1. From Individual Project to Historical Praxis

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, fundamental lines of thought from Sartre's early and later philosophy are introduced as foundational for his theoretical conception of practical ensembles. This is done to generate a general understanding of Sartre's philosophy and to introduce some of the considerations to be further developed in this work. The reason for the broader scale of this analysis lies in the fact that this work considers Sartre's early and later works to be complementary. To understand his later concepts, some earlier ones must be clarified first. In this way, conceptual transitions between Sartre's works can be reconstructed. Moreover, Sartre gives the theoretical basis for some of his earlier concepts in his later works, while changing his general perspective toward the social, cultural, and, most importantly, material conditions in which human beings find themselves.

Considering the specific focus of his philosophical writings, Sartre's philosophy can be divided roughly into his early, more existentialist works, which are more focused on human existence as an individual and free project, and his later, more Marxist works, which are more focused on the interplay between individual *praxis* and dialectical history. Throughout them all, Sartre takes an anthropocentric and deeply humanist view. His principal interest lies in the scope of human reality, freedom, and action. In an interview with *New Left Review* in 1969, Sartre stated that the quintessential problem at the heart of his philosophy is "how to give man both his autonomy and his reality among real objects, avoiding idealism without lapsing into a mechanistic materialism" (Sartre 1969, 46). Although Sartre approaches different aspects of this problem throughout his work, his principal methodology consists in analyzing the nature of human-world relations while taking ontological, phenomenological, dialectical, and praxeological considerations into account.

His two major works, *Being and Nothingness* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (in connection with *Search for a Method*), represent attempts to depict two apparently mutually exclusive aspects of human life—the internal perspective *of* an ontologically free agent and the external perspective *on* this agent as a needful material being in interrelation with sociocultural and material factors. These aspects, however, rep-

resent two interconnected planes of the existential reality of human beings. Human existence unites the lived experience of oneself as a free agent and of oneself as a socially dependent, material being. By reconstructing the changing foci of Sartre's philosophy and how he develops his philosophical concepts, this work intends to demonstrate how Sartre mediates between these two aspects.

1.2 Being and Nothingness

This section deals with the philosophical outlook of Sartre's first major work, *Being and Nothingness*. The main focus of this work lies in what can be called the internal dialectic of human existence, namely the fact that human existence is a dialectically synthetic relationship between being and consciousness. His later works are more focused on the external dialectic of human existence, or, rather, on the fact that human existence itself represents a mediation of the internal and external dialectic—a constant and mutually affecting interplay of these dialectical processes.

To understand the dialectically synthetic relationship of being and consciousness, "the *moments* of this synthesis" (Sartre 2021, 34, emphasis in original)—namely being and consciousness—have to be examined in the various ways they interrelate. Concerning being, Sartre explicitly differentiates between humans as exceptional beings that constantly relate to themselves and their surroundings and non-human entities. Ontologically, both humans and non-human entities *are* in the sense that both are *existent* by virtue of their ontological foundation in the materiality of being (Sartre 2021, 24). This being, Sartre claims, must be understood as follows: "Being is. Being is in itself. Being is what it is" (Sartre 2021, 29). However, Sartre identifies a difference in how humans and things relate to being. This is a differentiation of their respective *modes of being*.

Sartre refers to the human mode of being as being-for-itself, or just for-itself (French *pour-soi*). He refers to the mode of being of those non-human entities that comprise the physicochemical world as being-in-itself, or in-itself (French *en-soi*). Although his philosophical thinking is deeply influenced by Hegel, Sartre deviates from Hegel's concept of *ideality* in this regard (Bernstein 1980, 130).[1] Sartre justifies his distinction between modes of being with the claim that there is "an ontological chasm that cannot be mediated" (Bernstein 1980, 131) between being and human consciousness. Phenomenologically, according to Sartre, the consciousness of being can never be identical with being, because consciousness is characterized by relationality. He claims that the being of consciousness is to exist "*at a distance from itself*" (Sartre 2021, 128, emphasis in original).

1 A more thorough examination of Sartre's modes of being follows in section 2.2.

As a consequence, Sartre agrees with Heidegger on the fact that human existence is *being-in-the-world* (German *In-der-Welt-sein*). In Sartre's case, being-in-the-world must be understood as an ongoing, dialectical synthesis of being and consciousness. To exhaustively represent the nature of human existence, the fundamentally dialectical relation between humans and being must be the basis for all analyses. From this fundamental relationship, Sartre examines various aspects of human existence, such as *bad faith*, the conditions of the possibility of intersubjectivity, the situation of the individual, and the effects of the *look* or *gaze* of others. He does so by focusing on the internal perspective of a situated human existent. Such a perspective accounts for what it means to act in, experience, and engage the world based on a synthetic relationship of being and consciousness. Out of all the themes analyzed in *Being and Nothingness*, the most important ones for this work can be found in Sartre's conception of the nature of human agency, and his considerations about the quality of human freedom.

Action and Existence

Human action plays a central role in Sartre's philosophy. Sartre states that "being, in its case, is acting, and to cease to act is to cease to be" (Sartre 2021, 623). Action is decisive for being and not-being; it is an activity in which humans realize the possibilities that arise from their existential situation. Any human possibility not realized through action simply does not exist. Sartre gives three express conditions of action, namely *freedom of the acting being*, the *intention to act*, and the *discovery of the world as a lacking state of things* (Sartre 2021, 569–573). The *freedom of the acting being* represents the fundamental condition for action from which the other two conditions are derived.

Sartre locates the freedom of the *acting being*, i.e. the human agent, in the aforementioned fact that human beings exist in relation to being, or, more precisely, exist as a dialectical relating of being which is just given, or posited, as it is on one side and negating consciousness on the other. This dialectical relating must be understood in a rather practical way. Qua being, humans are material, organic, and necessarily social. They have basic and more complex needs and requirements that derive from physicochemical and psychological processes within themselves and their mediating milieu, i.e. their material surroundings, as well as from how these surroundings are socioculturally structured within forms of societal constellation.[2] Section

2 In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre uses terms like *entours* (e.g. Sartre 1943, 549) and *milieu* (e.g. Sartre 1943, 618) to refer to a person's surroundings, whereas the terms *environnement* (e.g. Sartre 1960, 167) and *milieu* (e.g. Sartre 1960, 196–199) are more prominently used throughout *Critique*. According to Petit and Gillaume (2018), there is a somewhat clear distinction between the terms *milieu* and *environnement* in French intellectual discourse: "The French term 'milieu' designates (i) the middle or center and its surroundings; (ii) the 'in-between two

4.2 discusses what it means for the materiality that surrounds human beings to be *socioculturally structured*. Sartre's understanding of the *structure* of forms of organization between human beings and non-human things refers to the set of rules, regulations, and expectations that mediates and thus shapes how a person's possible options for action are enabled.

