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### SARTRE AND PROBLEMS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ECOLOGY

One of the principal purposes of this conference is to examine the relationship between human beings and nature within the European philosophical tradition. Although I do not wish to anticipate colleagues' conclusions here, I think it may be helpful for me to begin by restating what has become, I take it, a commonplace, namely, that the mainstream of Western thought, inspired in part by the Biblical injunction to subdue the earth and then reinforced in its direction by early modern science and the further metaphors about the dominance of nature that were employed by such proponents of that science as Francis Bacon, has until recently encouraged rather than questioned the almost unlimited exploitation of the human ecosystem. The two individuals who are, in my opinion, the most important social philosophers of the mid-nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx, can be and have both been accused of continuing this attitude, at least by not doing anything to reverse it. Mill was, on the whole and despite the critical stances that he took towards sex discrimination and even, later in life, classical liberal economic theory, an optimistic believer in the reality of human progress and hence in the rightness of what were considered „progressive” nineteenth-century views about the exploitation of nature. The case of Marx, with which I am much more familiar than that of Mill, is, I suspect, more complex and would constitute a paper, indeed a monograph, in itself; but at any rate the initial impression conveyed by such Marxian writings as those passages in *The Communist Manifesto* in which he appears to praise the bourgeoisie for having performed its historical task of eliciting thitherto undreamt-of forces from „the lap of social labour” through the subjection of Nature to man is that he certainly did not anticipate some of the deep ecological concerns that bring us together here, 140 years later.

Western ethics and social philosophy in the middle portion of our century, the twentieth, were dominated, among living thinkers, by two individuals above all, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. Since this is a highly

controversial claim, though it is of course of a kind that can neither be proved nor disproved, I need to expand and qualify it a little bit in order to make it at all plausible. First of all, I said „among living thinkers”; I would not for a moment wish to deny the continuing influence, throughout the middle of our century, of Marx, Mill, and other great figures of the past. Secondly, I am confining my claim to those middle decades – roughly, the forties, fifties, and sixties; it is obvious that other voices are being heard more frequently now, though I believe that it is too early to say just which among them will prove to have been most influential for these final decades of our century. Thirdly, by referring to „Western ethics and social philosophy” I am deliberately excluding other aspects of philosophy in which American and British thinkers had a considerable influence during the period in question; Anglo-American ethics at the time was largely confined to a normatively sterile, though often interesting and clever, analysis of meta-ethical issues, and social and political philosophy was virtually moribund. Fourthly, there are those who would deny that Heidegger’s thought yields an ethics or a social philosophy at all, much less one that exerted any intellectual, cultural dominance; but without saying anything about the thorny and, to my mind, still significant and unfinished question about Heidegger and Nazism, I can simply attest to the enormous importance, in forming the social and ethical attitudes of so many of my past students and colleagues, of Heidegger’s explorations of everydayness, authenticity, the technical *Gestell*, and numerous other phenomena that he stressed. This brings me, fifthly and finally, to Sartre, who will occupy center stage for the remainder of this paper.

Sartre fascinates me. From my earliest university years, I found both his early philosophical and his literary works quite attractive on the whole; in those years, I knew virtually nothing yet about his political essays, some of which include important anticipations of the more systematic social and political philosophy of his later life, although European intellectuals were already quite aware of this developing aspect of his philosophy by the middle 1950s. At any rate, it seems to me unquestionable that Sartre came to be looked upon as one of the great intellectual „consciences” of the Western world during that quarter century following World War II that constituted the troubled, often very angry, often very frightening youth of my generation, the immediate historical background to the rather different world of today. I need only recall that it was the initiative of some Polish intellectuals, who decided in 1956 to solicit an article by Sartre on his view of the relationship between Marxism and existentialism in France for the special April 1957 issue of „*Twórczość*” that motivated his own decision to compose his monumental *Critique de la raison dialectique*, for which that article, *Questions de méthode*, eventually came to serve as the introductory essay. However one may evaluate the successive phases and the various aspects of Sartre’s social and political

stances during those years – for example, his contributions to the magazine, „France–URSS”, the vicissitudes of his relationship with the French Communist Party, his principled opposition to his government’s war against the inhabitants of Algeria, and so on – , the fact is that his views always figured prominently in every important debate and hence can be said, without exaggeration, to have contributed importantly to the consciousness of those times, the immediate prelude to our own.

