

SARTRE
AND
TERROR

Introduction

Following is a minimally edited transcript of a session on Sartre and terrorism from the North American Sartre Society meeting at Loyola University in New Orleans, March 2002. I organized the session as a response to the events of September 11, 2001. Initially at a loss to comprehend what occurred, I decided that this was exactly the kind of event that called for philosophical consideration. The attacks stunned me both in terms of the numbers of dead (I remember that morning hearing estimates of a possible 20,000 dead, now determined to be just over 2,700) and perhaps even more because of the means used and the symbolic and cultural significance of the targets. Civilian aircraft and civilians were used as weapons to attack the Pentagon and to cause the collapse of the World Trade Center, the military and economic centers of the country. If the fourth plane, downed by passengers in a field in Pennsylvania, had reached the US Capitol Building, its purported target, this symbolism would have included the government itself.

In the almost two years since the attack the Bush administration, with the overwhelming support of Congress, has embarked on a “War Against Terror.” The elements of this “War” are well known—ground wars fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, threats made toward Iran, Syria, and North Korea, passage of the U.S.A. Patriot Act, creation of the Office of Homeland Security, and the almost daily reminder that we live in a “changed world” and that another, perhaps even more devastating, attack is in the offing. The justification for these policies and their potential for success are of no interest to me here. I bring them up merely as a reminder that much must be thought through and subjected to theoretical analysis, and to offer the following as a contribution to a dialogue which must be taken up by philosophers, especially students of Sartre. As Ronald Aronson notes, Sartre was “the one great philosopher who has put violence at the center of his thought.”

My original intention when bringing this panel together was simply to ask for a response to the question, “What would Sartre think about September 11?” I had foremost in mind Sartre’s most notori-

ous support of terrorism or political violence in his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. As Sartre claims approvingly of Fanon's analysis, "to shoot down a European is to ... destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time." Violence "is man re-creating himself."¹ But as the reader will see the panelists found the question of pressing concern for reexamining virtually the entirety of Sartre's philosophical career. The insightful and provocative comments and the scope of these inquiries will provide, I trust, a stimulus to pursue these issues, especially among American philosophers, in this world which the Bush administration has declared "changed."

A note on the contributions: I asked that each of the five panelists limit their comments to ten minutes, after which we solicited audience responses, and then a few brief replies. What follows retains the preliminary and timely nature of these remarks. One panelist, Thomas R. Flynn, read an excerpt from his upcoming book, Volume 2 of *Sartre, Foucault and Reason in History*, and thus could not be included for copyright reasons. Elizabeth Bowman's comments focused on the Sartre piece, "About Munich," originally published in 1972 in *La Cause du peuple*. She asked that we publish a translation of that work in lieu of her comments and we have done so, placing it as a kind of opening remark by Sartre himself.

Each of the panelists contends that Sartre would have condemned the attacks, but their reasoning differs significantly and, more to the point, they find different degrees of strength in Sartre's condemnation. Thus, Aronson finds Sartre conceptually weakest in this respect, both because the scale and nature of the attacks are beyond anything Sartre confronted and because he embraced violence itself as emancipatory. Ronald Santoni points out Sartre's ambivalence, suggesting that for Sartre violence/terror are inevitable and necessary in any liberatory struggle and yet violence is a deviation or a dead end to the extent that it denatures or dehumanizes its targets. Thus Sartre could justify the attacks "as a response to injustices in the world," yet also condemn these attacks as inimical to the goal of full humanity. Robert Stone suggests the strongest defense of Sartre, claiming that the 9/11 attacks fail to meet any of Sartre's criteria for excusing (rather than justifying) terror. Sartre's concepts, then, would condemn the attacks and further provide us with conceptual tools to decipher their broader social significance.

The following is offered then as a first step and a provocation to re-engage Sartre's views on violence in light of the new identity the U.S. is forging for itself.

