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# Sartre's View of Kierkegaard as Transhistorical Man

Antony Aumann

*Northern Michigan University*, [aaumann@nmu.edu](mailto:aaumann@nmu.edu)

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## Sartre's View of Kierkegaard as Transhistorical Man

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Forty years ago, Jean-Paul Sartre presented an address entitled "The Singular Universal" at a UNESCO conference dedicated to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Søren Kierkegaard's death.<sup>1</sup> This address discusses several provocative themes such as non-objective knowledge, the incompleteness of the Hegelian system, and the transhistoricity of persons. Yet perhaps due to the opacity of the writing, the work languishes in relative anonymity amidst an otherwise well-known corpus. Nevertheless, I believe there is a coherent argument to be found in this address that connects these themes and sheds light on an important motif in Sartre's later writings, namely that of the singular universal. I intend to move through the address in linear fashion in order to unearth this argument.

### I. The Problem of Transhistoricity

Sartre begins by finding in the name of the conference an occasion for discussing his central worry. The conference was billed as "Kierkegaard Living", which is a seemingly innocuous title for a series of lectures on the state of Kierkegaard studies a hundred years after his death. But Sartre sees something paradoxical in this name. For it is not the case that Kierkegaard is living; nor would it make sense to entitle any conference "So-and-so Living" if that person were still alive. Thus, Sartre concludes "Kierkegaard Living" really means Kierkegaard is dead and also that Kierkegaard is the topic of conversation.

Sartre's problem with talking about Kierkegaard after he has died is that he is no longer what he was. While alive he was an individual subject, an agent of free choice. But since that

time death has intervened and robbed him of his subjectivity. In fact, this is what Sartre thinks death always does: it turns agents into objects of knowledge (SU 230-231). At first glance, this transition appears to benefit historians because it gives them an apt candidate for historical inquiry. Yet there is a potential problem. If, as Sartre believes, the true nature of a living person involves being a subject, the transition that occurs at death removes something important. As a consequence, historians who inquire after the dead will always be limited to what is inessential.

The question then becomes whether it is at all possible to gain access to the subjectivity of someone who has died. If so, if (for example) Kierkegaard can become a living subject for us today, then we have what Sartre calls “the strictly historical paradox of survival.” That is, we have the paradox that “a historical being, beyond his abolition, can still communicate as a non-object, as an absolute subject, with the generations that follow his own” (SU 231). Kierkegaard’s subjectivity then has validity not only in his own historical time period, but also in ours. He becomes, in short, a transhistorical man. But if this is not the case, if Kierkegaard cannot become a living subject for us today, then we have lost him forever. In his absolute subjectivity, he forever eludes our clutches.

In summary, either we have “the transhistoricity of historical man” in general and of Kierkegaard in particular, or we lose Søren qua Søren. Either it is possible for a person to have validity as a subject not only in his own historical time period but also in others (and hence be “transhistorical”), or once a person is dead his subjectivity is lost and gone forever. Resolving this dilemma is the goal of Sartre’s address.<sup>2</sup>

## II. Two Objections to There Being an Irreducible Remainder

Sartre's dilemma builds off the assumption that there is something about Kierkegaard historians cannot capture. But the truth of this assumption is not obvious. It could be that with the dead Kierkegaard in hand, with full knowledge of everything he said and did, we know everything we can possibly know about him. If so, there is no need to worry about moving beyond the historical and uncovering "Kierkegaard living" – we already have everything we want. Appropriately, Sartre's first question is, "when all is *known* about the life of a man who refuses to be an object of knowledge and whose originality rests precisely in that refusal, is there an irreducible remainder [*un irréductible*]" (SU 233)? In other words, is there anything about Kierkegaard that cannot be reduced to or expressed in terms of objective facts? Sartre looks at two reasons why we might think the answer to this question is "No."

