



Critique of Dialectical Reason, Vol 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles

Jean-Paul Sartre , Fredric Jameson (Foreword) , Alan Sheridan-Smith (Translator)

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At the height of the Algerian war, Jean-Paul Sartre embarked on a fundamental reappraisal of his philosophical and political thought. The result was the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, an intellectual masterpiece of the twentieth century, now republished with a major original introduction by Fredric Jameson. In it, Sartre set out the basic categories for the renovated theory of history that he believed was necessary for post-war Marxism.

Sartre's formal aim was to establish the dialectical intelligibility of history itself, as what he called 'a totalisation without a totaliser'. But, at the same time, his substantive concern was the structure of class struggle and the fate of mass movements of popular revolt, from the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century to the Russian and Chinese revolutions in the twentieth: their ascent, stabilisation, petrification and decline, in a world still overwhelmingly dominated by scarcity.

Critique of Dialectical Reason, Vol 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles Details

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Dan says

read just the problem of method within it. complex. too complex for a review here. I found Sartre's attempt at reconciling individual autonomy with broader social pressures very plausible and intellectually stimulating, it represents a depart from his early undilluted existentialism to a more considerate position formulated in the aftermath of his Marxist swerve.

Alex says

why sartre why?!?

thousands of pages, almost completely unreadable.

absurdly complex language to make absurdly basic points about revolution and struggle

i struggled with this monster for months before getting through about 500 pages and learning very little besides an important lesson about self-important marxists and their attempts to outwit one another even if it takes their whole lives spent writing utter nonsense.

(i may be the only one to get that far in the book, EVER)

Erik says

This is an advanced work on Dialectical Theory, Existentialism, Epistemology and Ontology. Anyone unfamiliar with these concepts, or traditions should seek more introductory works first and then move on to this fascinating but difficult study.

The Critique of Dialectical Reason grew out of Sartre's increasing disagreement with Marxist theory, as well as his disenchantment with the realities of life in Soviet Russia. In immediate terms this book grew out of the intellectual sparing between himself and Communist intellectuals that began with his book 'Search for a Method'. More comprehensively this book is the culmination of Sartre's philosophical and political engagement with the world.

Sartre's early existentialist philosophy stressed above all individual freedom and responsibility. Later, his political commitments, and the plight of oppressed groups, (presented to him in Simone de Beauvoir's increasing Feminism, as well as his friendship with Franz Fanon, and his rejection of capitalism) tempered many of his individualistic axioms. But, as Sartre became increasingly impacted by the Marxist arguments regarding class and material circumstances, he also became disenchanted with their rejection of individual rights and needs in favor of collective spirit. To Sartre neither the idealistic philosophy of capitalist society, nor the deterministic materialist dialectics of Marx (arguing that man's consciousness was determined by his

material conditions) were adequate: He sought a middle route.

In doing so Sartre combines Hegel's idealistic dialectics: dialectics of spirit, history, and logic, and Marxist materialist dialectics and examines their efficacy in understanding historical events.

The result is one of the most difficult and frustrating books ever written. In order to transcend the ironically binary categories of both idealistic and materialistic dialects, and to avoid universalism, (a big concern in France at the time with the emergence of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Lacan, etc) while also avoiding relativism, (which he argued Foucault among others will guilty of) Sartre is forced to create an army of specialized terms to equip him to proceed with his inquiry.

Critique volume 1. is well over 800 pages and bears the mark of having been written by a man propelled by uppers (up to 20 tablets of codrain per day). It is sprawling and loosely organized monster of a book. Luckily, the editing work has included a decent glossary of terms, (a much better one is included in Vol. 2.) The Glossary is crucial, and it makes sense for a committed reader (which is the only type of reader who has any hope of finishing this book) to buy Vol. 2 at the same time in order to utilize the glossary.

Length and difficulty aside this is an astounding and important work that cannot be overestimated.

Unfortunately, since the nature of the work regards both epistemology and ontology, it is impossible to reproduce the main conclusions of the book. Much in the way that Kafka wrote, Sartre's greatest insight, his liberation of Dialectical Reason from specifically idealist or materialist chains requires diligent attention. It is a method of thought that he is convincing one of, the only way to learn is such aspects of mental grammar are through mimicry. We have to read Sartre's convoluted book in order to experience the methodology of his thinking.

