

sons for acting are made manifest

2. Freedom and Liberation

One of the chief objections leveled against existentialism is that the precept "to will freedom" is only a hollow formula and offers no concrete content for action. But that is because one has begun by emptying the word freedom of its concrete meaning; we have already seen that freedom realizes itself only by engaging itself in the world: to such an extent that man's project toward freedom is embodied for him in definite acts of behavior.

To will freedom and to will to disclose being are one and the same choice; hence, freedom takes a positive

and constructive step which causes being to pass to existence in a movement which is constantly surpassed. Science, technics, art, and philosophy are indefinite conquests of existence over being; it is by assuming themselves as such that they take on their genuine aspect; it is in the light of this assumption that the word progress finds its veridical meaning. It is not a matter of approaching a fixed limit: absolute Knowledge or the happiness of man or the perfection of beauty; all human effort would then be doomed to failure, for with each step forward the horizon recedes a step; for man it is a matter of pursuing the expansion of his existence and of retrieving this very effort as an absolute.

Science condemns itself to failure when, yielding to the infatuation of the serious, it aspires to attain being, to contain it, and to possess it; but it finds its truth if it considers itself as a free engagement of thought in the given, aiming, at each discovery, not at fusion with the thing, but at the possibility of new discoveries; what the mind then projects is the concrete accomplishment of its freedom. The attempt is sometimes made to find an objective justification of science in technics; but ordinarily the mathematician is concerned with mathematics and the physicist with physics, and not with their applications. And, furthermore, technics itself is not objectively justified; if it sets up as absolute goals the saving of time and work which it enables us to realize and the comfort and luxury which it enables us to have access to, then it appears useless and absurd, for the time that one gains can not be accumulated in a store-

house; it is contradictory to want to save up existence, which, the fact is, exists only by being spent, and there is a good case for showing that airplanes, machines, the telephone, and the radio do not make men of today happier than those of former times. But actually it is not a question of giving men time and happiness, it is not a question of stopping the movement of life: it is a question of fulfilling it. If technics is attempting to make up for this lack, which is at the very heart of existence, it fails radically; but it escapes all criticism if one admits that, through it, existence, far from wishing to repose in the security of being, thrusts itself ahead of itself in order to thrust itself still farther ahead, that it aims at an indefinite disclosure of being by the transformation of the thing into an instrument and at the opening of ever new possibilities for man. As for art, we have already said that it should not attempt to set up idols; it should reveal existence as a reason for existing; that is really why Plato, who wanted to wrest man away from the earth and assign him to the heaven of Ideas, condemned the poets; that is why every humanism on the other hand, crowns them with laurels. Art reveals the transitory as an absolute; and as the transitory existence is perpetuated through the centuries, art too, through the centuries, must perpetuate this never-to-be-finished revelation. Thus, the constructive activities of man take on a valid meaning only when they are assumed as a movement toward freedom; and reciprocally, one sees that such a movement is concrete: discoveries, inventions, industries, culture, paintings, and books people the world

concretely and open concrete possibilities to men.

Perhaps it is permissible to dream of a future when men will know no other use of their freedom than this free unfurling of itself; constructive activity would be possible for all; each one would be able to aim positively through his projects at his own future. But today the fact is that there are men who can justify their life only by a negative action. As we have already seen, every man transcends himself. But it happens that this transcendence is condemned to fall uselessly back upon itself because it is cut off from its goals. That is what defines a situation of oppression. Such a situation is never natural: man is never oppressed by things; in any case, unless he is a naive child who hits stones or a mad prince who orders the sea to be thrashed, he does not rebel against things, but only against other men. The resistance of the thing sustains the action of man as air sustains the flight of the dove; and by projecting himself through it man accepts its being an obstacle; he assumes the risk of a setback in which he does not see a denial of his freedom. The explorer knows that he may be forced to withdraw before arriving at his goal; the scientist, that a certain phenomenon may remain obscure to him; the technician, that his attempt may prove abortive: these withdrawals and errors are another way of disclosing the world. Certainly, a material obstacle may cruelly stand in the way of an undertaking: floods, earthquakes, grasshoppers, epidemics and plague are scourges; but here we have one of the truths of Stoicism: a man must assume even these misfortunes, and since he

must never resign himself in favor of any *thing*, no destruction of a thing will ever be a radical ruin for him; even his death is not an evil since he is man only insofar as he is mortal: he must assume it as the natural limit of his life, as the risk implied by every step. Only man can be an enemy for man; only he can rob him of the meaning of his acts and his life because it also belongs only to him alone to confirm it in its existence, to recognize it in actual fact as a freedom. It is here that the Stoic distinction between "things which do not depend upon us" and those which "depend upon us" proves to be insufficient: for "we" is legion and not an individual; each one depends upon others, and what happens to me by means of others depends upon me as regards its meaning; one does not submit to a war or an occupation as he does to an earthquake: he must take sides for or against, and the foreign wills thereby become allied or hostile. It is this interdependence which explains why oppression is possible and why it is hateful. As we have seen, my freedom, in order to fulfill itself, requires that it emerge into an open future: it is other men who open the future to me, it is they who, setting up the world of tomorrow, define my future; but if, instead of allowing me to participate in this constructive movement, they oblige me to consume my transcendence in vain, if they keep me below the level which they have conquered and on the basis of which new conquests will be achieved, then they are cutting me off from the future, they are changing me into a thing. Life is occupied in both perpetuating itself and in surpassing itself; if all it does

