The Anguish of Freedom

Is Sartre's Existentialism an Appropriate Foundation for a Theory of Antisemitism?

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This article questions the theoretical background to Jean-Paul Sartre's thesis, formulated in Anti-Semite and Jew, *that antisemitism is "a free and total choice of oneself" by arguing against interpretations that emphasize the everyday meaning of the words "choice" and "responsibility", which leads some to invoke Sartre as a key witness for the total responsibility of actors for their antisemitic attitudes. On the contrary, this article argues that antisemitism, if one takes Sartre's decisionist theory of freedom seriously, mutates into a blind, inexplicable, and incomprehensible fate, and that the alleged total responsibility for antisemitism as a mode of "bad faith" (mauvaise foi) turns into total unfreedom.*

"Man is nothing other than what he makes of himself." –Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism,* 1946

"For us man is characterized above all . . . by what he succeeds in making of what he has been made." –Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method,* 1957

How does one become an antisemite? Are you made into one or do you make yourself into one? Tjark Kunstreich's juxtaposition of Hannah Arendt/Moishe Postone on the one hand and Jean-Paul Sartre on the other seems to be based on this alternative. There is "no determination for hatred toward Jews," this is an interpretive achievement of the subjects responsible for it.[1] Kunstreich should be credited for emphasizing the importance of Sartre for a critical analysis of antisemitism.[2] Curiously enough, Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946) still leads a shadowy life both in academic circles and political debates. Academic ignorance is easy to explain. Most philosophers refuse to deal with such "profane" topics as antisemitism, passing it on to the "empirical" sciences. These in turn, especially historians, but also social psychologists, either consider Sartre's essay too speculative or ignore it completely. In the political arena, Sartre's statements about the authentic Jew and its pro-Zionist consequences are disturbing to many.[3]

In the following article, I would like to present the thesis from *Anti-Semite and Jew* that antisemitism is "a free and total choice of oneself,"[4] and to illuminate some of its theoretical background. Sartre's statement is frequently quoted, but it is rarely associated with his existentialist premises. In my view, it would be quite odd if concepts such as choice and responsibility were to elude the meaning of everyday language and turn into their opposite, as Kunstreich claims. I will argue that antisemitism, if one takes Sartre's decisionist theory of freedom seriously, mutates into a blind, inexplicable and incomprehensible fate, and that the alleged total responsibility for antisemitism as a mode of "bad faith" turns into total unfreedom. This by no means denies the great merits

of *Anti-Semite and Jew*. On the contrary, I will show that this essay represents a work of transition from a supposedly concrete, but in fact terribly abstract existential-ontological view of the subject towards a more social-theoretical analysis of "situated freedom."

The Antisemite: Two Approaches

To Sartre, antisemitism is not a mere opinion that could be rationally debated or even understood as a contribution to a debate, nor is it a prejudice that could simply be revised by experience to the contrary. Rather, antisemitism is an affective, deeply hateful worldview. Taking seriously the emotional dimension ("passion") of antisemitism means challenging the naive-enlightened cognitivism that believes one can confront antisemitism with rational arguments.[5] But it is just as important to emphasize the systematicity of antisemitism, and thus counter the idea that antisemitism is an attitude isolable to a particular object, a kind of niche hatred. Antisemitism, for Sartre, is a "commitment of the soul," and "a comprehensive attitude that one adopts not only toward Jews, but toward men in general, toward history and society; it is at one and the same time a passion and a conception of the world."[6]

To Sartre, this resentful worldview is not a reaction to any actual behavior of Jews. Rather, it can only be explained by turning to the antisemitic person. Antisemitism does not result from the experience of external facts, but is the product of projective interpretations of antisemites. In his essay, Sartre tries to show that the "Jewish question" is in fact an antisemite question. An example will suffice here: a former schoolmate of Sartre says that a Jew was favored over him during an exam. This "good

Frenchman" blames the Jew for his failure. But, according to Sartre, several others were also favored over him. He ranked 27th on the list, and of the 26 before him, 12 had passed: "[s]uppose Jews had been excluded from the competition; would that have done him any good? And even if he had been at the top of the list of unsuccessful candidates . . . why should the Jew Weil have been eliminated rather than the Norman Mathieu or the Breton Arzell?"[7]

Sartre also forcefully argues against the primitive empirical approach of many historians who explain the causes of antisemitic attitudes through economic competition or other social conflicts between Jews and Gentiles.[8] "Far from experience producing his idea of the Jew," he concludes, "it was the latter which explained his experience. If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him."[9] Samuel Salzborn has recently pointed out that this famous phrase has often been misunderstood. Sartre has been accused of reducing Jewish identity to the attributions of the antisemite. According to Salzborn, however, Sartre knows very well that Jews also exist without antisemites, but that "the Jew," as an idea that orients antisemitism, is the product of the antisemite.[10] Thus Sartre writes: "[i]t is therefore the idea of the Jew that one forms for himself which would seem to determine history, not the 'historical fact' that produces the idea. . . . Thus[,] wherever we turn it is the idea of the Jew which seems to be the essential thing."[11] The historical fact of real Jews does not therefore produce the antisemitic idea of the Jew.

Up to this point, Sartre has only distinguished antisemitism from an empirical misunderstanding. The idea illuminates the experience, but where does the idea come from? Two questions arise: why does the antisemite invent the Jews and not some

other group upon which to act out his hatred? So far, we have only referred to the antisemitic person. What about this person, is his resentment an innate attitude? The first point is easy to clarify. Although Sartre at one point asserts the interchangeability of the object of antisemitic hatred,[12] he eventually revises this claim. Modern antisemitism chooses the Jew as the object of its hatred, because Jews are already preformed as evil by Christian hatred for Jews: first as "assassin of Christ," then mediated by Christian discriminatory practices as the bearer of an "economic curse." For Sartre, it is certainly "the Christians who have *created* the Jew," by forcing him into a specific historical and social role of redemption. But for modern antisemitism, this is merely "a memory." Modern antisemitism has picked up all of this and made it into "the pretext and basis" of its madness. "Thus, to know what the contemporary Jew is, we must ask the Christian conscience. And we must ask, not 'What is a Jew?' but '*What have you made of the Jews*?'"[13]

What Sartre only hints at here is a cautious relativization of the purely projective or constructivist approach. Factual religious differences between Judaism and Christianity are taken by Christians as an opportunity to projectively and imaginarily overcome their own internal conflicts.[14] Religiously speaking (not historically), Christianity does not really matter to Judaism: it is just another Jewish sect that follows a false Messiah. Christianity, on the other hand, needs Judaism: the accusation of murdering God was used to ingratiate themselves with the Romans and thus minimize their responsibility for the killing of Jesus. Later, however, this accusation served primarily to overcome the paradoxical sacrificial theory of Christianity, to quell their own doubts (incarnated in the Jews) about Jesus' divine sonship, and to projectively ward off

and combat feelings of guilt in their own magical practice of actually eating the Savior in Holy Communion (the doctrine of transubstantiation).[15]

Here, we have a first clue as to what Sartre calls *situated* freedom. Accordingly, modern antisemitism is unthinkable without the "preparatory work" that Christianity has accomplished. However, this traditional context does not yet explain why antisemitism becomes permanently reproduced in modern capitalist society or why it takes on a considerably different form than Christian hatred of Jews. Sartre's real topic is the source of this modern hatred of the Jews. Here, the argument of *Anti-Semite and Jew* takes on a peculiar dynamic. At the beginning of the essay, there is a tendency to explain antisemitism as the personal problem of the antisemite, to interpret it from what might be called an existentialist perspective of ego-weakness. As the text progresses, however, Sartre increasingly advances towards a social-theoretical grounding of the antisemitic choice.