#### II.A. The First Objection

One reason we might believe there is nothing "irreducible" about Kierkegaard is if we are committed Hegelians. On Sartre's interpretation, Hegel believed human beings are entirely determined by their historical circumstances.<sup>3</sup> One somewhat straightforward ramification of this view is that any individual can, in theory, be completely understood. Sartre takes this a step further. He claims this view entails that a person who has an adequate amount of historical knowledge and a good grasp of the Hegelian dialectic can *predict* the content of a future individual's life (SU 235). For example, he claims a person who knew about the problems of the colonial era could have foreseen how it entailed "an existence of misfortune, of anger and blood, of revolt and struggle" for the future generations of colonials (SU 235). Similarly, it seems a person who was knowledgeable about Lutheran Denmark could have foreseen Kierkegaard's

destiny: he was to become one more incarnation of the Unhappy Consciousness (SU 234). If we accept the theory underpinning these examples, then there ceases to be anything opaque or irreducible about human beings. At least in principle. It might turn out that we lack the requisite historical information to construct the particulars of some or even many lives. But this would just be a shortcoming of our present epistemic situation and would not entail there being something metaphysically irreducible about these people.

Despite his general adherence to this picture, Sartre denies that Kierkegaard can be *reduced* like this to a mere moment in the Hegelian system. He does think Kierkegaard is such a moment, but he also believes Kierkegaard is more than this. His motivations for this claim are complex but as a first approximation we can say Sartre believes it because he realizes the Hegelian moment “has to be lived through” (SU 235). What does this mean? It means that, in order for such a moment to come into existence, an actual human being must live through its foreseen determinations. This requirement brings subjectivity into play. In the process of living through the moment, the individual becomes a subjective witness to the truth of the predictions. He discovers *for himself* what he has been predestined to be (SU 235-236). This discovery is a discovery of what Sartre labels the individual’s “subjective truth [*la vérité subjective*]” (SU 235). It is this that the Hegelian moment fails to encompass.

The force of this claim becomes clearer once the meaning of the phrase “subjective truth” comes into focus. Although Sartre does not provide his readers with an analytic definition, he does equate the phrase with what he calls the *reality* of lived experience [*le vécu comme réalité concrete*] (SU 237). At first this is equally opaque, but it becomes less so when set in contrast with the notion of *descriptions* of lived experience [*les déterminations du vécu désigné par des mots*] (SU 238). Such descriptions are important because they enable us to give others a sense for

what it is like to be ourselves. Yet these descriptions do not tell everything. For example, when I listen to an eyewitness account of the World Trade Center bombing I do not thereby acquire that person's actual experience. What I miss in these descriptions, according to Sartre, is the concrete *reality* of the person's experience – i.e. the “subjective truth” he acquired in living through this moment. This shortcoming is inevitable. Even if the witness's words are akin to Shakespeare's in style and passion they will be radically heterogeneous with the experience itself (SU 238).<sup>4</sup>

There is something quite obvious and almost trivial about this truth. Nevertheless, Sartre uses it as the foundation for his central criticism of the Hegelian system. On his view, one of the projects of Hegelianism is to attain exhaustive knowledge of people's lives (or, to be pedantic, of “being”). Yet given the above observation, this is impossible. For there are no objective descriptions that capture the reality of a person's lived experience. Hence there exists what Sartre calls “a certain ontological area where being claims at once to escape knowledge and to be reached itself” (SU 237). This area is the “irreducible remainder” that the Hegelian system inevitably misses.

## II.B. The Second Objection

Even if all of this is correct and Kierkegaard's very life contests Hegel's system, Sartre suggests there may be reason to believe things change once he dies. To put it colloquially, the jury is now in: Kierkegaard has turned out exactly as Hegel predicted (SU 239). Or, to put it in Sartre's terminology, his “pre-natal being [*l'être prenatal*]” and “posthumous being [*l'être post-mortem*]” are now homogeneous (SU 240). Hence, despite its elusive character, Kierkegaard's lived experience really added nothing new to the equation. True, it was the mechanism for making

things turn out this way, but it was nothing more than this. In Sartre's poetic words, it was merely "a small surface agitation which soon calms down to allow the dialectical development of concepts to appear" (SU 241). Thus, anything about Kierkegaard's subjectivity that managed to defy the Hegelian system was purely provisional and ultimately inessential to the true nature of Kierkegaard's being (SU 240). Therefore, there is no truly irreducible remainder after everything that can be said about Kierkegaard has been said.