And so it should be of considerable interest in these new times, in which the last of the older generation of Cold Warriors, the generation of Sartre, are disappearing from the scene and our principal social and ethical preoccupations have begun to shift and become somewhat different, to take a backward look at his philosophy in order to examine what, if anything, it has to say about our present social concerns. Since questions of social ethics and ecology are central among these and the focal-point of our attention here, I propose to deal with this matter of Sartre and problems in the philosophy of ecology by considering the following sequence of topics: 1) reasons for regarding Sartre as indifferent or even hostile to ecological concerns on the basis especially of his early writings; 2) Sartre and ecology in the *Critique de la raison dialectique*, with special focus on his analysis of deforestation in ancient China; and 3) some hints at a more comprehensive Sartrean ecological ethic and philosophy of history on the basis particularly of posthumously-published works. I hope, as I shall try briefly to indicate again at the end, that this reevaluation of the evolution in thinking about nature and ecology on the part of one of the most prominent philosophers of the previous generation will provide some useful guidance to us as we attempt to attack these issues anew from the vantage point of our more recent historical experiences.

1. Particularly in the early years of his career, Sartre furnished abundant grounds for regarding him as an implacable enemy of nature and the natural and hence, by a very natural extension, of ecological concerns. There is evidence for this even at the level of his personal life, although at this level the evidence is mixed: he frequently admitted to feeling much more at home in cities, especially in Paris and Rome, rather than in the countryside, as has become even clearer from passages in his posthumously-published personal letters. On the other hand, he probably spent more time engaged in recreational outdoor activities – hiking, bicycling, vacationing at the seashore, and so on – during the summers of his early adult years than do, I would guess, most of my fellow countrymen of comparable age today; he was no Marcel Proust!

It is at the philosophical level that the early Sartre’s antipathy to nature was most clearly manifested. He has been called, not without some justification, „the last of the Cartesians”, a thinker who emphasized the polar

opposition between a sort of undifferentiated matter, called being-in-itself or sometimes simply *l'en-soi*, and a region of being called *l'être-pour-soi*, which, though not substantial like the Cartesian soul or mind, is locatable only in human reality and accounts for all activity and freedom in the world. While it would be erroneous simply to equate Sartre's *en-soi* with nature, a concept that is of human construction and that, as the more historically-minded later Sartre recognized better, has changed in its precise reference over diverse societies and epochs, or even with matter, nevertheless there always remained a sense in which Sartre, even in his later years, retained a negative attitude toward natural phenomena by virtue of the fact that he saw them as lacking what was quintessentially human. Nature, for him, is explicable in terms of causality, whereas intentional acts and other types of free human activity are not, in the final analysis.

A good illustration of the role assigned to natural phenomena in the early Sartre's systematic philosophical thought is his treatment, in *L'être et le néant*, of „my surroundings”, one of the elements of what he calls human „facticity”, as consisting of „coefficients of adversity”, limitations on the exercise of human freedom though not limitations of that freedom itself. Personally, I have always found his phenomenological survey of some of the diverse possible responses to such a „coefficient of adversity” as a hill that I approach and am expected to climb to be rather illuminating, a good way of capturing the moment of free choice that is involved in our responding to what may at first appear to be the sheer necessity imposed on us by things in our environment; but his choice of term well illustrates the antipathetic or antagonistic character of Sartre's view of the confrontation between nature and freedom.