First, however, he says that the antisemite simply cannot cope with the knowledge of his total responsibility and groundless freedom. Sartre's existentialism is based on the assumption that existence precedes essence, i.e., that human action is determined neither by nature nor by God or any other metaphysical principle. The "destiny" of man is essentially his indeterminacy, his absolute freedom. I will go into this in more detail later. For now, the antisemite chooses bad faith (*mauvaise foi*), i.e., the mode of being that denies his own freedom for the sake of achieving the absolute certainty of unfreedom and the biological-mystical belonging to a collective which, at the same time, assigns him his value as a human being. Almost in the style of a neoliberal management seminar guru, Sartre proclaims that, "[w]ithout respite, from the beginning

of our lives to the end, we are responsible for what merit we enjoy." Specifically, he means that the antisemite wants to trade his being-for-itself—his freedom, responsibility, and abandonment[16]—for being-in-itself. "Now the anti-Semite flees responsibility as he flees his own consciousness." He chooses "for his personality the permanence of rock," and "for his morality a scale of petrified values," in which he always belongs to the elite of mediocrity, and the Jew always to the outcasts of intelligence and superiority. The antisemite "chooses the irremediable out of fear of being free; he chooses mediocrity out of fear of being alone,"[17] and elevates this quality to a noble birthright, an ontological anchor.

At first glance, this sounds like the "escape from freedom" thesis of Critical Theory, particularly that of Erich Fromm and Theodor W. Adorno. But this is misleading, since Critical Theory understands the freedom from which the antisemite flees into authority as a historically specific and socially mediated freedom of action: the negative freedom of the bourgeois subject, who is released from personal relationships of dependence, but is all the more at the mercy of the blind mechanisms of the market.[18] Sartre, however, refers to the allegedly transhistorical human condition of the absolute freedom of will,[19] which is certainly equipped with all the conditions of modern precarious existence. Sartre elevates the powerlessness produced by capitalist market freedom and the anxiety of a precarious existence that comes with it into the originary experience of freedom.[20] The antisemite, one might say, simply lacks the courage to accept Sartre's existentialist view of groundless freedom and the associated thesis that man is "being there *for nothing . . . de trop*"[21] (superfluous).[22]

Only in the course of his argument does social content fill in this explanation. Suddenly, we not only face the antisemite as an isolated human being who has to cope with his human condition, but as a subject in a historically specific situation. Sartre thus approaches more and more closely the ideas of Critical Theory[23]—unknown to him at the time—that the antisemite is afraid of discovering the disastrous, but changeable, organization of the world. Such a thought would mean taking responsibility for changing the world and creating a better one, for man is "master of his own destinies." Instead, he assumes that the world is well organized in itself and has no social-structural defects. He "localizes all the evil of the universe in the Jew."[24] Wars and class struggle then do not exist because of nation states or exploitative social relations, but because of a Jewish conspiracy. Antisemitism is an ideology of redemption. The Jew is a metaphysical principle, standing for everything evil. In the antisemitic worldview, according to Sartre, the inalienable qualities of the Jew are the expression of a "metaphysical essence."[25] Racial antisemitism "came later" and is nothing but a "slender scientific coating of this primitive conviction."[26] The Jew acts on the principle "*to do evil* under all circumstances, even though he thereby destroys himself." This principle is paradoxical because, on the one hand, the Jew should possess this quality as something inalienable, substantial, and non-modifiable, but on the other hand, since he is hated ("one does not hate natural phenomena like earthquakes and plagues"), he should bear responsibility for it, i.e., he should do this evil out of freedom. The Jew is thus free, but only free to do evil.[27] "Strange freedom," Sartre writes, "which instead of preceding and constituting the essence, remains subordinate to it."[28]

In the antisemitic delusion, the Jew has a choice and yet has no choice, he is responsible and yet his evil is innate, his existence precedes his essence and vice versa. To Sartre, there is only one being to whom these qualities can be attributed, "only one creature, to my knowledge, who is thus totally free and yet chained to evil; that is the Spirit of Evil himself, Satan."[29] The will of the Jew/Satan wills only evil. In modern antisemitism, the Jew is no longer the messenger or son of the devil, he is the devil, pure evil,[30] responsible for all evils ("crises, wars, famines, upheavals and revolts"),[31] which necessarily demands a redemptive antisemitism. If evil in the form of the Jews was destroyed, "harmony will be reestablished of itself." For this negative task, "there is no question of building a new society, but only of purifying the one which exists." For "if all he has to do is to remove Evil, that means that the Good is already *given*." Instead of fighting against institutions, one fights against other persons, which for Sartre makes antisemitism a "safety valve for the owning classes,"[32] who thus encourage it.

The antisemite flees from the freedom, responsibility, and uncertainty that characterizes seeking, choosing, carrying through, testing, and revising the good; he "has cast his lot for Evil so as not to have to cast his lot for Good."[33] At the same time, he maintains a persecutory innocence,[34] he is a "criminal in a good cause."[35] He imagines himself threatened, defending his people against the evil attacks of "Jewish parasites." His evil deeds are necessary, meaningful work,[36] a duty, evil only to hinder evil, thus good. He has "found a means of sating [his murderous instincts] without admitting it to himself."[37]

All of these observations by Sartre, only hinted at here, aim at further determining the situation in which the antisemitic choice is made. An authoritarian and

projective form of conflict prevention and apparent coping with social and individual crisis phenomena comes to the fore here. This often remains rhapsodic, merely descriptive and articulated in contradictory ways. Thus, as the formulation of the "safety valve" shows, there are some elements of a manipulation-based theory of antisemitism, but there are also vulgar materialist passages[38] in which workers are declared to be largely immune to antisemitism because of their position in the production process.[39] If one does not approach Sartre's essay with Critical Theory, one will also wonder why, at the end, communism is presented as a solution to the antisemitism question. This passage is interesting precisely because here he moves away from the existential-ontological argument without falling into determinism. Since the antisemite "exists as a free agent in a situation," writes Sartre, "it is his situation that must be modified from top to bottom." But one cannot directly "attack [the] freedom" of the antisemite and influence it oneself, one can only "change the perspectives of choice" by changing the situation, such that "freedom decides on other bases, and in terms of other structures." Here the social dimension of antisemitism becomes clearer. Apparently, the antisemite does not simply flee from his abstract human condition, but from the precariousness of a certain situation. The hatred of Jews "is a passionate effort to realize a national union against the division of society into classes."[40] But the "divisions continue to exist, since their economic and social causes have not been touched" upon by nationalism. Thus, "an attempt is made to lump them all together into a single one," a single division that allows people to stop criticizing society as such and to refrain from taking responsibility for change: the division "between Jew and non-Jew." According to Sartre, "antisemitism is

a mythical, bourgeois representation of the class struggle," and "it could not exist in a classless society," since "it is for the Jews *also* that we shall make the revolution."[41]

Existentialist	Social-Theoretical
Existentialist freedom of the will	Private autonomous freedom of action Socially generated powerlessness
↓	↓
Anguish as consciousness of freedom	Fear of freedom
↓	↓
Bad faith as choice of irrationality	Flight from freedom as irrational coping mechanism
↓	↓
Mystical concept of immovable property or nation	Collective narcissism Inalienable national qualities
↓	↓
Projection of inner conflicts onto Jews	Projection of inner conflicts onto Jews

We Have (No) Choice

At a crucial point in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre speaks of antisemitism as "a free and total choice of oneself,"[42] namely the choice of a specific type of "bad faith" or disingenuous mode of existence. In order to understand this correctly, we must first examine more closely the concepts of freedom, choice, and bad faith, all of which are most fully developed in Sartre's magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*. As already indicated, the thesis that the antisemite chooses his mode of existence has often been misunderstood or not fully thought through. Within the scant reception of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, there is the impression that Sartre's decisionist approach affirms the moral responsibility and free decision of the perpetrators. But as I will demonstrate below, given the paradoxes of Sartre's unsurpassed decisionist conception of freedom, this impression is misleading. Sartre's categories are unfortunately not suitable (or only to a very limited extent) for filling in the subjective gap in the theory of antisemitism.