Unsurprisingly, Sartre refuses to concede this point; he denies that death alleviates the problem posed by subjectivity. To motivate this denial he cultivates an argument for the opposite conclusion, namely that death actually *heightens* the problem to the point of absolute scandal (SU 240 and 243). In this argument Sartre employs another historical example, namely the failure of Emmanuel de Grouchy's army to rejoin Napoleon at Waterloo (SU 242). Here, in the "failed attempt of an army officer," we have a concrete moment in history. But notice what happens when time passes and Grouchy dies: the concrete moment becomes an "absolute." Grouchy can no longer rejoin Napoleon and not even God can make it so. His failure to realize his goal is sealed forever; it is sealed *absolutely* (SU 242).

But, we might ask, how does this "negative absolute" reveal anything *scandalous*? Furthermore, how does it reveal anything scandalous *about Grouchy's subjectivity*? The answer to these questions lies in Sartre's choice of a historical *failure* instead of a historical *success*.<sup>5</sup> Sartre believes Grouchy's failure (like all failures) refers us to a hidden subjective moment, namely his experience of this failure (SU 242-243). What keeps this experience hidden from us is the fact that it cannot be seen as relative to any positive historical moment. If Grouchy had successfully rejoined Napoleon, we could say his experience of the event was a necessary but provisional mechanism for making this historical moment an actual moment. We could even go

on to describe this event in its totality and claim to have exhaustive knowledge of the whole situation. But Grouchy fails. His expectation of rejoining Napoleon never finds expression in the world and thus his experience does not bring any specific historical moment to life (SU 243). For this reason, Sartre claims Grouchy's subjectivity is absolutely *irreducible* to any historical knowledge and hence is absolutely scandalous. Therefore, the second objection does not hold.

### III. The Nature of the "Irreducible Remainder"

At this point in the text, a question signals a change in direction: "Can one go further" (SU 243)? This marks the end of Sartre's worries about whether there is anything irreducible about Kierkegaard's subjectivity and henceforth he assumes the matter is settled. The issue now becomes whether we can somehow manage to access this subjectivity in spite of its irreducibility. Sartre approaches this issue by saying more about what he means by "subjectivity" and why Kierkegaard's life serves as a paradigm example of this notion. Unfortunately, this discussion is very dense. In essence, it contains a version of the "dialectic of the subjective and the objective" presented in *Search for a Method*.<sup>6</sup> The treatment of the topic in this earlier work is clearer and its connection with the present address has been documented by other commentators.<sup>7</sup> Thus it is without hesitation that I will play off both texts in an effort to present the three steps of this dialectic.

#### III.A. The First Objective Moment

Sartre locates the first objective moment in a person's historical background. Every individual is born into a set of socioeconomic, cultural, moral, and religious conditions that are not of his choosing. These are what Sartre calls a person's "given [*donné*]." This "given" is important because it determines the range of possibilities [*les champ des possibles*] a person can realize (SU 248 and SM 93). For example, Kierkegaard's "given" results in his inability to escape Christianity. Even if he decided to become an atheist it would be an atheism *against Christianity* (SU 248). Or, for example, the "given" of a slave born antebellum results in his inability to gain full voting privileges. He could decide to work for social reform in this area, but even this project would be chosen in light of the prior historical prohibition. All of these considerations count as features of the first *objective* moment – objective because, at least in principle, it can become a part of historical knowledge.

