

Sartre In Dialogue With Foucault: Toward a Post-Existentialism

**By Christian Gilliam
Royal Holloway, University of London**

Concept or Life?

The relationship between Sartre and Foucault is often commented on in passing in most texts dealing with twentieth century Continental philosophy.¹ Indeed Sartre has a peculiar relationship with both the structuralist and poststructuralist movements alike. The former in particular use Sartre as a living symbol of what is to be avoided at all costs: a theory of the subject. The latter, despite following a similar trajectory on this point, seems more willing to accept the novelty of Sartre. Deleuze in fact refers to Sartre as a “breath of fresh air from the backyard.”² Truly, it is no secret that Sartre’s theory of seriality regarding revolutionary movements had a major influence on Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of crystallisation, and further that Sartre’s *The Transcendence of the Ego* anticipated Foucault and Deleuze’s decentering of the subject.³ Nevertheless there has never been a direct and proper dialogue or engagement between Sartre’s and Foucault’s philosophy, with perhaps the exception of Thomas R. Flynn’s *Sartre, Foucault and History*.⁴ This is particularly surprising considering that both are considered to be amongst the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, but also because both thinkers represent two different trends of the Continental tradition vis-à-vis subjectivity and agency, reflecting the continued debates between what Badiou⁵ has aptly identified as the philosophy of *concept* and the philosophy of *interior life*, to some degree reflecting the split between the modernist and the postmodernist camps.⁶

Both thinkers are taken to represent the two extreme poles situated around what seems to be an irrecoverable gap in, and the “divided and dialectical character” of Continental philosophy.⁷ On the one hand Foucault represents an overt anti-humanism that takes issue with any theory of the subject and interiority. Despite elucidating the structural conditions of history and personhood, Foucault is often seen as ‘going too far’ in his adamant refusal to resort to the subject. This in turn has led to charges of anti-rationalism, anti-Enlightenment and relativism.⁸ Sartre, on the other hand, is taken to represent an outmoded 19th Century humanism, explicitly relying on the role of the subject, dialectics and interiority. Despite developing a clear picture of agency, personhood and interiority he is considered to have completely neglected, or indeed misunderstood, the structural conditions of history. This has led to the charge that Sartre develops an overtly idealist, rationalist or even solipsistic philosophy.

Of course these views do portray a degree of oversimplification and subsequent misunderstanding. Nevertheless Foucault and Sartre can still be conceptually seen as prime representatives of this split, insofar as it concerns the place and status (as opposed to the nature) of the subject. We seem to be faced with an either/or situation. Either we are for Foucault’s sort of postmodern anti-humanism, in which case to speak of the self in any concrete terms is to boarder on an outmoded modernism, or we are for Sartre’s sort of modern humanism, in which case to speak of discourse and anti-representationalism, is to give-up the subject on which we rely, and to boarder on relativism and obscurity. In other words we seem to be facing an arbitrary choice between modernism and postmodernism. Yet such a choice is limiting and inadequate. Both positions seem uncannily incomplete.

In reality Sartre provides a useful account of the subject and interiority. However his account of exteriority is wanting. Strictly in this sense, he is bound and gagged by an outmoded modernist interpretation of history and power. Foucault on the other hand provides a far more sophisticated analysis of power, but contrary to undermining

Sartre it is a concept of power implicitly reliant on the Sartrean subject. Foucault and postmodernism more generally, tries to provide an account of intelligent, intentional activity without invoking that concept. Yet this remains paradoxical, for negation must reside in the For-itself, in consciousness.⁹ Alas he is unable to account for this in any discernable way. As such abiding by a troubling, simplistic, and binary logic such as: ‘do we go in for modernism or postmodernism?’ or ‘the life or concept?’ restricts us, and prevents us from finding any way out of what I would deem is an intellectual cul-de-sac. It is only through exploring the mezzanine, the *via media*, through engaging with Sartre and Foucault in dialogue, that we can come to develop a new relation between life and concept. We come closer to understanding the self and power in a consistent way, in a way which avoids the pitfalls of humanism and modern theories of power and the demand for representation, and the obscurity and over-obsessive anti-Cartesianism of postmodernism. It is to this we turn.

Sartre’s Dialectic of the Self

It has become tiringly cliché to overlook the complexities and nuances of Sartre’s work, and as such to cast him aside as the modernist thinker *par excellence*, as developing a representational subject that is self-grounded and self-transparent. Indeed for this reason it is fair to focus more on Sartre today. He is clearly the more misunderstood of the two thinkers. He is taken, is he not, to develop a consciousness that is an entirely self-enclosed, intra-psychoic realm, wherein history and the Other is viewed as irrelevant, at best?¹⁰ With this in mind, it will be said that not only is Sartre’s lack of social theory (and his later Marxist turn) problematic, but that the actual ontological premise of his work is deeply flawed and alienated from any postmodern objectives. Undoubtedly influenced by Heidegger, and in particular his famous *Letter on Humanism*, Sartre is reproached by postmodern thinkers for regressing to subjectivity as the starting point. In reaction to Sartre, Heidegger maintains that Nothing is the primordial source of negation, or rather that man is not, and cannot, be the source of negation. Negation “unfolds essentially in Being itself, and not at all in the existence of man—so far as this is thought as the subjectivity of the *ego cogito*,” and so man is different from Being, in that he is ‘housed’ in it.¹¹ Expanding on Heidegger’s critique of representation, postmodernism generally asserts that there is no single representational condition. Rather there are a number of positive conditions of which the idea of representation is an effect. The broader argument is that Sartre’s humanism fails to comprehend the historical contingency and roots of human alienation. This inundated narrative is usually the first to thwart any constructive dialogue with Sartre.