All these factors—physicochemical, psychological, sociocultural—which culminate in a human's corporeality and lived experience, belong to what Sartre refers to as *facticity* (Sartre 2021, 133). Qua consciousness, however, human existence does not coincide with its facticity, but, rather, relates to it (Sartre 2021, 622–628). Although this relational gap between being and consciousness is practically nil, Sartre claims it to be the decisive factor for the fundamental freedom of human existence (Sartre 2021, 128). Sartre refers to this fundamental freedom as *ontological freedom*. It describes the fact that human existence represents the dialectical mediation of being and consciousness. Human existence is a relation to and not an identity with being. This fundamental relationality of being and consciousness is the condition of possibility for recognizing that all forms of human conduct are, at their core, intentional and goal-directed actions. These actions are based on the inherent needfulness of human existence, i.e. the fact that human existence always strives for something

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places' (mi-lieu); (iii) the ambient atmosphere; and (iv) the medium (middle-term, intermediate or mediator) […] The term 'milieu' says both more and less than the term 'environment.' It says more, because it is not on the outside, but between the inside and the outside. It says less, because it refers to the unique experience of a living organism in a place, whereas the 'environment' is identical for all beings which find themselves in a place, and it stays outside the living beings. While the environment is objective, the milieu is 'trajective.'" (88). Petit's and Guillaume's first and second glosses for the term *milieu* can be found in the French phrase *au milieu du monde*, which Sartre often uses. This phrase does not at all refer to a supposed milieu of the world. It simply means *within*, *in the midst of*, or *in the middle of* the world. Their fourth understanding of *milieu* can be found in Sartre's conceptualization of totalization as a synthetic activity through which humans and what surrounds them become what they are in their interrelation in the first place. Agents interiorize the things, structural features, and people that surround them and totalize them as their world. However, this totalization is again shaped by the way the material surrounding is socioculturally structured, which again mediates and thus shapes an agent's actions. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explicitly states: "My 'surroundings' [French *mes entours*] should not be confused with the place I occupy […] My surroundings are the implement-things that surround me, with their coefficient of adversity and their equipmentality. Of course, by occupying my place I am founding my discovery of my surroundings […] Thus I am thrown, from the moment I exist, in the midst of existences that differ from me, and whose potentialities are unfolding, for and against me" (Sartre 2021, 657; Sartre 1943, 549). In this regard, in Sartre's philosophy there is a conceptual equivalence between *surroundings* as the whole of people, things, structures, and systems, and *milieu*, in the sense of a mediating milieu that predisposes the conditions of possibility for action in the first place.

it requires, wants, or wishes (section 2.3). Dialectically speaking, material requirements or mental wants and wishes represent positings that are negated through an active engagement between agents and themselves, or between agents and their milieu. Under the *freedom of the acting being*, i.e. ontological freedom, human beings can be understood as agents. In Sartre's understanding, the *freedom of the acting being* thus represents the necessary condition of possibility for human agency.

At this stage, the two other express conditions for action, namely the *intention to act* and the *discovery of the world as a lacking state of things*, come into play. For Sartre, human action must be conceived as an intentional and ontologically free undertaking that modifies the "way the world is *figured*" (Sartre 2021, 569, emphasis in original) according to certain ends arising within concrete situations. The condition of *intention to act* refers to the motivational and directional aspect of human action, namely the fact that human beings have certain ends that they intend to attain. The condition *discovery of the world as a lacking state of things* refers both to the ontological and to the epistemological aspect of human action, namely the fact that the concrete outline of those ends is relative both to how agents apprehend their action situation based on what their surroundings provide them, and to how this provision is assessed regarding an agent's requirements, wants, and wishes at the onset of action. Both conditions, however, dialectically interrelate. The ends that agents intend to attain through their actions are relative to the attainability of these ends as provided by the agents' capabilities on the one hand, and environmental factors such as the right means and other action conditions on the other.

The early Sartre explains the dialectical nature of action most evidently through the concept of *désirs* (Sartre 1943, 123), which can be translated simply as *desires*. In Sartre's dialectical understanding, a desire in the form of thirst, for instance, initially makes itself known as a complex of physical symptoms like a dry mouth or a slight headache (Sartre 2021, 139). As mentioned above, in Sartre's dialectical understanding, these physical symptoms represent positings of human being that express themselves through the body. However, owing to the fact of ontological freedom, human beings do not coincide with their being. They relate to their being. This means that they, for instance, examine what they feel and how they feel it. They try to explain why they feel the way they do or how to rid themselves of certain feelings. In this way, they relate to their physical symptoms rather than purely *being their symptoms*. By questioning and challenging these symptoms, by attempting to understand and even change them, these human beings engage with their facticity and temporality. They refer back to their existence, their experiences, and past actions in similar situations and discover their symptoms as uncomfortable in relation to a possible but as yet unrealized future self that is relieved of these symptoms. These human beings thus discover themselves to be in a *lacking state of things* that simultaneously outlines, anticipates, and projects toward a potentially satisfied future state of things (Sartre 2021, 511). Furthermore, these human beings recognize themselves as the very ones

who intend to transform their uncomfortable symptoms through action. They thus have the *intention to act* for themselves as ends in themselves. They are *autotelic*, in that they always, in some form or another, represent the end of their actions; their self (Greek *autos*) is their end (Greek *telos*).

Within this process of projecting toward a future state of things, together with the intention to act and the discovery of lacking something for themselves, the uncomfortable physical symptoms are disclosed to them as the desire of thirst. Sartre states that "[d]esire is a *lack of being*, and is haunted in its innermost being by the being that it desires. In this way, desire testifies to the existence of a lack in human-reality's being" (Sartre 2021, 140, emphasis added).

Desires bestow a fundamental directedness upon human existence because they project toward something that a human being lacks. For Sartre, desire is somewhat *attached* to an object of desire (Sartre 2021, 508–509). However, Sartre states that it would be "quite wrong to say that what is desired, in desiring, is our 'physical possession' of the desired object" (Sartre 2021, 508). Rather, a desire has a concrete direction toward an already familiar thing or toward a process in the world that represents the general context of its satisfaction. Thirst, as a desire for a glass of water or a cup of tea, for instance, represents a particular mode in which a specific, socioculturally situated, human subjectivity transcends toward and engages with the world for themselves in very specific ways (Sartre 2021, 510). In desiring, human beings not only simultaneously exist as what is lacking and as what is lacked; they also project toward themselves as a potential future self that is the end of their actions (Sartre 2021, 146–149).