This sense of confrontation was if anything reinforced by the increasing influence of Hegelian categories and ways of thinking on Sartre during the years following the publication of *L'être et le néant* in 1943. Now, Hegel's opposition of nature to history could be regarded by Sartre as complementary to his own fundamental polarity of in-itself and for-itself. One can see this influence at work in the important essay of 1946, *Matérialisme et révolution*, in which Sartre criticizes what he takes to be the freedom-rejecting implications of dialectical materialism, and in the transcript of a 1961 symposium, in which Sartre participated along with the Hegel scholar, Jean Hyppolyte, and several others on the subject of whether the dialectic is a law of nature as well as of history, or a law of history only. At that symposium, Sartre expressed agreement with Hyppolyte's position that to claim, like Engels, to find dialectical principles at work in nature is at least to run the risk of naturalizing history – in other words, of „reducing” history to the level of natural phenomena. Similarly, the binary Hegelian opposition between nature and history was a significant subject of reflection for Sartre in the unfinished notes,

written in part during a period of fairly intensive study of Hegel's thought by Sartre, that have been published posthumously under the title, *Cahiers pour une morale*.

Although to identify the relationship between human beings and their environment, or history and nature, as fundamentally oppositional is not *eo ipso* to take an ethical stance of unconcern towards issues of ecological ethics, nevertheless to make an inference from the former position to the latter would be quite understandable. In fact, in Sartre's case, it would be a mistake to look, not only for an ecological ethics, but indeed for any positive ethical doctrine in *L' être et le néant*. At the end of this book, he promised a future writing on the subject of ethics, but he was never straightforwardly to fulfill that promise. The *Cahiers pour une morale*, along with a large pile of as yet unpublished notes from the 1960s, constitute incomplete sketches toward such an enterprise, and the *Critique de la raison dialectique* can be seen as a sort of substitute for the promised ethics in the form of a social theory.

What is of most relevance to ethical considerations in Sartre's early work, even though it does not amount to a positive ethical doctrine, is the critical stance that he takes there towards a number of traditional ethical positions, and it is his focus on some of these positions that, more than any Cartesian or Hegelian influence, to my mind best explains the pejorative overtones that usually accompany Sartre's, especially the early Sartre's, references to „nature”. For it is the traditional ideological reinforcement of certain conservative behaviors and values as unquestionably, indisputably normative because they are said to be „natural” that most arouses Sartre's ire as an ethical critic. He is famous for insisting that there is no human nature, meaning that human beings, taken collectively, share no fixed, unchangeable characteristics that can be cited to determine *a priori* what is morally right and wrong, better and worse, within the limitations of our physical powers. And the latter, our physical powers, vary greatly according to changing circumstances both of individuals and of socially shared technologies. Indeed, it is reasonable to infer that for Sartre there is no „nature” tout court, if by „nature” one understands a set of fixed, unchangeable characteristics about the physical world as a whole that can be cited for the same purposes as those for which so-called „human nature” has been evoked, namely, to provide an *a priori* basis for a systematic ethic. Rather, the future, for Sartre, is open and to be forged in light of changing human possibilities – an idea that is reinforced by the work of his close collaborator, Simone de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, which places heavy stress on looking to the historical future as a guide to moral conduct in the present.

Indeed, from this point of view, the early existentialist critique of traditional nature-based and natural law ethics leaves much more room for attempting to generate a consistent ecological ethic than do, for example,



either cost/benefit utilitarian views, which must make somewhat *ad hoc* provisions to include utilities and disutilities to future generations within the range of costs and benefits to be considered, or possessive individualist liberal views, which, contrary to the spirit of the existentialist critique, assume the naturalness and eternal inviolability of private property and hence must treat ecology-based limitations on property use as justified only in exceptional circumstances. Conversely, it seems to me that it would be a serious mistake, even if it is a tempting one under present circumstances, to try to develop a new ecological ethic, however much we may need one, by imputing a set of intrinsic values to a new, generalized conception of nature – in other words, by reviving in some new form the notion of existing nature as being somehow normative and hence as a source of norms, or natural, ethical laws. I find the early Sartrean critique of the conservative dangers of all such positions, which complements elements of a similar critique in Marx, Nietzsche, and others, to be decisive, even though the early Sartre is of little use for the more positive task of constructing a suitable ecological ethic.

