

Freedom and Authority: Burke and Sartre in Dialogue

Joseph Pappin III

BURKE: In an earlier dialogue we spoke of "Tradition and Radical Individualism." Of course, M. Sartre, you are nothing if not the philosopher of freedom. All of which is most perplexing when we discover in your later thought your flirtation with Marxism. In light of your own "Itinerary of Thought" it might serve us well, and those still confined to the world, to reflect on freedom and its natural correlate, authority.

SARTRE: I welcome the continuation of our dialogue, despite the natural discomfort I have in residing in the hereafter, which I did not anticipate, with a counter-revolutionary such as yourself. Nonetheless, I welcome the chance not only to discuss my own view of freedom, but also to dispel the necessity of "authority" within human relations. For myself, the introduction of authority is the introduction of domination and oppression. Rather, I resolutely call for the "end of authority" and the recovery of freedom within the social context of egalitarianism, through which all hierarchies are to be eliminated in order that persons may indeed flourish. In order to insure a proper dialogue, your own thought seems rife with paradox. On the one hand, you spent

a lifetime fighting tyranny where others saw none—I think of your prosecution of Warren Hastings—and you were the enemy of despotism. At the same time, recoiling in your older age from the truest expression of freedom within the radical democratic movements heralded by the French Revolution, you made a *volte-face* and hid behind the tyranny of George III's monarchy. And yet you had the temerity to declare in your *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* that "Partial freedom seems to me a most invidious mode of slavery." No wonder that you were charged with inconsistency even in your own day.

BURKE: Undoubtedly the temptation to rip quotations from their proper intellectual moorings will be one both of us succumb to, as you have just done. The quote you have just cited was preceded by the following: "Liberty, if I understand it at all, is a *general* principle, and the clear right of all the subjects within the realm, or of none." At best the French Revolution introduced a "partial freedom."

SARTRE: It always amazes me how you play hide and seek with the doctrine of rights. Do you mean in this context that freedom is a natural right? If so, I have little doubt that you will soon attempt to resurrect from that bog of dogmatic intellectual treachery the connected notion of "human nature." In point of fact, if there is anything I believe that I succeeded in

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philosophically it was to demonstrate that there is no such thing as a "human nature." Whereas for you human nature, I presume, secures freedom, for myself it would most certainly annul freedom.

BURKE: While I wish to defend my own position, please elaborate on your own—somewhat.

SARTRE: To have a "nature" is to have an essence, which defines, substantiates, rendering something granite-like. To be this, by "nature" or essence, is not to be that. To be a tree is not to be a rock. In short, to be this one thing is to place a limit, to box-in, to render changeless. But freedom implies the surpassing of limits, the ability to change, to become. This is what existence is about.

BURKE: Hence your famous notion that for man "existence precedes essence."

SARTRE: Yes, and by this I mean for man "subjectivity is the starting point." Obviously my reference is to consciousness, which itself is a lack of being, an absence of being, a veritable "nothingness" within a world of things.

BURKE: Is this what you had in mind when you claimed that "man is nothing else but what he makes of himself?"

SARTRE: Indeed, "I am what I am not, and I am not what I am." Therefore, M. Burke, even though our earthbound thought is now in the past tense, I am sure that if you could you would now amend your position and renounce as *passé* any recourse to the concept of human "nature." "Nature"-talk may be adequate to non-human reality, but its conceptual network cannot capture the vivacity of human reality, *n'est-ce pas*?

BURKE: Your dialectical legerdemain moves quickly, but as an old parliamentary debater I was never taken to be a dull wit. In fact, I believe your thought is insufficiently nuanced. Not only does man possess a basic human nature, which in fact secures what he is substantially, this in no way precludes change or the vitality

of existence. Man also possesses a "second" nature which reflects his wealth of experience, choices and habits. Yet, I never denied the complexity of the matter. For I maintain that "The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity; and, therefore, no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man's nature or to the quality of his affairs."

Still, despite that complexity, "man is by nature reasonable; and he is never perfectly in his natural state, but when he is placed where reason may be best cultivated and most predominates." It is the element of reason which distinguishes human beings, the condition of acting freely. And yet you, M. Sartre, elevate "will" above all else.

