Sartre, Group Formations, and Practical Freedom:
The Other in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*

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Abstract

In this essay, I attempt to remedy the relative neglect that has befallen Sartre's analysis of social relations in the Critique of Dialectical Reason. *I show that, contrary to the interpretation of certain commentators, Sartre's analysis of social relations in this text does not contradict his earlier works. While his early work focuses on individual-to-individual social relations, the* Critique of Dialectical Reason *complements this by focusing on the way various group formations constrain or enhance the individual's practical freedom. To outline my argument, I first discuss the relationship between* Being and Nothingness *and the* Critique of Dialectical Reason *before going on to identify the four group formations Sartre discusses in the* Critique of Dialectical Reason *and the implications each has for the individual's practical freedom. I argue that while the group formations called the series and the institution constrain the individual's practical freedom, the open, democratic group formations called the group-in-fusion and, in particular, the organized group, enhance the individual's practical freedom. Because it is membership of an organized group that best enhances the individual's practical freedom, I conclude by arguing that Sartre implicitly holds that the individual's practical and political activity should be directed towards the establishment of a group formation that has the characteristics of an organized group.*

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While much has been written on Sartre's understanding of social relations in *Being and Nothingness,* relatively little attention has been paid to this topic in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason.* In this essay, I start to remedy this relative neglect. But because understanding the relation between Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and his earlier works affects how this text is interpreted, I first situate Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in relation to his earlier texts. While Thomas Anderson (1993, 1) holds that there is a radical rupture between Sartre's early and later works, I argue that this is not the case. In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre focuses on the *concrete embodied individual* rather than consciousness as he had done in earlier works, and on the various ways in which the individual's *practical freedom* is constrained by his social situation. Because Sartre recognizes that the concrete individual is embedded in a social situation inhabited by others whose practical activities affect his capacity to express himself freely in the concrete world, he provides an extended discussion of the way different social relations constrain or affirm the individual's practical freedom. But while in his early work Sartre focuses on immediate relations between two consciousnesses, following William McBride (1991, 41), my understanding of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is that it complements his early work by discussing: 1) the way the concrete individual relates to others through his membership of different *group formations*; and 2) how these group formations constrain or contribute to the realisation of the individual's practical freedom.

The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* identifies four different group formations: seriality, the group-in-fusion, the organized group, and institutions. For the purposes of his analysis, Sartre describes the *logical* relation between each group formation (Sartre 2004, 348, 583). The overall logical movement Sartre describes in his analysis can be summarized as follows: the atomized crowd of seriality is the ground of all collective relations; it is the normal collective relation between individuals. The individuals of the series do not help one another realize their individual goals; the series is a loose collection of individuals who just happen to be engaged in the same activity. If, however, there is an *explicit* threat to each individual, each individual's praxis, or practical activity, spontaneously combines to combat the same external threat. The common intentionality of each individual's praxis creates an organic and spontaneous common praxis that Sartre names the group-in-fusion. Because each member of the group-in-fusion has the same goal, and because the realization of this goal is necessary to protect their practical freedom, the common activity of each member creates a social formation in which each looks after and contributes to the realization of the other's practical freedom. If the explicit external threat turns into an *implicit* external threat, Sartre

holds that rather than simply dissolve the group-in-fusion, the group members can pledge allegiance to one another thereby creating a standing organization in which each individual: 1) affirms that he will care for and affirm the other's practical freedom; and 2) vows to fulfil a specific function within that organization. While the individuals of the group-in-fusion support one another as they each act together to combat the same external threat, their common activity is contingent on the existence of this explicit external threat. There is, therefore, a sense in which the solidarity engendered by the common external threat encountered by each member of the group-in-fusion is thrust upon each member by their contingent circumstance. In contrast, the pledge of the organized group provides a standing promise that each member will protect and care for the other's practical freedom. Because the pledge creates a group formation in which each member voluntarily promises to care for and affirm the other's practical freedom, I argue that it is this group formation and not, as Joseph Catalano (2007, 51) argues, the group-in-fusion, that best allows individuals to form a common bond in which each expresses solidarity with the other's attempts to be practically free. However, the organized group's internal differentiation can create a hierarchy that separates individuals from each other and devalues their individual contribution. This can lead to formalism, a lack of spontaneity, and the dominance of the organization's function over the individual. Sartre calls this group formation "the institution." As I understand it, the institution is the group formation that stultifies the individual's practical freedom to the greatest degree.

   This differentiated analysis allows Sartre to recognize that not all social formations allow the individual to express herself freely in the same way or to the same degree. Certain group formations allow the individual to be more practically free than others. While the mass of individuals of seriality and the group formation called the institution constrain the individual's practical freedom, the democratic, organic, and spontaneous group formations of the group-in-fusion and, in particular, the organized group enhance rather than constrain the individual's practical freedom. Thus, contrary to Mary Warnock's (1970, 116) influential interpretation, Sartre does not hold that all social relations are necessarily ones of conflict. Sartre recognizes that not only can the individual relate to another individual in a way that recognizes, respects, and affirms the other's practical freedom, but also that certain group formations can enhance the individual's practical freedom. To outline my argument, I start with the relation between the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and Sartre's early work.

The Relation between the Early and Later Sartre: Radical Rupture or Continuity?

According to Thomas Anderson (1993, 1), there is a radical rupture between

Sartre's early so-called existential thought, best exemplified by *Being and Nothingness,* and his later, Marxist inspired *Critique of Dialectical Reason.* In Anderson's reading, the impossibility of founding an ethics out of the ontological dualism of *Being and Nothingness* led Sartre to re-think the ontological categories around which his thought was based. The result is, for Anderson, that in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre places a far greater emphasis on the way the individual's social embeddedness affects his free creative self-expression. Thus, according to Anderson, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* describes a completely new ontology of being from the one outlined in *Being and Nothingness.* Indeed, for Anderson, "the human being of the *Critique* seems to be almost a different species from the human being of *Being and Nothingness* and earlier works" (Anderson 1993, 89).