Sartre on Munich 1972

1) Summary of Events

The first internationally staged "terrorist" event—the Palestinian kidnapping of Israeli athletes—occurred in Munich Germany during the 1972 Summer Olympics. Sartre's article "About Munich" concerns this event.

This summary of events is based on reports in the *New York Times* of Sept. 6, 7 and 9, 1972. At roughly 5AM local time on June 6, 1972, five Palestinians joined three others near the living quarters of the Israeli athletes and attacked. Two athletes were immediately killed; many fled; nine were held hostage (three were coaches, four were athletes, and two were Israeli security men). By 9AM the kidnapers had identified themselves as the Palestinian Black September group and negotiations began with the Munich police chief, Dr. Manfred Schreiber; the Interior Minister, Hans Dietrich Genscher; the Bavarian state Interior Minister, Bruno Merk; the President of the International Olympic Committee, Avery Brundage; the Arab League's representative in Bonn, Mohammed Khatib; the Tunisian Ambassador, and others. The Palestinians demanded the release of 200 Palestinian prisoners in Israel and safe passage out of West Germany. Golda Meir, then the Israeli Prime Minister, refused any concessions.

The negotiators and Palestinians agreed to fly the Israelis and the Palestinians by helicopter to a near-by military base where they would board a plane for Tunisia. Around 9PM, three helicopters arrived in the Olympic Village. The eight Palestinians, nine Israelis and three German officials boarded the helicopters and flew to the nearby military base. Mr. Brundage gave the instruction that the Palestinians were not to leave the country with the Israelis. As the transfer from the helicopters to the airplane was being initiated around 10:30PM, shots were fired. Within minutes, all the Israeli athletes and five Palestinians were killed; three Palestinians were wounded and later arrested.

The *New York Times* of Sept. 7, 1972, quoted the Munich police chief Dr. Schreiber: "I had the feeling we gave the first shots." And

the Bavarian state Interior Minister Bruno Merk was quoted as saying: “The firing was started by the police, naturally.”

On Sept. 9, 1972, the New York *Times* reported that the U.S. government had announced “the formation of an intelligence committee to deter international political terrorism in cooperation with intelligence services of friendly foreign countries.” The committee would be made up of senior officials of the State Dept., the CIA, the FBI and the DIA.

Summary prepared by Elizabeth A. Bowman

2) Jean-Paul Sartre, “About Munich”

Translated by Elizabeth Bowman

La Cause du peuple—J'accuse, No. 29, du 15 oct. 1972.

(Republished in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 11-17 nov., 1982, under the title “A New Sartre Scandal”)

Those who affirm the sovereignty of the Israeli state and also believe Palestinians have a right to sovereignty for the same reason, and who take the Palestinian question as fundamental, must admit that the Israeli establishment’s policy is literally crazy and deliberately aims at avoiding all possible solutions to this problem. It is therefore politically accurate to say that a state of war exists between Israel and the Palestinians. In this war the Palestinians’ only weapon is terrorism. It is a terrible weapon but the oppressed poor have no others, and the French who approved FLN² terrorism against the French must approve in turn the Palestinians’ terrorist action. This abandoned, betrayed, exiled people can show its courage and the force of its hate only by organizing deadly attacks. Of course these should be viewed politically, by assessing the intended results against those actually obtained. We would also need to settle the highly ambiguous question of the real relationships among Arab governments, none of which is socialist nor has socialist tendencies, and the feddayin³, which leads us to ask whether the Palestinians’ primary enemies may not be these feudal dictatorships, several of which have supported them verbally while at the same time trying to massacre them, and whether the first effort of the Palestinians, whose war necessarily dedicates them to socialism, must not be to side with the peoples of the Middle East against those Arab states which oppress them. But these problems cannot be treated in an article.

