

Ethics in practice: the dialectics of authenticity and consequentialism

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A) Introduction

This paper is the result of an essay that has just been published in the Yearbook of the German Sartre Society¹. The essay – to my knowledge the first of such a kind – analyses in depth Sartre's relationship with the Soviet Union from his childhood when he read Jules Verne's *Michael Strogoff* until the year of his death when he opposed the participation in the Olympic Games in Moscow. Sartre's frequent and sudden changes in his attitudes towards the Soviet Union are generally explained as ruptures. But my analysis of Sartre's actions and of their interplay with Soviet politics has led me to the conclusion that Sartre's behaviour is better explained not by the arbitrary concept of ruptures, but rather by Sartre's ethics.

B) Sartre's meta-ethical position

What do I mean by Sartre's ethics? On a meta-ethical level, Sartre's ethics can be defined in three ways:

1. as an anthropological value-ethics: Unlike the material value-ethics of Scheler and Hartmann I'd like to call it an anthropological value-ethics. All values are created by human beings. As Sartre wrote in his preface to Francis Jeanson's book *Le Problème moral et la pensée de Sartre* in 1947, ethical views and what in German is called *Weltanschauung* are the same. They both are part of the fundamental choice each human being makes. At a later stage these originally individual values may develop into a part of the practical-inert or the *hexis*, where they form mores, values, goods, exemplary conducts, ideals, and particularly institutions such as law.² This ethics differs from others by allowing man to choose evil, as Sartre emphasized in *Saint Genet* (1950-1952; 1952)³ and Beauvoir wrote in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (1946). With Sartre and

¹ Alfred Betschart, *Sartre und die Sowjetunion – ein Beispiel für Ethik in Situation*, in: *Carnets Jean-Paul Sartre: Reisende ohne Fahrschein*, Peter Knopp/Vincent von Wroblewsky (eds.), Frankfurt a.M. etc. 2012, p. 37-60

THIS PRESENTATION REFLECTS MY THOUGHTS ABOUT SARTRIAN ETHICS IN 2012. SINCE THEN THEY'VE DEVELOPED FURTHER. WHAT IS MENTIONED HERE AS THE CONSEQUENTIALIST ETHICS HAS BEEN INTEGRATED INTO AN ETHICS OF THE UNITY OF ENDS AND MEANS. SEE MY LECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JENA http://sartre.ch/Sartre+Beauvoir_Ethik_21.%20Jh.pdf

² All values have their origin in consciousness. For this reason Sartre's ethics necessarily is subjectivist with a wide range of possible values. For most of the critics of Sartre's subjectivist ethics it is unacceptable that infanticide or torture may be morally correct. But any historian and any ethnographer will confirm that there were societies that actually approved such behaviour. An objective value-ethics (David Detmer in *Freedom As a Value*, 1986) or an ethics based on social roles and institutions (T. Storm Heter in *Authenticity and Others: Sartre's Ethics of Recognition*, 2006) are irreconcilable with Sartrean ethics.

³ The first date indicates the year of writing, the second date the year of publication; when there is only one date, the year of writing is the same as the year of publication.

Beauvoir, evil is not just an error or a mistake, as it is for most other philosophers.

2. as a situational ethics: There are no rules that can be applied universally in all situations, and there are no concrete norms that can be deduced from general rules. In new situations, man has to invent new norms. As Sartre showed in *Morts sans sépulture* (1946), the moral position significantly depends on the actual situation one is in. Sartre and Beauvoir heavily criticised Kant's categorical imperative in its first form—that the maxim of any ethical decision should be able to serve as a universal law⁴. Sartre targeted Kant's maxim already in his first short story, *Le Mur* (1936/37; 1937), which was inspired by Kant's treatise *On a Supposed Right to Lie From Philanthropy*⁵. As concrete ethical decisions in specific situations are more easily described in literary than in philosophical works, it is only logical that Sartre's preference as a means to discuss ethical questions rather lay with literature than with theory.
3. as a discourse ethics: Sartre's concept is an important alternative to those of Habermas and Apel. As *L'Être et le néant* (1941-1942; 1943) and the plays *Huis clos* (1943; 1944) and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (1957-1959; 1959) show, man has to justify himself in front of the Other. In the *Cahiers pour une morale* (1947-1948; 1983) Sartre develops this concept further into an ethics of appeal. In contrast to Habermas and Apel, Sartre's Other is not an idealistic community of interlocutors, but it is the concrete Other.⁶ Sartre emphasized in the discussion about the *Les Mouches* (1941-1942; 1943) in Berlin in 1948 that such a discourse ethics is not an ethics of guilt or shame, but rather an optimistic ethics for active human beings, an aspect he raised again thirty years later in *L'Espoir maintenant* (1980).