Sartre's thoughts on desires render more clearly his conception of what it means to act. Acting, according to the early Sartre, "is to modify the way the world is *figured* [French *la figure du monde*], to arrange the means in view of an end" (Sartre 2021, 569, emphasis in original; Sartre 1943, 477). The term *figure* here refers beyond the material shape of the world and the things it comprises to the way these things are phenomenally given based on their being. To act based on the ends projected toward by an agent's desires thus means to modify the materiality of the world in such a way that the *lacking state of things* may become a *satisfied state of things* for these agents. In this way, acting does not merely mean acting based on one's desires. Rather, acting means to realize a subject-dependent, potential future state of the world in which one is involved for oneself. This realized state can be satisfying, but it does not have to. What is important is that such a state has been realized through action. By interiorizing said state of the world, agents may assess whether they realized their intended ends or not. An action, in this regard, is more than a goal-directed activity. It is also the realization of individual existence, understood as a free self-projection toward the future, which is directed through desires. Although Sartre emphasizes ontological freedom as a basis for human existence, he is not ignorant of the various interferences between an individual's action and their surrounding sociality,

culture, and materiality. Sartre mentions the role of other people, for instance, the abstract sociocultural structures of the societal constellations in which individuals are situated, and the *utility and adversity coefficients* of the things that may be used as means to an individual's ends. All of these factors potentially shape an individual's course of action. Nevertheless, although the facticity and the situation-dependent outline of desires mean that human beings are not the originators of their existence, they are the authors since they decide how they realize themselves through their actions.[3]

1.3 Search for a Method

This section deals with topics from *Search for a Method*, a work that marks the transition between Sartre's early, more existentialist works and his later, more Marxist ones. Sartre's *Questions de méthode*, translated as *Search for a Method* in English and *Fragen der Methode* in German, was released as a standalone work in 1957, three years before *Critique de la raison dialectique*. Although it was reprinted as the introductory essay to *Critique de la raison dialectique* in 1960, Sartre himself mentions a thematic shift of perspective between this essay and the main text of *Critique* (Sartre 1978, 15).

In *Search for a Method*, and even more so in *Critique of Dialectical Reason I* and *II*, Sartre not only shifts the tone but also the general focus of his philosophy. He begins to concern himself mostly with what can be called the external dialectic of human existence, namely the fact that human existence is a dialectically synthetic relationship between individuals and history. History, in this regard, is understood as the common actions of other individuals, groups, and collectives in relation to sociocultural and material factors. In the interview with *New Left Review*, Sartre states that the reason for the fundamental change in his philosophical outlook lies in the fact that life has taught him *la force des choses*, which can be translated as *force/strength/might/potency of things*. In this interview, Sartre also refers to *la force des choses* as the "power of circumstances" (Sartre 1969, 44).[4]

Compared with his earlier philosophy, the later Sartre is much more aware of the practical necessity of materiality and the individual's place in societal constellations that constrain and enable individual action. This is mostly a result of ongoing debates between Sartre and other French intellectuals on the role of Marxism in philos-

3 Section 2.4 expands this earlier conception of action in Sartre's philosophy by incorporating the dialectical principle of totalization, the relationship of forms of need and desire, and the instrumentalization of means to ends.

4 This term already implies that in Sartre's understanding, things develop a certain force or power under specific conditions and circumstances; the alternative would be primarily conceiving of things as having or exerting this power on their own. This idea is further developed in section 4.3.

ophy and society, the principal relationship between Western Marxism, Stalinism, and the Soviet Union, and basic questions surrounding the significance of the individual in historical processes (Jay 1984, 347–350). Jay also reconstructs the impact of Heidegger's *Brief über den 'Humanismus'* from 1947 on Sartre's philosophy. In this text, Heidegger principally critiqued French philosophers, especially Sartre, for misunderstanding and misrepresenting his existential philosophy. According to Jay, the fact that Heidegger pointed toward Marx's understanding of history as one way of recognizing the historical in being led to Sartre's engagement with Marxist thinking, which again paved the way for incorporating materiality and history into his philosophy (Jay 1984, 346–347). Whereas Sartre's early philosophy is an expression of his experience of heroic individuality in Nazi-occupied France, his later works express his confrontation with societal collectivity and the processes of upheaval, revolution, and transformation that took place in the aftermath of World War II. Sartre claims that his earlier focus on individual freedom, paired with his negligence regarding *la force des choses*, is rooted in his emphasis on an "interior experience, without any coordination with the exterior experience of a petty-bourgeois intellectual" (Sartre 1969, 45).

To account for the fact that things and circumstances can develop a certain *force*, in his later works Sartre seeks a deeper understanding of the historical situation of individuals and the inner logic of historical processes. He does so by examining the various ways in which individuals, through their actions, practically (re-)produce the very historical situation that produced those individuals in the first place (Richter 2011, 198). The main point of Sartre's later works is that human existence is an expression of society and that history is a constant circle of liberation and necessitation, propelled by the actions of individuals within larger groupings. Nevertheless—and despite the implications of his later philosophical outlook—Sartre still defends his conception of human freedom. He claims that everyone "in a period of exploitation is *at once both* the product of his own product and a historical agent who can under no circumstances be taken as a product" (Sartre 1963, 87, emphasis in original). In this regard, Sartre's early and later works are complementary. The externalities of human existence become comprehensible based on the internalities of human existence, whereas the functional principles of the internalities become clearer based on the general dialectical conditions of historical human existence. Similar to his approach in *Being and Nothingness*, to understand the externalities of human existence, the later Sartre focuses on the moments of a dialectical synthesis: individual and history, as well as the nature of their interrelation. Sartre believes this examination to be possible by fusing his existentialist philosophy with Marxist thought.[5]

5 For discussions about whether Sartre can be called an existential Marxist, see Betschart (2019) and Aronson (2019).

Regressive-Progressive Method

Search for a Method marks this transition between early and later Sartre. In this work, Sartre fully agrees with Marx's materialism, according to which "[t]he mode of production of material life generally dominates the development of social, political, and intellectual life" (Sartre 1963, 33–34). However, according to Sartre, Marxist theory in his time had become dogmatic. Rather than attempting to represent the reality of human life as a materially dialectical struggle driven by individuals, Sartre laments that Marxist philosophers conceive human life to be subject to supposed dialectical laws of nature and history. Sartre claims that Marxism itself had become a tool of oppression, especially in the U.S.S.R., rather than a tool of liberation (Sartre 1963, 21–22). He complains that the dogmatic reduction of human life to a mere expression of historical totalities undermines the significance of individual action and existence. As an existentialist philosopher, Sartre affirms:

> the specificity of the human act, which cuts across the social milieu while still holding on to its determinations, and which transforms the world on the basis of given conditions. For us man is characterized above all by his going beyond a situation, and by what he succeeds in making of what he has been made—even if he never recognizes himself in his objectification. (Sartre 1963, 91)

With his strong emphasis on individual action, Sartre reinterprets Marxist materialism. Using his later works, it could be said that for Sartre, materially conditioned action is the primary *mode of production* of human reality and history. Sartre claims that human existence can only be understood as an expression of history when history itself becomes understandable as an expression of human existence (Sartre 1963, 57). To account for his claim, Sartre borrows Lefebvre's methodology and further develops it into what he calls the *regressive-progressive method* (Sartre 1963, 51–52). He employs it to dialectically de- and reconstruct all relevant factors constituting the progression of history based on individual action (Simont & Trezise 1985, 109).

