CHAPTER VIII

AUTHENTICITY AND OBLIGATION

Thus far, my discussion of the ethical theory of existentialism has concentrated almost exclusively on the evaluative judgments of individual human beings, and has attempted to define the nature of the freedom in which those evaluations are made. Nothing has been said about the moral relations in which such autonomous individuals stand to one another, nor about the compatibility of a general ethical theory of the type outlined in earlier chapters with a recognition of some kind of moral obligation toward other human beings. This lack of attention to the social aspect of morality, it must be admitted, reflects a corresponding neglect on the part of most of the existentialist writers; and this neglect has led many critics to conclude that the concepts used by the existentialists in the analysis of evaluation are radically incapable of dealing with the phenomenon of moral community and the complex moral relationships to other human beings which such community comports. This charge has at least a *prima facie* plausibility about it which makes it all the more necessary to explore in detail the implications of the views developed so far for the whole topic of moral relationships among human beings. In this chapter, I will attempt to show that, while the existentialists do not have a fully developed theory of obligation, they have presented in embryo at least a conception of what the basis of moral relations between human beings should be.

This apparent lack of interest on the part of the existentialists in the social dimension of morality is in striking contrast to the current orientation of much moral philosophy in the English-
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speaking world. On the whole, the latter may be said to assume the existence of a more or less stable and harmonious society with a developed moral code and a highly articulated set of concepts defining the different role-relationships in which human beings may stand to one another, as well as the rights and duties associated with these roles. Under these circumstances, the job of moral philosophy is typically conceived to be the making explicit of the principles and rules with which, in such a state as this, we are assumed to be familiar, even if we may be unable to state them very clearly. Usually the acceptance of such rules is taken for granted and is not itself the subject of inquiry; but when a justification of the whole corpus of moral principles is called for, it is characteristically provided by arguments showing that an acceptance of these principles is in some sense definitive of human nature. Since the human nature such writers have in mind is, in fact, the fully moralized human nature of a stable and relatively harmonious society, there is a sense in which in spite of its circularity this argument can claim a certain rough truth. In any case, one main result of approaching the subject matter of morality from this angle is that purely individual decisions (i.e., decisions for which a determinate moral context is lacking), are treated either as external to the whole province of morality, or are assigned to the interstices of the moral life in which the moral rules we do accept leave us free either to act or not to act in a certain way.

If we consider the examples used by the existentialists from this point of view, sharply different presuppositions immediately become evident. These examples almost uniformly concern individuals who are forced to act under circumstances in which the support given by established moral institutions is for one reason or another unavailable. Even when the background of choice is a functioning society to which the moral agent belongs, it is usually described in such a way as to undermine any assumption that a

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moral consensus or any genuine moral reciprocity exists. The paradigm situation from which a general characterization of morality is to be derived is thus one in which the individual moral agent is compelled to choose and to act in isolation from, or in the absence of, any collectively accepted and reciprocally applied body of moral rules. Correspondingly, the "normal" situation in which such guidance and support are available receives relatively little attention from the existentialists. Since action in such circumstances is, as we shall see, permanently threatened with "in-authenticity," it qualifies at best as a borderline example of the "moral." The latter is thus made coextensive with the whole province of human action, and no special importance is attached to the distinction between broader questions of individual self-determination and the kinds of question that are usually thought of as being answered by reference not to an individual ideal but to a rule that is common to at least some group of human beings. Instead of excluding the former—as often happens—from the moral sphere because they do not clearly involve the application of shared rules, the existentialists tend to feel that rule-governed situations can be included within it only to the extent that they can be shown to involve individual choice. Or, to put the same point another way, morality as a whole is the province of individual self-determination, and the social dimension of morality and relationships with others come in simply as one element in the design of an individual life.

It would be unprofitable here to debate the advantages and disadvantages of a conception of morality that takes individual choice in its purest form as its paradigm case, and sees in shared moral rules only a special case of individual self-determination.3 The more important issue is to determine just how adequate an account of the moral relationships among human beings can be given by a theory that sets out from these root assumptions. As I have already indicated this inquiry carries one well beyond the limits of any moral theory that has so far been provided by the leading figures in the existentialist movement. In fact, it assumes

3 An interesting discussion of the place of "rules" and "ideals" within morality as a whole can be found in P. Strawson, "Social Morality and Individual Ideals," Philosophy, Vol. 36 (1961), pp. 1-17.
the character of an effort to expand the few hints and suggestions that have been thrown out into a positive account of moral obligation. The possibility of such an extension of existentialist ethical theory is precisely what I want to establish in this chapter. Before undertaking this task, it will be useful to examine a little more closely some of the reasons that have made the existentialists so reluctant to develop any account of obligation at all.

I

It is not difficult to locate the sources of the antipathy which the concept of obligation typically evokes in existentialist philosophers. The root notion in that concept is one of being bound in the sense of being subject to an effective restriction on the permissible range of human choice. Traditionally, this restriction itself has been thought of as independent of, and unremovable by, human volition. Indeed, many moralists have argued that it must be independent of choice if we are to be able to talk—as we all do—of what we ought to do even when we do not do it. If morality were, at bottom, a matter of will and choice as the existentialists believe, then all obligations would be self-imposed. An obligation I have created, however, is one from which I can release myself; and the latter, so the argument goes, is no obligation at all. Particularly in cases in which our practice is at variance with our declared principles, the decision to act in a way that violates a recognized obligation might appear to be tantamount to such a release; and the sense in which, barring special circumstances, one could still be said to believe sincerely that acting otherwise would really have been right becomes very unclear. Moreover, beyond this special difficulty, there is the general problem of how the will can bind itself at all if it is not confronted with objective

4 The view that moral obligation must be independent of human volition should not be confused—although it often is—with the quite different requirement that it be of such a nature that there can be conflicts between what we want to do and what it is our obligation to do. Sartre, as his theory of obligation shows, is certainly prepared to recognize that conflicts of the latter type occur but at the same time he holds that obligation as such is constituted by joint acts of choice.
moral relationships in re and, as Hume said, "has no object to which it could tend but must return to itself in infinitum."\(^5\) A will-created obligation would thus turn out to be simply an indefinitely prolonged series of acts of will which could never produce an uncancellable change in the "relation of objects" by which it would then be bound. By contrast, a truly binding obligation must have its basis outside the will, and would impose a restriction upon the will in much the same way as the antecedent determinacy of fact is supposed to define the goal of theoretical inquiry. Once the meta-ethical stamp of intellectualism is thus set upon the concept of obligation at the very outset, it becomes automatically unincorporable into any ethical theory based on the idea of moral autonomy; and it is to this fact that the existentialists' avoidance of the concept of obligation can most obviously be traced.\(^6\)

There are, however, other sources of this negative attitude toward the concept of obligation that are internal to the existentialist analysis of human being itself. For the existentialist, and for Sartre in particular, the primordial relationship in which every human being stands to every other tends to be one of conflict.\(^7\) This is not to deny that agreement and cooperation among


\(^6\) Thus, I would interpret Sartre's very strong denial that anything can oblige me to adopt any course of action (L'Être et le néant, p. 69) not as a denial of the possibility of obligation as such but rather of there being obligations which simply confront the moral agent without his having in any way helped create them. It should be noted, also, that Sartre speaks of the unavoidability of choice as "une obligation perpetuelle," but this use of the term is so different both from traditional conceptions of obligation and from Sartre's own conception of self-created obligations that I have not given it any special attention.

\(^7\) "Le conflit est le sens originel de l'être-pour-autrui" (L'Être et le néant, p. 431). In Pt. 3, ch. 3, of L'Être et le néant, Sartre seeks to establish this thesis by detailed analyses of "les relations concrètes avec autrui," among them love, hate, and sexual desire; and in each case he argues that we are caught between the alternatives of sadism and masochism, of treating the other as an object for one's self, or oneself as an object for the other. While neither of these strategies can succeed in suppressing our awareness of subjectivity and freedom—whether our own or the other's—Sartre insists that the disjunction they form is exhaustive. "C'est . . . en vain que la réalité-humaine cherche-
human beings ever occur, nor is it to attribute a disposition to hostile and aggressive behavior to all human beings. Like Hegel in his famous analysis of the dialectic of the master and the slave, Sartre has in mind a type of conflict that is rooted in the very structure of the reciprocal relationship in which two human consciousnesses stand to one another. The basis of this conflict is moral, and it lies in the fact that there can be no guarantee that the choices made by the "other" as an autonomous moral being will coincide with, or even be compatible with, my own. The appearance of another being enjoying the same moral freedom as I do is thus a challenge to, and a potential disruption of, "my" moral world which the other may well perceive simply as a set of facts or objects cut off from the context of possibility and first-personal choice with which I endow them. Since another human being cannot be the effort of transcendence that I am, and within which I experience and give meaning to my world, he can only know me and my world in the objective mode and this knowing collapses the properly evaluative dimension of my actions and leaves them stranded as so many natural events awaiting another evaluative interpretation which may or may not coincide with mine. Because this "collapsing-cognitive" apprehension of my values as "mere facts" is conceived by Sartre to be primary and inescapable in my relationship to other human beings, the advent of the "other" is a harbinger of conflict and not of concord. Even if the other moral consciousness proved to be in harmony with my own evaluations, there could be no guarantee of the indefinite continu-

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8 Sartre's most powerful description of this antagonistic relationship of human consciousnesses to one another can be found in the section entitled "Le regard," Pt. 5, ch. 1, of *L'Être et le néant*. Sartre's play, *Huis Clos*, has the same theme.
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uation of that harmony in which the possibility of conflict is therefore always latent. Thus, either by anticipation or in actual fact, the presence of another autonomous moral being like myself imposes upon me the ordeal of having my actions “devaluated” in the medium of another consciousness. In its most radical form, this devaluation may extend not just to the evaluative ordering of my world which I effect through my actions and choices, but to my very status as a moral personality. That is to say, another moral consciousness can do more than simply evaluate a situation differently from the way I do and thereby reduce my evaluations to the status of “facts.” It can also deny me the status of a moral agent altogether and treat me merely as an instrument to—or an obstacle in the way of—the realization of its own values. It can, in short, treat me as a thing rather than as a person, and repudiate or never recognize at all those principles of reciprocity that hold between human persons who mutually recognize one another as such. The appearance of an alien moral consciousness involves not just the threat of a conflict with my “values,” but the threat of my being absorbed into the moral world of the other through being denied recognition as an autonomous moral being.