C) Sartre's position in normative ethics

Although Sartre's meta-ethical position doesn't leave a lot of room for normative ethics, he developed at least three different approaches to normative ethics:

1. The most famous one is Sartre's ethics of authenticity. Authenticity requires a man to choose his values in exertion of his freedom and in consideration of his situation⁷, to act consistently according to his values, and to assume responsibility for his actions. But there are several limitations to be taken into consideration, when we talk about authenticity as an ethical criterion. An ethics

⁴ Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction.

⁵ *Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen* (1797)

⁶ Whereas ethics as an anthropological value-ethics entails a subjectivist ethics with a basically unlimited range of possible values, ethics as a discourse ethics potentially limits this range by asking for defensibility of these values in front of the Other.

In the *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1957-60; 1960), the Other primarily takes the form of the other members of one's groups. In contrast to communitarian ethics, which frequently understands community in a very broad way (the Judeo-Christian, the Western) as the community one is born into, for Sartre, each human being chooses the groups he wants to belong to (family, job, politics, religion, hobby).

⁷ The needs, which became a major focus of Sartre's ethics in the 60s, form a part of the situation like the body, the lived experience (*le vécu*), the Others, the practical-inert, *hexis*, and nature. Previously, in *L'Être et le néant*, Sartre had subsumed it all together in the in-itself.

of authenticity is not to be confounded with an ethics of identity.⁸ As the example of the champion of sincerity in *L'Être et le néant* shows, authenticity does not mean that the homosexual necessarily has to proclaim he is a homosexual.⁹ A further difficulty is, as Sartre writes in his *Notebooks*, that a person who is looking for authenticity for the sake of authenticity is not authentic. This considerably weakens the potential of authenticity as an ethical criterion. But the biggest issue with an ethics of authenticity is definitely that authenticity is a necessary but not a sufficient criterion for acting in an ethically correct way. As Anderson wrote, even a mass murderer can act authentically.¹⁰

2. Sartre and Beauvoir obviously recognized the limitation of an ethics of authenticity. For this reason, they introduced an additional criterion, the criterion of freedom. In *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (1945; 1946) Sartre wrote: "I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as my own". Beauvoir supports this view in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (1944) and in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*. But around 1950 Sartre and Beauvoir abandoned this ethics. In my opinion the reasons were twofold. When Sartre was working on *Saint Genet* and Beauvoir on *Faut-il brûler de Sade?* (1951), they had to concede that, if man is free, he must be free to choose evil. And evil may take the form of a limitation of the Other's freedom. But even more important was that they recognized that history is not compatible with freedom as an ethical criterion—a recurrent theme in the *Cahiers pour une morale*. History does not allow fulfilling Kant's categorical imperative in its second formulation that one must treat human beings "never merely as a means [...], but always at the same time as an end." There would be no history without man being used as a mere object and not as a subject.¹¹ To fulfil the criterion of freedom we have to wait for Kant's City of Ends.¹² But after the end of history according to Hegel and after the end of pre-history according to Marx, ethics is not needed anymore: everybody will spontaneously act ethically.¹³

⁸ Nor with a virtue ethics, as T. Storm Heter (op.cit.) wants to make us believe. Although giving his ethics a basis in ontology, Sartre carefully avoided drawing any conclusion from the "is" to the "ought". Authenticity is first of all an expression about the quality of a fundamental project. The ethics of authenticity is based on this fact, but ultimately it cannot conceal its arbitrariness like any other decision for a value. Its justification can only lie in justifying it in front of the Other.