SARTRE: This all sounds like warmed over Aristotelianism, to me. Such attempts at resuscitating classical thought would never have had the appeal that my thoughts did throughout Europe and America. As far as your idea of reason being the element that secures freedom you could not be further removed from the truth. I have put forward a detailed account of reason in my works *Search for a Method* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Without realizing it your own thought is one variant of reason, namely "analytical" reason. It tends to capture bits and pieces of reality and places them in frozen categories reflecting both the language of their socioeconomic class and a particular historical epoch. You take the verities of the historical moment in which you live as eternal and timeless and then attempt to apply these static concepts to a world of constant change. Whereas "dialectical reason legislates, it defines what the world (human or total) must be like for dialectical knowledge to be possible...it is Reason constituting itself in and through the world." Thus, "the basic intelligibility of dialectical Reason, if it exists, is that of totalization."

BURKE: It occurs to me, M. Sartre, as you take recourse to the myth of dialectics, that you are an idealist, which is truly the ultimate scandal of an existentialist who has gone through the baptism of Marxism. This business of reason as legislator and as constituting itself certainly carries overtones of idealism. Here we have man determining the world rather than disclosing a world already there.

SARTRE: I expected certain taunts along the way but this one I did not expect. Yet we are shaped by history and, taking this product of history, we transcend it and re-shape it according to designs and ends. This leads me to the conclusion that "Man makes himself out of what is made of him." How could this be other than a dialectical process? You long for the world of statics, in which Kings are kings, lords rule the manor, merchants bilk the poor and every commoner entertains the fairy tale of being knighted, which alas was your own desire.

BURKE: This charge of "statics" is a clear indication that you did not follow through on our mutual commitment to read each other's works carefully—obviously we have the time. Undoubtedly though you did read my works knowing how important commitment is to you. So I shall simply remind you that one of my most crucial claims is that the "Law of Nature is change." Yet, I never fell prey to the Heraclitean flux in which *all* is change. You equate existence with change which is dynamic, progressive, and vibrant. Change can also be oppressive and destructive of both the nature and the order of things. For while the "Law of Nature is Change," it is constructive insofar as it takes place within the order provided by, at least in England, the nation's constitution. While I do not hold to a strict organic view of the state, nor to any fatalistic historical determinism, yet I recognize that the organic model can be instructive. And like an organism, the state has a certain life, governed by opinions and

prejudices, opinions which reflect the accumulated wisdom of a nation's past, anticipating the future, not simply to reduplicate the past, but to provide a foundation for mature and reasoned growth.

SARTRE: Your reliance upon a "foundationalist" philosophy thoroughly dates you in today's philosophical milieu. As I listen to you I feel like a prisoner, consumed by the past, with no escape. Even if you anticipate the future, your horizons are too limited by the past. The truth is that at the bottom, or the core, or heart—call it what you will—is nothingness. I am not a something, posited, weighing down existence. I am a nothing.

BURKE: Sounds as if eternity has brought on a deep nostalgia on your part for times past, as you voice the extreme position of *Being and Nothingness*. In fact, so extreme were your pronouncements on man in that nihilistic track, that you quickly amended your position in your public lecture immediately after World War II on "Existentialism is a Humanism." There you made a major concession to the persistence of that enduring reality which is "human nature." You concealed this concession by referring instead to the "human condition." Recalling that lecture you state that "if it is impossible to find in every man some universal essence which would be human nature, yet there does exist a universal human condition." By elaboration you then assert that by this is meant "the *a priori* limits which outline man's fundamental situation in the universe." And then, as if to sustain what in fact is a vain attempt to circumvent the obvious, that is, the nature of man, you distinguish between the variables of historical situations and the invariable situations in which all persons exist. You then conclude that "What does not vary is the necessity for him to exist in the world, to be at work there, to be there in the midst of other people, and to be mortal there." You even go so far as to state "there is a universality of man." In

effect, you try to dance as close to the fire of "human nature" as possible without being burned—by the truth.

