ibid., p. 177.

> M. de Rollebon représente, à l'heure qu'il est, la seule justification de mon existence.[19]

George Howard Bauer speaks of Roquentin's project to write the book as an attempt to transform his life into the eternal hardness of a work of art.[20] In any case, Roquentin eventually realizes his own self-deception, for he speaks now in the imperfect tense:

> M. de Rollebon était mon associé: il avait besoin de moi pour être et j'avais besoin de lui pour ne pas sentir mon être. . . . Il se tenait en face de moi et s'était emparé de ma vie pour me <u>représenter</u> la sienne. Je ne m'apercevais plus que j'existais, je n'existais plus en moi, mais en lui.[21]

Roquentin has only to admit this to himself, and a new awareness fills him. "L'existence, libérée, dégagée, reflue sur moi. J'existe," he tells himself.[22]

It is only after a long series of bizarre experiences and conjurations that Roquentin realizes the significance of his discovery. The revelation occurs as he is sitting on a bench in the <u>Jardin public</u> contemplating the trunk of a chestnut tree. Roquentin forgets that it is a trunk. He forgets its verbal classification as a trunk, for the significance of mere words begins to fade. Roquentin begins

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[19] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 103.

[20] George Howard Bauer, <u>Sartre and the Artist</u> (Chicago, 1969), p. 19.

[21] Sartre, <u>La Nausée</u>, p. 140.

[22] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 141.

to realize that words are only conventions invented by man. What strikes Roquentin is the black knotty mass of trunk, the fact of the trunk in its brute existence, not as a symbolic essence. This is what precipitates what Roquentin calls his illumination. He understands now that he never before knew the meaning of existence. He was like everyone else who, walking along the seashore, would say that the sea is green, that the white spot in the distance is a seagull. But he never felt that these things existed, that the seagull was an actual existent seagull. Rather than thinking of being as existence, Roquentin would think of being as a belonging. For example, he would tell himself that the sea belonged to the class of green objects or that green was one of the qualities of the sea. Even when Roquentin looked at objects, he was never really aware of their existence. They only appeared as a kind of decor. If he took them in his hand, objects were only considered as tools to be used. If anyone had asked Roquentin what existence was, he would have answered in perfectly good faith that existence was nothing, just something added to objects without changing their nature. But now in the Jardin public, Roquentin finds that existence has unmasked itself, and it is now as clear as day.

Thus Roquentin has turned away from his former essentialist notions, such as thinking of existents only as belonging to an Aristotelian species or essence--"la mer

appartenait à la classe des objets verts."[24] His former tendency to regard objects as mere tools was an attempt at fleeing the consequences of their existence. As René Lafarge observes,

> As long as we live on the surface, we are content to classify objects and to use them, there is no mystery no uneasiness. We go freely among the objects surrounding us. They help us and they are reassuring. Each one has its purpose.[25]

Existence, for Roquentin, was nothing but the old essentialist conception of something somehow added to a pre-existing essence in order for it to be. What Roquentin has discovered is the significance of existence in general, or in its implications for mankind, the primacy of existence over essence.

This primacy of existence over essence immediately implies several consequences. In a very general sense, this means that the emphasis is placed on the individual existent instead of on mankind as a whole, the human essence. This is opposed to the Enlightenment view of individual sacrifice for the betterment of humanity. In modern terms, existentialism would tend to conflict with Marxism, which demands individual sacrifice for the sake of the community. It is in this subjective, individualistic sense that the theistic existentialists share the title with the atheists. Kierkegaard's

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[24] Ibid., pp. 179-180.

[25] René Lafarge, Jean-Paul Sartre: His Philosophy, translated by Marina Syth-Kok (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1967), p. 23.

subjective truth and concern for the individual, as well as Marcel's subjectivity, may be recalled.

In Sartrian terms, this individualism is carried to its extreme. For Sartre, existence preceding essence means that man exists first, encounters himself in the world, and defines himself later. Since there is no preconceived human essence, it is the individual man who determines what he is. Man's essence is definable only in terms of what man has made himself to be; he is what he conceives of himself after existence. The individual chooses his essence. As Sartre says,

> . . . l'homme n'est rien d'autre que ce qu'il se fait.[26]

This is the fact that Daniel cannot face up to--that he is a homosexual because that is what he has made himself.

In Les Mots Sartre seems to indicate that he was forced into an existentialist situation through the death of his father, which he calls one of the most important events of his early life. For Sartre thus had to create himself. Had his father lived, the young Jean-Paul would have known his rights and duties.[27] A father would have defined his position in life for him, "faisant de ses humeurs mes principes, de son ignorance mon savoir, de ses rancoeurs mon orgueil,

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[26] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, p. 22.

[27] Sartre, Les Mots, p. 30.

de ses manies ma loi."[28] As was the case, Sartre had difficulty finding his own raison d'être in the ordered world of his childhood, where nothing existed without reason, and where everyone, from the largest to the smallest, had his place marked in the universe.[29]

The primacy of existence over essence is the privilege of man, for all other beings are determined. The seed has implicit in itself all the characteristics of the future tree. The essence of the tree, therefore, exists before the existent tree itself. In this way Sartre defends the humanism of existentialism, for it affords man much greater dignity over a rock or a table in that man can choose what he is to be.[30] The kind of humanism which Sartre criticizes is the essentialist form of humanism which posits mankind as the end and as the higher value. Sartre cites an example from a story by Cocteau in which a character declares as he is flying over some mountains that man is amazing, having invented something as wonderful as the airplane. Even though the individual has not personally contributed to the development of the airplane, merely because he is a member of the human race, he feels somehow honored by the actions of others

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[28] Ibid., p. 76.

[29] Ibid., pp. 75-76.

[30] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, pp. 22-23.

responsible for the invention.[31] This is the type of humanism which Sartre finds absurd, and this is the type of humanism which he attacks in La Nausée.

The representative of this form of humanism in La Nausée is the Autodidacte, the self-taught intellectual who is attempting to read every book in the library in alphabetical order. He relates his experience in a prison camp during the war to Roquentin, and he confides to him that it was there that he learned to love humanity: "Je sentais que j'aimais ces hommes comme des frères, j'aurais voulu les embrasser tous."[32] Such a humanism is ludicrous, in Sartre's opinion, for it discounts the individual, and it becomes hyprocritical. In Roquentin's words, "Ils se haissent tous entre eux: en tant qu'individus, naturellement--pas en tant qu'hommes."[33] While discussing humanism in a café, Roquentin points out to the Autodidacte that he does not really love all men. He cannot really love the couple sitting next to them because he does not really know them. He wouldn't recognize them on the street and he does not even remember what color the girl's hair is. These individuals are mere symbols for the Autodidacte. As Roquentin tells him,

> "Vous vous attendrissez sur la Jeunesse de l'Homme, sur l'Amour de l'Homme et de la Femme, sur la Voix humaine.

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[31] Ibid., pp. 90-91.

[32] Sartre, La Nausée, p. 162.

[33] Ibid., p. 166.

--Eh bien? Est-ce que ça n'existe pas?
--Certes non, ça n'existe pas! Ni la Jeunesse ni l'Âge mûr, ni la Vieillesse, ni la Mort."[34]

For what exists for the existentialist is the individual and not Platonic ideas such as Love, Youth, Age, Death. All of these are only aspects of the individual existing in time. Thus, the Autodidacte's brand of humanism is false since there is no real concern for the individual human person. As Hazel E. Barnes points out, one finds that "the sole concrete manifestation of his love is a timid and furtive flirtation with homosexuality."[35]

This anti-humanism is the theme for "Erostrate," one of the stories in Le Mur. Paul Hilbert, the protagonist, is an anti-humanist. His individuality feels threatened by the mass of the social world. Hilbert is determined to commit an act which, like that of Erostratus who burned the temple of Diana at Ephesus, would make him infamous. He finally decides on shooting five passers-by outside a theatre and saving the last bullet for himself. Before committing the crime, he writes a letter to twenty writers, declaring his intentions. In his letter he addresses the writers telling them that the reason that they are famous and are so popular is because they love humanity. But he tells them that they have humanity in their blood and therefore they are lucky.

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[34] Ibid., pp. 169-170.

[35] Hazel E. Barnes, Sartre (New York, 1973), p. 43.

Hilbert continues, "Vous serez curieux de savoir, je suppose, ce que peut être un homme qui n'aime pas les hommes. Eh bien, c'est moi et je les aime si peu que je vais tout à l'heure en tuer une demi-douzaine."[36]

Hilbert's project, however, becomes a failure, for he only shoots one man and, fleeing down the wrong street, he hides in a toilet stall, and later he gives himself up. Hilbert's purpose, however, was not the commission of a crime, but, rather, the assertion of his individualism in opposition to the mass of humanity. As Joseph H. McMahon says,

> The failure . . . is all of a piece with what he really sought. He has not wanted to take his leave of the world, nor has he wanted to blow the world up; he has wanted to draw attention to himself and to know that such attention is finally being paid.[37]

The consequences of the primacy of existence over essence are manifold. The emphasis on the individual as opposed to the whole of humanity is one aspect of existentialism. Another important consideration is the fact of contingency or absurdity and its attendant nausea.

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[36]Sartre, "Érostrate," Le Mur (Paris, 1939), pp. 91-92.

[37]Joseph H. McMahon, Humans Being, the World of Jean-Paul Sartre (Chicago, 1971), p. 71.

CHAPTER IV

CONTINGENCY, ABSURDITY, AND NAUSEA

One Saturday afternoon, Antoine Roquentin decides to make a visit to the Bouville museum. Pursuing the portraits of the former "élite bouvilloise,"[1] he arrives at the one of the businessman Pacôme, from whose apparent gaze Roquentin cannot detach himself. The eyes of the portrait seem to somehow cast judgment on him. Sartre says metaphorically,

> Mais son jugement me transperçait comme un glaive et mettait en question jusqu'à mon droit d'exister. Et c était vrai, je m'en étais toujours rendu compte: je n'avais pas le droit d'exister. J'étais apparu par hasard, j'existais comme une pierre, une plante, un microbe.[2]

In close conjunction with the non-existence of God and the primacy of existence is the idea of contingency--contingency in the sense of a fortuitous, gratuitous event, an occurrence without cause or explanation, happening by chance and without intent. One refers here then to the contingency of existence. For, given the Sartrian premise that a Divine Creator does not exist, man's existence, the existence of the world, indeed, the existence of the universe is contingent--merely a fortuitous, inexplicable event. There is

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[1] Sartre, La Nausée, p. 120.