⁹ The situation of the homosexual in *L'Être et le néant* corresponds to the one of Simone de Beauvoir, who denied her bisexuality even to sympathetic interviewers such as Margaret A. Simons and Alice Schwarzer in the more liberal 1970s/80s. The shock about her loss of her job as a teacher in 1943 due to her bisexuality and her fear of being reduced from a philosopher and writer to a mere bisexual philosopher and writer obviously prevented her coming-out.

¹⁰ Thomas C. Anderson, *Authenticity and Others: Sartre's Ethics of Recognition* (2006).

¹¹ Sartre accepted violence, even forms of terrorism, in history when it was counter-violence with widespread popular support. This attitude caused a lot of criticism. But even the strongest critics will accept that there were forms of justified violence in the past: the Glorious Revolution, the American Revolution, the first part of the French Revolution, the Résistance against the Nazis. Therefore the difference between Sartre and his critics is rather the political question of which cases are acceptable than a matter of principle.

¹² Or as Marx said: After a socialist revolution, scarcity will not reign any more. The realm of freedom will have replaced the realm of necessity, and each man will get according to his needs.

¹³ Although Sartre gave up freedom as a criterion of ethics, freedom remained at the core of his political program. By this, freedom even gained in importance as Sartre's increased political engagement showed after he had given up freedom as a criterion of ethics, when ethical conversion was replaced by political revolution.

3. Next to Sartre's ethics of authenticity and the failed "idealistic" ethics of freedom, there is a third ethics, which I label "consequentialist". It's the ethics that today, in an age of political correctness and of a general ethics of identity and conviction, is mostly neglected. Dostoevsky not only said, "If God doesn't exist, everything is permitted", but he also said, "Each of us is responsible for everything and to every human being." Sartre wrote already in 1944, in *A propos de l'existentialisme: Mise au point*, that man is responsible for mankind. In his *Présentation [des Temps Modernes]* (1945)¹⁴, Sartre blamed Flaubert and the brothers Goncourt for the repression that followed the defeat of the Paris Commune. And Beauvoir wrote in *Idéalisme moral et réalisme politique* (1945) that means and ends may not be separated.¹⁵ Even before *Les Mains sales* (1947/48; 1948), Sartre showed in *L'Engrenage* (1946; 1948) that to reach a valuable ethical goal one may be forced to resort to violence and to kill innocent people.

Whereas the ethics of authenticity requires acting in consistency with one's values, the consequentialist ethics allows means in contradiction to one's values. How do the ethics of authenticity and the consequentialist ethics relate? Sartre never published anything of theoretical character about this conflictual relationship. I tried to get some clarification by having a look at Sartre's political *praxis*. Here are the results of my explorations, laid down in four theses:

1. The long-term character of Sartre's political commitment was mainly determined by his ethics of authenticity.
2. The political partners with whom Sartre wanted to achieve his political goals were mainly determined by his consequentialist ethics.
3. The point in time when Sartre started and when he finished the relationship with a political ally was mainly determined by his ethics of authenticity.
4. Sartre's concrete actions during the span of a political relationship were mainly determined by his consequentialist ethics.

Let's explore these theses one by one.

D) Thesis 1: The long-term character of Sartre's political commitment was mainly determined by his ethics of authenticity

In contrast to famous contemporaries like Aron, Malraux, Camus, and Koestler, Sartre's political program showed a remarkable stability during his whole life. It can be characterized by four elements:

- antimilitarism
- anticolonialism
- antiracism
- opposition to bourgeois morality

¹⁴ published first in English as *The Case for Responsible Literature*

¹⁵ Sartre supported this view in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1947) and the *Cahiers pour une morale*. Sartre's discussion was heavily influenced by Trotsky's book *Their Morals and Ours* (1938) and most probably also by John Dewey's answer to Trotsky. Trotsky advocated the position that winning the class struggle justifies any means. Dewey answered that such a position would contradict the liberation of mankind, the declared aim of the class struggle.

His long-term commitment to these four elements proves that when it came to his political *praxis*, Sartre lived up to the requirements of an ethics of authenticity.