SARTRE: So much for the careful reading of each other's works for which you earlier remonstrated me. You omit the telling portion in which I again proclaim the absolute character of human freedom over any universal dimension, be it "nature" or a "fundamental situation." Notice that I state that the universality of man "is not given, it is perpetually being made. I build the universe in choosing myself." Whereas you, M. Burke, tend to sanctify the past and wrap its mantle around the shoulders of human beings, weighing them down and suffocating their freedom. While acknowledging that there is a "fundamental situation," finding myself born in France, in a bourgeois family, in the twentieth century, I can "nihilate" my situation, to the point of either renouncing my past, reshaping it, or acquiescing totally to it. I am *not* submerged in or bound up by my past. The past, and my situation, is what it is to and for me through my own choice. Surely you see that, and your own life is a prime example of what I mean. Your father broke with his Catholic past while your mother clung to the same. You yourself followed the traditional path when faced with such a dilemma. You allowed yourself to be raised in your father's faith and then appropriated Anglicanism for yourself.

BURKE: I suppose we should seek convergencies where we can find them. It might be well to focus on this notion of a "situation," for, regardless of how we view the notions of "human nature" or "human condition," we both give place to the reality of man's "situation." We find ourselves placed within a situation in many aspects not of our choosing. For man, that situation is a natural one bringing with it a train of duties, and I am adamant in maintaining that our duties both reflect our situation and reflect the providential action of the Supreme Ruler, "the Author

of our being" who "is the Author of our place in the order of existence—and that, having disposed and marshalled us by a divine tactic, not according to our will, but according to His. He has in and by that disposition virtually subjected us to act the part which belongs to the place assigned us. We have obligations to mankind at large, which are not in consequence of any special voluntary pact. They arise from the relation of man to man, and the relation of man to God, which relations are not matters of choice."

SARTRE: Well, you have spelled out better than myself why it is that one must jettison the idea of God if we are to preserve the freedom of man. For you, God has put us in our place, subjected us to His will, given each of us an assigned list of duties and put us in obligation to others through no choice of our own. And yet you can still indict all partial freedoms as forms of slavery. *Mon cher ami*, we are, by your view of the matter, all slaves of God, virtual puppets, assigned to act our part, in anguish undoubtedly over the failure to do so. Even Freud could not alleviate you from this neurotic state of affairs.

But let me first of all focus on that element of our situation in which you refer to obligations of "man to man, and the relation of man to God," relations in which we have no choice. To claim that we discover ourselves in a situation bound by duties, obligations, and relations is to eliminate any choice on the part of man. Instead, I assert that "Human reality cannot receive its ends...either from outside or from a so-called inner 'nature.' It chooses them and by this very choice confers upon them a transcendental existence as the external limit of its projects."

BURKE: I too allow for choice, but I don't burden the human will with the full weight of the world and its meanings. I have a choice in marriage but having made that choice an entire train of duties follows inevitably. So, "When we marry,

the choice is voluntary, but the duties are not matters of choice: they are dictated by the nature of the situation."

SARTRE: I am not sure how far we are removed from one another on this issue. As I see it I am a lack of self, striving, almost in vain, to be a self in the world. I am "Consciousness of..." the other. I intend the other. Lacking a self or a world, human freedom first of all is "world-constituting." I reside in a world of meanings. For the bourgeoisie, it is the world of "respectability." Still, I am not thrust into the world as bourgeois; rather I choose, through an original choice, the world or horizon of meanings within which I am to live. Furthermore, not only is human reality "world-constituting" in its freedom, but also it is "world-surpassing." Human reality surpasses the world of meanings within which it lives towards other worlds of meanings. While being a comfortable bourgeoisie, we are able to surpass this world towards other possibles, stirred by our imagination or seen in the Other's world of being. I may choose to abandon this comfortable world of bourgeois existence, living off the surplus product of the common worker, and take on the revolutionary project of the oppressed laborer.

Finally, due to the fundamental character of consciousness, human reality is "world-nihilating."

BURKE: At last, you converge upon the position I have long thought you have occupied. You are a revolutionary nihilist, at least in your own self-conception.