While it is true that Sartre's analysis of the other in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* differs in a number of respects from his early thought, I do not follow Thomas Anderson's argument that *Being and Nothingness* and the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* are irreducibly different. While there are differences in the categories used, the general orientation of the argument developed in Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* complements his early existential analysis.

There are two reasons for this: First, despite maintaining that *Being and Nothingness* was describing the being of being-for-itself and being-in-itself, Sartre subsequently recognized that he had tended to conflate the being of being-for-itself with consciousness. This led Sartre to recognize that, despite having pointed towards consciousness's facticity, he had, in fact, proposed a "rationalist philosophy of consciousness" (Sartre 2008, 41). To overcome what he saw as his early idealism, Sartre came to highlight and emphasize the socially embedded nature of individual existence. Rather than focus on consciousness, in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre places the emphasis on the concrete living individual. This does not replace his earlier work on consciousness; it complements it by showing that the concrete living individual is embedded in a concrete world that affects and shapes his capacity to realize the pre-reflective fundamental project "his" consciousness has chosen.

The second reason is that while his early work focuses on the freedom of consciousness, my understanding is that the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* complements this by focusing on the various ways consciousness's concrete embodiment shapes, and is shaped by, its efforts to express itself concretely in the actual world. This issue relates to Sartre's conception of freedom. David Detmer (1988, 57–70) has pointed out that there are two senses of "freedom" in *Being and Nothingness:* ontological freedom and practical freedom. Ontological freedom emanates from the pre-reflective act of annihilation that founds

consciousness. By pre-reflectively nihilating its other, consciousness sets itself in opposition to, and so remains free-from, being-in-itself. Practical freedom emanates from consciousness's ontological freedom and describes the extent to which consciousness: 1) is free from external influences that impede its free self-expression; and 2) can actually and practically express itself in the concrete world. The difference between the two forms can be summarized as follows: ontological freedom describes the *freedom-from* somethingness that demarcates the fundamental ontological structure of consciousness; whereas practical freedom describes the individual's *freedom-to* shape its concrete world in-line with his pre-reflective fundamental project.

In his early work, Sartre tends to emphasize consciousness's *ontological* freedom to show that it is free from determinate being and so can always choose what it will be. The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* complements this by focusing on the ways consciousness's social situation affects and shapes its efforts to actually express itself in the concrete world. The result is that the *Critique of Dialectical Reason's* discussion of freedom relates to the individual's practical freedom. This leads to a subtle alteration in Sartre's thought. Whereas *Being and Nothingness'* discussion of the ontology of consciousness discloses that consciousness's ontological freedom is never constrained or determined by its social situation, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* focuses on the individual's *practical freedom.* This focus ensures that Sartre recognizes and examines the ways consciousness's attempts to express itself practically through its concrete embodiment condition, and are conditioned by, its external world. But while *conditioned* by its external world, the individual is not *determined* by it. The concrete individual reacts to the impediments to his practical freedom imposed on him by his social world in line with the pre-reflective fundamental project "his" consciousness has chosen to adopt. Thus, Sartre's analysis of consciousness in his early works is complemented and extended by the *Critique of Dialectical Reason's* analysis of the concrete individual's relation to his actual social world and the way his social world affects his actual concrete activity.

The Practico-Inert and the Other

To understand how the individual's concrete world shapes and constrains his practical freedom, and indeed to identify why the other is important in this respect, it will be helpful to briefly discuss Sartre's concept of the practico-inert. As noted, the individual is not simply free to determine how he will exist in the actual world. The world as it is encountered by the individual is the direct result of his own and other individual's *praxis* or practical activity. The combination of each individual's praxis creates a practico-inert field that affects and shapes the

individual's concrete existential possibilities.

The practico-inert describes the objects that emanate from each individual's praxis. These objects combine to form an objective horizon within which the individual exists. As Joseph Catalano explains, "the practico-inert is the ensemble of rules, laws, codes of behaviour as well as in the entire social complex that tends to keep us on the social level in which we are born" (2007, 51). This objective horizon is not a thought-out, planned occurrence; the practico-inert unintentionally results from the combination of each individual's own practical activity. Each individual's separate practical activity combines to form the objective world in which the individual finds himself existing. The result is, as Yirmiahu Yovel explains, that the practico-inert

> proscribes in advance a mode of life, class membership, and economic prospects, which shrink the range of man's spontaneity to mere, insignificant deviations, and it reaches its apex where the individual gives expression to no spontaneity at all, but plays his socioeconomic role in a completely inert or routinised manner. (1979, 488)

But Sartre does not simply hold that the praxis of others constrains the individual's practical freedom. He also appears to hold that the objects created by the individual's own praxis will eventually appear to him as a counter-finality that affects his practical freedom. This is because Sartre implicitly distinguishes between the *act of objectification* that he deems to be the expression of individual freedom and the *being of objectivity* which he insists is alienating. For Sartre, while the activity constitutive of the *act of objectification* allows the individual to express his individuality in objective form, the act of producing something cannot go on indefinitely; eventually, either the project is abandoned or an object is produced. If an object is produced, because it is a static entity, it does not reflect the individual's activity back to him.

> In losing their human properties, human projects are engraved in being, their translucidity becomes opacity, their tenuousness thickness, their volatile lightness permanence. They *become being* by losing their quality as lived events; and in so far as they are being they cannot be dissolved into knowledge even if they are deciphered and known. (Sartre 2004, 178)

The result is that although the individual's praxis allows him to express his subjective freedom, the object created as a result of his praxis must necessarily appear to him as an other that constrains his practical freedom. Individual praxis is, therefore, a double-edge sword: on the one hand it allows the individual to express himself practically; on the other hand, the objects created by his praxis will fold back on the individual to constrain his future practical freedom.