Just to give you some examples of this long-term commitment:

- a) With regard to antimilitarism: Although not a pacifist, Sartre despised the military and considered war acceptable only as a means of last resort. At the ENS¹⁶, he refused to participate in military training, which made him one of the very rare alumni who did not achieve the military rank of an officer. In 1938/39, he supported those like Daladier who tried to keep peace with Hitler's Third Reich. When the world was on the brink of a Third World War, between 1950 and 1954, he joined forces with the Soviet Union. Whereas after Stalin had made the first steps towards *détente* already in 1952, the West still hyperventilated at least until 1954.¹⁷ Sartre's antiwar position is also proven by his opposition to the colonial and postcolonial wars in Algeria and Vietnam and by his opposition to the use of military power by the Soviet regime in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan.
- b) With regard to anticolonialism: Sartre's anticolonialism dates back to 1924 when the Rif War in Northern Morocco politicised the young Sartre. He opposed colonialism well before the war in Algeria started. He was one of the rare voices who condemned the massacres in Madagascar in 1947, and he supported the Indochinese and Moroccan right to self-determination already by 1946/48. He opposed endeavours of the big powers to suppress other countries when the countries tried to define their own way of development as in the cases of Congo and Cuba. And in the 1970s, after the colonial regimes had come virtually to an end, Sartre supported regionalist movements, e.g. those of the Basques in Spain.
- c) With regard to antiracism: His most prominent position in this respect is Sartre's pro-Jewish and pro-Israel attitude, which characterized him for all of his life. But this was not Sartre's only *engagement*. After the Second World War, he supported black writers such as Richard Wright from the U.S. and representatives of *Négritude* such as Léopold Senghor, David Diop, and Aimé Césaire. That Sartre changed from an admirer of the U.S. and of its culture to one its heaviest critics has a lot to do with the racism in the South of the United States. His play *La Putain respectueuse* (1946) and in his *Cahiers pour une morale* bear witness to it.¹⁸
- d) With regard to his opposition against bourgeois morality: His criticism of bourgeois morality was the most important factor in his success as a writer of novels and short stories. He defended concubinage, abortion, and sexual freedom.¹⁹ Of particular importance was his defence of homosexuals. Daniel, in his trilogy *Les Chemins de la liberté* (1938-1948; 1945-1949), is a

¹⁶ *École Normale Supérieure*, Paris

¹⁷ It was under Stalin that the term "peaceful coexistence" was invented. American military leaders like Douglas MacArthur and Curtis LeMay were well known for their desire to start or at least to provoke a nuclear war.

¹⁸ See also *Ce que j'ai appris du problème noir* in *Le Figaro*, 16.6.1945

¹⁹ In particular in his short stories (the collection *Le Mur*, 1939) and in his novels (*Les Chemins de la liberté*, esp. *L'Âge de raison*, 1938-1941; 1945). On a personal level, his concubinage with Beauvoir cost him almost his job as a teacher during the Occupation, as concubinage was illegal at that time. In 1942, the Vichy régime increased the penalty for abortion from a maximum of six years of prison to the death penalty. Whether Beauvoir underwent any abortion, as she claimed by signing the Manifesto of the 343 in 1971, is uncertain.

remarkable figure, because at that time homosexual writers such as Gide, Cocteau, Jouhandeau, Green, and Montherlant either didn't publish works about homosexuals or, if they did, they did it anonymously. In his defence of Genet, Sartre met huge opposition not only from the Right, but from the Left as well. It may be seen as characteristic that the last interview Sartre ever granted was to the French gay journal *Le Gai Pied*.

Sartre's strong commitment to these four goals is confirmed by the absence of economic goals in his political program. As *Entretiens sur la politique*, a discussion between Sartre and the two former Trotskyites David Rousset and Gérard Rosenthal in 1948/49, show, Sartre had no interest at all in questions of nationalisation, trade unions, salaries, or employment. It is not astonishing that the Communists and Socialists had serious doubts about Sartre's political position. Indeed, when you have a look at the ideology of the various parties, Sartre's political program was rather one of a radical-socialist (with hyphen) in the sense of Alain than that of a radical socialist (without hyphen).²⁰

E) Thesis 2: The political partners with whom Sartre wanted to achieve his political goals were mainly determined by his consequentialist ethics