It must be said that for those who agree with the terrorist attacks to which the Israeli establishment and the Arab dictatorships have reduced the Palestinians, it seems perfectly outrageous that the French press and a segment of opinion should judge the Munich attack an intolerable outrage while one has often read dry reports without comment of strikes in Tel Aviv that cost several human lives. The principle of terrorism is that one must kill. And even if one is resigned to that, it remains, as it was for Albert Memmi⁴ who agreed with the Algerians’ struggle, inexcusable after an explosion to see mutilated bodies or a child’s severed head. But if one can admit it, then we must in fact recognize that the Munich attack succeeded

perfectly. It took place amidst an international sporting event that attracted hundreds of journalists from all countries; for this reason it assumed world importance, and, thereby, put the Palestinian question before the whole world more tragically than at the UN where the Palestinians are not represented. The Palestinians aimed not at massacring the hostages on the spot but at taking them to an Arab country where they would have negotiated an exchange of Palestinian prisoners in Israel for the hostages. Similarly, while we disagree with the Israeli government on all other points, we can understand that, being at war with the Palestinians, Israel would reject all concessions. Regardless of how one judges such intransigence, it too was on display before international opinion.

The only guilty party was the Munich police. For we now know that the Palestinians did not explode the device that was to take them out, but instead everyone, feddayin and hostages, was killed by police bullets.⁵ That there had been disagreements between Munich and Bonn does not excuse the cops. Quite the contrary.

Thus the attack at the Olympics historically unveiled, for all to see, the despair of the Palestinian combatants and the horrible courage this despair gives them. While tactically it did not advance their cause, it showed and established better than any speech at the UN both that we must now, right away, solve the Palestinian problem and that this problem has become everyone's. The violent indignation shown by "noble" hearts in the press concerns neither Palestinians nor Israelis. These good apostles would have Israelis killed in Israel rather than disrupt the noble and classical order of the Olympic games, this sacred ceremony from ancient Greece. This reaction was foreseeable and will soon give way to a more realistic view. It is meanwhile no less ignoble.

The New Orleans Session— March 2002

Ronald Aronson:

I would like to shift the question. I don't think the important question is what Sartre would say after September 11, but rather, "What should we say about Sartre after September 11?"

Writing in the *New York Times* during the week after September 11 Michael Walzer called for a critical engagement against those ideas and those thinkers who appear to justify terrorism or are soft on terrorism—or—he did not say this in so many words—uncritically embrace violence as a mode of struggle. We should, in other words, ask under what conditions violence is permissible. We should see violence itself as something which may become destructive, which can develop a logic of its own, and which needs to be channeled, focused and limited. For Walzer, September 11 confronts many intellectuals with their bad habits: valorizing violence, or tolerating it, or remaining fuzzy about it.

Among Sartreans there has been a good deal of all three, especially the valorizing of violence in Sartre's thought. Violence is praised as the emancipatory moment, the moment of becoming human, the ethical moment. From my point of view, our efforts should be focused on clarifying, thinking through, and critiquing the one great philosopher who has put violence at the center of his thought. I would say that September 11, if it means anything to us, should have given us this burden. I am critical of all of us, I include myself here, for saving this issue until the end of the conference, because if anyone should be rethought after September 11, it is Sartre.

Sartre was after all the philosopher of *Dirty Hands*. He was of course first the playwright of *The Flies* and *Dirty Hands* and the screenwriter of *In the Mesh*. Sartre's own radical politics are inextricable from his embrace of violence. In the *Devil and the Good Lord*, violence is the path to human emancipation, and this is politically laid out a year later in *The Communists and Peace*. Then Sartre became the author of a theory of revolutionary violence in *Critique*

of *Dialectical Reason*. He accepted the tactics of the FLN at a time during the Algerian war in his preface to Frantz Fanon, presenting Fanon in the most extreme way by celebrating violence as self-emanicipation. In 1972, Sartre expressed support for Black September's group murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics.

