

Existentialism & Libertarianism?

A Sartrean's view

William Irwin, professor at King's College (Penn./USA), has published a book with the title *The Free Market Existentialist. Capitalism without Consumerism* (Wiley: Chichester 2015). Most Sartreans would consider this book as a futile and strange enterprise to combine water and fire, to combine philosophical theories which cannot be combined:

1. Atheist existentialism: A philosophy which opposes to the absurd, meaningless world the individual subject with his freedom and free will. It is the subject that brings meaning into his life. He is fully responsible for his actions and strives for authenticity. Freedom is freedom in situation, ontological and not practical freedom: freedom to try and not freedom to succeed. Existentialism is not a philosophy of despair, but of optimistic toughness and action with Camus's Sisyphus as its example. Existentialism is a philosophy that suits philosophers and artists as well as entrepreneurs. (ch. 1 and 2)
2. Anti-consumerism (here Irwin refers to Henry David Thoreau and not to Herbert Marcuse): People should consume and work less to get more satisfaction. We should become authentic consumers and less slaves to status. But Irwin concedes: one size does not fit all when it comes to consuming and working. (ch. 3)
3. Evolutionary moral anti-realism: As there is no god, there is no objective morality. But due to evolution we are endowed with a core morality. At its center is reciprocity. This core morality is anchored in our genes. But our genes don't order us to do something, they only whisper: we are free to test the limits. The key non-moral virtue is prudence in successfully fulfilling one's desires: this is enlightened self-interest. (ch. 4+5)
4. Property rights: There are no natural rights and therefore property rights, too, are only the result of agreements. It is prudence which advises us to honor these agreements and it's the task of the minimal state to protect them. The most basic property claim is the property in one's own person. Everything else follows from that. Property rights are distributed unequally: life is inherently unfair, as not everybody shares the same amount of intelligence, beauty, athletic or artistic ability or wealth. (ch. 6)
5. Minimal state: The state should limit its activities to equal protection of life, liberty, and property. All other activities are to be privatized. The welfare state shall be replaced by private philanthropy. Everybody retains the right to exit to another state. Those who stay have to pay only a head tax ("equal tax") like a membership fee in a club. Rule of law and property rights provide the basis for free trade. In agreement with J. St. Mill, Irwin states that freedom may be limited only when it causes harm to another. Irwin concedes that the minimal state is only one option among others. People should have the choice to choose the state which suits them best with minimal cost or hardship imposed on them. (ch. 7)

Irwin will hardly find any Sartrean supporting his idea of combining existentialism with property rights and minimal state, political ideas which are associated with right-wing politics, with the Tea Party movement and the National Rifle Association. For us Sartreans, Sartre is a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, at the same time philosopher, writer, intellectual with socialist political positions, and a person who led a life against bourgeois morality. Irwin knows that. Therefore, he first separates Sartre's existentialism from his socialist views: "the association of existentialism and socialism is primarily a historico-cultural accident of post-war France" (S. 36). He refers to Raymond Aron who said that existentialism and Marxism are two philosophies "incompatible in their intentions, their origins and their ultimate ends". For Irwin the relationship between existentialism and socialism is not a necessary, but a contingent

one – to use terms by which Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir characterized their love relationships,

Immediately the question arises: “Does one have to be a lefty to accept the philosophical theories of *Being and Nothingness* and the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*”? For sure not. Sartre was against marriage and having children, but this doesn’t mean that an existentialist married with children is a contradiction in itself.¹ Nor is a free market existentialist a *contradictio in adiecto*. Sartre’s theories about freedom and the fundamental project, about practico-inert and series do not depend on certain political stances. Indeed, Irwin is right when he differentiates between Sartre’s theory about the initial choice and Sartre’s own initial choice with his left-wing political leanings. Theory and political practice have to be considered as two different levels – not completely independent from each other, but sufficiently to allow different political opinion in combination with existentialism.²

The problem of the connection between existentialism and socialism is further complicated by the fact that it is not fully clear how much Sartre was a socialist. In many regards he had a closer relationship with radical-socialism, a French political movement adhering to left-wing liberalism (liberalism in the European and not the American sense of the word)³. Sartre’s main political values – his four big noes against militarism, colonialism, racism, and bourgeois morality (particularly with regard to honor, authority, property, family, and sexuality) – had their origins in the views of left-wing liberals. That Sartre became a left-wing socialist was due to the fact that the liberals made too many compromises with regard to these values when they were in power. Alain, the French political philosopher and commentator that influenced Sartre so much in his days at the *École Normale Supérieure*, wrote in 1909:

I hear saying that political opinions change quickly and that the electoral masses are moving towards socialism. I do not believe this. These are only the words that change. The majority of men [...] wants order and freedom and not to pay much for it. [...] The opinion always stayed the same: it was progressive⁴ against the opportunists⁴ backing down; it was radical⁴ against progressive governments backing down; radical-socialist⁴ against radical governments backing down. I already see a time coming when everybody will be socialist. This will be a kind to ask always for the same, a harmonic combination of order and freedom.

