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Ambiguity in Sartre's Notion of "Bad Faith"

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*Abstract***:** In his magnum opus *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre provides us with a detailed phenomenological analysis of the tenuous features of the human existential situation, and the vexatious contours of human relationships. One of his claims is that a vast majority of human attitudes and relationships are founded on what he called "bad faith." Sartre provides several examples of "bad faith," in order to substantiate his claim that this disposition is widely prevalent in society. However, there is a methodological as well as programmatic problem with this claim. Sartre is not methodologically clear and consistent in his demonstration of "bad faith," as there are several ambiguities and inconsistencies in his presentation and argumentation. More fundamentally, it seems that while *Being and Nothingness* is an attempt to highlight the features of false consciousness which governs human attitudes and

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relations, in his subsequent works Sartre himself alludes to more authentic modes of human relations as well as fulfilling modes of "being-with-others"—modes which transcend the somewhat narrow and pessimistic presentation of "bad faith" as constitutive of the human predicament in *Being and Nothingness*.
Keywords: Bad faith, Inauthenticity, Authenticity, Good faith, Sincerity, Lying, Anguish.

The phenomenon of inauthentic modes of functioning in human society is indeed a common experience of human reality. Of the many themes that Sartre addresses, perhaps the one on bad faith—related to inauthenticity—is the one for which he is popularly most famous.[1] Besides, his concern with bad faith fits in with his obsession to philosophically preserve the radical nature of human freedom. For Sartre, bad faith is "bad" because it only serves to minimize our very "nature" as freedom itself.

Yet, as we shall see, while Sartre's concern to uphold freedom and protest against any tendency to escape from our existential situation is noble, the ontological and epistemological presuppositions with which he operates leave much to be desired. He wants to militate against the phenomenon of bad faith, but his ontology will not allow him to do so consistently and unambiguously. At every consideration of the different forms of bad faith which Sartre portrays for us we meet with serious problems as to the very possibility of its occurrence. Finally, the very explanation for the possibility of bad faith in the first place limps badly for want of adequate ontological presuppositions.

The scope of this paper is to systematically present the phenomenon of bad faith in the writings of the early Sartre—more specifically, in *Being and Nothingness*[2]—

and to point out areas of ambiguity and inconsistency with regard to the presentation of this phenomenon by Sartre. My basic thesis is that the explanation of the phenomenon of bad faith in terms of Sartre's phenomenology and ontology as presented in this *magnum opus* of his leaves much to be desired in terms of clarity and consistency and is thus an inadequate treatment of the issue.[3]

I shall begin by presenting the most significant descriptions of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness* (and the description of the possibility of bad faith in the first place), and then go on to indicate problems of ambiguity or inconsistency with regard to each of these descriptions. I shall conclude with a brief section indicating significant shifts which Sartre undertook in his later philosophical journey, thereby calling for a personal revision of his understanding of bad faith.

1. The Notion of "Bad Faith" in *Being and Nothingness*

Towards the end of the first paragraph in the section on bad faith, Sartre asserts that "there is one determined attitude which is essential to human reality and which is such that consciousness instead of directing its negation outward turns it toward itself. This attitude, it seems to me, is *bad faith (mauvaise foi).*"[4]

This notion of bad faith being "essential to human reality" and at the same time being something of a private nature in its construction is introduced even before the section on bad faith *per se*, in the section on "The Origin of Negation," where Sartre explains that the "nature" of a human being is existential anguish, and that bad faith results from a desire to escape the unique constitution of human "nature" as a being-for-itself. Let us begin, then, with Sartre's preliminary notion of bad faith before going on to describe the other instances of bad faith in the section on bad faith *per se*.

a. Bad Faith as an Escape from Existential Anguish

Chapter One of Part One of *Being and Nothingness* is concerned with the demonstration that "nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being—like a worm."[5] This recognition leads to a state of existential anguish, because we are faced with the fact that in reality we have no identity.[6] The obvious thing is to flee such a situation and to attempt to fill this existential void that consciousness generates with some identity or the other. On the other hand, Sartre seems to deny the very possibility of an escape from existential anguish. He asserts that "we cannot overcome anguish, for we *are* anguish," and "anguish, properly speaking, can be neither hidden nor avoided."[7] Thus,