First, Sartre is not guilty of retaining an erroneous ‘reification of consciousness’, as in viewing consciousness as an entity with an essence. Sartre only employs a vague ‘thin’ concept of the Cartesian cogito as *fundamentum inconcussum*, grounding negation in the For-itself, in consciousness. Through this Sartre is able to account for the origins of nothingness and thus freedom. Heidegger’s ground (Dasein), on the other hand, fails to account for the rise of distinctions such as human and natural or the act of negation and hence the origins of nothingness, beyond mysticism. Secondly Sartre’s work on consciousness, first defined in *The Transcendence of the Ego* is nothing short of revolutionary. Although the (post)structuralists are usually credited with being first to displace the subject, to take issue with essences, the fact remains that Sartre prefigures them strictly in this sense.

Second it is entirely inaccurate to see Sartre as suffering from solipsism. In *Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre felt he could “escape solipsism by refuting Husserl’s concept of the existence of the Transcendental ‘Ego’.”¹² Although he continues to maintain, throughout his work, “the hypothesis of a transcendental subject is useless and disastrous.”¹³ Sartre’s post-*Transcendence* works argues that “it does not help one bit to solve the question of the existence of Others.”¹⁴ In *Being and Nothingness* he moves away from simple Cartesianism (albeit a ‘thin’ Cartesianism), which hopes to posit the problem of the Other in terms of the *cogito*, claiming instead that “the existence of the Other renders the *cogito* possible as the abstract moment when the self is apprehended as an object.”¹⁵ The “road of interiority passes through the Other.”¹⁶ Simply put he claims that the only way to escape solipsism is through the development of a dialectic. Sartre quite clearly understands subjectivity quite differently from the likes of Descartes and Husserl, epitomising instead a kind of Hegelian humanism.

We witness then the early formation of Sartre’s ‘dialectic of the self’. In his early work it is realised through situatedness, facticity, and critically through being-for-others (i.e. the look). In his later work it is realised through the practico-inert, lived experience and totalisation. Generally speaking Sartre’s dialectic contends that the self is free, but the self’s freedom does not exist in a vacuum. Rather the self emerges in a field or background, in a situation as a being-in-the-world, which underscores negation. In this sense “*man can always make something out of what is made of him.*”¹⁷ The self is a distinct feature of the world, but not separate from it. Being is contrasted with Existence in that it is all-embracing and objective as opposed to individual and subjective. The For-itself and In-itself cannot exist in isolation, hence why Sartre adopts Heidegger’s notion of ‘Being-in-the-world’. As such Sartre sees the distinction as an *abstraction*. The concrete is man within the world in “that specific unity of man within the world which Heidegger, for example, calls ‘being-in-the-world’.”¹⁸

There is synthesis insofar as elements outside of the self (the situation) structure the self, establishing a whole, or what Sartre later calls the ‘singular universal’ and in some respects, ‘totalisation’. As Sartre puts it:

For us, man is defined first of all as a being ‘in a situation.’ That means that he forms a synthetic whole with his situation—biological, economic, political, cultural, etc. He cannot be distinguished from his situation, for it forms him and decides his possibilities; but inversely it is he who gives it meaning by making his choices within it and by it. To be in a situation, as we see it, is to *choose oneself* in a situation and also in the choices they themselves make of themselves.¹⁹

But as man, the self, reacts to this situation in continual flux and tension, there is no “harmonious synthesis.”²⁰ We are amidst objects that crush us, but which we in turn transcend, *ad infinitum*. Thus despite the presence of the situation, the primacy of nothingness remains, which in turn underpins the possibility of transgression, choice and authenticity. In fact Sartre’s concept of authenticity refers to a positive attitude towards nothingness. Bad faith, on the other hand, refers to a negative attitude or relation to nothingness in which an individual attempts to negate their freedom. Therefore freedom, the movement between the self and the situation exists in

dialectical circularity, in that freedom is always situated, as is the authentic and inauthentic modes of being. The thesis and the antithesis “represent the two moments of freedom” which remain “mutilated and abstract and perpetuate their opposition.”²¹ As such existence “exhausts itself in *maintaining* a conflict without a solution.”²²

So *tension* and *conflict* are critical features of Sartre’s dialectic, which appears to further distance him from Hegel’s synthesising dialectic, which defines the relation with Others in terms of knowledge and synthesis, from the point of view of a predetermined totality. Alas Hegel erroneously introduces an abstract moment of self-identity given in the knowledge of the Other, which portrays both an epistemological and ontological optimism.²³ In this way Sartre’s dialectic resembles more of a Kierkegaardian one. It champions the unsurpassable opaqueness of the lived experience. Or, as he puts it, it champions “pure, unique subjectivity against the universality of essence, the narrow, passionate intransigence of the immediate life against the tranquil mediation of all reality.”²⁴ Though Hegel acknowledges the unity of life and consciousness, and their mutual opposition, these are recognised as incomplete from the point of view of the totality. Where Kierkegaard sees the subjective, Hegel sees contradictions in formation. Like Kierkegaard, Sartre’s dialectic maintains that it is impossible to absorb man into any system, it emphasises that there is an irreconcilability of opposites, that there is an extreme subjectivity, and that there is no predefined privileged totality.