Yes, Sartre became an anti-American and a Socialist around and after 1945. But this had little to do with the intellectuals as pseudo-aristocracy as Irwin implies by referring to Alan Kahan’s book *Mind vs. Money* (2010). Unlike Friedrich Nietzsche with his *Übermensch*, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Theodor Adorno or many of today’s ecologists, Sartre never showed any contempt for the normal working people and their needs. Sartre was an egalitarian as is best shown by his refusal of any honors (from the Nobel Prize to employment with such institutions as the *Académie Française* or the *Collège de France*). He was always open to new technical developments (see e.g. his three articles about the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1945 or his statement in favor of paperbacks in 1965). See also his critique of the classical intellectual in the years of 1965 and after.

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, too, never married and had children, but she stood up for the women’s right to marry and to have children already in the time of *Le Deuxième sexe*. In the early 1980s she defended the women’s right to be heterosexual against radical feminist such as Monique Wittig and Collette Guillaumin, although Beauvoir led an exclusive lesbian live for the last twenty-five years up to her death in 1986.

² The same way as Sartre’s ethics fundamentally is a meta-ethics, his theory is a meta-theory. The one who believes in Marx’s philosophy, economics and social theory cannot but support the labor movement. Marx’s theory lacks any degree of freedom in this regard. The opposite is the case with Sartre’s theory. The concept of ontological freedom excludes any necessity in events where human beings are involved. Whereas for Marx the proletarian revolution was a necessity, for Sartre it was a question of odds and opportunities. As Sartre’s theory can neither predict nor justify, but rather leaves open a vast array of potential outcomes, I call it a meta-theory.

³ See my contribution about [Sartre and radical-socialism](#) in German.

⁴ A political current within French liberalism of the 19th century.

When Sartre became an anti-American and a Marxist, when he allied himself with the Soviets (although for not more than six years: 1954-56, 62-66), he did this because the capitalist countries were mired in wars in their (former) colonies and racism was still rampant. He allied himself with the communists, because they were the only ones who at least claimed to be against wars, (post-)colonialism, racism and bourgeois values. When the gap between theory and practice became too large (as in the cases of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the Soviet oppression of the first dissidents in 1965/66), Sartre was very quick in breaking with the communists. We should also not forget that the communists never accepted Sartre as left-wing philosopher. This is not only true for the Stalinist time and shortly after, but also for the more relaxed decade of the 1960s. And for Sartre it was clear that in case of a Soviet occupation of France he would have to flee: his first priority would have been (capitalist) Brazil.

After stating that existentialism does not necessarily imply a socialist attitude, Irwin goes one step further. He claims that there is an initial link between existentialism and libertarian politics: this link is said to be individualism (S. 63). Although this hurts a true Sartrean, I have to concede that Irwin is right. Although existentialism and libertarianism are not brothers in the same sense as Stalinists and Trotskyites are, but they are cousins. The easiest way to classify political ideologies is according to their kind of utopia. Is this a utopia of a collectivist kind or of an individualist kind? History was mainly dominated by religious utopias which normally are of a collectivist kind. This is true for Christian utopias as well, from catholic monasteries to Calvinist Geneva, from the Christian New Jerusalem to Thomas Morus's *Utopia* and Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun*.

After centuries of domination by collectivist utopias, first significant tendencies towards individualist utopias arose during Renaissance. In the age of Enlightenment individualism became an important stream among the intellectuals of their time, which shortly afterwards led to the foundation of European political liberalism. But Enlightenment produced collectivist thinkers, too, e.g. Jean-Jacques Rousseau with his *volonté générale*. Kant was soon followed by Hegel and his theory of the Objective and the Absolute Spirit. There are still some individualistic elements with Karl Marx (e.g. "to each according his needs"), but mainly he was a collectivist. Nietzsche was right when he categorized Christians and Socialists in the same group as representatives of slave morality fed by resentment. Among Marx's followers only few showed traces of their individualistic heritage (e.g. Rosa Luxemburg, the council communists, and generally the member-parties of the London Bureau). But this heritage was completely lost with the communist parties (whether Stalinist or Trotskyite) as well as with the social-democrats – until the later detected human rights as a central theme of their politics in the 1970s/80s.

