

History and Existentialism in Sartre by Leonard Krlogon
(in THE CRITICAL SPIRIT)

EXISTENTIALISM
Sartre
Existentialism
his - mindless
adjectival
& substantive
11th or 15th century

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"Existentialism poses both subj. & obj. problems for his. As subjects, existentialists espouse positions that are often antithetical to the his. dimension; as objects, they have exhibited ideas & activities that are often opaque to his. knowledge. In S both kinds of problems are joined, & in what follows, thru him a joint solution will be essayed."

p.240 takes up "adjectival and substantive" stages of intell. movements.

p.241: "It is a matter of distinguishing bet. the stage in which a TENDENCY develops as part & in the shelter of an already est'd. set of ideas & the stage it sets itself up as an ind. doctrine or phil. on its own. In its (existentialism) adjectival stage it goes back at least to H's (PHEN)... In its substantive stage it became an autonomous & characteristic 20th c. phil., with Husserl its main forbear & Jaspers, Heidegger & S its primary exponents.....
"Externally, the rel. bet. exis. & his. mindedness is one of rival siblings..."

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ambiguities in rel. bet. existentialism & historicism in S "not idiosyncratic but reflective of a fundamental dilemma in a characteristic intell. movement of OUR age. Uniqueness of S is not only rigor of his thought & responsiveness to world but "in his dev. he has traversed the whole spectrum of possibilities from anti- to pro-his. postures of existentialism."

ambiguities in rel. bet. exis. & historicism

...if we can discover an his. logic in his dev. the prospect of uncovering the function of his. in contemporary thinking. For S's dev. involves a shift that is large: than the change in his evaluation of his. & the growing centrality of his. is the key to it."

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pp.244-45 deals with Nausea & p.246 with (both) aesthetic dimension & L'imaginaire for it is imaginary consciousness makes man able "to posit reality as a SYNTHETIC WHOLE."

p.249:

"His (S's) inability to demonstrate the movement FROM his perception to his synthesis moreover was irremediable so long as he associated his. knowledge with aesthetic imagination. For he generalized this incompatibility bet. what the real analogue is & what it represents into an 'inherent contradiction' and 'ambiguity' of all images."

problem of relating reality & creation that he rounded out his 1st stage with the writing of B/N in which he articulated the doctrine of his. appropriate to this 1st stage

p.250: "It was this tendency of S's art & imagination to slide over into reality that explains his tenuous attraction to the his. he denied. It was to resolve the general problem of RELATING REALITY & CREATION that he rounded out his 1st stage with the writing of B/N in which he articulated the doctrine of his. appropriate to this 1st stage."

2nd problem then of synthesis & integration, of what S calls "TOTALITY" dominates the 2nd stage.

p.251: "He overcame, in B/N, the problem of discontinuity & in the service of this measure of integration, est'd. the ELEMENTAL BASIS FOR HIS. But he remained, in this wk. within the framework of individuality. It was the INTERNAL DRIVE to overcome this limitation upon unity that PUSHED him finally into the 2nd stage as his thought in search of a supra-indiv. totality & it was in the process of this search that his. became central to him."

re B/N, p.251: "as the most profound, systematic & coherent exposition of S's phil., it is crucial for the revelation of the INESCAPABLE LIMITS & problems of that thought--limits & problems which created intell. NEEDS that his. was later brought in to fill. MOREOVER, since S has NEVER departed from the main foundations of his thought, B/N also sets forth the assumptions which molded the subsequent form of his historical doctrine."

p.252: "The theme is rel. of existence & consciousness for the particular kind of being which S calls 'human reality.' These 2 sub-types of being manifest a radical rift in the heart of human being as such. This rift manifests a radical rift in the heart of human being as such. This rift manifests in the striving of consciousness to create a GROUND, A REASON FOR BEING, & to rejoin existence in a unitary, or, in S's term, 'totalized' being whose contingency would now be replaced by meaning."

p.252: "S had to bring consciousness to terms with all dimensions of human reality. Yet the HISTORICAL DIMENSION of

p.253: this reality; obvious as it is, get SHORT SHRIFT, & S's orientation of his these against detached knowledge as an activity & detached particulars as objects--both the stock-in-trade of historians--makes it clear that this was no mere oversight."

LK then cites 6 of S's pre-historical propositions--that is, propositions--that is, propositions of TIME & SOCIETY the 2 main constituents of the historical dimension--in the form of a cumulative argument: (1) Neither consciousness nor existence are in time."