> If I am my anguish in order to flee it, that presupposes that I can decenter myself in relation to what I am, that I can be anguish in the form of "not-being it," that I can dispose of a nihilating power at the heart of anguish itself. This nihilating power nihilates anguish in so far as I flee it and nihilates itself in so far as I am anguish in order to flee it. This attitude is what we call *bad faith*. There is then no question of expelling anguish from consciousness nor of constituting it in an unconscious psychic phenomenon; very simply I can make myself guilty of bad faith while apprehending the anguish which I am, and this bad faith, intended to fill up the nothingness which I *am* in my relation to myself, precisely implies the nothingness which it suppresses.[8]

Bad faith in this case, then, consists in a futile and unsuccessful attempt to flee our existential situation. From the quotation above and in these two pages immediately preceding the Chapter on "Bad Faith" *per se*, Sartre seems to question whether the outcome of bad faith is at all possible. He promises to address this issue, though (on the

conditions for bad faith to take place successfully), in the next Chapter, a promise that he will not entirely and satisfactorily fulfill, as we shall see.

b. Bad Faith as "Lying to Oneself"

In the phenomenon of lying, one person is aware of the truth but wishes to conceal it from the other, and tries to do so in words and deeds: "The liar intends to deceive and he does not seek to hide this intention from himself nor to disguise the translucency of consciousness."[9] Bad faith, on the contrary, involves a lie to oneself: "what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth. Thus, the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist here. Bad faith on the contrary implies in essence the unity of a *single* consciousness."[10]

Sartre's famous example of the woman who goes out on a date with a man with dubious intentions seems to fit into this characterization of bad faith. But in this example, it is the *woman* who possesses dubious intentions, for Sartre, and is thus in bad faith: "She knows also that it will be necessary sooner or later for her to make a decision. But she does not want to realize the urgency."[11] Sartre concludes his analysis of the woman's behavior by saying that what unifies the different acts that go to make up the bad faith of the woman "is a certain art of forming contradictory concepts which unite in themselves both an idea and the negation of that idea."[12] He goes on to explain this by adding that in bad faith it is either transcendence or facticity that is affirmed of the individual consciousness, but never a "valid coordination" of the two: "Bad faith seeks to affirm their identity while preserving their differences. It must affirm facticity as *being* transcendence and transcendence as *being* facticity, in such a way that at the instant when a person apprehends the one, he can find himself abruptly faced with the other."[13]

Sartre admits that this appears to be an impossibility: the act of lying to oneself is not possible given the nature of consciousness as translucent. "We must agree in fact that if I deliberately and cynically attempt to lie to myself, I fail completely in this undertaking; the lie falls back and collapses beneath my look."[14] Sartre promises to address the issue of the conditions for the possibility of lying to oneself later, and in fact does raise the issue again in the last section of this Chapter, but in a manner of argumentation that still leaves the question very unsettled, as we shall see.

c. Sincerity as an Example of Bad Faith

The word 'sincerity' usually has a positive connotation, but Sartre gives it a negative one, because in trying to "be" someone (or in trying to "be sincere"), I deny the very nature of consciousness as a unity both of facticity and transcendence. I turn facticity into a transcendent quality, and vice-versa. In the case of sincerity, I treat a factual quality (a courageous act) as if it is a transcendent one ("I am courageous"). The goal of sincerity is that "a man be *for himself* only what he *is*. But is this not precisely the definition of the in-itself—or if you prefer—the principle of identity?"[15] Sincerity, in fine, then, results in the attempt to diminish our status as a being-for-itself.

This is brought out in Sartre's illustration of the waiter in the café,[16] one of his more popular examples. In this caricature, Sartre points out that there is both, social pressure to assume a given role, as well as individual initiative in assuming the role. Both of these influences arise on account of the desire to "be someone."

On the other hand (somewhat confusing the issue even further) Sartre asks, "What then is sincerity except precisely a phenomenon of bad faith? Have we not shown indeed that in bad faith human reality is constituted as a being which is what

it is not and which is not what it is?"[17] Sartre goes on to give yet another example of the homosexual who refuses to be identified as one (true to his transcendental status), yet should not, but does, refuse to accept that he engaged in homosexual activity in the past (and thus is a homosexual, from the point of view of his factual status).