Condemned to Freedom

Sartre chooses to access freedom through nothingness. According to him, nothingness comes into the world through human existence. Questioning or searching contains the possibility of nothingness—a negative answer to the question about the existence of things, a not finding of the friend sought, a not knowing, a negation by determination, etc. This nothingness does not arise from the comparison of two affirmative judgements; for example, by comparing "I expected to find 100 euros in my wallet" with "there are 20

euros in my wallet" to "there are *not* 100 euros, *only* 20." Yet, instead of arguments for these claims in Sartre's text, one finds merely flowery language and incomprehensible metaphors. For Sartre, nothingness ("nihilation," negation) indicates freedom because it cannot arise from "psychic and positive events, affirmative judgments."[43] Questioning is only possible through a distance to immediate being and its non-reflective perception, through a reflective anticipation. On the other hand, being-in-itself is full positivity. Through questioning, the human being "is not subject to the causal order of the world."[44]

The given is always just there, but the judgement of a fact can be positive or negative—there is a choice. Negation thus does not exist in being-in-itself, for this cannot cause an act of negation. This act is therefore absolutely free. Freedom is the "perpetual mode of detachment from what is,"[45] "self-detachment,"[46] is thus radically negatively determined. For Sartre, the human being is never a merely positive being (in-itself), but is always at a reflexive distance to itself and to the world; the human being is a being-for-itself. According to Ulrich Pothast, Sartre's inference from nothingness to freedom, that is, from the nihilating activity of consciousness to the condition that supposedly underlies this activity,[47] is based on disregarding the distinction "between intentional act and its object."[48] Indeed, Sartre correlates "psychic and positive events" and "affirmative judgements"[49] without further ado. The "category of the not," however, is not a category that "exists *in fact in* the mind and is a positive and concrete process to brace and systematize our knowledge, [which] is suddenly released by the presence in us of certain affirmative judgments." Rather, it is a "refusal of existence."[50] Pothast, on the other hand, argues that even "imagining a non-being" is a psychological "act like others (and in this sense an event like others),"[51] even if the content of the act of

thinking contains a negation. In addition, the expectation, by which the "non-occurrence of the expected" is experienced as a lack, is "generated by a series of similar events, and if anything is a case of causality, then this one is."[52]

For Sartre, being free does not mean being one's own ground , i.e., having chosen the possibility of choosing and negating. This would lead to infinite regression: being free to choose one's own freedom (or unfreedom) presupposes freedom of choice. The free choice of freedom would then have to be freely chosen again, and so on. "If, therefore, freedom is defined as the escape from the given, from fact, then there is a *fact* of escape from fact."[53] Man is thus constitutively unfree in two ways. He is a merely contingent existence, groundless, there not by his own decision. Moreover, he is there in the mode of being free, which he likewise did not freely choose; i.e., he is "condemned to be free."[54] When Sartre says, "man is nothing other than what he makes himself,"[55] he does not mean that man is omnipotent and originally self-positing. Man neither originally posits the physical and social conditions into which he is born (although he can try to change them), nor does he choose to be free. He has to decide independently of these conditions and of every condition (or rule), he has to question and define himself. Defining here means that one can affirm or negate what is given. This affirmation/negation is groundless, i.e., not causally determined, thus free (detached from being as positivity). This is the meaning of the phrase, existence precedes essence.

Sartre identifies the "philosophical concept of freedom" with freedom of will. Freedom is not freedom of action, i.e., "the ability to obtain the ends chosen." In other words, "[s]uccess is not important to freedom," since freedom "means only autonomy of

choice."[56] Freedom is freedom to affirm/negate a state of affairs without being in turn determined by a state of affairs. The choice is indeed only an attitude to an existing condition. It can, however, indirectly change this existing condition, since, for example, only the attitude of the prisoner to no longer want to sit in prison but rather flee can motivate an act of escape, whereas resignation cannot do so. Freedom of choice not only means the spontaneity of consciousness in the sense of the absence of empirical/psychological determinants, as in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, but also the absence of all given criteria of decision. It thus means groundless freedom: "we apprehend our choice—i.e., ourselves—as *unjustifiable*. This means that we apprehend our choice as not deriving from any prior reality." Choice entails the "gratuitous determination of the for-itself by itself."[57] That is, Sartre lacks a positive concept of freedom of will, as formulated by Kant with the determinacy of the self-given moral law. In Kant's understanding, a free will determined neither by natural laws nor by intelligible moral laws is nothing, "an absurdity."[58]

Bad Faith as a Mode of Escape

The consciousness of one's own freedom, which, according to Sartre, is identical to groundlessness, godlessness, and the absence of justification by the given, causes anguish as an existential experience. There is a factual given, but my attitude to it is not given. I have to first develop my own criteria for evaluating this given out of nothing, in every second anew, without the previous decision necessitating the following one.

Because it is determined purely negatively, freedom means being subject at any moment to a groundless decision without any criteria:

> Vertigo is anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over. . . . I *am* not the self which I will be. First I am not that self because time separates me from it. Secondly, I am not that self because what I am is not the foundation of what I will be. Finally I am not that self because no actual existent can determine strictly what I am going to be. . . . Anguish is precisely my consciousness of being my own future, in the mode of not-being. . . . If nothing compels me to save my life, nothing prevents me from precipitating myself into the abyss. The decisive conduct will emanate from a self which I am not yet.[59]

Freedom is the being of consciousness (for-itself), anguish is the being of consciousness of freedom. Anguish, by definition, is directed towards the indeterminate. According to Sartre, however, the indeterminate par excellence is my freedom, my specifically human mode of being. In anguish, one grasps the "the total inefficacy of the past resolution," the permanent abyss between being and consciousness, between positivity and decision/freedom. There is no binding force of past decisions or criteria. At every moment, they must be reaffirmed and revalidated, "*ex nihilo* and freely."[60] Through his freedom, man is cut off from his past (being) and his future (ego). The self, in "the perpetual mode of detachment from what is,"[61] is not a constant ego, but an *empty point of decision*.