[2] Ibid., p. 122.

no real necessity or basis for existence. Chance, then, is the only thing that separates being from nothingness.

The idea of contingency certainly is not unique to Sartre. Contingency is very much a part of Heidegger's philosophy. Moreover, even admitting the existence of God, a certain form of contingency is possible, for there still remains the vast incommensurability between God and man that Kierkegaard realized. The question arises, why should a God create, why this world, why me, why at this time? According to Robert G. Olson, Gabriel Marcel deeply felt this form of contingency:

> Why, he asks in extreme wonder, does he exist as an author at a particular point in the space-time of the modern world writing a book on philosophy? Why is he not rather a leper at a point of space-time in the medieval world ringing his warning bell as he approaches a walled city?[3]

One finds a similar statement by Antoine Roquentin in a more succinct form. "Pourquoi suis-je ici?--Et pourquoi n'y serais-je pas?," he asks.[4]

It is in the literature, particularly in La Nausée, that Sartre deals with the idea of contingency, because, as Alfred Stern points out, this aspect of existentialism cannot be objectified in the theoretical works without losing some of its meaning.[5]

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[3] Op. cit., p. 30.

[4] Sartre, La Nausée, p. 147.

[5] Alfred Stern, Sartre, His Philosophy and Existential Psychoanalysis (New York, 1967), p. 30.

As Roquentin continues his tour of the museum, in view of the portraits of all the former bourgeois beings who somehow claimed a right to existence, he becomes more and more aware of his contingency. "Mon existence commençait à m'étonner sérieusement. N'étais-je pas une simple apparence?,"[6] he says to himself.

Concurrent with Roquentin's discovery of existence in the Jardin public is his realization of the consequences of the fact of contingency:

> Nous étions un tas d'existants gênés, embarassés de nous-mêmes, nous n'avions pas la moindre raison d'être là, ni les uns ni les autres, chaque existant, confus, vaguement inquiet, se sentait de trop par rapport aux autres. De trop: c'était le seul rapport que je pusse établir entre ces arbres, ces grilles, ces cailloux. . . .
> Et moi--veule, alangui, obscène, digérant, ballotant de mornes pensées--moi aussi j'étais de trop.[7]

De trop, which loosely translated means too much, conveys the idea of excess or superfluity. In terms of contingency, it refers to the superfluous or unnecessary fact of existence. Almost all of Sartre's characters have this feeling of being de trop at one time or another. Mathieu in L'Âge de raison:

> --Je suis de trop, se dit Mathieu avec tristessa.[8]

Boris, Mathieu's former student, in La Mort dans l'âme:

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[6] Sartre, La Nausée, p. 125.

[7] Ibid., p. 181.

[8] Sartre, L'Âge de raison, Vol. I of Les Chemins de la liberté, 3 vols. (Paris, 1945), p. 210.

Il était de trop à présent.[9]

Brunet, the ardent Communist, in La Mort dans l'âme:

Brunet se tait, désorienté; il se sent de trop.[10]

Eve, the insane Pierre's wife in "La Chambre":

"Il n'a pas besoin de moi; je suis de trop dans la chambre."[11]

Of course, there are those who never have this feeling of being de trop. They believe that their existence is somehow necessary. Like the élite bouvilloise portrayed in the museum, they believe that they have a right to exist, for they have had a right to everything: to life, to work, to wealth, to authority, and finally to immortality.[12]

These people cannot confront the contingency of their existence, and so they turn away and attempt to justify their existence or to claim it as a right. Sartre has a term for these individuals who feel that their existence is necessary. He calls them salauds.[13]

Roquentin encounters not only the defunct salauds in the museum, but also those alive and well in Bouville, the "belle cité bourgeoise." They are found everywhere--from the

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[9]Sartre, La Mort dans l'âme, p. 229.

[10]Ibid., p. 315.

[11]Sartre, "La Chambre," Le Mur, p. 67.

[12]Sartre, La Nausée, p. 120.

[13]Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, p. 221.

affluent Coteau Vert quarter on the heights above to the tumultuous business streets below. Roquentin looks on these people with disdain. He is repulsed to know that he must confront their calm and reassured faces. They go about their daily business, taking their existence for granted. Yet the constancy that is the basis of their lives is only a matter of habit.[14] As Anthony Manser observes, Roquentin "realizes that there are no ultimate laws, only regularities to which we are accustomed, which we accept as laws because we are accustomed to them."[15] Roquentin is aware that this constancy can change tomorrow. Since existence is contingent, who is to say that it cannot end or change just as well as it began? The possibility of such changes is vividly portrayed by Sartre's grotesque imagery. For example, the father of a family out on a walk might one day see what looks like a red rag coming toward him as if carried by the wind. He would see that it is a piece of rotted meat soiled with dust, ". . . un bout de chair torturée qui se roule dans les ruisseaux en projétant par spasmes de jets de sang." Or else a mother might see a pimple on her child's cheek puff up, crack, open up, and a third eye would appear. Or one day, one might suddenly feel one's clothes become living objects.

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[14] Sartre, La Nausée, p. 222.

[15] Anthony Manser, Sartre, A Philosophical Study (New York, 1966), p. 10.

Or then again, another might feel an itch in his mouth, and find that his tongue has become a centipede.[16]

Throughout Les Chemins de la liberté, Mathieu keeps recalling his friend Gomez, the Spanish revolutionary, and his statement that "Tous les Français sont des salauds."[17] It is not until after the French defeat in La Mort dans l'âme, that Mathieu realizes in Sartrian terms the statement's significance, that contingency can exist on a national scale. Before the defeat, it was natural to be French; there was the certitude that the world was made for man. With its defeat, France is like a large machine thrown off its track. It becomes evident then that France is merely another fortuitous occurrence, a territorial, historical accident. As Mathieu thinks to himself, "Nous sommes encore Français, mais ça n'est plus naturel. Il a suffi d'un accident pour nous faire comprendre que nous étions accidentels."[18]

A term which expresses essentially the same idea as contingency is absurdity. An existence without cause or reason, that is de trop, is an absurd existence. Reflecting on his experience in the Jardin public, Antoine Roquentin writes in his journal, "Le mot d'Absurdité naît à présent sous ma plume; tout à l'heure, au jardin je ne l'ai pas

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[16] Sartre, La Nausée, pp. 222-223.

[17] Sartre, L'Âge de raison, p. 141.

[18] Sartre, La Mort dans l'âme, p. 56.

trouvé, mais je ne le cherchais pas non plus, je n'en avais pas besoin." Roquentin continues, saying that he has found the key to existence, the key to his nausea. Everything is reduced to this fundamental absurdity. The trunk in the garden like everything else is absurd, irreducible. Nothing could explain its existence.[19]

In L'Âge de raison, Marcelle, Mathieu's mistress who has become pregnant, attempts to ignore the absurdity of her existence. She tells herself, ". . . si je n'essayais pas de reprendre mon existence à mon compte, ça me semblerait tellement absurde d'exister."[20] But she must eventually confront the fact through the unwanted child she bears. She cannot prevent herself from passing her hand over her stomach and thinking that it is there, something living and unfortunate like her, a life as absurd and superfluous as hers.[21]

Absurdity is a major theme in the literature of Camus. In L'Étranger, the protagonist Meursault leads a monotonous, day-to-day existence, without meaning, absurd. The tedium is broken only by random, accidental occurrences, without explanation, which serve to heighten the absurdity.

It is the awareness of the contingency or absurdity of existence which precipitates what Sartre calls nausea, for

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[19]Sartre, La Nausée, p. 182.

[20]Sartre, L'Âge de raison, pp. 19-20.

[21]Ibid., p. 90.

it results from a realization that one's very existence is meaningless, as it is only a gratuitous fact. Any basis or foundation for existence disappears. It is as if the rug, or, rather, the whole floor has been pulled out from under one's feet. This is the feeling of abandonment of which Heidegger speaks. Sartre's nausea then is not necessarily physical, but rather, metaphysical. Joseph McMahon describes it as a phenomenon within Roquentin which he projects onto things, "a kind of filth into which he has been plunged."[22]

According to Leo Pollman, Sartre had originally intended his first novel to be titled Mélancolie. It was Gallimard, his publishers, who suggested the title La Nausée,[23] since throughout the novel, Roquentin is afflicted by this feeling of nausea. It begins with the stone he had attempted to throw into the sea.[24] Later, it seizes him in the Café Rendez-vous des Cheminots:

> Alors la Nausée m'a saisi, je me suis laissé tomber sur la banquette, je ne savais même plus où j'étais; je voyais tourner lentement les couleurs autour de moi, j'avais envie de vomir. Et voilà: depuis, la Nausée ne m'a pas quitté, elle me tient.[25]

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[22]McMahon, op. cit., p. 38.

[23]Leo Pollman, Sartre and Camus, Literature of Existence, translated by Helen and Gregor Sebba (New York, 1967), p. 4.

[24]Sartre, La Nausée, p. 22.

[25]Ibid., p. 33.

The contrasting effect of mauve suspenders on a blue cotton shirt against a brown wall precipitates Roquentin's nausea once more. He becomes conscious of the fact that this nausea is not in him, but it is projected from the wall and from the suspenders. This nausea emanates from the things that surround him. It is a result of Roquentin's awareness of their existence.[26]

Again, it is not until after his enlightening experience in the Jardin public that Roquentin begins to comprehend the reason for his nausea and the full import of his experiences. In perhaps one of the most important passages in La Nausée, the meaning of the novel is revealed almost in full. Antoine Roquentin writes:

> Je comprenais la Nausée, je la possédais. À vrai dire je ne me formulais pas mes découvertes. Mais je crois qu'à present, il me serait facile de les mettre en mots. L'essentiel c'est la contingence. Je veux dire que, par définition, l'existence n'est pas la nécessité. Exister, c'est être là, simplement; les existents apparaissent, se laissent rencontrer, mais on ne peut jamais déduire. Il y a des gens, je crois, qui ont compris ça. Seulement ils ont essayé de surmonter cette contingence en inventant un être nécessaire et cause de soi. Or, aucun être nécessaire ne peut expliquer l'existence: la contingence n'est pas un faux semblant, une apparence qu'on peut dissiper; c'est l'absolu, par conséquent la gratuité parfaite. Tout est gratuit, ce jardin, cette ville, et moi-même. Quand il arrive qu'on s'en rende compte, ça vous tourne le coeur et tout se met à flotter, comme l'autre soir, au "Rendez-vous des Cheminots": voilà la Nausée; voilà ce que les Salauds--ceux du Coteau Vert et les autres--essayaient de se cacher avec leur idée de droit. Mais quel pauvre mensonge: personne n'a le

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[26] Ibid., p. 34.