Sartre's historical contribution bears on the discussion coming out of the 1930s that focused on the relation of means and ends in politics and centered around the Communist movement and the Communist Party. In *Darkness at Noon*, for example, Arthur Koestler has Communists apologizing for a violence that would create a free society. Any means that could lead to socialism were acceptable. In the 1950s, Sartre took this argument, namely that all means used to create a humane society were acceptable, one step further—by affirming that violence itself is positive. Violence by the oppressed is positive because it is a rupture with oppression. It is the birth of humanity, the beginning of ethics, a rejection of complicity with the oppressor. Sartreans often repeat these phrases. In his Fanon essay Sartre adds another dimension: violence itself entails the self-humanization, the self-creation of human beings who have been oppressed and through violence against their oppressors they became human. Violence is the path to achieving one's humanity.

We are now going on our third generation of intellectuals who have been influenced by this outlook. The problem is not violence that clearly aims at removing the oppressor from the backs of the oppressed. We can all think about this very clearly. It includes revolutionary war, insurrection, and guerrilla war. Where violence becomes problematic is when it becomes terrorism. That is, when it is no longer directed against agents of the state but rather directed at civilians. I am referring to murders of non-combatants, not attacks on police, military, or state authorities, but more-or-less arbitrary killings.

In these forty years since Sartre's theories of violence became the common coin of the Left, a significant shift has taken place in the locus of anti-systemic—violence—towards terrorist violence. Historicizing the Sartre of the 1950s and 1960s, we can see that in the last forty years political violence no longer primarily comes from the Left. It is no longer violence claiming human emancipation. It is no longer more-or-less targeted violence. Political violence more and more entails mass killings, which Sartre never confronted. It increasingly involves suicide attacks, which Sartre never confronted. I am speaking about violence which in general no longer aims at national liberation from colonial or other oppression (although this is still the target of Palestinian violence and up until recently IRA violence).

Today's terrorist violence is tied to more shadowy aims. I refer not only to ETA and the Tamil Tigers, each of which began as Marxist and has shifted towards the Right in their goals and outlook. They no longer proclaim a broader goal of human liberation but focus more narrowly on creating ethnic states by any means necessary. But besides these groups, most terrorist violence is positively right-wing, or it aims at no clear goal, or it often seems downright irrational. Al Qaeda, for example. What we now need to discuss with careful discrimination is the different kinds of violence, the means of violence, and the targets of violence. Sartre did none of this as he sweepingly embraced emancipatory violence per se.

We can see Sartre's contemporary relevance, and weaknesses, as a thinker of violence through his conflict with Albert Camus. Sartre's great strength lay in grasping systemic violence, and his perceptiveness in this respect was unrivaled by any other thinker in the 20th century. This great strength was Camus' great weakness. Perhaps Camus was incapable of seeing systemic violence because he was a *piet-noir* whose very identity was constituted by the colonial system in Algeria.. This led Camus to blind himself to other forms of systemic—violence—the French government towards French workers during the strike wave of 1947, for example. Sartre great weakness was his wholesale embrace of revolutionary violence, his unwillingness to think about its consequences, his too facile statement that it's not for intellectuals in the metropolises to tell the oppressed how to fight their battles, and his celebration of violence in the Fanon preface. A look at this essay reveals, by the way, that parts of it were written against Camus, who had been dead for a year. Sartre's weaknesses in his approach to violence—which can lead easily to justifications of terrorism, as Sartre himself did in 1972—are Camus' strengths. Camus understood that violence can become its own law in political struggles. This demands being confronted and being discussed.

Ronald E. Santoni:

In ten minutes or so, I'll only be able to touch on a few things and not offer much by way of argument.

I have a number of questions about the assumptions Ron Aronson is making, and even the form of the question he has rearticulated for us. But, for the time-being at least, I shall pass on those and turn to three pivotal quotes: First, Benny Lévy offers a key challenge to Sartre: "If the idea of revolution becomes identified with the idea of terrorism, it's done for. To restore meaning to the idea of revolution, if it's possible, one must do away with the concept of 'fraternity-terror'" (*Hope Now*, 96). Keep this in mind, for it will be of crucial relevance to what Sartre has to say about violence and terror in the *Critique*. The second quotation I offer is from *What Is Literature*, 1948: "I recognize that violence, under whatever form it may show itself, is a setback. But it is an inevitable setback because we are in a universe of violence; and if it is true that recourse to violence against violence risks perpetuating it, it is also true that it is the only means of bringing an end to it" (214).

