

Adrián Bene: Individual and Community. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in the Mirror of the Hungarian Reception

SUMMARY

The aim of my dissertation is to show that the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre played a transitional role between modernity and postmodernity. It is enough to think of the influence Sartre had on such postmodern thinkers as Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman or Fredric Jameson. In the study, I analyze the misunderstandings and ideological distortions in the reception of his oeuvre, especially in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Pointing out the relations between ideology and philosophy, I focus on the Hungarian reception that was strongly informed by historical-dialectical materialism in the decades of state socialism. The interpretation of Sartre has been distorted by personal, political, ideological and philosophical conflicts.

My approach is a hermeneutic one: while mapping out Sartre's philosophical context, I also reflect upon my own horizon. My interpretation is marked by the linguistic, narrative and cultural turns in humanities. In the process of observing an object, the observer selects and makes value judgements based on his or her own subjectivity which is constituted by the culture in a broad sense. Moreover, in social sciences we are part of the system we analyze. From this viewpoint, commitment in social philosophy is not less worthy than the illusion of scientific objectivity. This is the basic insight of both Sartre and the reflexive sociology of Alvin Gouldner.

I deal with Sartrean philosophy from an interdisciplinary point of view. The interdisciplinarity of my enterprise comes from the topic being studied which encompasses philosophy, ideology and social theory. Therefore I had to use several theoretical tools: the history of philosophy combined with ideological criticism, discourse analysis, cultural studies and reception aesthetics. Thus, I contextualize on a Marxism informed basis the texts not just historically and within the society but in the contemporary cultural-ideological horizon (drawing on cultural studies) and in the history of philosophy. After such contextualizations we may approach the texts through close reading in order to tackle the arguments, argumentative strategies, lexicology, style, metaphors, implied contents, presuppositions, references (after Siegfried Jäger). Here I apply critical discourse analysis on the field of philosophy and social theory. As a result, we can see the characteristics of a discourse of mid-20th century, in which politics, ideology, philosophy and sciences have been intertwined.

After the methodological introduction I place Sartre in a philosophical context, analyzing the key concepts of his thinking. The central problem of late Sartre was that of the relation between individual and community which is related to questions of alienation and estrangement. These are also the main problems of today's society with its atomized individuals. Consequently, Sartre's philosophical texts are worth re-reading.

After clearing the historical background of such concepts as individual, community, history and freedom in Enlightenment and Modernity, I review the influence of Kierkegaard, Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger on Sartre. In the 1930s French philosophers began to acquaint themselves with the German hermeneutics, phenomenology, existentialism and Marxism, due to the contribution of Jean Wahl, Raymond Aron, Alexandre Kojève. Sartre was deeply influenced by the Husserlian phenomenology based on intentionality. He elaborated his own conception of consciousness in *The Transcendence of Ego*, providing a correction of the Husserlian theory. Subjectivity remained the starting point but this, however, did not lead to solipsism, because the being of others in the world is considered the condition of the cogito. This realization sheds light on the fact that Sartre's conception of individual freedom is rooted in intersubjectivity. This aspect is proven through my analysis of such early writings as *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*.) Thus the commonly held view of Sartre's subjectivism as an idealism, even solipsism, could be queried. It can be claimed that this statement had no validity even in relation to the first period of Sartre's philosophy (ended by *Being and Nothingness*) which was characterized by the phenomenological study of consciousness. In this first masterpiece he provided a phenomenological ontology marked out for rethinking Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Sartre among others emphasizes the intersubjective dimension of the For-Itself, and its constitutive trait of freedom. This freedom of nihilation is individual, yet in conflict with alienating others, but in no way idealistic. What is related with consciousness is still not unreal in phenomenology, due to the noetic-noematic correlation. Following the critical remarks of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sartre brought the concreteness of human being into prominence. The claim that the Sartrean freedom is absolute, isolated and idealistic appeared in the last chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception*. Sartre's reply to this was *Cartesian Freedom*.