> droit, ils sont entièrement gratuits, comme les autres hommes, ils n'arrivent pas à ne pas se sentir de trop. Et en eux-mêmes, secrètement, ils sont trop, c'est-à-dire amorphes et vagues, tristes.[27]

Thus, the existentialist's nausea is a direct result of his realization that existence is contingent, absurd, gratuitous. Existence is simply a fact without explanation. Those whom Sartre calls salauds attempt to deny the fact of their contingency, their being de trop. They want to believe that theirs is the right to exist. Unfortunately this is a sad lie, and secretly they are aware of it.

Existence, contingency, absurdity, and nausea are primary tenets of existentialism. The secondary consequences which naturally evolve are headed by the doctrines of freedom and responsibility.

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[27] Ibid., p. 185.

CHAPTER V

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

In L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, Sartre says,

> Si, en effet, l'existence précède l'essence, on ne pourra jamais expliquer par référence à une nature humaine donnée et figée; autrement dit, il n'y a pas de déterminisme, l'homme est libre, l'homme est liberté.[1]

For, if, according to Sartre, there is no God, and thus existence precedes essence, man making of himself whatever he chooses to be, then this means man is free. Although, as Gordon E. Bigelow points out, human freedom is a major concern for all existentialists, with Sartre this freedom is carried to its extreme.[2] Sartre's freedom is autonomous. Since there is no God or pre-existing essence, man is free to choose an essence, or a basis of conduct for himself. In other words, it is left up to the individual to choose the values or the meaning for his own life. And there is nothing or no one who may say whether that certain set of values or that meaning is correct or justifiable. Therefore, as Sartre says, the individual's freedom is the unique foundation of values so that being the one through whom values exist, the individual is unjustifiable.[3]

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[1] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, pp. 36-37.

[2] Gordon E. Bigelow, A Primer of Existentialism, reprinted from College English, December, 1961, p. 177.

[3] Sartre, L'Être et le néant (Paris, 1943), p. 76.

Thus it is the individual who chooses the values or the meaning for his life, and, therefore, it is the individual who is responsible for what he is. Sartre points out that this factor of existentialism is what most horrifies some people, for these people have a certain manner in which they put up with their misery. And that is to think that circumstances are against them, that they are actually worth much more than what they are. They say that the reason that they have experienced no great love or no great friendship is because they have found no one worthy enough. They have not written any profound books because they have not had the time. They have not had children to whom they could devote themselves, because they have not found the right marriage partner.[4]

What these people do not realize is that it is up to them to create the right circumstances, or to act in spite of them. It is up to them to engender a love or to found a friendship. It is up to them to make the time to write the books. It is up to them to build a fruitful marriage. As Sartre says, "Nous sommes seuls sans excuses."[5]

The possible makes sense only if it has been actualized. Sartre points out that it is ludicrous to speak of the possibility of Racine writing another tragedy, when the fact is

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[4]Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, pp. 55-56.

[5]Ibid., p. 37.

that he did not write one. There is no other genius than that which is expressed in works of art. The genius of any writer is the sum of that writer's works.[6]

> Un homme s'engage dans sa vie, dessine sa figure, et en dehors de cette figure, il n'y a rien.[7]

When Marcelle says, in L'Âge de raison, "Je regrette la vie que j'aurais pu avoir,"[8] she is speaking nonsense in Sartre's opinion. For the only life she could have had is the one she does have, the one she herself has chosen.

Therefore, Sartre's doctrine of freedom is certainly no open door to hedonism or nihilism. For, in addition, Sartre says, not only does the individual bear responsibility for himself, but he bears responsibility for all men. As Sartre explains it, by the individual's actions, whereby he creates the essence of what he wants to be, the individual projects an image of what a man should be. The individual's choice of this course of action or that course of action affirms the value of it, since one can never choose what one thinks is bad. One always chooses what is good, and, according to Sartre, nothing can be good for the individual without being good for all men.[9] Although this explanation sounds rather paradoxical in light of the individualistic emphasis

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[6] Ibid., p. 57.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Sartre, L'Âge de raison, p. 13.

[9] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, pp. 25-26.

of existentialism, a better explanation follows. Sartre points out that there are those, of course, who, in their actions, believe that they are responsible for only themselves. And when someone asks them, "What if everyone acted that way?," they shrug their shoulders and say, "Everyone doesn't act that way." But Sartre says that, in reality, everyone should always ask himself, "What would happen if everyone acted in this way?" and then act accordingly.[10]

> Je suis obligé à chaque instant de faire des actes exemplaires. Tout se passe comme si, pour tout homme, tout l'humanité avait les yeux fixés sur ce qu'il fait et se réglait sur ce qu'il fait. Et chaque homme doit se dire: suis-je bien celui qui ait le droit d'agir de telle sorte que l'humanité se règle sur mes actes?[11]

This is the full meaning of freedom and responsibility, for the individual who realizes this feels the burden of not only his own actions but those of the entire world. That is why Sartre says that "être libre c'est être condamné à être libre."[12] This is the realization that Antoine Roquentin just begins to grasp after he has discovered existence and after his pre-determined essences have disappeared:

> Je suis libre: il ne me reste plus aucune raison de vivre, toutes celles que j'ai essayées ont laché et je ne peux plus en imaginer d'autres. . . . Seul et libre. Mais cette liberté ressemble un peu à la mort.[13]

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[10] Ibid., pp. 28-29.

[11] Ibid., p. 31.

[12] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 174.

[13] Sartre, La Nausée, pp. 219-220.

Iris Murdoch refers to La Nausée as the instructive overture to Sartre's works.[14] For, in his first novel, Sartre exposes only the fundamental tenets of existentialism--the primacy of existence, contingency, and absurdity. The consequent themes of freedom and responsibility are especially treated in Sartre's trilogy appropriately titled Les Chemins de la liberté. According to Iris Murdoch,

> Les Chemins is a study of the various ways in which people assert or deny their freedom in that pursuit of stable fullness of being, or self-confidence, which Sartre has said in L'Être et le Néant to be characteristic of the human consciousness and which he portrayed in La Nausée.[15]

Joseph H. McMahon says that the essential revelation of Les Chemins de la liberté is the "inevitability of freedom."[16]

The principal character throughout the novels, Mathieu Delarue, is obsessed with the idea of freedom. As Marcelle tells him, "Être libre. Totalement libre. C'est ton vice."[17] For, as with the absurdity of her existence, freedom is another aspect of life that Marcelle finds difficult to understand or to confront. As she says to herself,

> "Sa liberté!" Quand on se réveillait le matin avec le coeur tourné et qu'on avait quinze heures à tuer

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[14] Iris Murdoch, Sartre, Romantic Rationalist (New Haven, Connecticut, 1953), p. 18.

[15] Ibid., p. 19.

[16] McMahon, op. cit., p. 109.

[17] Sartre, L'Âge de raison, p. 19.

> avant de pouvoir se recoucher, qu'est-ce que ça pouvait bien foutre qu'on soit libre?[18]

Mathieu's concept of freedom is, existentially speaking, also a prevarication, for it is a freedom without responsibility. For seven years, Mathieu had engaged in a relationship of free love with Marcelle, his mistress. However, he is unwilling to accept its consequence in Marcelle's pregnancy. L'Âge de raison centers itself around Mathieu's efforts at procuring enough money for an abortion. Nevertheless, though he will not face up to it, the specter of responsibility seems to haunt Mathieu's freedom. As he is viewing an exhibition of Gaugin paintings, Mathieu pauses in reflection:

> "Les tableaux, ça ne vous prend pas, pensa-t-il, avec agacement, ça se propose; ça depend de moi qu'ils existent ou non, je suis libre en face d'eux." Trop libre: ça lui créait une responsabilité supplémentaire, il se sentait en faute.[19]

It is Mathieu's brother, Jacques, the well established lawyer, who states the case explicitly when Mathieu asks him for a loan:

> Cet enfant qui va naître est le résultat logique d'une situation où tu t'es mis volontairement et tu veux le supprimer parce que tu ne veux pas accepter toutes les conséquences de tes actes. Tiens, veux-tu que je te dise la vérité? Tu ne te mens peut-être pas en ce moment précis: mais c'est ta vie tout entière qui est bâtie sur un mensonge.[20]

Mathieu's brother continues saying that he would have thought that freedom meant confronting the situations in which one

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[18] Ibid., p. 86.

[19] Ibid., pp. 91-92.

[20] Ibid., p. 134.

had freely placed himself and accepting all responsibility. But, as he tells Mathieu, this obviously is not his brother's conception of freedom. Jacques chastises Mathieu for his hypocrisy. He tells him that he condemns capitalist society and yet he is a civil servant in that society. Mathieu displays sympathy for the communists, but he is careful not to commit himself as he has never voted. Mathieu scorns the bourgeois class, but he is a bourgeois himself, the son and brother of bourgeois, and Mathieu even lives like a bourgeois. Jacques ends by saying, "--Tu as pourtant l'âge de raison mon pauvre Mathieu!"[21] According to F. Temple Kingston, the age of reason is the age when youth surrenders its freedom for the respectability of social convention. "Mathieu refuses to accept the Age of Reason as presented by his brother Jacques who has become a bourgeois supreme."[22] Nevertheless, Jacques does present an accurate summary of the principles of Sartrian freedom.

What Mathieu apparently is seeking is what Sartre describes in L'Être et le néant as the pour-soi desiring to be en-soi. In other words, man seeks to be his own foundation or cause for his being. This amounts to man's desire to be God.[23] As Mathieu expresses it, "'Être libre. Être

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[21] Ibid., pp. 134-136.

[22] F. Temple Kingston, French Existentialism (Toronto, 1961), p. 173.