### III.B. The Subjective Moment

The subjective moment has two parts: "the internalization of the external" and the "externalization of the internal" (SU 254 and SM 97). The first part begins when the individual becomes *internally* conscious of his *external* "given." In Kierkegaard's case, this happens in a peculiar way. At first he sees himself and his fellow Danes as being conditioned and produced by a *common* "given." The same history and cultural traditions that made everyone else a Christian are making him one as well (SU 247). But, *pace* Hegel, he does not thereby come to experience himself as being simply one more instantiation of a universal moment in the necessary progression of world history (SU 249). The reason for this, according to Sartre, is that Kierkegaard sees within these commonalities things that are both contingent and unique (SU

250). For example, he finds his Christianity to be a result of *his* father's pietistic Christianity and of *his* "thorn in the flesh." But as far as he is concerned, these things could have been different: he could have had another father, his father could have not blasphemed, and he could have not had that "thorn in the flesh." In short, he could have had a different life *and he knows it* (SU 249). Consequently, he experiences his life as a singular accident, not a necessary universal (SU 250).

Sartre thinks this way of experiencing life reveals something of a paradox. Kierkegaard is able to look at the *deterministic* forces of history as if they were "in the beginning *indeterminate*" (SU 234). This does not by itself refute the necessity of the Hegelian system (Sartre still believes the dialectical progression is inevitable), but it does show something strange. To be specific, Kierkegaard's insight shows that the necessary Hegelian moments do not come into existence independent of all conditions. Their existence depends on singular events that could have been otherwise. Thus, although each moment will inevitably arise, there is no fixed way in which it will do so. And this is indeed a paradox: Hegel's historical necessities are also historical accidents (SU 251).

But even if someone is able to experience his historical setting like Kierkegaard does, this "given" still sets the boundaries on the field of possibilities open to him (SM 93). This is an important point to emphasize. Sartre believes a person's social, economic, and political environment effectively block off most logically possible futures (SM 93-95). This allows him to accept the Hegelian position that, with the right amount of historical knowledge, the next historical moment can be foreknown. Yet at the same time, Sartre believes every person's field of possibilities has a population greater than one (SM 93). In other words, however precisely a person's "given" may determine his future, it does not do so absolutely. There will always be

some room for variation. The upshot of this is that the individual is free and experiences the anxiety that comes along with being able to determine the specifics of his own future (SU 253). In addition, this is a situation he cannot escape; for all the possible avenues of retreat (suicide, passivity, etc.) are themselves free choices. Thus the second part of the subjective moment also begins with the experience of a paradox: choosing, although free, is a necessity (SU 255).

Through this “necessary free choice [*libre choix nécessaire*]” the individual realizes one of his thought-possibilities, i.e. an inner goal finds expression in the outer world. In the case of Kierkegaard, this means he “lives and expresses in his writings, ideas about sin, dread, freedom, finitude, subjectivity, and passion.”<sup>8</sup> Through his own agency he establishes the existence of something personally meaningful that becomes a part of history (SU 255). In Sartre’s words, “he objectifies himself in the world” (SM 93). This process is the externalization of the internal.

### III.C. The Second Objective Moment

Sartre claims that, in choosing, a person “surpasses” his original contingency (SU 251). He goes beyond the sum total of what was in the world before and adds something new. This brings new meaning into the world. There is first of all the meaning the individual himself provides for his actions. But there is also the meaning historians see, meaning found in the relation of these events to the world as a whole (SU 254). The future historian may even see a meaning that “the agent himself may not know, one which, through the conflicts it manifests and engenders, influences the course of events” (SM 94).

