

Sartre's Concept of Bad Faith in Relation to the Marxist Notion of False Consciousness: Inauthenticity and Ideology Re-Examined

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The chapter devoted to bad faith in *L'Être et le néant* is one of the best known of the work not only for the colourful and humorous examples which it contains, such as that of the waiter and that of the deceptively coquettish woman, but principally because it is one of the most revealing of the ethical implications of Sartre's ontology. Examples of bad faith abound in Sartre's literary works, his portrayal of the phenomenon fleshing out further, and at times bringing added complexity to, the theoretical account provided by *L'Être et le néant* of our ordinarily inauthentic condition. Clearly, bad faith is the prime instance of inauthenticity for the early Sartre, but less often remarked on are the many points of contact and overlap between his conceptions of inauthenticity and of ideology respectively.¹ The Sartre of the 1930s and 1940s presents ideology, in any of its manifestations in the lives of individuals, as a thoroughly negative phenomenon, be it the ideology of the bourgeoisie in *La Nausée*, or that of vulgar Marxists such as Brunet in *Les Chemins de la liberté* and those he admonishes in the first part of 'Matérialisme et révolution' (1946). Ideology, for Sartre, acts almost exclusively as a mystification of individuals' capacity for free thought and obstructs the possibility of autonomous and meaningful action. It is significant that in the cases in which Sartre portrays characters or discusses the examples of particular individuals who are clearly under the influence of an ideology of some kind, they are also invariably in bad faith. This would suggest that there is some kind of relationship to be charted between the two concepts, although it is also clear from the outset that no direct concordance can be hoped for. There are far fewer

examples in Sartre's texts in which individuals who are in bad faith are also under the influence of a mystifying ideology. Inauthenticity, then, for Sartre, is a category which is considerably broader in extent than ideology; the latter can be reduced to the former but not vice versa. The objection might of course be raised that it is almost inevitable that this should be the case because the early Sartre is not in fact concerned with ideology explicitly -- indeed, it is true that he rarely discusses it as such -- but primarily with questions of ontology and that his position on ideology is in fact only an extrapolation from his ontologically-based account of inauthenticity. Yet, the conclusion to which this objection would seem to lead, namely that it is beside the point to discuss the theoretical and literary works of the early Sartre in terms of questions pertaining specifically to ideology, appears deeply unsatisfactory and inadequate in the light of the many and diverse examples of ideology at work which Sartre's texts present. Moreover, although it is indeed the case that Sartre's primary interest was in ontology (and then in aesthetic matters), an acknowledgement of this fact should not lead us to foreclose on the possibility of identifying points of intersection between his thought and political philosophy.²

Given the breadth and diversity of theories of ideology, it would be far beyond the scope of this article to attempt any comprehensive account of the relationship between the work of the early Sartre and ideology. In the interests of narrowing the focus, the conception of ideology as false consciousness stands out as being the most immediately suitable candidate for comparison and potential cross-fertilisation with Sartre's thought. This area of Marxist discourse on ideology is concerned specifically with those situations and moments in the life of a society in which an ideology can be said to be mystifying and freedom-limiting. Defenders of some form of the false consciousness theory share with Sartre the desire to see individuals' emancipation from their unfree condition. It would appear that they also have some sort of truth/falsity distinction in common with him. For Sartre, those who are subject to an ideology and are thus in bad faith live out their inauthenticity as a kind of enduring lie which permits them to escape the anguish which accompanies the acknowledgement of their true condition. The concept of false consciousness similarly involves the idea that individuals' conception of reality either is in some sense actually false, and/or facilitates the interests of an oppressive group -- usually a ruling class -- without those individuals being aware that they are serving those interests.

It should be immediately apparent that a basic difficulty involved in charting a relationship between bad faith and false consciousness lies in the fact that Sartre locates the former at the level of the individual whereas the latter is customarily seen as a social phenomenon. However, closer examination of the concept of bad faith suggests that this apparent disparity is perhaps not as great as it seems. Although it is true that even in the cases in which Sartre depicts the bad faith of a community he is always staunchly resistant to any notion of a collective consciousness, nevertheless bad faith is far from being a monolithic concept and, in some of its manifestations, can be seen to be not incompatible with the idea of the social. Joseph Catalano has valuably discussed the matter of the different kinds of bad faith, of the levels at which bad faith exists, suggested by Sartre in *L'Être et le néant*.³ Catalano argues that Sartre's conviction that we are

always in bad faith is true only in a 'weak' sense, namely that we cannot avoid role-playing. When we exit one pre-defined social role, we inevitably enter another one. Catalano also identifies a 'strong' sense of bad faith in Sartre's writings, however, which involves accepting and being complicit with our social roles so that we hide from our fundamental freedom in some greater and active way. In *La Nausée*, writes Catalano, 'Roquentin does not, at the end of the novel, return to the same bad faith that he was living in at the beginning of the novel. At first, he was hiding from his freedom, and living a life characterized by a strong sense of bad faith. At the end of the book, he does indeed return to a role, as we all do, but there is a basic difference. Now he is no longer hiding from his freedom'.⁴ Catalano's identification of a 'strong' notion of bad faith in Sartre's thought seems to imply more of a social dimension to bad faith than the concept is usually credited with. If an individual not only passively accepts her social role but actively identifies with it, then it would seem that she is not just stoically bearing the burden of being inauthentic but willingly buying into a social value (for example the idea that a taxi driver, or a bourgeois person, etc. should think and behave in a certain way) which is, as it were, greater than herself, that is, which transcends her individual subjectivity. In Sartrean terms, she is fully subscribing to a freedom-limiting mystification.

