Sartre and Engels
The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and the Confrontation on the Dialectics of Nature

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Abstract: In a little remembered event in December 1961, Sartre entered into a debate with Roger Garaudy, as well as other representatives of the *Parti Communiste Française* (PCF), on the topic of the existence of a universal dialectical law applicable to nature as well as to human thought. In the debate, Sartre seeks to rebut the notion that humankind is merely an "alien addition" to nature, as Engels maintained, and instead argues that individual subjectivity cannot be reduced to an object of knowledge. This paper highlights the importance of the debate for both sides, but particularly for Sartre and his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

Keywords: *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, dialectical materialism, dialectics of nature, subjectivity

Introduction

On a bitterly cold December evening in 1961, some 6,000 mostly young people attended a debate between four luminaries of French intellectualism. At the time, such a gathering would not have seemed unusual; after all, the simmering political tension that always seemed to percolate just below the surface had burst into the open less than two months earlier in a police massacre that killed an estimated 200 French-Algerian Muslims who had been peacefully protesting a curfew directed solely against their ethnic and religious status.[1] Rather, the remarkable aspect that brought together Jean-Paul Sartre, the most prominent intellectual of the time, Roger Garaudy, a leader and resident philosopher of the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF), Jean

doi:10.3167/ssi.2012.180202 ISSN 1357-1559 (Print), ISSN 1558-5476 (Online)

Hyppolite, then a Professor at the *Sorbonne* and later to be at the *Collège de France*, and Jean-Pierre Vigier, a physicist and head of research at the *Centre national de la researche scientifique* (*C.N.R.S.*), one of France's most renowned scientific research institutes, was not the current political situation. On the contrary, the topic that evening concerned whether or not there existed dialectical laws of nature as there were for thought, as Frederick Engels and Karl Marx laid out in their writings more than eighty years before the debate. Presiding over the discussion was Jean Orcel, professor of mineralogy at the National Museum of Natural History and a member of the PCF since his time in the Resistance.

In the midst of de-Stalinization and as part of its attempt to engage various political and social thought, the debate was sponsored by the PCF's Council for the Center for Marxist Study and Research as well as the Communist Student Union, and was the inaugural event of a larger conference held over a period of seven days on the general theme of "Humanism and Dialectic."[2] The conference itself not only attracted a large and enthusiastic audience, but also provoked a deep discussion of one of the PCF's sacrosanct tenets.[3]

Although the topic of a dialectics of nature may seem arcane to most, and certainly of little importance at the time (and even less so today), one should not underestimate the significance attributable to the concept of a universal dialectical law applicable to nature as well as to thought in Marxism. Likewise, one should also understand the critical role such a concept plays, albeit for quite different reasons, in Sartre's work and especially his *Critique of Dialectic Reason*, which was published a little over a year before the debate. In fact, in the introductory pages of the first volume of the *Critique*, Sartre discusses alternatives to his approach, but devotes most of his attention to Engels and the dialectics of nature. Sartre argues that Marxism refuses to acknowledge thought itself as a dialectical activity; instead, Marxism merely dissolves thought into a universal materialist dialectic, thus eliminating humankind by dispersing it into the universe. In Sartre's words, this allows Marxism to substitute "Being for Truth," which results in Being no longer manifesting itself in any way, but merely evolving according to its own laws: the dialectics of nature is, consequently, a dialectic devoid of humankind. The source for this unfortunate occurrence is best expressed when Sartre says that "a law begins by being a hypothesis and ends by becoming a fact."[4] As we shall see, this prophetic statement illustrates the exact course of development that Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* assumes in its journey from hypothetical and forgotten fragment to canonical fact and law.

The stakes for the participants could not have been greater, and while others interpret the importance of the debate in various ways including an inability to agree upon a definition of the dialectic, or as two fundamentally different approaches to history—one dogmatic and the other critical—I would argue that the real philosophical, but at the same time deeply political, issue facing Sartre is the following. If the dialectics of nature as Engels conceived of it is accepted, then dialectical materialism represents, in a unified and coherent form, a detailed ontology based on substantive knowledge in the different sciences. As such, it is made universal and forms a complete philosophy.[5] In short, it is a general conception of the world and hence an incarnation of philosophy itself. But if this is so, then, the real question is not only the efficacy of the formulation of Engels' fundamental dialectical laws of nature applicable across all domains—the inanimate, the animate, and most importantly the connection between the two—but also the far more critical role of humankind within such a dialectic. In other words, is humankind merely an "alien addition" to nature, as Engels would have us believe, and, if so, is not Being, as Sartre argues, then reduced to knowledge, with humans just objects in a vast array of undifferentiated objects, the study of which is no different than the study of rocks?

In Sartre's view, the issue of a dialectic of nature is so fundamental to his project, and to his view of Marxism itself, that he confronts the topic at the very beginning of an already lengthy text, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Here he establishes a basic and essential concept that permeates the remainder of the *Critique*: an individual subjectivity not merely reduced to an object of knowledge. Two reasons ground this position. First, in order to provide a foundation for the discussion to follow, namely the sociological/anthropological formation of groups from collectives through *individual mediated praxis*, Sartre must show that the dialectic "is the individual career of its object" (CDR 37). In other words, there can be no pre-ordained schema imposed from without that controls individual development. On the contrary, humans live their history in a situation that is, as Sartre argues, dominated by a *milieu* of scarcity and necessity, which only dialectical reason can make intelligible. Secondly, to conceive of humankind existentially as *praxis-project* necessitates not only that the dialectic be grounded in existence, but also, in order to render the dialectic intelligible, that this existence be *human* existence. In this sense the polemic surrounding the dialectics of nature should be seen as a window opening onto a much larger horizon concerning the tension between, on the one hand, Sartre's desire to meld exis-

tentialism with his interpretation of Marxism, and, on the other hand, his attempt to ground that relationship in a subjective humanism that runs counter to the predicament of the subservient individual subsumed by the authority of class politics.[6]

While I intend to critically discuss each participant's involvement in the debate, I believe it necessary to first situate the event within its historical context. To merely read the debate without an understanding of the intellectual environment of the time renders the topic and the participants almost unapproachable. Likewise, to read just one of the participants' arguments is to comprehend the give and take of the discussion in a vacuum.[7] In order to accomplish this I will first lay out Engels' position on dialectical materialism enunciated primarily in his *Dialectics of Nature* and in his *Anti-Dühring*.[8] Although Engels' work is the starting point for the debate, few, if any, commentators ever really discuss its content; it is for the most part assumed. Yet, I believe an understanding of Engels' writings on the subject will prove to be quite revealing. From this point, I will move to a discussion of the basis for each side's argument in the debate. Lastly I will critically discuss the debate as it unfolds through its participants.

Engels and the *Dialectics of Nature*

Both Engels and Marx shared an early interest in the study of the natural sciences, but it was Engels who pursued this interest in earnest, informingMarx in 1873 of his intention to work on the *Dialectics of Nature*.[9] Even though the work was to remain unfinished and fragmentary, it assumed canonical status in Marxist circles almost immediately after its publication in the mid-1920s. And it was that status that Sartre sought to discredit and undo in his debate with the PCF establishment.