[23] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, pp. 653-654.

cause de soi, pouvoir dire: je suis parce que je le veux; être mon propre commencement.'"[24] But this desire of man is impossible to achieve, and man is frustrated. That is why Sartre says, ". . . l'homme est une passion inutile."[25]

After several unsuccessful attempts at procuring money for the abortion, Mathieu, in his disillusionment, succumbs to the false rationalization of which Sartre spoke earlier. He attributes his misfortunes to circumstances or destiny. Sitting in a bus, Mathieu contemplates: "'Ma vie n'est plus à moi, ma vie n'est plus qu'un destin.' . . . L'épousera, l'épousera pas: 'ça ne me regarde plus, c'est pile ou face.'"[26] But as the bus brakes to a sudden stop, Mathieu arrives at a similar sudden confrontation with the facts: Il pensa: "'Non, non, ce n'est pas pile ou face. Quoi qu'il arrive, c'est par moi que tout doit arriver.'"[27] The fact of his autonomous freedom is thrust upon Mathieu. He knew now that he was free, free to accept, free to refuse, free to vacillate, free to marry. He could do anything he wanted to do and no one had the right to counsel him. There would be no good or evil for him unless he invented them himself. Mathieu knew he was free and all alone in the

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[24]Sartre, L'Âge de raison, pp. 65-66.

[25]Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 708.

[26]Sartre, L'Âge de raison, p. 306.

[27]Ibid., pp. 306-307.

middle of a monstrous silence, without aid and without excuse. He was condemned to decide himself without any other recourse. He was condemned forever to be free.

In Le Sursis, as Mathieu stands on the Pont Neuf and contemplates suicide instead of leaving for the war, he realizes that, even in that final act, he cannot escape his freedom:

> Et l'acte était là, devant lui, sur l'eau noire, il lui dessinait son avenir. Toutes les amarres étaient tranchées, rien au monde ne pouvait le retenir: c'était ça l'horrible, horrible liberté.[28]

If freedom is a major theme, particularly in L'Âge de raison, responsibility is underscored in La Mort dans l'âme. The haunting question throughout the novel is that of responsibility or culpability for the French defeat. This historical fact was a humiliating burden to bear. Mathieu describes the feeling as he and the other French soldiers are passively waiting to be taken prisoners. They can feel the stares of the French citizens of the village. Mathieu imagines the citizens whispering about them: "'Les vaincus de 40, les soldats de la défaite, c'est à cause d'eux que nous sommes dans les chaines.'"[29] They were being judged by their countrymen and they were to be found culpable in

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[28] Sartre, Le Sursis, p. 355.

[29] Sartre, La Mort dans l'âme, p. 85.

the eyes of their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren. They would always be "les vaincus de 40."

That is why in the preacher's sermon, the news that the defeat of France is a punishment from God is called good news. That is why, when the old Frenchman who is among the first visitors to the same prison camp tells the prisoners, "Vous savez, les gars, c'est pas votre faute," he receives a warm farewell from all the French prisoners.[30] As Brunet, one of the prisoners, observes, "Ils aiment mieux se persuader que leur défaite est irrémédiable."[31]

But it is all an attempt at self-deception. The truth had already manifested itself when, on the way to the camp, the prisoners had seen a group of German soldiers, naked and playing in a stream:

> C'était ça, ce n'était que ça: leurs vainqueurs c'était cette chair blanche et vulnérable. Un soupir bas et profond déchire la foule. Ils ont supporté sans colère le défile d'une armée victorieuse sur des chars de triomphe; mais ces Fritz à poil qui jouent à saute-mouton dans l'eau, c'est une insulte.[32]

From his first appearance in La Mort dans l'âme, however, it is evident that Mathieu Delarue has finally become conscious of a Sartrian sense of responsibility:

> Mathieu dormait et la guerre était perdue. . . . Il gisait sur le dos, les yeux clos, les bras collés au corps et il avait perdu la guerre. Il ne se

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[30] Ibid., p. 346.

[31] Ibid., p. 336.

[32] Ibid., p. 261.

> rappelait très bien ou il était, mais il savait qu'il avait perdu la guerre.[33]

Mathieu would also like to rid himself of all guilt, to wash his hands of all responsibility, as his friend Pierné attempts to do, for he wants to believe that it was only the others who were defeated.[34] But the all-too-apparent truth is there to haunt Mathieu:

> Le vrai, c'était cette faute insaisissable et commune, notre faute. Fantôme de guerre, fantôme de défaite, culpabilité fantôme.[35]

In a critical passage in La Mort dans l'âme, Mathieu finds himself engaged in a confrontation with Pinette, a fellow soldier. Pinette is embittered with the defeat and does not feel himself culpable. He argues that he did everything that he was told to do, and that it was not his fault if he was not properly used. President Daladier declared the war, and General Gamelin lost it. Pinette says that he had nothing to do with it. Mathieu answers that for some fifteen years everyone could see the war approaching. Steps could have been taken either to avoid it or else to win it. Pinette argues that he could not have done anything since he was no government official. But Mathieu tells him that he could vote. Pinette becomes uneasy, and when Mathieu asks him for whom he voted, Pinette remains silent. "--Tu

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[33] Ibid., p. 45.

[34] Ibid., p. 87.

[35] Ibid., p. 62.

vois bien," says Mathieu. Pinette argues that he had to serve his military duty and that later he became ill. He says that there was only one opportunity that he had to vote. Mathieu asks him if he voted that one time. Again Pinette does not answer. Mathieu smiles and admits that he had not voted either.

Later Pinette continues with his excuses: "--J'avais pas le temps de m'occuper de politique. Je rentrais chez moi, crévé, et puis il y avait des disputes, et puis si t'es [sic] marié, c'est pour baiser ta femme tous les soirs, non?" "--Je suppose," answers Mathieu, but later adds that that is how wars are lost. Pinette becomes irate, and asks Mathieu that even if he would have been occupied with nothing but politics, what would that have changed? "--Tu aurais fait ton possible," answers Mathieu. As the argument ends, Mathieu reflects to himself:

> "Cette guerre, moi aussi, au début, je croyais que c'était une maladie. Quelle connerie! C'est moi, c'est Pinette, c'est Longin. Pour chacun de nous, c'est lui-même; elle est faite à notre image et l'on a la guerre qu'on mérite."[36]

Sartre's concept of freedom, thus, has far-reaching implications. The responsibility necessarily attendant to this autonomous freedom is difficult to bear. Only the strongest of individuals can confront it totally.

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[36] Ibid., pp. 94-95.

CHAPTER VI

CHOICE, ANGUISH, AND COMMITMENT

If man is totally and completely free, he is free to choose what he makes of himself. As Sartre says, ". . . nous sommes choix et être c'est pour nous, nous choisir."[1] Man is free to choose his future, and even his past and present. For one can always choose the attitude with which he regards the past or present.[2] It is in this way that one is said to choose the circumstances that are beyond one's immediate control: one's position in life, one's health, one's family.[3] Sartre gives the example of a malady which afflicts an individual. By the simple fact that one continues to live with this affliction, one chooses it. One also chooses the manner of regarding the malady, for example, as intolerable, humiliating, an object of pride, or the justification of failures.[4]

According to Sartre, one is thus always free to choose. The past cannot have any deterministic effect on one's present, for at each moment one is choosing a future. This is how Sartre explains the frequency of so-called radical

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[1] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 393.

[2] Ibid., pp. 579-580.

[3] Ibid., p. 612.

[4] Ibid., p. 393.

conversions, such as those portrayed in literature by Gide's Philoctète or Dostoievsky's Raskolnikov. One's original project or meaning in life can change at any time in the light of a new project which arises.[5]

Choice, says Sartre, is imperative. Since no one else can choose for the individual, the individual must choose for himself. Even not choosing is a choice, for the individual has chosen not to choose. Therefore, one's choice is not necessarily always pleasant. One may choose in resignation or in hesitation, in uneasiness or in flight from truth, even in choosing not to choose. The fact remains, as Sartre indicates, ". . . quel que soit notre être, il est choix: et il dépend de nous choisir comme 'grand' et 'noble' ou 'bas' et humilié.'"[6]

The theme of choice is central to Sartre's "Intimité," one of the stories in Le Mur. The story portrays a young woman's confrontation with the choice of staying in Paris with her impotent husband or leaving for Nice with her lover. Lulu, the young woman, finds it difficult to realize that it is her choice and her choice only. It is her liberated friend Rirette's words that Lulu keeps hearing: "'Vous ne pouvez pas rester avec Henri puisque vous ne l'aimez plus, ce serait un crime.'"[7]

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[5] Ibid., pp. 554-555.

[6] Ibid., pp. 550-551.

[7] Sartre, "L'Intimité," Le Mur, p. 110.

When Lulu's husband, Henri, slaps her brother, Robert, she uses the incident as a pretext for leaving. Yet she deliberately plans it so that she bumps into him on his way back from work. Perhaps the scene which best illustrates Lulu's situation occurs when Henri is pulling on one arm pleading with her to go back to him, and Rirette is pulling on the other arm, urging her to go on. Between the two, "Lulu était molle comme un paquet de linge."[8]

The end result is that Lulu stays with her husband, this time using the excuse that the neighbors talked her into it. Yet she still plans to continue seeing Pierre, her lover. As Philip Thody points out, "What Lulu really wants to do is to stay with her husband and still keep her lover--to have her cake and eat it--but she will not admit this to herself."[9] Lulu will not admit that her choice had been made all along, and that it was she, herself, who had made the choice, because, despite her excuses, no one could make the choice for her. One is reminded here of the story which Sartre relates in L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, in which, during the war, one of his students had come to him with a problem. The boy's brother had been killed in the war, and his father was a collaborationist. The boy lived alone with his mother and was her only consolation. At the time, he was faced with the

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[8]Ibid., p. 135.

[9]Philip Thody, Jean-Paul Sartre, A Literary and Political Study (London, 1960), pp. 31-32.

choice of leaving for England and joining the Free French Forces, or staying on with his mother. He was aware that remaining with his mother would be a concrete, personal act, while leaving for England would be a more idealistic, general act with an uncertain outcome.[10] Sartre could only tell him, "'. . . vous êtes libre, choisissez, c'est à dire, inventez.'"[11]

Actually, the young man had already chosen to stay with his mother. He knew the answer Sartre would give him, and that is precisely why he came to him. If he had wanted a different answer, he would have had to choose whom to seek for advice, already knowing basically what the advice would be.[12] That is why Sartre says that deliberation is always faked. For, even though one may not realize it, one has chosen in accordance with one's original chosen project or according to one's chosen set of values, before deliberation. He says explicitly:

> Quand je délibère, les jeux sont faits. Et si je dois en venir à délibérer, c'est simplement parce qu'il entre dans mon projet originel de me rendre compte des mobiles par la délibération plutôt que par telle ou telle autre forme de découverte.[13]

In La Mort dans L'âme, Mathieu Delarue realizes that he has chosen the war and the resultant defeat. He says that he

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[10] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, pp. 39-42.