Rather than conforming to dogmatic Marxism, and anchoring human beings within dialectical laws of nature, *Search for a Method* stays in line with his early works and emphasizes the significance of individual action as self-projection and self-realization. However, because this self-projection is situated in sociocultural and material conditions, the *historical situation* of the individual(s) in question must be analyzed as well. This means that "[f]or any *given period*, we shall attempt to determine the field of possibles, the field of instruments, etc. […] we shall determine (among other things) the area of intellectual instruments" (Sartre 1963, 135, emphasis in original). All these factors structure the historical situation according to which the actions of individuals and their role in the progression of history can be understood in their entirety. The regressive-progressive method is thus "at the same time an enriching cross-reference between the object […] and the period" (Sartre 1963, 148).

Sartre's method can be understood as a back-and-forth between historical and existentialist analyses that inform each other.

The regressive, analytical moment of this method is the analysis of certain historical, i.e. temporal, sociocultural, and material conditions. According to Sartre, these historical conditions scaffold the actions of individuals in meaningful ways (Hubig 1978, 127). In this regard, however, Sartre is careful not to postulate an insurmountable past and does not wish to make human beings a mere expression of their class (Dahlmann 2013, 139). Rather, he illustrates the fact that sociocultural and material factors are constitutive elements of human existence understood as a dialectical synthesis in progress.

The analysis of this progression is the subject of the progressive, synthetic moment of Sartre's theory. Here, Sartre intends to examine the interplay of constraints and possibilities, along with their significance for how individuals realize themselves as practical and sense-making beings. In this way, he claims himself able to depict the reality of an individual human not as stable, but as "a perpetual disequilibrium, a wrenching away from itself with all its body" (Sartre 1963, 151). Human existence is a free but historically situated, dialectical progression. From each individual's confrontation, overcoming, and reconciliation, in one way or another, with seemingly overpowering and all-encompassing processes and structures, these processes and structures not only derive their power and significance but are also instantiated as such in the first place. Unsurprisingly, a complete analysis depicting the entirety of an individual's existence would be extensive. Sartre's studies on Gustave Flaubert are a testimony to this extensiveness. In *Family Idiot*, Sartre meticulously studies the life of Flaubert, as well as his family and class relations. Sartre then tries to explain how Flaubert's literary oeuvre came about, which as Flaubert's life's work throws light on Flaubert's existence. With four books and over 2500 pages, Sartre's Flaubert studies remain unfinished.[6]

1.4 Critique of Dialectical Reason

This section aims to introduce the essentials of Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. The methodology Sartre lays down in *Search for a Method* serves as the theoretical point of departure for *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. In the latter work, Sartre's thoughts on the scope of human freedom, the significance of individual action and experience, and his claims about historical situatedness culminate. His theoretical considerations about practical ensembles can be found here as well.

6 A more theoretical and phenomenologically grounded analysis of Sartre's regressive-progressive method can be found in Smith (1979).

Whereas the internal dialectic of human existence was at the heart of Sartre's early works, especially regarding change and development in the course of practical self-projection and self-realization, in *Search for a Method* his main concern is to emphasize the necessity and possibility of addressing the external dialectic of human existence. Although *Critique* thus represents a logical development of those earlier works, it is not the case that Sartre merely adds to or further develops his earlier philosophy. With *Critique*, Sartre fundamentally shifts his philosophical perspective, going from ontological and phenomenological questions surrounding being, freedom, action, and existence to the conditions of the possibility for understanding what it means to be a material human organism both among other such organisms and in engagement with spatiotemporally structured materiality.

The Foundations of Dialectical Reason

To engage with these conditions of possibility, Sartre stresses the tension between human existence and history. This history, according to him, becomes comprehensible only through a dialectical mediation of the internal and external dialectic; or, more concretely, through the dialectical and mutually affecting interplay between interiority and exteriority. Sartre not only adds a material, social, and historical component to his research but also underpins his earlier thoughts with a theoretical analysis of the conditions of possibility for dialectical science and experience in general. At its core, *Critique* represents Sartre's attempt to provide a critical theory of society in the form of a social ontology that takes a dialectical conception of human existence, action, and experience as its theoretical point of departure. Consequently, the human perspective remains front and center in Sartre's philosophical thought. What changes, however, is Sartre's focus on the internal perspective of a situated human existent.

The later Sartre is less interested in what it means to act, experience, and engage the world based on a synthetic relationship of being and consciousness, and more interested in how individual action, experience, and world engagement, based on a synthetic relationship between individual and history, are both constituted by and constitutive of their social, cultural, political, and, most importantly, material conditions. Consequently, Sartre alters slightly his analytical perspective. In *Critique*, he focuses on human existence as a mediation of internal and external dialectics. For Sartre's philosophical endeavor, this change of perspective means that the internal dialectic of human existence that renders human beings ontologically free and goal-directed must be reconciled with the external dialectic of human existence through which human beings are both producers and products of their historical situation. Sartre's golden path toward this reconciliation is to advocate for a dialectical reason that allows him to incorporate the individual within the dialectical consummation of history, and vice versa, based on the historical *praxis* of individuals.

To understand Sartre's approach, it is necessary to be familiar with some of the assumptions he develops in this introductory discussion to *Critique*. However, the broad scope of his argument means that only a few central thoughts can be briefly addressed here.[7]

Sartre's discussion in *Critique*'s introductory chapter revolves around the status, significance, and validity of Marxist dialectic as a scientific method for analyzing natural and historical processes. The discussion begins with general assumptions about the nature of the scientific method. About analytical science and the induction of scientific laws, Sartre claims that "[w]hatever the object of his research, whatever its orientation, the scientist, in his activity, assumes that reality will always manifest itself in such a way that a provisional and fluid rationality can be constituted in and through it" (Sartre 1978, 19). Sartre claims that scientific laws are not facts; they remain external to their research object and represent general assumptions that must be falsifiable. Sartre argues that the dialectic, on the contrary, is "both a method *and* a movement in the object. For the dialectician, it is grounded on a fundamental claim both about the structure of the real and about that of our *praxis*" (Sartre 1978, 20, emphasis in original).