Most of the 92 sections of the *Dialectics of Nature* consist of brief notes that roughly break down into two related lines of thought, which together comprise the definition of dialectics as "nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought" (AD 131; DN 492). Each of these propositions plays a significant foundational role in the December debate. In the first line of thought, Engels puts forth a theory antithetical to the then prevailing viewpoint of the "*absolute immutability of nature*" (DN 321). In other words, Engels disputed, for example, the common notion that the planets and their satellites,

once put into motion by the mysterious "first impulse," circled on and on in their preordained ellipses for all eternity (AD 53). This fixed idea of nature gave way to the idea that:

> When we consider and reflect upon nature, … we see the picture of an endless entanglement of relations and reactions in which nothing remains, what, where,and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being and passes away. This primitive, naïve but intrinsically correct conception of the world is that of ancient Greek philosophy, and was first clearly formulated by Heraclitus: everything is and is not, for everything is *fluid*, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away. (AD 21; DN 321-23 and 327)

Thus, there were no permanent categories; rather, the natural sciences showed that things regarded previously as incompatible or forever separated, such as cause and effect, were, in fact, clearly connected and essentially merged into one another. The identification of things in their mutual relationships as only "causes" or only "effects" was indicative of what Engels called a "formal" or "metaphysical" way of understanding as opposed to a "concrete" manner of thinking from a dialectical point of view (AD 23). Engels argued that the dialectical method not only dissolved the concepts through which thinking functioned, but it also showed that what was seemingly immovable invariably developed into something new in objective reality.[10] Thus, Engels' notion of development held the key to eliminating the previously existing discontinuity between animate and inanimate nature. While individual branches of science such as geology, chemistry, and physics already embraced such a notion, the natural sciences as a whole and, in particular, the interface between the inorganic and organic scientific world, had yet to account for a unified structure. Engels felt, and adherents to Marxism believed, that a vital new concept of nature had been discovered, which was necessary to fill a previously unfilled void. In a statement that would later become completely perverted under Stalin, Engels remarked that dialectics knew "no hard-and-fast lines." There was no unconditional, universally valid "either—or" that connected the fixed metaphysical differences; instead, there was a "both this—and that" that reconciled opposites (DN 493). From the start, then, Engels presupposed a parallelism or unity between thought and objective reality, and it was the transient and inconsistent nature of reality that required thought to work with contradictory concepts that were not mutually exclusive.

Even though reality can be made the object of real knowledge, the order of nature is still mutable. This is not to suggest, however,

that an order does not exist. At this point the second major theme was introduced. For Engels, everything that existed was matter in motion, but this did not mean that all motion was the same (AD 44; DN 332-33). The natural sciences illuminated how these various forms of motion merged into one another, and Engels spent considerable time indicating how, for instance, mechanical motion, heat, and electricity were not absolutely distinct from each other. They represented, perhaps, different qualities, but the transition from one quality to another could be quantitatively determined. Engels then put forth the idea that the universe constituted a unit or a whole that consisted of matter in constant motion. This was not the same motion, however, but a number of different motions stretching from mechanical motion to the motion delineated in the history of humanity. The transition from one form of motion to another could be calculated, but each form displayed its own unique appearance or manifestation. With this much broader concept of motion, Engels believed that not only were mechanical, physical, and chemical forms of motion converted into each other, but also that chemical forms of motion were converted into biological forms out of a given level of development of nature, which, in turn, gave rise to life.

These ideas were provided further substance a short time later when Engels introduced the concept of dialectical laws of nature in *Anti-Dühring*. But it was in his "Outline of the General Plan" to the *Dialectics of Nature*, written before *Anti-Dühring,* that Engels first elaborated specific dialectical laws of nature. Here Engels stated that dialectics was the science of universal interconnections with not three main laws, but four:

> transformation of quantity and quality—mutual penetration of polar opposites and transformation into each other when carried to extremes—development through contradiction or negation of the negation—spiral form of development. (DN 313)

A year later, in the main text of the *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels dropped the fourth law and posited only the first three as dialectical laws of nature.[11]

The first law, the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa, concerned the ability to affect qualitative change only through quantitative addition or subtraction of matter or motion, that is, energy. As Engels explained, the change of form of motion was always a process that took place between two bodies, one of which lost a definite amount of motion of a particular quality such as heat, while the other gained a corresponding quantity of motion of

another quality such as mechanical motion, electricity, or chemical decomposition (DN 357). In a remark that had repercussions for the debate in 1961, Engels claimed that while the same law held true for living beings as for non-living things, he was only concerned with the latter, since with respect to the former, "[the law] operates under very complex conditions and at present quantitative measurement is still often impossible for us" (DN 357-58). He then delineated, within the fields of mechanics, physics, and chemistry, the nature of the law of transformation of quantity into quality and its inverse. But, when he came to a discussion of biology, he again repeated his earlier sentiment by saying that he preferred to dwell on examples of the "exact sciences" because the quantities were more accurately measurable and traceable (DN 361-62). It is interesting to note that both in the debate and in his written work, especially the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre consistently maintained that while a dialectic of nature could possibly exist, science lacked the tools to prove the laws of nature applicable to animate objects (CDR 32-33). What was true in Engels' time was also true almost eighty years later. Thus, it can be said that Sartre was merely agreeing with Engels' earlier conclusion, a point that escaped both Garaudy and Vigier, who remained entrenched in a dogmatic Marxism that had lost sight of its origin.

At this juncture, the fragmentary nature of the *Dialectics of Nature* rears its head and the discussion of the first dialectical law ends, as does any further discussion of the other two laws. However, in *Anti-Dühring,* Engels further develops his argument, and it is to that text that we must now turn.

Engels expanded his earlier discussion of quality into quantity with his theory of contradiction. He argued that no contradictions were present so long as things were at rest and lifeless, but that matters were quite different when motion was considered, since motion itself created contradictions (AD 111). While Engels was refuting Eugen Dühring's assertion that there was no "bridge" in rational mechanics from the strictly static state to the dynamic, he was also challenging the metaphysical status of the principle of non-contradiction. Moreover, if the mechanical change of position contained a contradiction at a very simple level, then Engels asserted it was equally true of the higher forms of motion of matter, especially with regard to organic life and its development. Being was "at each moment itself and yet something else." (AD 112). Thus, not unlike thought, life was also a set of contradictions that were present in things and processes themselves, and which constantly originated

and ultimately resolved themselves when death stepped in and all the contradictions necessarily faded away.

Engels then moved on to the second dialectical law of nature, the negation of the negation, which he described as an "extremely general—and for this reason extremely far reaching and important—law of development of nature, history, and thought" (AD 131). Here Engels turned to nature for an explanation. Specifically, he pointed to a grain of barley that fell on suitable soil and under the proper conditions underwent a change; it germinated. The grain, Engels believed, ceased to exist, was negated, and in its place a plant arose. After discussing the law of negation of the negation in the organic world, Engels offered similar arguments for geology, mathematics, history, and even philosophy. Nonetheless, Engels admitted that the discussion of the law of the negation of the negation was applied in a rather generalized manner with no discussion of the *particular* process of development undertaken in the example of the grain of barley (AD 131). For that matter, Engels never said whether the process in the inanimate world was even remotely akin to the process in the animate world, a seemingly essential fact if his thesis that the dialectics of nature applied equally to both human thought as well as nature was to be borne out.

In his concluding remarks concerning the law of the negation of the negation, Engels asserted that humans thought dialectically long before they even knew what dialects were. Dialectical thinking was, therefore, an unconsciously operative process in both nature and in history "until it has been recognized, also in our heads" (AD 130). In other words, the dialectic was the proper method or approach to unite the laws of thinking with the laws of the inorganic world.

It is fair to say that dialectical materialism, at least for Marx and Engels, extends over the entire field of organic and inorganic matter. As such, the laws of human reality cannot be entirely different from the laws of Nature. The dialectical chain of fundamental categories may, therefore, have a universal truth, which shows that the concrete dialectic extends to nature. Instead of *a priori* categories of simple classifications, Engels promulgates the idea of a hierarchy of forms of motion undergoing transitions one into the other, each connected to the other yet not reducible to more simple and general forms. Envisioned in terms of a ladder—a concept that will be a point of controversy between Sartre and Vigier—science consists of many rungs that become more and more concrete, with each higher level containing ever richer and more complex content.

Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* may seem hypothetical, ill-proven, and fragmentary. In fact, Garaudy made the point that Sartre was

merely arguing against a text that was never meant to be published—a gesture with a hint of duplicitousness attached, since the basic content of the *Dialectics of Nature* was held in such high esteem by the PCF, and it was, more importantly, at the very center of the December debate. In any case, it became entrenched as canonical within the Communist world, thanks to the efforts of one man: Joseph Stalin. Stalin's very crude "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," published in 1938, started out with a rather bold claim:

> Dialectical materialism is the world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party. It is called materialist because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of studying and apprehending them, is *dialectical*, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, *materialistic*.[12]

The specter of this claim still resonated more than twenty years later on that cold December evening in 1961. Stalin essentially provided a highly simplified and schematic summary of Marx's and Engels' thought, which was subsequently deemed authoritative within the PCF even after the dictator's death.

Concerned that dialectical materialism may be thought of purely as metaphysics—a charge that Sartre certainly leveled at his contemporary Marxists—Stalin sought to distinguish dialectical materialism from metaphysics on four main grounds. First, nature was a "connected and integral whole" in which things and phenomena were organically connected with, dependent on, and determined by each other. Secondly, nature was in a continuous state of motion and change where something was constantly arising and developing, and something was always disintegrating and dying away. Thirdly, natural quantitative change led to qualitative change. As such, the dialectical method held that the process of development should not be understood as a movement in a circle, but as an onward and upward progression, as a transition from an old qualitative state to a new qualitative state, as a development from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher. Lastly, dialectics understood internal contradictions as inherent in all things and phenomena of nature. Thus, the process of development from the lower to the higher took place not as a harmonious unfolding of phenomena, but as a disclosure of the contradictions inherent in things and phenomena, and in the constant "struggle" of opposed tendencies that operated on the basis of these contradictions.

In the second portion of the paper, Stalin delineated three features of philosophical materialism that fundamentally distinguished it from philosophical idealism. Marx's philosophical materialism held

that the world was by its very nature matter, and that the multifold phenomenon of the world constituted different forms of matter in motion that developed in accordance with their own laws. Next, Stalin asserted that matter, nature, and being were objective realities that existed outside and independent of consciousness, and, in fact, were all prior to consciousness. Consciousness, as secondary and derivative, merely reflected matter. Lastly, philosophical materialism held that the world and its laws were fully knowable, and that our knowledge of the laws of nature was verifiable through experimentation. Moreover, those things in the world that were not yet known would be made known by the efforts of science alone. All of these themes were supported, either implicitly or explicitly, by Garaudy and Vigier in the debate with Sartre; and, as we shall see, the reflection theory will be a point of special contention, with Garaudy arguing against Sartre's position of the primacy of consciousness.

While Stalin's expository material is easily understood, its excessive generalizations make the dialectical method a blunt instrument instead of a technique to comprehend a subtle yet extremely complex reality. Ignoring Engels' earlier admonition to the contrary, Stalin replaces Marx's and Engels' far more sinuous approach with a "hard and fast" set of determined rules that are essentially and universally valid as strictly "either-or" propositions. But the most significant feature of the paper is twofold. First, Stalin separates the dialectical way of thinking from materialism, components that Marx ties together in an ultimate synthesis. This distinction undoubtedly led future Marxist theorists to de-emphasize the dialectic while at the same time making too much of materialism. Secondly, Stalin makes no mention of the negation of the negation. In all likelihood, the paper's "Biblical" standing is attributable solely to the dogmatic and cultish status of its author; in fact, some 300,000 copies were sold in a mere nine months after its publication.

Having shown how Engels envisioned his "hypothetical" dialectics of nature, and how that vision journeyed to the status of "law" under Stalin, I want now to discuss the positions taken by Sartre and the PCF that culminated in the debate on the dialectics of nature.

Sartre and French Marxism: The Origin of the Debate on the Dialectics of Nature

While it would be convenient to talk only about the years immediately prior to the December debate, it would also be a confused

story. As with all events, it is never really just one thing; rather, a series of prior occurrences leads to an ultimate happening. And so it is with French Marxism: in order to understand the 1950s, we need to know something about the period starting in the 1920s. The complete destruction of a great deal of the old social order led to a fear of the unknown and a lack of political stability. Not only were the old monarchies experiencing upheaval; both leftist revolutionaries and right-wing reactionaries seemed to be lurking everywhere. Not immune to social and political turmoil, France also witnessed a "crisis of spirit" permeating most of Europe. It was, therefore, not a coincidence that the introduction of the first French translation of the works of Marx and Engels appeared in the mid-1920s, and did so amidst a need to not only understand the wholesale, senseless slaughter into which the First World War evolved, but the seeming decline of European civilization.[13] In other words, people were quite naturally looking for "something else," a "new" social order, and some found it in Marxism.

It was also during the late 1920s that study groups were formed by mostly young intellectuals. One group, called the "Philosophies," published a journal under the same name and drew together young Marxist philosophers, such as Georges Politzer, Paul Nizan, Henri Lefebvre, and Pierre Morhange.[14] Other journals were also established, but most, including *Philosophies*, were short-lived enterprises. They provided, however, a forum for ideas and an articulation of what the "new direction" might look like. This development was to gain further strength in the ensuing decade when Marxism began to flourish.

If the aftermath of the First World War brought about an evanescent recognition that something new must replace the old and worn out social structure, then the Great Depression ushered in a moral and ideological disruption in France. The severe economic crisis intensified the desire of the young intellectuals to renew and rebuild the old ideologies inherited from the earlier generation, especially since it appeared that the Third Republic was unprepared to meet the challenge of the faltering economy. As a result, many young people turned to the *Parti Communiste Française* as the sole instrument capable of combating the utter decay that appeared all around them.

As the 1930's saw an upsurge in intellectual interest in Marxism, it also saw that interest becoming increasingly attached to a Soviet interpretation. It might be helpful, therefore, to further elucidate Sartre's view on the dialectics of nature, since his position was first staked out during this period. While Sartre was rather non-political

in his early career, it can be said that once he acquired a political outlook, his inclinations pointed him toward Marx. Likewise, it can also be said that for his entire intellectual career he opposed the theory of the dialectics of nature. As early as 1936, Sartre laid out a general claim in his *The Transcendence of the Ego* "that a working hypothesis as fruitful as historical materialism never needed for a foundation the absurdity which is metaphysical materialism."[15] In referring to metaphysical materialism, Sartre meant the possibility of knowing about the nature of objects in-themselves, and the necessity to understand human beings on the basis of pre-existing laws. For Sartre, it was not necessary for the object to precede the subject for "spiritual pseudo-values" to vanish and for ethics to find their basis in reality. Sartre further elaborated these points in the chapter on the body in *Being and Nothingness*.[16] There, Sartre said that "the problem of the body and its relation with consciousness is often obscured by the fact that while the body is from the start posited as a certain *thing* having its own laws and capable of being defined from outside, consciousness is then reached by the type of inner intuition which is peculiar to it" (BN 401). Having said this, Sartre was firmly of the belief that such a body was not my body as such, "but a body-for-others" (BN 401-403). Thus, the body "in-itself" was merely a category whose entire foundation was the point of view of the Other who viewed my body from the outside. The body for-itself—the body as lived by consciousness—could have no particular laws pertaining to it. This point became one of the main issues of the discussion between Sartre and Garaudy, a point I will take up in the discussion of the debate itself, where it will be more appropriate to lay out both positions.

The key point here is to understand that not only does Sartre reject Marxism's embrace of a universal dialectic of both thought and nature, but he is also at odds with an attitude prevalent among leading Marxists of his day, including Garaudy, whom Sartre ridicules for his belief that "dialectical materialism's first step is to deny the existence of any legitimate knowledge apart from scientific knowledge."[17] This is an underlying but foundational attitude that Sartre projects not only in the *Critique*, but also in the debate; and, indeed, it is a position he maintains throughout his life.