is maintain itself, then living is only not dying, and human existence is indistinguishable from an absurd vegetation; a life justifies itself only if its effort to perpetuate itself is integrated into its surpassing and if this surpassing has no other limits than those which the subject assigns himself. Oppression divides the world into two clans: those who enlighten mankind by thrusting it ahead of itself and those who are condemned to mark time hopelessly in order merely to support the collectivity; their life is a pure repetition of mechanical gestures; their leisure is just about sufficient for them to regain their strength; the oppressor feeds himself on their transcendence and refuses to extend it by a free recognition. The oppressed has only one solution: to deny the harmony of that mankind from which an attempt is made to exclude him, to prove that he is a man and that he is free by revolting against the tyrants. In order to prevent this revolt, one of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one can not revolt against nature. When a conservative wishes to show that the proletariat is not oppressed, he declares that the present distribution of wealth is a natural fact and that there is thus no means of rejecting it; and doubtless he has a good case for proving that, strictly speaking, he is not *stealing* from the worker the product of his labor, since the word *theft* supposes social conventions which in other respects authorizes this type of exploitation; but what the revolutionary means by this word is that the present regime is a human fact. As such, it has to be rejected. This rejection cuts off the

will of the oppressor, in his turn, from the future toward which he was hoping to thrust himself alone: another future is substituted, that of revolution. The struggle is not one of words and ideologies; it is real and concrete: if it is this future which triumphs, and not the former, then it is the oppressed who is realized as a positive and open freedom and the oppressor who becomes an obstacle and a thing.]

There are thus two ways of surpassing the given: it is something quite different from taking a trip or escaping from prison. In these two cases the given is present in its surpassing; but in one case it is present insofar as it is accepted, in the other insofar as rejected, and that makes a radical difference. Hegel has confused these two movements with the ambiguous term "aufheben"; and the whole structure of an optimism which denies failure and death rests on this ambiguity; that is what allows one to regard the future of the world as a continuous and harmonious development; this confusion is the source and also the consequence; it is a perfect epitome of that idealistic and verbose flabbiness with which Marx charged Hegel and to which he opposed a realistic toughness. Revolt is not integrated into the harmonious development of the world; it does not wish to be integrated but rather to explode at the heart of the world and to break its continuity. It is no accident if Marx defined the attitude of the proletariat not positively but negatively: he does not show it as affirming itself or as seeking to realize a classless society, but rather as first attempting to put an end to itself as a class. And it is precisely because it has

no other issue than a negative one that this situation must be eliminated.

All men are interested in this elimination, the oppressor as well as the oppressed, as Marx himself has said, for each one needs to have all men free. There are cases where the slave does not know his servitude and where it is necessary to bring the seed of his liberation to him from the outside: his submission is not enough to justify the tyranny which is imposed upon him. The slave is submissive when one has succeeded in mystifying him in such a way that his situation does not seem to him to be imposed by men, but to be immediately given by nature, by the gods, by the powers against whom revolt has no meaning; thus, he does not accept his condition through a resignation of his freedom since he can not even dream of any other; and in his relationships with his friends, for example, he can live as a free and moral man within this world where his ignorance has enclosed him. The conservative will argue from this that this peace should not be disturbed; it is not necessary to give education to the people or comfort to the natives of the colonies; the "ringleaders" should be suppressed; that is the meaning of an old story of Maurras: there is no need to awaken the sleeper, for that would be to awaken him to unhappiness. Certainly it is not a question of throwing men in spite of themselves, under the pretext of liberation, into a new world, one which they have not chosen, on which they have no grip. The proponents of slavery in the Carolinas had a good case when they showed the conquerors old negro slaves who were be-

wildered by a freedom which they didn't know what to do with and who cried for their former masters; these false liberations — though in a certain sense they are inevitable — overwhelm those who are their victims as if they were a new blow of blind fate. What must be done is to furnish the ignorant slave with the means of transcending his situation by means of revolt, to put an end to his ignorance. We know that the problem of the nineteenth-century socialists was precisely to develop a class consciousness in the proletariat; we see in the life of Flora Tristan, for example, how thankless such a task was: what she wanted for the workers had first to be wanted without them. [“But what right does one have to want something for others?” asks the conservative, who meanwhile regards the workingman or the native as “a grown-up child” and who does not hesitate to dispose of the child's will. Indeed, there is nothing more arbitrary than intervening as a stranger in a destiny which is not ours: one of the shocking things about charity — in the civic sense of the word — is that it is practised from the outside, according to the caprice of the one who distributes it and who is detached from the object. But the cause of freedom is not that of others more than it is mine: it is universally human. If I want the slave to become conscious of his servitude, it is both in order not to be a tyrant myself — for any abstention is complicity, and complicity in this case is tyranny — and in order that new possibilities might be opened to the liberated slave and through him to all men. To want exist-

ence, to want to disclose the world, and to want men to be free are one and the same will.]

Moreover, the oppressor is lying if he claims that the oppressed positively wants oppression; he merely abstains from not wanting it because he is unaware of even the possibility of rejection. All that an external action can propose is to put the oppressed in the presence of his freedom: then he will decide positively and freely. The fact is that he decides against oppression, and it is then that the movement of emancipation really begins. For if it is true that the cause of freedom is the cause of each one, it is also true that the urgency of liberation is not the same for all; Marx has rightly said that it is only to the oppressed that it appears as immediately necessary. As for us, we do not believe in a literal necessity but in a moral exigence; the oppressed can fulfill his freedom as a man only in revolt, since the essential characteristic of the situation against which he is rebelling is precisely its prohibiting him from any positive development; it is only in social and political struggle that his transcendence passes beyond to the infinite. And certainly the proletarian is no more naturally a moral man than another; he can flee from his freedom, dissipate it, vegetate without desire, and give himself up to an inhuman myth; and the trick of “enlightened” capitalism is to make him forget about his concern with genuine justification, offering him, when he leaves the factory where a mechanical job absorbs his transcendence, diversions in which this transcendence ends by petering out: there you have the politics of the American employing class which

