

For Lévy, there is to this first Sartre a powerful and tonic antidote to philo tyranny. Sartre's objections to the various forms of bad faith in the reigning determinisms of the post-war era are well known. The latter make one mawkish with 'l'esprit de sérieux,' that goopy, viscous feeling of coincidence between myself as I am now and all that I have been and can expect to be. 'After all,' the serious man remarks, 'I cannot be a member of the Party because I am a bourgeois by birth.' 'I cannot become a poet because I come from a family of practical engineers.' His freedom wilts under the pressure of 'because's.' They define the look on the face of the famous man who, as his career ends, has his portrait painted in order that he can see himself in coincidence with that career. Seriousness is the response by which freedom flees from its anguish before itself. To this extent, one might say of Sartre what he often said of himself: that he is incorrigibly optimistic – one can always rise above one's excuses and leave one's seriousness behind.

But there is a point at which Sartrean freedom (and optimism) run up against Sartrean gloom, what I earlier called a 'philosopher's social hope.' As *Being and Nothingness* seeks to demonstrate, at its outer limits freedom is in pursuit of what it can never hope to obtain. It wants to 'found' itself, extinguish its contingency, and come into possession of the self-coincidence of things *while knowing itself in its contingent freedom*. It is the Sartrean self's doomed project to be God, *ens causa sui*. It pursues this will-o'-the-wisp in its moments of 'seriousness,' or even when it skis, swims, jogs, or seeks coincidence with natural being (while trying to preserve a residual freedom). It is at the horizon of the *Pour-soi's* love-making, of its writing, even of its grief, when it feels its pain to be insufficient and tries to close with some imaginary conception of true grief (the look on the face of the Pietà perhaps). But *at the outer limit*, it all comes to the same thing. Whether one loses oneself at a bar or playing at being Metternich as a leader of nations: 'We lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion' (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 615). Lévy has virtually unalloyed admiration for the manner in which Sartrean gloom dogs Sartrean optimism. Nothing better to damp down utopian hopes than the notion that man is a 'useless passion' to be God:

Mais si je fais de lui ce champion de l'antitotalitarisme c'est pour une seconde raison. C'est parce qu'il est... l'auteur de ces deux livres majeurs – *La Nausée* toujours, et *L'Être et le Néant* – dont le principe commun est que la contingence est absolue, la détresse définitive, le mal de vivre inguérissable – et qu'il n'y a donc nulle part, et qu'il n'y aura jamais, de «bon» point de vue qui permettrait de réconcilier le sujet, ni avec sa souffrance native, ni à plus forte raison, avec cette autre souffrance, voulue celle-là, violente, qu'est la souffrance de l'oppression. (352–53)

It is an outlook as unwelcome in 1939 Berlin as in 1979 Moscow.

Lévy links this gloom to something that academic philosophers in France often found unacceptable: that distance between the Sartrean *Pour-soi* and 'everything else.' They preferred the more nuanced Merleau-Ponty, to whose academic moderation Lévy objects. That stark Sartrean 'distance' provided Sartre's work, Lévy believes, with another useful antidote to totalitarianism: for there could be no mythologies of nature, of a type often found on the right, no essentialities binding man to some putative natural order. For Lévy this means no dangerous attraction to 'roots' and *Heimat*, to notions of intimacy between self and mountain, self and forest, or self and sea. 'Deep ecologists' would not be quoting early Sartre, who claimed he was 'allergic to chlorophyll' and preferred to fly to Italy rather than join Simone de Beauvoir in a car in order to enjoy the natural sights offered by an auto trip over the Alps. But the isolated *Pour-soi*, rather like the isolated Sartre of the 1930s, is also no creature of crowds: no Nürnberg rallies, no May Day celebrations. Thus Sartre I was closer to the Kierkegaard who warns that the 'crowd is untruth.'

In Lévy's view, once Heidegger overcame gloomy notions of the fatedness of the *Seinsgeschichte* and decided, after Hitler's election, that we can give a push to some new way in which Being might manifest itself, trouble began. Utopia beckoned. However, as long as Being is 'guilty' (if such a word may be permitted) for the *Seinsvergessenheit* and the reign of enframing, there is a sense in which all we can do is wait it out. In *Women in Love*, Lawrence's character Rupert Birkin remarks that we are caught in a 'river of dissolution.' We can't swim upstream to some better time. All we can do is go with the current and hope that we, or, more likely, our descendants, will know a 'new cycle of creation' (172–73). However, Lévy's optimistic Heidegger found a hero (with 'marvelous hands') who might just have represented the moment in which Being begins to reconfigure its relationship to *Dasein*. And thus the philosopher played his diabolical version of follow the Leader.

I have no idea how Lévy, Wolin, and Lilla might vote, but each seems committed to some form of what we might call liberal democracy (with Wolin at the left end of the spectrum). This is what separates them from Sartre II, Heidegger, and other philo tyrants. Liberal democracy – Lilla's Tocquevillian tradition – has little patience with utopian projects. It recognizes that the world is unlikely to be changed in our lifetimes – or those of our children and grandchildren. It accepts a much less dramatic stance vis-à-vis the problems that societies face. To that extent it is often boring to high-spirited people. It knows that the cheques these societies have written (declarations of man's rights or of independence) may never be cashed at full value. All they can do is their best.

For the social optimist, however, this is never enough. Or, to be more precise: for that species of social optimist convinced that all around him is a *totally hateful* society. He wants the Messiah as soon as possible, prefer-