In his book *Sartre against Stalinism*, Ian Birchall described very well how close many of Sartre's positions were to those of the Trotskyites. Mentioning the case of *Socialisme ou barbarie*, Michel Contat referred to a similar point in his interview on the occasion of Sartre's seventieth birthday²¹. Nevertheless Sartre only showed contempt for the various Trotskyite movements. The reason was very simple: he considered them to be hopelessly ineffective. For Sartre, two criteria had to be fulfilled to enter into any political alliance. The first one was that his own contribution would make a difference. This was the reason why he never saw any reason to join a political organisation, even not the *Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires*, before the Second World War. The second criterion was that the ally should be powerful enough to further developments in line with Sartre's own political program. The complete alignment of identity in political ideology was never a requirement for him, because he based his alliances purely on consequentialist grounds.²²

When Sartre joined the Communist-dominated CNE²³ during the Second World War and when he formed an alliance with former Trotskyites and others to build the RDR²⁴ in 1948, Sartre was very well aware of the limited political program they shared. Even more obvious were the cases of his alliance with the French Communists from 1952 to 1956 and those with the Soviet Communists from 1954 to

²⁰ The major gap between Alain and Sartre was Sartre's complete mistrust of the state. But this mistrust of the state doesn't qualify Sartre as a Socialist either. In his last years Sartre worked together with Benny Lévy on a book called *Pouvoir et liberté (Power and freedom)*. For Sartre it was clear that power is antagonistic to freedom. See also *Anarchie et morale* (1979; 1982).

Already in the discussion about *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (1944), Pierre Naville called Sartre a radical-socialist. And these doubts about Sartre's true political position continued. Even a benevolent Marxist journal like *La Nouvelle Critique* could ask in 1966: *Sartre est-il marxiste?* The answer was largely negative.

²¹ *Autoportrait à soixante-dix ans* (1975)

²² This is fully in line with Sartre's understanding of his role as an intellectual. The intellectual is neither an adventurer nor a militant – both fight for a party – he is primarily a critic of society and politics and gets involved in real politics only occasionally.

²³ Comité National des Écrivains

²⁴ Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire

1956 and from 1960 to 1966. In *Les Communistes et la paix* (part II, 1952), he stated clearly that he agreed with the Communists only on a limited number of points. Although the Stalinists avowed that they believed in peace, antiracism, and anticolonialism, Sartre knew that this was partly only lip service. For example, in the field of racism there were occasional outbreaks of anti-Semitism, like the Doctor's Plot in 1952/53, the publication of Trofim Kitchko's anti-Semitic book in the Ukraine in 1963, and the incarceration of Andrei Sinyavski and Yuli Daniel, two Jewish writers, in 1965. And when it came to Sartre's fight against bourgeois morality, the Stalinists' track record was dismal, because since the 1930s, they had favoured a *petit bourgeois* morality. The only point that spoke in favour of alliances with the Stalinists was that they were the only ones who could have a significant influence in furthering Sartre's own political program.

There were more cases of this kind. In Algeria, Sartre supported the fight of the FLN although his political sympathies were rather first with Messali Hadj and later with Aït Ahmed.²⁵ Or take the case of the *Gauche Prolétarienne* (GP). In the early 1970s, at a time after he had allegedly overcome his realistic amorality, Sartre preferred GP to *Vive La Révolution* (VLR), although in *On a raison de se révolter* (1972-74; 1974), Sartre agreed with VLR and their ideas about the alliance with feminists, gay activists, ecologists and regionalists, rather than with Benny Lévy's GP, for which only the workers' interests counted.²⁶ But Sartre preferred GP to VLR because, when it came to actions, only the GP had any influence.