As Sartre puts it, the object becomes a "counter-finality" (Sartre 2004, 183).

The concept "counter-finality" describes the process whereby individual "*praxis* inscribes itself in inertia and inertia returns as inverted *praxis* to dominate the very group which has objectified itself in this worked matter" (Sartre 2004, 336). Whenever the individual acts to overcome a counter-finality, whether it was produced by his own praxis or from the activity of another individual, he re-organizes the dynamics of the social field. New relations arise which produce alternative counter-finalities that have an impact upon the individual. But while he is acting, so is every other individual. Each individual produces his own practico-inert structures thereby creating a "practico-inert field" (Sartre 2004, 324). This field is the objective social world that surrounds each individual. It is comprised of individual objective entities such as roads, cars, buildings; collectives such as organisations; and instruments such as road signs, pavements and bus stops whose "frozen voices [define] how they are to be used" (Sartre 2004, 324). The combination of these practico-inert structures produces a dynamic tightly integrated web of counter-finalities.

The individual cannot completely free himself from these counter-finalities; every action he produces alters his social environment, while even when he is passive he is being acted on and altered by the activities of other individuals. While the other may not directly impose himself onto the individual, Sartre adopts the first-person perspective to explain that "his dispersed *praxis,* totalized by matter, turns back on me in order to transform me" (Sartre 2004, 226). For this reason, Sartre explains that "man has to struggle not only against nature, and against the social environment which has produced him, and against other men, but also against his own action as it becomes other" (Sartre 2004, 124). But the individual is not simply constituted by his practico-inert field; the ontological freedom of his *consciousness* means he is free to choose the meaning of his world and free to try to actually change his world. Thus, we find the relation of dialectical reciprocity pointed to earlier: the individual finds himself in a specific historical situation with specific structures and possibilities that shape and constrain his practical freedom. It is only by overcoming the constraining pressures of his social world in the form of objective structures, social norms, and the consequences of others' actions, that the individual will be able to express himself actually and practically in the world in accordance with his pre-reflective fundamental project.

The point Sartre is making is that the concrete individual does not and cannot simply choose to express himself in the world as and when he sees fit. The individual encounters resistance to his practical self-expression in the form of an already constituted social world. To secure his practical freedom, he must "enter

into conflict with the situation in which he finds himself" (Sartre 2004, 253). He must overcome the external resistance that emanates from his situation's practico-inert field before he can practically express himself. As Sartre explains, "men make their history on the basis of real, prior conditions" (1968, 87). But when the individual does overcome the constraints of his practico-inert field and secures his practical freedom, he does not completely overcome the constraints of his objective world; he simply *re-arranges* the dynamics of his social environment by altering the relation between existing counter-finalities and/ or creating new ones that will shape and constrain his practical activity. The individual is always embedded in a social environment constituted by counter-finalities that shape and constrain his practical activity; he can never be completely free to do as he likes when he likes.

From this discussion it should be clear that, following on from his early works' recognition that consciousness lives in relation with other consciousnesses that have an impact on its existence, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* recognizes that the concrete individual lives with others that affect his capacity to actually express himself in the world. For this reason, and because he aims to focus on the way various group formations constrain or realize the individual's practical freedom, Sartre spends significant time outlining various group formations and what these group social relations entail for the individual's practical freedom. It is to these group formations that I now turn.

Seriality

Sartre maintains that the primordial group formation is the *seriality* of the atomized crowd (Sartre 2004, 687). While individuals of the series direct themselves towards the attainment of the same end, they do not consciously act together, nor is there is a common bond between individuals. Individuals of the series work independently from one another to achieve their own ends, which just happen to be the same as their neighbor's end. Thus, while each individual of the series may be working towards the same end, each is only concerned with whether she attains her end.

Sartre's phenomenological description of the bus stop queue highlights the type of relation he envisages the series to entail (Sartre 2004, 256–269). Sartre writes that there is a gathering of people at a bus stop outside a church. It consists of numerous individuals of different ages, social classes, and sex who engage with one another in a particular manner. "These people do not care about or speak to each other and, in general, they do not look at one another; they exist side by side alongside a bus stop" (Sartre 2004, 256). Because each individual is concerned only with her own situation, she comports herself towards the other

with an attitude of indifferent coldness. Each worries only about her own being and the activities that she has to undertake to fulfil her work or family commitments. But while she worries about her own project, each individual exists with others who are also trying to fulfil their own ends. To fulfil their independent projects, each individual just happens to be required to engage in the same activity as others: they must each wait to catch the bus. The various individuals do not engage with one another; they simply wait for the arrival of the bus next to one another. It is because they are all engaged in the same activity that they become a collective defined by the activity of waiting for the bus. This common activity brings them into a specific formation with others grouped around the structures and norms of queuing at a bus stop.

While each individual directs herself to the bus stop and so is defined by her relation to this externality, she also becomes just another individual waiting for the bus. Because of scarcity there are not enough places for everyone waiting. As was the custom in Paris of Sartre's day, everyone takes a numbered ticket and waits her turn. There is no attempt to determine whose journey is more important and necessary. The individual becomes an indistinguishable part of the mass. Each individual loses her individual uniqueness and becomes part of an interchangeable number conforming to the dictates of the bus stop (Sartre 2004, 266). Not only does the ticket ensure that each individual becomes a faceless being interchangeable with the next, but each comports herself in a manner that is dictated in advance by the rules of the bus stop. No longer is the individual a free being with her own unique history and purpose; the bus stop alienates her from herself and the other.

