

7. Sedimentation and the Grounds of Cultural Values

At the time of the existentialist offensive in 1945, as we have seen, Beauvoir and Sartre agreed on a complicated set of claims summarised in the slogan 'existence precedes essence'. They agreed that there is no human nature, no fixed set of qualities that explain human behaviour in general, and no such fixed qualities of any group of people, such as a gender or a race. They agreed that this is because no individual has a fixed personality. Rather, on their view, an individual's behaviour is explained by their 'projects', the values they pursue even though they could choose to do otherwise. Beauvoir and Sartre further agreed that someone's social context can shape their behaviour only through forming the detailed content of these projects.

They disagreed, however, on a point so fundamental that it led them to importantly different varieties of existentialism. Beauvoir held that projects become progressively sedimented, increasing in influence over cognition and experience and becoming more difficult to alter. Sartre held that projects carry no such inertia, but are sustained only by the individual continuing to pursue them. This causes two immediate problems for Sartre's theory. One concerns his insistence that 'radical freedom' allows us to abandon any project without needing any reason to do so. This seems inconsistent with the very idea of pursuing a project at all. As we saw in chapter 3, however, the rest of Sartre's existentialism remains intact if we replace this claim with the idea that any project can be abandoned for reasons grounded in another project.

Sartre's second problem is more significant. Beauvoir holds that commitment to a project consists in progressive sedimentation through reaffirmation in action. Sartre's theory has no resources to substantiate the idea of commitment to a project. Beauvoir and Sartre agree that projects structure our experience, so that the world is experienced as a set of reasons for action that reflect our values, but where Beauvoir explains this as an effect of the sedimentation, Sartre leaves entirely mysterious how choosing a value, which need not even be a conscious decision, could have this effect on our experience. This might be

considered merely an incompleteness in Sartre's phenomenology of motivation, one that could perhaps be remedied without the idea of sedimentation. However, as we will see in this chapter, Sartre's initial form of existentialism requires his cultural theory to assume a widespread and entirely unexplainable coincidence. Sartre eventually came to accept the idea of sedimentation, as we will see, and the development of his cultural theory suggests that this is why he did so.

1. Two Varieties of Existentialism

We can see clearly the difference between Beauvoir's variety of existentialism and Sartre's variety in *Being and Nothingness* in the ways they each adapt the Freudian idea of an inferiority complex. This is central to Beauvoir's account of the origins of gender in *The Second Sex*, as we saw in chapter 5. The idea that boys are superior to girls, men superior to women, is instilled in boys and girls by their being offered different opportunities, encouraged to do different things, praised for different things, and discouraged from different things. The resulting difference in physical abilities is an aspect of Beauvoir's theory that has since been emphasised and developed (Young 1980; Chisholm 2008). Beauvoir's emphasis, however, is on the ambitions, interests, preferences, values, and self-image that are fostered in girls. It is this socialisation that, on her view, results in women having a sense of inferiority to men. Sartre, on the other hand, treats the inferiority complex entirely as a project that some individuals freely choose: the project of attempting to establish that one is by nature inferior structures one's experience, as we saw in chapter 5, so that one seems genuinely to be pursuing goals that one is in fact aiming to fail to achieve.

It might seem that this contrast merely reflects the fact that Beauvoir focuses on explaining the origins of a set of characteristics common to a group of people, whereas Sartre is focused here on the origins of an individual's character. It might seem that these differing theoretical contexts simply produce different conceptions of the inferiority complex. But this would miss the deeper point that Sartre's initial form of existentialism could not accommodate Beauvoir's analysis of the origins of common characteristics of social groups. On his view, social meanings can shape one's outlook only through being internalised into the projects one has freely chosen and can abandon. If you are categorised as a member of an inferior group, for example, then this social context needs to be taken into account in the ways you pursue your values, but it cannot shape those

values themselves. For you have absolute freedom to adopt projects that accept your purported inferior status, or that attempt to disprove it, or that attempt to ignore it.