Certainly if Sartrean authenticity, as in the authentic mode of Being, is a *style* of continuous negation and creation, the realisation of nothingness, then the self cannot exist as a synthesis. Synthesis, to be sure, implies identity through reconciliation, but Sartre’s self is typified by a rejection of identity and the embrace of the irreducibility of plurality of consciousnesses. As Others are understood as partaking in our estrangement, the Other-as-identity must be resisted. Sartre wishes to affirm our nothingness, that is to say our difference from a posited identity, rather than create something in unity with the Other-as-identity. This is a tenable position, for Sartre moves the relation with the Other away from one understood in terms of knowledge and ‘I am I’, towards a purely relational ontology (i.e. the look). As Sartre says: “Consciousness is a concrete being *sui generis*, not an abstract unjustifiable relation to identity,”²⁵ it is a “*denied identity*.”²⁶ In this way Sartre, contra Hegel, is led to conclude that “so long as consciousnesses exist, the separation and conflict of consciousnesses will remain.”²⁷

Sartre’s later writing is characterised by an attempt to materialise this dialectic, and so to make it more relevant to political theory. *Search for a Method* is a piece that, contra Althusser and Lukács, argues that existentialism and Marxism are compatible precisely because *both develop a dialectical mode of thought*. Here Sartre is more explicit in showing how the dialectic can be developed without falling into Hegelian totalitarianism, while also avoiding the risk of Kierkegaardian subjectivism, which itself can undermine the logic of the dialectic. Indeed he reproaches his overtly Kierkegaardian moment in *Being and Nothingness*, for envisioning the dialectic in abstract terms. Sartre finds his solution in Marx. In turning to Marx, Sartre feels he can avoid the Hegelian and Kierkegaardian risk: “Marx rather than Kierkegaard or Hegel, is right, since he asserts with Kierkegaard the specificity of human *existence* and, along with Hegel, takes the concrete man in his objective reality.”²⁸ This is not a turn against the dialectic initially developed in *Being and Nothingness*, as much as it

is a reworking of it. How surprising it is then, that various writers, such as Barrett, Catalano, Craib, Fox, McCumber, and Warnock have in various ways portrayed Sartre as a sporadic philosopher, void of any underlying and continuous ontology. At the very least they have failed to truly appreciate the shadow of Hegel and dialectical thinking in the early Sartre.

Sartre's Marxist Dialectic

However, for the purposes of our discussion, it is more crucial to note that in *Search for a Method* and following it, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, this 'dialectical circularity' is understood in more material and socio-political terms.²⁹ In response to Hegel's idealised dialectic, Sartre holds that the origin of struggle lies in a concrete antagonism "whose material condition is *scarcity*."³⁰ Hegel ignored matter as mediation, and Sartre makes matter, as scarcity, the mediation. Moving on from the abstract moment, as presented in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre argues that the first relation between men is the indefinite adherence of each to each, and that moreover "these formal conditions for all History are immediately seen to be conditioned by inorganic materiality, both as the fundamental condition determining the content of human relations, and as an external plurality within the communicative reciprocity and within the Trinity."³¹ With this as the theoretical base, the remainder of the work seeks to outline a theory of practical ensembles, of series and groups as moments of totalisation. History as the reciprocity of need-scarcity therefore determines that the world exists as an object of consumption. Violence and class struggle are reduced to the negativity that need and a material world of scarcity produce. And so "the conditionings of antagonistic reciprocity are, as a whole, and *in the abstract*, based on the relation of multiplicity of men to the field of action, that is, on scarcity."³² The practico-inert character of the process of exploitation, and that which is embedded within it (absolute and relative surplus-value) "established itself *against a background of scarcity*" and "*by men* (that is to say, by practical organisms who have interiorised and readopted scarcity in the form of Manichaeic violence)."³³ The original totalising position of man with the material world is reducible to need. I see the other as contra-man or the anti-man, the one-too-many. My aim then, is to suppress the freedom of the other in order to secure mine. The lust for capital accumulation is set against the backdrop of scarcity and lack.

The dialectic, in this case, is clearly pinned to a totalistic and Marxist reading of History. Sartre's 'historical totalisation' means that "any human life is the direct or indirect expression of the whole"³⁴ — the whole representing a Marxist/ class struggle. More specifically the dialectic relationship to which totalisation is related, is explained through *need (le besoin)*. Our project - that is our 'going beyond' - is defined by human need (an obvious metaphysics of origin). Need "is the first totalising relation between the material being, man, and the material ensemble of which he is apart."³⁵ Even the negation of the negation is understood in terms of need, for it is achieved, allegedly through the transcendence of the organic towards the inorganic, "need is a link of *univocal immanence* with surrounding materiality in so far as the organism *tries to sustain itself* with it."³⁶ Under this rubric Sartre is able to talk of the "*Truth of History*,"³⁷ the "individualised universal"³⁸ and the "foundation of human relations."³⁹ Sartre boldly claims that the second volume of *The Critique* is an attempt to "Establish that there is *one* human history, with *one* truth and *one* intelligibility."⁴⁰ Alas, Sartre's internal Kierkegaard-Hegel struggle has produced a victor: Hegel.