As Thomas Flynn (1984, 95) rightly notes, series being shares many of the alienating characteristics of the conflict defined subject/object social relations described in *Being and Nothingness.* There are three related aspects to the alienation of serial being. First, series being isolates individuals from one another. While the individual lives besides other individuals, she does not engage them in a purposeful common activity. Each simply engages in her own activities. Her activity may bring her into contact with others, but the individuals of the series do not attempt to purposefully help each other undertake the common activity their independent projects lead them to.

Second, serial being objectifies the individual by making her an interchangeable objective unit: for example, the individual becomes number four in the queue. This strips the individual of her unique subjectivity. It also leads each individual to comport herself towards the other in a specific way. Because of scarcity, each individual comes to see the other as a threat to their attainment of the shared goal. For example, the individual who stands at number five in the queue views the individual who stands at number four as an obstacle to the

attainment of his goal. Similarly, the individual at number four in the queue sees the individual at number five as a threat to her practical freedom. The result is that each individual becomes alienated, both from herself by virtue of becoming an interchangeable objective unit and, because each sees the other as a threat to her practical freedom, from the other.

Such a situation discloses the third aspect of the alienation of serial being: the individual's passive relation to a dominating external object. As described, serial being is grounded in an external object that externally unifies each individual's intentional activity without creating an organic common bond between the individuals. But this unity is only achieved because the subjective freedom of the individual is usurped and replaced by an interchangeable objectivity that usurps the subjective freedom and circumstances of each individual. Serial being does not take into consideration each individual; it makes each individual conform to the pre-established dictates of an external other. Through this process the individual is alienated from his freedom; not only is he turned into an interchangeable object, but, by adhering to the pre-established rules of the other, he does not freely and spontaneously express himself in the actual world.

Alienation is an inherent aspect of serial being and, because Sartre insists this is the primordial way in which the individual exists in relation to the other, it is always a potential aspect of the individual's social being. But while the alienation of serial being is the foundation of all group formations, it is not the only group formation possible. While Sartre insists that individuals do not necessarily have to overcome serial being, he does note that serial being *can* be overcome. This can only happen, however, if certain material circumstances occur and the individuals involved react to these circumstances in a particular manner. When the individuals of the series are confronted by an apocalyptic threat, Sartre maintains it has the potential to serve as the focal point that unifies the individuals threatened in such a way that they form a free organic and spontaneous unified group (Sartre: 2004, 341–241, 357). This organic unity allows each individual to express herself freely in a common activity in such a way that she is not constrained by the other, nor does she constrain the other's practical activity. Sartre calls this group formation the *group-in-fusion*.[1]

The Group-in-Fusion

The group-in-fusion is the name Sartre gives to an organic, spontaneous, group

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1.   The translator of the English version of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* has called this group formation the "fused group." However, I have chosen to use the term "group-in-fusion" because it emphasizes the open ended, dynamic nature of this group formation in a way that the term the "fused group" fails to convey.

formation in which each member works towards the attainment of the same end: namely, survival in the face of an external apocalyptic threat. The common intentional activity that results from each individual reacting to the same external threat creates a unified common praxis. This allows each individual to act spontaneously in a manner that affirms her own subjective freedom without this being usurped or constrained by the activities of other group members or usurping or constraining other group members' practical freedom.

Whereas the individuals of the series do not take an interest in the ends of the other individuals present, but simply *passively* experience and conform to the structures of the external object that they each independently perceive to be necessary to realize their own independent projects, the individuals of the group-in-fusion form an organic unity that *actively* fights against a common external threat (Sartre: 2004, 382). Because each individual is spontaneously and freely asserting herself against the same common threat, their individual activities coalesce to form a spontaneous, organic, and unified social formation. This is possible because the relation between individuals of a group-in-fusion is one of mutual reciprocity in so far as each individual recognizes that the other: 1) has the same end as she does; and 2) is crucial to the attainment of their common end. This ensures that each individual recognizes that the activities of the other are crucial to the attainment of their shared common goal.

Sartre maintains that the mutual recognition of each other's freedom and the common intentionality of their action create a non-hierarchical social relation. Each individual's spontaneous action spontaneously inspires, reinforces, and directs the actions of others. As such, each individual of the group-in-fusion is a leader.

As a collective *action,* the group-in-fusion is not a collective entity or consciousness. Sartre argues that claiming such collective action creates, emanates from, or sustains a collective being that transcends individual praxis would place the individual under the being of another. Rather than freely express himself, the individual would be subject to the dictates of the collective entity. This would alienate the individual from his free praxis (Sartre 2006, 16). Instead, Sartre insists that the group-in-fusion is a collective that is grounded in the immanent praxis of each individual. The spontaneous collective action of the group-in-fusion emanates from the fact that the intentionality of each individual is directed towards the same external threat rather than from a unified being that transcends the individuals involved and directs their activities.

To make his point Sartre differentiates between *totalization* and *totality* (Sartre 2004, 45–47). By *totalization* Sartre means an on-going process of becoming that is grounded in the spontaneous activity of each individual. By *totality* he means a

fixed, self-contained being that directs the activity of each individual. Sartre insists that the group-in-fusion is a *totalization* that is created and sustained by the continuous spontaneous activity of its individuals; it is not a transcendental totality that subsumes and directs the individual (Sartre 2004, 382). To account for the unity of individual praxis constitutive of the group-in-fusion without grounding it in a static transcendent entity, Sartre introduces an important concept: the mediating third. Sartre insists that the mediating third creates and sustains the group. However, importantly, the mediating third is not an external entity that glues the members of the group together. Sartre holds that the common focus of each individual and the role that each individual has as a mediating third ensures that the individuals involved bind together to form a common praxis.