After World War II Sartre emphasized the importance of situation, responsibility, and commitment in the background of individual choice and freedom. His lecture in 1945 titled *Existentialism is a humanism* tended to conciliate individual freedom with responsibility for others. It comprised the claim for community, common goals and action. This is because the Sartrean existentialism was simultaneously an action theory and a hermeneutics. We are free

to transcend ourselves in a project, but our self-definition is not independent of our situation. The ethical aspect of Sartrean philosophy became all the more characteristic. However, Sartre remained individualist (although it was an epistemological-methodological one, not some kind of egoism). This was unacceptable for the Marxist and structuralist holism which both held that the individual is determined by the social whole. Sartre acknowledged the influence of the age and the society, but he insisted on human freedom. It is only this freedom that makes singularity possible, which is the precondition of history made by man. The main misunderstanding on the Marxists' behalf is that the Sartrean freedom is passive, while the Sartrean consciousness is „out there in the world”, not isolated from it. In Sartre's view, every interpretation is transformation, through intersubjective relations. It is here that we can see the importance of culture in this conception, even though it remained an implication in Sartre's theoretical texts. This is why I analyze the concepts of culture and ideology in my third chapter. I compare the Marxist concepts of culture (from Marx to Lukács) with the ones of cultural studies (Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall) and of Clifford Geertz's cultural anthropology. Sartre's theory is partly compatible with the latter: culture as „the whole way of life”, the totality of interdependencies and as the practice of symbolical interactions. Along with Marx's conception of ideology, I review the theories of Max Weber, the Frankfurt School, György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Michel Foucault, Göran Therborn, Paul Feyerabend and Paul Ricoeur. The hermeneutic-pragmatic conception of the latter is similar to the one implied in Sartre's philosophy.

Sartre postulated that man is conditioned (but not strictly determined) by his social, historical, and cultural context. This lays emphasis on the question of agency. Does man really make history? Can we change our world? Official Marxism argues that the proletariat can put an end to capitalism, but the individual is completely determined. For Sartre, however, it is an undialectical approach: the society conditions its members, but they are singular individuals who can react upon their context. This Sartrean dialectics is based on interdependency, reflected by the progressive-regressive method.

In the 1950s Sartre became Marxist but retained his independence and criticized the official dialectical materialism in *Materialism and revolution*. Nevertheless, in the first issue of *Les Temps Modernes* he accepted the Marxist idea of class struggle, then in *What Is Literature?* he assigned writers with the task of revealing the social world for setting their readers free. This duty requires commitment. By this time he shared the Hegelian basis of Marxism: the dialectical negativity and the historicism, and the alienation. The second period of his philosophy is embedded in the tradition of Western Marxism which was considered heretic by

the official Marxism. The basis of this tradition is the young Marx's humanism, and one of the most influential Western Marxist texts is *History and Class Consciousness* by György Lukács. Its representatives all refuse the myth of economically determined history, which is the main characteristic of dogmatic Marxism. Ironically, the aforementioned Lukács became the prominent philosopher of dogmatic Marxism. Sartre had been influenced by such concepts of *History and Class Consciousness* as alienation, reification, totality, the working class as the collective subject of the revolutionary class struggle, the dialectic of history and the criticism of bureaucracy. This form of Marxism criticizes both capitalism and state socialism because of their alienating structure and lack of freedom. It is a small wonder that this was refused by the communists controlled by the Soviets.

The core of my dissertation attempts to connect discourse analysis and ideological-philosophical contextualization, in order to reveal the hidden ideological preconceptions in philosophical texts. In the fourth chapter I analyze the communist and structuralist (Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Foucault) Sartre-reception in France, then in the last chapter I map out the Hungarian philosophical discourse with its ideological charge. Sartre's communist critique was extremely offensive, because of his philosophy of freedom and methodological individualism. What is more, his leftist existentialism was so popular even in socialist countries that it was considered a concurrence by the Marxists. György Lukács was one of the prominent figures of the attack, and his opinion was canonized in the Hungarian reception until the 1980s.

In France, Sartre was first attacked by communist intellectuals 1944. These polemic writings were marked by personalities, political arguments, and harsh rhetoric. I review the argumentation of Henri Lefebvre, Roger Garaudy, and György Lukács.