In his study of ideology,⁵ Terry Eagleton points to the work of Raymond Geuss as particularly valuable in providing an illuminating critical analysis of the concept of false consciousness.⁶ For Geuss, it is those forms of ideology involving the delusion of individuals in a particular society which may be appropriately described as false consciousness, or ideology in the 'pejorative sense'. Geuss identifies many varieties of false consciousness and it is worthwhile enumerating some of them in so far as they will be relevant to our analysis of bad faith subsequently. Three broad categories of false consciousness can be identified, Geuss argues, only the first of which involves the idea that individuals are harbouring beliefs which are literally false. In addition to types of false consciousness which involve epistemic falsehood, there are those kinds of ideology in the pejorative sense in which a form of consciousness⁷ has as its basis certain functional properties and/or is rooted in certain genetic properties. There are a number of kinds of epistemic falsehood which, Geuss argues, constitute instances of false consciousness in individuals in a society. First, and most obviously, there is that kind which involves individuals mistaking the epistemic status of some of their beliefs, i.e., harbouring false beliefs which serve the interests of the oppressive group. Second, there is epistemic falsehood when individuals make what Geuss terms an "'objectification" mistake', that is when, amongst their beliefs, there is a belief which they take to be an objective reality and a natural phenomenon when it is in fact a social phenomenon. And finally, 'a form of consciousness is ideologically false if it mistakes self-validating or self-fulfilling beliefs for beliefs which are not self-validating or self-fulfilling'.⁸ Geuss provides the example of a group of people which he calls 'subgroup *G*'. 'If we think members of subgroup *G* are lazy, unreliable, and unintelligent, and hence act toward them in ways which make them become lazy, unreliable, and unintelligent, the belief that the members of *G* are lazy etc. is self-fulfilling'; what makes such self-fulfilling beliefs an insidious example of false consciousness is when they are presented as non-self-fulfilling. With regard to the type of false consciousness which has certain functional properties as

its basis, Geuss argues that an individual may hold a set of beliefs which, although not untrue, serve a functional role in the maintenance of a power structure. And false consciousness which is rooted in certain genetic properties, Geuss explains, is a form of consciousness which has its origin in reprehensible or unacceptable causes or ulterior motives.⁹ It should be noted that these forms of false consciousness are not mutually exclusive and that false consciousness can be present, in many cases, in more than one form at the same time.

The clearest examples of the coincidence of bad faith and false consciousness in Sartre's work are to be found in his portrayal of the Argives in *Les Mouches*, and the play hence merits particular attention in this regard. Sartre paints a picture of an oppressed people, and yet this oppression is characterised in particular by the almost complete absence of the various forms of coercion which one would expect to be indispensable to its maintenance. The unfreedom of the Argives, then, is assured largely by their inability or unwillingness, at the levels of both thought and subsequently action, to claim the freedom which is, and should be, theirs. It is for this reason that they can be said both to be in bad faith and to be prey to a dominant ideology. Indeed, it is worth noting at the outset that if some form of actual coercion *were* in place in Sartre's Argos (if, for example, Egisthe ruled by means of some sort of military dictatorship) then it would be much less likely that the Argives would be in bad faith, that is bad faith in the strong sense at least, because they would, in many cases, be in opposition to the regime, certainly at the level of thought if not also at the level of action. Their unfreedom would be imposed on them from without rather than being of their own making and they would hence have no reason to lie to themselves about the nature of their real condition as an oppressed people. By the same token, although ideology in the pejorative sense would almost certainly be in operation under such a regime, the unfreedom of the Argives would similarly not be due to that ideology in the first instance, but due to the threat of physical repression (imprisonment, execution, etc.) effected by the ruling elite. Sartre's *Les Mouches*, then, stages extremely well both bad faith and false consciousness. Both phenomena are most clearly in evidence, because they work most effectively, in situations in which individuals' unfreedom is not the result of coercion or repression, or the threat of them, but due to obstacles at the level of individual thought. The condition of Sartre's Argives is essentially of this sort.

What is of great interest in *Les Mouches* is the fact that the bad faith and the false consciousness of the Argives are so often instantiated in the very same examples in the text. This suggests either that the two concepts designate one and the same phenomenon at times, or that there is a degree of conceptual overlap between them with respect to certain situations, or that, at the very least, they are closely related to each other. As I have already suggested, and as will become clear later, the first of these possibilities would seem to be an overstatement of what is actually the case. The theoretical bases for Sartre's view of inauthenticity and those which underpin the Marxist idea of false consciousness are sufficiently contrasting for it to be important not to amalgamate the two concepts. But the latter two claims would appear to be entirely plausible. It is to the different types of false consciousness involving epistemic falsehood that we should turn first to find the closest correspondence between bad faith and ideology in the pejorative