This binding together occurs because the mediating third for a particular dyadic relation is also part of a dyad with another individual. In turn, this dyad is unified by another mediating third who is also a member of another dyad unified by yet another mediating third. Each individual of the group is a member of an immediate dyadic relation and a mediating third for another dyadic relation. Each individual's double role (her immediate relation with another individual and her role as a mediating third for another dyadic relation) ensures that each mediating third links each dyad to another dyad thereby creating the unity of the group. Or as Sartre puts it: "the third party is the human mediation through which the multiplicity of epicentres and ends (identical and separate) organises itself *directly,* as determined by a synthetic objective" (Sartre 2004, 367).

While the mediating third unifies the various individuals under a common intentionality, it does it in such a way that the activity of each individual contributes to the spontaneous development of their collective action. Not only is each individual's activity a spontaneous response to an external threat, but, because the collective activity is created and sustained by the activity of each individual, whether she is acting as a member of a dyad or as a mediating third, the activity of the collective group forms a spontaneous and organic unity that is dependent on the activity of each individual involved for its continued existence. As such, at no time does the activity of the group-in-fusion lead to the passive inertia or static being that constrains the activities of each individual and alienates her from her capacity to express herself freely.

Whereas serial being maintains a strict division between the individual and the other, the mediating third overcomes this binary opposition and binds each dyadic social relation together to form an organic cohesive whole. This ensures that relations between individuals in the group-in-fusion take on a new meaning. "In the fused group, the third party is my objectivity interiorized. I do not see it in him as other, but as *mine*" (Sartre 2004, 377). The spontaneous com-

mon activity of the group-in-fusion overcomes the other-ness of the other and allows the individual to determine that he and the other have the same interests. This allows each individual to identify with the other in a manner that brings each to trust that his action will be mirrored by the action of the other. Because he trusts that the other has the same interests as himself, the individual perceives that he can count on the other's support.

We should not think, however, that because each individual has the same interests and acts in the same manner this reduces each individual to an interchangeable element in the same way that serial being makes each individual interchangeable. Sartre insists that while each individual sees himself mirrored in the activity and intention of the other, this does not reduce each individual to the same. Because the activity of each individual is spontaneously directed towards the negation of the same external threat, it is not subject to predetermined schemas. Each individual's activity emanates from his spontaneous self-expression, which is directed against and thereby unified by the same common external threat. Because the group-in-fusion allows each individual to express himself freely and spontaneously, while simultaneously overcoming the otherness of the other, it is not marked by the alienation constitutive of serial being. It is important to note, however, that while the group-in-fusion emanates from the alienation of serial being, it does not form in order to overcome this alienation. The overcoming of the alienation of serial being is a secondary unintended consequence of the group-in-fusion's primary reason for forming: the desire of its members to combat an explicit external threat. As Sartre explains,

> the explosion of revolt, as the liquidation of the collective, does not have its *direct* sources either in alienation revealed by freedom, or in freedom suffered as impotence; there has to be a conjunction of historical circumstances, a definite change in the situation, the danger of death, violence. (2004, 401).

But because the group-in-fusion is grounded in exceptional historical circumstances, its demise is inevitable. The group-in-fusion can only exist as long as there is an explicit external threat to its members. Once that threat subsides so too does the group-in-fusion. The disappearance of the group-in-fusion's external threat can lead to one of two transformations in the structure of the group: 1) if the external threat simply disappears the individuals comprising it can simply fall back into the atomized crowd of serial being; or 2) if the threat continues to be *implicit,* the members of the group-in-fusion can choose to alter their group formation so that it becomes a sovereign institution (Sartre 2004, 676). However, before it reaches the form of a sovereign institution, following Sartre's logical progression, it first becomes an *organized group* bound by the pledge.

The Organized Group

If the external threat becomes implicit, Sartre holds that the members of the group-in-fusion can put in place standing measures, such as a democratically organized structure, and the promise to care for and affirm the other's practical freedom by means of "the pledge" (Sartre 2004, 418), that will enable them to re-kindle the loose knit spontaneous organic unity of the group-in-fusion if the implicit external threat once again becomes explicit (Sartre 2004, 412). While the group-in-fusion is a spontaneous organic unity, the pledge of the organized group mediates between the members of the group and binds each one to the other. This creates a semi-permanent structure which is maintained by each individual's promise to all its members that he will protect the other from the external threat.

> Thus, in the order: "Let us swear," he claims an objective guarantee from the other third party that he will never become other: whoever gives *me* this guarantee *thereby* protects me, as far as he is concerned, from the danger that *being-other may come to me from the other.* (Sartre 2004, 421)

Sartre recognizes that the pledge can take numerous forms; it does not necessarily have to be a formal statement of intent (Sartre 2004, 419). However, while the pledge can be explicit or implicit, each form is directed towards the same end: the promise to act together to protect the other's practical freedom from an explicit external threat. But Sartre is quick to warn that the pledge is not a social contract. Unlike the social contract, the pledge does not seek "to describe the basis of particular societies" (Sartre 2004, 420). The pledge is simply a "*practical device*" (Sartre 2004, 420) each individual uses to secure the other's guarantee that he will protect him from an external threat. But the pledge does not constrain the individual's freedom by predetermining how he will act towards the other. The pledge simply allows each individual to promise to the other that he will act in a way that cares for and affirms the other's practical freedom. It is up to the individual to decide the actual content of his actions as and when the external threat arises. By promising to care for and affirm each others practical freedom, each pledged member becomes a brother/sister to the other members of the group (Sartre 2004, 437).