The philosophical background of the attack was provided, firstly, by Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenological philosopher and, secondly, by the orthodox dialectical materialism which refused phenomenology. The main charges were idealism, irrationalism, subjectivism, ahistoricism, and ethical relativism. The political charges were fascism, collaboration, anticommunism, and reactionism. The means of the discursive exclusion is the class-based criticism: Sartre was a petty-bourgeois, *consequently* he could not be right in the Marxists' view.

*Materialism and Revolution* was Sartre's counter-attack. He identifies materialism with mechanical materialism and Marxism with Stalinism. Thus he demonstrates that materialism is at once a metaphysics and positivism: a deterministic and universalistic dogma. He criticizes the reflection theory and the dialectic of nature in the Marxist epistemology.

Although Sartre finds flaws in official Marxism, he stands up for the working class and its revolutionary politics. He wants to provide it with the right philosophy: his own existentialist practice-philosophy combined with a kind of Marxism (here primarily class struggle and revolution to eliminate alienation).

The reaction of the Communist Party was a fervent one. Roger Garaudy called Sartre pathologic, nihilist, feminine and, again, individualist. Sartre's unforgivable sin was his refusal of historical necessity. In 1948 Lukács's book titled *Existentialism ou marxisme?* came out. The basic assertion is that every bourgeois philosophy is subjective, reactionary and leads to fascism. This goes for Sartre's existentialism which is also a symptom of the crisis of capitalism and the bourgeois mind. Lukács backs up his argument drawing on *Being and Nothingness* that he regards as solipsism (partly along the lines of Merleau-Ponty, but refusing the phenomenology). His conclusion is that Sartre's attempt to conciliate existentialism with Marxism is in vain, since materialism is the only correct philosophy. In spite of these attacks, Sartre and the communists became allies between 1952-1956. Its consequence was the break with such friends and colleagues as Camus, Merleau-Ponty and Lefort. His series of political articles titled *Communists and Peace* set off the debate between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, which is analyzed in the dissertation. The theoretical importance of Sartre's articles lies in the central role of reification whose subjective experience justifies revolution. The basis of the collective struggle is the elaboration of common meanings. The goal is to annihilate the alienation, the obstacle of whom is atomization. This is where the problem of the individual and community appears – to be worked out 18 years later in *Critique of Dialectical Reason (CRD)*. After the Hungarian revolution in 1956 crushed by the Soviets, Sartre broke with the communists and expanded his own existential Marxism. The first step was *Le Fantôme de Staline* in which he emphasized the subsidiarity of Hungarian workers' committees proving the possibility for group agency. Rarity, the CRD's key concept, also appears in the text in the form of critique of the socialist state and bureaucracy. In the articles written in 1957 (whose common title is *Problems of Method*) Sartre proceeds on the path he has chosen and criticizes the official Marxism, especially the universalistic panobjectivism of Lukács. His Neo-Marxism (term of Mark Poster) encompasses the singularity of Kierkegaard and the comprehensive-hermeneutic sociology of Max Weber. Instead of unilinear causality Sartre suggests a hermeneutic dialectic to understand both the individuals and the society, through such mediations as family and different groups. Sartre elaborated his social ontology in this theoretical frame in CRD.

The double standpoint of Sartre's regressive-progressive method was so unusual that contemporary readers could not accept the theory. Marxists, on the other hand, had the same old objections concerning individual freedom and subjectivism. Other critics resorted to Merleau-Ponty's arguments in relation to subjectivism. Sartre's second masterpiece could not enter the canon of Western philosophy. It was ahead of its time. The Hungarian reception was based on the official Marxism in an overregulated discourse during the decades of state socialism. The political aspect of the Marxist ideology caused a characteristic distortion in the reception of Sartre. Since Lukács, the leading philosopher of Eastern Marxism, had the strongest influence in Hungary, this philosophical discourse is a paradigmatic example of state socialist order of discourse. I first describe the institutional background, then bring out the structure of the philosophical discourse with its ideological presuppositions. Finally, I demonstrate the functioning of this structure in the main texts of the Hungarian Sartre-reception, starting with Lukács charges became canonized.