When views such as these of other human beings as primarily sources of ultimate moral conflict dominate a theory of human relationships, it is not surprising that there should be little place within the latter for a doctrine of moral obligation. Sartre has, in fact, sometimes written as though there were no possibility of any genuine mutuality among human beings—only the alternatives of an aggressive imposition of one’s own moral perspective upon others, or a kind of masochistic submission to their aggression. But this is not the whole story. Sartre is at least as emphatic in his assertion that the refusal of recognition to alien moral personalities, like the refusal to recognize one’s own autonomy, can “succeed” only through what he calls “bad faith.” That is, in order to seal off my world from the intrusions of an independent moral consciousness, I must first locate and identify the latter, much in the way in which the hypnotic subject must “know” where a given object is in order not to be able to find it. Sartre’s point is that there is an internal contradiction in such denials of moral

9 L’Être et le néant, p. 502.
personality to which there corresponds a very special duplicity or dishonesty in our relation to ourselves. More generally, in spite of his very sharp distinction between the evaluative sense that my actions have for me and the moral appreciation that may be made of them by others, Sartre recognizes that we cannot simply dismiss or disallow the image others form of us. In one dimension of our being—the public and the social dimension—we are, so he says, what we are for others; we cannot invoke our own conflicting sense of ourselves to invalidate that public assessment of what we are. Sartre does not, it is true, develop this doctrine of publicity and of the authority of an external view of our actions as the basis for a theory of obligation; and he sometimes seems to be saying merely that we must accept the fact that we are for others something quite different from what we are for ourselves. But elsewhere in his writings he does appear to be defending—and even pressing to the limits of paradox—the view that it is the public signification of my actions that is controlling in moral contexts, and that to the degree that the moral consciousness issues into the world and creates or accepts definite relationships to others, it cannot by itself control, in the sense of modifying by its own individual fiat, its situation vis-à-vis those persons. In this sense at least, "being bound" is an inescapable feature of any moral experience that is more than a private reverie.

As I have already noted, it is in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty that a recognition of the central importance of this element of publicity receives a specifically moral interpretation, and some suggestive hints are given as to the way in which a theory of moral community might be developed in a manner compatible

10 For Sartre, the experience of shame is "une reconnaissance de ce que je suis bien cet objet qu'autrui regarde et juge." (L'Être et le néant, p. 319.) As one would expect, Merleau-Ponty's conception of the relationship among human consciousnesses differs significantly from Sartre's. For Merleau-Ponty, the consciousness of the other as an object is exceptional and marks a withdrawal from a shared understanding that human beings have of themselves and of others as active, purposive beings. See *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 412 ff.

11 It does not, of course, follow that we are the prisoners of the other in the sense of having to accept our identity for the other as our own sense of ourselves. As Sartre says, "je m'échappe d'autrui en lui laissant mon Moi aliené entre les mains." (L'Être et le néant, p. 345.)
with the fundamental existentialist doctrine that all morality rests ultimately on choice. Where Sartre is willing to recognize only the self-defining activity of human consciousness, set over against the moral opacity of the en-soi, Merleau-Ponty introduces a third, intermediate level—that of collective, funded meanings—which constitutes precisely the impersonal moral milieu in which most of our experience is situated. Not to reject the evaluations that are proposed to us by the community in which we live, is not ipso facto to choose them unless, Merleau-Ponty argues, we are prepared to suppress the distinction between our ordinary mode of consciousness and the specially cultivated mode in which all choice situations are antecedently marked out as such.\textsuperscript{12} Merleau-Ponty is even willing to go so far as to say that, if negation is the basic attribute of subjectivity, it is possible only by virtue of the tissue of collective meanings upon which it supervenes.\textsuperscript{13} No one of these has for Merleau-Ponty, any more than for Sartre, a compulsory hold upon the individual moral agent; but if he can opt out of any one of them, he can do so only in favor of another publicly defined mode of construing a certain type of situation, which may be recognized already, or which may have yet to establish its credentials.

Merleau-Ponty is here emphasizing, against Sartre and Heidegger, the essential place of the “On” or “Das Man” in any adequate account of the moral life. These writers condemn the anonymity of all “values” that are not, in the first instance, one’s own first-personal choices, and see in any reliance upon collectively held standards of evaluation and action the antithesis of the fully self-conscious autonomy which they call authenticity. By contrast,

\textsuperscript{12} Phénoménologie de la perception, p. 516. The central difference between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty on this point is not that the latter recognizes the “solicitation” of the social milieu—Sartre recognizes that just as clearly—but rather that Merleau-Ponty attributes a “privileged” status to long-established policies and does not feel that “la généralité du rôle” must be consciously assumed in a purely individual choice as Sartre appears to do. (See L’Être et le néant, pp. 602–03.)

\textsuperscript{13} “Si c’est par la subjectivité que le néant apparaît dans le monde, on peut dire aussi que c’est par le monde que le néant vient à l’être. Je suis un refus général d’être quoi que ce soit accompagnée en sous-main d’une acceptation continuelle de telle forme d’être qualifiée (Phénoménologie de la perception, p. 516).
Merleau-Ponty views the mediating function of public "meanings" as an indispensable element in the dialectic between the individual and the moral community to which he belongs. It would be a great mistake, however, to suppose that he assigns to these impersonal significations any kind of objectivity in the sense of ultimate independence of choice that is denied them by Sartre or Heidegger. His point is simply that individual choice exercises itself, not in the first instance upon all the logically possible options associated with a given situation, but rather upon the standing, socially established ways of interpreting those situations. He is also recognizing the fact that these evaluations present themselves with a certain impersonality, and that when we simply "go along" with them as most of us do most of the time, we are doing something that is subtly different from what we do when we explicitly adopt or reject them. The dialectic of moral self-definition is thus a confrontation of individual choice and established moral codes, and not, except in extreme cases, one between individual choice and an en-soi that has been stripped of all the accretions that an established moral tradition in a historically continuous society imposes upon it.

It has been widely recognized among existentialists that the true locus of these collective evaluations is the language we use. This is true of the writers who like Heidegger and Sartre are most insistently hostile to all supra-individual tendencies in morality, and also of those who like Merleau-Ponty recognize the interdependence of individual choice and cumulative or "funded" evaluations. In Merleau-Ponty's own words, the function of language is to make us see ourselves as another "other," that is, to es-

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14 See for example his Phénoménologie de la perception, pp. 518–19.
15 Thus Sartre can say that "(la totalité du langage) ne peut rien être si ce n'est la praxis elle-même en tant qu'elle se manifeste directement à autrui, le langage est praxis comme relation pratique d'un homme à un autre et la praxis est toujours langage par ce qu'elle ne peut se faire sans signifier. . . . En fait les 'relations humaines' sont des structures interindividuelles dont le langage est le lieu commun." (Critique de la raison dialectique, p. 180.) In spite of the Marxist overtones of this passage, its meaning is not really very different from Heidegger's characterization of speech as "das 'bedeutende' Gliedern der Verständlichkeit des In-der-Welt-seins, dem das Mitsein zugehört, und das sich je in einer bestimmten Weise des besorgenden Miteinanderseins hält." (Sein und Zeit, p. 161.)
Establish an intersubjective milieu within which the privileged position of the self is suppressed in favor of a standpointless and neutral mode of reference to all selves. Similarly, when our choices receive expression in language, they are cast into a medium over which no individual has complete control, and which can therefore serve to express the joint evaluative attitudes of many. This is preeminently not a language in which a sharp distinction is made between our characterization of “situations” and our evaluative construals of them. When we use the words of this language to convey our own individual attitudes and choices, the latter are thereby subtly modified because the public language in which they are expressed lends them certain implications and subjects them to certain criteria of reasonableness that may run counter to the actual sense of our choice and may even cause our own judgments to appear “alien” to us. This phenomenon of the alienation of moral attitudes when they come to be expressed in a public and objective language has generated a counter-demand for the no doubt impossible elimination of all dependence upon an established moral consensus in our language and our personal moral choices. The real point of the existentialist argument on this issue, as it emerges from Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Sartre, is not that we are, or should ideally be, entirely free of all dependence upon an inter-monde of public moral meanings; but rather that, whatever our degree of commitment to the latter, we can never be finally locked into any set of evaluations by the logic of our language. Certainly the very impersonality of the moral concepts we use, coming down to us as they do from a nameless past, conceals their origins in choice. When this happens, the rationality and order that are the achievement of a progressive systematization of individual choices come to be regarded as transcriptions of a rationality that is somehow implicit in the very situations with which our moral codes and concepts are designed to deal. In these circumstances, the inhibitions against revisionary individual choices are no longer just the practical difficulties that are inevitable whenever a system of commitments is called into question, but the kind of logical and metaphysical difficulty that

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prevents an individual from even thinking of himself as a potential critic of the code he has inherited. What the existentialists have done is precisely to resist the sorcery of language by which the objectivity of an established social consensus as reflected in the articulation of our moral concepts becomes confused with another kind of objectivity that choice is powerless to modify.

Nevertheless, important as all these observations on the role of publicity in the moral life undoubtedly are, they remain undeveloped in the writings of the existentialists. Their most serious attempt to provide a constructive theory of moral relationships among human beings is to be sought instead in their elaboration of the notion of authenticity, and in their effort to show that the very autonomy which as we have seen defines the moral condition of man, can also yield a principle of reciprocity on which a human community can be founded. I turn now to an examination of this doctrine of authenticity with a view to determining whether or not the existentialists are right in thinking that a positive ethic can be founded on the concept of moral autonomy.  