(Q B/N, p.107)

(2) "The 3 dimensions of time corresponds to the 3 facets of the creative act of consciousness... The past then is the 'factivity', 'the given', the 'contingent', the 'essence' & 'substance' of what we are. It is the unalterable, irremediable, factual necessity that 'haunts' consciousness; it is the world that consciousness determines itself to transcend." Q B/N, 83-4, 118-9

(3) "Consciousness must be both its own past--since the past is by definition the substance of what anything is--and at the same time it must deny, negate 'nihilate' this very past, for this is consciousness' very reason for being." (Q B/N, 105-7, 118-9)

JPS: "All my past is there, pressing, urgent, imperious, but its meanings & the orders which it gives me I choose by the very project of my end."

p.254: "As a matter of fact, if not of logic, S did break thru the paradox, but he did it now by deciding for the present over the future & the past... but he paid for it ambiguity. Q p.501"

JPS: "We choose our past in the light of a certain, but from then on it imposes itself upon us & devours us."

(4) LK shows however that past is still not history here since it is "my past", "my consciousness". "The 'event' that is 'a condition for all history'--that has the effect of 'making his. possible'--is the 'fact', abs., contingent, inexplicable of the birth of SOCIAL consciousness out of indiv. consciousness--S's terms, the 'Upsurge' of 'BEING*FOR*OTHERS' OUT OF 'BEING*FOR*ITSELF'."

p.255: "For the S of B/N his. has no autonomous status whatsoever."

LK says S refused to distinguish 2 sense of his. (1) as reality (2) as knowledge & the deliberate ambiguity had a tendency... to make historians like any past-creating individuals. Thus when S recalled his. situations it was to seduce in each an (his. act.) assessing his own past in the manner of an historian as an ex. of a larger analysis of INDIV. CHOICE."

p.256: (5) "Behind S's inability to people the his. arena which he defined was his more fundamental -- this time admitted-- failure to go beyond the indiv. & to constitute the society that was to inhabit it."

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Q S B/N, p.250, 429: "Human reality remains alone because the OTHERS has the nature of a contingent & irreducible fact.... The essence of the relations between consciousness is not the Mitsein; it is conflict. Thus individualized kind of existence is not only fact, but FAILURE

p.257: (6) "Here we have the key to the final & summary proposition of B/ N. It is a phil. of 'perpetual failure.'" (B/N, p.623)

In a word the 6 propositions show p.258 "Everywhere he(S) looked he saw isolation & frustration, & as a corollary the desired unity & fulfillment of which the frustration was a function." "The deprecation of his. was a function both of the dependent status of the past & the unreality of the group. But the past & the group were the only possible forces that could form a continuum. IF his. could be recognized, it could exercise a p.259 reverse effect as the medium for the realization of both past & society by internally relating them. Here was the need & here was the possibility that GRADLED S's growth."

p.259 THEN DEALS WITH THE CATAclysm OF war, occupation, resistance; "In what forms did he perceive the cataclysm of his times? And how did he translate the experience into concepts at least coherent to if not entirely consistent with his phil.?" And LK proceeds to analyze the trilogy Les Chemis de la liberte that marks break with two stages of S's thought.

p.260: "L'Age de raison --the 1st vol.--represents the point of departure, the fictional equivalent of B/N, but told now from the point of view, not of existence as in Nausea, but of consciousness. IT IS, INDEED, AN ACC'T. OF 'UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS.'" *****

p.264: "But...it is characteristic of S's 2nd stage that he has as yet not been able to clinch the synthesis of the indiv. & the group, involving as it does NOT ONLY THE COHERENCE OF AN IDEA, but the capstone of a system, this synthesis is itself a becoming, a movement along the dimension of time." " & so the ans. to our 1st ques.--in what form did S perceive the cataclysm?--is simply this: he absorbed the contemporary experience in the form of contemporary his...." It is here where LK also q S from Method Critique de la raison dialectique "but he meant Mxism in the sense of 'the only valid interpretation of his.', 'the conception of concrete syntheses..within a moving & dial. totalization which is nothing else but his.', 'the his. process in its totality.' In short, what replaced the individualistic temporal paradoxes failures of his 1st stage was the conviction, MEDIATED BY CONTEMPORARY HIS., that individuals could join with their fellow in an historical process...."

p.265: "This 2nd stage...is thus not so much Mxist as historicist." p.266: "the phil. of perpetual failure has become the phil. of continuous success."

***** LK now is ready to draw all his analysis, much of it most profound, to a most ambiguous conclusion; it is the last par. of the whole: "BUT IF S is an even approximately faithful expression of contemporary culture, then these relationships & with them, our familiar notion of HISTORY'S FUNCTIONS ARE ANACHRONISMS. (IF neither logic NOR science, NOR art any longer furnish general truths pertinent to human conduct, (IF THEIR MEANINGS are also utterly fragmented, THEN HISTORY must use the patterns of synchronization & succession of human actions in the common medium of time to link their particular fragments & to construct whatever general truths about man we must have. IF WE DO NOT APPLY OUR HISTORY TO THIS END we fail both as the historians & as the historical agents of our age."

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