2. Nevertheless, it remains true to say, as I have already pointed out, that both nature and the related concepts of „matter” and „materialism” play generally either nugatory or negative roles in the thought-framework of the early Sartrean philosophy. Although I do not for a moment wish to pretend that there was ever a complete reversal on this topic in his thinking, or even that such a complete reversal would have been desirable, I now wish to discuss briefly a certain shift in Sartre’s attitudes and emphases that took place in the years between the publication of *L’être et le néant* and that of the first volume of the *Critique de la raison dialectique*, a shift that leads him in the latter to treat ecological factors as absolutely central to an understanding of human society and history. On the issue of Sartre and materialism, some very useful clarifications are to be found in an article by the English-language translator of *L’être et le néant* and *Questions de méthode*, Hazel Barnes, that appeared in an important collection of critical essays, *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, edited by Paul Schilpp (LaSalle, Open Court Press, Illinois 1981). Barnes correctly claims, citing though in part also criticizing an earlier article of mine, that by the time of the writing of *Questions de méthode* Sartre had accepted a certain version of materialism, whereas of course in *Matérialisme et révolution* and other earlier writings he had rejected it in all of its versions.

If one proceeds to consider the general worldview that is unfolded in *Critique de la raison dialectique*, something that is obviously of much greater importance than any question of mere labels like „materialism”, one finds a social theory according to which human history and social structures have been thoroughly and completely conditioned by our natural, material environment, so that what is still a matter of collective free choice is only the forms

that the social structures will take, and even this is subject to many constraints. In short, the Sartre of the *Critique* emerges, in contrast to the popular and still better-known Sartre of *L' être et le néant*, as a philosopher of ecology, if not of an ecological ethic, whose sense of the relevance of the ecosystem to an understanding of who we are is probably deeper and certainly more informed by detail than that of any other prominent European contemporary. I shall now proceed to elaborate on this, first in terms of the overall scheme of the book, and then with reference to a specific example, that of the deforestation of China.

For the Sartre of the *Critique*, the single most significant fact about all of human history up to our time – a fact that is contingent, in the sense that he claims to be able to imagine societies of intelligent beings in which it would not be present, but also all-pervasive – is that of material scarcity. There have never been enough material resources for the satisfaction of all needs, and all of human praxis is and must of necessity be conditioned by this reality. Activity, change, history originates in human beings, never in the material environment; in this sense features of the environment still remain, in the later Sartre's thought, coefficients of adversity, though he rarely if ever uses the latter term in the *Critique*. But with this newly-acquired sense both of human materiality and of the profound meaning of dialectical interaction, Sartre now stresses the paradoxical but fundamental process whereby the effect of human praxis, particularly when it is on a large scale, operating on matter under conditions of material scarcity may result in a kind of role reversal, such that matter or Nature ends up determining the outcome. The intentions of human beings, in other words, acting on or often even against nature – Sartre invents the word, „antiphysis”, to identify this type of action –, often become counterfinalized as a result of their own praxis combined with certain inherent features of the natural world. One of the first and clearest examples that he provides of this antiphysis is deforestation in China.

The discussion of this phenomenon occurs early in the first volume of the *Critique*. The facts are relatively well known. For several thousand years, it was the practice of Chinese peasants systematically to eliminate trees from the fields and mountainsides as the agricultural frontier advanced. The cumulative effect of all these individual actions has been to dislodge the topsoil and allow it to clog the great rivers, thus causing the massive periodic floods for which certain regions, especially the great plain of the north, are famous. As Sartre says:

„Ainsi, le processus entier des terribles inondations chinoises apparaît comme un mécanisme construit intentionnellement. Si quelque ennemi de l'homme avait voulu persécuter les travailleurs de la Grande Plaine, il aurait chargé des troupes mercenaires de déboiser systématiquement les

montagnes. Le système positif de la culture s'est transformé en machine infernale. Or, l'ennemi qui a fait entrer le loess, le fleuve, la pesanteur, toute l'hydrodynamique dans cet appareil destructeur, c'est le paysan lui-même"<sup>1</sup>.