SARTRE: By "world-nihilating" I have something specific in mind. I should indicate that I am elaborating in effect what I call "existentialist freedom" which refers to the activity which is consciousness. My philosophy is a philosophy of action, not of inert substances and essences. I maintain that consciousness, as nihilating, is distinguished by three "primordial nihilations." The first is that of questioning. How could we be free save that we are able to question our world, to

negate it if freedom requires, and to create a new world?

BURKE: I believe it is certainly appropriate to question, if by this you mean to inquire, to learn from the accumulated wisdom of the past, to consider how graduated improvements might build upon the solid foundation of a firm constitution. My fear is that you mean by "questioning" something very radical: to call into question the very reason for existing of the state and society. And then by "world-constituting" you really mean to re-constitute a world yet to have been made except in the vain imagination of a revolutionary questioner. By world-constituting, surpassing, and nihilating, you really mean to call into question the very validity of a nation's present existence and constitution. You really should draw together these three strands of existentialist freedom and sum it up as "world-overcoming," or, better, "world destroying." You would take entire generations into a false utopia of your own imagination in which you trump "freedom for all," which in reality would be "freedom for me," namely the tyrant himself.

I do not renounce change, or reform, but it must be reform that is in agreement with the fundamental edifice of the building we may call the constitution. I advance a metaphysics of nature and society that surpasses your "Marxism of pure flux." I hold to the classical Aristotelian position which sees in both permanence and change the law of nature. I was a reformer, and in formulating a principle of reform "I would not exclude alteration; but even when I changed, it would be to preserve.... I would make the reparation as nearly as possible in the style of the building."

SARTRE: Your writing style practically oozes with an air of "*noblesse oblige*." What you did not recall was your fundamental status quo conservatism, grounded in an unquestioning political

irrationalism which celebrates “know-nothingness.” Your own writings convict you, as you wrote, “The foundations on which obedience to governments is founded are not to be constantly discussed. That we are here, supposes the discussion already made and the dispute settled.” No wonder that political conservatism is virtually without respect in intellectual circles with ancestors such as yourself.

BURKE: As so often is the case, you miss my point. I believe that those who perpetually seek to re-invent government are relying upon the limited resources of private, individual reason. They are placing their revolutionary imaginings above an inherited wisdom. If to be conservative is to acknowledge that the lived history and experiences of a nation, a civilization and its people as acquired over many centuries conveys a storehouse of insight and maxims, which ought to govern, at least on the order of principles, our lives, then I am guilty—but not foolish. I have already written my judgment on those who would think otherwise: “Those whose principle it is to despise the ancient, permanent sense of mankind, and to set up a scheme of society on new principles must naturally expect that such of us who think better of the judgment of the human race than of theirs should consider both them and their devices as men and schemes upon their trial.” My point is that it is extremely presumptuous for individuals to dismiss the established principles upon which a government and constitution such as that of England has been established and to throw a nation into a cauldron of anarchy and chaos, as did the French Revolution, with so little reverence for the wisdom of our ancestors. That, dear *monsieur*, is true foolishness. For myself, I believe that human society reflects “the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, molding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race.”

SARTRE: While you are vaunting the wisdom of the past, I am trying to elaborate for you an understanding of existentialist freedom that will establish the priority of the individual. I know that my discussion of the points concerning the “world-nihilating” functions of consciousness are a bit trying, but they do underscore the quest for authentic human freedom, not the security found in sequestering oneself in the encrusted wisdom of the past, but in recognizing that man is responsible for man, and this calls for action.

BURKE: Having taken for myself the title of “the Philosopher in Action” I am hardly one to be depicted, at least by implication, as the philosopher of capitulation and inaction.

SARTRE: May I please proceed on the principles of “world-nihilation?” I have mentioned the nihilating role of “questioning” and contrasted our two positions. The second nihilation is that of the “pre-reflective *cogito*.” Not only do we have immediate experience of a world but, simultaneously, and in an unreflected manner, we have an implicit self-awareness. This is the condition of freedom. To have an implicit awareness (of) self while thrust into the world through the intentionality of consciousness, intention being of its very nature “of” another, is necessary for freedom to exist. I am never completely absorbed into the world, or by others. Finding myself as I do in a world already constituted by others, and finding myself looked at and defined by others, this second nihilation nihilates the self that I am for others—an object for others. Instead, I am myself in the manner of not-being (*i.e.*, nihilating) it.