While both Heidegger and Sartre disclaim any intention of drawing directly normative conclusions from their "ontologies" of human existence, and deny indeed that any such can be drawn, there can be no doubt that both of them in fact make a normative use of the concept of autonomy. In Heidegger's case, it is quite clear that the denial of normative intentions has to do with the possibility of using his theory of Dasein to generate answers to specific questions about what is right and wrong. (See Sein und Zeit, pp. 294, 298, 312). Heidegger himself states that "der durchgeführten ontologischen Interpretation der Existenz des Daseins liegt ... eine bestimmte ontische Auffassung von eigentlicher Existenz, sein faktisches Ideal des Daseins zugrunde." (p. 310). He goes on to say that while "existentielle" or, as one might say, "second-level" analysis can never authoritatively settle "existentielle" or "first-level" questions about possible courses of action and obligations, it nevertheless has a certain "first-level" content.

"Wenn das Sein des Daseins wesenhaft Seinkönnen ist und Freisein für seine eigenen Möglichkeiten, und wenn es je nur in der Freiheit bzw. Unfreiheit gegen sie existiert, vermag dann die ontologische Interpretation Anderes als ontische Möglichkeiten (Weisen des Seinkönnens) zugrunde zulegen und diese auf ihre ontologische Möglichkeit zu entwerfen? Wenn die Analytik als existentiell eigentliches Seinkönnen die vorlaufende Entscheidlosenheit zugrundelegt, ist diese Möglichkeit dann eine beliebige?" (Sein und Zeit, pp. 312–13.)

To this last question Heidegger's answer is plainly "No"; and he develops a theory of conscience according to which Dasein constantly calls itself back
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II

Up to this point, moral autonomy has been described simply as a state in which human beings find themselves. Unavoidably, they see their situation in terms of possible alternatives among which they must choose; but they do not choose to see the world in this way. So conceived, moral autonomy is not itself the source of any directives for human conduct; it is, instead, the relationship to ourselves and to the world that is presupposed by any such search for specific principles of action. Quite obviously it would be pointless to urge human beings to achieve moral autonomy when it is their inescapable state of being. On the other

from its absorption in the world to a recognition and acceptance of itself as a free and responsible being. In spite of the metaphorical character of this treatment of conscience as a "call," Heidegger makes it quite clear that it has no mystical implications and that to hear the "call" is simply "sich in das faktische Handeln zu bringen," i.e., to act in the full sense of that term. Once again, conscience does not tell us for what we are responsible or what we ought to do. "Die Antwort vermag nur der Entschluss selbst zu geben... ihrer selbst sicher ist die Entschlossenheit nur als Entschluss," (Ibid., p. 298). Very significantly, a "public conscience" that does give answers to questions about conduct is identified as the voice of Das Man (p. 278); and "morality" is described as emerging from a conscience that is wholly individual (p. 286). For Heidegger's discussion of conscience and guilt, see Sein und Zeit, pp. 267–301.

Sartre's denial that ontology has normative implications can be found in L'Être et le néant, p. 720. Especially in L'Existentialisme est un humanisme he defends a view that is very similar to Heidegger's with respect to the use of autonomy as a goal, namely that it can yield a certain style of moral existence that excludes conduct based on "bad faith" but does not give answers to specific moral questions. Like Heidegger, Sartre's rests his case for a normative use of autonomy on the fact that "l'homme est un être libre qui ne peut, dans les circonstances diverses, que vouloir sa liberté"; but he does not develop a theory of conscience and appears to hold simply that freedom, as the "nature" of man, implies a "volonté de liberté" without showing any concern about possible charges of circularity against which Heidegger defends himself at length. (Sein und Zeit, pp. 314–16.) At the same time as he shares this general position with Heidegger, however, Sartre also associates the Kantian notion of reciprocity with this "volonté de liberté," as Heidegger does not, and argues that while the content of morality is variable, its form is universal and this "form" includes not just the individual autonomy on which Heidegger insists but a respect for the autonomy of others. See L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, pp. 84–86.

hand, if the existentialists wish to say (as they clearly do) that we can, and also that we should, choose to be free and autonomous beings, and that the achievement of this autonomy is the proper objective of a truly human life, the autonomy that is thus to be achieved cannot be the same as the autonomy that is a datum of human life.

As I have already suggested, a way out of this difficulty is provided by Merleau-Ponty's "dispositional" interpretation of moral freedom. If the latter is conceived as a capacity for envisaging one's situation in terms of alternative possibilities of action, then it is certainly possible to distinguish between having such a capacity and activating it, and also between exercising it only within a very restricted area of one's life and seeking to extend it to all aspects of life. Whether one has such a capacity at all is presumably very much like the question whether a given type of being has the capacity for learning a language. One either has it or one has not—it is not chosen or achieved. But if autonomy is understood not just as a latent capacity but as the progressive development and exercise of that capacity, then it is, at the very least, not senseless to make this development itself a goal of moral effort. Interpreted now as identifying an object of choice and purposeful effort, the concept of autonomy would generate a directive to realize in ourselves an intensified moral self-consciousness, and to subject wider and wider tracts of our experience to analysis in terms of alternatives of voluntary action. It would presumably also direct that in relation to others one should do whatever one can to encourage and facilitate the development by them of a similarly heightened moral self-awareness. It is of course not at all easy to say just what steps would be required to this end but it seems highly probable that they would involve far-reaching and radical changes in our method of moral education. In any case, the mode of life in which this distinction between choice and non-choice is rigorously enforced, and in which every choice is in-

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dividual in character, is what the existentialists mean by an authen-
tic human existence. Authenticity may indeed be regarded as the prime existentialist virtue; and it consists in the avoidance of that false relation to oneself and to others that is set up when choices are represented as something other than what they are—something for which the individual is not responsible. Inauthen-
ticity, by contrast, is the arch-principle of mystification in the relationship between human beings and in the relationship of an individual human being to himself. As Sartre's writings make very clear, it is the main obstacle in the way of any truly human relation-
ship based on a reciprocal recognition of one another as fully responsible moral agents. The authentic human being is one who has so thoroughly defined his relationship to the moral attitudes characteristic of the community to which he belongs—either by assimilating or by modifying or by wholly rejecting them—that he is able to make moral judgments in his own name and not just in the ventriloquistic and impersonal manner of a communal morality.

It still remains to ask whether the progressive development of this way of looking at the world—this profound moralization of the self—is a good thing and also, more importantly, whether the recognition of oneself as an autonomous moral being can provide a logically sufficient and necessary condition upon which moral relationships among human beings could be founded. It is this latter claim that is unmistakably suggested in the writings of the existentialists—particularly Sartre—but which has never been argued by any of them. Some critics who have noted both this claim and the failure to support it by argument, have treated it as simply a hasty borrowing from Kant of a principle that does not emerge from the existentialist analysis of human nature at all but that is needed if the latter is not to issue in an unacceptable

20 Sartre does give at least a sketch of such an argument in L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, pp. 81–82, when he tries to show that "la mauvaise foi est ... un mensonge" and that "l'attitude de stricte coherence est l'attitude de bonne foi." What he is getting at here is the fact that the person who claims to be confronted by moral "donnees" cannot present what are really his claims and preferences in a form that makes a reciprocal understanding with others possible. The latter must either take or leave his "intuitions" of moral truth, and in any case there is no basis for true mutuality.
moral solipsism. This way of treating the existentialists as simply inconsistent plagiarists in their constructive ethics, in its own way begs the same question to which Sartre and others have yet to give a reasoned answer: is the recognition of oneself as an autonomous moral being uniquely fitted to provide a principle of respect for and cooperation with other like beings? At this point, the interpreter of existentialism must make the effort alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, the effort to determine whether or not a constructive argument in support of the existentialists' affirmative answer to this question—the argument that the existentialists have failed to provide—can in fact be found.

It is always tempting to seek to justify the designation of some goal of human effort as a universally valid moral ideal by claiming that the human capability by which this goal is achieved represents the essence of man. Thus, we might be led to argue that a capacity for autonomous choice is the quintessentially human function and not simply one capacity among many, whose relationship to and priority (if any) over other traits and powers of human beings has yet to be determined. It may indeed be the case, as the existentialists seem often to assume, that there is a certain progression in our ways of conceiving our own natures, and that this progression converges upon a definition in terms of capacity for autonomous choice. Thus, we begin with the "natural" attitude in which we virtually coalesce with "what we are," i.e., with the attributes of physique, race, nationality, and culture that distinguish us from other human beings. At this stage, the capacity for self-objectification and self-choice may play virtually no part at all in our image of ourselves. This is also the stage at

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21 See for example, O. Bollnow, "Existentialismus und Ethik," pp. 995 f.

22 Such a development seems to be postulated by S. de Beauvoir, Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, p. 51 ff, where she speaks of adolescence as the period in which "l'individu doit enfin assumer sa subjectivité." A similar progression toward a stage of moral autonomy is described in detail in Piaget, The Moral Judgment of the Child, especially ch. 4. Piaget describes autonomy in a way that is strikingly similar to the conception of reciprocity outlined in this chapter. "The morality of autonomous conscience does not tend to subject each personality to rules that have a common content: it simply obliges individuals to place themselves in a reciprocal relationship with each other without letting the laws of perspective resultant upon that reciprocity destroy their individual points of view." (p. 397)
which the cleavages between the various natural communities into which human beings organize themselves are most absolute and unbridgeable. But when these characteristics that separate one human group from another lose their importance and their criterial status, as they tend to do with increasing communication and cooperation among these groups, the capacity for autonomous self-determination very likely will assume a prominence it did not previously have, although even then (as Sartre’s analysis of bourgeois personality shows) an ostensibly disinterested and “objective” attitude may conceal highly restrictive criteria of equality.  

Even if it could be shown, however, that our various and partial conceptions of human nature converge on one in which the capacity for self-objectification and self-determination is separated out from all the irrelevancies of race and nationality and economic class, the properly normative question would still remain unanswered. What claim after all has this special capacity to be treated as the cornerstone of morality, whatever its place in some hypothetical schedule of human development may be? Unless the existentialist can show persuasively that the human capacity for interpreting experience sub specie possibilitatis generates distinctively moral relationships to other beings sharing this capacity, how can he defend himself against the charge—often made by critics—that he is simply proposing another form of moral essentialism and that what he puts forward as the essence of human nature reflects no more than his own arbitrary preference for one human capacity over others? I am assuming here that however large a place a writer like Sartre wishes to make for autonomous choice within his account of moral personality, he is not prepared to present that account itself as no more than his own choice. I am also assuming that the only satisfactory answer to this challenge would be a moral one, i.e., a demonstration that autonomy provides the basis for moral community as other “essences” do not, and that “ontological” assumptions about what

23 See, for example, Sartre’s acrid reflections on “bourgeois universalism” in its relation to colonial populations in his Preface to Frantz Fanon, Les damnés de la terre (Paris: F. Maspero, 1961).  