sense. Clearly, it is those types of false consciousness involving the idea that ideologically mystified individuals hold beliefs which are in some cases literally false which would seem to be the best candidates for a potential conceptual relationship with a theory concerned with individuals who are deceived about the nature of their real condition. In fact, we need look no further than to the basic condition of the Argives in *Les Mouches* to find, clearly represented in addition to bad faith, all three types of false consciousness involving epistemic falsehood. First, if the Argives are in bad faith because they do not recognize their fundamental freedom and hence will not react against the culture of guilt which dominates in Argos, then it is because they have been induced to believe fully that they are guilty and that continual repentance for their supposed crimes is necessary. Their basic condition, it seems to them, is one of unfreedom as Jupiter makes explicit in a remark to Egisthe in act II, scene V: 'les hommes sont libres . . . Tu le sais, et ils ne le savent pas'.¹⁰ According to the Sartrean world view, the Argives, then, are harbouring a belief about themselves which is false and which serves the purposes of their oppressors. Second, it would seem that Sartre's Argives, fifteen years having passed since Agamemnon's murder, habitually make what Geuss terms an "objectification" mistake¹¹ in that their false belief about their condition has become so ingrained that they apparently see no possibility of things being otherwise. They have been completely insulated from outside influences and seemingly have no awareness of cultural difference or of the relativity of values. The social practices of Argos, and their own unfree condition, are not for them the product of culture but seem to have taken on the status of indisputable facts of life. Hence, as the ceremony of the dead proves, the act of repentance is no longer for them merely in the name of expiation for the crime of having permitted Agamemnon's murder but has become generalized to include all the other dead, as if repentance, rather than repentance for a specific crime, is an end in itself.¹² And there is the old woman's tale to Jupiter, Oreste and the Pedagogue in act I concerning her six-year-old grandson who has been brought up in guilt and repentance, even though the child clearly has no sins to atone for.¹³ The third type of false consciousness involving epistemic falsehood, that which comes in the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy, is also clearly in evidence in the Argives' unfreedom. Jupiter, through the efforts of his representative and subordinate Egisthe, has succeeded in instigating a regime in which the Argives believe themselves to be bound to eternal repentance, and thus to be intrinsically unfree. Having been induced to accept and collude in their unfreedom, there is no apparent prospect of the Argives ever liberating themselves. And yet, the force of this insidious ideology of guilt lies in the fact that Jupiter and Egisthe have scrupulously concealed the truth from them. Jupiter refers to man's fundamental freedom as '[l]e secret douloureux des Dieux et des rois'.¹⁴

Clearly, in the case of *Les Mouches*, these three forms of false consciousness involving epistemic falsehood are different aspects of, or ways of looking at and trying to explain, the same phenomenon, namely an ideologically oppressive social structure. Our understanding of the dominant ideology of Argos can be enriched further by introducing these types of false consciousness which have as their basis certain genetic and functional properties. The appropriateness of the former, in the light of our remarks above about Jupiter and Egisthe, is fairly self-evident; their actions, from the outset, have been fuelled by dubious ulterior motives. The matter of the ways in which the ruling ideology of

Argos involves the functional type of false consciousness is both more complex and more interesting. It will be remembered that this form of ideology in the pejorative sense does not have to entail the idea that people hold beliefs which are necessarily false. Hence, the Argives' belief in their own guilt has some foundation in the truth because they were originally responsible for not preventing the murder of Agamemnon. However, in the intervening period Egesthe's regime has worked to perpetuate this feeling of guilt to serve its own, and ultimately Jupiter's, ends and it is in this sense that the culture of self-incrimination and repentance in Argos plays a functional role ideologically in the upholding of an oppressive power. It is worth noting that dominant ideologies are rarely just sets of ideas alone foisted upon a community. They are often aided by and maintained through certain specific social and cultural practices. In *Les Mouches*, the ceremony of the dead and the insistence on regular repentance are examples of such practices. Without going as far as actual coercion, these practices serve as important supports to the culture of guilt. As such, they are suggestive of the Gramscian concept of hegemony which turns on the idea that institutional practices in civil society serve to maintain the authority of the elite. By the same token, they can also be seen as pointing towards the Althusserian idea of the materiality of ideology, that is the notion -- similar in many ways to Gramscian hegemony -- that ideology is actually inscribed in social practices and is thus not just the province of ideas. For Gramsci, hegemonic apparatuses include, amongst others, such institutions as the church and the family. In *Les Mouches*, the ceremony of the dead and the cult of repentance are linked to each of these institutions respectively. The former is presided over by the High Priest and plainly shows all the signs of being an event which has a religious significance for the Argives. With respect to the latter, the example of the old woman and her grandson in act I clearly indicates that the family is an important and powerful means for the propagation and continuation of the guilt culture. It is also important to recognize that the functioning of a dominant ideology may well, and often does, involve inconsistencies and internal contradictions. *Les Mouches* provides a good example of this with regard to the form of false consciousness rooted in genetic properties. If Jupiter's and Egesthe's insidious motives are the point of origin of Argos' ideology of guilt, it is nevertheless not the case that the two characters form a united front. In act II, scene 5 the complicity between them breaks down, Egesthe claiming to be weary of working to ensure the maintenance of the ideology of guilt in spite of Jupiter's repeated insistences. He consequently allows himself to be killed by Oreste in the following scene without putting up any resistance. The source of Argos' dominant ideology can be said, at this point in the play, then, to contain a fundamental inconsistency, or to be fissured.