F) Thesis 3: The point in time when Sartre started and when he finished the relationship with a political ally was mainly determined by his ethics of authenticity

The alliance with the Soviet Union in the years 1954 to 1956 and 1960 to 1966 is the favourite point of criticism of all the sartrophobes. When we look back from a standpoint of fifty or sixty years later, this criticism is understandable. But the situation was quite different at the time, when Sartre decided in favour of these alliances. From 1953 onward, the Soviet Union had started to liberalise its internal regime and to loosen its strict control over Eastern Europe. It was ready for a compromise on Germany and gave Austria its independence back. It opened up a relationship with the developing countries on equal footing. There was a boom in literature, with authors like Panfërov and Erenburg. Pierre Lazareff, the director general of the right-wing publishing house *France Editions*, was allowed to travel freely around the USSR. Contrary to these positive developments in the East, decolonialisation in the West was hardly in sight. In 1954 the Algerian War started. Racism was a fact of daily life not only in the U.S., but in all the French and British colonies. McCarthyism and political hypocrisy were at their height. The Bolshoi Ballet was not allowed to perform in Paris.

The situation around 1960 was similar. The Soviet Union insisted on peaceful coexistence, which led to the break with Maoist China. The technical and economic development of the USSR was such that the West suffered from the *Sputnik* crisis and seriously considered that the Soviet Union could economically overtake the West²⁷. For writers and artists, it was the second Golden Age of the Communist

²⁵ Whereas the FLN (Front de Libération National) favoured a crude Arab-nationalist socialism, Messali Hadj stood for a more orthodox kind of socialism, for which he received a big support from the Algerian workers in France, and Aït Ahmed advocated a multicultural socialist Algeria, which brought him the support of the Berbers.

²⁶ In the interview with Contat (*Autoportrait à soixante-dix ans*) Sartre confirmed that in his theoretical ideas he was closer to VLR than to GP.

²⁷ Important scientists, including Raymond Aron, even believed in a convergence of the systems.

years: Yevtushenko and Solzhenitsyn could publish critical poems and novels, the directors Tchukhray and Romm produced antiwar and antitotalitarian films. In contrast to this, the West was seriously trapped in all its colonial and post-colonial wars and military actions in and around Algeria, Vietnam, Congo, and Cuba. In comparison to six years earlier, the level of racism had hardly diminished. The cultural revolution that is now known under the label of “May 68” was not yet in sight. Therefore, based on his own political program, it’s not astonishing that in the years 1954 and 1960, Sartre recognized a natural ally in the Soviet Union.

Whenever Sartre started an alliance, the time of its start was heavily determined by favourable circumstances. The alliance with the Communists in the CNE coincided with the German Occupation and the Hitler’s war against the Soviet Union. In the case of the RDR it was the heightened tensions due to the Marshall Plan and the takeover of power by the Communists in various Eastern European and Asian countries. The oppression of the Left opposition in France, as shown by the affairs of Henri Martin and the arrest of Duclos, was the reason for the start of Sartre’s alliance with the French Communists in 1951/52. The case of Sartre’s alliance with the *Gauche Prolétarienne*, which started when Marcellin, the minister of the interior, wanted to ban all radical left-wing newspapers in 1970, was similar.²⁸

But Sartre’s political program not only determined the point in time when a political alliance was started, but also when it was finished. As the start and the end of political alliances were a fundamental decision, Sartre’s alliances regularly did not just wither away—they ended in a loud divorce. Here again a few examples: the end of the RDR in summer 1949 when Rousset and others accepted money from the U.S.; the Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968; the incarceration of Huberto Padilla on Cuba in 1971. A comparison of Sartre’s behaviour with that of Heinrich Böll, the German winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, clearly shows the different character of their commitments. Both Sartre and Böll started to visit the Soviet Union regularly in the early 1960s. Both noted the persecution of dissidents. Böll was even in Prague when the Soviet Army occupied Czechoslovakia. But whereas Sartre stopped his collaboration with the USSR in 1966 and then broke with them publicly in 1968, Böll continued to visit the Soviet Union until 1979, even after he had granted asylum to Solzhenitsyn in 1974.