Anguish is also "ethical anguish," for freedom is the "unfounded foundation" of values.[62] One does not decide *on the basis* of criteria, but *for* criteria.[63] "It follows that my freedom is the unique foundation of values and that nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value."[64] The existence of moral foundations does not determine my recognition of them. I decide on the should/should not (validity/invalidity of a commandment) without any criteria to guide or authorize me. I can never invoke the instructions of an external authority or given rule because *I* have to decide that this is a moral/good/right one. My own decision therefore gives the instructions its value, and this decision cannot be avoided: "[i]f a voice speaks to me, it is always I who must decide whether or not this is the voice of an angel; if I regard a certain course of action as good, it is I who will choose to say that it is good, rather than bad." Something is good then, if and because I want it that way. I cannot claim that I want it because it is good in itself, since "there can no longer be any *a priori* good."[65] Sartre thus opposes Kant's correlation of freedom and reason. According to Kant, positive freedom (of the will) is a non-causal necessitation of the will by the moral law.[66] Kant binds morality, reason, and freedom indissolubly together. According to Sartre, however, this would be an essence that precedes existence, and thus unfreedom.[67]

What does his thesis mean, then, that the antisemite flees from his humanity, i.e., from his freedom? In the strict sense, one cannot flee from freedom, only from the consciousness of freedom, that is, from anguish. But the anguish always remains: "I must think of it constantly in order to take care not to think of it." Hence, for Sartre, "the flight from anguish is only a mode of becoming conscious of anguish. Thus anguish, properly speaking, can be neither hidden nor avoided—I can in fact wish "not to see" a

certain aspect of my being only if I am acquainted with the aspect which I do not wish to see."[68]

In "bad faith," one decides to be in anguish in the form of not being in it. That is, bad faith presupposes freedom (as the source of anguish); it is nihilating behavior against nihilating behavior. *In bad faith, one lives as if the theory of human determinism, for example, by "race, blood and soil," is right, although one knows that it is wrong.* Sartre criticizes the attempt of psychoanalysis to dissolve the paradox of bad faith, that is, "the coexistence . . . of two contradictory, complementary structures which reciprocally imply and destroy each other."[69] But the ability to hide something from myself "means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived."[70] Psychoanalysis cannot solve this problem, because the division into consciousness and unconsciousness cannot explain repression, resistance, or the censor itself.[71]

But even sincerity, the admission of what one "is" (now as "character"), is just another mode of bad faith. Both try to make the human being into a being-in-itself: "[t]he man who confesses that he is evil has exchanged his disturbing 'freedom-for-evil' for an inanimate character of evil."[72] He discovers in himself drives, inclinations, a character, without considering that these can only take effect through his free choice.

How is bad faith possible for Sartre? There are three dimensions of the "*weltanschauung* of bad faith":

1) The person in bad faith first decides upon "the nature of truth" in the sense of "not to demand too much, to count itself satisfied when it is barely persuaded, to force itself in decisions to adhere to uncertain truths."[73] Does that mean that there are only

"barely convinced" antisemites? Daniel Goldhagen also poses this question to Sartre and sharply rejects the construction of antisemitism as a mode of "bad faith."[74] If one follows Goldhagen, then Sartre here employs the anachronistic and rationalizing tendency of declaring it impossible for antisemitism to be a firm conviction of human beings. In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, there is a different representation of the antisemite's bad faith: he chooses "to reason falsely" because of his "longing for impenetrability." The rational man knows that his truths are never final and can always be called into question. He could undergo new experiences that challenge his views. The antisemite, on the other hand, is terrified by the form of truth, by the process of "indefinite approximation," of life "in continual suspension." He searches for firm, innate opinions, "attracted by the durability of the stone."[75] Only by letting oneself be determined by one's passions can one permanently curb reason and experience. What remains, however, is the idea that irrationality is a choice (mind you, not an irrational choice), indeed, that the antisemite "delights in acting in bad faith." In other words, "[n]ever believe that anti-Semites are completely unaware of the absurdity of their replies. ['I hate Jews because a Jewish furrier robbed me' etc.] They know that their remarks are frivolous, open to challenge."[76] The antisemite is "not" impervious to reason and experience "because his conviction is strong. Rather his conviction is strong because he has chosen first of all to be impervious."[77] Hence, if I choose to reason wrongly, then of course I have no obvious "strong convictions" which guide me in my judgments and make me take the objectively false for the true. No, I have always looked spellbound at the truth.[78]

2) Whoever previously believed that the choice of bad faith was a conscious (reflected) self-deception is mistaken. Suddenly, Sartre says that "there is no question of a reflective, voluntary decision" to act in bad faith, "but of a spontaneous determination of our being." What this means is not made clearer by Sartre's example of *putting oneself* in bad faith "as one goes to sleep."

3) Finally, and related to the previous point, is the idea that one is in bad faith "as one dreams." It is "as difficult to get out of" the mode of being in bad faith "as to wake oneself up."[79] Here, Sartre refers to the inertia of this mode of being, which Harald Welzer—without mentioning Sartre—also points out in the context of the behavior of perpetrators and followers. People tend to retain fundamental decisions they had made about behavior in certain situations.[80]

According to the basic philosophical categories of Sartre's main work (*Being and Nothingness*), the thesis that the antisemite flees from freedom can only be interpreted existentially-ontologically. It is out of anguish towards my future self, my future decisions, and my absolute ontological groundlessness that *I bring myself* to perform the strange spectacle of bad faith for myself, where I try to hide the fact of my freedom from myself.[81] Sartre's categories here are still completely ahistorical and unsocial. For whatever reason, the flight from freedom is understood as a reaction to the unbearable freedom of will, a freedom of which I must therefore also be immediately certain. Sartre even speaks of the "evidence of freedom."[82] This evidence is contested in and by means of bad faith.[83] Moreover, the status of the choice of bad faith is completely unclear. On the one hand, in contrast to psychoanalysis, bad faith is interpreted as a conscious self-deception ("I must know in my capacity as deceiver the

truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived"[84]); on the other hand, this choice seems to just happen to us ("no question of a reflective, voluntary decision)."[85] Sartre's concept of choice ultimately moves in this latter direction, as will be shown below.

Action and Choice

Sartre is a philosopher of praxis. However, the praxis he is concerned with above all is not the spatio-temporal praxis of freedom of action, but rather choice, the praxis of freedom of will.

Actions for Sartre are in principle intentional; the condition for action is a desideratum, a lack, called "*négatité*." The realization of a lack presupposes a project. A house is built only if a concept of the house is given as a "*desirable* and not yet realized possible."[86] Action implies a double negation: first, a distance from the given and the positing of a non-being (utopia/plan/project); second, the consideration of the given from this non-being as a lack. Sartre puts forward the thesis that the intolerability of a situation as a motive for action is the result of our evaluation of the situation on the basis of a project. No "factual state," whether social structure or psychological condition, "is capable by itself of motivating any act whatsoever."[87] This is because the in-itself only refers to itself, not to a non-being from which the situation could be experienced as a lack, which in turn is a condition for the motivation to act.

Since the project cannot proceed from being-in-itself, it can only happen out of pure freedom, which implies "the permanent possibility of effecting a rupture with its

own past, of wrenching itself away from its past so as to be able to consider it in the light of a non-being."[88] Every action is thus motivated, according to Sartre, but the emergence of a motive presupposes a spontaneous act of evaluation. In short: 1) descriptive recording of the situation; 2) project of a concept of how it could be otherwise; 3) comparison with the situation, which is thus experienced as a lack; and, 4) experience of lack as motive for changing the situation.