BURKE: I feared that you would pull us down into the technical world of your phenomenological ontology. At least you spice things up in your literature through phrases such as “Hell is other people.”

SARTRE: That phrase is dramatic and limited in scope. Yet it does indicate the

tendency of others to treat us as objects and place us within their world and to attempt, thereby, to annul our freedom. On a broader social scale, it is harder to imagine such activity carried to a more extreme scale than in an aristocratic society in which one practically loses all being if one is not in the class of the socially elite. Aristocracy robs others of their freedoms by reducing them to instruments of their own lordly class. In fact, *monsieur*, some would have it that you yourself were such an instrument who became a mouthpiece for the Marquis of Rockingham and his Whigs. At least you were not a minister of the King and, I give this to you, you admirably fought against the consolidation of power in the King's Court in your early work *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*. I do admire in that work your condemnation of arbitrary power and despotism as destructive of freedom.

BURKE: Yes, and in that work I declared, lest history forgets, that "I am no friend to aristocracy, in the sense at least in which the word is usually understood. . . . The generality of peers, far from supporting themselves in a state of independent greatness, are but too apt to fall into an oblivion of their proper dignity, and to run headlong into an abject servitude."

SARTRE: To my mind, the choice between the aristocracy and the King and his Court does not move us any closer to the common man. It is still freedom for the elites.

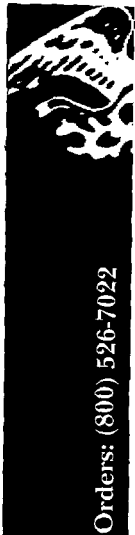
But, please let me come to the point I wish to make concerning the "pre-reflective *cogito*." I believe that we choose our world and that the implicit awareness of self in all our conscious acts insures our fundamental freedom. I am not bound by a tradition, or class, and the world-view it entails save as they are placed before me as a "coefficient of adversity." To be born an aristocrat does not in itself prevent me from taking on the project of liberty for the commoner or the day laborer. If I am

indifferent to the plight of the destitute having been born an aristocrat, if I am docile before the objectification of others as servants, as instruments of my own designs, that is my choice.

There is in fact what I call an "original choice." At some point I choose from among the vast array of possibles that my freedom is, which I signify as my "original choice" or "project." My project signifies my being-for-itself as transcending the various givens which are my situation, such as my place, my surroundings, and my past. These givens become obstacles to my freedom only through my original choice. That I am born an aristocrat does not bind me to my class save through my choice to retain my privileges at all costs, and then the commoner as potential revolutionary looms as an impediment to my project—*i.e.*, to remain an aristocrat. Why not, instead, accept the challenge offered to the rich man in the Gospels to obey Jesus and sell off all my belongings and become a religious fanatic?

BURKE: You always seem at your cryptic best. But still, what shapes this original choice? For what purpose do you or anyone choose one path or project and not another? The Lord gave a reason for the rich man to sell all his possessions, so that he could choose the path of perfection. In fact, in an almost paradoxical fashion, this reflects an insight you yourself offered when you acknowledged that "Man is possessed by the things he possesses."

But my real concern here is to wonder if in fact you are the irrationalist. Why do I choose this project over another? Surely you grope for the answer when you write: "Past motives, past causes, present motives and causes, future ends, all are organized in an indissoluble unity by the very upsurge of a freedom which is beyond causes, motives, and ends." To credit one's original choice or project to an "upsurge of a freedom" strikes me as being the prisoner of one's present passion. You,



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Being and Nothingness, which did not develop the social sphere of freedom much beyond the dyadic relationship of self and other. And that relationship as there depicted is indeed bleak, as that prized initial "upsurge of freedom" finds itself frozen by the look of the other, a look that objectifies me into a stereotype sustained by the look. Your pronouncements that man is "condemned to be free" and that "hell is other people" seem to account for the range of freedom for the early Sartre.