G) Thesis 4: Sartre’s concrete actions during the span of a political relationship were mainly determined by his consequentialist ethics

Sartre did not care very much about the authenticity of his actions during the lifetime of his alliances. Just the opposite—he did not mind concealing the truth, even lying. His relationship with the Soviet Union is again a particular example. His series of articles in *Libération*, under the title *La Liberté est totale en U.R.S.S.* (1954) is famous—or rather, infamous, many would say. There are several points in favour of Sartre. First, this title was not his; second, Sartre’s full statement rather meant that

²⁸ In the two important cases of North Vietnam and China, it was obviously the lack of a positive development along the lines of Sartre’s political program that inhibited any closer alliance. Although Sartre was a fierce fighter against the war in Vietnam, he never came out as a supporter of North Vietnam or Ho Chi Minh. Oliver Todd’s trip to North Vietnam in 1966, with Sartre’s request to establish contact to Sartre’s former friend Tran Duc Thao, was a failure. In the case of China, Sartre was quite sympathetic to the basic ideas of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, that the common people start a revolution from below and that moral arguments enjoy an important role. But aware of fraternity-terror that had already started, he saw no reason for a closer cooperation, in contrast to several other French left-wing intellectuals (e.g. Roland Barthes).

criticism in the USSR was allowed only as long as it didn't criticise the leaders²⁹; and third, the book published by Lazareff and his wife under the title *L'U.R.S.S. à l'heure Malenkov* (1954) confirmed many of Sartre's positive statements. But it's obvious that Sartre did not tell the full truth.³⁰ When Sartre gave a speech in early 1955 (*La Leçon de Stalingrad*), he did not even hesitate to fiddle with history: he concealed that the Communists first were allied with Hitler and the Third Reich and that they joined the Résistance only in 1941. Silence was a characteristic element in the second period of his alliance with the Soviets, too. Sartre was quite aware of the growing oppression after 1962, which partly took an anti-Semitic character, but publicly in the West he kept quiet. It was hardly noticed that he declined the invitation to participate in the Fourth Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union in 1967.

His relationship with Cuba is another example for Sartre's consequentialist attitude. By 1961, Sartre and Beauvoir had learnt that Cuban homosexuals were persecuted. They were shocked, and this situation got worse in 1965, when concentration camps for homosexuals and other "scum of society" were established. Heberto Padilla would later say in the film *Conducta Impropia*³¹ that Sartre told him that what the Jews were to Hitler, the homosexuals were to Castro. But Sartre remained silent. The only sign of disagreement was his missing the Cultural Congress in Havana in 1968, officially due to illness—I mean it was a very diplomatic illness³². Sartre's very troublesome relationship with the *Gauche Proletarienne* followed a similar pattern. Sartre had several quarrels with GP: he left *Secours Rouge* because of GP in February 1971; he had an open disagreement with them about lynching and popular justice in May 1972; and he had to pose an ultimatum to GP to have more women involved in the work of the newspaper *Libération* in February 1973.³³ But Sartre defended GP until their dissolution in autumn 1973.

This opportunistic relationship to truth can also be remarked in many of Sartre's interviews, particularly those of the 1970s. To young interviewers who were close to the latest fashion of Maoist thought, he uttered positive statements about China and Maoism and he criticised his previous alliances with the Soviets. The two most extreme cases of concessions that Sartre made were his interview with John Gerassi, published as *Iron in His Soul* (1971), and his talks with Benny Lévy, published under the title *L'Espoir maintenant*.³⁴ In *On a raison de se révolter*, Sartre

²⁹ „Le citoyen soviétique possède, à mon avis, une entière liberté de critique, mais il s'agit d'une critique qui ne porte pas sur des hommes, mais sur des mesures.“

³⁰ Cf. Beauvoir's letter to Algren dated 12.7.1954 (*Lettres à Nelson Algren, 1947-1964* ; 1997)

³¹ By Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez-Leal (1984)

³² Among the participants were Michel Leiris, Giulio Einaudi, Arnold Wesker, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Aimé Césaire, Hans Magnus Enzensberger

³³ *Secours Rouge* was an organisation to help left-wing victims of state oppression. GP advocated popular justice including lynching in the case of a notary wrongly suspected of having raped and killed a girl in Bruay-en-Artois. Whereas Michel Foucault widely supported popular justice, Sartre opposed it and asked that the normal court would judge this case.