In contrast to Sartre, the course taken by the PCF was quite different. The immediate aftermath of World War II saw the world split into two major camps: one based on the ideals of capitalism and the other tethered to Soviet-style Marxism.[18] The immediate response by the PCF was to close ranks among intellectuals in an ideological solidarity centered on an agreed upon formulation of Marxism. Central

to this enforced discipline was Stalin's 1938 essay, to which the PCF demanded adherence in its efforts to ensure a disciplined conformity. This effort to control thought, or at the very least to ensure a dogmatic approach to what the PCF thought Marxism ought to look like, naturally had the effect of diminishing the intellectual vitality of the period, often with rather dramatic results.

One could point to various events in the early 1950s that helped shape the Marxian landscape in France, but one in particular seemed to emphasize the way in which the PCF attempted to institutionalize its thought and to reject even the notion of a discussion that might be self-critical. At the behest of the PCF, a national meeting of intellectuals was held to discuss two themes: socialist humanism and the objectivity of the laws of nature and society.[19] The leader of the philosophic discussion was Jean-Toussaint Desanti, who, while generally attacking the usual suspects, namely the bourgeoisie, specifically singled out phenomenology and neo-Hegelianism as reactionary, with Merleau-Ponty and Hyppolite as those movement's main representatives.[20] The rise in popularity, especially among the young, of both of these philosophical disciplines not only threatened the hegemony of Marxism in a general manner, but also specifically endangered the PCF's ability to control political discourse with philosophical ideologies. In the PCF's eyes, phenomenology promised an unconditional freedom, a history that was unintelligible, and nature as a kaleidoscope of human perceptions and interpretations. Hegelianism fared little better than phenomenology in that it was considered as a disguised attack on the notion of objective laws. Desanti argued that the dialectic in the hands of the phenomenologist merely discounted the rational dialectic in favor of a dramatic vision of the adventure of consciousness. Hegelianism, on the other hand, saw the dialectic as a cloak in which all the vicissitudes of life were wrapped.

It must be understood that the conference was designed both to stake the claim that Marxism was indeed a science and to emphatically lay the blame for its failure to be perceived as a science on the bourgeoisie. The conference reports emphasized that while the bourgeoisie were content to allow some materialism to intrude upon scientific research, they resisted any wholesale attempt to integrate dialectical materialism into a general world outlook. In the PCF's view, the consequences for the natural sciences resulted in a contradiction that hampered not only fundamental research but the long-term viability of knowledge. Under the influence of bourgeois ideology, the social sciences denied any notion of an objective

material basis for laws of society. As Michael Kelly observed, the resulting debate over the objectivity of the laws of nature and society became a central focus of the controversy that lasted well into the next decade.[21]

After the death of Stalin in 1953, a slow process of revival and a movement to engage in meaningful exchanges with various ideologies prevalent in France at the time began to occur. The December debate was integral to that effort. French Marxism's polarizing "friend and enemy" approach gradually turned into a more flexible move toward dialogue. This new *rapprochement* was spearheaded by Garaudy as the PCF's leading philosophical spokesperson.

Whereas only a few years earlier the PCF had organized a conference solely for the purpose of discrediting Merleau-Ponty, [22] by the late 1950s, they sought to engage a wider array of thinkers, including Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre's relationship with the PCF was a complex one, and, although never a Party member, he identified himself as a "fellow traveler," and generally lent his support to what he viewed as the cause. But in the mid-1950s, Sartre turned openly critical of the PCF after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1956) and the events that unfolded in Hungary in the same year. Nonetheless, Sartre never lost sight of his desire to reconcile his interpretation of Marxism with his existentialism, and in his well-known essay, "Marxism and Existentialism," he acknowledged Marxism as the indispensable framework for all contemporary knowledge.[23] Not only was Marxism indispensable, but Sartre also envisioned his own existentialism as a mere parasitic ideology of Marxist thought. This did not mean, however, that Sartre declared existentialism dead. Rather, he distinguished his Marxism from that of the PCF. For Sartre, Marxism was in the grip of analytic reason, with the dialectics of nature playing an integral role. Moreover, the Marxism espoused by the PCF failed completely to assimilate the essential lesson of existentialism, namely the critical role of human subjectivity. While Marxism for Sartre meant embracing the materialist theory of history and Marx's conception of economics, he believed that many of the PCF's Marxist concepts were not just dogmatic, but petrified. He saw the PCF roaring down the wrong path in its zeal for scientific purity; and, as it skidded out of control, all Marxism did was eject the human element from a position of primacy and reduce human beings and knowledge to an objective status, which was, according to Sartre, not only illusory, but anti-dialectical. Thus, only existentialism bolted inexorably onto his understanding of Marxist thought could provide the human quality that Sartre saw as lacking in the late 1950s.

Such were the philosophical positions of the participants prior to the debate. More could be said, especially concerning the rapidly developing political situation of the time, but I think a reasonable understanding of the two competing positions allows one to grasp not only the importance of the topic discussed, but why so many people were drawn to the occasion.

The Debate on the Dialectical Laws of Nature

The debate was introduced by Jean Orcel who, in his somewhat lengthy commentary, unmistakably aligned himself with Garaudy and Vigier. In his view, the importance of dialectical materialism rested both in its conception of a world view and in the fact that it is a method conforming to the spirit of science. Yet, he also saw philosophy as a scientific effort whose fundamental objectives were to "surpass itself without end in the investigation of being, ranging from physical nature to living nature, and from living nature to human societies" (ME iii-iv). While Orcel's polemic was racked with generalities and platitudes, he saw philosophy as marked by the battles for scientific spirit, with Marxism engaged in an epic struggle to rescue scientific research from the treachery of philosophical dogmas. He thus viewed dialectical materialism not as a restraint on science, but as a liberating force. Like Engels, Orcel—a geologist—supported his belief in the dialectical laws of nature by referring to the geological history of the earth, which he asserted was "an impressive example of the dialectical movement of nature" (ME ix). But Orcel failed, like all the others before him, to connect the inorganic world of rocks and mountains with the organic universe of living flesh and human thought, other than by analogy. After Orcel's introductory remarks, the debate broke down into two discussions, the first led by Sartre with a helping hand from Hyppolite, and the second shared equally by Garaudy and Vigier.[24]

The main point of Sartre's argument is that the dialectic should be seen in terms of a relationship between a human subject and an object. He dismisses the dialectic of nature as a metaphysical foundation for knowledge, since it merely reduces being to the knowledge we have of it. In furtherance of this point, Sartre rejects what he believes to be Marx's conception of knowledge as a reflection of reality, a point that Garaudy addresses in his portion of the debate. For Sartre, human consciousness not only constitutes the relationship between things, but is the methodological foundation of all knowledge.

As Sartre further explains in the *Critique*, consciousness is the basis for history and its process of totalization. Given its foundation in consciousness, history is both rational and intelligible, a fact that Sartre hopes will correspond in structure to the Marxian account of society and history. The dialectic derives, therefore, from human activity. Moreover, the dialectic imbues human activity with knowledge. As such, one cannot surmise intelligibility from an external viewpoint; rather, one can only discern intelligibility in relation to a subject within a situation, a subject whose activity is not only freely chosen but also, insofar as purposeful human activity (praxis) involves a comprehension of the situation in which one acts, makes a contribution to the overall comprehension of the process of historical totalization.

At the very beginning of his remarks, Sartre seeks to establish the primacy of a dialectic of history. Key to his understanding and what he, in fact, insists is "very important," is the notion that before the intelligibility of both analytic reason and mathematics—to which Sartre believes Marxism has fallen prey—there is the intelligibility of the dialectic. This translucidity of the dialectic, itself based on the comprehension of the situation implicit in praxis, indissolubly bonds the thought of being to the being of thought. Thus, the dialectic appears to each as the transparency to oneself of one's own activity and the opacity of all others; in other words, as freedom (one's own) and necessity.