Sartre provides an example of this stratification of meaning in *Search for a Method* (SM 95-6). He relates the story of a person who worked as a member of the ground crew at an air base

in London. Although at the time people of his race were forbidden to fly airplanes, the man took an airplane and flew it across the English Channel. In this particular action, he “surpassed” the givens of his particular situation and realized an individual project: the possibility of aviation for himself. The man had no mind for expressing “the present stage of the struggle of the colonized against the colonialists” (SM 96) for he sought only to find meaning for *himself* by realizing *his own* project. But what had personal meaning for him also came to have widespread meaning for future history. Historians and anthropologists now see his action as an important step in “the general revolt on the part of colored men against colonials” (SM 95). Thus, without his intending it, his *singular* choice brought *universal* meaning into history. With this we stumble across the first sense of Sartre’s title: meaning [*sens*] is the singular universal (SU 251).

There is something more here that must be brought to light. When historians and anthropologists see in the man’s action an instance of a wider cultural phenomenon or the dawn of a new age for his country, they are *de facto* understanding his action as an incarnation of a Hegelian moment or universal. As we have already said, Sartre believes the historical progression of these moments is deterministic, something he makes explicit in the case of the struggling colonials (SU 235). Thus from the historian’s perspective the man’s action takes on the form of necessity: he was destined to rebel against the colonialist regime. Yet it is always a “two-sided coin,” for the man’s actions are also free and worked out within a *field* of possibilities (SU 255). He truly does cause history to deviate with his choices – but “only in conformity with what this very course should be” (SU 255). Once again we are left with a paradox: a *free* and hence *contingent* action introduces meaning that was ultimately *necessary*.

### III.D. The Irreducibility of Kierkegaard

The purpose of looking at this dialectic was to expose the formal structures of the “irreducible remainder” contained within the subjective moment. The hope was that this would provide a background against which we could see, as Sartre does, how Kierkegaard in particular serves as an example of irreducibility. Here is what we can now say.

If we confine ourselves to the objective point of view, Sartre will say there are two ways to understand Kierkegaard. The first way involves seeing him through a Hegelian or world-historical lens. Here Kierkegaard is seen as a product of the abstract structures of his time period, a mere instance of that general Christian form, the Unhappy Consciousness (SU 255-256). The second way of understanding him involves seeing him through a Freudian or (perhaps) Marxist lens. Here the focus is on the particulars of Kierkegaard’s life and the point is to interpret his unique accomplishments as a function of his relationship with his father or his financial situation, etc (SU 255-256). Both of these ways of understanding – both the universal way (the first way) and the singular way (the second way) – are important and neither one of them can be reduced to the other (SU 257).

But just as Sartre thinks it would be a mistake to be single-mindedly Freudian or single-mindedly Hegelian in one’s approach to Kierkegaard, so too does he think it would be a mistake to focus only on the objective aspects of Kierkegaard’s life. As we have seen, he believes there is something more to human beings than this. There is something about an individual that remains after all that can be reduced to objective determinations has been so reduced. And we now know what Sartre thinks this is. It is the individual’s lived experience of freely realizing personal projects within a contingent, historical framework.

At this point a new problem arises. For the moral of the Grouchy example was that an individual's subjectivity is irreducible only if it *fails* to find meaningful expression in the world. Yet Kierkegaard apparently succeeds at instituting many of his desires: he writes books that people have read, he engages in public affairs that change the course of life in Denmark, etc. So, we might ask, what is the source of *Kierkegaard's* irreducibility? Where is *his* failure?

Sartre believes the answer to these questions can be found in Kierkegaard's staunch refusal to identify himself in terms of these events. One example of this is his use of indirect communication. Normal communication would count as a successful externalization of a writer's internal beliefs, dispositions, and views. But for Kierkegaard writing is different. He does not organize his words to provide readers with intelligible doctrines, theories, or concepts. Instead he uses "irony, humor, myth and non-significant phrases [*les phrases non signifiantes*]" to direct our attention away from such things and back toward the living person who uses them (SU 258). He reverses our point of view so that we no longer think about the objective moment of *his* linguistic expressions but about the subjective moment of our *own* lived experience (SU 258-260). As a consequence curious readers who aim to discover Kierkegaard, or even a Kierkegaardian view, will not find it in his books. These writings *fail* to convey knowledge of his inwardness; they only help readers acquire knowledge of their own inwardness.