Although predominantly collectivist, the 19th century had some remarkable individualistic thinkers. On the one hand we have philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, both of whom influenced Sartre. On the other hand, it was anarchism which was the second important current of individualistic thinking. Sure, anarchism was a broad current. There were individualist anarchists like Stirner and Thoreau, and there were collectivists such as Pyotr Kropotkin, with Mikhail Bakunin standing somewhere in the middle. The break up of the First International in 1872 stands for the dispute between the collectivist Marxist-communists and the more individualistic anarchists.

There is nothing to add about the first line of influence, the one by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, but the second one is almost unknown. In the early 1970s Sartre gave up associating himself with Marxism and started referring to terms such as antihierarchical-libertarian and anarchist to characterize his political position – with *libertaire* in French being a synonym for anarchist. Unfortunately this development of Sartre's political thinking seems to be unknown to Irwin. This relationship between Sartre and anarchism is relevant, because there is a significant connection between anarchism and libertarianism. Not only was the word 'libertarian' invented by the anarchist Joseph Déjacque, but there also exist modern anarchist currents, particularly anarcho-capitalism with Murray Rothbard, which are close to libertarianism. All in all, Irwin's association of existentialism and libertarianism because of

their joint individualistic attitude may be disturbing, but Irwin's claim is justified. Both free market economics and libertarianism on the one hand and existentialism on the other hand give priority to the individual and not to groups or classes.

Looking at Irwin's understanding of philosophy in and around *Being and Nothingness*, I have to concede that much of it is a correct interpretation of Sartre's philosophy. But there are some points which need to be stated more precisely. Although Irwin correctly differentiates between ontological and optical freedom, his understanding of Sartrean freedom is too individualistic. Already in *Being and Nothingness (L'Être et le néant)* the subject is and always was a social individual, living in society and not like Thoreau in the woods. The subject needs the others to reflect upon himself. Without the mirror of the other I cannot attain self-knowledge. Sartre's play *No Exit (Huis clos)* confirms this position. Only because of Garcin's, Inès's, and Estelle's need of the other, we can say: "Hell is other people."

Too individualistic is also Irwin's understanding of responsibility. Sartre's responsibility has nothing to do with responsibility in a religious or legal understanding of this term. The subject is not responsible because he sinned. There are no objective norms for whose violation the subject could be responsible. And in law, notions such as intention and negligence or cause and effect are important to determine a subject's legal responsibility. When speaking about responsibility Sartre understands it more in the etymological sense of the word: the subject has to respond to questions the others raise. If he doesn't answer in a negative way, the subject is responsible for what happened. As the others have the right to ask questions about whatever they want (maybe with the exception of very private matters), the subject is responsible for everything. On the other hand, the subject is not responsible to everybody, not to an imaginary abstract subject, but only to the concrete subjects asking questions. That's why we can call Sartre's ethics a discourse ethics. In many cases it is sufficient to raise one's voice against something for not being responsible any more. Sartre blamed Flaubert and the brothers Goncourt for being responsible for the suppression which followed the defeat of the Paris Commune not because they did not raise their weapons against the oppressors, but because they didn't speak out against it.

Not correct is also Irwin's understanding of authenticity. He seems to be influenced too much by the works of David Detmer (*Freedom as Value*, 1988), Thomas C. Anderson (*Sartre's Two Ethics*, 1993), and T Storm Heter (*Sartre's Ethics of Engagement*, 2006). Their works are very interesting attempts to develop Sartre's ethics further in a normative way. But they fail to include Sartre's development after 1950 when he gave up attempts to develop normative ethics but focused mainly on meta-ethics. First, Sartre never understood authenticity in Heidegger's sense of *Eigentlichkeit*. Authenticity is primarily defined by its opposite, bad faith (*mauvaise foi*). As Sartre defined it in *Anti-Semite and Jew (Réflexions sur la question juive)*, the subject acts in bad faith when he infringes his transcendence and/or his facticity by e.g. not accepting his responsibility for his acts or not having a clear conscience of the situation he is in. Secondly, Sartre gave up any attempts to set up a normative ethics on the criterion of authenticity towards the end of the 1940s, after he had recognized that inauthenticity is as freely chosen as authenticity and that the choice of inauthenticity can be even justified in particular situations (e.g. for Jews or gays).