But, just like an escape from anguish is a futile one, so is an attempt to be sincere or to try to be a being-in-itself, because I am *conscious* of this intention as not being a properly human one. "Thus in order for bad faith to be possible, sincerity itself must be in bad faith."[18] Not only is the act of being sincere a case of bad faith, but even *trying* to be sincere is in bad faith (if at all it is possible). One wonders, however, how Sartre would have reacted if the waiter in the café insisted that he mainly discuss philosophy with Sartre instead of serving him coffee.

d. Good faith as an Example of Bad Faith

Sartre tries to draw a distinction between good and bad faith, but as the explanation progresses, it becomes apparent that good faith is merely a form of bad faith, as he has described bad faith earlier. Good faith is understood to be the disposition to operate from bad faith while assuming that it is good to do so (while bad faith stops short of making such an assumption), i.e., good faith is persuaded by evidence pertaining to some issue (that, for example, Pierre likes me), while bad faith is not persuaded by such evidence (or any evidence, for that matter). Good faith is willing to commit itself to some belief, while bad faith refuses to do so and so suspends belief.

Like sincerity, then, good faith, while it seems to be an antithesis of bad faith (in our ordinary understanding of these terms), is really not so, according to Sartre: "The

ideal of good faith (to believe what one believes) is, like that of sincerity (to be what one is), an ideal of being-in-itself."[19] This is because "good faith seeks to flee the inner disintegration of my being in the direction of the in-itself which it should be and is not."[20] But here too, Sartre questions the possibility of good faith:

> The nature of consciousness is such that in it the mediate and the immediate are one and the same being. To believe is to know that one believes, and to know that one believes is no longer to believe. Thus, to believe is not to believe any longer because that is only to believe–this in the unity of one and the same non-thetic consciousness . . . Thus, belief is a being which questions its own being, which can realize itself only in its destruction, which can manifest itself to itself only by denying itself . . . To believe is not-to-believe.[21]

The possibility of good faith, like any other form of bad faith, is intertwined within the discussion of the possibility of bad faith in general. In what follows, Sartre will try to demonstrate (finally, but alas, not definitively) that bad faith is indeed possible.

e. The Possibility of the Enterprise of Bad Faith

As we have seen thus far, Sartre only presents us with different attempts at bad faith, and different illustrations to clarify these attempts. At every point, though, he has questioned whether the different forms of bad faith are at all possible *in principle*, given his ontological presuppositions about human consciousness. While a primary condition for the possibility of bad faith is the suspension in belief in the unique nature of human consciousness as being a complex of facticity and transcendence, a more necessary condition for its possibility is that one is able to successfully *lie* to oneself (about the nature of one's facticity and transcendence), given the *translucency*

of consciousness. We need to keep in mind that Sartre refuses to accept any appeal to the subconscious in order to explain bad faith (i.e., that it is due to subconscious forces that we suppress one aspect of our consciousness—either the factual or the transcendent). He finally addresses this issue in the last section in the Chapter on bad faith, along with his description of good faith. He asserts here that the only way that bad faith is possible (and explainable) is to consider it as an instance of "faith" or "belief":

> The true problem of bad faith stems evidently from the fact that bad faith is *faith*. It can not be either a cynical lie or certainty—if certainty is the intuitive possession of the object. But if we take belief as meaning the adherence of being to its object when the object is not given or is given indistinctly, then bad faith is belief; and the essential problem of bad faith is a problem of belief.[22]

We have seen already how he distinguishes good and bad faith. His explanation for the very possibility of bad faith rests on this distinction. In bad faith, one does not commit oneself to believing persuasive evidence (as in good faith), but one is confronted with, and so *believes in the presence of non-persuasive evidence* (i.e., evidence that is "not given or is given indistinctly"):

> Bad faith apprehends evidence but it is resigned in advance to not being fulfilled by this evidence, to not being persuaded and transformed into good faith . . . Thus bad faith in its primitive project and in its coming into the world decides on the exact nature of its requirements. It stands forth in the firm resolution *not to demand too much*, to count itself satisfied when it is