And yet it never seemed that way, at least until recent times when they began to be made aware of it, to individual peasants clearing their individual patches of land over those millennia. Human beings, in an instance such as this, working together, as it seemed, in a common struggle against nature, became, through natural means, their own worst enemies. It is in the context of a reflection on the significance of this example, several pages later, that Sartre affirms his adherence to a materialist monism: „Le seul monisme qui part du monde humain et qui situe les hommes dans la Nature [...], le seul qui puisse dépasser ces deux affirmations également vraies et contradictoires: dans l'Univers toute existence est matérielle, dans le monde de l'homme tout est humain"<sup>2</sup>.

Of course, as Sartre well realized and the structure of his book indicates, this is a particularly simple example of the role of the ecosystem in human history. Further complexities could be introduced even in this example if one were to add an account of the social organization of traditional Chinese agriculture, and surely any comprehensive understanding of most contemporary ecological problems requires a strong awareness of the dominant mode of production that is involved. But Sartre's principal concern in this discussion, as my last citation from him should have made clear, is to insist on the element of human intentionality that underlies and ultimately explains ecological catastrophes, however deeply hidden that element may sometimes be. The theoretical implication of this is, obviously, to refuse to treat Nature as a fixed, closed entity at a distance, as a God might; the practical implication is to combat pessimism about past and present threats to the ecosystem, however grave and seemingly overwhelming they may be, and to work consciously to take these matters, so to speak, into our own hands – in which, whether we have been aware of it or not, they have always been. Sartre mentions in passing, for example, that a program of reforestation would have been needed to avert the consequences of the initial deforestation in China; but is it not the case that a reforestation program, both in China and in the Amazon region, where deforestation with even more global potential consequences is taking place at the present time, remains within the realm of human possibility? On the other hand, such a possibility can only be actualized if and when appropriate, non-exploitative socioeconomic structures are in place.

<sup>1</sup> J. P. Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Gallimard, Paris 1985, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.



3. My confidence that this is a reasonable interpretation of the implications of the later Sartre's thought for a philosophy of ecology is strengthened by the fact that such is the message of a very suggestive, though more journalistic than strictly philosophical, book on the subject that has been written by one of Sartre's closest and best French interpreters, André Gorz. His *Écologie et politique* contains, as far as I could tell from a cursory search, only one explicit reference to Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*, but that friendly reference makes it clear that Gorz thinks of his strong ecological activism as carrying out, rather than contravening, the spirit of Sartreism. This word, Sartreism, sounds a bit humorous, perhaps, to those who are familiar with Sartre's thought, because Sartre did not feel attached to any particular set of past philosophical formulas and was perfectly happy to move in new directions of thinking whenever it seemed appropriate to him, however much they might appear to be at odds with earlier directions. Thus, the contrast between the individualism of *L'être et le néant* and the strong social orientation of the *Critique* is superficially very striking, despite the fact that, at a deeper level, one can readily discern a great many elements of continuity. Sartre's comparative lack of ego-involvement, as a philosopher, in his own previous formulas should serve, I think, as a good example to all of us who participate in the enterprise of Western philosophy: the fact that neither problems of ecology nor the partly related, partly separate problems of our societies' relationships to the less developed countries of the world have been matters of major concern to most of our intellectual ancestors or even, perhaps, to many of us in the past should not serve as a barrier against our acknowledging the centrality of these problems today, as we are attempting to begin to do at this conference. With these remarks as background, I would like to conclude by briefly reviewing some hints at a more comprehensive Sartrean ecological ethic and philosophy of history that are to be found both in works published during his lifetime and particularly in certain passages in his often very rough but interesting *Nachlass*.