Note Sartre's ambivalence already. Ambivalence, I argue in detail elsewhere, pervades Sartre's overall treatment of violence and terror. To this audience, I'm prepared to say that Sartre on terror offers a bit of a "hodge-podge," but I'll settle in print for "ambivalence."

My third quotation is from the 1947-48 *Notebooks for an Ethics*: "We need not see in terrorist violence, in a Hegelian manner, a passage toward liberation, but rather a dead end This is an experience that can benefit no one. And ... it does not suppress slavery and alienation" (406).

It would do us well to keep these quotations in mind as we proceed, for as we do a rapid and selective survey of the general topic, I'll note corroborating evidence for the two-sidedness I see in Sartre's attitude towards terror and violence.

Ron Aronson has spoken of Sartre's later embrace of violence as emancipatory. We may note that, as early as in 1946, in *Materialism and Revolution*, Sartre views, "We, too, are human beings" as the cry at the heart of any revolution and endorses violence for the sake of liberation from oppression (232). But even here he recognizes that oppressors are also human beings and suggests that the genuine revolutionary minimizes their destruction.

But in our focus on terror, we must now note Sartre's concept of "fraternity-terror" in *Critique I*, the notion on which Lévy in 1979-80 picks up and torments him. Here in the *Critique* Sartre says that

violence "is called terror when it defines the bonds of fraternity itself," and "bears the name of oppression when it is used against one or more individuals imposing an untranscendable statute on them as a function of scarcity" (737). Basically, what you get here is a *pledged group* (*un groupe assermenté*) that purports to guarantee the freedom of everyone against anti-praxis or anti-freedom. In this way, fraternity is born. But "fraternity" and "terror" become "twin brothers." Terror has the function of uniting: it is the "primary unity" of the being of the group in so far as it is the power of freedom over necessity (alienation) in everyone. Although it is the "bearer of death," it unifies by guaranteeing "solicitude [i.e., uneasiness] for everyone," and is, thus, a way of yielding reciprocity among all third parties (*les tiers*). Through the oath, everyone in the group has the right over the life and death of every other member. And this right affirms and presents itself as "justified violence" against the practico-inert, alienation, necessity, and group dissolution (434-437). In short, in *Critique I*, and later in *Critique II*, Sartre describes terror phenomenologically as a form of "self-justifying" counter-violence. In combating the violence of colonialism, oppression and racism, Terror presents itself as self-justifying praxis. I hope to get further into the issue of justification as we move on.

It perhaps goes without saying that Sartre's ringing endorsement of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, in his "Preface" to it, pretty much follows his intricate analysis of violence and Terror in the *Critique*. Ron Aronson's account is basically accurate. Vehement violence and terror are seen in the "Preface" as counter-violence and counter-terror, as necessary evils that can transform the exploited, colonized, oppressed sub-human (*sous-homme*) into a full human being. Violence here can be emancipatory, curative, restorative, unifying, creative, and humanizing. And, in this manner, Sartre is more definitely justifying violence and terror, not just describing them as "presenting" themselves as justified (as, e.g., in the *Notebooks* or the *Critique*). Sartre and Fanon want a "new man" and the humanization of bourgeois society. But one is already entitled to ask, in passing, what some other critics have asked: how can Terror against the Other overcome alienation and bring about a "new humanity"? But that is another closely related issue—one on which Sartre himself exhibits tension, if not outright ambivalence.