By trusting the other to care for her practical freedom, the individuals of the organized group come to recognize that the other is not a threat to her practical freedom. Each individual recognizes that the other extends her practical freedom by: 1) helping her secure her practical freedom against their common implicit threat; and 2) contributing to the realisation of her independent projects by either volunteering to help her attain her end or purposefully not

creating impediments that would prevent her from achieving her ends (Sartre 1992, 279). The pledge is not, therefore, simply a superficial verbal statement; the pledge alters the dynamics of the group. Through the pledge and the concrete acts of support it instantiates, each member of the organized group becomes confident that the other will support and affirm his practical freedom. The pledge brings each member of the organized group to: 1) recognize that the other is another free subject with his own practical projects; and 2) express solidarity with the other's practical freedom. The result of this reciprocated solidarity is a close-knit group in which each member comports herself freely in relation to the other, supports the other's independent projects, and perceives the other to be an extension of, rather than a constraint on, her own practical freedom. For this reason, Kevin Boileau rightly notes that "members [of the organized group] act in concert as a 'we'" (2004, 78).

While individuals of the group-in-fusion support one another as they each act together to combat the same external threat, their common activity is contingent on the existence of this explicit external threat. Not only do members of the group-in-fusion simply focus on a unitary end (survival in the face of an external threat) which prevents them from choosing what end that they, as a group, will work together to achieve; but there is also a sense in which the solidarity engendered by the common external threat encountered by each member of the group-in-fusion is not a voluntary action but is one that is thrust upon each member by their contingent circumstance. In contrast, the pledge of the organized group provides a standing promise that each member will protect and care for the freedom of the other even if there is not a common, immediate, explicit threat present. Furthermore, by voluntarily expressing solidarity with the other's practical freedom, and due to the open, democratic nature of the organized group, it would appear that, contrary to the members of the group-in-fusion, members of the organized group are free to choose the end towards which their group activity is directed; their collective action is not so constrained by the need to fight an immediate, explicit, external threat. For these reasons, I understand that it is this group formation and not, as Joseph Catalano (2007, 51) argues, the group-in-fusion that: 1) best allows individuals to form a common bond in which each expresses solidarity with the other's attempts to be practically free; and 2) facilitates the achievement of practical projects that express and extend the individual's practical freedom in ways that would not be possible if she acted on her own.

At this point however, I want to suggest an important, if often ignored, relation between the pledge and the conversion outlined in Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics.* This will further validate my argument that the *Critique of Dialectical*

Reason complements, and is dependent on, Sartre's early works. In the *Notebooks for an Ethics,* Sartre holds that it is only once consciousness chooses to undergo a difficult and painful process called conversion that it can come to reflectively recognize, respect, care for, and affirm the other's practical freedom in the way necessary for a social relation based on the pledge to exist. I want to suggest, therefore, that the pledge and the organized group created as a result of it are only a possibility once all potential members of the organized group have chosen to undergo conversion.

Because, in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre maintains that consciousness, or being-for-itself, is essentially nothing or free, he argues that consciousness is defined by the pre-reflective fundamental project it adopts. Consciousness's pre-reflective fundamental project is the general project that shapes its activities, values, norms, and beliefs. While consciousness is essentially nothing, Sartre maintains that it tends not to be content to live in nothingness. Consciousness pre-reflectively desires to be something. But it does not want to forego its nothingness by simply becoming something. Consciousness wants to synthesize with objective being (which Sartre calls being-in-itself) to become a being-in-itself-for-itself; or as he provocatively calls it: God (Sartre 2003, 587). Becoming God will provide consciousness with the freedom that its ontological nothingness provides as well as the security of being. The result is that Sartre holds that consciousness's "natural tendency" (Sartre 1992, 6) is to adopt a pre-reflective fundamental project that tries to realize its pre-reflective desire to be God.

However, the consciousness that adopts a pre-reflective fundamental project that aims to fulfil its pre-reflective desire to be God is destined to fail because attaining the fixed identity inherent to being-in-itself-for-itself would annihilate the nothingness that defines consciousness (Sartre 2003, 636). While Sartre recognizes that the consciousness that continuously fails to become God can simply continue to attempt to fulfil its futile desire to be God, he also recognizes that its perpetual failure to become God may lead consciousness to choose to escape from this futile attempt by choosing to undergo a difficult process called conversion (Sartre 1992, 472). While Sartre notes that there is no particular reason why consciousness should choose to undergo conversion (Sartre 1992, 357), the consciousness that does choose to undergo conversion will alter two different, but related, aspects of its existence.

First, conversion alters consciousness's pre-reflective fundamental project to one that does not aim to fulfil its futile pre-reflective desire to be God. Instead, conversion brings consciousness to realize reflectively: 1) the futility of this endeavor; and 2) that its freedom is at the source of this futile desire. Sartre holds that the combination of these two aspects will bring consciousness to

adopt a pre-reflective fundamental project that has freedom as its end (Sartre 1992, 474).

Second, conversion will bring consciousness to alter its reflective self-understanding. Prior to conversion, consciousness thematizes its essential nothingness so that it reflectively understands itself to have a fixed identity. Conversion brings consciousness to reflectively understand that because it is essentially nothing, it is free to determine its own existence. By reflectively understanding that it is essentially free and adopting a pre-reflective fundamental project which reflectively affirms this freedom, conversion brings consciousness to a fundamentally "new, 'authentic' way of being" (Sartre 1992, 475). This new authentic way of being alters consciousness's understanding of, and relation to, the other (Sartre 1992, 12). While, prior to conversion, consciousness understands that the other is an objectifying threat to the pure subjective freedom it pre-reflectively understands itself to be, conversion brings consciousness to understand and reflectively accept that: 1) the other is another free subject with its own independent project rather than the objectifying threat consciousness understands the other to be prior to conversion; and 2) because it is only through the objectifying look of the other that it becomes aware of the objective body in which it exists, the other plays a necessary and crucial role in the full disclosure of all the structures of its being (Sartre 1992, 499).