24 This seems clear from Sartre’s statement that “le choix est fondement de l’être-choisi mais non pas fondement du choisir.” (L’Être et le néant, p. 561.)
really constitutes human nature merely conceal the need for this kind of supporting moral argument.

While an argument must be made along these lines in behalf of the existentialist position, it is important not to pitch one's expectations too high. Even if it proves to be possible to show that the achievement of authenticity has a special relevance to some conception of obligation that is consistent with other stands taken by the existentialists on issues of ethical theory, it would by no means follow that this is the only goal to which our actions and choices must ultimately be directed. At times, some of the existentialists seem to espouse this latter view and have gone so far as to suggest that from the ultimate goal of moral freedom all other subordinate goals can somehow be extracted.²⁵ Clearly, however, such an extreme downgrading of "empirical" desires and goals to the status of mere symbolizations of an ultimate and exclusive goal of freedom would prove as implausible as Hegel's quite similar treatment of finite conation, and would seriously underestimate the independence and—in another sense of the term—the "autonomy" of the quite ordinary needs and desires that we all share. It may well be, as I will suggest later on, that authenticity is not just one more goal with no particular relationship to any others we may have; and that instead, it interpenetrates the whole corpus of our antecedently established aspirations in a peculiarly intimate way. But even if this proves to be the case, there can be no justification for simply assuming that this relationship is of the means-ends type or that all goals other than self-conscious moral freedom have a purely derivative and instrumental function.

There is a still more important caveat to be entered at this point. It is one thing to argue, as I propose to do, that certain distinctively human capabilities have a special importance in connection with the establishment of relationships among human beings that can effectively bind them to the performance of cer-

²⁵ See, for example, S. de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale d'ambiguïté*, p. 34, where freedom is described as "la source d'où surgissent toutes les significations et toutes les valeurs." While Mme. de Beauvoir also speaks of freedom as "la condition originelle de toute justification de l'existence," she too often speaks of freedom as though it stood in a end-means relationship to other subordinate goals.
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tain actions. It is quite another matter to argue that the possession of these capabilities by itself constitutes a sufficient condition for its being true that we have a moral obligation to respect the moral freedom of other human beings. If certain existentialists, like Simone de Beauvoir, hold, as they appear to, that the fact that we are autonomous beings provides a sufficient condition of our being under such an obligation to all human beings, I can only say that I think this is a mistake. There are a number of familiar difficulties in the way of any effort to prove that man ought to be a moral being at all, i.e., that he has a duty to constitute communities with other beings like himself—whatever trait or capability is taken to provide the basis of that likeness—within which everyone is recognized as having a right to equal consideration. Many attempts have been made in the course of the history of moral philosophy to show that there is such an unconditional duty, but it is difficult not to feel that they have succeeded only by being circular and by inserting among the fundamental attributes of moral personality the very disposition to communal life that then duly emerges in the conclusion. If we agree with Aristotle's view that a wholly non-social being would have to be a beast or a God, as I think we must, and if, as can be plausibly argued, living in the society of other human beings necessarily involves an implicit assent to the validity of some general rules governing relations between members of the group, then the interesting and important question for the philosopher is to determine how and on what basis this relationship among human beings is to be constituted, and not to prove that it ought to be set up at all. If a person were really disposed to challenge this assumption that human beings must, one way or another, live together on the basis of some shared understanding, and to reject root and branch the discipline and the restrictions that such a mode of life inevitably requires, it is not clear how one could even seek to persuade him to do otherwise, although one might well predict that

26 See her Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, pp. 95-103. Sartre is more cautious and admits that “la liberté comme définition de l'homme, ne dépend pas d'autrui”; but he argues that “dès qu'il y a engagement, je suis obligé de vouloir en même temps que ma liberté la liberté des autres.” L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, p. 83. Whether “obligé” here refers to the obligation of logical consistency or of practical necessity is not altogether clear.
he would be unable to carry out consistently his plan of living without any dependence on others. On the other hand, if as can normally be assumed to be the case, there is an initial disposition to find some basis for moral community, then it can be shown that certain capabilities which we “naturally” possess assume a special importance. By themselves, however, these capabilities, whether they be the ability to reckon consequences or to choose between alternative courses of action, do not declare that they must be used for the purpose of establishing a moral community among human beings.

III

It is time now to turn to the concept of obligation itself, and to take note of certain of its features before going on to ask what the special relationship between authenticity and obligation may be. We may begin by considering the way in which claims that human beings have certain general duties can be established in the face of possible challenge. As has already been pointed out, such challenges are often met by arguments intended to show that the mode of conduct that is being called for is somehow part and parcel of our human nature, and thus cannot rationally be rejected by us. Since all conceptions of what constitutes our nature are themselves open to challenge, many philosophers have come to feel that the nature to which appeal is made must be one that has somehow been recognized as such by the person to whom the argument seeking to establish the reality of the obligation is being made. In the history of political philosophy, this perception has led to the elaboration of contractarian theories of obligation like Rousseau's, which justify all limitations on what may permissibly be willed by reference to certain postulated acts of assent by the very persons who are thus subject to what are really self-imposed obligations. The effect of such theories is to base all obligations on the obligation to keep a promise, and while some of the proponents of this view have associated it with excessively literalistic conceptions of the form assumed by these contractual undertakings to which they appeal, the notion of promises as the
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basis of obligation generally can be separated from these irrelevancies. When this distinction has been made, the conception of promises as self-engaging acts proves to have great power and suggestiveness as a model for understanding moral relationships among human beings. I will argue that, when suitably interpreted, it can provide the elements of a theory of obligation and of moral community that can be accepted by the existentialists consistently with their commitment to the doctrine of moral autonomy.27

Promising is, of course, merely the clearest and most dramatic example drawn from the larger class of what might be called self-created obligations. What distinguishes obligations of this kind is the fact that the obligation is explicitly assumed by a given person at a more or less definite point in time. This assumption is often, as in the case of promising, a linguistic performance of a certain kind, and involves the public use of a form of words that has the effect of placing the person who uses them under an obligation to the person to whom the promise is made. The effect of the use of the promise-formula is to license an expectation on the part of the person to whom the promise is made. What may not be so obvious but is of great importance for our purposes is that in so licensing another's expectations I must implicitly disallow in advance an appeal to any justifications for a failure to do what I have promised to do, other than those that fall within a certain more or less precisely defined range of excuses. One "reason" for non-performance that is disallowed by this formula would certainly be any such statement as "I don't want to" or "I have changed my mind." A person who tried to justify non-performance in this way would merely show that he did not understand the promise-making formula he had used. It is thus an intrinsic feature of the latter that it does effectively "change the situation" between two or more persons in a way that cannot be canceled by just any subsequent decision not to do what one decided to do in making the promise. The change thus made is not some magical modification of the relationships in

27 In the outline I give here of a theory of obligation I have drawn at various points on the views of John Rawls as stated in "Justice as Fairness," Philosophical Review, Vol. 67 (1958), pp. 164–94, and in other articles.
which "objects" stand to us, but rather a linguistically effected change in the relationship between the person who makes the promise and the person to whom it is made. Given normal circumstances, once a person has put himself "on the hook" by engaging in the promise-making practice, he has bound himself in a way that carries with it all the externality and rigor that any deontologist could require.

It has sometimes been alleged that even self-created obligations require as a condition of their effectiveness that there be moral principles such as "Promises are to be kept," the truth of which is certified by an act of intellection that is logically prior to all particular acts of promise-making. In this way, the authority of special obligations is assimilated to what is assumed to be the standard case in which rational necessity is the basis of moral authority. It is perfectly possible, however, to agree with the cognitivist that "Promises are to be kept" is necessarily true; and yet, to hold at the same time that this is an analytic truth which generates an actual obligation only if we decide to engage in the promise-making activity. Thus, we come to be obliged only because we choose to use the promise formula, and if we chose never to use it, we would not be under an obligation. It would not make sense to argue that *Pacta sunt servanda* means that we ought to engage in promise-making practices; and therefore the obligation is one that we put ourselves under when we do so engage. It is of course true that most people do not think of themselves as deciding to take part in, or not to take part in, the promise-making activity which is a going social concern into which we are in some sense "born." The established social character of this practice does not, however, imply or require that there is any corresponding "natural" obligation with respect to promises at all; and it seems much more plausible to treat the whole logically structured activity of promise-making as a human contrivance, as Hume thought, and as one which does not have to be thought of in cognitivist terms at all.

To be sure, self-created obligations are usually held to be only one type of obligation. There are many others such as the obligation to deal justly with other human beings, or the obligation to prevent unnecessary suffering, which do not seem to lend them-
selves so readily to an analysis along these lines, and certainly do not involve any express acts of self-commitment as promise-making does. But the case of special obligations still provides a useful clue, because it is quite possible that even where such explicit verbal performances are absent, there may be other less obvious means by which, in effect, we authorize an interpretation of what we do or say, which becomes an implicit element in our relationship with other persons and has much the same force as an obligation. For example, it can be argued that simply by speaking a language we authorize others to assume that we are saying what we believe to be true, so that when we lie, we violate an obligation accepted implicitly through our use of language. So too, when we accept what has been determined by some principles of justice as our fair share in some distribution, the other participants are justified in assuming that we accept these principles and will abide by them in like cases even when it may be more advantageous to us not to do so. In this case, we have again and by our own action (though not by any explicit linguistic performance) accepted a rule of action—in this case, a rule of justice—and have, in effect, disallowed "I don’t choose to" as a defense in the case of non-performance.