[11] Ibid., p. 47.

[12] Ibid., p. 46.

[13] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 527.

did not decide to choose, but in actuality he had thus already chosen. He had chosen this war and this defeat, and he had awaited the day of their arrival.[14] As Sartre explains, there are no accidents in life. A world-wide event which suddenly erupts, such as a war, does not come from the outside. For example, if I am mobilized in a war, ". . . cette guerre est ma guerre, elle est à mon image et je la mérite."[15] These are almost Mathieu's exact words quoted earlier.[16] According to Sartre, I deserve it, first of all, because I can always escape from it, either by suicide or by desertion. These are the same ultimate possibilities that are available to one in any situation. It will be recalled that Mathieu, when presented with the possibility of suicide, did not choose it. Therefore, Sartre says, if one does not escape from the situation, in this case, the war, by the means available, then this means one has chosen the war. Of course, there may be many reasons for this choice: because of weakness to act otherwise, because of the fear of public opinion, because of family pride, because of the desire for the esteem of others. In any case, it is still one's choice. Commenting on war and responsibility, Sartre states,

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[14] Sartre, La Mort dans l'âme, p. 85.

[15] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 639.

[16] Sartre, La Mort dans l'âme, p. 95.

> Si donc j'ai préféré la guerre à la mort ou au déshonneur, tout se passe comme si je portais l'entière responsabilité de cette guerre. . . . Car il a dépendu de moi que pour moi et par moi cette guerre n'existe pas et j'ai décidé qu'elle existe.[17]

Whereas nausea is the state brought about by the realization of the contingency of existence, anguish is the result of man's confrontation with his freedom and responsibility and the knowledge that he must choose.[18] For, according to Sartre, the individual is in anguish because he knows that he has no justification for his choice. That is why Sartre says that the existentialist finds it inconvenient that there is no God, because when a God disappears, so do all possibilities of any pre-existing values. There is no a priori good because there is no infinite and perfect conscience to conceive it. Man chooses his own values, but there is nothing or no one to tell him that he has chosen correctly.[19] This is the same anguish that Kierkegaard called the anguish of Abraham and which Sartre explained earlier. As Sartre states further, ". . . si je considère que tel acte est bon, c'est moi qui choisirai de dire que cet acte est bon plutôt que mauvais."[20]

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[17] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, pp. 639-640.

[18] See René Lafarge, op. cit., p. 85.

[19] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, pp. 34-37.

[20] Ibid., p. 31.

Besides this lack of justification, the existentialist realizes that he is responsible not only for himself but for all mankind. Therefore, when he chooses, the individual realizes that he chooses for all humanity. Thus, as Sartre says, ". . . l'homme, étant condamné à être libre, porte le poids du monde tout entier sur ses épaules."[21] This is the full significance of the existentialist's anguish.

In La Nausée, Antoine Roquentin has not yet become aware of the full consequences of his existential experience. The anguish of choice only begins to appear in the most insignificant situations, such as the decision of which direction to take.

> Devant le passage Gillet, je ne sais plus que faire. . . . Je suis plein d'angoisse: le moindre geste m'engage. Je ne peux pas déviner ce qu'on veut de moi. Il faut pourtant choisir.[22]

In Le Sursis Mathieu briefly contemplates Sartre's other means of escaping from the war--desertion. He is faced with the anguish of trying to decide what exactly is his affaire, or meaning for his life. He examines his various choices as follows:

> Refuser, se croiser les bras ou bien filer en Suisse. Pourquoi? Je ne sens pas ça. Ça n'est pas mon affaire. Et la guerre en Espagne ça n'était pas non plus mon affaire. Ni le parti communiste. Mais qu'est-ce qui est mon affaire? se demanda-t-il avec une sorte d'angoisse.[23]

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[21] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 639.

[22] Sartre, La Nausée, p. 82.

[23] Sartre, Le Sursis, pp. 252-253.

Again, sitting in the Café des Deux Magots, Mathieu realizes the significance of his freedom with its consequent anguish: "'Je suis libre,' se dit-il soudain. Et sa joie se mua sur-le-champ en une écrasante angoisse."[24]

There is apparently a progression in Mathieu throughout Le Sursis, which culminates in his awareness of responsibility and his final commitment in La Mort dans l'âme. Towards the end of Le Sursis, he has already begun to accept the experience of anguish:

> Il se sentait fort; il y avait au fond de lui une petite angoisse qu'il commençait à connaître, une petite angoisse qui lui donnait confiance.[25]

Commitment is the final act of the authentic existentialist in his progressing awareness. This commitment is the choice which he makes. It is the meaning he has chosen to give to his life. For, once the individual has become aware of his freedom, has considered his possibilities, and made his choice, he has committed himself to that choice. In other words, the individual's choice must be followed by action. For, as Sartre says,

> . . . il n'y a de réalité que dans l'action.[26]

He goes further to say that the individual exists only to the

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[24] Ibid., p. 343.

[25] Ibid., p. 433.

[26] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, p. 55.

extent that he fulfills himself. He is nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else than his life.[27]

The authentic existentialist must therefore be totally involved, engagé. Some one particular action or set of circumstances is not total involvement. Man's only hope, Sartre says, is in action, and it is that action, involvement, commitment which enables a man to live.[28] As he states, ". . . je n'existe que comme engagé et je ne prends conscience (d)'être que comme tel."[29]

In La Nausée, Anny, Antoine Roquentin's former lover, has evidently experienced the same existential awakening as Roquentin. But, according to Joseph H. McMahon, she refuses to believe that he has had the same experience, because she wishes to believe her experience unique.[30] She attacks Roquentin's attitude of inaction, as she tells him, "Tu te plains parce que les choses ne se disposent pas autour de toi comme un bouquet de fleurs, sans que tu te donnes la peine de rien faire. Mais jamais je n'en ai tant demandé: je voulais agir."[31]

Throughout L'Âge de raison, Mathieu has the same difficulty committing himself. His attempts to escape the

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[27] Ibid. [28] Ibid., pp. 62-63.

[29] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 352.

[30] McMahon, op. cit., p. 50.

[31] Sartre, La Nausée, p. 212.

consequences of Marcelle's pregnancy by securing enough money for an abortion is an example of Mathieu's unwillingness to commit himself. Yet there are other choices for involvement which weigh heavily on his conscience. The war in Spain which his friend Gomez is fighting disturbs him. The opportunity of joining the Communist party with his friend Brunet also has him in a quandary. Mathieu feels that it is necessary to invent excuses to flee his guilt. He tells himself he cannot do otherwise because he is in Paris, because he is not involved, and because his place is at Marcelle's side. Yet he wants no commitment to her either. He tells himself that he is not destined for commitment, and others are. "Gomez. Il était dans le coup, il est parti, c'était son lot."[32] Mathieu is attempting to turn away from the full significance of his freedom. In his heart he knows the answers to the false questions he poses: "Pourquoi ne suis-je pas dans le bain, avec Gomez, avec Brunet? Pourquoi n'ai-je pas eu envie d'aller me battre? Est-ce que j'aurais pu choisir un autre monde? Est-ce que je suis encore libre?"[33]

For, Mathieu really knows that he is free and that the reason he has not committed himself is simply because he, himself, has chosen not to. All of his dilemma becomes evident in the scene in which Brunet has come to visit Mathieu

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[32]Sartre, L'Âge de raison, p. 143.

[33]Ibid., p. 142.

in order to ask him to join the Communist Party. Brunet tries to convince his friend that he needs the Party more than the Party needs him, that to join would be for his own good. Mathieu then asks,

> Alors? Tu penses que j'ai besoin de m'engager?
> --Oui, dit Brunet avec force. Oui, tu as besoin de t'engager.[34]

As Brunet explains to him, Mathieu's freedom means nothing without action:

> À présent c'est fait, tu es libre. Mais à quoi ça sert-il, la liberté, si ce n'est pour s'engager?[35]

Mathieu realizes that Brunet is right. He realizes that the life he is living is only <u>abstract</u>, as Brunet puts it. He admits that he has lost a sense of reality, and in committing himself, he would rediscover everything, ". . . de la chair, du sang, de vraies passions."[36] Mathieu realizes that Brunet in his freedom has chosen his destiny, even the German grenade which will one day disembowel him. In this way, Brunet had fully assumed his freedom.

> Il s'était engagé, il avait renoncé à sa liberté, ce n'était plus qu'un soldat. Et on lui avait tout rendu, même sa liberté.[37]

This is why Mathieu says that Brunet is more free than he is.[38]

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[34] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 149.

[35] <u>Ibid</u>.

[36] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 150.

[37] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 152.

[38] <u>Ibid</u>.

However, in spite of Brunet's convincing argument, Mathieu begins searching for excuses again. ". . . tu as de la veine," he tells Brunet.

> --De la veine d'être communiste?
> --Oui.
> --Tu en as de bonnes! Ça se choisit, mon vieux.
> --Je sais. Tu as de la veine d'avoir pu choisir.[39]

Brunet knows he has lost. He asks for a final answer. Mathieu knows he has the choice before him: ". . . donner un sens à sa vie, choisir d'être un homme, agir, croire. Ce serait le salut."[40] But Mathieu refuses.

It is not until La Mort dans l'âme that Mathieu finally commits himself. His friend Pinette has decided to join a small band of Frenchmen who will make a last desperate stand against the approaching Germans. When he invites Mathieu to join him, he refuses. But when Pinette searches for a rifle and finds one, Mathieu, in a significant gesture, picks one up also.[41] The two join a small group in a bell tower, and the conflict soon begins. After Mathieu kills his first German soldier, he realizes the import of his act. Mathieu looks at the dead soldier and laughs. He knows that for years he had tried to act, but to no avail. His former actions were, in a sense, stolen from him; they were not really his, and so they amounted to nothing. But this action

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[39] Ibid. [40] Ibid., p. 153.