In a longer presentation, I would also want to spend time on the acrimonious Sartre-Camus confrontation of 1952 over *The Rebel*—a debate that clearly had its roots in, and turned on, the growing differences between the two writers over violence and its limits. Sartre

was pretty damned hard on Camus when, in fact, given one side of Sartre's over-all ambivalence, he had—as the quotations from *What is Literature?* and the *Notebooks* attest—important points in common with him. Although Sartre adamantly opposed Camus' imposition of limits or *mesure* on revolution—and appeared willing to justify revolutionary murder, he was committed to humanity and worried about the effects that destroying human beings would have on the project of remaking humanity. This issue surely comes to a head in the still unpublished, *Rome Lecture*, to which I now want to move. In doing so, I want to pay tribute to Bob Stone and Betsy Bowman for their pioneering work on it—four dependable articles which I have studied carefully and to which I feel indebted. Yet, given my own recently acquired photocopy of the *Rome Lecture*—which I have here before me—I trust that my consideration of it moves beyond theirs.

Stone and Bowman are right, I think, in pointing out that Sartre in the *Rome Lecture* of 1964 builds on his earlier view in *What is Literature?* (1948) that means and ends are a “synthetic unity” of interrelated moments of history-making praxis and are not independent units to be weighed morally against each other. On this basis, the issue of the justification of Terror cannot allow for the moral separation of ends and means. That's one important emphasis of the *Rome Lecture*.

But, in a quick survey, I must focus more on the closely linked notion of “making humanity” (*faire l'homme*), to which Sartre gives a central and dramatic place in the lecture. Humanity is lacking, is incomplete, alienated. Humanity is to be made. This *need* for completion posits “integral humanity”; and no means can be separated or excluded from the incomplete human being's need to be completely human, to be *homme intégral*. Further, for Sartre here, the satisfaction of this need requires no additional “justification,” because in a means-end synthesis, “it is by itself adequate justification for its own satisfaction.” We have here another kind of self-justifying revolutionary praxis. So we come face-to-face, in this conceptually rich lecture, with the issue of the moral permissibility of Terror, to which he now speaks most directly. Can Terror be used by the oppressed to break their state of dehumanization?

In my judgment, Sartre has used all sorts of “weasel words” regarding this issue in other writings—words such as “necessary,” “unavoidable,” “inevitable,” “acceptable,” “excusable,” etc.—but not “*morally* justifiable” or “*morally* permissible.” But without using the precise words, he is here, I submit, offering the case for the moral justifiability or moral permissibility of violence and Terror. And he does so at the price of adding ambivalence to his over-all position.

Invoking the above, one could argue, for instance, that given the subhuman's need to be humanized, even Terror can be justifiably used to attain full humanity. But that would seem to run into tension with Sartre's later claim that “all means are good except those that denature the end” (*tout les moyens sont bons sauf ceux qui dénaturent la fin*) (typescript of *Rome Lecture* 139). Does that eliminate Terror being in synthetic union with the end of attaining integral humanity? The answer to that is arguable, not unambiguous. But that's not all. In these closing minutes, I must point out that Sartre also presents here four “enabling” or “limiting” conditions (my words) for the justifiability of Terror. But within these conditions he says both that there is no justification for Terror outside its necessity (*Rome Lecture* 134), and that it is a “night moment,” a “deviation” out of necessity from humanity as an end. There is—and I can show more later—critical ambivalence and critical tensions within the framework of permissibility or justifiability here. So, once more, we are left with ambivalence—even in this more detailed discussion of justifiability.

With respect to 9/11, then, I submit that Sartre's response, like my own, would not have been totally unambiguous or unambivalent. I'm not suggesting that he would have attempted a straightforward moral justification of it. But he would have surely seen it, in part, as a response to injustices in the world, to the disparities between what we Americans have and what most of the world does not have, as an attack by those allegedly upholding the cause of the oppressed against both the oppressor and the most visibly ostentatious symbols of bourgeois capitalism. (Sartre's strong distaste for America's reigning bourgeois capitalism was never hidden.) But the other humanly sensitive side of Sartre would have viewed it as criminal and inimical to the end of creating a new, autonomous, “integral humanity.”