According to Sartre's understanding of authenticity, Thoreau was not necessarily leading a more authentic live in the Walden Woods than a woman on a shopping spree in New York's Fifth Avenue. Sure, Sartre, too, was an anti-materialist in the sense of not highly valuing material goods. He gave that much money away to other people that he had once to be saved by his mother when he couldn't pay the tax bill. Sartre would have agreed to Irwin's demand to consume and work less (as long as we understand work as salaried work). But authenticity doesn't mean leading a live with few material goods. Irwin's conclusion is right that one size does not fit all when it comes to consuming and working.

The only thing Irwin seems to know about Sartre after 1950 is his proximity to the communists and to socialism in general. The literature he uses (in particular Thomas R. Flynn's *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, 1984) is influenced too much by the *Zeitgeist* of former times. Irwin doesn't seem to know the *Flaubert (L'Idiot de la famille)* nor does he

seem to have deeper knowledge of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (*La Critique de la raison dialectique*). Stating that the later Sartre was more concerned with ontical than ontological freedom (S. 38) is not correct.

Irwin seems to fundamentally misunderstand the character of Sartre's philosophy. Neither in *Being and Nothingness* nor in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* the main focus is on freedom. Sartre had a completely different understanding of philosophy than we have it now – particularly in the U.S. where philosophy is heavily influenced by analytical philosophy. According to Sartre, the object of philosophy is the human being as a subject (in contrast to medicine or human science which focus on the human being as an object). Psychology, sociology, and history are part of philosophy, insofar as they devote themselves to the human being as a subject and not an object. *Being and Nothingness* is mostly psychology. More than nothingness and freedom, Sartre discusses interpersonal relationships in *Being and Nothingness*. And the *Critique* is conceived as the basis of the 'Prolegomena to a future anthropology'. Ontical freedom is not the concern of the *Critique*. That there indeed is no major difference between *Being and Nothingness* and the *Critique* with regard to freedom is best shown by the fact that the statement about the ontological freedom of a slave can be found in both works.

The first part of the *Critique*, including *Search of a Method* (*Questions de méthode*), is devoted to a critique of Marxist theory at that time. To understand the major part of volume I and the whole volume II of the *Critique*, we have to understand that the two major questions Sartre tried to answer were the following: How can we understand an individual? (exemplified later in his biography of Flaubert) and How can we understand history? In the second volume of the *Critique* Sartre tries to understand the history of the Soviet Union as an example of understanding history in general. And in the first volume, he works out the concepts for the analysis in the second volume. Among the important questions to which Sartre tried to give an answer were: Is it a class or a party who makes the revolution? How can we explain the Moscow Trials and the Gulag? Important elements in Sartre's answers were the differentiation between series (eventually connected with a milieu) and (organized) groups and the introduction of the concept of terror-fraternity (in English usually wrongly translated as fraternity-terror). Of significance was also his definition of the three major factors which cause things going wrong so often: scarcity, counter-finality, and practical constraints. When Irwin writes that Sartre ceased being an individualist existentialist in favor of being a social existentialist and refers to the fact that Sartre never used the term of authenticity in the *Critique*, Irwin only shows that he did not understand the nature of the *Critique*.

A major pillar of Irwin's book about the *Free Market Existentialist* is his moral anti-realism. His major points of reference are Richard Joyce and Richard Garner. This astonishes for somebody who writes a book in which existentialism forms a key element. Sartre is the most famous fore-runner of what we call today anti-realism. For Sartre any value, whether moral, legal, esthetic or religious, is a product of consciousness, the for-itself. Being, the in-itself, is purely contingent, is what it is. According to his view as nominalist and anti-realist, it is the subject that orders the in-itself by his words and values it according to his initial choice. All values are created by the subject, even those which are a part of the practico-inert (like the laws) or hexis (like the customs). Therefore I call Sartre's ethics an anthropological value-ethics, which together with the properties as a discourse ethics and a situational ethics characterizes Sartre's meta-ethics.

Unfortunately Irwin is not consistent in what he calls anti-realism. On p. 89 he equates his position with the rejection of objective morality, a morality that exists independently of people's beliefs and desires. Sartre would agree to that. Irwin also correctly criticizes non-cognitivists for reducing moral statements to some kind of expression of emotional (dis-) approval. But later anti-realism is equated with the position that all moral statements are false (p. 104) or that there is no moral truth (p. 119). But this is a misunderstanding of anti-realism and Sartre would have never agreed to that. Although the values expressed by a subject are only subjective and hence we can talk about moral relativism, values are absolute for the subject (the same way as a statement normally is claimed to be absolutely true, although it

depends on the speaker and the situation he is in). By pronouncing a value judgment the subject raises the claim that also others (although not necessary everybody) have to act according to this value.