[41] Sartre, La Mort dans l'âme, pp. 193-195.

was not stolen from him at all. He himself had pulled on the trigger, and for once something had happened. The concrete evidence was lying on the ground, dead. "'Quelque chose de definitif,' pensa-t-il en riant de plus belle."[42]

As the German cannon closes in on his position in the bell tower, Mathieu is the only one left. He is incensed that the Germans have broken the resistance so quickly, but he is determined that it should have lasted at least fifteen minutes. He approaches the parapet and continues shooting. In his final act of commitment, Mathieu takes his vengeance on all the former choices he had but to which he refused to commit himself. Each bullet avenges a former scruple--one bullet for Lola from whom he did not dare steal, one bullet for Marcelle whom he should have jilted, one bullet for Odette with whom he did not want to go to bed; this bullet for the books which he dared not write, that bullet for the trips that he denied himself, another bullet for all those whom he had wanted to hate but whom he tried to understand. Mathieu avenges himself on that idealistic realm of essences which never existed. He was shooting now at Mankind, at Virtue, at the World, he was shooting at the street, at the flowers, at the gardens, at everything that he loved.

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[42] Ibid., p. 236.

Il tira: il était pur, il était tout-puissant, il était libre.
Quinze minutes.[43]

Mathieu had finally assumed his freedom.

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[43] Ibid., pp. 244-245.

CHAPTER VII

AUTHENTICITY, TRANSCENDENCE, AND DEATH

According to Robert Olson, the authentic man, for Sartre, is the person who ". . . undergoes a radical conversion through anguish and who assumes his freedom. He recognizes himself as the cause for there being a world and as the unique source of the world's values and intelligibility."[1] In his final act of commitment, Mathieu Delarue became an authentic individual. But most of Sartre's characters, including Mathieu Delarue in L'Âge de raison are examples of inauthenticity, or as Sartre terms it, mauvaise foi. This bad faith is an attempt at fleeing the anguish brought about by the awareness of one's total freedom and consequent responsibility. It is the attempt to evade choice and commitment. Thus, Mathieu's attempts to escape responsibility in L'Âge de raison, Daniel's use of God as a scapegoat for his homosexuality, Marcelle's denial of freedom, the defeated French soldiers' refusal to accept responsibility of defeat, and Lulu's flight from choice in "L'Intimité" are all examples of bad faith.

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[1] Olson, op. cit., p. 139.

Sartre's "L'Enfance d'un chef" is a whole case study of the development of bad faith. Lucien Fleurier, the young protagonist, experiences an existential evolution similar to Roquentin. However, as Philip Thody comments, "Whereas Roquentin faces up to his own nausea and realizes the dishonesty of all attempts to escape from it, Lucien Fleurier takes the easy way out."[2] Born into a typically bourgeois family of factory owners, Lucien is naturally expected to follow in his father's footsteps. His essence has thus supposedly been pre-defined. Lucien asks his father, "'Est-ce que je deviendrai aussi un chef? demanda Lucien. --Mais bien sûr, mon bonhomme, c'est pour cela que je t'ai fait. . . .'"[3] Nevertheless, Lucien's progressive existential awareness leads him to question this pre-conceived role. This begins with the discovery of his own existence. Suddenly one day he tells himself, "'Moi, je suis. . . .' Et un leger déclic se produisit: il s'était réveillé de sa longue somnolence."[4] Lucien then proceeds through the various stages of existentialism. He becomes conscious of the contingency of his existence: "Son existence était un scandale et les responsabilités qu'il assumerait plus tard suffiraient à peine à la justifier."[5]

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[2] Thody, Jean-Paul Sartre, A Literary and Political Study, p. 33.

[3] Sartre, "L'Enfance d'un chef," Le Mur, p. 169.

[4] Ibid., p. 180.

[5] Ibid., p. 220.

The fact of freedom and responsibility becomes evident: "'Être seul! gémissait-il en se tordant les mains, n'avoir personne pour me conseiller, pour me dire si je suis dans le droit chemin!'"[6] Lucien also realizes that he must commit himself. "'Je suis fait pour l'action!,'" he tells himself.[7] This new awareness leads him to believe that he will never really be able to succeed his father as head of the factory.

However, gradually, Lucien turns away from this existential orientation, and he begins to fall into bad faith. The first indication of this is his call on God as being responsible for his conversion from homosexuality which was mentioned earlier. Later, Lucien is attracted to Berthe, the young housekeeper, but he does not want to commit himself, and so, he convinces himself that he has no rights to her.[8] Similarly, in his affair with the young girl, Maud, he wishes to avoid any entanglements. Finally Lucien contrives a meaning for himself, he fabricates an essence in his imagined hate for Jews: "'Lucien, c'est moi! Quelqu'un qui ne peut pas souffrir les juifs.'"[9] As Hazel Barnes explains,

> Lucien who has felt that he carried no weight with his friends, suddenly feels that he is endowed with an aggressive personality when he seizes the opportunity of making himself known and marked as "the man who hates Jews."[10]

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[6] Ibid., p. 198.

[7] Ibid., p. 217.

[8] Ibid., pp. 222-223.

[9] Ibid., p. 248.

[10] Barnes, op. cit., p. 141.

In the final pages of "L'Enfance d'un chef," the metamorphosis of the potential existentialist into a bourgeois essentialist culminates. "Il avait fait, de bonne foi, le recensement minutieux de tout ce qu'il était."[11] Lucien now feels that he knows that the real Lucien is to be sought in the eyes of others, in the hopeful expectancies of his future workers.[12] Therefore, Lucien now seeks his identity in his objectified, defined state of being--that of head of his father's factory.

Like the salauds of La Nausée, Lucien believes that he has a right to existence, and certain rights which are commensurate with his position in the community. "'J'AI DES DROITS!'" he declares. Furthermore, he believes that these rights are absolute like mathematical objects and religious dogmas. Lucien ignores his previous existentialist revelations. He says that he had long thought that he existed only by chance, but that was only because he had not reflected on it sufficiently. He now believes that he has his defined, set place in life. Even long before his birth, his place in the sun had been marked out. Already, even before the marriage of his father, he was expected. If he was brought into the world, it was in order to occupy this space. Lucien denies his contingency because he feels, or he wants to feel,

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[11] Sartre, "L'Enfance d'un chef," Le Mur, p. 249.

[12] Ibid., p. 250.

that his existence is necessitated: "'J'existe pensa-t-il, parce que j'ai le droit d'exister.'"[13]

Lucien is already impatient to fill his father's position, and he wonders if M. Fleurier might not soon die. This conversion takes place within a café, and as Sartre sarcastically writes, "La métamorphose était achevée: dans ce café, une heure plus tôt, un adolescent gracieux et incertain était entré; c'était un homme qui en sortait, un chef parmi les Français."[14] Leo Pollman comments on Sartre's irony in "L'Enfance": "Here Sartre's existentialism is completely turned around and offered in unmistakable irony, not to say parody, as redeeming realization that l'essence précède l'existence."[15]

All that Lucien needs now to distinguish him as a bourgeois salaud is a mustache. In the last line of the story, one learns that he has decided to grow one.

In "La Chambre," another story from Le Mur, Sartre presents another example of bad faith. Eve, who is from another typically bourgeois family, has decided to remain with her husband, Pierre, who is gradually going insane and lies sequestered in a single room. According to Joseph McMahon, Pierre's isolation is due to his refusal to live as a free being because of his fear of freedom and its

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[13] Ibid., pp. 250-251.

[14] Ibid., p. 252.

[15] Pollman, op. cit., p. 28.

consequences. "Pierre's hallucinations are radical reductions of the forces of the bourgeois world in which he has refused to live." McMahon continues, "By enclosing himself in his room he has acted freely against one world and has freely accepted another."[16]

Eve, too, is attempting to escape her former bourgeois existence, but, as Philip Thody points out, she cannot share her husband's madness. "The wall between human minds cannot be scaled and however much Eve may hate the normal world, she can never escape from it."[17] Nevertheless as McMahon notes, Pierre and Eve have one advantage over Eve's bourgeois parents in that "at least once, they have performed a free and conscious act."[18]

Perhaps the most manifest case of bad faith is that of Daniel. In his attempt to escape responsibility for his homosexuality, Daniel seeks all types of excuses. He tries to conceive of the universe as an ordered predestined universe, in which no one can effect any change: "On n'y pouvait rien, c'était comme ça. Quelque chose dans ce ciel, dans cette lumière, dans cette nature en avait décidé."[19] Thus he has

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[16]McMahon, op. cit., pp. 53-55.

[17]Thody, Jean-Paul Sartre, A Philosophical and Political Study, p. 26.

[18]McMahon, op. cit., p. 55.

[19]Sartre, L'Âge de raison, p. 171.

been predestined to his homosexuality. It is his fate, and he can do nothing about it. Yet he still feels shame over what he is, and shame reveals some form of responsibility. Daniel, however, attributes this to nature. "Tous les invertis sont honteux, c'est dans leur nature,"[20] he says.

According to Sartre, shame reveals other existents, for it is only before the Other that one can be judged and that one becomes an object. As Sartre says, "la honte . . . est honte de soi, elle est reconnaissance de ce que je suis bien cet objet qu'autrui regarde et juge."[21] That is why Daniel says in the presence of Mathieu, "J'ai honte d'être pédéraste parce que je suis pédéraste."[22]

Actually, that is what Daniel wants, that is, to be an object, or in Sartrian terms to be en-soi instead of pour-soi. For by being an object instead of a conscious existent, Daniel would escape all responsibility for what he is. He would coincide with himself, for his existence would be the same as his essence. As Daniel himself expresses it, he would like to be made of stone, immobile, insensitive, making no sound, deaf and blind. The insects would crawl all over his body, but he would remain a statue, without a project, without a worry. Perhaps then he would coincide with himself.

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[20] Ibid., p. 373.

[21] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 319.

[22] Sartre, L'Âge de raison, p. 373.