Consciousness' altered understanding of the other brings it to alter its comportment towards the other. Prior to conversion, social relations between consciousnesses conform to a subject/object, conflictual opposition in which each seeks to objectify the other to maintain its privileged subjectivity (Sartre 2003, 276-326). Because conversion brings consciousness to reflectively understand that the other is another subject with its own independent project and that the other is necessary for the full disclosure of its being, the converted consciousness no longer seeks simply to affirm its subjectivity in opposition to the other. Conversion brings consciousness to empathize and express "solidarity" (Sartre 1992, 479) with the other's situated freedom. This sense of empathy and solidarity manifests itself in consciousness's reflective support for, and affirmation of, the other's attempts to secure its practical freedom (Sartre 1992, 279, 282, 330, 508).

While this brief explanation does not highlight all of the aspects of post-conversion social relations, it should, I hope, highlight that it is only once consciousness has undergone conversion that it will be able to alter its comportment towards the other so that it reflectively recognizes, respects, cares for, and affirms the other's practical freedom (for a more detailed discussion of what conversion means for Sartrean social relations see Rae [2009]). This is impor-

tant for Sartre's discussion of the pledge in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* because, as noted, the pledge brings the concrete individual to express solidarity with the other and explicitly affirm that he will care for the other's practical freedom in the way that Sartre has previously argued is only a possibility for the converted consciousness. Thus, while Sartre never explicitly makes this connection, I want to suggest that, because it is only the social relations of converted consciousnesses that allow each individual to reflectively recognize, respect, care for, and affirm the other's practical freedom in the way necessary for the creation and continuation of an organized group, it is only once all potential members of the group have chosen to undergo conversion to a pre-reflective fundamental project that has the affirmation of freedom as its end that each member can open himself to the other in the way necessary for the pledge and the organized group it instantiates to exist.

To sustain its loose but integrated structure, however, the pledged group must differentiate the functions that each member undertakes; it must organize itself. Only by organizing itself can the group maintain a permanent structure that will allow each to express his subjectivity, while being sufficiently closely knit that, should it be required, the members can bind even closer to one another. The notion of an organization has two functions: "the word 'organisation' refers both to the internal action by which a group defines its structures and to the group itself as a structured activity in the practical field, either on worked matter or on other groups" (Sartre 2004, 446). The organization defines the group members to external non-members, while also providing each individual with a particular differentiated function. This differentiation unifies the organization while also allowing practical problems to be solved.

The individual, therefore, fulfils a specific function in the organization. However, Sartre maintains that fulfilling a specific function does not constrain the individual's practical freedom because: 1) she voluntarily fulfils the activities of her function (Sartre 2004, 467); 2) the common activity of the organized group protects her from the external threat's annihilation of her practical freedom; and 3) being a member of an organized group allows her to work together with others to achieve ends she would not be able to achieve if she worked on her own. Thus, while it may appear that fulfilling a fixed function alienates the individual from her practical freedom, Sartre explains that

> this alienation (at least at this level) is only apparent: my action develops, on the basis of a *common power*, towards a *common objective*; the fundamental moment which is characteristic of the actualisation of the power and the objectification of the *praxis* is that of free individual practice. (2004, 458)

From this we see that the organized group is not a transcendent other that alienates the individual from his practical freedom; the organized group is so structured that the individual contributes to the common praxis by freely fulfilling his own specific function. Sartre notes that this creates a fundamental difference between the internal structure of the group-in-fusion and the organized group. Whereas all members of the group-in-fusion are focused on the same immediate end (the immediate overcoming of an immediate threat), the spontaneity of the group-in-fusion ensures it lacks a coherent organizational structure; each individual simply acts in the way he thinks is most appropriate to his immediate situation. In contrast, the semi-permanence of the organized group creates an effective organizational structure that co-ordinates each individual's praxis and allows each individual to express himself freely within the limits of his function. This co-ordination allows each member of the organized group to contribute to the common activity that realizes his own and the other's practical freedom.

Furthermore, each member of the organized group reflectively understands that the organized group is grounded in her own individual praxis. Each realizes that it is she who directs the group, shapes the group, and determines the common praxis of the group; the group does not appear as an other that directs her activity. As Sartre explains,

> the only direct and specific action of the organised group, therefore, is its organisation and perpetual reorganisation, in other words, its actions on its members. By this, of course, I mean that common individuals settle the internal structures of the community rather than that the group-in-itself imposes them as categories. (Sartre 2004, 463).

But while the organized group allows each individual to combat an external threat effectively, the goal of each individual's praxis is not the group; it is the common threat that necessitates the creation of the organized group. To privilege the group would be to risk turning it into a transcendent totality that dictates how each individual is to act. This would alienate the individual from his practical freedom because his actions would be predetermined by the group. For this reason, Sartre insists that the organized group exists to further the individual's practical freedom; the individual does not exist to serve the ends of the organized group.

The organized group is, therefore, an example of the sort of spontaneous, organized, democratic, and fundamentally open group formation that affirms rather than constrains the individual's practical freedom that T. Storm Heter (2008, 121) argues Sartre defends in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. It is precisely because the organized group enhances rather than constrains the individ-

ual's practical freedom that I want to suggest Sartre holds that each individual's practical and political activity should be directed towards becoming a member of an organized group.