Generally speaking, Sartre's turn to Marxism results in him continuing, against his own intentions and certainly against his existentialist aspirations, to remain metaphysical insofar as his limited use of history continues to follow a pursuit of the origin or *Ursprung*. As Foucault notes, if the theorist "refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics," if he actually "listens to history" in a genealogical mood, "he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms."⁴¹ Differences and discontinuities within history and the forms of identity that precede it may be recognised by Sartre's *mediation*, but they may only appear within an established framework or be seen as expressions of the whole, thus an 'expressive totality'.

But as Foucault taught us, to be truly post-metaphysical, to resist the political implications of total uses of history and to be more aware and open to multiplicity, we must seek to demolish any monistic, holistic and simplistic concept of history, favoring instead a profound pluralistic political ontology, or 'detotal history'. Foucault is adamant to dispel "total history" and its inherent "ideological use of history by which one tries to restore to man everything that has unceasingly eluded him over a hundred years."⁴² This is for the very reason that it ends up limiting claims of the Other. It is also theoretically inaccurate insofar as the totality, and appearance of man to which it is tied, is the result of a *chance* in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. As such, "if those arrangements were to disappear" then "man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."⁴³ The main point is "History constitutes"⁴⁴, but it also constitutes *by chance*. As Foucault would make clearer when turning to his genealogical studies, the forces operating in history do not accord to a single regulative mechanism, but rather are the result of 'haphazard conflicts', thus requiring diachronic as supposed to synchronic analysis. The contents and subjects analysed by the human sciences cannot remain stable, nor can they escape the pressure of History so understood.

Further, such totality implies that forms of domination or power can always be found in one place, usually the state. It tends to follow a binary model of struggle (i.e. class struggle), which suggests that once the source of the antagonism is overcome, once we are freed from the shackles of a repressive power, our true human essence will be freed. In Marxist terms the state embodies the economic base, indeed the 'economy' becomes an abstract universal object that produces concrete effects (determination). This leads to the belief that the destruction of the state, of the site of domination, will lead to liberty. This in turn leads to the Platonic theory of ideology, in which there is a clear distinction to be made between true knowledge and warped knowledge (ideology). Unlike his previous work, which with regards to epistemology remains rather vague, developing a subtle theory of 'intuition', his later work sees the formation of an explicit epistemology centred on praxis.⁴⁵ Sartre thus introduces an historical dimension of knowledge, and so positions himself in the realm of relativity.

What I am suggesting then, is that we can and should further *detotalise* Sartre's dialectical materialism, or totalisation. We should develop a Sartrean understanding of totality and totalisation within the context of a detotalised social, or micro, field or within a world of multiple histories. What we totalise, or rather the process of

totalisation, is a totalisation of our immediate situation, the “material conditions of ... existence” that “circumscribe the field of ... possibilities.”⁴⁶ The material field of possibilities, in which we are situated, could merely be the immediate and local ‘whole’. Indeed the material field (of multiplicity) of possibilities that we totalise, can be understood in a somewhat Foucauldian sense of field of action, as a sight of governance. Taking this further the interiorisation of exteriority and the exteriorisation of interiority can be thematically paralleled with ‘power-relations’, dialectically understood. In this sense, to borrow one of Sartre’s phrases, but to give it new meaning, we, as in man, can be the expression of a *detotal-totalisation*, or a totalisation of a detotal field. Further this relation, again consistent with the broad concept of Sartre’s dialectic, is one of continual flux, a continual back and forth. Attempts at abstraction and universalisation can only result in schemata that are continually valid only for that process.

Power-Relations not Domination

With this in mind, we are inclined to focus on the microforces of power, which do not relate to a simple totality or the notion of power as domination. Rather such microforces of power are disparate, unstable, productive, flexible, and operate relationally. Foucault holds that recourse to sovereignty, as a tool to be used against *discipline* is misguided, for sovereignty and disciplinary mechanisms “are two absolutely integral constituents of the general mechanisms of power.”⁴⁷ If one wants to look for a non-disciplinary form of power or, rather, to struggle against discipline and disciplinary power, it is not towards the ancient right of sovereignty that one should turn, but towards the possibility of a new form of right, one which must indeed be anti-disciplinarian, but at the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty (loc. cit.). In this sense we are obliged to turn away from the typical approach of analysing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, to analysing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. *The main objective of these struggles “is to attack not so much such-or-such institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but, rather, a technique, a form of power.”*⁴⁸

Critically, power is no longer understood as a mode of action acting directly and immediately on others, as it is with Marxist Sartre. Rather power acts on peoples actions or an “action upon an action,” and possible actions.⁴⁹ The exercise of power then is a ‘conduct of conduct’ and “a management of possibilities,” which is to say that power is “less a confrontation between two adversaries or their mutual engagement than a question of ‘government’” as in to “govern”: “to structure the possible field of action of others.”⁵⁰ Defining power this way, as a mode of action upon the actions of other, as the government of men by other men, “includes one important element: freedom”: “Power is exercised on free subjects, and only insofar as they are ‘free’.”⁵¹ It seeks to structure the field of possibilities in which the behaviour of active subjects is able to inscribe itself.