This is because the values one freely chooses, according to Sartre's initial form of existentialism, are ontologically prior to any reasons that might be presented by other people's views of one, which is a consequence of his more general view that it is the values at the heart of one's projects that transform the social and physical structure of one's environment into a field of reasons. Garcin and Estelle are tortured by other people's views of them only because these views conflict with their projects of seeing themselves as macho or feminine by nature. However, as we saw at the end of the last chapter, Sartre also thinks that most of us are committed to the project of bad faith. This is the project of identifying oneself with a particular set of characteristics as though these are a fixed essence that causes one's behaviour. Garcin and Estelle have this bad faith in common, even though they do not ascribe to themselves the same fixed essence.

Sartre's initial form of existentialism ascribes to this common bad faith two roles that Beauvoir ascribes to sedimentation: to explain why we are unaware of some of our motivations and to explain why we sometimes feel constrained by the reasons we experience in the world. Through the lens of bad faith, according to Sartre, reflection on our own motivations portrays them as manifestations of a fixed nature rather than expressions of our chosen projects. According to Beauvoir's existentialism, by contrast, a sedimented value can produce desires that conflict with our more recently endorsed values, leaving us puzzled about the origins of the desire. And we can become genuinely constrained by the reasons we experience in the world, at least in the absence of a concerted effort at changing through counter-conditioning the sedimented projects that shape those reasons. Beauvoir can explain by sedimentation features of experience that Sartre can explain only by bad faith. This is why they develop, as we saw in chapter 5, different varieties of existentialist psychoanalysis.

Beauvoir's reliance on sedimentation makes her form of existentialism preferable to Sartre's for a reason that seems to explain why Sartre went on to adopt Beauvoir's conception of sedimentation and revise his existentialism accordingly. The issue is not one of internal coherence. Sartre's reliance on bad faith does not threaten the philosophical integrity of his theory of the structures of motivation. Rather, the problem arises because Sartre wants to ground an account of cultural characteristics in this phenomenology of motivation. How could his initial existentialism explain why members of a social category,

such as a gender or ethnic group, often have characteristic values in common? Sartre does not want to deny the apparent empirical reality of such cultural values. But his attempt to explain them rests on bad faith being a widespread characteristic, which simply pushes the question back one step. How can Sartre explain this common feature of people's outlook? Sartre's initial form of existentialism precludes there being any answer to this question, as we will see. This is the unexplainable coincidence that Sartre's cultural theory must postulate and that Beauvoir's theory avoids.

2. Cultural Values Without Sedimentation

We can isolate the problem with Sartre's initial form of existentialism by analysing his attempt to account for the origin of cultural values within its framework, the essay on the place of Jewish culture in French society that he wrote in the immediate aftermath of the liberation of Paris in 1944. He published its first chapter in *Les Temps Modernes* during the existentialist offensive towards the end of 1945, then the whole essay as a small book in 1946. The book analyses the relationship between anti-Semitism and Jewish culture without drawing on the empirical studies and historical analyses available at the time and without much attention to the atrocities that had just been committed against Jewish people (Baert 2015: 123-4, 130-1). Despite these features, or perhaps partly because of them, Sartre's book set the agenda for analyses of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity in post-war French culture (Rybalka 1999; Judaken forthcoming). But this book is also a significant moment in Sartre's philosophical development. For it demonstrates the inadequacy of his initial form of existentialism to ground a cultural theory, an inadequacy which, as we shall see, Sartre may soon have recognised.

Sartre presents his analysis of Jewish identity in opposition to two other views. One is the view that there is some fixed essence, some ethnic nature, shared by Jewish people. Understanding people as having fixed natures, of course, is the core of bad faith. Sartre ascribes this view to anti-Semitism, which he argues is the project of seeing oneself as having a fixed nature in virtue of one's ethnicity, a nature which is superior to the nature of Jewish people, who are consequently cast as refusing to accept their supposedly natural inferior position (A&J: 17, 25-7). Sartre focused his analysis of the idea of ethnic nature on this anti-Semitism because he thought that, as a matter of fact, this anti-Semitism was strongly influential in French society at the time. The idea that there are ethnic natures does not itself entail racial supremacism of any kind, for one could think that ethnic groups have different essential natures of equal value. But all forms of ethnic essentialism

would be instances of bad faith, according to Sartre's initial form of existentialism, precisely because they ascribe fixed natures to people.