Or, to use another one of Sartre's examples, Kierkegaard attends a party and uses his brilliant wit to make everyone laugh. The partygoers may think they have gained some insight into his being, but they have not. Why not? Because Kierkegaard famously goes home to write in his journal that he is something quite different than what they have experienced: a melancholy person who wants to shoot himself.<sup>9</sup> Of course, he did freely choose to act this way. And, in an important sense, this means he has successfully externalized himself for the rest of history to

observe. This makes it tempting to say Kierkegaard's subjectivity *is* reducible by virtue of the fact that it only serves the provisional purpose of bringing life to an objective moment. But this would be a mistake because, according to Sartre, Kierkegaard works hard to make sure that "this objectification does not define him" (SU 259). That is to say, he finds his personal identity in what is internal and not in what is external. His words and actions thus *fail* to tell historians anything essential about the man behind them (SU 260-261).

#### IV. Catching Hold of the Irreducible Remainder

After all of this, the central question remains unanswered: is there any way for us to gain access to Kierkegaard's irreducible subjectivity now that he is dead? Sartre thinks there is. In order to understand his reasons we will have to discuss his rendition of the story of Adam and "the myth of sin."

To some degree, Sartre's discussion of the first human sin is an answer to Kierkegaard's own discussion of this story in the pseudonymously published *Concept of Anxiety*. For instance, in both cases a central feature of the interpretation involves thinking of Adam as a placeholder for all mankind (SU 253-255).<sup>10</sup> This entails that each individual commits his own first sin in the same way Adam did – although not in *exactly* the same way as Adam did, since all sins are committed in different historical circumstances. Of course, for the atheistic Sartre, sin is only a metaphor or stand-in for the "necessary free choice" every living individual makes (SU 255). Unsurprisingly, Sartre claims even Kierkegaard has his own way of repeating the original sin/free choice of Adam (SU 261). In so doing, Kierkegaard institutes the same universal as Adam did. He becomes what Adam would have become had Adam lived in his historical

circumstances. But given that we all share in Adam's condition, what is true of Kierkegaard must be true of us as well. We must all really be Adam recommenced in new circumstances (SU 261). Now notice the consequences! If Kierkegaard becomes Adam and I become Adam, then so too do I become Kierkegaard. The same goes for everyone else. Each one of us remains unique because our sin/free choice is grounded in a unique historical situation, but each one of us is united with all mankind because the condition of sin/free choice is a universal one.

Here we discover why Sartre thinks we can catch hold of Kierkegaard's irreducible remainder. As we now know, the source of his irreducibility lies in his subjectivity. And up to this point the historical distance between him and us has created a barrier because the only thing we have had is historical knowledge, which does not adequately account for subjectivity. However, if the view Sartre presents in "the myth of Adam" is correct, there is a way around this problem. By virtue of the fact that I (like everyone else) am Kierkegaard, his "lived experience" becomes my "lived experience" (SU 263). I thereby become a subjective witness to what was initially only Kierkegaard's to view. In short, I catch hold of his irreducible remainder.

## V. Conclusion

On the surface, it might seem as if this entire discussion of the paradox of transhistoricity is epistemological in nature. Indeed the stated goal is to determine whether it is possible to *know* everything about Kierkegaard. However, like Sartre's investigations into Jean Genet and Flaubert, this investigation has an underlying metaphysical agenda. This agenda is important because it allows us to understand the importance of the present address for Sartre's later thought.