Only the absolute free consciousness lends a facticity to the value of a cause/motive. The situation, for example, of the worker and his resulting "sufferings" seem to him "*natural*: they are, that is all." Sartre thus thinks it necessary "to reverse common opinion" and acknowledge that it is not "the harshness of a situation or the sufferings it imposes that are motives for us to conceive of another state of affairs in which things would be better for everybody; on the contrary, it is from the day that we can conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our suffering and that we *decide* that these are unbearable" (translation modified).[89]

This decision must therefore be strictly unmotivated. But that is completely absurd. The term "suffering" alone indicates a pre-reflexive form of the experience of lack. This may not motivate revolutionary action—in this respect, Sartre is right—but it can at least motivate other actions (individual attempts at improvement/adapting to the labor market/reformist action). Ultimately, Sartre must also acknowledge that human action is motivated by passions. These, however, are suddenly endowed with the quality of "autonomy," since they "posit ends."[90] Thus, to maintain the claim that the in-itself does not exhibit negativity, Sartre paradoxically reinterprets affective action as autonomous action.[91] But it now remains a mystery how one can uphold the claim that

any positing of an end is the result of an absolutely free choice ("Human reality can not receive its ends, as we have seen, either from outside or from a so-called inner 'nature.' It chooses them.")[92]

According to Sartre, human actions are fundamentally inexplicable. If they could be explained, there would be no such thing as radical freedom. But there remains the possibility of understanding action through existential hermeneutics. This operates with a regressive-progressive method: action has motives and subordinate ends, but these are constituted by an initial project and can only be understood through it. A "hierarchy of interpretations"[93] or ends exists in the action to be understood. Actions presuppose subordinate ends and motives which presuppose deeper ones and become understandable from them. In this "regressive psychoanalysis,"[94] we proceed from the subordinate ends to the deeper ones "until we encounter the meaning which does not imply any other meaning and which refers only to itself."[95] By a "synthetic progression one re-descends from this ultimate possible to the considered act and grasps its integration in the total form."[96] Actions are thus not without ground, they even have a final ground. This free project of a non-being, a possibility, however, "is not 'self-explanatory.'"[97] The subordinate ends and means (deeds) receive their meaning from this project (by subsumption into the totality, which is unified by the original end).

These actions and purposes are meaningfully adequate (as one can say with Max Weber)[98] in relation to the initial project, but they are by no means necessary. First of all, there exists the possibility of choosing indifferent possibilities within a totality of meaning, i.e., ends which are irrelevant to the overall structure. As an example, Sartre mentions the alteration of details that are irrelevant to a figure when looking at it. There

is thus a variability of ends internal to the project, the choice of which cannot be understood from the standpoint of the meaningful whole. Secondly, modifying the initial project is "always possible," as well as meaningfully inadequate action (relative to the previous project). But this modification of the initial project is itself groundless, "*unjustifiable.*"[99] Suffering from a project or its consequences cannot be the motive for its negation. Motives, according to Sartre, always exist only within a project. If I negate the project and its consequences for myself, I am already beyond this project in another meaningful whole. If I am still in the old project, then my motives are related only to it, accordingly, as means of its realization, not its abolition. Here, too, an immanent negation is completely excluded and only an abrupt leap from one project to another is conceivable.

In order to understand this better, Sartre's theory of action can be summarized as such:

1) human being *is* action. Its characteristics are only given as a "unity of behaviors,"[100] not in the form of things;

2) the determinants of action are also the result of actions—making choices/creating projects/positing ends;

3) the intention as definiens of action is characterized by surpassing a situation. Drives/motives of action exist only from ends. These cannot be posited by the in-itself (consciousness of something), which is fixated only on itself and its givenness. Only breaking with the given (nihilation) makes the intention possible: positing ends (projects for my possibilities) and appreciating (the situation from this project). Consciousness/freedom posits these final ends that give meaning to the world and

constitute action. It admittedly refers to the in-itself (consciousness of something), but is not conditioned by the given. It "exists as the disengagement from a certain existing given and as an engagement toward a certain not yet existing end;"[101]

4) the freedom of consciousness, since it cannot be grasped from the given, exists as unconditional action (choice). The final end, which enables the intention that defines the action, is not conditioned by anything else. It is chosen without any reason. This groundless "choice made without base of support and dictating its own causes to itself,"[102] this action which makes actions possible, is not a weighing of motives/drives, but the very basis for the existence of evaluative criteria and motives. According to Sartre, "a reflective decision in relation to certain ends" always takes place "within the compass of motives and ends already posited by the for-itself."[103] The *reflective* choice occurs within a project produced by an initial spontaneous choice, "an earlier and more spontaneous choice than what is known as 'will,'"[104] and thus "not something over which we have any control."[105] The original project first creates a mode of being, a universe of meanings and possibilities between which we then consciously choose, for example, the antisemitic universe, within which certain options for action emerge for the antisemite. A mode of being is a basic attitude towards oneself, life in general, and others,[106] and since it is "not an object of my reflective consciousness," this means that "I am, so to speak, the victim of my own choice of being."[107]

This choice is not unconscious, but "non-thetic," whatever that means. Consciousness *is* choice, but it is not analytically graspable. We can "apprehend it only by living it."[108] However, Sartre writes, "if the fundamental project is fully experienced by the subject and hence wholly conscious, that certainly does not mean that it must by the

same token be *known* by him." For he still lacks the "instruments and techniques necessary" to "fix [the choice] by concepts."[109]

According to Sartre's decisionism, the values which count as criteria for a desirable way of life result from a radical choice (i.e., "a choice which is not grounded in any reasons") as Charles Taylor notes: "[f]or to the extent that a choice is grounded in reasons, these are simply taken as valid and are not themselves chosen."[110] For Sartre, it is only through the choice that "all reasons come into being."[111] Man "must choose without reference to any preestablished values."[112] But, as Taylor rightly states, this position is "deeply incoherent."[113] A radical choice that depends neither on strong nor weak evaluations (i.e., pre-established criteria) and only creates them as such, is a "criteria-less leap which can not properly be described as choice at all."[114] The agent of such a choice would be "utterly without identity . . . a kind of extensionless point,"[115] his "choice" an unintentional fall or a "willful . . . simulation of a random generator."[116] Sartre's "I," afraid of plunging into the abyss at any moment,[117] is not a subject that could accept responsibility, but a cork floating on the sea of random decision-making. Sartre's "promised total self-possession," as Taylor aptly puts it, "would in fact be the most total self-loss."[118] The radical choice between alternative evaluations "is quite conceivable, but not a radical choice *of* such evaluations" without recourse to any values or given desires.[119] No weighing would be possible here, unless one considers it possible to weigh without scales. Even if Sartre wants to deny it, in this case anyone would act without any reason.

Again, we end up with a concept of choice that defies what is reasonably understood to be a conscious act for which one can be held responsible.[120] Thus, the

view that Sartre's analysis of the total and free choice of the antisemitic mode of being allows for imputability is at least questionable, if not completely misguided.[121] For if my "own" choice cannot be explained to me or justified by reasons, then it is in no sense under my control, nor can it be ascribed to me. It is rather an "*impersonal* spontaneity,"[122] as Sartre puts it elsewhere. But even if such a choice were attributable, as a kind of cynical bad faith, doubts about this interpretation would still be warranted. All that would remain is the claim that antisemites themselves do not really believe in the truth of their worldview, which only instrumentally serves them for overcoming their "existential" anguish.

These admittedly provisional suggestions are not meant to imply a deterministic view of human actions, especially in relation to antisemitic acts of terror. One thing is certain, however: the Shoah was not a reflex, not an act of nature, and certainly not something that was perpetrated on Jews by accident–the Nazis and their helpers knew exactly what they were doing. For the extermination of the Jews to become a reality, it was first of all (but not only) necessary to accept the antisemitic ideology, i.e., the belief that killing Jews was meaningful work that had to be done. Why this seemed meaningful to these people can be explored with the help of Moishe Postone's work, Horkheimer and Adorno's *Elements of Anti-Semitism*, Fromm's theory of the authoritarian character, and many of the pertinent insights in Sartre's essay. Sartre's existentialist theory of the subject and theory of action, however, do not shed much light on this terrible process.