Irwin combines his anti-realistic ethics with an evolutionary ethics. As in Sartre's times, evolutionary ethics was no topic, we cannot find any statements by Sartre about it. But Irwin is wrong in claiming that Sartrean and evolutionary theory are incompatible (p. 120). Sartre formulated his theory in a careful way to leave enough room for new scientific findings. Irwin cites the famous sentence by Marx that men make their own history, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past (p. 38). This statement reflects very well Sartre's opinion that there are two different components in the formation of the subject, on the one hand the constitution of the subject on a biological as well as social and psychic basis and on the other hand the personalization of the subject whose center-piece is the subject's initial choice. And for Sartre, who applied this theory in his *Flaubert*, it was clear that constitution had a much bigger share than personalization in the formation of the subject. But as personalization is based on the subject's ontological freedom, the subject is nevertheless fully responsible for what he is. With very few exceptions, biology does not determine a subject in such a way that there is no choice at all for him. This refers not only to ethics, but also to physical handicaps or sexual orientation.

It is not important whether we accept evolutionary ethics based on genes or simply assume that there are social and psychic processes in place which led to a world-wide convergence of basic moral principles (I assume Sartre would have pleaded for the later). As Irwin states himself, our genes don't order us to do something, they only whisper. An evolutionary ethics as Irwin conceives it doesn't tell the subject what to do. The final decision stays with the subject. This is what Sartre always emphasized. And, as a representative of situational ethics, he went even one step further: the application of a general moral rule doesn't tell the subject exactly how to act in a specific situation. In *Existentialism and Humanism* (*L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*), Sartre refers to the problem of a young man during Occupation whether he should stay with his ailing mother or go to England to fight with the Allied forces. Sartre's answer: you will not find any rule that will solve your moral problem, you rather have to invent a solution. From a Sartrean's point of view, an evolutionary ethics based on genes could be possible, but it would add little to a general theory as the subject still has his freedom to decide this or the other way. The relationship between existentialism and evolutionary ethics is again only a contingent one.

Most of the problems Sartreans will have with Irwin's book will stem from his advocacy of property rights and minimal state. These two theories are deeply associated with right-wing politics, which regularly causes nausea with a true Sartrean. But unlike die-hard political property rights theorists like Robert Nozick (*Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 1974), Irwin does not base his concept of property rights on natural law. As an anti-realist he states that they are the fruits of an agreement. Subjects will usually honor them because of prudence. But this way, property rights become very fluffy. Why talking about property rights and not human rights? Why using economic categories in politics and law? As both Sartre and Irwin are anti-realists, the true Sartrean will deny that human rights have the character of natural rights as Irwin will deny it for his property rights. Although knowing that these rights are only a result of an agreement, both will fight for the rights of the subjects as if these rights were absolute in character. For a Sartrean it is at least good to know that Irwin fights not only for the wealthy, but also e.g. for gays (p. 166f.). This proves that Irwin's libertarian understanding of freedom is significantly broader than the Tea Party's and much closer to the one of J. St. Mill. As the property rights are the fruit of an agreement, the subjects are free to agree on different sets of property rights. Therefore as in the case of evolutionary ethics, the relationship between existentialism and property rights (or human rights) is not a necessary, but a contingent one.

The same is valid for the concept of the minimal state. Irwin is quite frank about the fact that the minimal state is only a viable option which would have to compete with other models such as the welfare state or more authoritarian models. Irwin dreams that people could shop around for the state which suits them best. And to do this, people would have to be free to

leave a country and to enter another one with minimal cost or hardship imposed on them. With these ideas Irwin is very close to what Sartre advocated in the last few years of his life. Since *On a raison de se révolter* (discussions Sartre had with Philippe Gavi and Pierre Victor/Benny Lévy in 1972-74) Sartre was of the opinion that there is a fundamental contradiction between freedom and power, particularly state power. For this reason he advocated anti-hierarchical, libertarian ideas (libertarian not in the American, but the French sense of the word, i.e. anarchist) in favor of “minorities” such as women, gays, ethnic and regional minorities or ecologists. In the last few years of his life he frequently referred in interviews to himself as an anarchist. Unfortunately the majority of these interviews were published not in French, but in other languages such as English, German, Italian, and Spanish. Therefore academia never got really aware of this important shift in Sartre’s political thinking.