However, while being a member of an organized group enhances the individual's practical freedom, Sartre recognizes that the organized group will, logically, give rise to structures that will subsequently constrain the individual's practical freedom. The different functions of the organized group help establish a permanent unifying common bond between all its members. But while the organized group privileges the individual's praxis over the function, the reification of these functions will lead to the alienation of the individual from his practical freedom. Rather than focusing on the organized group as a form of common praxis in opposition to an external threat, the function of the group can become reified and valued for itself. Put differently, because the organized group is maintained by each individual fulfilling her specific function, it may appear that the function is the essential aspect of the group, while the individual is the inessential aspect. Rather than realising that the activity of the function is dependent on the praxis of a particular individual fulfilling that function at a specific time, it may be thought that the function can be performed by anyone. This change in perspective leads the individual to be thought of as an interchangeable monad in an overarching *totality*. The group becomes the important aspect which directs and determines the content of the activities that each individual must undertake. Sartre calls this atrophied group formation *the institution.*

Institutions

Institutions constrain the individual's practical freedom because the function of the institution becomes more important than the individual fulfilling that function (Sartre 2004, 600). Two consequences arise from this: First, the individual is no longer perceived to be unique; he is seen to be a mere object capable of being replaced by another individual; and second, the individual is prevented from freely expressing himself in the actual world because he becomes trapped by the dictates and norms of the function he fulfils in the institution. Contrary to the function of the organized group, the function of the institution does not allow the individual to choose freely and spontaneously how to fulfil the tasks constitutive of his function. The function of the institution dictates in advance how the individual is to act.

Moreover, the privileging of the function over the individual ensures that each individual interacts with the other through the function that each undertakes. Individuals of institutions do not spontaneously and freely interact with one another. Each must comport himself towards the other in a specific pre-de-

termined manner. The result is that the "third-party is still *my brother,* but he is almost or completely unknown" (Sartre 2004, 587). Each individual recognizes that he is working towards a common goal with other individuals, but the structure of the institution prevents him from freely interacting with them. Their interaction is mediated by the formal functions, structures, and norms of the institution, which prevent each from forming an organic bond with the other members of the institution. Because the institution constrains the individual within its boundaries, rules, and structures while dictating how each individual will interact with the other, it does not contribute to the realization or affirmation of the individual's practical freedom. For this reason, Sartre calls the institution a "degraded group" (Sartre 2004, 600).

The specialization inherent to the activities of each member of the institution means that each individual is not only segregated from other members of the institution that do not engage in his specialization, but, because the institution predetermines the way in which he is to fulfil his function, the individual of the institution tends to adopt a specific manner constituted by specific pre-determined mannerisms, behaviors, actions, and ways of being. He becomes what Sartre calls an "organisation man" (Sartre 2004, 605).

Organization man defines himself in terms of his function in the organization. His existence revolves around freely subordinating himself to the role he fulfils in the organization. While the individual of the *organized group* freely adopts the behavior and activities required by his role, there is still a direct and recognized relation between his privileged position and his function. This ensures that the way the activities of the function of the organized group are fulfilled is freely determined by the individual. The function of the institution, however, pre-determines how the individual is to act. Rather than freely determining his actions, organization man must conform to predetermined roles. Because his function dictates how he is to act, the institution alienates the individual from his free spontaneity, constricts his actions, and makes him impotent in regard to the content of the function he fulfils.

There is, however, another aspect to the way the structure of the institution, and in particular the way its sovereign-structure, alienates the individual from his practical freedom. According to Sartre, the different functions of the institution form a hierarchy headed by a sovereign. This sovereign has overall authority, but more importantly he is the focal point for the members of the institutions. It is the sovereign who dictates how the institution will act, what it will be directed towards, and the manner in which each member will comport himself (Sartre 2004, 607–609). The sovereign-structure ensures that not only is each individual subordinate to the sovereign, but each individual subordinates his

freedom to the fulfilment of the dictates of the sovereign. Rather than choosing how he will live, organization man orients his being around the dictates of another: the sovereign. As Sartre explains, "provided that the goal of the sovereign really is the common object of the group, no one will have any aim other than serving the sovereign himself, and everyone will pursue the common aim, not because it is common, but because it is the object of free sovereign *praxis*" (2004, 631). By fleeing from his freedom, organization man is the epitome of someone who lives in bad faith.

Thus, the institution alienates the individual from his practical freedom through: 1) its objective structures and pre-determined behavioral schemas, which dictate in advance how he is to act; and 2) the sovereign who demands that the individual follow his dictates. Alienation is, therefore, a constitutive aspect of the individual's experience of the institution. Not only does his immediate function alienate him from his practical freedom, but the overall structure of the institution alienates him from freely expressing himself in the actual world by dictating how he is to live, what he is to do, and when he is to do it.

While the isolation inherent to the institution shares certain similarities with that of series being, in many ways the alienation of the institution is worse. While both the series and the institution are ways of being that constrain the individual's practical freedom, it becomes clear through Sartre's description that the institution creates far more insidious and complete forms of alienation, domination, and constraint than are found in the series. While the series directs individual activity, it still leaves the individual with the option of directing herself towards the external object in certain non-determined ways. For example, the individual at the bus stop could alter her attitude towards others, or she could engage them in conversation. However, Sartre implicitly insists that such is the constraint and domination found in the institution that its structures severely constrain each individual's attitude towards the other *and,* more importantly, each individual's capacity to interact with the other. Because the way of being instantiated by membership of an institution is more pervasive, constrained, and debilitated than the ways of being found in other group formations, it is by being a member of an institution that the concrete individual's practical freedom is most constrained.

It must be remembered however that Sartre's criticisms of the constraints imposed on the individual's practical freedom by the structure of the institution do not apply to all group formations. Other group formations, most notably the group-in-fusion and the organized group, do not constrain the individual's practical freedom; they contribute to its realization. Indeed, given that his entire *oeuvre* is concerned with the affirmation of the individual's ontological and practical freedom, I do not think it is controversial to say that Sartre is implicitly

defending those group formations that enhance the individual's practical freedom. While he recognizes that it is up to the individual to choose to affirm her own practical freedom, Sartre holds that membership of an organic, democratic, and open group formation, as found in the group-in-fusion and especially the organized group, is essential if the individual is to be practically free.

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