From this dialectic of history, Sartre sees Engels extending the same principles to nature in order to satisfy a dire need to apply an identical method to other structures of matter (ME 7). Sartre thinks this emanates from one simple principle, the unity of knowledge that requires everything to utilize the same dialectical method regardless of whether the object is physical, chemical, or organic. Sartre is critical of this position, since he sees contemporary Marxism applying what is observable in the natural world to the organic world only through a non-scientific extrapolation, that is, by analogy. As we shall see, Garaudy and Vigier completely reject this position, even though they offer little to support their views other than the very analogies Sartre criticizes.

Just as Engels is unable to analyze organic matter in any manner similar to that of inorganic material, Sartre furthers his argument by explaining that to date no one has been able to produce the organic from the inorganic. Sartre believes at most that the organism is a totality, but that the means to study it as a totality do not exist. What we are capable of understanding is, he thinks, merely its form. Under

these circumstances, the dialectical method is hardly taking place. Moreover, the task of deciding whether a dialectic of nature exists is, Sartre asserts, not at its very root a philosophical enquiry. It is, rather, a scientific endeavor, but Sartre laments the fact that scientists are no more free from prejudices than philosophers, a position at odds with Vigier, who believes that science's lack of dogmatic ideology is the only device available to eliminate prejudicial dogmas from philosophical discourse. The nature of the enquiry means that scientists must ask themselves two important questions, and here the crux of Sartre's argument becomes clearer: in nature, are totalities or totalizations on-going, and would the totalization of the whole be known to nature? In considering these questions, Sartre reasons that we all have a physical or chemical status, but there are some laws which superimpose themselves as primary at the level of the organic. In an example that one may speculate is chosen specifically to counteract Vigier, Sartre refers to de Broglie's explanation of the dialectic of the wave and of the particle.[25] Sartre points out that each have a proper time and frequency associated with them, which is conditioned by the rhythm and frequency in its interior. Simply stated, the frequency of vibration becomes the law of the wave. It possesses a mass and time that are correct to it, but importantly, this status is not the product of the system itself; rather, it is sustained from within. As Sartre concludes, "it is not the totality that makes itself, it is the synthesis that we observe by empirical procedures, and that we discover as an empirical caricature of certain realities. In other words, the molecule has a structure, but it is its status that becomes its exteriority" (ME 14-15).

Apart from the scientific world, when we encounter the social sphere Sartre believes that we produce our own societies and that these societies form a concrete whole. This is exactly why the dialectic exists, which is far different from physico-chemical systems that are separated from us by too many levels. We can never recover the interiority of the facts of these systems, because we always see them from the outside. In other words, from an epistemological point of view, these systems are exterior to human knowledge, but from the point of view of Being, they are internal to us. Since we only view these systems from the vantage point of exteriority, the type of knowledge we possess of them is not dialectical in any profound sense of the word.

For Sartre, the dialectic is nothing other than praxis; it is the law of totalizations of society by humans and of humans involved in a social movement. As such—and this is one of Sartre's key points—

human beings may exist in nature, but they are exterior to it. If there is to be a dialectic of nature, then nature must be a totality. Yet, Sartre points out that nature is thought by most physicists to be infinitely infinite. Even if levels of nature exist, there is an infinity at each level. A reality that excludes all totality cannot be dialectical, and since nature is infinite, it is only a series of facts that destroy any unity. Even the law of negation of a negation has, as Sartre points out, an indeterminate outcome if nature is an infinity without unity.

It should be emphasized that Sartre sees history and knowledge as dialectical processes because they are creations of human beings who act in their own development. For Sartre, it makes no sense to extend the dialectic to non-human phenomena, since dialectics can only deal with concrete totalities in which human beings totalize themselves through praxis. Nature does not constitute a whole and its disunity prohibits any universal dialectic from being attributed to it. Moreover, the contradictions operating in nature are not similar to those taking place in the social world. The opposing forces operating inside a physico-chemical system are not interactive, reciprocal relationships operative through human mediation. Lastly, Sartre believes that humans can know society and history from its interior, but the physical world remains external to us, never allowing us to penetrate to its inner core.

In support of Sartre's position, Jean Hyppolite's formal remarks are brief, filled with anecdotes, and at times entertaining.[26] But, as he admits, he does not have anything compelling to add to the debate. His main point is that there are grave consequences to Marxism's claim to make nature historical by importing dialectical laws into it, and by naturalizing history by subjecting it to the same laws as the physical world. What these consequences are, however, remains unsaid. As it is for Sartre, Hyppolite's point of departure is praxis, and it is only in the experience of history that the negation arises, which, of course, gives rise to the negation of the negation as a project of totalization. Hyppolite takes aim at Garaudy's claim that human history does not form a totality when Hyppolite says that the project of human history is that of making human totalizations that appear in an immanent manner in relations between human individuals across nature. But can the dialectical schema be extended to fields other than human history? The answer for Hyppolite is that this is only possible through analogy.

After Sartre and Hyppolite finished their remarks, the debate moved on to the representatives of the PCF, Garaudy and Vigier. In his preliminary remarks, Garaudy attempts to frame his position in

support of a dialectics of nature by rephrasing Sartre's primary themes.[27] He asserts that the starting point for Sartre's argument is his definition of the dialectic found in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*: "the dialectic is a type of intelligibility appropriate for the organized 'whole'" (ME 28). Not surprisingly, Garaudy concludes that the fundamental category of the dialectic is the totality, with human praxis as its original experience. On the basis that history is the outcome of human acts, Garaudy then reasons that Sartre embraces the idea of historical materialism. Thirdly, Garaudy believes that when it comes to nature, we are in the presence of a "non-human given," which he believes Sartre acknowledges, but which falls outside of the grasp of dialectical reason or intelligibility properly speaking. Rather, Garaudy argues that such a non-human given can be grasped only through a positivist understanding of nature as inscribed in facts and laws.[28] Lastly, Garaudy thinks Sartre's main argument distills to a simple fact: we are able only to speak of the dialectic of nature by analogy.

In laying out these points, Garaudy hopes to show that Sartre's admission of a dialectic of history or historical materialism must necessarily lead to a recognition of a dialectic of nature; that is, he hopes to refute Sartre by analogy. In support of this argument, Garaudy points to Sartre's adherence to the phenomenological concept of intentionality, which he believes forms the premise for Sartre's rejection of idealism. In somewhat confusing language, Garaudy argues that Sartre refuses "those insular thoughts grasping themselves outside the world, which is the Cartesian *cogito*" (ME 30). Rather, Garaudy thinks that Sartre, following in a Kantian tradition, sees consciousness and praxis grappling with the *in-itself*, which he labels as the "other than man," or the existence that precedes human existence (ME 31). Humans experience this existence as a material realm in the form of a negation of their activities in terms such as a denial of invention, a threat, a resistance, or a limit (ME 31). But the *in-itself* is not a mere abstraction. Garaudy asserts that while it is the negation of human desires or specific projects, in some cases the in-itself affirms rather than rejects hypotheses formed in relation to it, which obviously leads to manipulation by human beings. In arguing that these hypotheses represent known limitations on human activity, Garaudy concludes that they reveal the outline of a structure of the world that is, over time, more and more finely delineated (ME 32).

Having declared that the *in-itself* to be structured, Garaudy then asks whether we are able to define this pre-human being. Garaudy believes that Sartre gives form to this other than human through the

negation of a human act, but this negation is not always identical with itself. Nor, Garaudy argues, could this provide the structure of the reality of Being. As such, Garaudy believes that each hypothesis necessarily dies and passes on what he terms its "new power" to the "non-human" (ME 32). Yet, if one admits that this pre-human is, as Garaudy suggests, concerned with the practical, ordinary human, then there is only one proper response: this *in-itself*, this pre-human, has a structure that only science uncovers and permits us to speak about, and which only dialectical thought can make intelligible.