Perhaps then he would be what he is--a homosexual, a coward, a malicious person. As he says, "Être pédéraste, comme le chêne est chêne."[23]

Daniel seeks this objectivity in le regard of the Other. For, according to Sartre, it is as objects that one perceives others, and it is as an object that one is perceived by another. This is the reason that Hilbert in "Érostrate" forces the prostitute to parade naked before him. He insists on avoiding the bodily contact which implies personal relationship, for he wishes to regard the prostitute as a mere object. As Philip Thody says,

> The sadist in Being and Nothingness tries to dominate The Other by making him realize that his existence is absurd and contingent. He does this by forcing The Other to become completely identified with his body, which the sadist then contemplates as an obscene prison for The Other's mind. The fact that Hilbert remains dressed while the prostitute walks about in all her naked obscenity under the threat of his revolver is characteristic of the sadist's desire to imprison The Other in the flesh while he himself remains free.[24]

Therefore, it is in le regard, the look of the Other, which reveals the individual to himself as an object.[25] Thus, Daniel achieves his desire in the look of another. One day he realizes that he is the object of another's look.

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[23]Sartre, Le Sursis, p. 131.

[24]Thody, Jean-Paul Sartre, A Literary and Political Study, p. 28.

[25]Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 419.

The look penetrates him like a knife to the core, and condemns him to being himself, a coward, a hypocrite, a homosexual for all eternity.[26]

According to Sartre, however, one's freedom can still not be completely limited by the other since it is still up to the individual to recognize the other's freedom and to acquiesce to the other's objectivization of himself.[27] This is why, in a mock mystical experience, Daniel discovers the solution in the look of an eternal omnipotent God, whose look he cannot flee or overcome. He addresses himself to the Almighty: "Tu me regardes et tout espoir s'enfuit: je suis las de me fuir. Mais je sais sous ton oeil que je ne peux plus me fuir. . . . Je suis, je suis, je suis pédéraste, mon Dieu."[28]

In a letter to Mathieu, towards the end of Le Sursis, Daniel relates the details of his discovery to him.

> Quelle angoisse de découvrir soudain ce regard comme un milieu universel d'où je ne puis m'évader. Mais quel repos, aussi. Je sais enfin que je suis. . . . Je n'ai plus à supporter la responsabilité de mon écoulement pâteux: celui qui me voit et me fait être; je suis comme il me voit. Je tourne vers la nuit ma face nocturne et éternelle, je me dresse comme un défi, je dis à Dieu: me voilà. Me voilà tel que vous me voyez, tel que je suis.[29]

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[26] Sartre, Le Sursis, p. 133.

[27] Sartre, L'Être et la néant, pp. 609-610.

[28] Sartre, Le Sursis, pp. 193-194.

[29] Ibid., p. 398.

The existentialist individual who is aware of his freedom and responsibility knows in anguish that he must choose. In choice, he has sway over the past, present, and future, as explained earlier. That is why, according to Sartre, the individual's obligation to choose is never-ending. For, since one is totally free, any previous choices can never be binding on the future, and one can always change one's attitude toward the past. Therefore, the individual must constantly choose. Even if the choice is to continue as before, this constitutes a renewal of a previous choice. As Sartre says, "la liberté qui se manifeste par l'angoisse se caractérise par une obligation perpétuéllement renouvelée de refaire le Moi qui désigne l'être libre."[30]

This is what is meant by transcendence, for the existential individual is constantly transcending himself. He can never coincide with himself, for as soon as he "becomes" a certain essence he knows that in his freedom he must renew his choice of this essence or choose another. Therefore, in all actuality, the existent can never really be defined, because as soon as he is defined as this, that, or the other, he is already a different person. That is why Sartre says that man is ". . . un être qui est ce qu'il n'est pas et qui n'est pas ce qu'il est."[31] Man is that which he is not

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[30]Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 72.

[31]Ibid., p. 97.

because he is constantly projecting himself toward a future (that which he is not), and he is not what he is, because as soon as one attempts to define him in the present (what he is), the man has already projected himself toward the future. As Sartre says, the individual _is_ not his past, because the past is what the individual _was_. That is why, he points out, I may be surprised or even indignant at another's anger for something I said yesterday since I am no longer the same person today. As Sartre says, "tout jugement que je porte sur moi est déjà faux quand je le porte, c'est-à-dire que je suis devenu _autre chose_."[32]

The fact of his transcendence is what Daniel cannot accept. As mentioned earlier, his existence wants to coincide with his essence. He wants to be a homosexual as an oak is an oak. For, then he would be an object, free from responsibility for what he is and free from having constantly to choose and to transcend himself.

According to Joseph McMahon, transcendence is what Anny refers to in _La Nausée_ when she says, "Je me survis."[33] As McMahon says, this claim of Anny's that she is living beyond herself means that "she is living beyond both her past and her former notion that she was a fixed quantity."[34] Roquentin

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[32] _Ibid._, p. 160.

[33] Sartre, _La Nausée_, p. 203.

[34] McMahon, _op. cit._, p. 50.

apparently inherits Anny's term; however, he does not seem to have as yet grasped the meaning of transcendence:

> À présent, je vais faire comme Anny, je vais me survivre. Manger, dormir. Dormir, manger. Exister lentement, doucement, comme ces arbres, comme un flaque d'eau, comme la banquette rouge du tramway.[35]

Commenting on Roquentin in this passage, McMahon says,

> He accepts Anny's term and decides that he, too, will survive beyond his ego: in other words, he will acknowledge that there is no fixed value that can be labeled "Roquentin" and whose ingredients and uses can be exhaustively listed. But immediately he decides that he will also live like the trees and the puddles of water, letting events happen, imitating the objects' resignation. He knows, however, that this is no way out, no usable response. Events will continue to exist in a mode quite different from that of the trees.[36]

The fact of transcendence seems to haunt Mathieu throughout L'Âge de raison. The professor of philosophy apparently cannot arrive at a conclusion as to whether or not he is what he is, an individual totally defined, or if he is able to change--to transcend himself. At times, Mathieu attempts to arrive at a definition of himself, but he is never sure about such a definition. As he is leaving the Luxembourg gardens to search for Ivich he defines himself as a simple civil servant, a civil servant who has money problems and who was on his way to find the sister of one of his former students. But he wonders if this definition is valid, if the chips were

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[35]Sartre, La Nausée, p. 220.

[36]McMahon, op. cit., p. 50.

already down. "Est-ce que je ne suis plus qu'un fonctionnaire?" he asks himself.[37]

It is Ivich, Boris' sister with whom Mathieu is infatuated, who chastises Mathieu for his intranscendence. As Ivich tells him, "--Vous êtes installé et vous ne changeriez pas pour tout l'or du monde." She continues to say that "on a l'impression que vous avez votre vie faite et vos idées sur tout."[38] In response to which Mathieu eventually says that he will try to change, but Ivich reveals that she does not believe him.

Mathieu is again struck by his stagnant life, when he refuses Brunet's offer to join the Communist Party. Before leaving, Brunet asks Mathieu what he is becoming. Mathieu feels irritated at the question because he knew he was becoming nothing and he admits this to Brunet. Brunet then sums up the stagnant existence of Mathieu: ". . . quatorze heures de cours par semaine et un voyage à l'étranger pendant les vacances." Mathieu agrees, avoiding Brunet's looks.[39]

At the very end of L'Âge de raison, Mathieu finally concludes that "il n'était rien et cependant il ne changerait plus: il était fait."[40] Therefore, as he has done in

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[37] Sartre, L'Âge de raison, p. 66.

[38] Ibid., p. 100.

[39] Ibid., p. 146.

[40] Ibid., p. 377.

regard to all other aspects of existentialism, Mathieu fails in regard to transcendency.

The question may arise that if the authentic individual is in a state of constant transcendence, at what point does he coincide with himself, at what point does he become definable. Sartre's answer is, "at death."

> Au moment de la mort nous sommes, c'est-à-dire nous sommes sans défence devant les jugements d'autrui; on peut décider *en vérité* de ce que nous sommes.[41]

In Sartrian terms, the moment of death is when the *pour-soi* becomes *en-soi*. One finally becomes an object, a corpse. Until then, one's life is, as Sartre says, *en sursis*[42]--on reprieve--because one cannot judge or define it since one always has a future before him in which he can always change. This is what Mathieu realizes when he sees what he thinks is the dead body of Lola, Boris' mistress. "'Une vie, pensa Mathieu, c'est fait avec de l'avenir comme les corps sont faits avec du vide.'" He reflects on his own life and is struck with the thought of the future, for he is aware that everything is *en sursis*.[43]

The individual is, according to Sartre, a series of *attentes* or projections to the future. Death is what puts

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[41]Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 159.

[42]*Ibid.*, p. 583.

[43]Sartre, *L'Âge de raison*, p. 261.

a halt to these attentes.[44] Sartre calls death "le mur,"[45] for it is what one encounters at the end of life. The absurdity of death lies in that very fact--that it is an end. For, as Sartre says, if it is at this point that one is able to finally define one's life, to ascertain its meaning; if death is the arrêt du compte, and yet one does not choose the moment when this account is rendered, then the free acts which have made up one's life have little import. To illustrate this point, Sartre cites an anecdote of Diderot: two brothers stood before God on the final day of judgment. The first asked God why he had made him die so young. God answered, "In order to save you, because if you had lived longer, you would have committed a crime, like your brother." So then the other brother asked, "Why did you make me die so old?" Therefore, says Sartre, one minute more or one minute less might change the whole meaning of life for the individual.[46] Sartre gives the example of a young man who aspires to being a great writer, writes one successful novel, and then dies. Who is to say that he would not have been a great writer had not death intervened. And yet he did die, and the fact remains that he did write only one novel. Therefore all his attentes,

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[44] Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 623.

[45] Ibid., p. 615.

[46] Ibid., pp. 622-623.

all his particular actions, all his values fall into absurdity.[47] Life itself is absurd because of death, for death makes life somehow incomplete.

Mathieu continues to become aware of all the implications of death. "Il n'y avait rien eu à attendre," he thinks, "la mort était revenue en arrière sur toutes ces attentes et les avait arrêtées, elles restaient immobiles et muettes, sans but, absurdes." There was nothing else to expect anymore. No one would ever know if Lola would have ever finally made Boris love her. The question itself was meaningless. Lola was dead and there was nothing left to do for her, not a caress, not even a prayer. Life was only "attentes d'attentes," nothing but a deflated existence which caves in on itself. "'Si je mourais aujourd'hui, pensa brusquement Mathieu, personne ne saurait jamais si j'étais foutu ou si je gardais encore des chances de me sauver.'"[48]

Perhaps the best illustration of the absurdity of death, and consequently life, is Sartre's title story from Le Mur. The story describes a man's encounter with approaching death--le mur. Pablo Ibbieta, a Spanish revolutionary, has been captured and is sentences to go before a firing squad in the morning. Pablo is suddenly faced with the prospect of his own impending death. He had never thought about death before

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[47] Ibid., pp. 623-624.