Sartre's second opponent is 'the democrat', who denies that there are any significant differences between ethnic groups. Sartre argues that this is simply a different form of the tendency 'to suppress the Jew' (A&J: 144). Whereas the anti-Semite wants us to see the Jewish person entirely as Jewish and not as a person, the democrat wants us to see the Jewish person entirely as a person and not as Jewish (A&J: 57). Sartre argues that it is rather the whole Jewish person 'with his character, his customs, his tastes, his religion if he has one, his name', not just his abstract humanity, that 'we must accept' (A&J: 147). If there is no Jewish essence, then what is it that Sartre wants us to accept beyond the common humanity of each person? It is clear that Sartre is here committed to the idea that there are cultural characteristics of Jewish people. This does not require any particular values had by every Jewish person, only that there are values that are characteristic of Jewish people in general.

This cultural identity is grounded, Sartre argues, not in any ethnic essence, but in the situation that, he claims, is common to all Jewish people. This is the situation of living in a broader society that contains substantial hostility towards Jewish people. Because each Jewish person has to formulate and pursue their projects against this common background, there are likely to be features in common across those projects (A&J: 60, 67, 72, 89, 90, 145). This is what Sartre means when he argues that anti-Semitism cannot be a reaction to any characteristics of Jewish people, as anti-Semites themselves claim it to be, but rather any such cultural characteristics come about as a result of anti-Semitism (A&J: 143). He has taken his inspiration here from Richard Wright, whom he cites as having recently argued that 'there is no Negro problem in the United States, there is only a White problem' (A&J: 152). Likewise, argues Sartre, there is no 'Jewish question' facing France at the end of the war, no question of the proper place of Jewish people in French society, but only a question of how anti-Semitism is to be defeated (A&J: 151-3).

It might seem, therefore, that Sartre's declaration that Jewish culture is grounded in the context of anti-Semitism is merely a rhetorical over-statement of his central claim that anti-Semitism is not a response to Jewish culture. The notable absence throughout the book of any reference to stories, histories, aphorisms, poetry, music, humour, festivals, rituals, and other cultural items that shape families and communities, apart from his occasional use of the word 'customs', might similarly seem merely an effect of Sartre's

desire to emphasise that anti-Semitism is not a response to Jewish culture. But these features of his analysis are required by his initial form of existentialism. For according to that existentialism, the significance of an individual's cultural context depends on their projects, so this cultural context cannot itself shape those projects. If there are values common among members of a cultural group, therefore, these must be explained primarily by features common to the projects they have each freely chosen. But why should these people each choose projects that have these common features? It is to answer this question that Sartre needs to appeal to the anti-Semitism common to the situations of Jewish people.

3. Bad Faith as the Ground of Cultural Values

In itself, however, this appeal to the wider culture suffused with anti-Semitism is not sufficient to explain any cultural characteristics of Jewish identity within the framework of Sartre's initial form of existentialism. For this wider social context in which Jewish people pursue their projects, like the narrower social context of Jewish culture itself, can be constituted for the individual as a field of reasons only in the light of that individual's freely chosen projects. The significance of the anti-Semitism that an individual encounters results from that individual's projects, on Sartre's initial view, so cannot constrain the choice of those projects any more than the fabric of Jewish culture could. If there are to be features common to the ways in which Jewish individuals respond to this wider cultural climate, therefore, these need to be explained in terms of common features of the projects that shape this wider climate as a field of reasons for those individuals. This is why Sartre appeals, at this stage of his cultural theory, to his conception of bad faith.

More specifically, he appeals to the form of bad faith that he here labels 'inauthenticity', which he describes as the attempt by an individual 'to deal with their situation by running away from it' (A&J: 92). This does not mean that the Jewish person taking this attitude denies that there is a climate of anti-Semitism, or even denies that they are a member of the group of people that anti-Semitism categorises together as inferior. Rather, this project incorporates the anti-Semite's idea that there are such things as ethnic essences. The person pursuing this project attempts to prove through their behaviour and outlook that they have an essence other than the one the anti-Semite ascribes to them and that the anti-Semite is therefore wrong about the nature of Jewish people in general (A&J: 94-5). This is a project of 'running away from' an essence ascribed to one by asserting a contrary

essence.¹ Just as Garcin attempts, in *Huis Clos*, to establish that his nature is not what other people think it is, Sartre thinks that Jewish people pursuing this project attempt to prove that the nature of Jewish people is not as the anti-Semite portrays it.