According to Sartre, applying dialectical thinking to a research object allows one to demonstrate whether the object in question is dialectical or not by experiencing dialectical principles to be at work in the object. Therefore, the dialectic also represents the principle of its own intelligibility. Thus, for dialectical science to be valid, it must verify whether the *movement*, i.e. the behavior and internal processing, of its research object, is dialectical, and it must also substantiate its own methodological validity regarding the object in question. Based on these assumptions, Sartre discusses some Marxist paradigms of his time. He criticizes Engels' *Dialektik der Natur* in particular and accuses Engels' philosophical outlook on the dialectics of nature of ultimately failing in accounting for the research object in question. Engels intends to provide the most elementary dialectical laws of nature that govern not only natural but also historical and mental processes. He does so to ground dialectical materialism, i.e. a dialectic of matter, and to ultimately verify it as fundamental science (Engels 1975, 348–349; Remley 2012, 23–25). According to the conception of dialectical materialism, history, and human thought represent outcomes of nature, which is itself understood as the constant dialectical interpenetration of physicochemical processes and substances.

Sartre does not deny that natural processes can be conceived as dialectical. On the contrary, he agrees that given technological progress and the refinement of scientific methods and technologies, nature might indeed be proven dialectical (Sartre 1978, 33). Nevertheless, he insists that dialectical conceptions of nature do not necessarily confirm whether natural processes are in fact dialectical. Sartre claims that

7 For a nuanced analysis of the discussion and its historical background, see Remley (2012).

the experience of dialectical lawfulness in nature represents a specific point of view on nature. Such a dialectical experiencing is possible only because human reason itself conforms to dialectical principles. Sartre states that a dialectical notion of nature is itself a dialectical conception of nature by the human mind.[8] Given that the dialectic is not only a method but also the principle of its intelligibility, "the only dialectic one will find in Nature is a dialectic that one has put there oneself" (Sartre 1978, 31). Consequently, Sartre states:

> The procedure of *discovering* dialectical rationality in *praxis*, and then projecting it, as an unconditional law, on to the inorganic world, and then *returning* to the study of societies and claiming that this opaquely irrational law of nature conditions them, seems to us to be a complete aberration. (Sartre 1978, 33, emphasis in original)

Sartre argues that it would be fallacious to derive dialectical laws of nature from a dialectical understanding of natural processes and then use those dialectical laws for an understanding of human society and history. Sartre's rejection of Engel's theses culminates in his central point of criticism regarding the dialectic of nature. Sartre states that the only appropriate research objects for dialectical thinking are those that can be shown to process dialectically when these research objects are experienced as such from within their processing. Nature, however, cannot be experienced dialectically from the inside but only analyzed from the outside (Remley 2012, 36). Sartre claims that Engels fails to ground a dialectic of matter as a foundation for understanding history because he grounds it on an object toward which he must remain analytical and thus external. This means that he cannot substantiate the validity of his method regarding the research object in question.

Human Existence as Practical Mediation of Internal and External Dialectic

Rather than locating the dialectic of history in nature, Sartre thus locates it in human existence, which he understands as an ongoing mediation of individual action and experience. These two inherently interconnected processes represent practical ways of how humans relate to their physicochemical milieu. They are also fundamental for the constitution and intelligibility of human reality and history in the

8 In this regard, Sartre argues in similar ways to Kant in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Regarding the *technology of nature*, Kant states that a statement such as "nature processes purposively" must be distinguished from a statement such as "due to the purposive structure of human experience and reason, natural processes must be conceived to be purposive in order to be intelligible." For the formulation of scientific laws to be possible, nature itself must be conceived *as if* it was purposeful (Kant 1974, 349–350; also Hubig 2010). Sartre states that Engels' idea that nature is dialectical has similarities to a Kantian regulative idea that is "incapable of being corroborated by any particular experience" (Sartre 1978, 29).

first place (Remley 2012, 39). In dealing with material conditions, humans not only make history but can also understand history and thus themselves as being the results of their actions. Although this conception of the dialectic is also material, it must be understood as a dialectic *in* matter as opposed to Engels' dialectic *of* matter (Hartmann 1966, 71). For Sartre, the mediation of action and experience represents an expression of what he calls *dialectical reason*; a reason that constitutes "itself in and through the world, dissolving in itself all constituted Reasons in order to constitute new ones which it transcends and dissolves in turn" (Sartre 1978, 21). The entirety of *Critique* fundamentally rests on the premise that to understand the dialectic of history, history itself must be understood based on human existence; this happens by apprehending the dialectic that is at work in individual, world-directed actions, aimed at modifying physicochemical surroundings (Sartre 1978, 40–43). Only in this way can the dialectical method account for both the dialectical movement of its research object and its methodological validity.

With his strong emphasis on individual action and experience, Sartre stays true to his existentialist roots while also accounting for the constraints that material circumstances impose on the individual. Humans are organic entities that make history through free and active confrontation with material conditions. These conditions necessitate and enable their actions. In this regard, ontological freedom must be understood in its unfolding as the constant self-liberation from lacking states of things that are nevertheless rendered necessary as the milieus in which human beings realize themselves. According to Sartre, this dialectic of liberation and necessitation is the basic principle of understanding history. At the same time, history is the basic process through which the dialectic of liberation and necessitation can be understood.

To simplify this conjuncture, it is useful to analyze the basic dialectical principle that the later Sartre identifies to be at work in both action and experience: namely, the principle of totalization. This principle describes a "developing unification" (Sartre 1978, 46) of parts into a wholeness, which is called the totality. The principle of totalization represents a succession of the three dialectical moments: positing, negation, and negation of the negation, i.e. affirmation or sublation. Sartre uses the principle of totalization to explicate the dialectical process at play within the course of action and experience. Both represent complex interrelations between human and non-human things in which an initially meaningless, and contingent but objectively *given*, is negated in its positing through the transforming, identifying, concretizing, and qualifying practical relating of a human subject. Because totalization represents a synthetic activity, however, relation-specific objectivity and subjectivity are produced within the totalizing relation itself. This human negation of objective positing results in a contradiction that is fundamentally sublated in the form of a meaningful and practical relation in which both subject and object represent totalities. *Sublation* means that the initially separate aspects remain present as

unified aspects of the totality in question. This relation comes about in this meaningful and practical way because of the structural dynamics of human action and experience on the one hand, and the structural characteristics and properties of objective reality on the other. For this reason, Sartre identifies action and experience as interplays of exteriorization and interiorization. More precisely, he identifies every totalization to be an exteriorization of interiority and an interiorization of exteriority. Through action and experience, humans transform interiority (a meaningful relation to the world, intended actions, subjective goals, etc.) into exteriority (the materiality of the world, realized actions, objective goals, etc., *as* totalities) and vice versa (by apprehending the givenness of being, identifying certain objects, and thus constituting meaningful relations with these objects *as* totalities). They do so by actively mediating between themselves and the world (Sartre 1978, 45–48). Sartre identifies individual action and experience at the heart of human existence to be totalizing processes that, to ultimately constitute human reality and history, dialectically unite interior and exterior aspects. He thus identifies human existence, as being-in-the-world, to be a lived contradiction with itself that continuously sublates itself to contradict itself anew.

