

recognize that a resolution would demand several volumes of 'existential psychoanalysis' in order to identify the 'situation' and the 'fundamental choice' - his terms of art - which led to Sartre II.

Still, Lévy offers intriguing speculations on the way in which Sartre's own outlook made it easier for him to go this terrible route. For example, he rarely engaged in debate. Indeed, he was all too quick to disown positions he held yesterday. Yesterday, remember, is the 'in-itself,' closed, rock-solid, and no longer myself. Me? I am a *projet* into the future (he loved the image of a power-boat pulling itself up out of the water). In fact, why stop, at merely two Sartres? There were many, and they didn't always communicate with each other.¹² Lévy notes that in *Words* Sartre II pays a bitter adieu to literature, in a book that is a stylistic masterpiece, as if he wanted to show he could do the thing one more time, in the very moment he was rejecting it. Literature? That was yesterday. At the very end of his life, he could *stagger* his oldest friends by giving an interview to a young man, Benny Lévy, who had become a kind of Rasputin figure (not unlike Ralph Schoenman to the aged Bertrand Russell). To Benny Lévy, who would eventually rediscover his Jewish roots, Sartre dismissed his famous existentialist categories, like anguish, by saying, in effect, 'Well, everybody believed in that stuff then. Of course, I really never felt anguish myself.' Worse: he succumbed to Benny Lévy's insinuations of the importance of the Jewish religious tradition. This - the 'religious,' not the 'Jewish' - was too much for the old Sartreans.

Bernard-Henri Lévy is right to be annoyed with the old Sartreans. This was simply Sartre again, up to his old tricks, shedding yet another skin, and trying, perhaps, to generate one more scandalous position before death took him. No excuses, no apologies. No debate. And yet one must enter a mild demurrer. Sartre spent too much time with the young. This was not in the professorial mode, of course (he turned down the Collège de France's invitation), where the danger is of a captive audience of other people's children. In Sartre's case, he seems to have had a difficult time maintaining friends of his own age - Merleau, Camus, Aron, Koestler, and others. As he grew old, their places came to be filled by these thirty-something, like Benny Lévy and the Maoists: 'I don't like people my age. Everyone I know is much younger than I am. I get along with them best: they have the same needs, the same areas of ignorance, the same areas of knowledge' (Sartre, 'Self-Portrait at Seventy,' 31). In *Words* Sartre boasted that he had no 'super-ego,' that unlike other men he carried no Anchises on his back. Maybe. But post-adolescents (and chronic post-adolescents, like Saint-Juste) have *very* strong super-egos, possessing all the imperious

12 Lévy himself notes that even during the heyday of Sartre II there were many moments defined by the liberty-loving Sartre I: in his efforts during the Algerian War and on behalf of Biafra, the Kurds, and the Armenians.

severity of that faculty. With their demands for more and more radical positions, they seem to have been a heavier burden for Sartre than old Anchises. Part of him seems also to have recognized their danger, thus his refusal to abandon his *Flaubert* to write a popular novel for 'the people.' Sartre always said his aim was to 'think against himself.' He noted that when he failed, this was owing to a failure to be sufficiently radical ('Self-Portrait at Seventy,' 65). Unfortunately, his young 'colleagues' did not help him think against his inclination to out-radicalize himself, a danger compounded by his coeval, Simone de Beauvoir, who was no brake on Sartrean radicalism.

At one point, Lévy compares the Sartrean and Heideggerian modes of self-criticism. Heidegger had been notoriously unwilling to acknowledge error or to ask for forgiveness. He refused Marcuse's request that he do so and disappointed Paul Celan on the occasion of the poet's visit to Todtnauberg, Heidegger's mountain retreat. The Heidegger who speaks in Lévy's account is *imagined*:

«no comment; ni aux amis ni aux ennemis, ni aux vainqueurs avides de ma repentance ni à Celan, Arendt, Fédier, Löwith, Towarnicki, le petit Sartre, je ne lâcherai le moindre mot d'aveu ou de remords; parce que je suis trop fier? parce que je persévère? parce que le crime est, au contraire, si grand qu'il est inavouable, inexpiable? parce que s'expliquer serait une façon de plaider, de revendiquer des circonstances atténuantes et que, ce crime-là, je suis conscient, comme vous, que nulle circonstance ne l'atténue? comprenez qui voudra; je n'ai rien à en dire de plus» (Lévy, 297).

It is the lingo mode: 'Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.' Oracles do not apologize. Perhaps they expect to win on historical appeal, posthumously.

By contrast, the Sartre whom Lévy imagines is insouciant and all-too-ready to concede. 'Is there any political position you've taken that you regret?' The question was, in fact, put to him, and his reply was 'aucune, aucune.' The 'aucune' attracts Lévy's notice, leading him to invent an expanded reply:

mais c'est un «aucune» qui, contrairement à ce que l'on pourrait croire, n'est ni arrogant, ni buté, ni même catégorique, mais léger au contraire, désinvolte. Tantôt: «vous voulez une autocritique? mais oui, voyons! la voici! celui qui parle aujourd'hui étant, par principe, étranger à celui qui parlait à l'époque, celui qui dit j'ai fauté n'ayant rien de commun avec celui qui, de fait, a fauté, rien n'est plus simple que de vous satisfaire et rien n'a moins de conséquence; je vous concède toutes les autocritiques que vous voudrez et aucune n'a d'importance; je les multiplie, je les devance, je veux bien les produire à la chaîne, puisqu'aucune, par définition, n'a plus le pouvoir de m'atteindre;