Lo says

So, i have finished this, what do you know!!!!

I DID IT. MY SPIRIT HAS NOT BEEN BROKEN, though Sartre has repeatedly tried.

THAT BEING SAID i don't think i can rate this !!!!!

I would give it one star tbh given on the many many times i have been SO ANGRY AT THIS BOOK AND EVEN MORE AT HIS AUTHOR JEAN-PAUL SARTRE U GHG !!!!!!!

/BUT/ i don't think it actually deserves one star you know

And i just think the goodreads rating system doesn't allow me to rate it properly!!!!!!!!!! I AM STUCK IN A DILEMMA.

Also i would say the last 80 pages deserve for themselves 5 stars if only because CAPITALISM IS EVIL AND HAS TO BE DESTROYED!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

My opinion of this book in the end is : Sartre should stop trying to make himself seem soooo smart and should stop using words he's the only one able to UNDERSTAND THE MEANING. My friend told me today you don't write books for other people and it doesn't matter if no one is able to understand what you're saying, BUT I STRONGLY DISAGREE. if you're going to write 894 pages of nonsensical bullshit, with horrible concepts and words that literally NO OTHER PERSON EVER USES, i think you're the problem,

not me because i don't care enough about you to waste my life trying to understand it. I don't care if you're a philosopher and if you're ~*~Jean-Paul Sartre~*~ blabla i mean i'm not saying if you're talking about weird things like the ~soul~ or whatever, OK, BE OBSCURE, but you're talking about freedom!!!! and capitalism!!!!!! how are we going to destroy capitalism if no one understands your book ??? not that this book is the only book about capitalism or that someone else can't write another book, but i'm just saying! if your intention is to denounce capitalism, then do it in a way that people are going to be like "CAPITALISM IS EVIL" if not you failed and i've just read 894 pages OF UTTER NONSENSE. NONSENSE!!!!!! not to mention the terrifying moments where my beloved l'être et le néant was completely ignored so Sartre could contradict himself about freedom LIKE i'm not accepting that. I still salute his determination to write this, I GUESS, and i suppose for people that share his delusions (if you could call them that) this book is perfect. but what i want are actual books about freedom and not a book where sartre masturbates over his own intelligence for, i repeat, 894 PAGES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I AM NOT HERE FOR THAT.

As a consequence i am not rating this book and i would also advise you TO NEVER READ IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!! not that you ever wanted to because WHAT SANE PERSON WOULD WANT TO READ THIS OF THEIR OWN FREE WILL (me, apparently)

ok bye.

John Wilson says

Not really a book about Marxism but more generally a theory of human association. Read and re-read and re-reading. You have to go back to this book several times before it makes sense. Go to the parts on the bus queue first (seriality) then try 'the indirect gathering'. Sartre makes more sense in the middle and at the end of the book when he talks of seriality, the en fusion, the group, the organisation and the institution. (I am a published writer on Sartre and can be contacted through this site for comments and queries - John Wilson)

Pierre Moessinger says

Sartre was taking amphetamines while writing this book. Probably too much.

Michael Miley says

Along with Search for a Method, this book was a fascinating examination of dialectical reason as applied to groups-in-fusion and the then reigning Marxist paradigm of the French left. Sartre critiques the claim that such reason provides the truth of history and adds his existentialist ideas of intentionality and individual choice. Expands on phenomenological analysis and historical reasoning with the idea that individuals choose their own destiny within the context of historical givens and limitations that act as constraints and oppositions. The word he used was alterity. I used to read this book late into the night, while I drank glasses of cold vodka, and then congratulate myself that drunk as I was, I could still understand Sartre. Maybe there was a connection here to Sartre's own drug use....

Leonardo says

Esta dialéctica del obstáculo y el límite, respecto del poder de la mente por un lado y el poder político por otro, fue bien comprendida por la fenomenología de la subjetividad que (en contraste con la corriente Heideggeriana) reconoció al nazismo, y por ende al Estado capitalista, como el verdadero límite del progreso histórico. Desde Husserl a Sartre hallamos los esfuerzos principales para transformar los límites en inicios, y en muchos modos Foucault siguió esta misma línea. Ver Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trad. David Carr (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trad. Quentin Hoare (London: Verso, 1990);

Imperio Pág.269

eesenor says

Sartre demonstrates that the economic system that best accommodates individual freedom is Socialism.