In contrast to this response to anti-Semitism, the attitude of authenticity accepts that there are no fixed natures and recognises that the anti-Semitism pervading the wider society ascribes to oneself a fixed nature nonetheless, one of ethnic inferiority. In adopting this attitude, the individual becomes 'a man, a whole man, with the metaphysical horizons that go with the condition of man' (A&J: 137-8). The authentic individual recognises that they are pursuing freely chosen projects in their particular situation. There is nothing more to be said about authentic people in general or more specifically about authentic Jewish people, according to Sartre; the authentic individual 'is what he makes himself, that is all that can be said' (A&J: 137). There is nothing generally true of authentic people apart from their affirmation that there are no fixed natures, even when there are significant features of their situations in common. For there is nothing generally true of the projects they pursue, except that these embody 'a true and lucid consciousness of the situation' and assume 'the responsibilities and risks that it involves' (A&J: 90).

It follows from this that if there are cultural characteristics of Jewish identity, if there are values common to many Jewish people in virtue of their being Jewish people, then these are not grounded in authentic responses to the climate of anti-Semitism, but must rather result from inauthentic responses to it. Sartre argues that the inauthentic response to being ascribed some negative fixed characteristic, such as being untrustworthy or avaricious, is to attempt to demonstrate the contrary fixed property, such as honesty or generosity (A&J: 73-4, 95-6). Because anti-Semites are motivated by an idea of their own superiority, however, not by a particular image of Jewish identity, anti-Semites can admit that Jewish people may be honest or generous by adding the qualification that these are somehow inferior forms of honesty and generosity (A&J: 74-5; see also A&J: 82). A more general feature of inauthenticity, argues Sartre, is the valuing of critical introspection, initially aimed at ensuring that one's behaviour repudiates the anti-Semitic stereotype. The resulting tendency to self-analysis is then cited by the anti-Semite as itself a feature of Jewish inferiority (A&J: 94-5).

¹ For an analysis of the varieties of bad faith that Sartre outlines in *Being and Nothingness*, see Webber 2009: chapters 6 and 7.

This theory of cultural characteristics fails to establish what Sartre claims to want to establish. It fails to establish that society at large should respect Jewish people not only as people, but specifically as Jewish people. The priority given to anti-Semitism in the construction of Jewish culture and the recommendation that French society work to undermine anti-Semitism together imply that Jewish culture itself should be undermined. The role accorded to bad faith in the theory implies that widespread recognition of the reality of the human condition would result in the disappearance of Jewish culture. Sartre comes close to admitting this when he points out that the erosion of anti-Semitism would 'make easier' an authentic response to the Jewish condition and 'make possible, without violence and by the very course of history, that assimilation' that he had earlier described as the goal of 'the democrat' (A&J: 147). This erosion of Jewish culture would not be forced, but the very fact that Sartre's theory entails that it ought to occur looks rather less respectful of Jewish culture than Sartre proclaims himself to be.

4. The Project of Bad Faith

Sartre's theory of cultural characteristics in *Anti-Semite and Jew* relies on his concept of bad faith to explain not only why a particular individual adopts the values common in their cultural group, but also why there already are prevailing values among that cultural group. This cultural question cannot be answered with reference only to that group's wider situation, such as the climate of anti-Semitism, within Sartre's initial form of existentialism, because that wider situation would not itself constitute a field of reasons for behaving in one way or another. Any field of reasons is constituted by the physical and social world in relation to the values of the individual for whom they are reasons. A group of people having a common response to a common situation, therefore, can be explained only by a common project or set of projects. This is what led Sartre to argue that Jewish culture is grounded in a very general project that he considered prevalent across his society, the project of bad faith.

But this does not yet explain the origin of cultural characteristics. For we can ask why bad faith should be prevalent across this wide cultural group. Indeed, even if it were prevalent across the whole of humanity, we could ask why. Sartre cannot hold that bad faith is an innate or necessary part of human existence, since this would contradict the basic claim of his existentialism, that existence precedes essence. For bad faith is a project that values the attribution of fixed essences to oneself and to people in general. If this value can be innate and necessary, then why not other values? Sartre clearly does not think that it is

essential to human existence, however, for he claims that there are authentic individuals, although these are rare (A&J: 90, 138). But why should they be rare? 'There is no doubt that authenticity demands much courage and more than courage', Sartre proclaims, telling us that authenticity involves accepting 'risks and responsibilities' and inauthenticity is a response to the situation seeming 'intolerable' (A&J: 90, 92). His philosophy, however, requires that these reasons are grounded in prior projects of the individuals. What could the relevant projects be?