The use of panopticism is a particularly obvious example of the manifestation of such power. As we know, it is the systems of power that regulates the practice of discursive formations, and notions of truth, be that through manifold relations, open strategies, or rational techniques. Fundamentally the panoptic gaze operates in a similar fashion to Sartre’s *le regard* insofar as the look of the Other plays a critical part in our estrangement from ourselves. The critical difference is that whereas Sartre focuses on an individual ontological relation, Foucault focuses on an institutional one, tied into a

genealogical axis— discourse. Discourse provides the form of knowledge through which the estrangement of the self by Other is epistemically arranged. I am constantly in a struggle, then, in a relationship between my attempt to objectify a person and their attempt to do so to me. Therefore, my “original fall is the existence of the Other.”⁵² Although the Other’s gaze, for Sartre, is not epistemic but primarily ontological, such ontological relations are open to being configured epistemologically by the For-itself. Once undergoing the transformation of the ontological relationship, the For-itself is in a position to make it an item of knowledge. But it is primarily a neutral experience. For it is the knowledge as associated with power, that gives the look its meaning in the reflective stage of consciousness.

With reference to the third genealogical axis, Foucault seeks to examine the way in which the individual constitutes and recognises him/her self as a subject. Foucault sought to analyse how an ‘experience’ came to be constituted in modern Western societies, and how such an experience caused individuals to recognise themselves as subjects, or more precisely, subjects of sexuality. The 18th century “did not exclude sexuality, but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals ... it produced and determined the sexual mosaic.”⁵³ The aim was not to suppress sexuality, but rather to provide it with an analytical, visible and permanent reality. It was “implanted in bodies, spilled in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principle of classification and intelligibility not the exclusion of these thousand aberrant sexualities, but the specification, the regional solidification of each one of them.”⁵⁴

Crucially, Foucault’s study then is not a history of sexual behaviours nor a history of representations, but a history of the discourse of ‘sexuality’.⁵⁵ Differently, Foucault sought to examine the history of the experience of sexuality “where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture.”⁵⁶ Of course this third axis of genealogy is explicitly related to the first two. The first axis looks at the formation of sciences (*saviors*) that refer to it, the second axis looks at the systems of power that regulate its practice, and the final axis addresses the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognise themselves as subjects of this sexuality. Through this genealogical approach to sexuality Foucault came to see how the individual was led to focus his or her attention on him/her self, in order to decipher, recognise and acknowledge himself as a subject of desire, bringing into play between himself and himself a certain relationship that allows him to discover, in desire, the truth of his being, albeit natural or fallen.⁵⁷ In this way, as Hendley puts it, “our reflective comprehension of ourselves can only be articulated in terms of the theoretical and non-theoretical discursive possibilities at its disposal.”⁵⁸

What is useful about Foucault’s ‘aesthetic of existence’ or ‘care of the self’, is that it offers a political twist to Sartre’s notion of authenticity, in that it is a continuous refusal of what we are insofar as that is defined and shaped by and through power-knowledge. As Foucault says himself, he wishes to define existence as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture. That is to say that the experience of the self, *the material field of possibilities*, must be understood within the context of the three axes of genealogy. The early Sartre’s exploration of experience, and the situation, is highly problematic in that it does not consider the socio-political. With the later Marxist Sartre in which the economic base or scarcity is the totalising centre of the social formation, ideology

is taken to be a mystification of the real existing truth, enacted or guided by the bourgeoisie. This presupposes a stable binary that simply does not exist, bound by an outmoded Platonic logic.

Power-Knowledge and Sartrean Dialecticism

At this point we come full-circle, finding ourselves back to Sartre's subject as originally defined in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. As much as Foucault attempts to exorcise the Sartrean ghost he "returns to the Sartrean project of reconfiguring the subject as a possible site for freedom."⁵⁹ Yet Foucault falls foul of avoiding any discernably *clear* theory of an enactive creative self that underpins such power-relations and freedom. "Freedom slips in the back door, as it were, as a necessarily 'agonistic' quality of power."⁶⁰ Similarly Žižek on this rare occasion offering a fair criticism of Foucault, contends that Foucault's work faces a "paradox" for "there is no pre-existing positive Body in which one could ontologically ground our resistance to disciplinary power mechanisms."⁶¹ This reluctance towards embracing consciousness and subjectivity suggests that they are strictly understood as they figure in Descartes and Husserl, which mean surrendering the *concept* of consciousness to the Cartesians. But this need not be the case. Further, although agreeing with the (post)structuralists that "structure produces behaviour," Sartre maintains shows that it is impossible to pass over "the reverse side of the dialectic in silence" for "Man can only 'be spoken' to the extent that he speaks."⁶² Yet we look in vain for anything like a positive articulation of free productive action in Foucault. Much like with Heidegger's account of nothingness, whilst we are shown a negative activity, there is no concern to ground this activity upon a negative being. Sartre's ontology gives us that grounding.