Up to this point, the thrust of Garaudy's presentation centers around an attempt to show that Sartre's own work accounts for a pre-human existence that can only emanate from nature. If this can be shown, then, Garaudy reasons, Sartre will have implicitly accepted an originary concept of human existence that is indissolubly linked to nature as the only "thing" existing prior to human development. Thus, not only does human existence derive from nature, but presumably all other forms of matter, both organic and inorganic, also derive from nature.

Even accepting Garaudy's thesis, there is a rather glaring problem with his argument and that is the link between the organic and the inorganic. While Garaudy may like to think the two are inseparably bound together, just because thinking humans and inorganic rocks emanate from a single source—nature—does not necessarily unify the two. Perhaps recognizing this problem, Garaudy asserts that while a dialectic of nature does not imply an arbitrary extrapolation, that is an analogy, he declares that it is, perhaps, more proper to think of the dialectic as existing not so much in nature as in our thoughts (ME 35). Thus, to say that the dialectic of nature exists is, according to Garaudy, to say that the structure and the movement of reality is such that only in dialectical thoughts do we render phenomenon intelligible and manageable. In the end, however, and as if recognizing science's inability to link the organic with the inorganic, Garaudy seems to resign himself by saying that while these relations may at first seem opaque, praxis and theory will eventually render them far more transparent.

In assessing Garaudy's position we need to look a little deeper into how Sartre sees the *in-itself* and how the *in-itself* fits into this pre-human schema. First of all, while the conception of the term *in-itself* is somewhat ambiguous, it is, as Sartre indicates, "itself," it is "what it is," and it "is," but it "can neither be derived from the possible nor reduced to the necessary" (BN 29). In a word, it is contingent. As such, it is solid (*massif*), it is identical to itself, it is filled

with itself and thus opaque to itself. Moreover, it is without origin, without deficiency, and thus non-referential. For Sartre, with respect to human existence, *being-in-itself* takes the form of facticity, the unchosen givens of a human existence which is "thrown" into its world (BN 131).[29] That being said, it is very difficult to identify *being-in-itself* with the inanimate world, as Garaudy would like us to do. The *in-itself* is not, as Sartre points out, a foundation for itself or any other Being, as Garaudy tries to postulate. Rather, the entire idea of foundation comes into the world through the *for-itself*, or consciousness. If the *in-itself* is unalterably linked to anything, it is as the *in-itself* losing itself as *in-itself* in order to found itself as consciousness; it is, in fact, that which the *for-itself* nihilates (BN 129). By being both a unity with an *in-itself* and its negation, *being-for-itself* shares the contingency of the *in-itself*; it is itself *Dasein*.[30] Because, for Sartre, all things start with the *Cogito* or with thought, the *in-itself* is associated with the inanimate world of nature only insofar as, like nature, it is that which consciousness negates as that which consciousness is not.

It should also be remembered that Sartre does not outright reject the possibility of a dialectics of nature. He only asserts that the very idea is merely a metaphysical hypothesis that is not knowable with certitude, and would, moreover, be irrelevant to the comprehension of human history even if it could be known. At best, the dialectics of nature can only serve as a "regulative principle" in order to guide scientific research. This principle does not rise to the level of certain knowledge, since it is unverifiable (CDR 28). This is not the case, however, in the realm of human experience, where verification is possible because the dialectic, as the practical project of the human subject interiorizing his environment and externalizing his internal project in praxis, is constitutive of reality. We know the dialectic of human history because we have direct experience of it; we not only live it, we make it (CDR 33).

As almost an afterthought, Garaudy concludes his remarks with a very brief reference to the thesis that consciousness is a reflection of material processes. While the entire subject of Marxist epistemology versus the Sartrean notion of consciousness is too complex to be comprehensively discussed here, some mention of it is necessary in this context. Essentially, Garaudy wants to distinguish between dialectical materialism's "fundamental thesis" of the precedence of matter over consciousness and Sartre's concept of the primacy of consciousness. For Garaudy, the main point of Marx's epistemology is that knowledge is not a passive reflection of reality, impressed

immediately upon our minds; it is, rather, a product of human activity. Thought is not merely an epiphenomenal quality of being separate and apart from nature. On the contrary, thought's power derives from the fact that humans are part of nature, a point that is consistent with the unifying theory of the dialectics of nature. Moreover, the real world exists prior to and independently of our thought, and remains so after thought has replicated it. Science's task is, therefore, to reproduce this independent reality in thought with the aim of thought corresponding to its object. In order to match adequacy to reality, science must reconstruct the multi-sided concreteness of that reality by means of abstract concepts. These abstract concepts must, in turn, be brought together such that by means of their interconnectedness, thought reproduces the complex inner structure of concrete reality.[31] Thus, Marx's epistemology breaks with both rationalism and empiricism, and is essentially realist in its ontological assumptions; thus, it is both scientific and materialist.

Although Sartre does not directly respond to Garaudy (in fact, he does not address Garaudy at all, saying that he gets along better with philosophers than scientists), he does reject the materialist contention that humans are a product of nature. He asserts instead that the existentialist "human condition" involves freedom being thrown into a world or situation. Sartre radically separates human existence from nature, with the result that it is impossible to explain human existence on the basis of natural processes. Humans, unlike non-human beings, possess no cognizable essence; rather, any comprehension that we have of them can only be an immediate, intuitive understanding of their freedom.

The last of the speakers was Jean-Pierre Vigier.[32] In his extensive remarks, Vigier separates Sartre's presentation into seven component parts and poses each part in the form of questions. Not all of them are of equal importance, but there are several strains of thought that I wish to focus on.

Vigier's first question concerns the unity of knowledge, or whether historical materialism can only achieve its validity within the general framework of the dialectic of nature. The answer, for Vigier, is in the affirmative.The dialectic of nature is, properly spoking, anterior to the history of human thought. Vigier sees the idea of evolutionary development as progressively invading all of the sciences: first in astronomy, then in chemistry, and now in physics. This idea of history, of evolution, and of analysis in terms of development, is the very source of the dialectics of nature, according to Vigier's account. It applies universally to both the organic world and the inorganic.

I should point out that when Vigier refers to Darwin's account of evolution as the model, he does so by saying that Marx sees it as a striking example of a dialectical analysis of the evolution of the species. However, Vigier never says that the dialectic of the organic Darwinian world is the same as that in the inorganic world. Moreover, in the organic world, Darwin's theory fails to provide a deterministic theory of development and instead is more in the nature of a "law of tendency," where each species "tends" to adapt itself to its given environment. A critical element is missing in Darwin's account of evolution, namely, the necessity for its law to be borne out in each case to which the law applies. Vigier points instead to the prodigiously complex and mobile structure of the atoms engaged in extraordinarily violent movements as evidence of the dialectic of nature. Engels also used this Heraclitian flux or movement as a basis for his theory of the dialectics of nature. But, as we have seen, Engels is never able to connect this movement with organic and life.

The central notion of Vigier's discussion is his theory of levels, a theory that Sartre addresses in his opening remarks. Strikingly, at the outset Vigier concedes that because of the nascent character of the theory of a dialectics of nature, he cannot depend on that theory to support a theory of levels. Very generally, the theory of levels postulates that the realities in the infinity of levels or totalities can be broken down into their own laws. Consequently, whenever we move to a smaller size, we will encounter a new mechanics. Thus, the unity of contraries can be understood as the unity of elements at one level that engenders the phenomenon of a higher level (ME 61). This, Vigier believes but without explanation, is true for both geology and biology.