catches the worker in the trap of sports, "gadgets," autos, and frigidaires. On the whole, however, he has fewer temptations of betrayal than the members of the privileged classes because the satisfying of his passions, the taste for adventure, and the satisfactions of social seriousness are denied him. And in particular, it is also possible for the bourgeois and the intellectual to use their freedom positively at the same time as they can cooperate in the struggle against oppression: their future is not barred. That is what Ponge, for example, suggests when he writes that he is producing "post-revolutionary" literature. The writer, as well as the scientist and the technician, has the possibility of realizing, before the revolution is accomplished, this re-creation of the world which should be the task of every man if freedom were no longer enchaind anywhere. Whether or not it is desirable to anticipate the future, whether men have to give up the positive use of their freedom as long as the liberation of all has not yet been achieved, or whether, on the contrary, any human fulfillment serves the cause of man, is a point about which revolutionary politics itself is still hesitating. Even in the Soviet Union itself the relation between the building of the future and the present struggle seems to be defined in very different ways according to the moment and the circumstances. It is also a matter wherein each individual has to invent his solution freely. In any case, we can assert that the oppressed is more totally engaged in the struggle than those who, though at one with him in rejecting his servitude, do not experience it; but also that, on the other hand, every man

is affected by this struggle in so essential a way that he can not fulfill himself morally without taking part in it.

The problem is complicated in practice by the fact that today oppression has more than one aspect: the Arabian fellah is oppressed by both the sheiks and the French and English administration; which of the two enemies is to be combatted? The interests of the French proletariat are not the same as those of the natives in the colonies: which are to be served? But here the question is political before being moral: we must end by abolishing all suppression; each one must carry on his struggle in connection with that of the other and by integrating it into the general pattern. What order should be followed? What tactics should be adopted? It is a matter of opportunity and efficiency. For each one it also depends upon his individual situation. It is possible that he may be led to sacrifice temporarily a cause whose success is subordinate to that of a cause whose defense is more urgent; on the other hand, it is possible that one may judge it necessary to maintain the tension of revolt against a situation to which one does not wish to consent at any price: thus, during the war, when Negro leaders in America were asked to drop their own claims for the sake of the general interest, Richard Wright refused; he thought that even in time of war his cause had to be defended. In any case, morality requires that the combatant be not blinded by the goal which he sets up for himself to the point of falling into the fanaticism of seriousness or passion. The cause which he serves must not lock itself up and thus create a new element of

separation: through his own struggle he must seek to serve the universal cause of freedom.]

At once the oppressor raises an objection: under the pretext of freedom, he says, there you go oppressing me in turn; you deprive me of *my* freedom. It is the argument which the Southern slaveholders opposed to the abolitionists, and we know that the Yankees were so imbued with the principles of an abstract democracy that they did not grant that they had the right to deny the Southern planters the freedom to own slaves; the Civil War broke out with a completely formal pretext. We smile at such scruples; yet today America still recognizes more or less implicitly that Southern whites have the freedom to lynch negroes. And it is the same sophism which is innocently displayed in the newspapers of the P. R. L. (Parti Republicain de la Liberte) and, more or less subtly, in all conservative organs. When a party promises the directing classes that it will defend their freedom, it means quite plainly that it demands that they have the freedom of exploiting the working class. A claim of this kind does not outrage us in the name of abstract justice; but a contradiction is dishonestly concealed there. For a freedom wills itself genuinely only by willing itself as an indefinite movement through the freedom of others; as soon as it withdraws into itself, it denies itself on behalf of some object which it prefers to itself: we know well enough what sort of freedom the P. R. L. demands: it is property, the feeling of possession, capital, comfort, moral security. We have to respect freedom only when it is intended for freedom, not when it

strays, flees itself, and resigns itself. A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied. And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom. I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbor into prison.

Indeed, the oppressor himself is conscious of this sophism; he hardly dares to have recourse to it; rather than make an unvarnished demand for freedom to oppress he is more apt to present himself as the defender of certain values. [It is not in his own name that he is fighting, but rather in the name of civilization, of institutions, of monuments, and of virtues which realize objectively the situation which he intends to maintain; he declares that all these things are beautiful and good in themselves; he defends a past which has assumed the icy dignity of being against an uncertain future whose values have not yet been won; this is what is well expressed by the label "conservative." As some people are curators of a museum or a collection of medals, others make themselves the curators of the given world; stressing the sacrifices that are necessarily involved in all change, they side with what has been over against what has not yet been.]

It is quite certain that the surpassing of the past toward the future always demands sacrifices; to claim that in

destroying an old quarter in order to build new houses on its ruins one is preserving it dialectically is a play on words; no dialectic can restore the old port of Marseilles; the past as something not surpassed, in its flesh and blood presence, has completely vanished. All that a stubborn optimism can claim is that the past does not concern us in this particular and fixed form and that we have sacrificed nothing in sacrificing it; thus, many revolutionaries consider it healthy to refuse any attachment to the past and to profess to scorn monuments and traditions. A left-wing journalist who was fuming impatiently in a street of Pompeii said, "What are we doing here? We're wasting our time." This attitude is self-confirming; let us turn away from the past, and there no longer remains any trace of it in the present, or for the future; the people of the Middle Ages had so well forgotten antiquity that there was no longer anyone who even had a desire to know something about it. One can live without Greek, without Latin, without cathedrals, and without history. Yes, but there are many other things that one can live without; the tendency of man is not to reduce himself but to increase his power. To abandon the past to the night of facticity is a way of depopulating the world. I would distrust a humanism which was too indifferent to the efforts of the men of former times; if the disclosure of being achieved by our ancestors does not at all move us, why be so interested in that which is taking place today; why wish so ardently for future realizations? To assert the reign of the human is to acknowledge man in the past as well in the future. The Humanists of the

Renaissance are an example of the help to be derived by a movement of liberation from being rooted in the past; no doubt the study of Greek and Latin does not have this living force in every age; but in any case, the fact of having a past is part of the human condition; if the world behind us were bare, we would hardly be able to see anything before us but a gloomy desert. We must try, through our living projects, to turn to our own account that freedom which was undertaken in the past and to integrate it into the present world.