And the publication of *Hope Now (L’Espoir maintenant)* didn’t help either. In this discussion between Sartre, the softy, and Benny Lévy, then not anymore a pushy leftist, but a pushy Talmudist, it is very difficult to discern what Sartre really wanted to say and what were just kind remarks to avoid a conflict with Benny Lévy. Not everything can be taken at face value, but it is clear that Sartre advocated a society organized in smaller units, in “fraternities”, similar to clans in primeval times, but now not based on blood ties, but on free choice. He championed the idea of a less powerful state. Sartre did not advocate the idea that we can renounce on the state now because man is essentially good by nature, as many anarchists do. Sartre was not a Rousseauist (“back to nature” and everything will be good)⁵.

In accordance with Marx, he expected socialism at the end of (pre-)history, that’s when the realm of ethics appears, when there is no state any more – a but that’s also death, as Sartre wrote in the *Notebook for an Ethics*. Life is essentially associated with a multitude of contradictions and limitations due to scarcity, counter-finalities and practical constraints. As Sartre did not expect the end of history soon, he was rather a minarchist than an anarchist. Since the end of the World War II Sartre defined the ideal society (and socialism) as a Kantian Kingdom of Ends. This was equivalent to the second part of Marx’s definition of a communist society as “to each according to his needs”. But differently to the socialists and also to most of the liberals – for most liberals a human was narrowly defined as a white Anglo-Saxon heterosexual protestant male –, Sartre was always aware that there is not man, but only men. Hence, there is not one state that suits everybody.

In this regard Sartre and Irwin are very close to each other as to J. St. Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville. Aristocratic rule, authoritarian regime and parliamentary democracy may differ in the number of the oppressed and the degree of oppression, but in any case there will be oppression. The Sartre of *Hope Now* would have most probably agreed to a minimal state as far as the federal government in the U.S. and the European Union are concerned. But below the federal level, Sartre would have much smaller units than the current states in the U.S. or in the EU. If those in Houston are for weapons and against gay marriage and those in Austin against weapons and for gay marriage – let them have it. If those in Boise (Idaho) want to have a minimal state and those in Boston (Mass.) prefer a welfare state – let them have it. Why should Manhattan not have different laws from those in Bronx or on Staten Island as long as this doesn’t impede the flow of human beings and goods between them? Sartre would have definitely welcomed the separatist tendencies in Scotland and Catalonia — and wondered about why there are no separatist tendencies in the U.S..

To summarize this review of William Irwin’s book *The Free Market Existentialist*: Irwin’s combination of atheist existentialism, anti-consumerism, evolutionary moral anti-realism, property rights, and minimal state does not convince me. Important elements of his

⁵ Sartre und Beauvoir originally had a second normative ethics to the ethics of authenticity. This was their ethics of freedom, which stated that I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim. They recanted this ethics of freedom because, when working on Sade and Jean Genet they came to the conclusion that man is not intrinsically good but can pursue aims which are considered evil (not only by society, but also the subject concerned). For further discussion see my paper about [Sartre and Beauvoir – an ethics for the 21st century](#) in German.

combination, such as anti-consumerism, property rights, and minimal state, are individual choices and hence cannot be considered as necessary elements of his theory. Neither can I agree to several points of his presentation of Sartre's existentialist theory, particularly when it comes to responsibility and authenticity. Irwin's knowledge of Sartre's *Critique* seems to be rudimentary and the Sartre of the 1970s is completely unknown to him. But: Irwin is right when he points out that existentialism as a philosophical theory doesn't necessarily imply socialism. And there is an interesting intersection between Irwin and the later Sartre when it comes to the minimal state. Irwin does not convince me with his combination of atheist existentialism, anti-consumerism, evolutionary moral anti-realism, property rights, and minimal state, but it's a very interesting combination. The former Greek Finance Minister and enfant terrible of the European left, Yanis Varoufakis, said that Marx was a libertarian Marxist, as Marx believed the state to wither away.⁶ Why should a libertarian existentialist be a contradiction? Therefore – and differently from many other “good” books about Sartre and his theory – Irwin's book *The Free Market Existentialist* will always be remembered by me as great food for thought. What can you expect more from a book?

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⁶ <http://www.marxsite.org/2015/10/marx-was-libertarian-marxist-yanis.html>.