

But Sartre! How fondly does Lévy recall him: this anarchistic, Nietzschean, 'Stendahlia', individualistic dandy and aesthete, this pursuer of women, frequenter of cafés and restaurants, friend of actors, inveterate traveller and lover of Venice. And, above all, this incorrigible proponent of a philosophical conception of freedom that is arguably the most extreme in the Western tradition. Much of Lévy's book is an attempt not only to situate Sartre in the context of French thought at mid-century but to rescue him from the uninformed detractors who, during the structuralist period, insisted that Sartre had committed Heideggerian sins of belief in the subject-identical-to-itself, a species of 'humanism'. Truly *vulgar* misrepresentations, one can scarcely call them 'misreadings,' for they suggest only the most cursory and untutored readings (if readings there were). It is another pleasure of Lévy's book to see him rescue Sartre from the effects of yet another canard: that he was some sort of epigone of Heidegger who managed to get everything *wrong* because his German was not very good or he was insufficiently dedicated to the hermeneutics of the Heideggerian text.

It is unclear how much of Heidegger Sartre had read in the years before *Being and Nothingness*. However, he had read enough (probably beginning around 1939) to know that Heidegger was working a street close to the one down which he wished to go, took what he needed, and spun it in his preferred direction. In dealing with the Heidegger 'influence,' Lévy has recourse to the German thinker himself, in remarks he offered on Hegel and Schelling: 'N'est-ce pas Heidegger qui, cette fois, écrit: «les grands penseurs ne se comprennent jamais fondamentalement les uns les autres, précisément parce qu'à chaque fois ils veulent le Même, sous la figure de la grandeur qui leur est propre?»' (171). In Sartrean existentialism, there is, for example, no deep mystery of forgotten Being, no *Seinsgeschichte*. In fact, in one of his few post-1950 references to Heidegger, he speaks of the privileged status of Being vis-à-vis human beings as an 'alienation' (Sartre, 'The Writer and His Language,' 91–92).

There is, instead, *Pour-soi*, consciousness – and everything else; and the 'everything else' is Being *in-itself*, a rock to the freely flowing and airy 'nothingness' of the *Pour-soi*. So much a nothingness is this *Pour-soi*, however, that even its past – even its 'yesterday' – has fallen into the 'in-itself' and must be overcome as it moves forward in its almost monstrous freedom.⁹ Where Heideggerian '*Angst*' makes *Dasein* sense its contingency and the haunting presence of Being, Sartrean '*angoisse*' is the *Pour-soi*'s apprehension of its freedom, from which it may flee into that most famous of Sartrean categories 'bad faith.' In short, Sartre's is a secularized, urban

existentialism, and the Black Forest philosopher was right to disavow it.¹⁰ They could have had little use for one another.

Lévy is tireless in exposing the inept readings that the structuralist generation made of Sartre's alleged 'humanism.' He reminds us, for example, that in *Nausea* (1938) the ridiculous 'Autodidact' is an avowed humanist, a profession of faith that occasions in Roquentin a desire to kill him (an early hint of Sartre's violent tendency). Humanism as the subject-identical-to-itself – what is this but an occasion comparable to those that provoke in Roquentin episodes of nausea? That these obvious features of Sartre's work were misconstrued represents the *Sartresvergessenheit* of French thought: 'On a oublié cette ambition sartrienne. On a oublié ce choc-Sartre, cet événement, cet ébranlement, ce débordement, ce raz de marée. On a oublié, accessoirement, cette mise à feu du dictionnaire, cette galvanisation soudaine d'une langue qui se propage à travers le monde. On a oublié ... la portée de ce discours qui, pour la première fois dans l'histoire de la littérature et de la pensée, se veut, et se fait, à la fois populaire et mondial' (Lévy, 30–31).

Even Sartre's sin, for the Lacanians, of doubting the unconscious is taken up by Lévy, who points out how thoroughly Sartre was committed to what he called the 'facts' of psychoanalysis: repression, parapraxes, the meaningfulness of the dream, etc. What he resisted was what he called the 'materialist mythology' of psychoanalysis, and, to be sure, now that psychoanalysis, turning in the throes of its scientific crisis, is kept breathing only in humanities departments, Sartre looks increasingly sound on this point.

Lévy takes up the anti-Sartreans on virtually every point of their indictment: he is not a failed Heidegger (or Husserl – but Hegel is another matter). He is not a proponent of the self-identical subject, a Heideggerian humanist. '*Being and Nothingness*, *Nausea*, *Saint Genet* are masterpieces – and the *Chemins de la liberté*, the early plays, and *L'Idiot de la famille* (where Sartre complicates Sartre II's life) are among the major works of the century. And there is no 'philotyranical' dimension to Sartre I. Not for nothing did the post-war French Communist party turn its heavy artillery against him as a 'bourgeois ideologue' and a 'mystified' individualist. In those days, Sartrean conceptions of freedom made an unhappy couple with Marxist notions of historical determinism as much as with Freudian notions of psychic determinism.

10 Wolin reports, however, that in 1945, when Heidegger was faced with 'de-Nazification' proceedings at the hands of the French and in need of serious support from French intellectuals, he wrote Sartre a 'fulsome letter' in which he 'stressed the profound affinities he detected between *Being and Nothingness* and his own work.' He even proposed a 'philosophical ski trip' through the Schwarzwald (Heidegger's *Children*, 88).

9 Given all this, Heidegger was entirely right, in 'The Letter on Humanism,' to establish a distance between his work and that of Sartre.