Allen Roush

Philosophy 463

Final

**Part A.**

The concept of “otherness” fascinated Sartre enough that he dedicated a portion of *Being and Nothingness* to studying its nature. For Sartre, the existence of “the other” is a pre-requisite for the existence of the conscious self. Before Sartre goes on to explore human relations with the other, he warns the reader that “at the very core of the one the other remains always present, precisely because neither of the two can be held without contradiction. [...] each of them is in the other and endangers the death of the other”[[1]](#footnote-1). We may be radically free as individuals, but our attempts to leverage this freedom necessarily causes us to act in ways that reduces the freedom of others, which causes conflict. Sartre thus concludes that conflict is the most basic human relation, and the starting point for his study of otherness. This belief is applied throughout his political works, and remains one of the bases of the Marxist writings of the later Sartre.

This theory of conflict is applied in Sartre’s three fundamental forms of social organization: the series, the group, and the class. In attempting to define the series, Sartre offers us an example of a group of people waiting for the bus. They exist as a large sum of individuals in isolation. They view each other as strangers, and since everyone consciously keeps to themselves, the would-be bus-riders are in a state of “reciprocal isolations”. This is inherently due to our pre-reflective understanding of the conflict we are always in with others. Sartre alludes to this aspect by commenting that “reciprocal isolations […] in this sense, can be defined as a particular way of living […], in interiority and as reciprocity within the social, [e.g.] ("No one helps anyone, it's everyone for himself’)”[[2]](#footnote-2). If one of these strangers around me happened to accidently spill their drink, I would not feel obligated to help them because it doesn’t affect me. Here I see the fundamentally adversarial role that I take towards strangers because I view myself as in conflict with them.

Worse yet, there’s not necessarily enough space on the bus for everyone. Here we begin to see the source of Sartre’s later Marxism.

It is at precisely this level that material objects will be found to determine the serial order as the social reason for the separation of individuals [and this] derives from scarcity: there are not enough places for everyone. […] which remains the context of the whole investigation[[3]](#footnote-3)

If there aren’t enough spaces on the bus, then I won’t be allowed on and I must wait for the next one. This only happened because of other people having received their bus ticket before me. My recognition of the contingency of these actions (These strangers in-front of me for the ticket didn’t have to exist) is the moment I realize that I conflict with others.

Within *Search for a Method*, Sartre concludes that conflict is at the heart of economic relations.

Now […] productive forces have entered into conflict with relations of production. Creative work is alienated; man does not recognize himself in his own product, and his exhausting labor appears to him as a hostile force. […] alienation comes about as the result of this conflict[[4]](#footnote-4)

Without conflict, there would be no incentive to valorize labor. We become unable to see our self in our work precisely because the laborers work (of say, manufacturing cars) goes on into cars that other people will buy and use. Work becomes as adversarial as the other is, precisely because the worker is otherized from their work.

**Part B.**

*Baudelaire* is Sartre’s first published biography of a person. Within it, he attempts to existentially psychoanalyze the French Poet Charles Baudelaire. In order to do this, Sartre attempts to find Baudelaire’s “initial choice” that makes him who he is. *Baudelaire* implements Sartre’s earlier work on existential psychoanalysis by postulating Charles Baudelaire’s supposed original choice. *Baudelaire* also implements Sartre’s ideas about writing by not having written it to assert an end-goal outside of justifying its argument.

Two pages from the end, Sartre presents the reader with what he believes is Baudelaire’s initial choice: “He chose to exist for himself as he was for others. He wanted his freedom to appear to himself like a 'nature'”[[5]](#footnote-5). Sartre follows up the claim by asserting that he created his “whole retched” life, and that he deserved the life he created. To figure out someone’s initial choice, we must understand the consciousness and being that makes them who they are. Since humans are a totality of the unity of their actions, some traditional psychoanalysis techniques are helpful, but Sartre’s theory differs in that “[existential psychoanalysis] must reduce particular behavior patterns to fundamental relations — […] of being — which are expressed in this behavior”[[6]](#footnote-6). *Baudelaire’s* intricate analysis and biographical nature make it an authentic attempt to describe Baudelaire’s consciousness. It is thus a seminal work of existential psychoanalysis.

Sartre believes that there is an inherent freedom to writing that “puts the order of ends under the order of causes”[[7]](#footnote-7) . By opening a book as a reader, I’ve decided that I want to entertain the thoughts of the writer. These thoughts are interesting to me precisely because they are created by an other who also possess radical freedom to act or think however they please. If this writer were not free, then why would I read their work? I do not care to hear the forced confessions of political prisoners, because the writings they have written were only written to appease their captors. Sartre is thus quick to reject propagandists as good writers: “If I were to suspect the artist of having written out of passion and in passion, my confidence would immediately vanish, for it would serve no purpose to have supported the order of causes by the order of ends”[[8]](#footnote-8).

*Baudelaire* appears to be written without an exterior motive and freely by Sartre. Sartre was not especially wealthy and most likely did not make a fortune on the book. Sartre might describe Baudelaire in language that sounds negative at times, but it’s apparent that he’s not trying to disparage Baudelaire or slander his reputation. In this way Sartre is fulfilling his side of the “pact of generosity” between author and reader that he believes dialectically exists. We can appreciate the time and intricacy that Sartre put into this work, and its study by students like myself attests to its rigor. Sartre writes authentically because he writes to his (perceived) maximum ability: “the author’s demand is that I carry my demands to the highest pitch. Thus, my freedom, by revealing itself, reveals the freedom of the other”[[9]](#footnote-9). Sartre thus writes in generally good faith, and fulfils his responsibility as a writer in *Baudelaire*.

1. Priest, *Jean Paul Sartre: Basic Writings* (Routledge Press, 2005), 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid 313 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid 316 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sartre, *Search for a Method* (Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1963), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Sartre, *Baudelaire* (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1950), 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Priest, *Jean Paul Sartre: Basic Writings* (Routledge Press, 2005), 256 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid 271 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid 271 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid 271 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)