So Foucault's "unresolved problem is that of accounting for the human *agency* that responsible resistance requires."⁶³ Empirical distinctions cannot serve as a basis for they fail to denote, to use Sartre's words, "an ontological relation which must render all experience possible and which aims at establishing how in general an object can exist for consciousness."⁶⁴ It is not the case that in order to constitute myself as *not being* a particular being, I must have some previous knowledge of this being. Knowledge certainly provides a context. But it is the ontological existence of the For-itself that renders such experience possible in the first instance. Thus "the fundamental relation by which the For-itself has to be as not being *this* particular object to which it is present is the foundation of all knowledge of this being."⁶⁵

Taking this logic of the Sartrean subject and interiority to its ultimate conclusion, it is also critical to reintroduce the emotional core of the subject: namely bad faith. We are all aware that Foucault attempts to provide pure descriptions of discursive events, from a neutral perspective that brackets any claim to intelligibility. For Foucault, Husserl was confined by his attempt to ground truth by giving a 'history of the referent', undermining total phenomenological detachment.⁶⁶ Foucault attempts to operate a decentring, an extreme phenomenology if you will, that leaves no privilege to any centre. Foucault's genealogy, in this regard, departs from Nietzsche's original use of it. For the Nietzschean genealogist "the foundation of morality, at least since Plato, is not to be found in ideal truth" rather it "is found in *puđenda origo*: 'lowly origins', catty fights, minor crudeness, ceaseless and nasty clashing of wills."⁶⁷

I believe that again, Foucault runs into error. Not only is there theoretical space for the Sartrean subject and bad faith, but also it is, fundamentally, a theoretical necessity.

In moving towards an analysis of the self-to-self relationship Foucault moves freedom beyond the confines of exteriority, as noted by Deleuze.⁶⁸ The manifestations of power in the second axis refer to forms of exclusion, open and transparent political acts, which limit and shape the field of possibilities (the situation) via disciplinary procedures, primarily through the utilisation of the gaze. In the third axis we move to a more insidious form of self-estrangement, concerning how the self relates to itself, or if you prefer, the internal look, in which case the self becomes its own Other, performing its own dialectical play. Subsequently the self-to-self relationship refers to ways individuals produce themselves as specific sorts of subjects in and through socially regulated practices, i.e. interiority. There is then, a discernible 'thinness' in Foucault's concept of the subject, which as Fox rightly observes, "strips down the subject to a thin aesthetic surface underneath which there is seemingly nothing but a chaotic process of change and fragmentation."⁶⁹

Although relations of power permeate any society, although the notion of a society without relations of power is an abstraction, surely the particular type of organisation of discourse towards the norm, reflects a fundamental striving for order and unity, for safety and stability, for something rather than nothing? The type of knowledge that is delivered, strived for, circulated, negated, affirmed and so forth, will surely reflect the historical and circumstantial nature of discourse. But the way in which it interacts with subjects is surely not just the function of the mechanisms of power, but also of the operators and players of this power? In fact this echoes Sartre's criticism of contemporary Marxism as being typified by a rushed totalisation, whereas to totalise is to replace the particularity by a universal, wherein the "aim is not to integrate what is different as such, while preserving for it a relative autonomy, but rather to suppress it."⁷⁰ The Marxists Scholastics will be obliged to explain Flaubert, or even Napoleon, with reference to Historical laws, the necessity of class conflict and so on. Indeed, there are structural reasons for the appearance of such men. But what this approach overlooks is why it was this particular Flaubert, or this particular Napoleon, who occupied this space. Refusing to "abandon the real life," existentialism asserts that it is "inside the particularity of a history, through the peculiar contradictions of *this* family, that Gustave Flaubert unwittingly served his class apprenticeship."⁷¹ One is born into a situation of universality, or a material field of possibilities, but it is lived through in particularity. Sartre's notion of *mediation* is designed to account for this dialectical play between the universal and the particular, a mediation between concrete men and the material conditions of their life "between human relations and the relations of production, between persons and classes" and so forth.⁷² Coming back to Foucault, this does not mean to say that there is a nature of knowledge, an essence of knowledge, that bad faith is the universal condition of knowledge. Knowledge is historical and circumstantial, but the way in which it circulates is partially a reflection of its intersection with the self's attitude. Certain discourses, practices of power, ideas of normal, are often unquestionably accepted, adopted, applied and so forth. The question is, how is this so?

So, other than outright, obvious, exclusionary practices (i.e. confinement), I am estranged by the Other through a look that is ontological in origin, but easily appropriated by knowledge. The look is ontologically neutral. It's meaning is provided by the prevailing discourse, the particular situation and my attitude towards it. The look, if you like, is the non-discursive moment that is in turn interpreted discursively. Equally the self-to-self relationship can be understood as a kind of

‘internal look’, wherein I make my self the Other, the censor and the looker. I understand and judge my self, however, through an estranged knowledge, a knowledge of a real and external, yet unidentified, Other. Unlike the obvious, transparent, and material mechanism of power, which seeks to normalise through tactics of exclusion, the third axis of power is dependent on me. This is a question of how individual bodies subjectivise their predicament, how they relate to their conditions of existence. There remains an existential possibility (as opposed to a determination), a psychological-existential experience of a void, in the subject’s relation to its social existence.

The Dialectic Redefined: Verging on Post-Existentialism

This may at first seem illogical for the notion of bad faith appears to be premised on the very thing that is already the effect of power: “it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gesture, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals.”⁷³ That is to say that Sartre’s bad faith is part of the analysis which seeks to ask why certain people want to dominate and so on, which in turn is based on a humanistic analytic of finitude, the death bound consciousness, the Cartesian subject. However I maintain that the fault lies with Foucault rather than Sartre.