If one is already committed to the project of bad faith, to seeing oneself as having a particular fixed essence, then one would find the continual attribution of a different essence to oneself intolerable, would need courage to overcome this project that is fundamental to one's outlook and self-image, and the risks and responsibilities that come with doing so would seem to be reasons against overcoming it. But bad faith is precisely the project that we are trying to explain. Sartre does describe the awareness that we have no fixed natures as 'anguish' (B&N: 54-7). This cannot be the claim that we are by nature inclined against embracing our freedom over our projects, that it is part of the essence of our existence that awareness of this freedom induces anguish, and that we are thus naturally inclined towards bad faith, for this clearly would contradict the basic claim of Sartre's existentialism. Sartre must rather view anguish as a symptom of bad faith, a reason present in our experience as a result of our project of affirming that we have a fixed nature (Webber 2009: 111-6; Webber 2011: 185-6).

There are passages in *Being and Nothingness* where Sartre suggests that it is social pressure that leads us to adopt the project of bad faith. The customers in the café expect the waiter to behave as nothing more than the embodiment of the essence of waiterhood. 'Society demands that he limit himself to his function', Sartre writes, 'as if we live in perpetual fear that he might escape from it' (B&N: 82-3; see also A&J: 73-4). More generally, the person in bad faith will exert pressure on those around them not to exhibit behaviour that threatens the idea that people have fixed natures. Being raised and continuing to live in a climate of bad faith, it might be argued, therefore explains why an individual is likely to adopt this project oneself: to do otherwise requires them to resist that social pressure (Webber 2009: 112; Webber 2011: 187). Authenticity does not exert a contrary pressure, moreover. The authentic person's belief that there are no fixed natures could not be threatened by other people behaving as if there are, since the authentic person could put that down to those people's bad faith.

However, this explanation of the widespread adoption of the project of bad faith overlooks one of the central claims of Sartre's initial form of existentialism, which we considered in chapter 3. This is the claim that one experiences the world as a field of reasons to be considered, compared, accepted, rejected, or revised, rather than as a nexus of causes that simply force one to behave in a particular way. Each individual therefore has strong continuous evidence that they do not have a fixed nature that produces their behaviour through causal interaction with their environment. This continuous evidence constitutes internal pressure against the project of bad faith. In order to explain why the individual adopts the project of bad faith, therefore, the social pressure to do so must constitute a reason to value having a particular fixed nature, a reason strong enough to outweigh the contrary evidence of one's own experience. But one would only see it this way, according to Sartre's initial form of existentialism, if one already had some relevant project. What is that project and why is it widespread? This is essentially the question we started with: what explains the prevalence of bad faith?

5. An Unexplainable Coincidence

Ultimately, this question cannot be answered within Sartre's initial form of existentialism. This is due to its combination of two claims. One is that features of the individual's physical and social environment constitute reasons for that person only in the light of projects that person is already pursuing. The other is that projects have no inertia of their own, but influence our experience and behaviour only if we continue to endorse them. The features of the wider environment within which Jewish culture develops, therefore, cannot constitute reasons for that culture to develop in one way or another, except in the light of some prior project common to the members of that community. Sartre identifies this project as bad faith. But the problem does not rest on this claim. Whatever that prior project is claimed to be, we can ask why it is common to those people. This could be answered only with reference to another project, about which the same question could be raised. In the end, we must reach a project whose adoption by each individual is unmotivated. Sartre's cultural theory therefore rests on the unexplainable coincidence of the widespread adoption of this project.