> barely persuaded, to force itself in decisions to adhere to uncertain truths . . . Let us understand clearly that there is no question of a reflective, voluntary decision, but of a spontaneous determination of our being. One *puts oneself* in bad faith as one goes to sleep and one is in bad faith as one dreams. Once this mode of being has been realized, it is as difficult to get out of it as to wake oneself up.[23]

With this strange statement about the nature of bad faith, Sartre seems to have considerably qualified his understanding of bad faith as taking place within the normal circumstances of the translucency of consciousness. Furthermore, bad faith turns out to be a strange form of belief, because instead of committing itself to the *evidence* presented to consciousness, "it has become content with itself as belief."[24]

2. Problems Connected with Each of These Descriptions of "Bad Faith"

While Sartre's intentions are noble, in that he wishes to provide a phenomenological analysis of the prevalence of bad faith in normal human relations, his methodological and ontological presuppositions or commitments do not allow him to easily demonstrate the validity of the nature of bad faith itself. We will examine each of the types of bad faith presented above, in order to highlight a few ambiguities and even inconsistencies in Sartre's argumentation while presenting these cases.

a. Bad Faith as an Escape from Existential Anguish

As the main feature of bad faith here is to suppress the transcendent nature of one's consciousness and to try to reduce oneself to an in-itself, this description of bad faith is very similar to the one of "sincerity." Hence the arguments versus Sartre's presentation of existential anguish as a form of bad faith will be found among those pertaining to the notion of sincerity.

b. Bad Faith as "Lying to Oneself"

One of the most problematic issues within the bad faith problem is the one about the nebulous nature of lying to oneself given the fact that Sartre subscribes to the full translucency of consciousness, as well as his reluctance to have recourse to subconscious drives as being responsible for our bad faith decisions and actions. For Sartre, the mixed motives that we have when we operate from bad faith seem to be crystal clear, because of the "psychic unity" that goes to make up the consciousness of the for-itself.

Thus, asserts Santoni, "in the strict sense of successfully and completely hiding a truth from oneself, within the unity of a single consciousness, "lying to oneself" is not possible for Sartre."[25] However, Santoni believes that in the last section on the possibility of bad faith, Sartre makes room for a *modified* version of "lying to oneself," hinged on Sartre's statement that "it is precisely as the acceptance of not believing what it believes that it is bad faith."[26] This acceptance allows one to "not believe while "believing" and presumably believe while "not believing"."[27]

The problem, however, is that lying to oneself may now only be understood in a *weak* sense,[28] rather than the strong one that Sartre would have us commit ourselves to, if he could.

> As such, it seems to be a lie of "half-persuasion," which Sartre earlier characterizes as a common, degenerate form of the lie and rejects as an instance of bad faith.[29] Either there is an inconsistency here, or Sartre, without having specifically expressed it, has altered his

approach to "half-persuasion" while developing his account of bad faith.[30]

Secondly, this involves cynicism on the part of the person who is lying, because there is a "*deliberate* intention to accept as persuasive what is not fully persuasive, and to "believe" (according to criteria that one "knows" are inadequate for *full* persuasion) what one consciously does not fully believe."[31] However, on a number of occasions (as Santoni indicates) Sartre expressly rules out cynicism as part of bad faith.[32]

Sartre himself realized that the definition of bad faith as "lying to oneself" cannot be entirely acceptable. He promises to explain, though, how it may be possible, but doesn't live up to his promise to the extent that he himself would have desired. He is faced with two alternatives: either to retain his notion of the translucency of consciousness, in which case "lying to oneself" is only possible in a weak sense, and thereby the person living in bad faith may be considerably less responsible than may appear at first, or on the other hand to accept that consciousness may not be entirely translucent, and that there may be either inattention on the conscious level or non-conscious forces at play. He is unwilling to accept the second alternative because of his ontology. Thus, he seems more willing to present us with an unclear picture of bad faith rather than abandon his ontological presuppositions.

c. Sincerity as an Example of Bad Faith

In his analysis of sincerity as a feature of bad faith, Santoni contends that Sartre indulges in a bit of equivocation in his description, and this equivocation leads to the false association of sincerity with bad faith: "he seems to be juxtaposing an ordinary-language formulation of sincerity with his own idiosyncratic philosophical view of human reality as consciousness."[33] In other words, Sartre takes the ordinary

language understanding of sincerity as "being true to oneself," and applies it to a specific manner of the functioning of *consciousness* according to Sartrean ontology. When Sartre asks, "how can he *be* what he is when he exists as consciousness of being?,"[34] he asks an illegitimate question, because he is confusing the normal understanding of being with his own understanding of consciousness as not being able to be described only in terms of being (as it has to be described in terms of non-being as well).