What Sartre's concept of bad faith and the Marxist concept of false consciousness have fundamentally in common, as analysis of the portrayal of the Argives in *Les Mouches* bears out, is the fact that they are both theoretical attempts to elucidate the reasons why individual subjects, and/or individual subjects who are members of social groups, suffer and endure unfreedom. Instances of the two concepts linking up closely, although often less easily identifiable than those in *Les Mouches*, can be found in a number of Sartre's literary works. Before moving on to discuss in greater detail specific issues relating to how these concepts connect with each other, I will highlight two rather more oblique examples, drawn from *La Nausée* and from *L'Age de raison* respectively. In

the former novel, Roquentin observes a petit bourgeois couple in the portrait gallery of the Bouville museum who, in so far as they are not only deeply impressed by but also in awe of the portraits of the high bourgeois leaders of the town, reveal themselves to be fully complicit with the dominant ideology which keeps them in a position of subordination. Their inauthenticity, clearly a case of bad faith in the strong sense, is closely related, then, to their being prey to false consciousness of the functional type. In *L'Age de raison*, there is the scene in which Mathieu visits his self-satisfied bourgeois brother Jacques to ask for financial help. From the outset, Mathieu is plagued by a feeling of intimidation and self-incrimination in Jacques' presence. Trying to make sense of this, Mathieu later examines, but then rejects, the idea that this is just an inferiority complex which he suffers in relation to his older sibling. In fact, what is represented in this discussion between the two brothers is Mathieu struggling against not only the psychological reflexes of a time-ingrained sibling rivalry but against the whole value system that his brother represents, namely bourgeois ideology. In so far as he does not succeed -- he proves unable to overcome fully his feelings of inferiority and guilt -- he can be said to be both in bad faith and to be harbouring false consciousness. Although he has rejected bourgeois ideology, he continues, to some extent, to identify with the bourgeois values and assumptions of his youth rather than acting on his freedom to reject them outright in order not to feel in any way intimidated. It would be greatly overstating the case to claim that Mathieu's bad faith in this example was of the strong variety. What is clear, though, is that Mathieu is unable to detach himself fully from an oppressive value system and can thus be said to be still in some sense ensuring its safe continuation. Indeed, one of the points of particular interest in this scene in *L'Age de raison* is that it stages a coincidence of false consciousness, and bad faith which is not of the strong variety. Whether or not Mathieu's bad faith here is of the weak type, or whether some other kind of bad faith -- not strong at any event -- which Catalano's conception of weak bad faith does not do full justice to is in evidence, is a matter which merits further consideration. Certainly, the example, like so many in Sartre's literature, brings added complexity to any account of the nature of the coincidence of bad faith and false consciousness in his work.

If Sartre and Marxist theorists share a desire to explain the reasons for the acceptance of unfreedom, it would appear that they take a rather different line on the question of who is responsible for this condition. Sartre holds that when we are in bad faith we are aware that we are lying to ourselves and therefore knowingly acquiesce to our self-deception. In the case of bad faith in the strong sense, this acquiescence extends of course to active participation in and full complicity with our inauthentic mode of being. Consequently, for Sartre, we are responsible for being in bad faith; it is our fault at a subjective level. Conversely, in many of the cases in which Marxists speak of people being prey to ideology in the pejorative sense, and of them therefore harbouring false consciousness, the underlying assumption is that those people are victims because they are unaware of the insidious ways in which that ideology is influencing them. Ideology, in such cases, is often presented as something which is foisted upon people by an oppressive power which is seeking to protect its own interests. For Marxists, then, it would seem that the victims of ideological mystification are not responsible for their condition. The classic example which is to be found in many areas of Marxist theorising and discourse is the idea that the

working class in capitalist society is kept in its place by being induced to internalize a set of values which serve to uphold the status quo even though those values are contrary to their real interests. This idea is to be found, again, in Gramsci's concept of hegemony and is founded on a strong appearance/reality distinction, that is the notion that the way people are induced to see things is not the way that they really are. However, it should be noted that the fact that the Marxist concept of false consciousness is based on the idea that people are unaware of the fact that they are mystified does not entail the idea that they are passive and do not participate in perpetuating the ruling ideology. Geuss' argument that there is a 'functional' form of false consciousness indicates that the ruling ideology which has disreputable origins ('genetic' false consciousness) is not only tacitly acquiesced to but is actively kept in place by the mystified through their subjective agency. In fact, it seems that the matter of whether an ascription of individual responsibility should be made rests ultimately on the question of what status theorists accord to subjective thought and its manifestations in action. Defenders of the false consciousness theory can answer the charge that individuals are ultimately responsible for their unfreedom, because they participate actively in its maintenance, with the claim that the collusive actions of those individuals are a direct product of their mystified thought. Individuals remain essentially blameless victims, then, because they are unaware of the implications of their actions. However, this reply to the existentialist is far from satisfactory because it seems implicitly to involve denying the individual subject's capacity for autonomous thought, and subsequently action, to an implausible degree. It cannot account at all successfully for those cases, for example, in which individuals who live in the same or very similar conditions, and who have been subject to the same kind of social conditioning, sometimes respond differently to their circumstances. Even if some Marxists might want to claim that such cases are the exception to the rule, they still cannot plausibly reject the existentialist's objection that they need to be theoretically accounted for nevertheless.