But on the other hand, we know that if the past concerns us, it does so not as a brute fact, but insofar as it has human signification; if this signification can be recognized only by a project which refuses the legacy of the past, then this legacy must be refused; it would be absurd to uphold against man a datum which is precious only insofar as the freedom of man is expressed in it. There is one country where the cult of the past is erected into a system more than anywhere else: it is the Portugal of today; but it is at the cost of a deliberate contempt for man. Salazar has had brand-new castles built, at great expense, on all the hills where there were ruins standing, and at Obidos he had no hesitation in appropriating for this restoration the funds that were to go to the maternity hospital, which, as a result, had to be closed; on the outskirts of Coimbre where a children's community was to be set up, he spent so much money having the different types of old Portuguese houses reproduced on a reduced scale that barely four children could be lodged in this monstrous village. Dances, songs,

local festivals, and the wearing of old regional costumes are encouraged everywhere: they never open a school. Here we see, in its extreme form, the absurdity of a choice which prefers the Thing to Man from whom alone the Thing can receive its value. We may be moved by dances, songs, and regional costumes because these inventions represent the only free accomplishment which was allowed the peasants amidst the hard conditions under which they formerly lived; by means of these creations they tore themselves away from their servile work, transcended their situation, and asserted themselves as men before the beasts of burden. Wherever these festivals still exist spontaneously, where they have retained this character, they have their meaning and their value. But when they are ceremoniously reproduced for the edification of indifferent tourists, they are no more than a boring documentary, even an odious mystification. It is a sophism to want to maintain by coercion things which derive their worth from the fact that men attempted through them to escape from coercion. In like manner, all those who oppose old lace, rugs, peasant coifs, picturesque houses, regional costumes, hand-made cloth, old language, etcetera, to social evolution know very well that they are dishonest: they themselves do not much value the present reality of these things, and most of the time their lives clearly show it. To be sure, they treat those who do not recognize the unconditional value of an Alençon point as ignoramuses; but at heart they know that these objects are less precious in themselves than as the manifestation of the civilization which they repre-

sent. They are crying up the patience and the submission of industrious hands which were one with their needle as much as they are the lace. We also know that the Nazis made very handsome bindings and lampshades out of human skin.

Thus, oppression can in no way justify itself in the name of the content which it is defending and which it dishonestly sets up as an idol. Bound up with the subjectivity which established it, this content requires its own surpassing. One does not love the past in its living truth if he insists on preserving its hardened and mummified forms. The past is an appeal; it is an appeal toward the future which sometimes can save it only by destroying it. Even though this destruction may be a sacrifice, it would be a lie to deny it: since man wants there to be being, he can not renounce any form of being without regret. But a genuine ethics does not teach us either to sacrifice it or deny it: we must assume it.

The oppressor does not merely try to justify himself as a conserver. Often he tries to invoke future realizations; he speaks in the name of the future. Capitalism sets itself up as the regime which is most favorable to production; the colonist is the only one capable of exploiting the wealth which the native would leave fallow. Oppression tries to defend itself by its utility. But we have seen that it is one of the lies of the serious mind to attempt to give the word "useful" an absolute meaning; nothing is useful if it is not useful to man; nothing is useful to man if the latter is not in a position to define his own ends and values, if he is not free. Doubtless an oppressive regime can

achieve constructions which will serve man: they will serve him only from the day that he is free to use them; as long as the reign of the oppressor lasts, none of the benefits of oppression is a real benefit. Neither in the past nor in the future can one prefer a thing to Man, who alone can establish the reason for all things.

Finally, the oppressor has a good case for showing that respect for freedom is never without difficulty, and perhaps he may even assert that one can never respect all freedoms at the same time. But that simply means that man must accept the tension of the struggle, that his liberation must actively seek to perpetuate itself, without aiming at an impossible state of equilibrium and rest; this does not mean that he ought to prefer the sleep of slavery to this incessant conquest. Whatever the problems raised for him, the setbacks that he will have to assume, and the difficulties with which he will have to struggle, he must reject oppression at any cost.

3. The Antinomies of Action

As we have seen, if the oppressor were aware of the demands of his own freedom, he himself should have to denounce oppression. But he is dishonest; in the name of the serious or of his passions, of his will for power or of his appetites, he refuses to give up his privileges. In order for a liberating action to be a thoroughly moral action, it would have to be achieved through a conversion of the oppressors: there would then be a reconciliation of all

freedoms. But no one any longer dares to abandon himself today to these utopian reveries. We know only too well that we can not count upon a collective conversion. However, by virtue of the fact that the oppressors refuse to co-operate in the affirmation of freedom, they embody, in the eyes of all men of good will, the absurdity of facticity; by calling for the triumph of freedom over facticity, ethics also demands that they be suppressed; and since their subjectivity, by definition, escapes our control, it will be possible to act only on their objective presence; others will here have to be treated like things, with violence; the sad fact of the separation of men will thereby be confirmed. Thus, here is the oppressor oppressed in turn; and the men who do violence to him in their turn become masters, tyrants, and executioners: in revolting, the oppressed are metamorphosed into a blind force, a brutal fatality; the evil which divides the world is carried out in their own hearts. And doubtless it is not a question of backing out of these consequences, for the ill-will of the oppressor imposes upon each one the alternative of being the enemy of the oppressed if he is not that of their tyrant; evidently, it is necessary to choose to sacrifice the one who is an enemy of man; but the fact is that one finds himself forced to treat certain men as things in order to win the freedom of all.