Furthermore, Sartre seems to indulge in more equivocation when he identifies consciousness and bad faith when he says, "Have we not shown indeed that in bad faith human reality is constituted as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is?"[35] But, asserts Santoni, "if to be sincere is, as Sartre says, *to be what one is*, it obviously does *not* have the structure of *being what it is not and not being what it is*."[36] Sartre, then, cannot have it both ways: either he defines bad faith in two ways (and indulges in equivocation), or he defines it in one way, but it doesn't then apply to sincerity.

The difficulties with the example of the waiter as manifesting bad faith in trying to be sincere are obvious. For Sartre is not just trying to say that the waiter who *acts* excessively waiter-like is thus sincere and in bad faith. He seems to be making a far stronger claim[37] and asserting that *any* waiter (or any person who takes his or her job seriously), by acting out their social roles well enough, live in bad faith. Sartre's ready label of "bad faith" over any social role-playing thus seeks to call into question any and every human occupation taken seriously and responsibly.

D. Z. Phillips complains that in the waiter example, "Sartre speaks in terms of ceremony and dance, but does not take them seriously enough. The words and gestures of the waiter must be taken in the context of that ceremony and dance."[38] Phillips is arguing against what he feels to be Sartre's "general contention that there is nothing in the waiter's profession which has any dignity and which could provide any satisfaction worthy of a human being."[39]

This notion of sincerity as being an example of bad faith, then, as we have seen, is not without ambiguity and grounds for critique, in terms of both illustration as well as explication.

d. Good Faith as an Example of Bad Faith

The basic equivocation Sartre indulges in here is that he begins his analysis of the possibility of bad faith by clearly *distinguishing* between good and bad faith, and ends his analysis by reducing good faith to a form of sincerity, and as sincerity is a form of bad faith, good faith too may be said to be a form of bad faith.

Santoni, though, gives us a redeemed understanding of good faith that need not fall under the category of bad faith. Good faith, by committing itself to believing in something is better off than "bad" faith which refuses to do so, and thereby doesn't deserve the name of "faith." Furthermore, good faith "*assumes responsibility* for the authorship of its beliefs and actions . . . While the attitude of bad faith is to flee its freedom and its anguish, the attitude of good faith is to face its freedom of consciousness; that is, the autonomy and responsibility to which consciousness is condemned."[40]

From this we can see that Sartre cannot have it both ways: either he accepts that good faith is different from bad faith (and hence cannot be qualified as a form of bad faith), or that good faith is the same as bad faith (but then how may one distinguish the two, as Sartre would wish us to do, in order to explain the

very possibility of the phenomenon of bad faith?). Sartre, of course, argues that the *ideal* of good faith (to commit oneself entirely to a belief) is to be in bad faith, but this is not satisfactory, as then we will not be able to distinguish between good and bad faith, and hence not be able to explain how bad faith is possible in the first place.

Good faith does not metamorphose into an in-itself state precisely because *epistemologically* it remains "faith" and not certainty, claims Santoni. Furthermore, on the *ontological* level,

> good faith is precisely the human being's (freedom's) project of accepting its abandonment to freedom and the anxiety of its ontological distance . . . it is the basic attitude of accepting ourselves—without regret, remorse, despair, or excuse—as anguished "freedom" and of taking responsibility for our choices, projects, attitudes. Good faith, as an ontological attitude, is, we might say, the "*acceptance*" *of our abandonment to both freedom and responsibility.*[41]

Hence the notion that Sartre presents of good faith as yet another mode of bad faith is not without its problems**.** Let us go on to examine whether at the very least Sartre's description of the very possibility of bad faith meets some degree of clarity and consistency.

e. The Possibility of the Enterprise of Bad Faith

We have observed that all Sartre's notions of a translucency of consciousness have almost disappeared by the end of his description of bad faith. After building up "the conditions which render bad faith conceivable, the structures of being which permit us to form concepts of bad faith,"[42] he is now not able to provide us with the possibility for this conceptual schema to take off the

ground in the first place (i.e., given his ontological presuppositions).

