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## SARTRE: A PHILOSOPHICAL BIOGRAPHY

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) was one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. Regarded as the father of existentialist philosophy, he was also a political critic, moralist, playwright, novelist, and author of biographies and short stories. Thomas R. Flynn provides the first book-length account of Sartre as a philosopher of the imaginary, mapping the intellectual development of his ideas throughout his life, and building a narrative that is not only philosophical but also attentive to the political and literary dimensions of his work. Exploring Sartre's existentialism, politics, ethics, and ontology, this book illuminates the defining ideas of Sartre's oeuvre: the literary and the philosophical, the imaginary and the conceptual, his descriptive phenomenology and his phenomenological concept of intentionality, and his conjunction of ethics and politics with an "egoless" consciousness. It will appeal to all who are interested in Sartre's philosophy and its relation to his life.

THOMAS R. FLYNN is Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Philosophy at Emory University. He is the author of many articles and books, including *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility* (1984); *Sartre, Foucault and Historical Reason*, vol. I, *Toward an Existentialist Theory of History* (1997) and vol. II, *A Poststructuralist Mapping of History* (2005); and *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2006).

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*Thomas R. Flynn*



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*For my extended family*

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## Preface

On the evening of October 29, 1945, Jean-Paul Sartre delivered a much-anticipated lecture, advertised as “Existentialism is a Humanism,” to an overflow crowd in the Salle des Centraux on the Parisian Right Bank. As he was already well known for his novels *Nausea* and the recently published *The Age of Reason* and *The Reprieve*, his plays, *The Flies* and *No Exit*, and his philosophical essays, especially the daunting masterpiece *Being and Nothingness*, his talk was seen as the manifesto for this rapidly spreading style of thought. It is still the philosophical essay that people read when they seek an introduction to his work and to this movement in general. Yet it is the only piece that he openly regretted having published.

In what follows I shall survey the intellectual path that led Sartre to this juncture, the turn that it presaged, and the resultant works and deeds that came to define him as “Sartre.” This is a biography, the story of a life. But it is a philosophical biography, an account of the development of the thought and works of arguably the most famous philosopher of the twentieth century.

Renown is not the same as admiration. Sartre is famous for his theory of ethico-political commitment. As Spinoza reminds us, decision inevitably implies exclusion. But, in Sartre’s case, the ethical and the political usually went together. And this commitment involved polemics. One is often better known by the nature of one’s enemies than by the number of one’s friends. Though it would be futile to weigh the respective numbers in either camp, as we progress I shall consider Sartre’s friends, his opponents and, tellingly, his several estrangements from former friends such as Raymond Aron, Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

To clarify the nature of this project at the outset, let me repeat that it is a survey of Sartre’s life and works and of their relation, but not the

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usual chronicle of the details of his childhood and lineage. Others have done that for us. Nor is it limited to a study of his philosophical publications, though these play the major role because of their increasing centrality throughout his career. One must certainly consider his literary works. He was offered the Nobel Prize for literature, which he declined – a phenomenon that itself calls for explanation. What makes a philosophical biography of Sartre especially challenging is not only the quantity of his work – he admitted to writing for several hours every day, even while on holiday – but its variety: plays, novels, short stories, literary, aesthetic and political criticism, numerous prefaces to other people’s works, and insightful philosophical studies, not to mention the founding and editing of a major journal of opinion and critique, *Les Temps Modernes*, that has appeared regularly since its first issue, October 1, 1945. Rather than charting the curve of productivity along parallel, genre-specific lines, I intend to read his writings as expressions of a profound but sometimes “metastable” commitment, as he would say, to the conceptual and the imaginary, to the philosophical and the literary, broadly speaking, to Spinoza and Stendhal. For the basic thesis of this study, its leitmotif, is that Sartre was chiefly a philosopher of the imaginary and that this accounts in large part for both his penchant for the literary and his ready acceptance of Husserlian phenomenology, with its “imagistic” arguments, which he is alleged to have discovered in the early 1930s. Even when he finally abandons imaginative literature in favor of political commitment, I shall argue, it is in the service of an egalitarian *ideal* – what he calls “socialism and freedom” or the “city of ends.” Indeed, he signals his adieu with a “novel that is true,” his autobiographical *Words*, while continuing to labor on his massive existential biography of Gustave Flaubert, another “novel that is true.” So the imaginary, with its promise and its limits, its inspiration and its ambiguities, will bookend this study, as it did Sartre’s life from childhood to final years.