As I have already suggested, and as analysis of the portrayal of the Argives in *Les Mouches* bears out, the coincidence of bad faith and false consciousness often involves bad faith in the strong sense, although this is not exclusively the case. An individual is in bad faith in the strong sense because he actively identifies with a pre-defined social role, and there is a much higher probability that such an active identification with a role of this sort will be of significance in terms of a dominant ideology than will a resigned, habitual acceptance of a role. A pre-defined social role may well contribute to the maintenance of that ideology in the interests of an oppressor -- indeed, it may even have developed in accordance with the requirements exacted by that ideology -- and, hence, an active identification with it indicates the individual's willingness, whether knowingly or unknowingly,¹⁵ to serve those interests to the best of his ability. It would seem that this matter of willingness to identify with social roles bolsters the existentialist's case for imputing responsibility to the inauthentic and ideologically mystified individual. If it is the latter's willingness to participate in his role, which means that he better serves the dominant ideology, then surely, the existentialist could argue, the amount of responsibility attributed to him for what is, ultimately, his own and others' unfreedom must increase. However, the Marxist could reply to this, as before, that if the individual is nevertheless unaware that he is serving the dominant ideology and an oppressive power,

then he cannot be held responsible for his actions, however willingly he might be carrying them out. To which the existentialist could retort that being in strong rather than weak bad faith is optional -- not everybody chooses to be in strong bad faith -- and that the choice which this involves carries with it responsibility for serving the dominant ideology in a greater way. It would then remain to be decided to what extent individual choices are, in certain circumstances, conditioned by the values propagated by the dominant ideology in question and/or are determined to some extent by conditions of objective possibility of which, as Thomas Flynn has demonstrated, the Sartre of *L'Être et le néant* has only a limited conceptual awareness.¹⁶ In other words, the matter of whether individuals in certain circumstances -- notably in their professional lives -- are conditioned, or feel compelled -- perhaps threatened with unemployment -- to choose to be in bad faith in the strong rather than the weak sense would then have to be examined.

Although the majority of cases in which there is a coincidence of bad faith and false consciousness involve bad faith in the strong sense, it does not follow that manifestations of bad faith in the strong sense always involve false consciousness. Take the famous example of the waiter in *L'Être et le néant*. The waiter is in bad faith because he over-identifies with his role as a waiter thereby suppressing his fundamental freedom and individuality. He is in bad faith in the strong sense because he is fully complicit with his freedom-limiting role. And yet it would be unconvincing to claim that he is a victim of false consciousness because the role of waiter cannot plausibly be said to be a manifestation of, or to be in the service of, an oppressive ideology in any significant sense. Admittedly, it is a social role -- more precisely, in this particular case, a socio-professional role -- that is, a role constituted by ideas and values, developed and ingrained through social practice, and these are external to the individual who adopts them such that, when he does over-identify with them, he is alienated from himself as a free being capable of self-determination and self-definition. However, it would be highly implausible to call these ideas and values ideological. To do so would be to strip the concept of ideology of all its force because it would follow that just about any social role could be called ideological. Why would it be valid to label the waiter's bad faith ideological and not, say, that of a secretary or that of a pretentious golfer? What would have to be behind the claim that individuals in these roles are not only in bad faith but also harbouring false consciousness is the conviction that the roles in question serve as constituents of the ideological supports of capitalism. Yet such a conviction would be hard to countenance as such social roles are relatively unpolitical in nature. Indeed, just about *any* kind of developed society, including non-capitalist societies, might have waiters and secretaries who are in bad faith in the strong sense. The objection might of course be raised that in capitalist society a person who is occupying the role of waiter is, *as a waiter*, also a member of a relatively underprivileged, and thus oppressed social class, and that the fact of his being a waiter rather than, say, a monopoly capitalist, is hardly politically insignificant. But this line of argument involves, strictly speaking, progressing from the question we set out to answer to a different, even if related and important, question. For the matter in hand concerns the freedom of the individual subsumed in the role of waiter, and the role of waiter in relation to a dominant ideology, and not that of the waiter as member of an oppressed social class. The point is that when

the individual over-identifies with his role as waiter he is not, by that act in itself, buying into and contributing to the maintenance of an oppressive ideology.