According to Allen Wood, "in bad faith, I disbelieve what I believe to the extent that I recognize my belief as an imperfect attempt to produce an integral response to the world. But bad faith is not a case in which I disbelieve what I believe in the stronger sense of *knowing* that what I believe is false while nevertheless believing it."[43] Hence Sartre, to be consistent with his description of bad faith as a form of faith, should have said that there are *degrees* of consciousness of bad faith, or *degrees of believing or non-believing non-persuasive evidence.* Wood goes on to add that,

> the devices available to Sartrian bad faith seem, on the whole, to be restricted to what Harry Stack Sullivan calls "selective inattention." In bad faith, I maintain my belief by consciously attending to those aspects of the world that my belief integrates, and directing my attention away from those aspects that clash with my belief . . . Some sort of "divided mind" explanation, most likely involving unconscious knowledge and unconscious choices, seems required to account for this conduct.[44]

Even if we do not need to have recourse to the unconscious[45] to explain the phenomenon of bad faith, there is no doubt that the process of "selective inattention" is operative in the person operating with bad faith: he or she pays greater attention to some beliefs while neglecting others. Of course, Sartre could still argue that at one point in time the person makes a conscious choice in deciding to which beliefs he or she should pay greater attention.[46] But this is a considerably muted allegation of bad faith, and does considerably damage to Sartre's notion of consciousness being entirely translucent.

Kathleen Wider, in her short but thorough-going analysis of Sartre's presentation of the different modes of self-consciousness, raises a much more fundamental objection with respect to Sartre's epistemological presuppositions connected with bad faith.[47] She points out that in connection with the nature of belief in the last section on bad faith, "Sartre argues that once I know I believe, I see my belief as purely subjective, and so my belief is undermined; it is no longer directed outward toward its object."[48] But Sartre accepts that, according to his own ontology, "non-thetic consciousness is not to *know*."[49] Yet, Wider adds, "he dismisses this inconsistency on his part by simply repeating his claim that pre-reflective consciousness, in its translucency, is at the origin of all knowledge."[50] In other words, Sartre admits that knowledge of the belief of bad faith destroys the specific belief in question as a *belief* (it loses its status as belief),[51] yet he sees no harm in going on all the same to uphold the function of this known belief as providing for the possibility of bad faith.[52]

3. Beyond the "Bad Faith" of *Being and Nothingness*

We have examined both Sartre's presentation of the phenomenon of bad faith, as well as problems connected with this presentation. The general picture which emerges is that while Sartre is keen to demonstrate the constant temptation towards the many modes of bad faith and thereby the minimizing of our basic ontological status as free beings, his ontological and epistemological presuppositions themselves seem to restrict his ability to demonstrate the possibility of these modes of bad faith adequately. At best he presents us with an inadequate and ambiguous presentation of bad faith. At worst, this presentation is inconsistent or internally incoherent. In

either case his presentation on bad faith seems to require either serious revision of his ontological and epistemological presuppositions, or a much more coherent (and by implication a far less incriminatory) approach towards the explication of the possibility and the operative preponderance of bad faith as part of our human experience.

At various points in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre seems to define the nature of human consciousness itself as being plagued with bad faith. We have to keep in mind, however, that almost the entire work of *Being and Nothingness* is directed towards the explication of what constitutes *false consciousness.*[53] Sartre himself mentions the distinct possibility of authenticity or the "self-recovery of being,"[54] as well as almost contemporaneously wrote material that would later appear in *Notebooks for an Ethics*. This material seems to allow more easily for an authentic mode of human functioning, a far cry from the bad-faith-ridden-consciousness description of human reality with which *Being and Nothingness* is replete.