These examples suggest that the notion of a self-created obligation may be susceptible of generalization. While Hume was perhaps the first to propose a conception of rule-governed reciprocity as the basis of moral obligation generally, it is Kant's vision of the human community as a kingdom of ends that most clearly suggests the form this conception might take if pressed to the limit. In place of Hume's rather skimpy list of the possible forms of reciprocity, Kant makes the principle of reciprocity the governing norm for all relationships among human beings. If I must never, as Kant says, treat any other human beings merely as a means (i.e. as a thing), then I must judge only those actions to be morally permissible which I can justify to those affected by them, by appealing to considerations which I would be prepared

28 In his Grundlegung einer Metaphysik der Sitten, ed. E. Cassirer (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1913) Vol. 4, pp. 291 ff. Kant's notion of a kingdom of ends is frequently referred to by Sartre, and while his comments are often critical, there can be no mistaking the influence of Kant's ethical theory on his treatment of moral questions.
to accept if the situation were reversed. What is important here is not so much the actual content of these jointly acceptable rules of conduct, nor Kant's claim that this content can be uniquely determined by purely logical tests, but rather the mode of human relationship within which this consensus emerges. Each human being recognizes all other human beings as being, like himself, morally free and as endowed with the capacity for understanding, accepting, and carrying-out jointly acceptable policies; and this recognition becomes a principle of respect for the moral freedom of others through each person's disallowing an appeal to mere disinclination or subjective preference as a ground for non-performance of obligations deriving from those policies. A "kingdom of ends" as Kant calls it, or a "moral community" is simply a human society in which the fundamental relationship in which all the members stand to one another is that of persons to whom a rational justification by reference to considerations they can freely accept is due for all actions that significantly affect them.

There are, to be sure, features of Kant's conception of a moral community that pose difficulties for any radically voluntaristic ethical theory that seeks to appropriate it. It has already been pointed out that Kant did not for one moment suppose that the obligations connected with this mode of human relationship were self-created in any sense that implies choice. Furthermore, while he recognized that we can and too often do choose not to comply with the requirements of the moral law, he did believe that all of us unavoidably recognize the controlling normative status and validity of the mode of human relationship on which the kingdom of ends rests. In other words, with every Willkür there is associated a rational will; and the presence in each of us of the latter insures that, whatever our professions, we will all be aware at some level of the true moral quality of our actions. What these assumptions seem to support is a belief that a moral community is always and necessarily realized among rational beings, even when it remains "invisible" by virtue of their failure to act in the manner required by the principles whose validity, on this account, they nevertheless recognize. But when we consider the ac-

29 See ch. 5, n. 6.
tual state of most, if not all, human societies, it becomes highly problematic not only whether any of them would qualify as a moral community in the sense of one that effectively realizes a rational and just ordering of human relationships, but also whether there is the kind of universal though tacit recognition of the authority of this ideal. At the very least, the evidence is ambiguous. If we sometimes seem to give a paradoxical recognition to the ideal of true mutuality by seeking to justify inherently unjust arrangements to the very persons who suffer most from them, there are also large and unrecognized lacunae in our moral consciousness that are hard to reconcile with the view that we always envisage and judge our own actions from the standpoint of a member of a community of rational and moral beings. In any case, doubts about the degree of acceptance that the ideal of a moral community finds at any level make it necessary to go more deeply into the questions that were taken care of for Kant by his assumptions about the rational will present in each of us.

These are questions about the institution and acceptance of moral community among human beings. They are rendered more difficult by other weaknesses in the Kantian scheme, and by the unavailability to us of a number of alternative rationales of obligation which Kant, to be sure, repudiated, but which other moral philosophers have used extensively. If passing Kant's test of the validity of moral maxims is at most a necessary condition of the rightness of an action, and not a sufficient condition as he seems to have supposed it to be, then we will still be confronted by a number of formally valid but incompatible policies of action in any given situation. It becomes evident that if such conflicts are to be resolved and jointly acceptable policies are to emerge, a detailed consideration of specific empirical claims and needs will be necessary. Moreover, if we cannot simply assume, as Kant does, that there is a natural and unconditional obligation to submit one's claims to a rational adjudication, neither can we argue that treating other human beings as ends is the only rational policy for the conduct of life when prudence and self-interest are the standard of rationality. Here again the evidence is far from clear and may even be generally favorable to this thesis. Even so, there is a notable disproportion between the strictness of the obligation

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to respect other human beings, as most of us would interpret it, and the incomplete, and in many respects ambiguous state of the evidence showing that to do so will always be in our interest. But if we drop, or in one way or another qualify, these supporting assumptions which have been associated with the conception of a moral community, the effort to realize this community will inevitably come to seem more like one possible policy, among others, which we might adopt in our relations with other human beings. It will also be one which we must think of ourselves as choosing and as choosing for reasons that themselves reflect certain evaluative preferences on our part.

If we were to allow this last point to stand without any further elaboration, however, we would in effect have given up all prospect of establishing any special connection between authenticity and obligation; and this chapter is intended to show precisely that such a connection exists. In fact, the assertion that adherence to the ideal of a moral community is an arbitrary choice needs to be qualified in two important respects. First, it needs to be pointed out that while adoption of the principle of moral reciprocity and mutual respect does involve a choice, repudiating that policy in a really consistent way would be extremely difficult. All of us are reared in societies in which the notions of reciprocity and of justification play some role, however ambiguous and precarious that role may be; and while every individual is, in principle, free to assume in his own case, or reject, the "choices" made by others that are reflected in the moral code of the society in which he is reared, there is, in practice, an obvious limit to the degree to which he can consistently reject these principles while continuing to be a member of that or any society. Since we have been formed by these practices, we cannot repudiate them in toto and continue to be the social beings they have made us. Even when we ostensibly reject only some portion of these rules, there is a great likelihood that we will go on tacitly appealing to and counting on the rejected principle, at least in cases in which it is advantageous to us to do so. If we do, we could hardly refuse to accept the authority of the principle in those cases in which it would require the sacrifice of some short-run interest of our own. In this sense, the authority of moral principles might be said to
be just the reverse side of the practical difficulty of rejecting more than a sharply limited segment of prevailing moral practices without committing inconsistencies of this kind. There is no portion of that corpus of rules that is in principle immune to revision, but the abandonment of the whole would be tantamount to the dissolution of all social relationships based on reciprocity with other human beings. In this sense, principles are authoritative and independent of our wills; and their authority would be simply that of the standing presumption that we do wish to continue to benefit from existing forms of mutuality, as well as of the practical difficulty of consistently doing anything else. Of course, this presumption may be shown to be false in particular cases, but it could still be used to account for the general authority that is claimed for the whole range of forms of social cooperation.

In some sense, then, moral communities do exist, and in some measure all of us have been formed by them, and as a practical matter would find it very difficult to "opt out" of the obligations they entail, even if we were so minded. The further point that needs making is that if we are dissatisfied with the various "natural" communities to which we belong, and are dissatisfied not because these associations involve the acceptance of obligations to other human beings, but because these obligations seem arbitrary and irrational and irrelevant to our real needs and desires, then only a purified conception of obligation as joint self-commitment based on mutual respect for one another's status as autonomous moral agents affords much prospect of a stronger and more satisfactory mode of human relationship. More specifically, if what we want is more community and not less, then only self-initiated obligations will prove to be effectively binding when the supporting assumptions on which other conceptions of obligation rest have been abandoned. To be sure, when I signify to others a desire to work out with them understandings that will then be jointly accepted as norms governing my actions and theirs, I do not thereby surrender the right to criticize or to seek to revise the

30 This is the sense in which I would understand Merleau-Ponty's somewhat cryptic statement that "la moralité est à faire." Merleau-Ponty himself explains this statement as meaning that "apart from a pure heteronomy accepted by both sides . . . there is no given universality; there is only a presumptive universality." (The Primacy of Perception, pp. 30–31.)
policies we progressively elaborate. I do, however, place myself in a position in which, barring quite exceptional circumstances, I must regard a refusal by me to do what these understandings require of me as unjustifiable, and therefore as wrong in the only sense of that term for which any common authority can be claimed. Even if I invoke my inalienable power to re-open the questions that were resolved by our joint understandings, and proceed to answer them differently and thus cancel that understanding, I cannot by the fiat of my will alter the fact that this was a shared, a public understanding, in which one crucial element was the surrender of unrestricted discretionary powers by all parties. I could consistently repudiate the publicly understood content of that understanding only by retreating into a kind of solipsism of the present moment, in which I deny that anything that I may have permitted myself to be understood as accepting at some moment in the past has any relevance to, or authority over, what I now judge to be my right. Certainly these understandings, like all policies that have a temporal stretch to them, are effectuated by a whole series of choices that we make over a period of time; but here, the initial choice has a quite special function which is both to create a locus of moral objectivity and to place it beyond our own sole control. That locus of objectivity is the “other”—the moral community that is constituted by these joint understandings; and if one major attribute of autonomous moral personality is the ability to reopen and to decompose into their elements of “fact” and “value” all policies of action that are proposed to it, then another equally important power is this ability to alter our situation vis-à-vis other human beings in a way that gives rise to a sense of right and wrong that we cannot repudiate.

Inevitably, a theory of obligation constructed on these lines will have a narrower range of application than our ordinary concept of obligation is thought to have; and to many, there will quite understandably seem to be as little continuity between the one and the other as there is, according to some critics, between our ordinary understanding of what is involved in choice and the existentialist version of that concept. The existence of these discontinuities may be freely conceded; as may the fact that there are
great practical difficulties in the way of a review, in the light of this sharpened concept of obligation, of what are ordinarily thought of as being our duties to one another. Nevertheless, even in the absence of such a review, we are not entirely without means of giving effect to the ideas presented above. We can, after all, ask ourselves whether a given policy or principle is one that others could accept consistently with what we know about their needs and aspirations. While nothing, finally, can take the place of participation by those affected in the formulation or review of such policies, raising questions in this hypothetical form may at least enable us to eliminate many alternative courses of action on the ground that others can have no rational motive for assenting to them. Thus, it may be that many of the social arrangements and practices in the design and institution of which most people have had no share whatever, can be defended at least as interim expedients on instrumental or utilitarian grounds, and thus as presumptively acceptable to those affected by them, even though ex hypothesi they cannot claim any degree of "obligatoriness" in the special sense now attaching to that notion. If we seek, wherever possible, to transform that presumptive consensus into a real one by the widest kind of consultation and discussion, it is hard to see what justification there could be for dismissing this revised conception of obligation simply on the ground that it involves a break with more familiar and current ideas on the subject.