Vigier then asks, that if we admit the theory of levels, then must we also admit that the dialectic itself moves from the simple to the complex? Of equal importance is Vigier's question as to how we move from one level to the next and from the organic to the conscious. Dialectical explanations vary from one field to another. But the passage from one level to another is evident in the theory of sequence, which Vigier believes separates him from Sartre. In support of this theory, Vigier offers three observations. First, for years science has been interested in the movement from the organic to the conscious and from the inorganic to living matter. Secondly, this interest has progressed within a dialectical framework moving toward more and more complex stages. Lastly, denying the possibility of analogy, Vigier thinks that the existence of the transition theory allows for a great scientific progress that, by its very nature, cannot

be dogmatic. In other words, science, according to Vigier, cannot lead to any dogmatic postulates. In reply to Vigier's argument, it has to be said that even if one accepts the view that science cannot be dogmatic—a view that defies historical reality—the mere fact that science is interested in the movement from the organic to the conscious and from the inorganic to living matter is hardly a foundation to assert that a dialectic of nature and its concomitant unifying structure exist. Vigier's position is essentially that Marxism represents the rupture in the history of knowledge and philosophy. Accordingly, all previous finite and limited *a priori* systems must give way to science as the one non-dogmatic endeavor to explain reality. Quite naturally, Vigier sees dialectical materialism as the only proper scientific method available to accomplish this task.

The debate concluded on this note. It is fair to say that the two sides failed to bridge the gap separating them. Sartre and Hyppolite continued to maintain a dialectic founded in individual consciousness and constituted by human subjectivity. For their part, Garaudy and Vigier saw the dialectic as the reflection, in thought, of the objective dialectical movement, both natural and historical, of external reality. Of course, subjectivity for Garaudy could not be established at the individual level as it was with Sartre; rather, it resided purely in the social collective. But this was, perhaps, an essential point not only to the debate, but to an understanding of the *Critique* as well. This was why Sartre was keen to address Engels at the very beginning of the *Critique,* well before he launched into his discussion of collectives and group formation, all of which depended on praxis played out at the level of individual mediated subjectivity. Without this clear understanding of the vital position accorded the subject, the rest of the *Critique* would not have been able to provide its rich insights on human praxis. Thus, the debate on the dialectics of nature cannot be reduced merely to a problem of definition.

More was at stake than a "critical" versus a dogmatic approach to human history. If these were the only issues framing the discussion, there would have been little reason for so many people to venture out on such a cold December evening. Sartre saw the conflict with a dialectics of nature as emanating from Marxism's attempt to constitute itself into a science with a single, overriding thesis so fundamental to materialism as to be irrevocable: the precedence of matter over consciousness. Antithetical to the dialectical humanism of the *Critique*, Sartre needed to dispel this "fundamental thesis" if he was to be successful in joining *his* existentialism with *his* Marxism. In this regard, Sartre may agree that humans are

"alien" to nature, but they are hardly a superfluous addition, as Engels would have us believe.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Professor James Dodd of the New School for Social Research for his very helpful comments on an early draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Professor Nicolas de Warren of Wellesley College, not only for his encouragement in writing this paper, but also for his insightful observations and his numerous helpful discussions. Finally, my thanks to David Detmer and Bruce Baugh for assisting me in the preparation of this text.

Notes

1. The exact number of deaths that occurred on the night of October 17, 1961 is unknown. Many of those who participated were beaten to death and their bodies dumped into the River Seine or the canals of Paris only to be recovered weeks after the event. For an exacting account not only of the events of that night, but the atmosphere permeating France at the time that brought them about, see: Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006).
2. Most major newspapers in Paris reported on the debate. See, for example, Ernst Labrousse, "Après la Semaine de la Pensée Marxiste: Dialectique et Multitude," *Le Monde* (20 décembre 1961), 10; and "Débat Garaudy-Sartre-Hyppolite-Vigier á la Mutualité: 6000 Jeunes Parisiens Pour Une Leçon de Philosophie," *Humanité* (8 décembre 1961), 2.
3. Unless otherwise indicated, throughout this essay I will use the term "Marxism" to refer to the Marxism espoused by the PCF in France. I am aware that many people in France who identified themselves as Marxists did not hold the same

views toward Marx's theories as did the PCF, and this group would include, I believe, Sartre. I should also point out the Sartre himself generally uses the generic term "Marxist" or "Marxism" to refer both to the PCF's brand of Marxism and to his own.

4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume One, Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Rée (London: Verso, 2004), 26. Hereafter CDR.
5. For example, William McBride argues that dialectical materialism amounts precisely to a "dogmatic materialism" as opposed to Sartre's "critical dialectic," the consequences of which impose a distortive rigidity on our attempts to understand human history. William McBride, *Sartre's Political Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 119-20. Mark Poster sees Sartre's concern as one where if a dialectic of nature is accepted, then, the idea of a Marxist revolution would be ruled out. His reasoning is that should a dialectic of nature assume the status of an epistemological principle, the kind of thinking and consciousness necessary for socialist society would be impossible. Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 272-73. Michael Kelly sees the debate turning on irresolvable notions of the definition of the dialectic. In other words, the two share "no agreed upon concept of the dialectic." Sartre, Kelly says, sees the dialectic in terms of a relationship between a subject and an object, while Garaudy sees it as a form of movement and interconnections. Michael Kelly, *Modern French Marxism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 115. Pietro Chiodi also sees the problem in terms of a lack of a fundamental agreed upon understanding of the dialectic. This lack of a univocal use of the term dialectic vitiates the entire discussion in Chiodi's mind. Pietro Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, trans. Kate Soper (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1976), 103-23.
6. For a recent discussion of Sartre's humanism see, Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism that is not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). 225-26.
7. All references to the debate are to the original transcript published as *Marxisme et Existentalisme: controvers sur la dialectique* (Paris: Plon, 1962), hereafter ME. All translations of the debate are my own. It should be noted that portions of the debate have been translated into English and published previously. However, no complete translation of the entire debate has been published. See, Jean-Paul Sartre, "Science and the Dialectic," *Man and World,* 9 (1) (February 1975): 60-74, which published a partial translation of Sartre's main speech, but without any commentary or translation of any other participant's speech. Likewise, Jean-Pierre Vigier's speech was translated in Jean-Pierre Vigier, "Dialectics and Natural Science," in *Existentialism versus Marxism: Conflicting Views on Humanism*, ed. George Novack, trans. Gerald Paul (New York: Delta Books, 1966), 244-57, but, again, no other portion of the debate was translated nor was any commentary provided in the text. I should also point out that the topic did not "go away" after the debate. In the early 1970s, a Russian philosophical journal published a series of articles extolling the virtues of Engels' "great book," the *Dialectics of Nature*. See for example, B.M. Kedrov, "Engels' Great Book," *Soviet Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 10 (1) (Summer, 1971): 3-26, and B.G. Kuznetsov, "The Dialectics of Nature and the Dialectics of Capital," *Soviet Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 10 (1) (Summer, 1971): 43-62. In addition, the commentary following the debate was rather in favor of the official PCF position. An example would be

George Novack, "Is Nature Dialectical," *International Socialist Review* (Summer, 1964), accessed electronically on March 30, 2011 at http://www.marxist.org/archive/novack/works/history/ch13. In more recent times, philosophers steeped in the analytical tradition have repudiated Engels' position, albeit none have risen in support of Sartre. See, Erin Martz, "The Conflict of Science with Marx and Engels' Dialectic," *Contemporary Philosophy*, 19 (6) (1997): 23-27; J. E. Guendling, "Dialectics and Nature: A Quest for Empirical Status," *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 5 (4) (Winter, 1997): 238-52; and D. Goldstick, "Marxism and Logical Contradiction," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 73 (1) (March, 1995): 102-13. Lastly, I note with interest a recent article by Dennis Overbye, "'It's Alive! It's Alive!' Maybe Right Here on Earth," *New York Times*, 27 July 2011, Science Section, accessed electronically on July 27, 2011 at http://www.nyt.com/2011/07/28/science/28life.html?, which chronicles a group of scientists who are using the tools of genetics to try to generate the "Frankensteinian" spark that will jump the gap separating the inanimate and the animate. So far, according to the article, it has not succeeded.

8. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Anti-Dühring" and "Dialectics of Nature" in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works,* Volume 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987). Hereafter referred AD and DN respectively.
9. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Marx and Engels Letters from 1873," in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works, Volume 44* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 500.
10. Engels defines thought in the following manner: "But if the further question is raised what thought and consciousness really are and where they come from, it becomes apparent that they are products of the human brain and that man himself is a product of nature, which has developed in and along with its environment" (AD 34). A little later Engels asks whether human thought is sovereign. His answer is that human thought is not the thought of individual man, but it "exists only as the individual thought of many billions of past, present and future men" (AD 79).
11. While one can only speculate as to Engels' motivation, it may well be that the law of negation of negation could cover the law of spiral development under the notion that similar configurations recur at ever higher and more complex levels.
12. Joseph Stalin, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," accessed electronically on June 17, 2010 at: http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1938/09.htm. For a general discussion of Stalin's article see: Paul Blackledge, *Reflections on Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 110; 154-61. For a discussion of the relationship between Sartre and Stalinism see, Ian Birchall, *Sartre against Stalinism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).
13. I am referring here to Jacques Molitor's translation of the then known works of Marx and Engels published by Alfred Costes in Paris. Almost half of the sixty volumes appeared within a four year period between 1924 and 1928. This along with the translation of various works by Lenin as well as the translation of the work of George Plekhanov aided greatly in the development of Marxist philosophy in France. See, Michel Kelly, *Modern French Marxism*, 21. In discussing his own experience, Sartre also indicates that there was very little formal teaching of Marx in the schools of France in mid-1920. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 17.

14. See Bud Burkhard, *French Marxism Between the Wars* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000), 35-58. Burkhard presents an historical account of the development of French Marxism starting in the mid-1920s.
15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 105.
16. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956). Hereafter BN.
17. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," in *The Aftermath of the War (Situations III)*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Seagull Books, 2008), 87.
18. For a detailed account of the social/political history of the postwar period, especially with regard to Sartre's evolving political thought see David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Post-War* France (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
19. The PCF published a substantial portion of the proceedings in its journal under the title, "Documents des journées nationales d'études des intellectuels communistes," *La Nouvelle critique* 45 (avril-mai, 1953): 125-368. The actual title of the conference was : "L'objectivité des lois de la nature et de la société et ses conséquences—L'humanisme socialiste."
20. Desanti's talk was titled, "Pourquoi la pensée bourgeoise nie l'objectivité des lois."
21. Michael Kelly, *Modern French Marxism*, 82. An example of the PCF's approach to the dialectics of nature during the mid-1950s can be seen in an article by Maurice Caveing, "Marx et la dialectique de la nature," *La Nouvelle critique*, 67 (July-August, 1955): 10-29. Caveing directs his attack at Léon Blum, the leader of the SFIO (French Socialist Party), but it could just as well have been directed at Sartre. In the attack, Caveing reiterates the importance of Engels' laws of nature and their application to animate life. While the article is probably better reasoned than most of the period, Caveing still does not offer any evidence for his conclusions.
22. Organized in November 1955 primarily in response to Merleau-Ponty's book, *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, the conference title was appropriately enough called, "*Mésavetures de l'anti-marxisme: Les malheurs de M. Merleau-Ponty*," and attracted such speakers as Garaudy, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, and Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre and Desanti satirized the idealist basis of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of ambiguity while others attacked Merleau-Ponty's political position as reactionary. Garaudy argued that Merleau-Ponty desired to replace a central tenet of Marxist thought, the dialectic, with relativism, and its materialism with phenomenology.
23. The essay comprises a portion of the preface to the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, published in English as a separate book, entitled *Search for a Method*. I am specifically referring to Sartre's work, *The Communist and Peace*, trans. Martha Fletcher (New York: George Braziller, 1968), where, after a series of failed strikes orchestrated by the PCF and during the period of public awareness of the Soviet show trials of the 1930s, Sartre explicitly defended the PCF as the necessary expression of the working class and implicitly defended Soviet Marxism. In contrast, Sartre signed the manifesto, "Contre l'intervention soviétique," published by *France-Observateur* in November 1956, which protested the Soviet invasion of Hungary. In public statements, Sartre said he was breaking with the PCF over their support of the invasion. His position was further elaborated upon when he wrote *The Ghost of Stalin*, trans. Martin Fletcher (New York: George Braziller, 1968), which was first published in *Le Temps modernes* in December of 1956 and January of 1957.

24. Two things are of interest with regard to Sartre's participation in the debate. First, while the official program for the debate listed the academic position of each participant, no such identifying designation was listed for Sartre; merely his name appeared. Borrowing slightly from de Gaulle, it was evident that everyone knew "Voltaire." Secondly, I have alluded to the political events concerning Algerian independence earlier in this paper. I mention this only because de Beauvoir felt that Sartre should not have participated in the debate because of, among other reasons, the political situation at the time, and the fact that Sartre had thrown himself back into writing his monumental work on Flaubert. She also disliked the format of the debate, which she felt did not allow Sartre time to fully discuss his position. Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstances*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), 609. To this I would add, although de Beauvoir does not, the fact that Frantz Fanon had died the day before, which must have had an effect on Sartre.
25. Louis de Broglie (1892-1987) was a French physicist, Nobel laureate, and member of *the Académe française*. Vigier served as de Broglie's assistant at the C.N.R.S. at the time of the debate.
26. Jean Hyppolite was named a professor at the *Sorbonne* in 1949, and in 1954 he became director of the *École Normale Supérieure*. In 1963 Hyppolite was elected to the *Collège de France*. Hyppolite exercised a profound influence on French philosophers who came to prominence in the 1960s such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze.
27. Roger Garaudy was expelled from the PCF in 1970 after voicing his criticism of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. He subsequently converted to Islam and became an ardent supporter of the Palestinian cause. In 1996 he published a controversial book, *Les mythes fondateurs de la politique israelienne*, in which he denied the Holocaust. The book was banned in France, and Garaudy was prosecuted and sentenced to a suspended jail term.
28. It should be noted that Garaudy distinguishes between positivism and what he terms a "mechanistic" understanding, by which he means an interpretation of nature as a totally unconscious, machine-like force (ME 29).With regard to Garaudy's reference to positivism, I believe it should be thought of in terms of the early nineteenth century "*positivisme*" of St. Simon and Comte. This involved the derivation of a theory of the nature of man and the social from the generalized theory of the nature and structure of the physical world. The major classes of both physical and biological facts were ordered according to their mutual relations of dependence or autonomy, and this ordering in turn used to generate an ordering of the sciences on the basis of their relations of complexity/ simplicity. The science of the most dependent class of phenomenon, and, therefore, the most complex was to be the science of the human species. See, Ted Benton, "Natural Science and Cultural Struggle," in *Issues in Marxist Philosophy, Volume II: Materialism*, eds. John Mepham and David-Hillel Ruben (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1979), 110-11.
29. See also, Klaus Hartmann, *Sartre's Ontology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 70.
30. See Klaus Hartmann, *Sartre's Ontology*, 71, and Stephen Dinan, "Spontaneity and Perception in Sartre's Theory of the Body," *Philosophy Today*, 23 (3) (Fall, 1979): 279-91.
31. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York, Penguin Books, 1993), 100-101.

32. Jean-Pierre Vigier was, from 1948 to 1963, assistant to Louis de Broglie at France's *C.N.R.S.* He authored more than 200 scientific articles and books, many of which dealt with his main research area, quantum mechanics. Sartre and de Beauvoir knew Vigier and, in fact, just weeks before the debate he directed their activities in a PCF- led protest against fascism and racism held in the wake of the police violence that occurred the previous October. See note 1. Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstances*, 604.