Robert Stone:

I thank those who have gone before for framing the issues. I'll start by answering Ron Santoni's statement that there is a justification of terror in the 1964 *Morality and History, Version I: The 1964 Rome Lecture*.⁶ I don't read it that way. Ron alludes to a criterion there: the end is the synthetic unity of the means. I'll try to explain and apply it. I'll also answer Ron Aronson. We need not put Sartre on the defensive. On the contrary, *Morality and History, Version I: The 1964 Rome Lecture* allows us both to denounce the 9/11 attacks and to begin deciphering them. I'll advance a Sartrean hypothesis.

First, for Sartre terror is never "justified." Here is Betsy Bowman's translation of the criterion—a difficult issue treated sketchily—in the final, incomplete chapter of the 1964 *Rome Lecture*, itself the climax of the mid-1960s "morality of praxis":

Morality is control of praxis in light of itself, that is to say, in light of its goal.

[There is a] rule of efficacy: all means to attain the goal are good on condition that they do not alter the goal in producing it.

Morality is a supplementary control of efficacy: the goal, being the synthetic ensemble of means, socialist morality is none other than the goal itself returning to its means to control them in light of itself which is to say, to demand of those means that they be absolute means, that is, at once the means of the means (hence linked mediately to the goal) and means to the goal, linked directly to it. (Manuscript 164/Typescript 138)

Thus a discursive process in the revolutionary group relates means to the group's ends as parts to an unfolding whole or totalization. The end of revolutionary praxis is not *after* it but instead synthesizes its means as its parts. Each means must already contain and partly realize the end. Any means that change that end or render it unattainable are ruled out. In "returning to its means" the end is thus a moral criterion.

This passage sums up issues facing the revolutionary group. Among them is "terror." This term has a new ideological function, implying as it does that the status quo is free of terror. Sartre was referring to violence in the Russian, Algerian and Cuban revolutions, and especially to the USSR's fraternity-terror in maintaining unity—a means he judged excessive by his criterion. (Our government is now also implying all opposition is unpatriotic.) Indeed Sartre never

finds terror "justified." It is always "a deviation" though it may be excused—if it meets the four "conditions" which Santoni mentions:

That it not become "a system itself" but remain a "provisional expedient." (160/133) Al-Qaeda fails here: all it *is* is a terror system without popular roots. 9/11 was only its latest, most dramatic act, if indeed it can be attributed to al-Qaeda alone.

That "an ideology of terror" and "a morality of suspicion" (160/134), as in the USSR, be avoided. The 9/11 attacks fail here too, issuing from an ideology of "holy war" taken as indiscriminate terror.

That there be "no justification [for terror] beyond its necessity," "*never* making it the easy solution when a more difficult one is possible." (161/134) If a goal was to get U.S. troops out of Saudi Arabia, 9/11 was unnecessary and inappropriate. Other, non-violent means to that end were available.

Being "a deviation of humanity as end due to urgency," a "pause" in liberation, terror is excusable only if "it issues from the people." (160/134-5) Again, the 9/11 attacks fail. "The people" *were the children in the planes* who did not voluntarily become missiles and the janitors, service people and homeless in and under the World Trade Center.

Clearly the 9/11 attacks do not meet Sartre's four conditions. Being anti-human, they could not be a means to any human end. They fail, then, by Sartre's criterion that the end of "integral humanity" be the synthetic unity of means to it. He would almost certainly join us in condemning it.

Unlike Camus, Sartre is said to have no moral control. Yet we've seen it's there in outline. The criterion in Chapter 4 of the 1964 *Rome Lecture* borrows from "Ambiguity," the last chapter of Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.⁷ All acts are ambiguous in that their full meaning is evident only over time. Beauvoir proposes the goal of "human liberation" as itself a standard for deciding among means to itself. Sartre re-uses this 17 years later with no acknowledgement. Her chapter reminds us that existentialist ethics was invented to deal with dilemmas like: may a magistrate in occupied France save ten hostages by giving the Nazi's a Communist resistance fighter? Will a Kantian or other a priori morality help? For Beauvoir, the end of liberation is not advanced by surrendering this person; such a means "ruins" its own end. Solidarity in refusing to choose in behalf of

such a system is called for.⁸ In our world, 11 million children under 5 die from preventable causes in annual holocausts,⁹ yielding dilemmas of struggle similar to those of the Resistance—but that are not covered in *The New York Times*.