The binary or dualistic ontological understanding of nature in *Being and Nothingness* seems to constitute an ontological bias or assumption rather than a phenomenological description. In reality, consciousness is not as translucent and controllable as Sartre would like us to believe. There are a good number of psychological, sociological and cultural forces at play which condition consciousness, even though they may not determine action in a certain direction. Sartre does not make philosophical space for sub-conscious theory in his works, but in his later writings, already in the early 1960s, especially in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason,*[55] he is sympathetic to the Marxist emphasis on the fulfillment of transcendental human needs, in the context of the many socio-economic restrictions to human freedom. Sartre delineates the many common human needs which bind us into a common humanity–this is still not an essential description of what it means to be human, nor an

ideological justification for praxis, but rather a phenomenological realization that human beings share a particular set of material, intellectual, social and communicative needs. At this stage, Sartre is also more appreciative of the need for inter-subjective and group efforts to bring about social change, in order that these fundamental human needs are met.

Thomas Anderson designates the focus of the early Sartre as *authenticity*, while that of the later Sartre as *integral humanity*. It is a pity that Sartre did not work out his understanding of bad faith with regard to his later understanding of what it means to be authentically human. It would seem that bad faith for the later Sartre would entail a conscious forgetting of our social responsibilities stemming from this new sense of social concern and human solidarity.

According to Anderson, Sartre had arrived at a *third* phase in his ethical theory, in which he allowed for substantive or *ontological* claims with regard to a primary '*we*' consciousness as the foundation for human striving.[56] In this third and controversial phase – controversial because De Beauvoir did not seem to accept that these were indeed Sartre's developed views – Sartre seemed to have clearly moved beyond his earlier repulsion in terms of formulating substantive claims. Based on this primordial 'we' consciousness, bad faith would seem to now constitute a refusal to recognize our fundamental connectedness and continue to live as if we are separate monads, each seeking to create his or her own set of values, apart from a consensual dialogue based upon this ontological commonality. While one can trace a thin line of continuity between the concerns of the early Sartre and this last Sartre in terms of retaining the nature of human *freedom*, this

revised understanding is indeed a far cry from that presented in *Being and Nothingness*, at least in terms of how the problem of bad faith is depicted. However, it is an approach with which we can more easily identify, as well as an approach which we badly need in our contemporary world of individual and social fragmentation.

Notes

[1] David Detmer, in *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity* (Chicago: Open Court, 2008), p.88, states that "Sartre suggests that bad faith is very pervasive indeed, and many readers take his overall message to be that it is virtually inevitable and inescapable."

[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

[3] Ronald Santoni, in *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), xviii, points out that, "although Sartre's notion of bad faith has engaged the interest of academics and laypersons alike—and has even become a kind of watchword for many seeking to understand Existentialist thought—it has hardly been free of conceptual confusion, controversy, and lack of detailed understanding."

[4] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 48.

[5] Ibid., 21.

[6] Or, in other words, the nature of consciousness "simultaneously is to be what it is not, and not to be what it is" (ibid., 70).

[7] Ibid., 43.

[8] Ibid., 44.

[9] Ibid., 48.

[10] Ibid., 49.

[11] Ibid., 55. On the other hand, a few lines later Sartre mentions that "she does not quite know what she wants," implying a state of ambiguity rather than pure translucency of consciousness.

[12] Ibid., 56.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 58.
[16] Cf. ibid., 59, for the detailed caricature of the waiter.
[17] Ibid., 63.
[18] Ibid., 67.
[19] Ibid., 69.
[20] Ibid., 70.
[21] Ibid., 69.
[22] Ibid., 67.
[23] Ibid., 68.
[24] Allen Wood, "Self-Deception and Bad Faith," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, ed. Brian P. McLaughlin and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 221. This author gives a very lucid description of the contents of the last section of the Chapter on bad faith, far clearer than the dense and convoluted one that Sartre himself provides. The explanation by Santoni too, in *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy*, 37-46, is very readable.
[25] Santoni, 42. I will examine the possibility of the operation of bad faith in more detail a little later.
[26] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 70.
[27] Santoni, 43.
[28] Santoni thus concludes his Chapter on "Bad Faith and "Lying to Oneself"" by asserting that "it is a far cry from the view of bad faith (suggested in the early part of Sartre's analysis) that requires a *successful* concealment of truth from consciousness in the full translucency of consciousness" (p. 46).
[29] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 48.
[30] Ibid., 45.
[31] Santoni, 45.
[32] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 67, 70. Santoni, however, devotes an entire Chapter of his book (Ch. 3) to demonstrate that Sartre has to commit himself to defining bad faith in terms of cynicism.
[33] Santoni, 10. See 10-16 for his critique of Sartre's identification of sincerity as an instance of bad faith, from where I have culled out these objections to Sartre's argumentation.
[34] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 58-59