A freedom which is occupied in denying freedom is itself so outrageous that the outrageousness of the violence which one practises against it is almost cancelled out: hatred, indignation, and anger (which even the Marxist cultivates, despite the cold impartiality of the doctrine)

wipe out all scruples. But the oppressor would not be so strong if he did not have accomplices among the oppressed themselves; mystification is one of the forms of oppression; ignorance is a situation in which man may be enclosed as narrowly as in a prison; as we have already said, every individual may practise his freedom inside his world, but not everyone has the means of rejecting, even by doubt, the values, taboos, and prescriptions by which he is surrounded; doubtless, respectful minds take the object of their respect for their own; in this sense they are *responsible* for it, as they are responsible for their presence in the world: but they are not *guilty* if their adhesion is not a resignation of their freedom. When a young sixteen-year old Nazi died crying, "Heil Hitler!" he was not guilty, and it was not he whom we hated but his masters. The desirable thing would be to re-educate this misled youth; it would be necessary to expose the mystification and to put the men who are its victims in the presence of their freedom. But the urgency of the struggle forbids this slow labor. We are obliged to destroy not only the oppressor but also those who serve him, whether they do so out of ignorance or out of constraint.

As we have also seen, the situation of the world is so complex that one can not fight everywhere at the same time and for everyone. In order to win an urgent victory, one has to give up the idea, at least temporarily, of serving certain valid causes; one may even be brought to the point of fighting against them. Thus, during the course of the last war, no Anti-fascist could have wanted the revolts of the natives in the British Empire to be suc-

cessful; on the contrary, these revolts were supported by the Fascist regimes; and yet, we can not blame those who, considering their emancipation to be the more urgent action, took advantage of the situation to obtain it. Thus, it is possible, and often it even happens, that one finds himself obliged to oppress and kill men who are pursuing goals whose validity one acknowledges himself.

But that is not the worst thing to be said for violence. It not only forces us to sacrifice the men who are in our way, but also those who are fighting on our side, and even ourselves. Since we can conquer our enemies only by acting upon their facticity, by reducing them to things, we have to make ourselves things; in this struggle in which wills are forced to confront each other through their bodies, the bodies of our allies, like those of our opponents are exposed to the same brutal hazard: they will be wounded, killed, or starved. Every war, every revolution, demands the sacrifice of a generation, of a collectivity, by those who undertake it. And even outside of periods of crisis when blood flows, the permanent possibility of violence can constitute between nations and classes a state of veiled warfare in which individuals are sacrificed in a permanent way.

Thus one finds himself in the presence of the paradox that no action can be generated for man without its being immediately generated against men. This obvious truth, which is universally known, is, however, so bitter that the first concern of a doctrine of action is ordinarily to mask this element of failure that is involved in any undertaking. The parties of oppression beg the question;

they deny the value of what they sacrifice in such a way that they find that they are sacrificing *nothing*. Passing dishonestly from the serious to nihilism, they set up both the unconditioned value of their end and the insignificance of the men whom they are using as instruments. High as it may be, the number of victims is always measurable; and each one taken one by one is never anything but an individual: yet, through time and space, the triumph of the cause embraces the infinite, it interests the whole collectivity. In order to deny the outrage it is enough to deny the importance of the individual, even though it be at the cost of this collectivity: *it* is everything, *he* is only a zero.

In one sense the individual, as a matter of fact, is not very much, and we can understand the misanthrope who in 1939 declared: "After all, when you look at people one by one, it doesn't seem so awful a thing to make war upon them." Reduced to pure facticity, congealed in his immanence, cut off from his future, deprived of his transcendence and of the world which that transcendence discloses, a man no longer appears as anything more than a thing among things which can be subtracted from the collectivity of other things without its leaving upon the earth any trace of its absence. Multiply this paltry existence by thousands of copies and its insignificance remains; mathematics also teaches us that zero multiplied by any finite number remains zero. It is even possible that the wretchedness of each element is only further affirmed by this futile expansion. Horror is sometimes self-destructive before the photographs of the charnel-houses of Buch-

enwald and Dachau and of the ditches strewn with bones; it takes on the aspect of indifference; that decomposed, that animal flesh seems so essentially doomed to decay that one can no longer even regret that it has fulfilled its destiny; it is when a man is alive that his death appears to be an outrage, but a corpse has the stupid tranquillity of trees and stones: those who have done it say that it is easy to walk on a corpse and still easier to walk over a pile of corpses; and it is the same reason that accounts for the callousness described by those deportees who escaped death: through sickness, pain, hunger, and death, they no longer saw their comrades and themselves as anything more than an animal horde whose life or desires were no longer justified by anything, whose very revolts were only the agitations of animals. In order to remain capable of perceiving man through these humiliated bodies one had to be sustained by political faith, intellectual pride, or Christian charity. That is why the Nazis were so systematically relentless in casting into abjection the men they wanted to destroy: the disgust which the victims felt in regard to themselves stifled the voice of revolt and justified the executioners in their own eyes. All oppressive regimes become stronger through the degradation of the oppressed. In Algeria I have seen any number of colonists appease their conscience by the contempt in which they held the Arabs who were crushed with misery: the more miserable the latter were, the more contemptible they seemed, so much so that there was never any room for remorse. And the truth is that certain tribes in the south were so ravaged by disease