IV

Now that an account has been given of both authenticity and obligation, the question of whether there is some special relationship between them must be faced. Does recognition by human beings of one another as morally autonomous beings, together with a disposition to intensify and extend wherever possible the kind of self-awareness on which this recognition rests, supply a uniquely suitable basis for a moral community characterized by binding relationships among its members?\footnote{The notion of authentic existence or \textit{Entschlossenheit} as developed by Heidegger seems to be wholly lacking in social or other-regarding implica-} There are reasons for
thinking that it does, assuming always that there is a disposition to communal living based on something other than force or fear. It must also be assumed that the human beings who are so disposed have needs and desires that are not so hopelessly disparate as to be incapable of joint satisfaction, and that the powers with which these persons are endowed are not so incommensurate as to cancel out any motive that the stronger party might have for cooperation with the weaker. These material conditions seem to be roughly satisfied by human beings as we know them; and so, too (although here, no very great assurance is appropriate) is the further condition that the kind of choice of which the persons entering into these relationships to one another must be capable is not just momentary preference, but a long-term commitment to joint policies, with all the implications for disciplinary controls over the actions of individuals that such policies involve.\textsuperscript{32} Even though from the existentialist point of view there can be no once-and-for-all commitment to such policies that eliminates any subsequent reconsideration of the issues they pose, no long-range commitment at all can be made by persons who are constitutionally unable to resist impulses which may run counter to a line of conduct they have adopted. Unless these conditions are met, no stable human community is likely to be founded on whatever basis. When they are, however, the special kind of self-consciousness associated with authenticity has a contribution to make which must now be described.

Let us consider first the implications that a recognition of oneself as a morally autonomous being might have for the way one presents oneself as a candidate for moral relationships to other

\textsuperscript{32}The notion that choice has a temporal stretch to it is common to all the existentialists, but it must be conceded that until Sartre developed his theory of obligation in \textit{Critique de la raison dialectique} there had been little emphasis on any element of discipline associated with choice.
human beings. The most salient of these implications can be very simply stated. If a man thinks of himself as a morally autonomous being, the very nature of this character that he imputes to himself is such as to absorb any other feature of his nature which he might designate as the basis for his relationships with other human beings, and on the strength of which he might demand respect and acceptance from them. Let us suppose, for example, that a man proposes to make the fact that he is a proletarian—or a white man—or a Buddhist—the primary basis of his association with other human beings. Since he is at the same time, as I am assuming, committed to the doctrine of moral autonomy, he will be forced to admit that his being a proletarian, or a white man, assumes the criterial function he assigns to it only as the result of a choice on his part. In fact, being a proletarian or a Buddhist or even a white man in any sense which implies the imposition of priorities by which, e.g., being a white man takes precedence for purposes of action over being something else, inescapably turns out to involve an exercise of the same autonomy that presides over the whole moral life. If this is so, then to demand that one be respected in one’s capacity as a white man or as a proletarian is to demand respect as one who “chooses himself” as a proletarian, and could have “chosen himself” as something else. This, in turn, is indistinguishable from demanding recognition as a free moral agent—with this reservation, that it is not explained why respect is to be confined to those moral agents who freely choose themselves in this one way. The relevant point here, however, is that once the agent adopts the autonomist view of his own moral activity, every subsequent role he espouses must be understood as a mode of self-determination for which he bears final responsibility. For this reason, if he is prepared at all to enter into an association based on reciprocity and mutual recognition with other human beings, he can do so only in his capacity as a free moral agent. If he is an autonomous moral being, then in every subordinate goal he sets himself, and in every principle he adopts, he is also bringing into play that fundamental capacity for self-determination. He cannot repudiate or remain indifferent to the latter without, at the same time, withdrawing the claim he makes for the subordinate goals that are its expression.
This line of reasoning can quite obviously be extended so as to yield conclusions that cast light not just on the role in which I can present myself as a candidate for moral relationships with other human beings, but also on the terms of cooperation which I can offer to my prospective partners in a moral community. If they, too, are autonomous moral agents, and if they, too, can have obligations only by placing themselves under obligations, then what could I offer them except respect for this freedom of self-definition and self-engagement which they, like me, enjoy? Even if they were not to share my conception of moral personality, which, as I am assuming, is based on the doctrine of autonomy, and were to give priority to other attributes they possess, it seems clear that from my standpoint their establishment of these priorities would have to be regarded as itself an exercise of that same autonomy. In this context, it is important to emphasize once again a point that has already been made. This is that while self-conscious autonomy absorbs our other desires, wants, and aspirations by transforming them into so many forms of self-determining choice, it does not follow that these wants must be somehow derivable or deducible from the fact that we are autonomous beings. Quite obviously, many of them will pre-date the recognition of one's autonomy as a moral being; and in any case, they are absorbed into this autonomous condition not by some process of logical derivation, but by passing through a critical review as a result of which they are put forward, if at all, as claims with which others have to reckon as my choices, whatever their previous history and no matter how initially passive in relation to them I may have been.\(^{38}\) They must, in other words, be assumed. The point that I am making here is simply that if we accept the doctrine of autonomy at all, we cannot avoid thinking of other human beings, for the purposes of possible moral relation-

\(^{38}\) Sartre's views with respect to the logical relationship of "original" and "secondary" choices to one another are stated in *L'Être et le néant*, pp. 548-50. While he makes quite clear that this relationship is not one of deducibility but a looser one in which particular choices may contribute to a larger thematic unity from which they cannot be strictly derived, it would be too much to claim that he endorses the interpretation I have offered of total choice as a "resultant." Thus, Sartre argues that I can make errors about the nature of my own original choice and this inevitably suggests that it has a more "categorical" or "occurrence" character than I have suggested it does.
ships with them, as standing in this relationship to their own desires and wants.

This point has implications which make clearer how the aspiration to authenticity may facilitate the formation of moral relationships that can be truly binding. From what has already been said, it follows that the moral community that the existentialists project is one in which the only condition of membership is the very capacity for choice and self-commitment itself, and in which the members reciprocally recognize one another as “choosers.” The force of this identification resides in the fact that it requires that each individual who is a member of such a community must regard himself, and be regarded by his fellows, as the sole and responsible arbiter of his own interests, and as controlling what may be called his “input” of claims into the public adjudicatory forum in which a common policy that resolves conflicts among claims must be formulated. Thus the données of every moral problem are provided by the expressed preferences of human beings, each of whom speaks for himself and whose “vote” must be allowed to register as it stands, and not be interpreted out of existence or tacitly overridden by some theory of human nature that by-passes or disallows the explicitly declared preferences of the individual. Nothing is more alien to the general ethos of existentialism than the kind of moral paternalism that “knows better” than the individual moral agent what is good for the latter, or worse still, what the latter “really” wants. As often as not, this is done by appealing to some view of what is involved in moral personality as such; and when, as frequently happens, this view turns out to have substantive moral implications, these are established as antecedent premises on which subsequent joint deliberation must proceed, and which it is powerless to revise. By contrast, the existentialist insists that every element entering into the consideration of a moral problem must be “赞助” i.e., must come in as the declared preference of one of the parties to such a deliberation; and his declaration is to be authoritative

84 See S. de Beauvoir's statement, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 198, that while “le bien d'un individu ou d'un groupe d'individus mérite d'être pris comme but absolu de notre action ... nous ne sommes pas autorisés de décider à priori de ce bien.”
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for the other participants in the sense that none of them has the right to look behind or interpret this preference in any way that is not authorized by the person whose preference it is.

Perhaps the most important feature of the relationship between authenticity and obligation remains to be described; and in order to grasp its significance, one must understand how precarious and conditional such moral community as exists at any given time appears to the existentialists. As I have already indicated, there are writers on ethical theory who seem to assume the existence of a moral community as a presupposition of any distinctively moral activity on the part of individual human beings who belong to it. On this view, it does not make any sense to speak of the defining principles of such a community as reflecting any kind of choice on the part of its members; they constitute instead a datum of the moral life antecedent to, and presupposed by, the choices of individual moral agents. I have indicated too that existentialist writers, by contrast, are typically much more strongly impressed by the fraudulence of what passes for moral consensus, and by the fragility and the partiality of such genuine consensus as does exist. Because they see so clearly the insecurity and the ambiguity of our actual moral practices as judged by the standard of true mutuality, the existentialists conceive the relation of each individual to the moral community in the volitional mode and that community itself as a *realisandum* or as an "endless task" in the Kantian sense. This view in turn is inspired by the perception that our moral failures are as often due to our not recognizing certain classes of human beings as candidates for moral relationships at all, as they are to non-performance of duties within the sphere in which we do recognize the authority of moral principles. Precisely because the concept of autonomy is formal in the sense of abstracting from substantive rules of conduct, it makes possible a clearer focus upon the moral relationship between persons which is the precondition for a successful resolution of questions of conduct, as well as upon the problematic and vulnerable character of such moral community as exists.