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[1] Tjark Kunstreich, "Mit 'Israelkritik' gegen Antizionismus," in *Prodomo. Zeitschrift in eigener Sache* No. 13 (2010): 11.

[2] I call this a 'critical' theory of antisemitism in order to make clear that Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* is fundamentally different from approaches that treat modern antisemitism either as a purely marginal phenomenon, like a secondary contradiction of capitalism, or those that want to derive it positivistically from real conflicts between a Jewish minority and a social majority. Anyone who has even rudimentarily dealt with the research on Nazi perpetrators since the 1990s will recognize that many of the insights made by Sartre almost 50 years earlier have now been painstakingly and gradually confirmed, including: the independence of antisemitism from experience (Goldhagen); its character as a cultural code (Volkov) which articulates the central conflicts of modernity in a perverted way and tries to pathologically resolve them in the form of redemptive antisemitism (Friedländer); its Manichaean and nationalist elements (Holz/Haury); the eliminatory dimension of the 'democratic' view of the Jew (Goldhagen), and much more.

[3] Thus, Enzo Traverso equates Sartre's concept of the authentic Jew and Zionism with antisemitic "notions of the unassimilable character of the Jew," Enzo Traverso,

Auschwitz denken. Die Intellektuellen und die Shoah (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000), 317. But Sartre does not claim this anywhere. Sartre is rather concerned with how Jews can defend themselves in the situation of an antisemitic threat (and its denial by liberals and leftists). Since the Jew has "passionate enemies and passionless defenders" (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* [New York: Shocken, 1976], 52), he must defend himself: "[t]he authentic Jew abandons the myth of the universal man." He "wills himself into history as a historic and damned creature; he ceases to run away from himself and to be ashamed of his own kind . . . he knows that he is one who stands apart, untouchable, scorned, proscribed, and it is *as such* that he asserts his being" (98-99). He sees the world of humanity "fragmented by irrational divisions" and begins his struggle against it starting from his side, his part of the world, his situation—"he is what he makes himself" (99). Later, however, Sartre openly argued as an anti-Zionist, albeit in a more moderate variant than his contemporaries.

[4] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 11.

[5] Leszek Kolakowski argued in a similar way in 1956: "[antisemitism] cannot be confronted with arguments: it is inevitably associated with the type of reaction to which arguments, as a way of thinking, are foreign and inimical. . . . This is clear to anyone who has had occasion to conduct hopeless discussions with an anti-Semite—an activity that always resembles trying teach a foreign language to an animal." Leszek Kolakowski, "Anti-Semites: Five Familiar Theses and a Warning," in A. Michnik/A. Marczyk (eds.), *Against Anti-Semitism: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Polish Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 144. In contrast, Enzo Traverso insists that Sartre's emphasis on passion misjudges the objective-modern character of the

Shoah (Traverso, *Auschwitz denken*, 310). Here, Traverso mistakes a weakness of Sartre's *presentation* for a systematic lack of *analysis*. Emphasizing the emotional matrix of antisemitism does not reduce it to a simple pogrom antisemitism, and neither is it refuted by a supposed "antisemitism of reason." The "antisemitism of reason" is first of all a tactical maneuver to distinguish "scientific" antisemites from mere "belly anti-Semites." Klaus Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus. Wissenssoziologie einer Weltanschauung.* Neuausgabe (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010), 370-372. Moreover, the passionate source of antisemitism by no means implies that the Nazi perpetrators were "abnormal" sadists, as Sarte is accused of believing by Traverso.

[6] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 7, 11.

[7] Ibid., 8.

[8] A wealth of such false empirical "explanations" of antisemitic attitudes can be found in Hannah Arendt's book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* "Since the Restoration," Arendt writes, for example, about nineteenth century France, "the House of Rothschild played the role of state banker in France, so that from then on everything that was anti-monarchical and republican became necessarily antisemitic as well." Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft.* 6th edition (München: Piper, 1998), 124; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1994), 47. Fabian Kettner critically remarks: "Arendt ignores the fact that experience must already have been preformed if one immediately and exclusively sees 'the Jew' in the banker. 'Experience' as such does not exist. Moreover, in the above-mentioned examples, which she has considered with great understanding, there is a stereotyping and an inference from the individual about the collective attributed to him." See Kettner, "Die

Herrschaft des Niemand. Hannah Arendts Konzept anonymer Herrschaft und seine Folgen," in I. Elbe/S. Ellmers/J. Eufinger (eds.), *Anonyme Herrschaft. Zur Struktur moderner Machtverhältnisse* (Münster: Dampfboot, 2012), 292.

[9] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 8.

[10] Samuel Salzborn, *Antisemitismus als negative Leitidee der Moderne. Sozialwissenschaftliche Theorien im Vergleich*. (Frankfurt: Campus, 2010), 74-75. Sartre writes in 1976: "In 1946 I defined the Jew as a person whom others consider a Jew. Today I would add the whole historical and cultural aspect of the Jew." Jean-Paul Sartre, "Die Ehre, die mir Jerusalem erweist", in Sartre, *Überlegungen zur Judenfrage* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994)*,* 218.

[11] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 10-11.

[12] Ibid., 38.

[13] Ibid., 48, 49.

[14] Sartre's relativization of the projection thesis is far removed from Hannah Arendt's assertion that because Jews are not a random, interchangeable scapegoat they also ceased to be merely "innocent victims." Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 6. For, of course, non-interchangeability does not mean that Christian anti-Judaism is the result of concrete experiences with Jews. Rather, factual ideological differences are taken as an opportunity to construct a phantasmagorical idea of the Jew, one supported by an alleged divine authority (the Jews as children of the devil, John 8:38-44). Thus, already in Christianity, it becomes possible for there to be hatred of Jews without any concrete Jews. See Karl-Erich Grözinger, "Die 'Gottesmörder'", in Schoeps/Schlör (eds.), *Bilder der Judenfeindschaft. Antisemitismus – Vorurteile und Mythen* (Augsburg: Bechtermünz

1999) 65-66. In *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, David Nirenberg meticulously shows this development from religious differences to the Christian demonization of Jewish "stubbornness" and "enmity"–"the Jew" ultimately becomes a pure surface projection of inner-Christian conflicts.

[15] Since the middle of the eleventh century, there has been a debate in the Catholic Church about Holy Communion. According to the doctrine of the factual transformation of bread into the body of Christ, it is claimed that the body of Christ was "crushed by the teeth of the faithful." Lateran Council of 1059, cited in Kurt Flasch, "Das Abendmahl: Ding oder Zeichen. Berengar von Tours gegen Lanfrank", in Flasch, *Kampfplätze der Philosophie. Große Kontroversen von Augustin bis Voltaire*. 2. Aufl. (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2009), 89. See also Ernst Simmel, "Anti-Semitism and Mass Psychopathology," in Simmel (ed.), *Anti-Semitism: A Social Disease* (New York: International University Press, 1946), 56-58. In Catholic tradition, however, at the beginning of the debate surrounding Holy Communion, there were quite rational criticisms of the logically contradictory core of the doctrine of transubstantiation. See Flasch, *Kampfplätze*, 89-91.