Beauvoir's variety of existentialism does not face this problem, even though it agrees that features of the physical and social environment constitute reasons for the individual only in the light of that person's projects. For on Beauvoir's view, the opportunities, encouragements, and discouragements that shape childhood direct the individual towards

projects that incorporate the values of their surrounding culture. Because projects become sedimented, these cultural values become sedimented. Once the individual has matured and is able to adopt projects on the basis of their own critical reflection, their thought will be influenced by these sedimented values. If new projects are formed that contradict these values despite their influence, moreover, it would take considerable pursuit of these projects for them to become sedimented in place of the old ones. Beauvoir's focus on the limitations imposed on women by the sedimentation of gender should not be taken to imply that acculturation is itself ethically problematic. On her variety of existentialism, this cultural transmission is simply a feature of human existence, whatever the ethical status of the values transmitted in this way.

Beauvoir's existentialism can therefore account for values being common to the outlooks of members of a social group. If there are any values characteristic of Jewish people, or of some particular group of Jewish people, then these would be explained by the sedimentation of the cultural climate in which those people grew up and which they perpetuate in adulthood as a result. There is no need for any underlying existential project like bad faith whose adoption could not be explained. This variety of existentialism, moreover, can provide a more sophisticated analysis of prejudice. Sartre's initial variety of existentialism constrained him to understanding anti-Semitism as a project of claiming a natural superiority over Jewish people. As well as resting on the unexplainable coincidence of a widespread adoption of bad faith, this excludes more subtle forms of anti-Semitism that might infect the outlooks of people who do not endorse such a project of racial superiority, as George Orwell pointed out (1948). Beauvoir's form of existentialism allows that anti-Semitism present in one's surrounding culture can become sedimented in one's outlook, such that it can influence one's thought and behaviour even if one explicitly rejects anti-Semitism.

Sartre's initial form of existentialism cannot account for the transmission of culture in this way, because sedimentation is ruled out by his claim that projects, having no inertia of their own, persist only by the individual upholding them. Childhood plays no special role in the formation of the individual, according to Sartre's initial form of existentialism. The adult chooses projects in relation to their physical and cultural surroundings. Although they may continue with projects first chosen in childhood, their upbringing does not constrain them. They might choose to uphold the values of their families or immediate communities, but they are just as able to choose not to. Although he does not mention this possibility in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre's initial form of existentialism allows that an

inauthentic person might uphold the values of their family or community precisely in order to identify with these as their own essence. If a theory of cultural transmission were developed from this idea, then it too would rest on the unexplainable coincidence of widespread bad faith.

Bad faith therefore plays a crucial role in Sartre's initial variety of existentialism. He portrays it as a social malady responsible not only for the idiosyncratic difficulties people face and the basic conflicts between people, but also for the very existence of common values largely shared across a cultural group. Unlike his claim that projects can be abandoned for no reason, therefore, his idea that bad faith is a widespread project cannot simply be denied while accepting the rest of his initial existentialism. Yet this reliance on bad faith to explain cultural characteristics requires us to accept a theory that rests on a large scale coincidence that is not just unexplained, but is in principle unexplainable. This problem is generated by combining the claim that projects have no inertia of their own with the claim that the reasons we encounter are dependent on our chosen projects. The second of these is the core of the claim that our existence precedes our essence. To avoid the problem without abandoning existentialism, therefore, Sartre needs to replace his claim that projects have no inertia with Beauvoir's idea of sedimentation.

6. Sedimentation in the Formation of Genet

By the time he wrote his biography of Genet, published in 1952, Sartre had revised his conception of human existence to include the sedimentation of values central to Beauvoir's form of existentialism. The biography analyses the literary works, lifestyle, and character of Jean Genet as expressions of a single complex project rooted in his childhood. In his early years, a moral outlook was instilled into him. 'Work, family, country, honesty, property' are central to this moral outlook and even though he grows up to flout these values in his actions and writings, he does so precisely because the idea of their goodness remains 'graven forever upon his heart' (SG: 6; see also SG: 21-2). His project is born of the tension between this outlook and his own status as a poor peasant child and an adoptee. He imaginatively attains the good of owning property through occasional petty thefts. In doing this, 'he is unaware that he is forging his destiny' (SG: 16).