Before the lived contradiction that is human existence can be explained in more detail, it is worthwhile examining the conceptual relation between Sartre's early and later works once more. It has been mentioned that Sartre emphasizes the internal dialectic of human existence in *Being and Nothingness*. The early Sartre focuses on the significance of human action as a self-projection and self-realization. Agents not only realize themselves through action but also modify the current state of things and even practically constitute an altered state through their actions. The later Sartre is mostly concerned with the relation between internal and external dialectic in *Critique*. He uses the concept of totalization to describe the relationship between human beings and their milieu as an inherently practical one. The concept of totalization incorporates the processes of human action and experience within an explicitly dialectical conception of the practical world-relatedness of individuals. Along these lines, Cannon (1991) identifies a conceptual similarity between an individual's world- and self-making action in *Being and Nothingness*, and totalization in *Critique*. She states that Sartre's earlier conception of action emphasizes the internal, mental processes of wanting, longing, and projecting, whereas Sartre's later conception of totalization emphasizes the external and more practical aspects of action (170–173). The current work agrees with Cannon's observation but argues for a conceptual *development* in Sartre's philosophy. Sartre retroactively explicates the internally dialectical processes underlying his earlier conception of human action and experience and then unites them with the externally dialectical processes that underlie the material embeddedness of human agents within societal constellations. In this regard, Sartre's early and later works are complementary. The processes outlined in *Being and Nothingness* are substantiated with dialectical principles and incorporated into a materi-

alist conception of history—without losing the significance of Sartre's existentialist thoughts.

However, as a consequence of his later Marxism, the significance attributed to the materiality of human existence changes. In *Critique*, Sartre emphasizes the fact that human existence, although still understood as ontologically free, is strongly conditioned by its inert material conditions: the material requirements of one's physicality, one's education and upbringing, one's inborn or acquired features, abilities and capabilities, one's position within forms of societal constellation, and the concrete material circumstances of one's existence. According to Sartre, humans are materially inert organisms situated in equally inert socioculturally structured conditions that are characterized by scarcity. Most importantly, humans have concrete physical requirements, wants, and wishes that necessitate them to confront and modify their inert conditions to their satisfaction. Here, four interrelated concepts can be identified that are fundamental for understanding Sartre's later philosophical outlook, namely inertia (French *inertie*), scarcity (*rareté*), need (*besoin*), and *praxis*.

Inertia and Scarcity

Regarding the larger context of material conditions in which individuals find themselves, the concept of *inertia* refers to the pure givenness and recalcitrance of matter in the form of the human body and the material world on one hand, and the plasticity of both on the other (Hartmann 1966, 100). *Inertia* is closely connected to the concept of *scarcity*, which means the limited availability of commodities. Scarcity is understood as a "basic human relation, both to Nature and to men" (Sartre 1978, 123). It is inherent to the human condition to exist as an inert, organic entity that has certain material needs. Humans require certain forms of nutrition, access to water, protection from harsh weather conditions, and so on. To satisfy these needs, humans must work with and against inert matter. They must change themselves and the materiality around them to overcome the fact that their resources are scarce (see section 4.2).

From Desire to Need

Section 1.2 discussed how the early Sartre exemplifies and concretizes his idea of the *lack of being* in human existence through the fact that human beings have desires (French *désir*). Such desires bestow human existence with a certain directedness, practical intentionality, and finality toward the future. In desiring, human beings transcend the given toward the possible by projecting from the concrete facticity of their existence toward a potential future self. Despite his earlier reflections about the restraining factors of an agent's situation, and despite the significance he at-

tributes to human desire as a specific mode of subjectively relating to the world in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre does not reflect on how agents' individual histories fundamentally shape the ways those agents relate to the world by virtue of their desires. The early Sartre engages in intricate discussions about what it means to be moved and motivated by desires (Sartre 2021, 139–143) and to sexually desire the body of another human being in particular (Sartre 2021, 505, 511). He also analyzes the fundamental structures of desire alongside the existential dimensions of *doing*, *having*, and *possessing* (Sartre 2021, 746–777). However, by accepting the individualist nature of a person's structures of desire as a given fact, the early Sartre is ignorant of how these structures of desire are themselves shaped by an agent's lived experience. This experience necessarily takes place in a socioculturally structured and materially predisposed milieu. This milieu fundamentally affects an agent's upbringing, education, and experience. The desire of thirst, for instance, given as it may be, does not abstractly project toward water in general, but to a more or less concrete outline of action toward a familiar horizon of ends (Sartre 2021, 730, 747). Depending on how agents were socialized, how these agents have satiated their thirst in the past, and what their environments provide, different drinking actions will be projected. A person who grew up in an urban environment, for instance, initially projects toward different ends and thus, connectedly, to different courses of action than a person who grew up as a nomad in a desert area with no infrastructure. The urbanite may project towards taking a cup or a glass and filling it up at their faucet when at home. The desert dweller may have a completely different relationship with water because water is a rare resource in the desert. When thirsty, these people may project toward different ways of finding, preserving, and consuming water owing to their specific situation and experience. However, if both have a water bottle readily at hand or if there is the option to simply buy water, they may both do so.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre does not reflect on the reason why desires express themselves differently based on a person's facticity. He simply accepts that human beings have desires as specific modes of subjectivity toward the world. However, the concrete outline of desires, and thus the ends toward which these desires project, as well as the actions that potentially ensue from them, must be understood as having been shaped by the agent's facticity, i.e. the whole of the material, social, and cultural conditions that gave rise to this specific form of human existence up to the point of the present action.