[35] Ibid., 63.

[36] Santoni, 14-15.

[37] That he seems to be making a stronger claim is borne out by the fact that the example of the waiter is presented within the context of the nature of identity-descriptions. Keep in mind that Sartre *accepts* that the waiter is not *only* a waiter: "the waiter in the café can not be immediately a café waiter in the sense that this inkwell *is* an inkwell" (ibid., 59). Joseph Catalano, on the other hand, in "Successfully Lying to Oneself: A Sartrean Perspective," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. L, No. 4 (1990): 673-93, tries to redeem Sartre by asserting that "*our* waiter has chosen his job precisely in order to avoid the responsibility of questioning his role in society" (p. 692). The problem is: if Sartre is indeed making such a tame observation, then his allegations about the bad faith status of "sincerity" should also be similarly tame–but they are not.

[38] D. Z. Phillips, "Bad Faith and Sartre's Waiter," *Philosophy* 56 (1981): 28.

[39] Ibid., 29. Phillips, on the other hand, considers a number of the things a waiter would find worthwhile in his or her profession (p. 29).

[40] Santoni, 80-81. This criticism of Sartre's notion of good faith as bad faith I owe to Santoni.

[41] Ibid., 86-87, original italics. Santoni is aware that this definition of good faith may seem to come close to the description of "authenticity" found in Sartre's later work titled, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellaeur (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Santoni distinguishes between sincerity, good faith and authenticity in the later Chapters of his book.

[42] Ibid., 67.

[43] Wood, "Self-Deception and Bad Faith," 222.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Wood himself goes on to illustrate a case of a person engaging in an act of bad faith on the conscious level. However, there is certainly no translucency of consciousness demonstrated on the part of the person in the illustration. See Wood, "Self-Deception and Bad Faith," 223-25.

[46] In the words of Santoni, 40, "The faith of the coquette, for instance, in "deciding" in advance not to be fully convinced in order to convince itself (*sic*) that she is not what she is (a flirt) is in *bad* faith from the start." The most question, however, is: can she

be said to be in bad *faith all through* (given that consciousness is continuously translucent)?

[47] Kathleen Wider, "The Failure of Self-Consciousness in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 32 (1993): 737-56. In fact, she tries to (successfully, in my opinion) point out a number of ambiguities and inconsistencies in Sartre's presentation of self-consciousness. She concludes by saying, "If my criticisms of Sartre's account of self-consciousness are correct . . . the ontology developed in *Being and Nothingness* has been seriously undermined" (p. 753).

[48] Ibid., 750.

[49] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 69.

[50] Wider, 750.

[51] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 69: "To believe is to know that one believes, and to know that one believes is no longer to believe."

[52] Or, in the words of Santoni, 38: "the initial enterprise of bad faith is to be seen as a decision made in bad faith about the nature of bad faith."

[53] See Thomas Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1993), Ch. 3, Section 1, which is titled, "The Ontological Structure of Human Relations: Alienation, Degradation, Conflict."

[54] In *Being and Nothingness*, 70, n. 9, Sartre refers to, "a self-recovery of being . . . [which] we shall call authenticity, the description of which has no place here." In reference to this, Anderson comments that "Apparently a treatment of authenticity belongs in ethics, not in a work of ontology" (p. 16).

[55] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, Vol. 1, new ed., trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 2004) and *Critique of Dialectical Reason: The Intelligibility of History*, Vol 2 (unfinished), trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1991).

[56] See the Appendix of Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics*, titled, "Sketches of the Third Ethics," 169-172.