For he is repeatedly caught in these little acts of theft and condemned severely for them. 'In all probability, there were offenses and then punishment, solemn oaths and then relapses', writes Sartre, but the significance of these events can be summarised in the

instantaneous judgment, 'You're a thief' (SG: 17). Over this period of time, he comes to accept that this judgment correctly identifies his essential nature, that this 'dizzying word' makes sense of his life as an outsider in this pious community, the offspring of dishonest reprobates who would abandon their own son (SG: 17-19). Sartre describes this stage of Genet's life as his first 'metamorphosis', adopting the term that Beauvoir used in *The Second Sex* to describe a gradual change in outlook (SG: 1, 18; SS: 780). Through instilling their morality in him and then bringing him to accept their moral judgment of him, his society 'have penetrated to the very bottom of his heart and installed a permanent delegate there which is himself' (SG: 21). Much like the 'superego' described by Freud, this sedimentation of society's moral code will continue to condemn Genet for desires and actions that violate that code.

Unlike the Freudian superego, however, this representative of society's judgments is partly responsible for Genet continuing to violate that moral code. For this sedimentation is only the first stage of Genet's 'progressively internalising the sentence imposed by adults' (SG: 37). The second is his decision to embrace this essence, rather than resist its influence. Sartre describes this as a 'conversion', but does not mean the instantaneous reorientation of values that he had called 'radical conversion' in *Being and Nothingness* and that we contrasted with Beauvoir's idea of 'metamorphosis' in chapter 5. Sartre is clear that Genet's 'conversion' to being a thief is a form of sedimentation. 'Again and again the child pledged himself to Evil in a state of rage, and then one of his judges only had to smile at him and the decision melted in the fire of love', he writes, but 'then, one day, he found himself converted, exactly as one finds oneself cured of a passion that has caused long suffering' (SG: 50). What makes this a conversion is that it is based on conscious decision, rather than an unnoticed development. But it is sedimentation: Genet's evaluative outlook is gradually transformed by his repeatedly deciding to embrace his supposed evil nature.

Sartre has adopted Beauvoir's conception of commitment to a project. What commits Genet to being a thief is this sedimentation, which transforms his outlook in the same way that his earlier repeated endorsement of his society's morality left him 'unable to liquidate a system of values that denies him his place in the sun' (SG: 16). 'To adopt a mental attitude is to place oneself in a prison without bars', Sartre claims; one can reason to 'a new point of view entailing new commitments', but this does not in itself displace the original attitude, which continues to influence thought and action (SG: 69). This sedimentation, however, does not prevent us from being free. 'We are not lumps of clay, and what is important is not what people make of us but what we ourselves make of what they have

made of us' (SG: 49). We choose the projects that become sedimented in our outlooks and we can erode them through new projects. It is by facing the givens of life 'and digesting them little by little' into its own projects that 'freedom alone can account for a person in his totality' (SG: 584).

Sartre therefore no longer needs his theory of bad faith to explain how we can be unaware of some of our motivations or why we sometimes feel constrained by the reasons we find in the world. He can agree with Beauvoir that these phenomena arise when our deeply sedimented values are at odds with our more recently endorsed values. Sedimented values are the prison without bars. Moreover, he no longer needs to rest his cultural theory on bad faith. The values of one's surrounding culture can become sedimented in one's outlook just as the Morvan peasant morality becomes sedimented in Genet's and an idea of male superiority becomes sedimented according to Beauvoir's theory of gender. Sartre does retain his theory of bad faith, however, including his claim that it is widespread (SG: 33-4). He retains his theory that our experience of the world as a field of reasons conflicts with the idea that we have fixed natures and that anxiety is the experience of this conflict (SG: 60, 591-2). But he now has the resources to explain the widespread adoption of bad faith in terms of its sedimentation as a cultural value (SG: 34-6).

7. Existence Precedes Sedimentation

Sartre's mature form of existentialism in *Saint Genet* thus retains some of the distinctive features of his initial existentialism. But in abandoning the idea of radical freedom in favour of sedimentation, he transforms his philosophy. Sartre criticised Freud's theory of mind for its explanatory incompleteness, yet his own alternative articulated in *Being and Nothingness* left entirely unexplained what commitment to a project amounts to and how this shapes one's experience, and left entirely unexplainable the claimed widespread adoption of the project of bad faith. These explanatory deficiencies are remedied by adopting the idea of sedimentation. This is the development of Sartre's philosophy that Beauvoir mentions in her response to Merleau-Ponty a few years after *Saint Genet* was published: Sartre came to see freedom as inherently engaged in its social context through the sedimentation that gave projects their 'temporal thickness' (MPPS: 242-3, 252; see chapter 3.7, above). He therefore came to accept the version of existentialism that Beauvoir had first articulated in *She Came To Stay*. Her first detailed philosophical elaboration of it, however, was *The Second Sex*, to which Sartre acknowledges his debt in *Saint Genet* (SG: 37, 57, 291).