One can argue that Sartre must have recognized the fact that focusing on desires, without criticizing how the concrete outline of these desires is itself shaped by society, culture, matter, and the processing of history throughout a person's existence, does not provide a solid foundation for a critical theory of society. This is even more true because the dialectical interrelation between action and experience has to be considered as the very foundation of such a theory. To allow for structural

analysis of the processing of history, the later Sartre thus introduces the concept of *need* (French *besoin*), stating:

> Everything is to be explained though *need* (*le besoin*); need is the first totalising relation between the material being, man, and the material ensemble of which he is part. This relation is *univocal*, and *of interiority*. Indeed, it is through need that the first negation of the negation and the first totalisation appear in matter. Need is a negation of the negation in so far as it expresses itself as a *lack* within the organism; and need is a positivity in so far as the organic totality tends to preserve itself *as such* through it. (Sartre 1978, 80, emphasis in original)

The lack of being that the early Sartre has located in human desire thus gains a much more prominent and much more fundamental significance in his later works. In *Critique*, need represents a fundamental affirmation of the synthetic, human being-in-the-world in its corporeality. Through their fundamental needfulness, humans necessarily engage in an interior relation to their exterior world. They lack whatever they manifest through their needs. Consequently, humans urge satisfaction in the future.

At first glance, Sartre's later conception of need as *besoin* is similar to his earlier conception of *desire* as *désir.* In her study of Sartre's philosophical works in the context of psychoanalysis, Cannon also remarks that Sartre's shift from structures of desire to structures of need might suggest that "the later Sartre has embraced some kind of instinctualism" (Cannon 1991, 172) and simply shifted his perspective from a person's internality to their externality. This, as Cannon rightly remarks, is not the case. Sartre's conception of need is not reduced to a mere physical drive toward the material world. It does not represent just a switch from the mental to the physical foundations of a human's world-relatedness. Rather, it remains a totalizing relation between a person and their surroundings. Furthermore, need is also not *some* totalizing relation, it is the *first* one. Given that human existence is a material endeavor, need, in its initially pure and simple form, is fundamental for human existence because it grounds the necessity for a person to practically relate with their surroundings to survive (Cannon 1991, 172–173). For Sartre, need, or, more precisely, the fact of *being needy*, grounds the possibility of a human being's continued existence, action, experience, and, most of all, freedom.[9] Need represents both the fundamental and abstract relation between a human being and that being's socioculturally structured material surroundings. Furthermore, this abstract relation of need is what instantiates concrete desires in the first place. Part of the current work is to further investigate how this instantiation takes place within forms of societal organization.

9 For a more prosaic approach to the relationship between needs and human freedom, see Sartre (2001).

The change in focus from desires in *Being and Nothingness* to needs in *Critique* fundamentally changes the conceptual grounding of Sartre's philosophical perspective, thereby opening up Sartre's philosophy toward those practical constraints, material potentials, and societal dynamics that condition human existence beyond the borders of the concrete action situation. Against the concept of *need* as the fundamental, abstract relation of a human's engagement with the world, Sartre can analyze how human desiring is shaped and thus potentially transformed in its concrete form by and through the larger form of societal organization in which individuals are situated. This allows him to reconstruct how forms of societal constellation, which began in the attempt to systematically provide for material requirements, wants, and wishes, transform in such a way that they change how individuals do so. Needs thus represent fundamental, abstract, and, most importantly, immediate ways of how people relate to their material surroundings for themselves. Without dismissing his earlier thoughts on desires, the later Sartre predominantly conceptualizes the lack of being as a lack of resources, commodities, skills, rights, knowledge, etc., that agents require to survive and persist in one way or another (Cannon 1992, 132). As a consequence, Sartre shifts his focus from the analysis of the internal structures of action to the concrete, historically situated *praxis* of individuals.

Cannon, referring to an unpublished manuscript by Sartre[10], claims that Sartre again developed his thoughts regarding the relation of needs and desires after *Critique*. According to Cannon, in this manuscript Sartre considers desires to be "socialized need" (Cannon 1992, 134), i.e. need that is transformed into desire "through relations with others in the socio-material world" (Cannon 1992, 135). According to this understanding, nutrition, for instance, as a person's physical requirement, which owes itself to the corporeality of human existence, is only ever a pure and simple need in the form of *besoin* in an infant state. Since this need can be satisfied through a number of different practical interrelations between the infant and whoever nourishes them, Sartre assumes that how this need is satisfied, socializes this need, and connects it to a larger societal form of organization. In this understanding, infants who lack nutrition cry initially because of an unpleasant physical symptom complex that is attributable to an abstract, undirected need in the form of *besoin*. However, as soon as this need has been taken care of a few times in a row, for instance through breastfeeding or a bottle, the abstract and undirected need is rendered into a concrete desire in the form of *désir*. These infants still cry because of the same unpleasant symptom complex resulting from a physical lack of nutrition. However, they no longer cry as a result of an abstract and undirected need but because of a concrete

10 Cannon refers to a manuscript of 589 pages of unorganized notes. According to Stone and Bowman (1986) this manuscript contains Sartre's unpublished notes for a lecture called *Morality and Society* (Bowman & Stone 1992; 2004) and other notes about ethics.

desire for their caregiver's breast or the bottle as a means to gain nutrition. In mutual interaction with their caregiver's action, these infants' need has been socialized so that it has become a structurally dependent desire relative to the form of societal organization in which both caregiver and infant are situated (Cannon 1992).

Throughout a person's life, abstract forms of initially undirected need may arise, for instance on account of changes in understanding or living conditions, or because of the larger dynamics of societal constellations themselves. Still, these forms of need will always be socialized and concretized into desires, because their satisfaction necessarily takes place within sociocultural surroundings that already scaffold a practical, instrumental horizon of possibilities. Most importantly, because human existence represents a constant struggle with scarcity, Sartre's conception of the dialectical relationship between needs and desires is constitutive for understanding the formation of societal constellations (see section 4.2).

Despite his thoughts on *socialized need* in his later manuscript, Cannon states that in *Critique* Sartre is already "careful to point out that need is always socialized" (Cannon 1992, 134), because how a person produces themselves "conditions not only the satisfaction of his need but also need itself" (Sartre 1978, 95). Throughout *Critique*, Sartre sporadically argues that how people suffer their need, become acquainted with and learn certain modes of behavior can itself become interiorized and habituated in the form of *hexis*, i.e. an acquired disposition that shapes a person's actions in relation to their position within forms of societal organization. In this context, Sartre discusses the intricacies of habit formation, the socialization of needs into desires, and the role of habits, or *hexeis* (which is the Greek plural of *hexis*), in the perpetuation of societal organization. However, because these discussions require an understanding of the course of human action, and because it is irrelevant for that course of action whether it takes place based on a need or a desire, the socialization of *need* into *desire* is discussed in more detail in section 4.5.

Based on these thoughts, a conceptual distinction between the notions of *need* and *desire* in Sartre's philosophy can be made. Desires, understood as *désirs*, represent concrete, directed, socioculturally shaped, and mediated as well as subjectively qualified modes in which human beings exteriorize themselves. They do so by relating to and engaging with their surroundings for themselves based on their requirements, wants, and wishes. Needs, understood as *besoins*, represent abstract and initially undirected modes in which these human beings relate to their surroundings. The way in which human beings practically do so is through *praxis*.