and famine that one could no longer feel either rebellious or hopeful regarding them; rather, one wished for the death of those unhappy creatures who have been reduced to so elemental an animality that even the maternal instinct has been suppressed in them. Yet, with all this sordid resignation, there were children who played and laughed; and their smile exposed the lie of their oppressors: it was an appeal and a promise; it projected a future before the child, a man's future. If, in all oppressed countries, a child's face is so moving, it is not that the child is more moving or that he has more of a right to happiness than the others: it is that he is the living affirmation of human transcendence: he is on the watch, he is an eager hand held out to the world, he is a hope, a project. The trick of tyrants is to enclose a man in the immanence of his facticity and to try to forget that man is always, as Heidegger puts it, "infinitely more than what he would be if he were reduced to being what he is;" man is a being of the distances, a movement toward the future, a project. The tyrant asserts himself as a transcendence; he considers others as pure immanences: he thus arrogates to himself the right to treat them like cattle. We see the sophism on which his conduct is based: of the ambiguous condition which is that of all men, he retains for himself the only aspect of a transcendence which is capable of justifying itself; for the others, the contingent and unjustified aspect of immanence.

But if that kind of contempt for man is convenient, it is also dangerous; the feeling of abjection can confirm men in a hopeless resignation but can not incite them to

the struggle and sacrifice which is consented to with their life; this was seen in the time of the Roman decadence when men lost their zest for life and the readiness to risk it. In any case, the tyrant himself does not openly set up this contempt as a universal principle: it is the Jew, the negro, or the native whom he encloses in his immanence; with his subordinates and his soldiers he uses different language. For it is quite clear that if the individual is a pure zero, the sum of those zeros which make up the collectivity is also a zero: no undertaking has any importance, no defeat as well as no victory. In order to appeal to the devotion of his troops, the chief or the authoritarian party will utilize a truth which is the opposite of the one which sanctions their brutal oppression: namely, that the value of the individual is asserted only in his surpassing. This is one of the aspects of the doctrine of Hegel which the dictatorial regimes readily make use of. And it is a point at which fascist ideology and Marxist ideology converge. A doctrine which aims at the liberation of man evidently can not rest on a contempt for the individual; but it can propose to him no other salvation than his subordination to the collectivity. The finite is nothing if it is not its transition to the infinite; the death of an individual is not a failure if it is integrated into a project which surpasses the limits of life, the substance of this life being outside of the individual himself, in the class, in the socialist State; if the individual is taught to consent to his sacrifice, the latter is abolished as such, and the soldier who has renounced himself in favor of his cause will die joyfully; in fact, that is how the young Hitlerians died.

We know how many edifying speeches this philosophy has inspired: it is by losing oneself that one finds himself, by dying that one fulfills his life, by accepting servitude that one realizes his freedom; all leaders of men preach in this vein. And if there are any who refuse to heed this language, they are wrong, they are cowards: as such, they are worthless, they aren't worth anyone's bothering with them. The brave man dies gaily, of his own free will; the one who rejects death deserves only to die. There you have the problem elegantly resolved.

But one may ask whether this convenient solution is not self-contesting. In Hegel the individual is only an abstract moment in the History of absolute Mind. This is explained by the first intuition of the system which, identifying the real and the rational, empties the human world of its sensible thickness; if the truth of the here and now is only Space and Time, if the truth of one's cause is its passage into the other, then the attachment to the individual substance of life is evidently an error, an inadequate attitude. The essential moment of Hegelian ethics is the moment when consciousnesses recognize one another; in this operation the other is recognized as identical with me, which means that in myself it is the universal truth of my self which alone is recognized; so individuality is denied, and it can no longer reappear except on the natural and contingent plane; moral salvation will lie in my surpassing toward that other who is equal to myself and who in turn will surpass himself toward another. Hegel himself recognizes that if this passage continued indefinitely, Totality would never be achieved, the

real would peter out in the same measure: one can not, without absurdity, indefinitely sacrifice each generation to the following one; human history would then be only an endless succession of negations which would never return to the positive; all action would be destruction and life would be a vain flight. We must admit that there will be a recovery of the real and that all sacrifices will find their positive form within the absolute Mind. But this does not work without some difficulty. The Mind is a subject; but *who* is a subject? After Descartes how can we ignore the fact that subjectivity radically signifies separation? And if it is admitted, at the cost of a contradiction, that *the* subject will be *the* men of the future reconciled, it must be clearly recognized that the men of today who turn out to have been the *substance* of the real, and not *subjects*, remain excluded forever from this reconciliation. Furthermore, even Hegel retreats from the idea of this motionless future; since Mind is restlessness, the dialectic of struggle and conciliation can never be stopped: the future which it envisages is not the perpetual peace of Kant but an indefinite state of war. It declares that this war will no longer appear as a temporary evil in which each individual makes a gift of himself to the State; but it is precisely at this point that there is a bit of sleight-of-hand: for *why* would he agree to this gift since the State can not be the achieving of the real, Totality recovering itself? The whole system seems like a huge mystification, since it subordinates all its moments to an end term whose coming it dares not set up; the individual renounces himself; but no reality in favor of which he

can renounce himself is ever affirmed or recovered. Through all this learned dialectic we finally come back to the sophism which we exposed: if the individual is nothing, society can not be something. Take his substance away from him, and the State has no more substance; if he has nothing to sacrifice, there is nothing before him to sacrifice to. Hegelian fullness immediately passes into the nothingness of absence. And the very grandeur of that failure makes this truth shine forth: only the subject can justify his own existence; no external subject, no object, can bring him salvation from the outside. He can not be regarded as a nothing, since the consciousness of all things is within him.