³⁴ A similar case is the hyperbolic language Sartre uses in his preface to Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961). In content, Sartre did not say much more than what he had said elsewhere: to liberate themselves the colonised people have to take up arms, because the colonisers would not voluntarily grant them their freedom. The "scandal" was Sartre's language. And this was helped by a serious mistake in the translation from French into English in the translation by Constance Farrington. Whereas the French text reads: "abattre un Européen c'est faire d'une pierre deux coups, supprimer en même temps un oppresseur et un opprimé", the English translations by Farrington said: "to shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time." Whereas in the French original the oppressor is at the same time an oppressed person, Sartre's dialectical thinking gets completely lost in the Farrington's translation, where the oppressor is not anymore identical with the oppressed person. This grave mistake was

declared to Benny Lévy and Philippe Gavi that his moral development had three stages and his statements about Maoism were quite positive. But in the important interview for the book *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*³⁵, he rigorously denied ruptures in his philosophical development³⁶, and he considered it absurd to call him a Maoist.

How far did Sartre's consequentialism go? He definitely was not afraid of dirty hands. But the worst he got were ink spots. Indeed, he did not ask Flaubert and the brothers Goncourt to raise their guns, he blamed them only for not having raised their pens against repression. Sartre's consequentialism obviously is not a fully fledged utilitarian one. There are even reasons to assume that Sartre thought that at least part of one's private life is exempt from any ethical considerations. At any rate he refused to give up the *Flaubert*³⁷ in favour of actions considered to be more important by his Maoist friends. And he limited his consequentialism to his personal actions. He never forced his friends to submit their actions to his ideas.³⁸

H) Conclusions

What are the conclusions we can make from these considerations?

1. Sartre's actual behaviour suggests that—within the limits his meta-ethical position sets to any normative ethics—not one or the other normative ethics is to be followed, but that the ethics of authenticity and the consequentialist ethics have to be combined to lead to ethically correct behaviour—a position that is confirmed by his play *The Devil and the Good Lord*³⁹.
2. Although the ethics of authenticity prevails in the most fundamental decisions, in the daily *praxis* the consequentialist ethics is of at least equal, if not greater importance.
3. Conflicts normally prevail between the ethics of authenticity and the consequentialist ethics. These conflicts are the reason for frequent failure, and are the reason why Sartre wrote in *Saint Genet* that acting ethically is impossible. The relationship between the two ethics, the ethics of authenticity and the consequentialist ethics, is a dialectical one. It's this dialectical character that distinguishes Sartre's ethics from Max Weber's combination of an ethics of responsibility with a Kantian ethics of intention.⁴⁰

corrected only by the 2004 translation of Richard Philcox where it now reads correctly: "Killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed."

³⁵ Edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp (1975; 1981)

³⁶ See also Rupert Neudeck's interview with Sartre in 1979

³⁷ *L'Idiot de la famille. Gustave Flaubert de 1821 à 1857* (1954-71/72; 1971/72)

³⁸ For example, during his alliance with the PCF he always supported Péju, Mascolo, and Audry when they wrote articles that caused anger with the Communists.

³⁹ *Le Diable et le bon Dieu* (1951). In the film *Sartre. Un film réalisé par Alexandre Astruc et Michel Contat* (1972-1976; 1977) Sartre said that the intellectual always has to criticize, but he also has to be loyal to the political partner as long as it is not impossible. One cannot leave a group at any time and in whatever way.

⁴⁰ To subsume the consequentialist ethics under ethics of authenticity would mean a loss of this dialectical, conflictual relationship between the two ethics, which is the main reason why ethics is impossible today. Authenticity does not necessarily comprise consequentialism. The conflict between Albert Camus and Sartre was one about consequentialism, not about authenticity. As *Les Justes* (1949) show, it was not acceptable to Camus that innocent children would be killed during a revolutionary act; Sartre would have regretted their death, but would have accepted it as part of history. Subsuming whatever one likes as a criterion for authenticity (e.g. mutual recognition in the

Apart from these three conclusions with regard to ethics, there is a fourth one. It refers to the understanding of Sartre's political behaviour. In my opinion, there is no need to resort to a concept of ruptures to explain Sartre's political behaviour and all the twists he took. His own dialectical ethics, defined by his ethics of authenticity and his consequentialist ethics, explains his political behaviour much better.

18.11.13/v1.3

case of T. Storm Heter, op. cit.) also weakens the link between ethics and ontology, which was very important to Sartre.