If we now consider these views in the context of the theory of obligation and of the moral community sketched out in the
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preceding section, it is difficult not to conclude that the existen­
tialists have made a valid and important point. It may well be
the case that natural communities like the family can continue to
exist and even thrive although their members simply fulfill the
duties assigned to them by their roles within these communities,
and no one explicitly formulates the nature of his role to himself
in such a way that it incorporates a statement of the basic rela­
tionships between human beings on which that community rests.
It seems impossible, however, that a moral community such as I
have described should ever exist except as it is sustained by an
awareness on the part of its members of the mode of relationship
to others that it involves and by a conscious determination to
persevere in it. For the moment we lose the sense of ourselves and
of others as "choosers" or lose our belief in the importance of this
mode of identifying one another, our capability for actions and
decisions that are truly shared will be affected. In a moral com­
munity, the whole corpus of rules and policies must remain in
principle permanently open for reconsideration and possible re­
vision if that community is to be completely sovereign in the
sense of being able to raise and to resolve in a manner binding on
all whatever issues it may face. But in order to be sovereign in
this sense, the members of a human group must recognize one an­
other as endowed with the capacities of choice and self­
commitment which make it possible for them to be participants
in such collective choices.\textsuperscript{35} To the extent that that recognition is
effectively denied or is restricted by unilaterally imposed limits
on the scope of choice, a moral community ceases to exist, and
with it, relationships of obligation lapse. Those who might other­
wise be subject to obligations will not have been permitted to act
jointly with us to change our relations to one another in a way
that would be binding; or perhaps not even they themselves will
have fully grasped their capacity for so altering their own situa­
tion. In any case, in the absence of reciprocal recognition of one
another as capable of this special kind of choice, a certain mode

\textsuperscript{35} This notion of a collective or joint choice, which has been developed so
extensively in the \textit{Critique de la raison dialectique}, is not a recent addition to
Sartre’s ethical theory and can be found as early as \textit{L’Existentialisme est un
humanisme} where Sartre says that “(la) liberté se veut dans le concert.” (p.
88.)
of human relationship becomes an unavailable option; and it is this mode of relationship that alone renders obligation intelligible.

Here then, we touch on the deep underlying motive for associating authenticity with obligation in the way the existentialists do. Because the various natural communities into which we are born only very imperfectly embody the ideal of human mutuality, we, as individuals, must continuously define for ourselves the moral community in which we effectively live. By so doing, we contribute in differing degrees to the expansion or contraction of such genuine mutuality as in fact exists; and if it is true, as I have argued, that mutuality is a condition of obligation, then we can properly speak of choosing to be obliged by choosing the mode of human relationship that makes obligation possible. Moreover, like all policies, the policy of living together with other human beings on the basis of a reciprocal recognition of one another's autonomy becomes effective only through corresponding choices made by individual human beings. When human beings single out their capacity for choice and self-commitment and place a value on it by seeking to extend and intensify their awareness of the choices that are open to them, and when they are able to describe these choices to themselves in such a way as to make evident the full burden of moral implication they carry, the making of such choices bearing on the constitution of a moral community will at the very least be facilitated. If, at the same time, they understand that only a similar recognition and prizing of the autonomy of other human beings can provide the framework within which the claims they may wish to make on others will have a place, they will surely perceive in the existentialists' positive evaluation of our capacity for autonomous moral choice, not just a facilitating but a necessary condition of the form of life they seek.

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There has been one major exception to the existentialists' lack of interest in the social and institutional aspect of morality. At
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least since the end of World War II, the French existentialists have evinced a strong and continuing interest in Marxism, and have indicated—sometimes defiantly and sometimes rather wistfully—their awareness that its mode of dealing with moral questions represents a direct antithesis to the moral individualism of their own position. This confrontation of existentialism and Marxism has led to a number of exchanges which have contributed in some measure to our understanding of the existentialist approach to questions of social morality; but these have been largely polemical exercises rather than attempts to build a general theory of human relationships on the foundation of the doctrine of autonomy. This last is what Sartre had promised to do “in a coming work” at the end of L’Être et le néant, but that work has never appeared. In its place, Sartre published in 1960 the first volume of Critique de la raison dialectique, a major effort to reconcile the principal theses of existentialism with those of Marxism through a reinterpretation of the dialectical structure of human action or praxis. In this book, Sartre goes so far as to speak of existentialism as an “enclave within Marxism”; but, while a final judgment on the relationship between the two as Sartre now understands them must await the completion of the Critique, a number of critics have already expressed doubts about the absorption of Sartre’s earlier views by his more recently adopted Marxism and have suggested that on a number of points of crucial importance it is the latter that has had to accommodate itself to existentialism rather than the other way around.

By itself, the first volume of Critique de la raison dialectique is an enormous and—by reason of its formidably complex style and vocabulary alone—an extremely difficult book to understand. Many of the topics it takes up have little or nothing to do with ethical theory; and its central concern is rather with the phi-

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36 See, for example, Merleau-Ponty’s Humanisme et Terreur, which marks the first major attempt by an existentialist to do justice to some of the insights of Marxism without accepting either its materialism or its determinism. Merleau-Ponty’s political philosophy was to undergo considerable revision in his later Les aventures de la dialectique (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).

37 L’Être et le néant, p. 722.

losophy of the social sciences. Its principal thesis is that our mode of understanding of social institutions and of social change is never wholly independent of our practical attitudes and commitments with respect to them, and that both take the form of certain conceptual syntheses or "totalizations" by which our social environment is organized with a view to action. In essence, this amounts to a new version of Hegelianism, qualified by a recognition of the underlying contingency of all human actions, individual or collective, and also by Sartre's express endorsement of a thoroughgoing ontological individualism according to which individual human beings are ultimately the only dialectical agents and any collective praxis must be understood as a complex function of an indefinitely large number of individual dialectics. In any case, a large place within Sartre's statement of this theory of society is assigned to the emergence of what he calls "groups"—human communities based on reciprocity—out of "serial" aggregates in which human beings cooperate with one another as they do in a queue, but without any recognition or acceptance of an effective identity binding them together. The paradigms which Sartre uses for his analysis of the emergence of groups are drawn from revolutionary situations in which a crowd suddenly acquires a conscious unity of purpose and acts as a single body. While much of what he has to say about such formations and the circumstances of scarcity and class antagonism which they presuppose, is very interesting, it would seem to fall more into the province of social psychology (insofar as the latter deals with the phenomena of self-identification among members of an emergent social group) than into that of ethics. Embedded in this theory of groups, however, there is a long discussion devoted to the "pledge" by which, a "group-in-fusion" is transformed into a permanent unit of social cooperation. In the course of this section, Sartre gives an account of human relationships based on self-created obligations which in its essentials runs parallel to the conception outlined earlier in this chapter.\(^{39}\) While some of the special assumptions attached to this theory as well as the forbidding terminology in which it is couched make it unsuitable for use as a general statement of an existentialist theory

\(^{39}\) *Critique de la raison dialectique*, pp. 381–460.
of obligation, its main points must be briefly noted here as a means of substantiating the general thesis of a compatibility between autonomy and obligation which I have been defending.

The most noteworthy feature of Sartre's theory of the pledge is its recognition that through a promise or its equivalent, human beings can change their situation vis-à-vis one another in such a way as to bring into existence reciprocal rights and obligations which then constitute effective limits on the exercise of each individual's autonomy. In language that often recalls—rather strangely—that of Hume's discussion of obligation, Sartre repeatedly calls the human group based on reciprocity an "invention" by which individual human beings produce a new form of relationship to one another by binding themselves (i.e. by restricting their own liberty of choice) on the condition that others do likewise.\(^\text{40}\) This performance requires that each participant become what Sartre rather awkwardly calls a "third"—a kind of ideal, and in some sense at least, impartial agent who shares certain goals with others and identifies their actions in pursuit of these goals with his own. This new identity typically emerges in the course of some spontaneous joint action such as the taking of the Bastille. The pledge is essentially a formalization of the relationships so formed and is designed as a guarantee of the permanence of the newly-formed group against dissolution when the external dangers that were the occasion for its formation temporarily recede. Eventually, the permanent group takes on institutional form through the increasing differentiation of social functions and roles within the group and the consequent elaboration of codes of practice; and since the institutionalized group is always in danger of relapse into a purely external or "serial" mode of relationship among its members, the pledge has to be constantly renewed. Here it is important to note that Sartre recognizes that this renewal occurs not through explicit acts of swearing faith to one another but through any act of reciprocity such as aiding another who is in need. Indeed, as Sartre says, "it is always a

\(^{40}\) On the other hand, Sartre asserts against Hume that a pledge or promise can effect an irreversible change in one's situation: "Le serment n'est ni une détermination subjective ni une simple détermination du discours, c'est une modification réelle du groupe par mon action regulatrice." (p. 441)
case—except in emergencies—of renewing the pledge.”

A number of passages are of particular interest because they express so clearly both Sartre's recognition of the possibility of a self-imposed limit on what an autonomous being may do, and his conception of the reciprocal understanding on which this self-limitation by each individual rests. Thus we are told both that my belonging to the group is my free project and that this project by its nature makes a claim on each member of the group. It amounts, in fact, to an undertaking by me to satisfy the claims made on me in my capacity as a “third”; and this free undertaking is explicitly declared to involve a limitation of my liberty. In order that I may be able to count on other members of the group, each of them must be able to count on me; and they can be expected to respect limitations on what they may legitimately do, only if I honor their claim to a similar limitation on me. The pledge thus creates a “transcendence” of the group over its members which Sartre describes as an absolute right, and which he also speaks of as a “positing of man as an absolute power of man over man under conditions of reciprocity.” In this way, through my own choice, obligation becomes a feature of my condition as it never was before; and it cannot simply be negated by my consciousness without thereby authorizing the use of violence by others to insure compliance. Finally, because the basis of human relationships within this newly created body is, for the first time, mutual recognition of self-imposed obligations toward one another, the pledge that brings the group into being is in fact, as Sartre says, “the beginning of humanity.”

This beginning takes on an imperatival character by virtue of its being permanent in a way that makes it indefeasible for all future time; it thus refers the recognition of one human being by another back to the reciprocal affirmation of two common traits: we are one because we issued from the primeval slime at the same time and because each one enabled the other to do so with the concurrence of all the others. Thus we are if you please a unique species that made its appearance by a sudden mutation at a given point in time; but our specific nature unites us qua freedom. In other words, our common being is not an identical nature in each one of us, but rather a reciprocity that presupposes the

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41 Ibid., p. 493. Emphasis added.
42 Ibid., pp. 439 ff.
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setting of conditions on both sides; in approaching a "third" I do not recognize my own inert essence as it is manifested in another example. I recognize instead my indispensable accomplice in the act that will tear us loose from the soil, the brother whose existence is not distinct from mine and comes to me as my existence, but nevertheless depends on mine as mine does on his (with the concurrence of all the others) in the irreversibility of a free assent. . . . We are brothers in the sense that after the creative act of the pledge we are our own sons, our own joint invention. Moreover, just as in real families, this fraternity expresses itself in the group through a set of reciprocal and unique obligations which are laid down by the group on the basis of its situation and its goals (i.e., general obligations to render mutual assistance and obligations to perform particular actions or tasks in specific and rigorously defined situations.) But as we have just seen these obligations simply express the shared character of the underlying exigency and of the act of self-creation which has taken place and which constitutes the irreversible mortgage of our commitment with respect to future action.43

While these and other passages clearly establish a close correspondence between Sartre’s conception of obligation and the theory of the moral community outlined in earlier portions of this chapter, other features of his position raise certain questions.