A possible objection to my argument so far might be that the principal evidence I have adduced to support my claim that there is a conceptual relationship to be accounted for between bad faith and false consciousness has been drawn from *Les Mouches* and that this play presents examples of unfreedom which are rather untypical of those to be found in Sartre's literary and theoretical writings in general. Indeed, it is true that Sartre's other texts provide fewer examples of ideology generated by and in the service of intentionally oppressive powers. And it has to be admitted that *Les Mouches* lends itself particularly well to a Marxist interpretation of ideology. Yet, it is important to note first that, as the examples from *La Nausée* and *L'Age de raison* highlighted earlier indicate, instances of this or a similar kind of ideology are nevertheless present in Sartre's other works, even if they appear less frequently and are often less easily apparent. And second, that the image of bad faith which Sartre presents in *Les Mouches*, although perhaps contrasting with that depicted in many of his other works, is not for all that inconsistent with those other representations. Examination of the chapter devoted to bad faith in *L'Être et le néant*, for instance, reveals that important aspects of Sartre's theoretical formulation of bad faith harmonise closely with the image of the phenomenon presented by the portrayal of the Argives' unfreedom. Sartre states, for example, that although bad faith implies the unity of one consciousness, this does not mean that such bad faith 'ne puisse être conditionnée par le 'mitsein', comme d'ailleurs tous les phénomènes de la réalité humaine'.¹⁷ This clearly suggests that Sartre does not rule out the possibility of cultural conditioning because he recognizes that the individual subject, although irreducible as a consciousness to any sort of social collectivity, is nevertheless not immune to the influence of her fellow-subjects. It is not impossible, Sartre therefore indicates, that bad faith be learnt or acquired by the individual subject in her social context. This is highly significant in terms of relating the concept of bad faith to that of false consciousness because it is clear that the success of a dominant ideology, like that represented in *Les Mouches*, depends to a significant degree on cultural conditioning for the propagation and maintenance of its constituent ideas and values. Sartre also states that bad faith, although a fundamentally unstable phenomenon, does not tend to be merely transitory and fleeting in its appearances: 'elle peut même être l'aspect normal de la vie pour un très grand nombre de personnes. On peut *vivre* dans la mauvaise foi, ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'on n'ait de brusques réveils de cynisme ou de bonne foi, mais ce qui implique un style de vie constant et particulier'.¹⁸ For the reasons highlighted and discussed above, it would seem to be more than merely coincidental that the Argives both live habitually in bad faith and have also been under the influence of an insidious and freedom-limiting ideology for many years. Sartre goes on to claim that '[I]e véritable problème de la mauvaise foi vient évidemment de ce que la mauvaise foi est *foi*';¹⁹ bad faith is an act of self-deception that we are fundamentally aware of, but this does not mean that we do not habitually believe in the lenitive distorted notions about our real condition which we entertain, because we do. Bad faith, then, like false consciousness, is not a condition which we can escape from in any simple or obvious way. It may be that being in bad faith involves a choice, whereas harbouring false consciousness essentially does not because it is foisted upon us from without, but this choice is not one that is easy to correct. Inauthenticity, then, in the

Sartrean schema, is a pervasive and enduring phenomenon rather as false consciousness for Marxists is. The final footnote of the chapter on bad faith in *L'Être et le néant* states that it is nevertheless not the case that 'on ne puisse échapper radicalement à la mauvaise foi. Mais cela suppose une reprise de l'être pourri par lui-même que nous nommerons authenticité'.²⁰ Here, Sartre is of course pointing in the direction of the ethics of conversion which he would attempt to give theoretical expression to in his *Cahiers pour une morale*. Overcoming inauthenticity, then, requires a special effort, rather as seeing beyond the limitations imposed by a ruling ideology must surely do too. With regard to the apparent particularity of the portrayal of bad faith in *Les Mouches*, it is important to note that the fact that bad faith is perhaps not presented in such a way as to seem as complicit with ideology in the pejorative sense in many of Sartre's other writings as it is in *Les Mouches* takes nothing at all away from the fact it is portrayed in this way in this play. *Les Mouches*, with its portrayal of a community that is oppressed by an evil oligarchy, reveals, albeit in a rather particular way as I shall argue, one of the many dimensions of the Sartrean concept of bad faith -- namely, bad faith in conjunction with an ideologically oppressed condition -- and there is no reason to consider this particular dimension less important than the others.

The ultimate criterion for deciding whether a case of bad faith also involves the harbouring of false consciousness relates, more often than not, to the matter of whether there is an oppressive power of some sort or another -- and these come in many and diverse forms -- which is benefiting in some way from the unfreedom of the oppressed and thus has an interest, whether this interest is actively pursued or not, in ensuring the maintenance of an ideology which has psychologically restrictive effects. That bad faith should be in the strong rather than weak sense is in many cases -- though not without exceptions -- a necessary but not sufficient condition for there to be a coincidence of the two phenomena. And an ideology which does not have any beneficiary whatsoever would be such a weak form of ideology in the pejorative sense as to barely merit categorization as such. It remains to be asked, however, exactly how bad faith and false consciousness, in those cases in which they do both present themselves, work together in mutually complementary ways to produce the unfreedom of individual subjects. Our discussion of the question of an individual's responsibility or non-responsibility for his own unfreedom seemed to point to the conclusion that the theoretical bases for the concepts of bad faith and false consciousness were so different as to rule out a viable cross-fertilisation of the two concepts. And yet, as our analysis of the unfreedom of the Argives in *Les Mouches* revealed, in certain situations bad faith and false consciousness do seem to form a powerful unity in terms of the effects they produce in the individual subject. I would like to suggest that, in the case of *Les Mouches* at least, bad faith can perhaps be profitably seen as being in some sense inscribed within and harnessed by the dominant ideology. In so far as one of Sartre's Argives identifies with the guilt culture (his accorded role) and therefore puts himself in bad faith in the strong sense, he is also harbouring false consciousness because he is the victim of Argos' oppressive ideology. Clearly, it is in the interests of his oppressors that he be in bad faith in the strong sense because it is only then that he becomes complicit with the dominant ideology, and it may be fair to argue even that his bad faith has been induced in him, through cultural conditioning, by that ideology. This conclusion amounts to claiming that bad faith in the strong sense can be in