## Acknowledgments

It is perilous to begin a list of individuals and organizations to whom appreciation for this undertaking should be directed. The risk multiplies as the years of my research on this volume have mounted. In terms of organizations, the members of the North American Sartre Society and the Groupe d'Études Sartriennes continue to foster my research and that of many others by providing a forum for discussion and a source for valuable publications. I am grateful for the good fortune to have been present at the origin of both groups. I thankfully acknowledge support from Emory University and its Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry, as well as for a recent sabbatical leave that afforded me the leisure to pursue and complete this project. Regarding individuals, I wish to thank Michel Rybalka and his dynamic wife, Maya, for hospitality shown me in their home in the Basque country as I did research for early portions of this book, and to Jean Bourgault for numerous discussions during my visits to Paris over the years. Across the Channel, but still in the Gallic embrace, I must acknowledge the friendship and intellectual stimulation of many visits with Christina and Bernard Howells. They personify for me the joy and the depth of the intellectual life. As for the States, among colleagues and friends, I have been especially blessed by the support of Joseph Catalano, William McBride and Ronald Santoni, who discussed this manuscript at the Sartre Circle during a meeting of the American Philosophical Association. Too many others deserve mention that space will not allow, but such is the price of existential finitude. They will see their work mentioned in the book. I must acknowledge the inspiration and encouragement of the late Hazel E. Barnes, who had been a faithful friend *ab initio*. For technical support I wish to thank Larry Coty, a former student and long-time friend, and Michael Hodgin of the philosophy staff at Emory, who bridged the gap between written work and

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digital availability. But most of all I owe a debt of gratitude to Hilary Gaskin of Cambridge University Press. Her patience with my hedgehog-like ways is surpassed only by her ability to transfer plodding academic writing into viable, if not deathless, prose. The dedication to my extended family is in joyous celebration of numerous expressions of loving care: Collitons, Flynnns and Martins, *in caritate non ficta*.

## Abbreviations

<i>AD</i>	<i>Adventures of the Dialectic</i> (Merleau-Ponty)
<i>B</i>	<i>Baudelaire</i>
Bauer	<i>Sartre and the Artist</i>
<i>BEM</i>	<i>Between Existentialism and Marxism</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Being and Nothingness</i> ( <i>EN</i> )
<i>BT</i>	<i>Being and Time</i>
Centenary	<i>Sartre Today: A Centenary Celebration</i> (Bowman and Stone in Van den Hoven and Leak [eds.])
<i>CDG</i>	<i>Carnets de la drôle de guerre</i> (1st edn.) ( <i>WD</i> )
<i>CDG-F</i>	<i>Carnets de la drôle de guerre</i> (2nd edn., rev.)
<i>CDR</i>	<i>Critique of Dialectical Reason</i> (2 vols.) ( <i>CRD</i> )
<i>CDS</i>	“Conscience de soi et connaissance de soi” ( <i>CSKS</i> )
<i>Cér</i>	<i>La Cérémonie des adieux, suivi de entretiens avec Jean-Paul Sartre</i> (De Beauvoir)
<i>CF</i>	“Cartesian Freedom,” <i>LPE</i>
<i>CF-F</i>	<i>CF</i> , in <i>Situations</i> vol. 1
<i>CHR</i>	<i>Conférence à la Lyre havraise nov. 1932–mars 1933</i> (Études Sartriennes)
<i>CM</i>	<i>Cahiers pour une morale</i> ( <i>NE</i> )
<i>Condemned</i>	<i>The Condemned of Altona</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>The Communists and Peace</i> and <i>A Reply to Claude Lefort</i>
Contat and Rybalka	<i>The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre</i> (2 vols.)
<i>CRD</i>	<i>Critique de la raison dialectique</i> ( <i>CDR</i> )
<i>CSC</i>	“Autour des conférences de Sartre à Cornell,” <i>Sur les écrits posthumes de Sartre</i>
<i>CSKS</i>	“Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self” (“ <i>CDS</i> ”)
<i>DE</i>	“Dialectical Ethics”
<i>DES</i>	Diplôme d’Études Supérieures
<i>EB</i>	<i>Sartre’s Existential Biographies</i> (Scriven)
<i>EN</i>	<i>L’Être et le néant</i> ( <i>BN</i> )
<i>EH</i>	<i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i>