43 "Ce commencement devenant pour chacun nature impérative (par son caractère de permanence indépassable dans l'avenir) renvoie donc la reconnaissance à l'affirmation réciproque de ces deux caractères communs: nous sommes les mêmes parce que nous sommes sortis du limon à la même date, l'un par l'autre à travers tous les autres; donc nous sommes, si l'on veut une espèce singulière, apparue par mutation brusque à tel moment; mais notre nature spécifique nous unit en tant qu'elle est liberté. Autrement dit notre être commun n'est pas en chacun une nature identique; c'est au contraire la réciprocité médiate des conditionnements: en m'approchant d'un tiers, je ne reconnais pas mon essence inerte en tant qu'elle est manifestée dans un autre exemple: je reconnais le complice nécessaire de l'acte qui nous arrache à la glèbe, le frère dont l'existence n'est pas autre que la mienne, vient à moi comme la mienne et pourtant dépend de la mienne comme la mienne dépend de la sienne (à travers tous) dans l'irréversibilité d'un libre consentement. . . . Nous sommes frères en tant qu'après l'acte créateur du serment nous sommes nos propres fils, notre invention commune. Et la fraternité, comme dans les familles réelles, se traduit dans le groupe par un ensemble d'obligations réciproques et singulières, c'est-à-dire définies par le groupe entier à partir des circonstances et de ses objectifs (obligations de s'entraider en général, ou dans le cas précis et rigoureusement déterminé d'une action ou d'un travail particulier). Mais ces obligations—nous l'avons vu à l'instant—ne traduisent à leur tour que la communauté de l'exigence fondamentale et tout aussi bien de l'auto-creation passée comme hypothèque irréversible de la temporalisation pratique.” (Ibid., p. 458.)
To take one example, there is in Sartre's account a very strong emphasis on the violence to which I expose myself from other members of the group by virtue of the pledge I have given as a member. There would seem to be some danger that this emphasis will obscure the very important distinction between the motive I have for keeping faith, and the valid basis for my obligation to do so. My motive may well be fear of the consequences of violating my pledge; but I would be under an obligation even if for some special reason I did not need to fear reprisals. In one place, however, Sartre goes so far as to say that the "indépassibilité" of the commitment assumed through the pledge may vary in degree from individual to individual, and that the prospect of violence in the event of infidelity serves to raise the level of this "indépassibilité," and thus to make it less probable that I will fail in my duty.  

This is no doubt true in one sense, but it misses what is surely the distinctive force of the pledge which is to make non-performance and default unjustifiable, no matter what our tendency to keep or to break faith may be in the face of a certain level of prospective violence. That prospect may after all confront us whether or not we have pledged ourselves. What the pledge does is to disallow in advance any right we might claim either to do as we please or to resist such reprisals as our failure to comply may call forth from the group. On the other hand, as I have shown earlier, Sartre seems to recognize quite clearly that the core notion in obligation is that of a logical self-binding, and not that of a threat; and if at other times he argues that what effectively produces social cohesion is the prospect of violence, this may be explained by his evident feeling that too strong an emphasis on the internal logical structure of the pledge would tend to suggest that the latter is no more than a "reciprocal determination of discourse . . . a mere game of signs and meanings." Nevertheless, these apparent inconsistencies do create some doubt as to whether Sartre would give the weight to the notion of logical self-binding within his conception of obligation which it seems to deserve, and as long as this doubt subsists, it cannot be said, with

44 Ibid., p. 459.
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complete confidence, that his views tally perfectly with those advanced earlier in this chapter.

A question arises also about the limited character of the groups within which, on Sartre's view, rights and duties come into being. The context of discussion makes amply clear that these groups stand in antagonistic relationships to other groups or social classes, and that the formation of a group typically takes the form of a response, through internalization, to a previous identification of it as a group by an antagonistic social class. It follows that the community thus formed and the obligations it comparts are in no sense universal and include only those who, by their actions, demonstrate their affiliation. It may be that in his promised discussion of the way dialectical relationships among groups generate the movement of "History" Sartre will develop a theory along Marxist lines of the eventual emergence, through conflicts among restricted groups, of truly universal human community—an authentic "cité de l'homme." If so, it may well turn out that in such a society obligation will rest solely on the common human capacities of autonomy and rationality, and no longer on the special interests of restricted groups; but Sartre has also told us that we can know nothing of the freedom that will characterize that eventual society and presumably, therefore, nothing of the form that obligation will assume in it either. Nevertheless, it does seem clear that in Sartre's view the momentum behind the movement toward such a state will be provided not by the internal logic of the idea of reciprocity but by the progressive resolution of the deepseated conflicts between material interests which, until they are overcome, render impossible the emergence of a common interest and the sense of a common human identity.

One may agree with Sartre that moral communities have material presuppositions, and still feel that he has underestimated the logical if not the causal power of the notions of reciprocity and justification. Even if it turns out that genuine social cooperation among different interest groups must await the emergence of new relationships of production and distribution of goods, the most

46 Questions de méthode (Paris: 1960), p. 32. This study is bound in the same volume as Critique de la raison dialectique.
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general features of such a new economic system itself must, one would think, be derived from, or at least pass the test of, some conception of the social arrangements that could justly be accepted by all elements in a society. This in turn presupposes a use of the notion of reciprocity beyond the limits of any restricted group. It is clear, too, that no restricted group can ever employ its moral vocabulary beyond the limits of its internal affairs for the purpose of justifying a refusal to seek larger and more comprehensive forms of social accommodation. It would, after all, be rather incongruous to claim a right to disregard systematically the interests of the very groups from whom a recognition of that right is then solicited. Insofar as such extra-mural use of the moral notions operative within a restricted group is contemplated at all, its legitimacy would be dependent on its taking the form of an appeal for a wider recognition and realization of the idea of reciprocity; and this is what Sartre with his rather fanatical emphasis on the limited character of groups has thus far failed to make sufficiently clear.

It is at just this point, of course, that the need will be most keenly felt for a truly and unconditionally universal form of obligation—one that goes beyond both the Sartrian conception of obligation as effective only inside restricted pledge-groups and the wider, "no right not to . . ." conception of obligation presented earlier in this chapter. This would have to be a type of obligation that would permit us to assert that it is our positive duty, in all historical circumstances and in all social classes, to do what we can to bring into existence a truly universal human community. Sometimes the demand for such a conception of obligation is deprecated on the ground that the only relevant weakness of the available theories of obligation is that they provide us with nothing to say to individual human beings or restricted moral communities (if there are such) that in actual fact neither seek nor propose a wider sphere of moral relationships. This, it may be claimed, is not a very serious deficiency, since the stance of such an individual or community, in the unlikely event of its being consistently maintained, could only be defined as a repudiation of the assumptions under which alone a wider moral community can even be sought. One may concede the force of this rebuttal
and still feel that a conception of obligation as reciprocal self-binding cannot provide an adequate basis for certain moral attitudes to which, if we have them at all, we are likely to attach great importance. Specifically, we do feel that we have moral obligations of various kinds toward many human beings who are either temporarily or permanently incapable of true participation in a moral community because they cannot "bind themselves." Children, for example, are unable, before a certain age, to grasp the notion of justification and to make long-range commitments; and feeble-minded or deranged persons are permanently incapacitated in this respect. Then too, there are persons who have reached maturity in cultures quite different from our own in which the idea of basing moral relationships on voluntary reciprocal understandings is quite unfamiliar. Even at certain levels of our own society there are persons whose experience has been such that they are unable to attach much, if any, meaning to such ideas. Nevertheless, many people feel that moral restraints on what may permissibly be done are operative in these cases, in spite of the absence of any relationship based on mutual recognition of one another as autonomous moral beings. The question therefore arises of how such an extension of the notion of obligation beyond the range of effective moral community can be justified.

This is not a question that can be answered in a way that is likely to satisfy those who raise it. It is perhaps just possible that a deeper analysis of the principle of reciprocity and of the cognate notion of justification might show that even within restricted moral communities based on a common economic interest or shared racial characteristics there is nevertheless a tacit recognition given to the primacy of the human capacity for rational choice. If so, it could be argued that moral relationships within such groups reflect a recognition that equal consideration

47 Sartre may be implying something of this kind when he says that "le malaise secret du maître, c'est qu'il est perpétuellement contraint de prendre en considération la réalité humaine en ses esclaves (soit qu'il compte sur leur addresse ou sur leur compréhension synthétique des situations, soit qu'il prenne ses précautions contre la possibilité permanente d'une revolte ou d'une évasion), tout en leur refusant le statut économique et politique qui définit en ce temps les êtres humains." Ibid., pp. 190–91.
is due to their members by virtue of their possession of this attribute of human nature, and not by virtue of the other (e.g., racial) characteristics which may, nevertheless, for other reasons be subjoined to it as criteria of membership in this group. Obviously, such an analysis would present grave difficulties, but if any progress could be made in this direction, the basis would be laid for an even stronger charge of inconsistency against any group that refused like consideration to members of other groups in the event that circumstances were sufficiently favorable to permit them to extend that consideration without undue risk to themselves. Perhaps, too, other parallel lines of argument might be constructed to deal with the case of those who are incapable, whether temporarily or permanently, of sustaining moral relationships of the type proposed. After all, all of us are children before we are adults and any one of us may become mentally incapacitated, so we do have a stake in seeing to it that such persons are treated as having, within the limits of feasibility and prudence, the same rights and duties as they would have if they could speak for themselves, since in choosing for them we may well be choosing for ourselves. More than this it would probably be unfair to ask an ethical theory to establish. No ethical theory is likely to be able to show that loving concern for other human beings and perhaps for animate creation as such is a duty; and to this rule existentialism forms no exception.