The *Cahiers pour une morale*, on which Sartre was working during the late 1940s, contain some interesting and useful extended reflections on the question of historical progress and its relationship to any possible ethics. Ecological concerns as such play very little role in these reflections, but it is interesting to observe in them Sartre's strong skepticism about any attempted equation of technological and scientific progress with progress in history, a skepticism that is not, however, reducible to the sort of anti-technology attitude that some have claimed to find, for example, in Heidegger. In addition, the *Cahiers* are useful for the sense that they provide, in a few scattered passages, of the importance of generational differences in shaping social perceptions; our heightened awareness of ecological problems today must in part be explained by referring to such differences. There are also passages in the *Cahiers* that

contain ethical formulations of an almost apocalyptic sort, unacceptably idealistic in their implications, concerning the remote possibility of a society-wide „radical conversion” to authenticity, which would in some vague sense constitute the end of history. A soil in which formulas of this sort are disseminated is a soil that is still not very propitious for the development of an ecological ethic.

In the first volume of the *Critique de la raison dialectique*, the product of a decade later, Sartre’s vastly heightened awareness of the importance of our material environment, which I have just discussed, occurs within the framework of a notion of history – both of the garden variety of short-term histories of small groups and movements in which we all become involved from time to time, and of history in its larger senses up to and including world history – as what he calls „totalization”. There is nothing closed or fixed about history so conceived, as there would be if we were to think of past history as a settled „totality”; history as totalization is and always will be, as long as the human race survives, an ongoing process, but it is certainly one of which the twentieth century is more aware than were past epochs. In the posthumously-published second volume of the *Critique*, which was composed at the same time as the first volume but never completed, this sense of history as totalization becomes even more prominent in Sartre’s thought. Especially in his detailed discussion of the evolution of the Soviet Union during the late 1920s and early 1930s, a discussion in which Sartre appears to be more reluctant than in any of his other writings to allow that the sequence of events, at least on a large scale, could have taken a different course from the one that it did take, in light of the nation’s commitment to revolutionary development, Sartre uses the new expression, „totalisation d’enveloppement”. This is meant to indicate the sense in which major historical projects ultimately involve all the members of a modern society. In this same unfinished second volume of the *Critique*, near the end, we find Sartre much more willing than at any previous time to entertain what might be called „science-fictional” hypotheses, both about the possibility of our being observed by intelligent and more advanced visitors from other planets and about more immediate possibilities of both a positive and a negative sort – e.g., substantially lengthening the duration of human life, or the premature ending of human history through some catastrophe – that have been introduced by contemporary science and technology. In the face of all of this variety of considerations, Sartre wishes once again to affirm that it is we human beings who make our own history, that that history is never, in the final analysis, a fatality imposed externally upon us, and he argues eloquently and in great detail in continued support of this basic position of his.

It is a position with which I personally am in strong agreement, and it serves as the basis of an ethical attitude, vis-a-vis our present ecological

concerns, that is activist and that, while not complacently optimistic, leaves open the possibility of a certain optimism. But it is still not by any means a developed ethic. Sartre did, however, make one last effort, which of course he also left incomplete, at developing a systematic ethical stance, and as my final point I would like to report on one portion of these as yet unpublished notes of the mid-1960s by way of suggesting something about the lines that such a stance might have taken. This particular set of notes was written in preparation for a lecture that Sartre gave to the Gramsci Institute in Rome in 1964, although the lecture itself is said to have been much shorter than the notes themselves; they exist in manuscript and typescript form and have been briefly and partially summarized by my American colleagues, Robert Stone and Elizabeth Bowman, in an article that has appeared in English in the journal, „Social Text” (13/14, winter/spring 1986), and in French in the „Annales de l’Institut de Philosophie et de Sciences Morales” of the University of Brussels, 1987.