SARTRE: Different topics engaged me later in life than those which were part of my earlier situation, but my passion for freedom and my effort, however feeble, to give a voice to the dispossessed and out-cast never abated. Your effort to reduce my earlier writings to an egotistic account of freedom neglects entirely my call for responsibility as the other side of the coin of freedom. The end of my book on *Being and Nothingness* concludes with the topic of "Freedom and Responsibility."

Obviously, you held Lord North responsible for prosecuting the war against America; you held George Grenville responsible for the absurd Stamp Tax; and you held Warren Hastings responsible for England's tyrannical oppression of India. I take the notion of responsibility

you locate this uniquely human condition called freedom in negative terms. You speak of freedom in relationship to "anguish" and "abandonment."

SARTRE: I am wanting to underscore the ineluctable tie between freedom and responsibility. Holding as I do that the first principle of existentialism, to which I alluded earlier, is that "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself," I mean to say two things: first, in freedom "man chooses his own self" and "in making this choice he also chooses all men.... To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose," since I assert that we cannot make the choice of evil. When we choose we are affirming our choice as a value or a paradigm for all other persons as something worthy of emulation. How can that not bring with it anguish?

BURKE: But where are the guideposts to help us make our choices? Where are the parameters that signal this far and no further? Where are the restraints upon the excess of passions, appetites, of unbridled will-to-power; yes, where are the barriers to an excess of freedom? In my own work on *The Reflections on the Revolution in France* I posed this question: "But what is liberty without wisdom and with-

out virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is a folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint." The first virtue in relationship to freedom is that of moderation. This is a point that goes back to Plato and Aristotle. There is no adequate discussion of freedom that circumvents its connection with moderation, order, and the principle of law. Your treatment of freedom ignores these traditional and essential limits of freedom. On this point I am in agreement with the father of existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard, who in *The Works of Love* expounded on freedom in relationship to the law: "Only the law can give freedom." Kierkegaard continues: "Alas, we often think that freedom exists, and that it is the law which restricts freedom. However, it is just the other way: without law freedom simply does not exist, and it is the law which gives freedom."

Human nature exists as a law and guide for our freedom. The state exists to aid us in the perfection of our nature, and it ought to provide considerable leeway to our freedom, even at the risk of a certain loss of virtue, in order that the reins of liberty be sufficiently free for us to achieve our own perfection without forcing perfection or virtue upon us. Human nature is indeed the standard of morality and ethics, and sufficient freedom must be permitted individuals to realize a nature which is naturally social. Still, freedom, in order to flourish, requires reason and a certain sense of regulation to be possessed.

SARTRE: You wrestle with your original choice of conservatism, *n'est-ce pas*? In fact you have a severe judgment of freedom, for you have written that "the spirit of freedom [leads] in itself to misrule and excess." I fear that your internal dialectic of freedom and order too easily capitulates to excessive structure and stateism. Indeed, I may avoid the language of "virtue" carrying with it the baggage of Aristotelianism and its philosophi-

cal fetish with substances, natures, essences, teleology—in short that whole metaphysic of inert reality.

BURKE: What a shameful characterization of Aristotle's philosophy grounded as it is in the reality of Pure Act as the highest realm of being, the full realization of all potentiality calling forth an ethic of self-perfection. This is a "dynamic" not inert philosophy.

SARTRE: Please let me, and let us, conclude. The point between us is that I do not require, in fact I oppose, these philosophical appurtenances which circumscribe choice and responsibility for that which by freedom I make of myself. I choose myself; I fashion myself out of nothing. And yet I do not plunge human reality into ethical nihilism, for in choosing I am choosing for others as well. I am offering an ethic of authenticity, removing all excuses that some philosophers attach to us like barnacles, blaming parents, climate, social class, whatever. These are limits to our freedom only in relationship to our freely chosen projects. Not to recognize that is to succumb to, in language you and Aristotle might choose, the vice of "bad faith." This vice equates with inauthenticity. If I claim that I am only what I am, a creature of habit, not to be blamed for the self that I am, then I am in "bad faith." To equate my being, founded on a lack of being, on a social role or function, is to fail to recognize my exercise of freedom, and that my freedom transcends any self that I may appear to be. To say simply that "I am an inferior person due to my inferiority complex" is a form of bad faith and violates the virtue of authenticity.