[48] Sartre, L'Âge de raison, p. 262.

because the occasion had never presented itself, but now the occasion was there and there was nothing else to do but to think about death.[49]

The fact of death, when thrust upon him, makes the individual realize his very mortality. Until that moment, one ignores his eventual doom, and, in order to make life meaningful, one conducts himself as if he were immortal. Pablo reflects on his past life, his quest for happiness, for freedom, his desire to liberate Spain, and he says to himself, "Je prenais tout au serieux, comme si j'avais été immortel."[50] Later Pablo perceives that now, in his new awareness, it would not even make any difference if he were set free, for, several hours or several years of waiting are all the same when one has lost the illusion of being eternal.[51]

The fact of death makes the revolutionary aware of the meaninglessness of his entire life: "Elle ne valait rien puisqu'elle était finie."[52] Like Mathieu, Pablo begins to realize the absurd nature of death which leaves the individual's life, his projects, his values incomplete, meaningless, absurd. His life was before him, finished, closed like a sack. Yet everything in it was incomplete. Pablo tries to pass some kind of judgment on his life. But he cannot. His

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[49]Sartre, "Le Mur," Le Mur, p. 16.

[50]Ibid., p. 27.

[51]Ibid., p. 29.

[52]Ibid., p. 27.

life was still an ébauche, a rough sketch. As Pablo tells himself, "J'avais passé mon temps à tirer des traites pour l'éternité, je n'avais rien compris."[53]

As dawn approaches for Pablo and his two companions who are also awaiting the same fate, bodily functions cease to function properly, and man is revealed in his pitifully weak state. The other two prisoners begin to cry, but Pablo has decided that he wishes to die properly. As the day dawns, his two companions are led away first, and the sounds of intermittent salvos can be heard. Pablo is finally led out, but he is held for questioning. The authorities wish to learn the whereabouts of Ramon Gris, the revolutionary leader. Pablo knows where he is, but he will not reveal this to the authorities. Instead, in a mere whim, he tells them that Ramon Gris is hiding at the cemetery, which is not in fact the truth. He is held until the authorities are able to ascertain the truth of his statement. A while later, he is led out to a courtyard and Pablo learns that he will not be shot. Dazed and confused, he meets a fellow revolutionary who informs him that the authorities have killed Ramon Gris. It seems that Gris had left his former hiding place and had decided to hide in the cemetery. "--Au cimetière!," exclaims Pablo. He becomes dizzy and finds himself on the ground laughing so hard that tears come to his eyes.[54]

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[53] Ibid., pp. 27-28.

[54] Ibid., p. 38.

The story is reminiscent of Sartre's characterization of death in L'Être et le néant. He observes that one has often compared man's situation to that of a condemned prisoner among other condemned prisoners. None of them know the day of their execution, but each day, there are some prisoners led away to their death. But, says Sartre, this comparison is not exact. Rather, man's situation is that of a condemned prisoner who prepares himself bravely to meet his end, who makes a great effort to cast a valient figure on the scaffold; and who, in the meantime, dies from an epidemic of influenza.[55]

The fact of death is probably the most pessimistic aspect of Sartre's existentialism. In a revealing passage in La Nausée, he seems to summarize his impression of existence:

> Tout existent naît sans raison, se prolonge par faiblesse et meurt par rencontre.[56]

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[55]Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 617.

[56]Sartre, La Nausée, p. 189.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The philosophical structure of Jean-Paul Sartre is clearly manifested in his fictional works. Existentialist theory is portrayed in a concrete manner through the personalities, relationships, and situations of Sartre's fiction. Like L'Être et le néant, the fiction examines the pour-soi, its relation to the en-soi, and its relation to the Other. The only difference is that the vehicle for the former is philosophy and the vehicle for the latter is literature. Le Mur seems to focus on the pour-soi itself, the relationship between the pour-soi and the en-soi is dealt with particularly in La Nausée, and Les Chemins de la liberté concerns itself with the relationship between the pour-soi and the Other.

Sartre's literary theory is based largely on his existentialist philosophy. In L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, Sartre addresses himself to those who criticize existentialist literature because it describes feeble, weak, cowardly, or evil beings. Sartre says that if he, like Zola, declared that his characters were the way they were because of the effects of their environment, or of society, or due to a physical or psychological determinism, then his critics would

be reassured; they would be able to say that that is the way things are, and that one cannot do anything about it. When the existentialist describes a coward, however, he says that the coward is responsible for his pusillanimity. He is not like that because of a cowardly heart or a cowardly brain. He is that way because he made himself that way by his actions. What Sartre's critics want to believe is that one is born either a coward or a hero. Sartre says that one of the most frequent criticisms of Les Chemins de la liberté is how Sartre can make heroes out of characters who are so feeble. Sartre finds this objection ludicrous for it supposes that the individuals are born heroes. Sartre's critics want to believe that if a person is born a coward, he will be perfectly tranquil because there is nothing he can do. He will be a coward all his life no matter what he does. On the other hand, if a person is born a hero, he will be just as tranquil. He will be a hero all his life. He will drink like a hero, and he will eat like a hero. The existentialist says that the coward makes himself a coward and the hero makes himself a hero. There is always a possibility that the coward will cease to be a coward and that the hero will cease to be a hero.[1]

This is the significance of Mathieu's final decision of commitment, of Daniel's rationalized homosexuality, of Lucien

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[1]Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, pp. 59-62.

Fleurier's conversion to bourgeois essentialism. They are the free and conscious acts of concrete, existent characters. This idea permeates Sartre's fiction. The one exception, to a certain extent, would be La Nausée, whose orientation is more didactic than illustrative and whose characters are more symbolic than real.

Critically speaking, La Nausée is undoubtedly Sartre's most significant work of fiction, if not of all his literary genres. It ranks as one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century fiction. As a whole, Le Mur is found to be Sartre's weakest work of fiction. Leo Pollman says that "Le Mur (The Wall), La Chambre (The Room), Érostrate (Erostratus), and Intimité (Intimacy) are disappointing; they provide no satisfactory esthetic solution."[2] Pollman also says that "in these stories Sartre also made the mistake of allowing certain basic tenets to stand out too obviously."[3] He finds "L'Enfance d'un chef" to be the only exception to his criticisms.

Les Chemins de la liberté is perhaps the most controversial of Sartre's fiction. The problem stems from Sartre's original intention to make Les Chemins a tetralogy. Therefore, the work remains incomplete. This, in fact, is one of the major points of criticism. The only two sections which

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[2]Pollman, op. cit., p. 27.

[3]Ibid., p. 28.

have appeared of the intended fourth volume, La Dernière Chance, are two extracts entitled "Drôle d'amitié," published in Les Temps Modernes in November and December 1942. Simone de Beauvoir, however, has revealed in a brief account how Sartre had planned to end Les Chemins. It turns out that Mathieu is not killed in his last stand against the Germans. He is taken prisoner and meets his friend Brunet. Mathieu later escapes, has a liaison with his brother's wife Odette, but is soon recaptured by the Gestapo and dies under torture.[4] According to Germaine Brée, even the unauthentic Daniel who had become a collaborationist was to make a final act of commitment in the last volume by blowing himself up in a café which is filled with German soldiers.[5]

Therefore, Les Chemins is faulty because the final denouement has not been actually published. One does not know exactly what final meaning the characters of Les Chemins are to convey. The characters themselves are en sursis and one cannot make a final judgment in regard to them. The greatest problem in this respect is the case of Mathieu. There seems to be much controversy over the question of Mathieu's final act of commitment. Anthony Manser believes that the discovery that Sartre did not mean Mathieu

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[4]Thody, Sartre, A Biographical Introduction, pp. 84-86.

[5]Germaine Brée, Camus and Sartre, Crisis and Commitment (New York, 1972), p. 226.

to die "destroys whatever value we might have seen in the gest."[6] Iris Murdoch calls Mathieu's final gesture a "senseless destruction,"[7] and Philip Thody does not believe that Sartre intends Mathieu to be admired either.[8]

Whatever Sartre's intention may have been, literarily and philosophically speaking, it would have been a mistake to have Mathieu survive. The events leading progressively up to the decision to act, and the final crescendo during the conflict culminating in the implied destruction of the bell tower would, solely from a literary viewpoint, render any account of Mathieu's survival anti-climactic, disappointing, and contrived. From the viewpoint of Sartre's own existential philosophy, the fact that Mathieu finally became aware of his freedom, finally chose to act, and finally committed himself to the extent of putting his own life in peril, does indicate that Mathieu has achieved a kind of Sartrian salvation. Joseph McMahon seems to agree. He acknowledges that Mathieu's acceptance of his freedom is "a sparse joyless possession; but it is something and what it is is better than what has been."[9] Anthony Manser seems to believe that Mathieu's act

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[6]Manser, op. cit., p. 185.

[7]Murdoch, op. cit., p. 22.

[8]Thody, Jean-Paul Sartre, A Literary and Political Study, p. 58.

[9]McMahon, op. cit., p. 139.

is senseless because there is no point in delaying the German advance for only fifteen minutes.[10] The fact, however, is that Mathieu's gesture is not to be seen against its world-wide import but in its proper existential framework. According to Sartre, values are chosen by the individual. Mathieu himself chose the value of his action, and he committed himself to it. Therefore, it makes no difference whether he held out for five or fifteen minutes; it makes no difference whether he killed one German soldier or the whole German army. Mathieu made a personal choice and a personal commitment. He fully assumed the implications of his freedom, and according to Sartre's own definition, became an authentic individual. Therefore, philosophically speaking, there is no point in having Mathieu survive. He has already achieved his development, and further examples of continuing commitment would be philosophically uninteresting.

In closing, it should perhaps be noted that, with the passing of time, Sartre's philosophy has varied in some aspects. Therefore the facts arrived at and the conclusions drawn can only be based on the theoretical and fictional works examined and Sartrian thinking at the time of their production.

It is hoped that this study has, to a certain extent, elucidated Sartre's fiction in regard to its philosophical

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[10] Manser, op. cit., p. 185.

content and significance. It is also to be hoped, if not expected, that such an understanding will inevitably lead to a commensurate appreciation.

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