fact a function of ideology in the pejorative sense. If this argument seems plausible with regard to *Les Mouches*, it is harder to defend, however, as an analysis of many other situations in which there is a coincidence of bad faith and false consciousness. In *Les Mouches*, the social role which the Argives are expected to identify with -- that of feeling constantly guilty -- is in fact one and the same thing as the dominant ideology itself. This means that there is no discrepancy in their case between being in bad faith in the strong sense and harbouring false consciousness. Other cases are often more complex and do not yield as easily to this kind of argument. A relatively underprivileged individual, for example, who is under the impression that the iniquities sustained by the capitalist system are justified because everyone has an equal chance in life to find their pot of gold -- it hasn't been him yet but if he tries harder it may be one day -- would quite possibly consent willingly to identify with his socio-professional role as a local shopkeeper. He is in bad faith in the strong sense and is harbouring false consciousness but, in this case, these phenomena designate two different things: an over-identification with the role of shopkeeper, and ideological beliefs which suggest collectively that capitalism is basically a fair system. Consequently, his being in bad faith is not one and the same thing as his being under the influence of an oppressive ideology. However, it does not seem unreasonable still to want to claim that this individual's bad faith is in some sense inscribed in the dominant ideology. After all, it would appear to be more than coincidental that his identification with his role, and consequent reluctance to question capitalism, serves well an ideology which acts to legitimate an economically iniquitous system. Yet, it seems that to argue this claim convincingly might require moving onto the terrain of class analysis -- to contend, for example, that the chances of him making it, as the member of an underprivileged class, are small and that his identification with his socio-professional role in fact principally serves the interests of the privileged classes of capitalist society. Such a move, as I indicated earlier, involves departing from the question, strictly conceived, of how bad faith and false consciousness relate to each other.

If what I have argued in the last paragraph is plausible, then it seems that the nature of the depiction of the coincidence of bad faith and false consciousness in *Les Mouches* is, in fact, something of a special case and not one which should be assumed to be representative of many of the situations in which both bad faith in the strong sense and ideology in the pejorative sense are present at the same time. Certainly, the example of the shopkeeper is much more representative than that of the Argives of the typical forms of ideological unfreedom to be found in capitalist society. And yet, a recognition of the real nature of the coincidence of bad faith and false consciousness in *Les Mouches* surely suggests the possibility of incorporating an existentialist, subject-based view of inauthenticity into a Marxist conception of ideology in the pejorative sense just as, clearly, it also highlights the value of complementing such a subject-based view of inauthenticity with such a conception of ideology. One of Sartre's ideologically dominated Argives, for the reasons indicated above, is of course much more unfree, in terms of the coincidence of bad faith and false consciousness in his subjective experience, than the majority of oppressed individuals under capitalism can be said to be (if one omits to discuss the dimension of economic unfreedom under capitalism, nonetheless crucial to analyses along social class lines). The shopkeeper, owing to the fact that there is a discrepancy between his bad faith and his false consciousness, has the possibility

perhaps of backing out of his bad faith in the strong sense into a weaker form of it, and perhaps of calling into question the dominant ideology which works to uphold capitalism. The Argive, conversely, is trapped in a vicious circle whereby the dominant ideology, that is to say false consciousness at the level of his subjective experience, ensures that he remains in bad faith in the strong sense, and this latter secures the safe continuation of the dominant ideology. However, although the image of the coincidence of bad faith in the strong sense and false consciousness which Sartre presents in *Les Mouches* cannot be said to be representative of those situations in capitalist society in which there is also a coincidence of the two, what can be fairly concluded is that Sartre's conception of inauthenticity -- even if fundamentally conceptually distinct from the Marxist conception of ideology in the pejorative sense -- harmonises with this latter, at least with regard to the experience that each phenomenon produces in the individual subject. That experience, in both cases characterized by unfreedom at the level of thought, is more or less one and the same, and consists in psychological constraints on the possibility of positive action, by which I mean, in this context, thought and action which leads to a greater amount of real personal freedom. Both backing out of bad faith in the strong sense and liberating oneself to some extent from the influence of an oppressive dominant ideology are surely ways to increase the one's real freedom.

It would perhaps now be fitting to draw some general conclusions about how bad faith and false consciousness, and hence inauthenticity and ideology in the pejorative sense more broadly conceived, relate to each other. Perhaps the most important point is that, according to the Sartrean world view, bad faith is a necessary pre-condition for false consciousness whereas the contrary is not the case. That is, an individual subject can be in a state of inauthenticity without being under the influence of an oppressive dominant ideology and yet, to be ideologically oppressed he must necessarily also be inauthentic. This is not surprising given that, as I indicated above, Sartre derives his concept of ideology from his ontologically-based conception of inauthenticity. It is a sort of conceptual epiphenomenon. And if it is possible to be inauthentic without being under the influence of an ideology, then it follows that the overcoming of bad faith to reach a state of authenticity, on Sartre's view, will not be secured simply by mentally defeating such an ideology. Rather as the early Sartre lacks a conceptually independent theory of ideology, theoretical accounts of inauthenticity at the level of the individual subject have not been the primary concern of Marxist philosophy, on the other hand, but, as I have suggested, the position which would be most coherent with its other postulates would in all probability be, conversely, to inscribe inauthenticity within ideology. *Les Mouches* brings added complexity to and, in terms of its portrayal of ideology, even stands in paradoxical relation to Sartre's theoretical position because, as I argued above, it lends itself to a Marxist interpretation of the functioning of ideology in the pejorative sense. And yet, Sartre's existentialist insistence elsewhere on the inalienable capacity of individuals to make choices and on their responsibility for the choices that they make, highlights the weaknesses of such a view of ideology. With regard to less extreme cases of ideological oppression than that in Sartre's Argos, a viable theory has to be able to account not only for instances of ideological incorporation but also for those individuals who explicitly contest the dominant ideology and even escape its influence to some extent. In so far as this is the case, it is clear that a convincing Marxist theory of ideology