Praxis and History

Praxis is understood as "an organising project which transcends material conditions towards an end and inscribes itself, through labour, in inorganic matter as a rearrangement of the practical field and a reunification of means in the light of the end"

(Sartre 1978, 734). Sartre uses the notion of *praxis* to describe both individual actions in concrete situations, as well as the historically situated realization of human existence as a whole.[11] Sartre states that every *praxis* "presupposes a material agent (the organic individual) and the material organisation of an operation on and by matter" (Sartre 1978, 71). In this regard, *praxis* is the function of human existence, and human existence represents the form from which *praxis* is instantiated. As material entities, human beings are both agents and end. They are the ones who act for themselves within their material surroundings to satisfy themselves in and through their surrounding materiality. Accordingly, Sartre claims that human reality, as constituted by *praxis*, is fundamentally mediated by material reality. Furthermore, every *praxis* primarily is an "instrumentalisation of material reality" (Sartre 1978, 161). Breathing instrumentalizes air, walking instrumentalizes the soil, and so on, and owing to the materiality of human existence, action, and experience take place between material entities.

With the notion of *praxis*, Sartre emphasizes that humans must simultaneously be understood as the concrete quasi-product and the effective (re-)producer of their social and material situation and, concomitantly, their form of societal organization. Sartre claims that "[n]othing happens to men or to objects except in their material being and through the materiality of Being. But man is precisely the material reality from which matter gets its human functions" (Sartre 1978, 182). Through his conception of *praxis*, the interrelation between interiorization and exteriorization becomes clearer. As aspects of action and experience, interiorization and exteriorization represent two sides of the same coin. Sartre states that

> the human relation of exteriority is based on the direct bond of interiority as the basic type of human relation. Man lives in a universe where the future is a thing, where the idea is an object and where the violence of matter is the 'midwife of History'. But it is man who invests things with his own *praxis*, his own future and his own knowledge. (Sartre 1978, 181, emphasis in original)

In this context, the dialectic of liberation and necessitation becomes clearer. Human existence is a lived contradiction: it represents an irresolvable tension between the needs of an organic being that necessitate *praxis*, and the fact that this *praxis*, as a relation between human being and world, is based on ontological freedom through which the tension of liberation and necessitation becomes intelligible as unsolvable in the first place. Neither freedom nor necessity can be understood as *facts* that somehow condition human existence as a totality. Human existence is itself a totalizing activity in which human beings enact and promote their freedom in the pro-

11 By way of example, the individual *praxis* of writing this sentence takes place as a structural moment of the *praxis* of writing this section, this chapter, this work. All represent practical moments of the *praxis* or practical realization that is the author's existence.

cess of enacting and promoting their materiality and thus their structures of necessity (Sartre 1978, 70–71). By focusing on the concept of totalization, the later Sartre places more emphasis on the synthetic process itself and less on its resulting totality. Thus, even if individuals appear to be somewhat determined by certain factors such as material, social, or historical constellations and conditions, these factors are themselves totalities that result from human action and experience in the first place. This processual understanding allows Sartre to retrace the historicity of these factors and to explain the entanglement of liberation and necessitation in practical life. Furthermore, when human existence is understood as a totalizing process, the significance of individual situations within the process changes. Rather than illustrating ontological freedom through individual choice and action within concrete situations, every situation is itself a moment in a larger interlocking process that proceeds from moment to moment and from situation to situation. A situation is not something that individuals constitute anew each time they act by negating the given and transcending it toward the possible. Rather, a situation is a concrete sublation of past situations that again represent concrete ways in which individuals have (re-)produced themselves and the larger structures they are situated in through their actions. Although situations are still understood to be transcended and surpassed, the mode of how this happens is retained as well. Consequently, individual action situations can only be entirely understood in relation to the historically produced and history-producing process that is human existence.[12]

1.5 Concluding Remarks

The development of Sartre's philosophical thought throughout his works accounts for the fundamental reality of human existence. All human beings find themselves in relatively fixed sociocultural and material conditions and constellations, which constrain their choices and influence their actions. Furthermore, to live their lives, humans must act based on the conditions they find themselves in, which means that these individuals must actively engage with the facticity of their lives. At first glance human existence seems to be determined by a wide variety of factors that might inhibit or eliminate their agency, seemingly rendering them passive objects or cogs in a machine, perhaps even to a point where there are zero choices and only one possible course of action. In the contemporary, highly technological world, this worry

12 Since this section is mainly intended as an introduction to certain fundamentals of Sartre's philosophy, a deeper discussion about the concepts *totalization* and *totality* cannot be engaged here. Jay (1984) and Tomlinson (2014) give more theoretical insight into the significance of these concepts in Sartre's philosophy. However, a more technical analysis of these concepts focusing on experience and action as totalizations can be found in section 2.2.

may be prevalent. However, the fact that action and experience represent relations with the world means that these relations ultimately express the ontological freedom of the human being. Human beings are not identical to being but exist as a relation to it. However slight it may be, there is always the chance for them to become aware of their situation. Given enough insight and self-reflection, they can analyze their constraints and possibilities so that they may take responsibility and understand the scope of their agency.

Sartre's way of further analyzing this scope leads to his theories on practical ensembles. Every instance of *praxis* necessarily takes place in connection to other material entities that support and/or challenge its outcome. By focusing on both *praxis* and context, Sartre can retrace, from a dialectical and praxeological point of view, the nature of predominant interrelations in certain constellations. According to Sartre, the dialectical progression of history mirrors the dialectical progression of individual human existence. Both progress as ongoing totalizations that are driven by lived contradictions. In the case of human existence, this contradiction is the oscillation of practical freedom and material necessity. However, in the case of history, it is the oscillation between *serial* and *communal* structures (see sections 4.3 and 4.4). Because human beings satisfy their needs and desires in different ways as situated in larger constellations, these constellations exhibit different forms of organization that are functionally differentiated and interrelated. Technology in the form of manufactured objects and structures, but also in the form of body techniques, plays an important part in the structuring of these constellations.

However, before these larger theoretical considerations can be engaged, it is necessary to analyze more thoroughly the concrete course of human action. Sartre claims that the processing totalization of practical ensembles is fundamentally driven by goal-directed human activities based on requirements, wants, and wishes. However, from the larger dialectical, materialist, and historical context of *Critique*, it does not become clear what this means on the exact level of action. If human action and experience are supposed to render the progression of history intelligible from the inside, the structural course of action and experience must be scrutinized first. This may require previously mentioned principles and dynamics to be analyzed again from an action-theoretical perspective, but the overall approach of this work benefits from a more thorough reconstruction and further development of Sartre's understanding of the course of action. This reconstruction is the subject of the next chapter.