Firstly it must be stressed that Sartre does not provide an essentialist subject or humanism, as we saw. Nevertheless Foucault rejects any anthropomorphism, any human-centric theory, any attempt by the human science to theoretically objectify the background conditions of their own discourse. But this does not make anthropology troublesome as much as it makes the theory of it troublesome.⁷⁴ The ‘doublet’ remains as an epistemological circle. Foucault’s reluctance to employ ‘man’ in his works is over-obsessive, to the point of replicating the very empirico-transcendental split he strives to avoid. This is done by adopting a method, which seeks a position of a detached spectator, or a view from nowhere. Oddly, then, Foucault falls back into a pre-Nietzschean *explanation at a distance*, a sort of positivist ideal of philosophy as a rigorous science.⁷⁵

What has been outlined perfectly encapsulates a dialectical reasoning that can only be accounted for by Sartre’s particular dialectic of the self (once it is of course purged of its Marxist connotations). History, then, is lived in interiority, in consciousness, which provides the condition for the possibility for there being historical facts. Following Kierkegaard, Sartre envisages a transhistorical condition of historical knowledge, which is to say that there is a beginning that is lived as non-knowledge, “in as much as he [man] both produces and discovers, at a given moment in the temporal unfolding of his life, his relation to an absolute which is itself inserted in History.”⁷⁶ These are truly ‘dialectical twists’ for “each of us, in our very historicity, escapes History to the extent that we make it. I myself am historical to the extent that others also make history and make me, but I am a transhistorical absolute by virtue of what I make of what they make of me, have made of me and will make of me in the future—that is, by virtue of my historicity.”⁷⁷ Such circularity overcomes the ‘hidden realities’ of structuralist Marxism and poststructuralism, with their contention that there are no beginnings. Equally, it overcomes the over-essentialist issue regarding the positing of a definitive beginning, a Cartesian view of clear and distinct representations. Only dialectical reasoning can bring any coherence to Foucault’s thought, wherein there is a material interdependence between thought and its object, a

subject-object dialectical unity and circularity. And in turn only Foucault's power-knowledge can help determine how the knowledge of being knows itself as a being conditioned by other beings, (yet in turn still be able to assert its rationality).

To conclude, Both Foucault and Sartre represent two extremes that must be reconciled. The Foucauldian extreme is an analysis of power and the social that is ghostly, that is disembodied, that is selfless, lacking interiority. Sartre, on the other hand, focuses so much on the self that the Other as social is entirely neglected, and so he lacks exteriority. When Sartre's begins to redefine his dialectic in Marxist turns, he continues to misunderstand the nature of power, overlooking the analysis of strategies and tactics in history. And so we favour Foucault when regarding power. In many ways it significantly contributes to Sartre's dialectic of the self, providing an all-important appreciation of the micropolitical. As Flynn puts it, Sartre's unresolved problem concerns "coming to acknowledge the full force of structural conditioning in human history."⁷⁸ But Foucault's analytic of power *needs* a supplement. How is the self to practice an aesthetics of existence? Simply, how are we to 'think'? And so we do to poststructuralism what Sartre did to Marxism. We approach the genealogical 'situation' in terms of *existence*— that is, of comprehension. Kierkegaard comes back into the fold, in that we reintroduce the unsurpassable singularity of the human adventure. But we do not reintroduce it into Marxism, and the Marxist totality. We reintroduce it to Foucauldianism and the Foucauldian detotality. Rather than seeing this as a contradiction (as the Marxist saw the reintroduction of Kierkegaard as a contradiction), we see it as a necessity (as Sartre sees it as a necessity in historical materialism). Thus the comprehension of existence is presented as the human foundation of poststructuralist thought, inasmuch as human existence and the comprehension of the human are inseparable. We subsequently replace historical materialism with genealogy.

Notes

¹For example: Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1991) *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; David Cooper (1999) *Existentialism: A Reconstruction* (2nd ed). Victoria: Blackwell; Francois Dosse (1997a) *History of Structuralism* vol 1: *The Rising Sign, 1945-1966*. Trans. Deborah Glassman. London: University of Minnesota Press; Francois Dosse (1997b) *History of Structuralism* vol 2: *The Sign Sets, 1967-Present*. Trans. Deborah Glassman. London: University of Minnesota Press; Thomas R. Flynn (2005) 'Introduction: Sartre at One Hundred—a Man of the Nineteenth Century Addressing the Twenty-First?' in van den Hoven, A and Leak, A. (ed) *Sartre Today: A Century Celebration*, p. 1-14. Oxford: Berghahn Books; Nik F. Fox (2003) *The New Sartre: Explorations in Postmodernism*. London: Continuum; John McCumber (2011) *Time and Philosophy: A History of Continental Thought*. Durham: and Jon Simons (1996) *Foucault & the political*. London: Routledge.

² Giles Deleuze (2006a) *Dialogues II*. Trans. Hugh Tomlison, Barbara Habberjam, Elliot Ross Albert. London: Continuum.

³ See Jean-Paul Sartre (2011) *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Oxon: Routledge

⁴ Thomas R. Flynn's (2005) *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason: Volume Two a Poststructuralist Mapping of History*. London: University of Chicago Press.