Thus, nihilistic pessimism and rationalistic optimism fail in their effort to juggle away the bitter truth of sacrifice: they also eliminate all reasons for wanting it. Someone told a young invalid who wept because she had to leave her home, her occupations, and her whole past life, "Get cured. The rest has no importance." "But if nothing has any importance," she answered, "what good is it to get cured?" She was right. In order for this world to have any importance, in order for our undertaking to have a meaning and to be worthy of sacrifices, we must affirm the concrete and particular thickness of this world and the individual reality of our projects and ourselves. This is what democratic societies understand; they strive to confirm citizens in the feeling of their individual value; the whole ceremonious apparatus of baptism, marriage, and burial is the collectivity's homage to the individual; and the rites of justice seek to manifest society's respect

for each of its members considered in his particularity. After or during a period of violence when men are treated like objects, one is astonished, even irritated, at seeing human life rediscover, in certain cases, a sacred character. Why those hesitations of the courts, those long drawn-out trials, since men died by the million, like animals, since the very ones being judged coldly massacred them? The reason is that once the period of crisis, in which the democracies themselves, whether they liked it or not, had to resort to blind violence, has passed, they aim to re-establish the individual within his rights; more than ever they must restore to their members the sense of their dignity, the sense of the dignity of each man, taken one by one; the soldier must become a citizen again so that the city may continue to subsist as such, may continue to deserve one's dedicating oneself to it.)

But if the individual is set up as a unique and irreducible value, the word sacrifice regains all its meaning; what a man loses in renouncing his plans, his future, and his life no longer appears as a negligible thing. Even if he decides that in order to justify his life he must consent to limiting its course, even if he accepts dying, there is a wrench at the heart of this acceptance, for freedom demands both that it recover itself as an absolute and that it prolong its movement indefinitely: it is through this indefinite movement that it desires to come back to itself and to confirm itself; now, death puts an end to his drive; the hero can transcend death toward a future fulfillment, but he will not be present in that future; this must be understood if one wishes to restore to heroism

its true worth: it is neither natural nor easy; the hero may overcome his regret and carry out his sacrifice; the latter is none the less an absolute renunciation. The death of those to whom we are attached by particular ties will also be consented to as an individual and irreducible misfortune. A collectivist conception of man does not concede a valid existence to such sentiments as love, tenderness, and friendship; the abstract identity of individuals merely authorizes a comradeship between them by means of which each one is likened to each of the others. In marching, in choral singing, in common work and struggle, all the others appear as the same; nobody ever dies. On the contrary, if individuals recognize themselves in their differences, individual relations are established among them, and each one becomes irreplaceable for a few others. And violence does not merely provoke in the world the wrench of the sacrifice to which one has consented; it is also undergone in revolt and refusal. Even the one who desires a victory and who knows that it has to be paid for will wonder: why with *my* blood rather than with another's? Why is it my son who is dead? And we have seen that every struggle obliges us to sacrifice people whom our victory does not concern, people who, in all honesty, reject it as a cataclysm: these people will die in astonishment, anger or despair. Undergone as a misfortune, violence appears as a crime to the one who practices it. That is why Saint-Just, who believed in the individual and who knew that all authority is violence, said with somber lucidity, "No one governs innocently."

We may well assume that not all those who govern have

the courage to make such a confession; and furthermore it might be dangerous for them to make it too loudly. They try to mask the crime from themselves; at least they try to conceal it from the notice of those who submit to their law. If they can not totally deny it, they attempt to justify it. The most radical justification would be to demonstrate that it is necessary: it then ceases to be a crime, it becomes fatality. Even if an end is posited as necessary, the contingency of the means renders the chief's decisions arbitrary, and each individual suffering appears as unjustified: why this bloody revolution instead of slow reforms? And who will dare to designate the victim who is anonymously demanded by the general plan? On the contrary, if only one way shows itself to be possible, if the unrolling of history is fatal, there is no longer any place for the anguish of choice, or for regret, or for outrage; revolt can no longer surge up in any heart. This is what makes historical materialism so reassuring a doctrine; the troublesome idea of a subjective caprice or an objective chance is thereby eliminated. The thought and the voice of the directors merely reflect the fatal exigences of History. But in order that this faith be living and efficacious, it is necessary that no reflection mediatize the subjectivity of the chiefs and make it appear as such; if the chief considers that he does not simply reflect the given situation but that he is interpreting it, he becomes a prey to anguish: who am I to believe in myself? And if the soldier's eyes open, he too asks: who is he to command me? Instead of a prophet, he sees nothing more than a tyrant. That is why every authoritarian party regards thought as a danger

and reflection as a crime; it is by means of thought that crime appears as such in the world. This is one of the meanings of Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. Roubatchov easily slips into confession because he feels that hesitation and doubt are the most radical, the most unpardonable of faults; they undermine the world of objectivity much more than does an act of capricious disobedience. Yet, however cruel the yoke may be, in spite of the purges, murders, and deportations, every regime has opponents: there are reflection, doubt, and contestation. And even if the opponent is in the wrong, his error brings to light a truth, namely, that there is a place in this world for error and subjectivity; whether he is right or wrong, he triumphs; he shows that the men who are in power may also be mistaken. And furthermore, the latter know it; they know that they hesitate and that their decisions are risky. The doctrine of necessity is much more a weapon than a faith; and if they use it, they do so because they know well enough that the soldier may act otherwise than he does, otherwise than the way they want him to, that he may disobey; they know well enough that he is free and that they are fettering his freedom. It is the first sacrifice that they impose upon him: in order to achieve the liberation of men he has to give up his own freedom, even his freedom of thought. In order to mask the violence, what they do is to have recourse to a new violence which even invades his mind.