<i>EHist</i>	<i>The Ethics of History</i> (Carr et al.)
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Écrits de jeunesse</i>
<i>Emotions</i>	<i>The Emotions, Outline of a Theory</i> (Frechtman)
<i>ES</i>	Études sartriennes nos. 1–16
<i>EW</i>	<i>Essential Works of Foucault</i> (ed. Rabinow)
“L’Exigence”	“De l’aliénation morale à l’exigence éthique,” <i>LTM</i> , <i>Témoins de Sartre</i>
<i>FI</i>	<i>The Family Idiot</i> (5 vols.)
<i>Film</i>	<i>Sartre: un film</i>
<i>Flies</i>	<i>The Flies</i>
<i>Génération</i>	<i>Génération intellectuelle: Khâgneux et Normaliens dans l’entre-deux-guerres</i>
<i>HDV</i>	<i>History and the Dialectic of Violence</i> (Aron)
<i>HF</i>	<i>Heidegger en France</i> , vol. II (Janicaud)
<i>Hope</i>	<i>Hope Now: The 1980 Interviews</i>
<i>Ideas</i>	<i>Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology – Book I</i> (Husserl)
<i>IF</i>	<i>L’Idiot de la famille</i>
<i>Imaginary</i>	<i>The Imaginary</i>
<i>Ion</i>	<i>L’Imagination</i>
<i>IPH</i>	<i>Introduction to the Philosophy of History</i> (Aron)
<i>Ire</i>	<i>L’Imaginaire</i>
<i>LaC</i>	<i>Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres, 1926–1939</i>
<i>Lectures</i>	<i>Lectures de Sartre</i> (Burgelin)
<i>Life</i>	<i>Jean-Paul Sartre. A Life</i> (Cohen-Solal)
<i>LPE</i>	<i>Literary and Philosophical Essays</i>
<i>L/S</i>	“Self-Portrait at Seventy,” <i>Life/Situations</i>
<i>LS-E</i>	<i>Letters to Sartre</i> (Beauvoir)
<i>LTM</i>	<i>Les Temps Modernes</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Mallarmé, Or the Poet of Nothingness</i>
<i>MAEA</i>	<i>Les Mots et autres écrits autobiographiques</i> (Pléiade)
<i>Mémoires</i>	<i>Mémoires</i> (Aron)
<i>MH</i>	“‘Morale et Histoire,’ the Cornell Lectures,” <i>LTM</i>
<i>MR</i>	“Materialism and Revolution”
<i>MS</i>	“‘Marxisme et Subjectivité,’ la Conférence de Rome, 1961,” <i>LTM</i>
<i>Nausea</i>	<i>Nausea</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>Notebooks for an Ethics</i> (CM)
<i>NG</i>	<i>La Nausée</i> (Goldthorpe)
<i>Obliques-Arts</i>	<i>Sartre et les Arts, Obliques</i> , nos. 24–25
<i>OR</i>	<i>Œuvres romanesques</i> (Contat and Rybalka)
<i>ORR</i>	<i>On a raison de se révolter</i>
<i>PCF</i>	Parti communiste français
<i>PL</i>	<i>Pouvoir et liberté. Benny Lévy. Cahiers</i> (ed. Gilles Hanus)
<i>PPS</i>	<i>La Première philosophie de Sartre</i> (Flajoliet)

## Abbreviations

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<i>Prime</i>	<i>The Prime of Life</i>
<i>PS</i>	<i>Pour Sartre</i>
<i>PSM</i>	<i>Pourquoi et comment Sartre a écrit "les Mots"</i>
<i>QMW</i>	<i>Quiet Moments in a War</i>
<i>RDR</i>	Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire
<i>SA</i>	<i>Sartre Alive</i> (Aronson and Van den Hoven)
<i>SaP</i>	<i>Sartre avant la Phénoménologie: Autour de "La Nausée" et de la "Légende de la vérité"</i> (De Coorebyter)
Schilpp	<i>The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre</i>
<i>SFP</i>	<i>Sartre face à la phénoménologie. Autour de "L'intentionnalité et de "La Transcendance de l'Ego"</i> (De Coorebyter)
<i>SFHR</i>	<i>Sartre, Foucault and Historical Reason</i> (2 vols.) (Flynn)
<i>SG</i>	<i>Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr</i>
<i>Sit</i>	<i>Situations</i> , vols. 1–x
<i>SM</i>	<i>Search for a Method</i>
<i>SME</i>	<i>Sartre and Marxist Existentialism</i> (Flynn)
<i>ST</i>	<i>Sartre on Theater</i>
<i>STE</i>	<i>Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions</i> (Mairet)
<i>STG</i>	<i>Le Siècle traversé</i> (Gandillac)
<i>TC</i>	<i>Théâtre complet</i>
<i>TE</i>	<i>"La Transcendance de l'ego" et autres textes phénoménologiques: "Conscience de soi et connaissance de soi," précédé de "Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl"</i>
<i>WA</i>	<i>Writing Against. A Biography of Sartre</i> (Hayman)
<i>WD</i>	<i>The War Diaries of Jean-Paul Sartre, November 1939–March 1940</i>
<i>WE</i>	<i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (Fanon, preface by Sartre)
<i>WL</i>	<i>What is Literature? And Other Essays</i>
<i>Words-F</i>	<i>Les Mots</i>

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. The suffixes F and E in an abbreviation indicate that the work is a French or English version of another volume on the list.