[16] Abandonment [*Verlassenheit*] is an existential-ontological category which means that man "cannot find anything to rely on—neither within nor without." (Sartre, *Existentialism*, 29). He decides alone. To choose an adviser also means nothing other than "to commit oneself" (33), since I know more or less what the priest, the doctor, etc., will advise me to do. I have to actively follow this advice, it does not determine me.

[17] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 19.

[18] See Erich Fromm, *Studien über Autorität und Familie. Sozialpsychologischer Teil,* in Fromm, *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 1 (München: DTV, 1989), 174, 177-179; Theodor W. Adorno "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in Adorno, *Critical Models* (New York: Columbia, 2005), 102.

[19] Sartre himself does not speak of freedom of will, he uses the terminology of the "will" for something else. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 442-444. In substance, however, Sartre's concept corresponds to theories of freedom of will. Philosophically speaking, there is no general agreement about the meaning of freedom of the will. See Geert Keil, *Willensfreiheit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007). Provisionally, and with regard to its radical understanding in Sartre, it is here defined as the freedom to will or not will a state in the world, to give it this or that meaning without in turn being determined by a state in the world. In contrast, freedom of action can be clearly defined as the possibility and capacity to assert or realize a will that can be taken as determinate in the world.

[20] See Hans-Ernst Schiller, "Das Individuum als singuläre Existenz: Sartres Philosophie der Befreiung", in Schiller, *Das Individuum im Widerspruch. Zur Theoriegeschichte des modernen Individualismus* (Berlin: Frank and Timme, 2006), 303. See also endnote 120 in this text.

[21] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 84.

[22] Salzborn also criticizes this. See Salzborn, *Antisemitismus als negative Leitidee*, 123. He notes that Sartre first "decouples" antisemitism "in an ontological-existentialist way from real socio-historical experiences and thereby relocates it into the unspecified essence of the antisemite." Michael Großheim also understands the flight from freedom

into the fiction of total security through something else as an attempt to cope with a purely philosophical problem. See Michael Großheim, *Politischer Existentialismus. Subjektivität zwischen Entfremdung und Engagement* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 45. In contrast to Sartre, however, he interprets this problem as the result of a misinterpretation of human subjectivity by Fichte and Romanticism, to which Sartre ultimately refers. Subjectivity as "affective involvement" (Großheim, 28) is artificially divided into an empty, self-determining ego on the one hand and a world of equally valid facts and possibilities on the other, which do not affect this ego. Großheim subsumes relations and circumstances—even experience and unquestioning identification with deeds and states of affairs—to the model of "subjectivity without any alienation" (55). But he cannot explain why the idea of an empty ego, indifferent to the world and detached from all relations, did not emerge until the nineteenth century. Or why it was not only among "artists and intellectuals" (1), but also among millions of people that a need to escape into authoritarian collectives appeared, as well as ideas of total self-annihilation. Ultimately, he has to posit a highly questionable autonomous history of ideas and their infiltration into the self-understanding of modern man.

[23] The proximity of Sartre's remarks to the theory of the *Authoritarian Personality* and the *Elements of Anti-Semitism* has also been noticed by its representatives. Theodor Adorno wrote: "There is marked similarity between the syndrome which we have labeled the authoritarian personality and 'the portrait of the anti-Semite' by Jean-Paul Sartre. . . . That his phenomenological 'portrait' should resemble so closely, both in general structure and in numerous details, the syndrome which slowly emerged from our empirical observations and quantitative analysis, seems to us remarkable." Adorno

quoted in Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 417.

[24] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 28.

[25] Ibid., 27.

[26] Ibid., 26. See also Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus von links. Kommunistische Ideologie, Nationalismus und Antizionismus in der frühen DDR* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002), 119; and, Jan Weyand, *Historische Wissenssoziologie des modernen Antisemitismus* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016).

[27] See Raphael Gross, *Anständig geblieben. Nationalsozialistische Moral* (Frankfurt/M: S. Fischer, 2010), 36: "But in order to arouse moral indignation among the viewers [of the film "Jud Süß"], the Jews in the film had to be more than just remote-controlled monsters time, they also had to have a certain freedom and capacity to suffer."

[28] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 27, 28.

[29] Ibid., 28.

[30] See Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 28-29, 35, 38-39, 41, 43.

[31] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 28.

[32] Ibid., 30, 31.

[33] Ibid., 31.

[34] On this phrase [*verfolgende Unschuld*], see Karl Kraus, *Dritte Walpurgisnacht* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 186-187: "One accuses he who tells the truth, the lie on which one was caught. One finds what one does reprehensible as soon as the other does it. You can call the 'armed attack from a safe hiding place a cowardly, common

assassination' and carry it out. What you do not want done to you, lie and do to the other."

[35] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 35.

[36] Harald Welzer, *Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden (*Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 2007), 48-49. Welzer refers to the fundamental significance of interpreting murder as meaningful work that must be done. Without this interpretation, he argues, the Shoah would not have been possible. I only mention in passing that Welzer puts forth an absurd distortion of Critical Theory—he considers it a theory of individual psychopathologies (42-43) only to reproduce the theory of the authoritarian character one-to-one at the end of his book, but without theoretical justification and without mention of Critical Theory.

[37] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 35.

[38] "Each man judges history in accordance with the profession that he follows. Shaped by the daily influence of the materials he works with, the workman sees society as the product of real forces acting in accordance with rigorous laws." (Ibid., 25).

[39] Ibid, 25-26.

[40] Ibid., 107.

[41] Ibid., 107-109.

[42] Ibid., 11.

[43] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 11.

[44] Ibid., 22, 23.

[45] Ibid., 35.

[46] Ibid., 25.

[47] See Ulrich Pothast, *Die Unzulänglichkeit der Freiheitsbeweise. Zu einigen Lehrstücken aus der neueren Geschichte von Philosophie und Recht* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), 93.

[48] Ibid., 94.

[49] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 11.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Pothast, *Freiheitsbeweise*, 94.

[52] Ibid., 95.

[53] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 485.

[54] Sartre, *Existentialism*, 29; Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 439.

[55] Sartre, *Existentialism*, 22.

[56] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 483. Herbert Marcuse criticizes Sartre, stating that the free subject is no longer the starting point for the rational determination and appropriation of the world, but the last refuge and expression of liberal ideology in the midst of totalitarian conditions. The free choice between enslavement and death, one of Sartre's favorite examples in *Being and Nothingness*, is a vanishing point and anchor of absolute spontaneity without spatio-temporal freedom of movement. Sartre thus correlates freedom with death, not with a successful life. In fact, Sartre quite cynically admits that Jews could have violated the prohibitions of the Nazi regime at any time if only they did not care so much about their lives (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 524). See Herbert Marcuse, "Existentialism: Remarks on Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'etre et le Neant*", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 8.3 (1948): 322-323.

[57] Ibid., 464, 465.

[58] Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," in *Kant Practical Philosophy*. Mary Gregor, ed. and tran. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 446.

[59] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 29, 32.

[60] Ibid., 33.

[61] Ibid., 35.

62 Ibid., 38.

[63] Here Sartre radicalizes the problem of the decision in situations of moral dilemmas into a decisionistic ethics (Sartre, *Existentialism*, 30-31). He is right that an ethics of duty like that of Kant either ignores moral dilemmas or leaves the individual helpless in them. However, it is a completely different question as to whether, with Sartre, one must think of moral action in principle not from the rule but from the exception (which, of course, is not so rare in modern societies) and whether one can postulate a criterionless decision for criteria.