It is possible to bring to light the metaphysical agenda by exposing its connection to the epistemological project. This can be done as follows. On the epistemological level Sartre discusses whether we can know more about Kierkegaard qua historical figure than what we learn from objective facts. In other words, he discusses the accessibility of Kierkegaard's "irreducibility." As it turns out, Kierkegaard's "irreducible remainder" is to be found in lived experience or inwardness, "nearly the perfect secret place" for him to hide from objective knowledge (SU 259). However, Sartre's inspection of this secret place reveals something interesting, namely that it is also *the arena* in which Kierkegaard discovers himself as free. In this subjective moment Kierkegaard sees his predicted life both "as if it were at the beginning indeterminate" (SU 234) and as if it were open to "a field of possibilities" (SM 93). Thus Sartre makes it sound as if Kierkegaard's "irreducibility" just is his experience of freedom. And this implies something striking. An epistemological investigation into Kierkegaard *qua historical figure* provides the resources for a metaphysical investigation into Kierkegaard *qua subjective agent* – i.e. into the nature of Kierkegaard's freedom. The two projects converge on the same point: lived experience or inwardness.

Seeing this connection illuminates the place of the UNESCO address in Sartre's intellectual development. At the time of the address (1964) he had already published *Search for a Method* and the first volume of *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). One function of these earlier texts was to piece together the deterministic strand of his recent political work with the emphasis on individual freedom characteristic of his earlier work. In other words, Sartre was, as David Sherman puts it, attempting to construct "an amalgam of existential phenomenology and Marxism."<sup>11</sup> Given the above, we can say that the essay on Kierkegaard is another attempt to create such an amalgam. In fact Kierkegaard's struggle to find a place for subjectivity and

freedom in the face of the Hegelian system seems to serve as an allegory for Sartre's own struggle. (Perhaps this is why Sartre makes Hegel sound so much like the Marxists' mechanistic view of him.) Accordingly, the way Sartre depicts Kierkegaard's solution to the problem reveals something about Sartre's own views at this point in time. What is this solution? To summarize, a place for freedom is found, but only in first person experience (cf. Sherman 183). Only from this perspective do we discover how the universal moments of the historical process that condition the lives of individuals are also conditioned by these lives. And this is the final meaning of Sartre's phrase "the singular universal": from one point of view the universal creates the singular and from another the singular creates the universal.

Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> My page references will be to the English translation by Peter Goldberger found in *Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Josiah Thompson, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1972), 230-265. All future references to this text appear as SU. Other English translations of this essay can be found in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, tr. Johan Mathews (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); *Søren Kierkegaard, "Modern Critical Views"* Series, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989); and *Situations*, tr. Benita Eisler (New York: G. Braziller, 1965). The French original can be found in *Kierkegaard Vivant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard has his own discussion of this problem. See *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, tr. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 146-147.

<sup>3</sup> The viability of this interpretation of Hegel is questionable. However, as I note in the conclusion of this paper, Sartre has interesting reasons for depicting Hegel in this way.

<sup>4</sup> Some commentators find an analogous claim in Kierkegaard's own discussion of the relationship between language and existence. See, for example, Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, in "The Arguments of the Philosophers" series, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1982), 146-156.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, Sartre believes *every* life venture ultimately results in failure (SU 241 and 264). This radical claim depends on certain other views he has about the ontological make-up of the world and the fundamental impossibility of the human project in the face of this ontology. We find many of these views being proposed and argued for in the early chapters of *Being and Nothingness*.

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<sup>6</sup> *Search for a Method*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Random House, 1968). All future references to this text appear as SM.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Thomas C. Anderson, “Sartre and Human Nature” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (1997): 585-595. See also William L. McBride, “Sartre’s Debts to Kierkegaard: A Partial Reckoning” in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal, 18-42 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Crittenden, “The Singular Universal in Jean-Paul Sartre” *Literature and Aesthetics* 8 (1998): 29-42 at 34.

<sup>9</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, ed. and tr. Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), entry #53 for April 1836.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, tr. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 28-29.

<sup>11</sup> See “Jean Paul Sartre” in *The Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy*, eds. Robert C. Solomon and David Sherman, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 163-187 at 164-165. All future references to this text appear as Sherman.