⁵ Badiou, A. (2012) *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, pp. 1ii-1vi. London: Verso.

⁶ There have been numerous attacks on postmodernism from the modernist camp. Take for instance: Dews, P. (2007) *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and The Claims of Critical Theory*. London: Verso; Habermas, J. (1987) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Trans. F. Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press; Norris, C. (1993) *The Truth about Postmodernism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Putnam, H. (1983) *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers: Volume 3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Žižek, S. (1999) *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso. Taylor, C. (1986) Foucault on freedom and truth. In D. Couzens Hoy (Ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, pp. 69-102. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Wolin, R. (2004) *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism, From Nietzsche to Postmodernism*. Woodstock: Princeton University Press.

⁷ Badiou, A. (2012) *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, p. Iiii. London: Verso.

⁸ See n. 6, in particular Habermas, Norris and Wolin.

⁹ Sartre was increasingly concerned that Heidegger "was going in for mysticism": Beauvoir as quoted Fell. P. J. (1979) *Heidegger and Sartre: An Essay on Being and Place*, pp. 165. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹⁰ John McCumber (n 1, p. 316) is a recent advocate of this view.

¹¹ Heidegger, M. (2011) 'Letter on Humanism' in Krell, D. F. (ed) *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, p. 178. London: Routledge.

¹² Sartre, J. P. (2008) *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Trans. H. E. Barnes, p. 259. London: Routledge.

¹³ Loc. cit.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 259.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 260.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 260.

¹⁷ Sartre, J. P. (2008) *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, p. 35. London: Verso. Italics added.

-
- ¹⁸ Sartre (n. 10), p. 27.
- ¹⁹ Sartre, J. P. (1995) *Anti-Semite and Jew: an Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, pp. 59-60. New York: Schocken Books.
- ²⁰ See Sartre, J. P. (1963) *Saint Genet: actor and martyr*. Trans B. Frechtman, p. 338. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- ²¹ Loc. cit.
- ²² Ibid, p. 273.
- ²³ See Sartre (n. 10), pp. 262-269.
- ²⁴ Sartre, J. P. (1968) *Search for a Method*. Trans. H. E. Barnes, p. 11. New York: Vintage Books.
- ²⁵ Sartre (n. 10), p. 263.
- ²⁶ Ibid, p. 201.
- ²⁷ Ibid, p. 268.
- ²⁸ Sartre (n. 22), p. 14.
- ²⁹ Sartre, J. P. (1976) *Critique of Dialectical Reason I: Theory of Practical Ensembles*. Trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, p. 68. Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- ³⁰ Ibid, p. 113.
- ³¹ Ibid, p. 120.
- ³² Ibid, p. 735.
- ³³ Ibid, p. 739.
- ³⁴ Ibid, p. 50.
- ³⁵ Ibid, p. 80.
- ³⁶ Loc. cit.
- ³⁷ Ibid, p. 52.
- ³⁸ Ibid, p. 56.
- ³⁹ Loc. cit.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 69.
- ⁴¹ Foucault, M. (1991) 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in Rabinow, P. (ed.), *The Foucault Reader: an Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, p. 78. London: Penguin Books.
- ⁴² Foucault, M. (2008) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. Smith, S. A. M, p. 15. London: Routledge.
- ⁴³ Loc. cit.
- ⁴⁴ Foucault, M. (2002) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, p. 405. London: Routledge.
- ⁴⁵ See Hendley, S. (1991) *Reason and Relativism: A Sartrean Investigation*, pp. 22-23. New York: State University of New York Press.
- ⁴⁶ Sartre (n. 22), p. 93.
- ⁴⁷ Foucault, M. (2008) 'Two Lectures', in Roach, S. C. (ed.), *Critical Theory and International relations*, pp. 324-325. London: Routledge.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 331.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 340.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 341.
- ⁵¹ Ibid. p. 342.
- ⁵² Sartre (n. 10), p. 286.
- ⁵³ Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan, p. 47. London: Penguin Books.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 44.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 3.

-
- ⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 4.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 5.
- ⁵⁸ Hendley (n. 43), p. 189.
- ⁵⁹ Fox (n. 1), p. 44.
- ⁶⁰ Hendley (n. 43), p. 54.
- ⁶¹ Žižek (n. 6), 301.
- ⁶² As quoted in Fox (n. 1), p. 44.
- ⁶³ Fox (n. 1), p. 259.
- ⁶⁴ Sartre (n. 10), p. 199.
- ⁶⁵ Loc. cit.
- ⁶⁶ Dreyfus. L. H. & Rabinow. P. (1983) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (2nd ed), p. 50. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 108.
- ⁶⁸ Deleuze (2006) *Foucault*. Trans. Hand, S. London: Continuum.
- ⁶⁹ Fox (n. 1), p. 50.
- ⁷⁰ Sartre (n. 24), p. 48.
- ⁷¹ Ibid, p. 93.
- ⁷² Ibid, p. 76.
- ⁷³ Foucault (2001) ‘The Subject and Power’, in Faubion, J. D. (ed)., *Michele Foucault: Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, p. 322. London: Penguin Books.
- ⁷⁴ A similar argument is made by Hendley (n. 44).
- ⁷⁵ See Sartre (n. 10), p. 147.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 153.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 161.
- ⁷⁸ Flynn (n. 1), p. 259