As a result of this transformation of his existentialism, Sartre is able to explain not only the social prevalence of bad faith, but also the transmission of cultural values generally in terms of sedimentation. He had argued that values characteristic of Jewish culture resulted from a form of bad faith, as we have seen. His initial form of existentialism denied that there are any 'innate qualities' of individuals, and therefore of any groups of individuals, and denied that sedimentation was possible, so he had no other option than to explain cultural values in terms of projects, or 'ventures in behaviour' (A&J: 93). Bad faith was simply the project that could ground such an explanation. Once he had accepted the idea of sedimentation, he could describe Genet as imbued with the morality of the people who raised him without attributing to him any prior project of bad faith. Sedimented values can be overcome through new projects, on Sartre's mature view, but when great social pressure is exerted in childhood the resulting values are deeply sedimented by the time the individual is sufficiently mature to formulate their own projects, so will strongly influence these projects (SG: 21).

Although his focus is on a specific individual, Sartre does hold in *Saint Genet* that sedimentation of values under social pressure in childhood explains more generally why members of a social group have values in common. In particular, he argues that it explains how an evaluative outlook can be deeply embedded in the self-image of each member of a particular cultural group (SG: 34, 54-5). This echoes his essay 'Black Orpheus', published in 1948, where he first describes the sedimentation of cultural values. There he argues that black people share a common 'basic experience' of the human condition as filtered through 'the still fresh memory of a historical past' of slavery (BO: 312). A century after its abolition, a 'collective memory', 'the most vivid of memories', 'an enormous nightmare' haunts the descendants of the victims of this slavery (BO: 311-2). This shapes the relative values that a black person places on black and white people, argues Sartre, including the evaluative dimension of the black individual's self-image. This aspect of the individual's self-image resembles an essence that is discovered as much as it resembles a project freely created (BO: 317-9).

The contrast between this theory of an ongoing cultural effect of slavery and his analysis of Jewish culture written only a few years earlier is striking. He no longer thinks such characteristics could be explained only by projects, instead gesturing towards a quality of the individual's outlook that is neither innate nor chosen, but received through upbringing. At its basis is 'an original sin', but this is not bad faith, for 'the black man is its

innocent victim' rather than its perpetrator (BO: 313). Where he had analysed Jewish culture as a product of bad faith, Sartre now argues that the black person is 'forced into authenticity' by being visibly a member of the group that were the victims of slavery (BO: 268). This authenticity is the recognition of a value that Sartre describes as 'a pledge and passion at one and the same time', that 'makes you and you make it' (BO: 319). The black person who wants to identify just as human cannot simply reject this sedimented value and embrace a new outlook; 'a bitter regret shows through' (BO: 322). Instead, this value can be overcome only through a gradual process (BO: 323).

Sartre's acceptance of sedimentation in 'Black Orpheus' allows him to explore cultural effects of the violence of slavery, which contrasts with his emphasis on anti-Semitic opinion rather than anti-Semitic violence in his earlier analysis of Jewish culture. It also allows that racist values have an insidious influence on the thought and action of people who do not knowingly endorse those values. Sartre does not explore this implication, but it is precisely the form of racial prejudice that Orwell complained was missing from Sartre's analysis of anti-Semitism. That he first embraced sedimentation in 'Black Orpheus', written as a preface to an anthology of poetry by black authors and published as Beauvoir was finalising *The Second Sex*, however, does suggest that this transformation of his existentialism was motivated by his recognition of the inadequacy of his analysis of anti-Semitism and Jewish culture, and its indication of a more general inability of his initial form of existentialism to ground a cultural theory. But while he was rethinking his existentialism through writing his biography of Genet, an analysis of racism and its cultural effects far more sophisticated than Sartre's own was being developed by Frantz Fanon. In the next chapter, we will see that this too is a canonical work of existentialism that incorporates the idea of sedimentation.

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