The portion of these notes that interests me here concerns a certain kind of ecological disaster that was brought about by the widespread use of a potent form of „antiphysis”, a drug containing thalidomide with the brand name of „Softénon”, that was prescribed as a sleeping pill for pregnant mothers in the late 1950s, but that turned out to have the effect of causing enormous deformities in the infants born to the mothers who had taken it. A number of mothers in the city of Liège, when they discovered what had happened, decided either to abort or, in a certain number of cases, to commit infanticide. This is the historical event that Sartre proceeds to analyze. The thrust of his analysis is that the actions of the Liège mothers should not be assessed in the traditional terms of what he calls „neo-positivist” ethics – was such infanticide morally permissible in light of the supposedly supreme value of human life and of the sometimes countervailing considerations that are contained in the notion of „quality of life”? For this neo-positivist way of thinking, according to Sartre, presupposes a repetitiveness and unchangeability in the structures of human life, and hence in its moral codes, that is undermined both by the „antiphysis” of modern technology, however badly, as here, it may at times fail us, and by the mothers’ actions. The broader implication of those actions, he says, is to posit an historically different possible future in which no child would be born with a sub-human destiny, as is still the case now for a large percentage of the human race. Thus, even though the mothers in question came primarily from the middle classes of a privileged, advanced industrial society, Sartre sees what they did as raising larger issues about global dominance and subordination and, concurrently, about the nature of ethics itself. The Kantian idea of a kingdom of ends and all similar notions that presuppose a fixed, stable, universal domain of moral rules are undermined by the kinds of radically new possibilities, both positive and negative in terms of humanity’s historical

future, that are opened up to us by technology at the present time. Any ethic that will be appropriate to our new understanding of the ecosystem and of our role in it, then, according to Sartre, will have to involve a rejection of past ethical structures, systems, and assumptions.

All of these texts, published and unpublished, taken together amount to nothing more than suggestions towards an ecological ethic for our times. They do not directly resolve such major concrete issues as that of the desirability of the widespread use of nuclear energy, and they fly in the face of what I perceive as a vague but broadly-based current tendency, resulting in part from our enhanced awareness of some of the disasters that we have inflicted upon ourselves by severely damaging the ecosystem, to restore ancient attitudes of quasi-religious respect for nature and for „her” rhythms. I confess that I often indulge in the luxury of such nostalgic attitudes myself, at fleeting moments. But Sartre is correct, I think, in saying, as I pointed out near the outset of this paper, that „nature” is a concept that human beings construct and reconstruct across time, rather than some entity in itself, and that it is ultimately our collective free choice to make of it what we will, constrained by the technological limitations of what we can. While such a view might well be accompanied by a complacent optimism about „progress” on the part of some thinkers, in Sartre’s case it was complemented by an uncompromisingly harsh critique of the use to which human beings have put and are continuing to put so much of our modern technology in the service of perpetuating or even intensifying social relationships of domination. Thus described, these complementary attitudes – awareness of radically different and better future human possibilities, severe criticism of the role of existing social structures in the exacerbation of ecological problems – are ones that I endorse.

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#### SARTRE I PROBLEMY FILOZOFII EKOLOGII

Już sposób ujmowania relacji człowiek – przyroda w głównym nurcie europejskiej tradycji filozoficznej może uchodzić za antycypację współczesnych problemów ekologicznych. Wspomniawszy o biblijnym zaleceniu, by „ziemię czynić sobie poddaną”, o założeniach nowożytnej nauki i XIX-wiecznej filozofii społecznej, autor przechodzi do rozwinięcia kwestii tytułowej. Przedmiotem analizy stają się trzy aspekty stosunku Sartre’a do problemów filozofii ekologii: 1) widoczna w jego wczesnych pismach obojętność, a nawet wrogość wobec spraw ekologii; 2) Sartre i ekologia w *Krytyce rozumu dialektycznego* i 3) uwagi o Sartrowskiej etyce ekologicznej i filozofii historii, zwłaszcza na podstawie jego prac opublikowanych pośmiertnie.