[64] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 38.

[65] Sartre, *Existentialism*, 26, 28.

[66] See Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Practical Reason," in *Kant Practical Philosophy*. Mary Gregor, ed. and tran. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5:29, 5:33.

[67] Sartre thus criticizes what Leonhard Creuzer, a shrewd contemporary of Kant, called "intelligible fatalism." Leonhard Creuzer, "Skeptische Betrachtungen über die Freiheit des Willens", in R. Bittner/K. Cramer, eds., *Materialien zu Kants "Kritik der praktischen Vernunft"* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 282. This implies the identification of freedom with morality, whereby immoral action would consequently be unfree action (279). This

tendency is clearly present in Kant. In the Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant emphasizes that "freedom can never be located in a rational subject's being able to choose in opposition to his (lawgiving) reason." Immanuel Kant, "The Metaphysics of Morals," in *Kant Practical Philosophy*. Mary Gregor, ed. and tran. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6:226). Therefore, "only freedom in relation to the internal lawgiving of reason is really an ability; the possibility of deviating from it is an inability" (6:227). But Kant also revises this assessment and tends more and more towards decisionism. For a criticism of Kant's incompatible theories of freedom (i.e. his intellectualist and decisionist views), see Samuel Klar, *Moral und Politik bei Kant. Eine Untersuchung zu Kants praktischer und politischer Philosophie im Ausgang der "Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft"* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), 67-80. Klar's arguments against decisionism are thus also relevant for Sartre.

[68] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 43.

[69] Ibid., 54.

[70] Ibid., 49.

[71] Ibid., 52-53.

[72] Ibid., 75.

[73] Ibid., 68.

[74] See Daniel J. Goldhagen*, A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 18-19. Goldhagen rejects Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* due to its alleged lack of factual basis. He does not realize how much his own axioms for research on antisemitism (Goldhagen, *Willing*

Executioners, 39-41.) have in common with Sartre's approach—how much they had been anticipated by Sartre.

[75] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 12. Hannah Arendt also emphasizes that the "longing" for "the most rigid, fantastically fictitious consistency of an ideology" which "transcend[s], the elements of reality, of verifiable experiences" is a hallmark of the totalitarian attitude (Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 352, 362). However, Arendt associates this longing for a rigid "fictitious world" (362) with socio-historical conditions, the "essential homelessness" of a world whose "accidental, incomprehensible aspects" the masses "can no longer bear," (352) a world which has thoroughly atomized them. This is reminiscent of Fromm's thesis of the escape from negative freedom.

[76] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew, 13.*

[77] Ibid., 14.

[78] There seems to be no room here for a concept of necessarily false consciousness, which—one must say over and over again—does *not* imply that people are *determined* to hold incorrect views of reality. Sartre therefore cannot take into account how a reified consciousness, shaped by everyday experiences with capitalist forms of wealth, could be a source (albeit not the only one) of antisemitic attitudes. In contrast, the strength of Postone's work lies in its ideology-critical perspective. See Moishe Postone, "Anti-semitism and National Socialism, *New German Critique* 19, Special Issue 1: Germans and Jews (Winter 1980), 97-115.

[79] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 68.

[80] See Welzer, *Täter*, 59-60.

[81] It is questionable whether the phrase "*my* decisions" makes any sense at all for the unconnected decision points. Because "I" am supposedly not the same "I" who decides in the next second.

[82] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 40.

[83] Arthur C. Danto criticizes Sartre from another angle. According to him, absolute freedom is a reflective cognition, or, at least, conjecture that by no means denotes evidence. Thus, people could certainly believe in determinism "without ever having known or thought otherwise." Arthur C. Danto, *Jean-Paul Sartre* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1975), 79. Consider, for example, a medieval Christian raised with a belief in the Augustinian doctrine of grace or a 5 year old Palestinian child raised by members of Hamas. Although their attempts to become a mere object of divine will or of pure national identity may be doomed to failure, they would nevertheless not be an expression of bad faith in the Sartrean sense.

[84] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 49.

[85] Ibid., 68.

[86] Ibid., 433, 434.

[87] Ibid., 435.

[88] Ibid., 436.

[89] Ibid., 435, 434-435.

[90] Ibid. 443.

[91] Sartre wants to discover the structure of being-for-itself in affect. For a critical view, see Jürgen Hengelbrock, *Jean-Paul Sartre. Freiheit als Notwendigkeit* (München: Karl Alber Verlag, 1989), 124. According to Hengelbrock, affect is anything but autonomous.

It is rather (to say with Kant) an expression of a pathological affection. Hengelbrock writes that if one wants to describe this quality of affect—fleeing a state of affairs—as autonomy, then one must also absurdly "grant autonomy to the plant," since it too turns its leaves towards the light to "negate" a state of affairs.

[92] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 443.

[93] Ibid., 457.

[94] Ibid., 460.

[95] Ibid., 457.

[96] Ibid., 460.

[97] Ibid., 448.

[98] Max Weber, *Economy and Society*. Keith Tribe, ed. and tran. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 88.

[99] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 463, 464.

[100] Ibid., 476.

[101] Ibid., 478.

[102] Ibid., 479.

[103] Ibid., 443, 444. "What we usually understand by 'will' is a conscious decision that most of us take after we have made ourselves what we are." See Sartre, *Existentialism*, 23.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Danto, *Sartre*, 71.

[106] Recall here Sartre's definition of antisemitism as a "conception of the world" (Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 11).

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[107] Hengelbrock, *Sartre*, 135-136.

[108] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 463.

[109] Ibid., 570.

[110] Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency?" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 29.

[111] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 479.

[112] Sartre, *Existentialism*, 45.

[113] Taylor, "Human Agency," 32.

[114] Ibid., 33.

[115] Ibid., 35.

[116] Keil, *Willensfreiheit,* 173.

[117] See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 29, 31-32.

[118] Taylor, "Human Agency," 35. Sartre formulates this promise of self-possession: "[t]hus, the first step of existentialism is to put every man in possession of what he is and to entrust him with total responsibility for his existence" (translation modified). Sartre, *Existentialism*, 23.

[119] Taylor, "Human Agency," 29. Hartmut Rosa reconstructs the social-structural conditions of a capitalist "accelerating society" that are necessary to produce the idea of a "punctual self" (253) completely disconnected from the world and at the same time completely emptied, one whose freedom consists only in being torn away from everything and for whom the other human being is only the limit of his own freedom (which includes nothing except being torn away), that is, the "possible death of my possibilities." See Rosa, *Weltbeziehungen im Zeitalter der Beschleunigung. Umrisse*

einer neuen Gesellschaftskritik (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2012), 249-253. Axel Honneth also aptly notes that Sartre sees in intersubjectivity only the "struggle for the maintenance of the pure transcendence of the for-itself," or rather an "existentially reinterpreted" struggle for self-preservation of the "empty openness of a for-itself." Axel Honneth, "The Struggle for Recognition: On Sartre's Theory of Intersubjectivity," in Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 165.

[120] See also Pothast, *Freiheitsbeweise,* 100-101. Ernst Tugendhat shows how the existentialist-decisionist concept of choice flips over into total heteronomy, using Heidegger as an example. Ernst Tugendhat, *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 200-219.

[121] See Kunstreich's thesis that Sartre's theory permits a "critique of the antisemite as a subject responsible for his choice" (Kunstreich, "Israelkritik," 11).

[122] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 98.

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