in the pejorative sense should include an explicit recognition of the existential dimension of individual subjects' lives. In this regard, the phenomenologico-ontological preoccupations of the early Sartre can be seen as of great value to Marxism.

The false consciousness theory is, of course, only one of a range of theories of ideology, and to have discussed the relationship between it and Sartre's concept of bad faith is to have only examined the relationship of the early Sartre to ideology in one perspective. What will perhaps stand out above all as conspicuously absent from this discussion, in view of the high incidence of the phenomenon in Sartre's various depictions of ideology at work, is any consideration of the functioning of ideology in the positive sense. In so far as bad faith can be seen to harmonize with the concept of false consciousness, it can be seen as part of a project of radical political critique. Sartre's underlying motivation, and indeed initial stimulus to theorize inauthenticity, was his hatred of bourgeois society, whereas the Marxist target is of course the ideological supports of capitalism; in reality, the enemy of one camp is not so dissimilar from that of the other. And yet, at least as many examples in Sartre's texts of inauthenticity in the form of submersion of individual freedom in ideology involve contestatory forms of ideology, that is types of ideology which positively put forward an agenda which challenges the ideologico-political and/or socio-cultural status quo in some significant way. In this regard, Sartre's most common target is (entirely unparadoxically, moreover) the 'vulgar' Marxism of his Stalinist communist contemporaries. Hence, Brunet in *Les Chemins de la liberté* is every bit as inauthentic for Sartre as the ideologically incorporated petit bourgeois couple at the Bouville museum are in *La Nausée*. Having examined some of the limitations of Sartre's existentialist view of inauthenticity in relation to the concept of ideology in the pejorative sense (and vice versa), it is worth noting briefly that there are equally some considerable difficulties involved in Sartre's similarly extrapolating his attitude towards ideology in the *positive* sense, as he does, from his ontologically-based conception of inauthenticity. If all ideology in the positive sense is to be rejected because, as with ideology in the pejorative sense, it involves the alienation of individuals' ontological freedom, then it must surely follow that not only Stalinist Marxism has to be rejected but also many powerfully contestatory ideologies -- such as Marxian philosophy, non-Stalinist Marxist theories, feminism, anti-colonial ideologies, and perhaps even existentialism itself -- with which the political left has traditionally been in sympathy, as was Sartre himself. All of which suggests strongly that the philosophy of the early Sartre was, with respect to his reading of ideology in the positive sense, at odds with his nascent political theory, an inconsistency which his work from the late 1940s up until *La Critique de la raison dialectique* would gradually but surely remedy.

Notes

- [1](#) Indeed, to my knowledge, no major study of the early Sartre has centered on this subject, and it seems to have been curiously overlooked even in works focusing on Sartre's work in relation to questions of political theory.
- [2](#) Tom Flynn's work on the early Sartre exemplifies my point here admirably. See *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), Part I pp. 3-48.
- [3](#) Joseph Catalano 'Good and Bad Faith: Weak and Strong Notions' (1993), re-printed in W. McBride *Existentialist Ethics* (1997).
- [4](#) *Ibid* p. 125.
- [5](#) Terry Eagleton *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991). See pp. 24-25, p. 43, p. 233.
- [6](#) Raymond Geuss *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- [7](#) *Ibid* p. 12, points out that he is using 'the term "form of consciousness" to refer to a particular constellation of beliefs, attitudes, dispositions, etc.'
- [8](#) *Ibid* pp. 13-15, on epistemic falsehood.
- [9](#) See *Ibid* pp. 15-21, for a much more detailed account of the functional and genetic types of false consciousness. I have cited only those aspects of these types of ideology in the pejorative sense which are of value to the attempt at conceptual cross-fertilization with bad faith.
- [10](#) *Les Mouches*, published in *Huis Clos suivi de Les Mouches* (Gallimard, 1947) p. 200.
- [11](#) Geuss op. cit. p. 14.
- [12](#) *Les Mouches* Act II, scenes 1-3.
- [13](#) *Ibid* p. 115.
- [14](#) *Ibid* p. 200.
- [15](#) It is worth noting that the fact that an individual who is in bad faith is, according to Sartre, always fundamentally aware that she is in bad faith does not entail the idea that, in the cases in which that individual is also serving the interests of the propagator of an oppressive dominant ideology, she is aware that she is serving those interests. Indeed, if she were aware of this she would in all probability not be harbouring false consciousness at all.

[16](#) Flynn op. cit. pp. 75-8.

[17](#) *L'Être et le néant* p. 84.

[18](#) *Ibid* p. 85.

[19](#) *Ibid* p. 104.

[20](#) *Ibid* p. 107.