Very well, replies the partisan who is sure of his aims, but this violence is useful. And the justification which he here invokes is that which, in the most general way,

inspires and legitimizes all action. From conservatives to revolutionaries, through idealistic and moral vocabularies or realistic and positive ones, the outrageousness of violence is excused in the name of utility. It does not much matter that the action is not fatally commanded by anterior events as long as it is called for by the proposed end; this end sets up the means which are subordinated to it; and thanks to this subordination, one can perhaps not avoid sacrifice but one can legitimize it: this is what is important to the man of action; like Saint-Just, he accepts the loss of his innocence. It is the arbitrariness of the crime that is repugnant to him more than the crime itself. If the sacrifices which have been assented to find their rational place within the enterprise, one escapes from the anguish of decision and from remorse. But one has to win out; defeat would change the murders and destruction into unjustified outrage, since they would have been carried out in vain; but victory gives meaning and utility to all the misfortunes which have helped bring it about.

Such a position would be solid and satisfactory if the word *useful* had an absolute meaning in itself; as we have seen, the characteristic of the spirit of seriousness is precisely to confer a meaning upon it by raising the Thing or the Cause to the dignity of an unconditioned end. The only problem then raised is a technical problem; the means will be chosen according to their effectiveness, their speed, and their economy; it is simply a question of measuring the relationships of the factors of time, cost, and probability of success. Furthermore, in war-time discipline spares the subordinates the problems of such calcu-

lations; they concern only the staff. The soldier does not call into question either the aim or the means of attaining it: he obeys without any discussion. However, what distinguishes war and politics from all other techniques is that the material that is employed is a human material. Now human efforts and lives can no more be treated as blind instruments than human work can be treated as simple merchandise; at the same time as he is a means for attaining an end, man is himself an end. The word *useful* requires a complement, and there can be only one: man himself. And the most disciplined soldier would mutiny if skillful propaganda did not persuade him that he is dedicating himself to the cause of man: to his cause.

But is the cause of Man that of each man? That is what utilitarian ethics has been striving to demonstrate since Hegel; if one wishes to give the word *useful* a universal and absolute meaning, it is always a question of reabsorbing each man into the bosom of mankind; it is said that despite the weaknesses of the flesh and that particular fear which each one experiences in the face of his particular death, the real interest of each one is mingled with the general interest. And it is true that each is bound to all; but that is precisely the ambiguity of his condition: in his surpassing toward others, each one exists absolutely as for himself; each is interested in the liberation of all, but as a separate existence engaged in his own projects. So much so that the terms "useful to Man," "useful to this man," do not overlap. Universal, absolute man exists nowhere. From this angle, we again come upon the same antinomy: the only justification of sacrifice is its utility;

but the useful is what serves Man. Thus, in order to serve some men we must do disservice to others. By what principle are we to choose between them?

It must again be called to mind that the supreme end at which man must aim is his freedom, which alone is capable of establishing the value of every end; thus, comfort, happiness, all relative goods which human projects define, will be subordinated to this absolute condition of realization. The freedom of a single man must count more than a cotton or rubber harvest; although this principle is not respected in fact, it is usually recognized theoretically. But what makes the problem so difficult is that it is a matter of choosing between the negation of one freedom or another: every war supposes a discipline, every revolution a dictatorship, every political move a certain amount of lying; action implies all forms of enslaving, from murder to mystification. Is it therefore absurd in every case? Or, in spite of everything, are we able to find, within the very outrage that it implies, reasons for wanting one thing rather than another?

One generally takes numerical considerations into account by a strange compromise which clearly shows that every action treats men both as a means and as an end, as an external object and as an inwardness; it is better to save the lives of ten men than of only one. Thus, one treats man as an end, for to set up quantity as a value is to set up the positive value of each unit; but it is setting it up as a quantifiable value, thus, as an externality. I have known a Kantian rationalist who pas-

sionately maintained that it is as immoral to choose the death of a single man as to let ten thousand die; he was right in the sense that in each murder the outrage is total; ten thousand dead — there are never ten thousand copies of a single death; no multiplication is relevant to subjectivity. But he forgot that for the one who had the decision to make men are given, nevertheless, as objects that can be counted; it is therefore logical, though this logic implies an outrageous absurdity, to prefer the salvation of the greater number. Moreover, this position of the problem is rather abstract, for one rarely bases a choice on pure quantity. Those men among whom one hesitates have functions in society. The general who is sparing of the lives of his soldiers saves them as human material that it is useful to save for tomorrow's battles or for the reconstruction of the country; and he sometimes condemns to death thousands of civilians whose fate he is not concerned with in order to spare the lives of a hundred soldiers or ten specialists. An extreme case is the one David Rousset describes in *The Days of Our Death*: the S.S. obliged the responsible members of the concentration camps to designate which prisoners were to go to the gas chambers. The politicians agreed to assume this responsibility because they thought that they had a valid principle of selection: they protected the politicians of their party because the lives of these men who were devoted to a cause which they thought was just seemed to them to be the most useful to preserve. We know that the communists have been widely accused of this partiality; however, since one could in no way escape the

atrocities of these massacres, the only thing to do was to try, as far as possible, to rationalize it.

It seems as if we have hardly advanced, for we come back, in the end, to the statement that what appears as useful is to sacrifice the less useful men to the more useful. But even this shift from useful to useful will enlighten us: the complement of the word *useful* is the word *man*, but it is also the word *future*. It is man insofar as he is, according to the formula of Ponge, "the future of man." Indeed, cut off from his transcendence, reduced to the facticity of his presence, an individual is nothing; it is by his project that he fulfills himself, by the end at which he aims that he justifies himself; thus, this justification is always to come. Only the future can take the present for its own and keep it alive by surpassing it. A choice will become possible in the light of the future, which is the meaning of tomorrow because the present appears as the facticity which must be transcended toward freedom. No action is conceivable without this sovereign affirmation of the future. But we still have to agree upon what underlies this word.