BURKE: Yes, we must conclude, and I fear that the true characterization of your philosophy is that of futility. You have indeed captured a generation with your call to authenticity, but the futility lies in the inability of the self, which is a lack of self, to ever realize itself, for then it would be by your own admission, a "freedom

thing.”

I know I risk opening a new door in our dialogue at the very moment when our time has elapsed. Can we summarize our positions and renew the discussion at another time, in the context of the relationship between freedom, community and authority?

SARTRE: I am sure you would call it “prudent” that we wrap things up. In many respects I feel a bond with you, as you fought an often apparently vain fight for the oppressed of America, Ireland and India. My antipathy arises over your relentless elitism and your failure to fight for the oppressed during the French Revolution. But more to the subject of freedom.

I think a summary is simply tedious at this point. As I have said, our freedom is our consciousness which is our choice. We do not have freedom. Rather we are freedom because we are not yet. We have a lack of being, desiring what we lack, abandoned, as there is no God to make us be and to determine what our actions ought to be. We are in anguish over our condition, for in choosing we choose not only ourselves, but for all others.

But, I admit, my defense of freedom at this point fails to account sufficiently for the social dimension, although I adumbrated the social in my early work through the discussion of the “situation.” As our next conversation will turn to questions of “authority,” in the context of “community” and “solidarity,” you will readily see that my later work extends and develops in a consistent manner the principles elaborated in *Being and Nothingness*. On the broader social dimension the human condition is seen to be, as I have depicted it in my *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, a result of scarcity, due to the disproportionate accumulation of goods by the bourgeoisie and the dis-alienation suffered by all people at the hands of a liberal, bourgeois, capitalist society. And, as much as in my earlier work, freedom emerges here as the ultimate value and

the goal to be sought for every individual.

BURKE: Your summary opens up new ground to cover, but let us defer that to the second half of our discussion on “Freedom and Authority.” I refuse to concede the full range of existentialism to you, rooted in a profound atheism—at least you do not conceal your fundamental position. In fact, I could endure the label “Political Existentialist” as long as we added the qualifier “realist” to the label—hence, Realist Political Existentialist.

For me the force of “existentialism” in my politics of freedom and order is the focus upon the concrete reality of the situation at hand, and the circumstances which require prudential judgment, submission to duty and proper authority, within the broad context of a Christian Natural Law, a law mediated through religion—with Christianity being *primus inter pares*, but the great historical religions not necessarily excluded—through institutions, social groups, intermediate organizations and all of those groupings which buffet the exercise of imperial authority over the individual. Still, we are placed by the Sovereign Disposer in a certain time and place, consequently “we must do the best we can in our situation. The situation of man is the preceptor of his duty....” By this I simply mean that the generality of moral principles require for the authentic flowering of freedom that we prudentially act within the circumstances in which we are placed, whose outlines are sketched by our “situation,” one in which we seek to maximize the good and minimize the evil, or seek the lesser evil when the good appears nowhere in sight. Herein lies a realistic political existentialism, not the false utopianism which you vainly seek. This is underscored by my emphasis upon the role of reason. In the realm of practical affairs I refer to the rule of “political reason.” And I give considerable ground to natural feelings and inclinations, especially as they are compatible with reason

as buttressed by Natural Law. Perhaps the abiding distinction between us is your radical subjectivism and the absolute primacy given to the “will,” and my realistic, intellectualistic political

thought applied to man’s situation.

SARTRE: Your final comments necessitate our further discussion. In the meantime, *bonjour*, M. Burke.

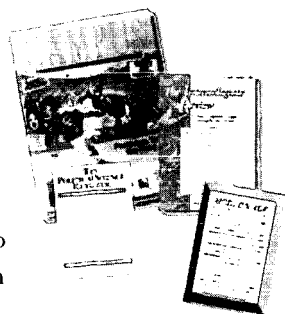
BURKE: Good day to you, M. Sartre.



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