Sartre's moral-historical framework in Chapter three of the 1964 *Rome Lecture* helps us to grasp the 9/11 attacks. Prior to the Algerian revolution of 1954-1962, he asserts Algeria's colonized masses had faced three options. First, "restoring a previous alienating system" (104/82) would replace colonialism with subordination to the Islamic system that preceded France's 1830 invasion and murderous conquest. Since such restoration was blocked by the French Army, each Algerian's second option was to demand "assimilation" into the colonial present, i.e. aiming "to be a colonizer." (110/88) But militarily enforced superexploitation bars entry into the present as well. To meet their needs Algerians are left with a third option, to invent "an unknown future" of "integral humanity," "with radical negation of [their] present condition as sole guideline" (118/96)—i.e. independence.

The crisis that led to 9/11 has parallels. Assimilation into our present polarizing system of globalization is barred to the Muslim masses, but not to the Saudi monarchy. It has accepted U.S. investment and military protection (and the risks of defiling sacred land) against its opposition, al-Qaeda. Fleeing into the Islamic past, al-Qaeda would out-Islam the monarchy. It heaped contempt on the royal family's craven assimilationism by its 9/11 attack. But, far from championing the excluded Muslim masses' claim for "integral humanity," it manipulates them in a battle among Saudi elites for control of oil wealth.¹⁰

So Sartre's *Morality and History, Version I: The 1964 Rome Lecture*, offers both guidelines for liberatory action that rightly condemn the 9/11 attacks and an outline of oppression of the Arab world that helps us frame an hypothesis to decipher the meaning of those attacks.

Summary of Audience Response:

1) Terrorism for our generation began on 9/11. One thing significant about this new terrorism, something absent in Sartre, is the religioU.S. aspect. Unlike the terrorism of the past which was political, religion is essential to this new kind of terrorism.

2) To come back to Aronson's point about the historical shift. When we are speaking of the period from, say, World War II through the late '60s or '70s, the situation was politically a much easier place to understand. It was much easier to apply what Sartre said to Left or Right terrorism. It was much easier to see what thinkers were sympathetic to.

The terms Left and Right are different kinds of concepts now and are not so useful for trying to label or understand these acts of terrorism. It is no longer so easy to identify a group practicing terrorism as Left or Right as these terms have become increasingly complex. I am not sure whether Al Qaeda would properly be seen as coming from the Left or the Right.

3) Sartre would have been unconcerned with 9/11 in and of itself. 9/11 had no meaning in itself. It was not retaliation. It was not to change a relationship of oppression. It had no end. It was a means without an end.

What is significant, and what Sartre would have focused on, is that the U.S. government turned it into a way of creating fear in the American public. The U.S. government made it an act of terrorism.

9/11 was a means, even though the U.S. government didn't do it. Sartre would focus on this meaning: the violence of the U.S. government, its retaliation, its ends

4) A phrase from the discussion stood out: "thinkers who justify terrorism or are soft on terrorism." Commentators tend to use a kind of cost/benefit analysis in these matters asking whether an act is justified or not, in our best interests, etc. This is the kind of thinking that went on a few years back during the U.S. intervention in Central America. This is the wrong kind of focus—is it justified or are we being soft. The focus should be on how to respond to terrorism.

To continue the Central America example, Nicaragua went to the World Court taking the U.S. government to court over the mining of its harbor and Nicaragua won a judgment against the U.S.. The U.S. ignored it. Reagan, in fact, announced in advance that the

U.S. did not recognize the authority of the World Court. But then the U.S., in the U.N., abstractly urges nations to obey international law. Thus how should Nicaragua respond to a perceived hostile act from the U.S.. Use the laws and the U.S. ignores the World Court.

Note: These last two remarks fairly characterize much of the audience reaction. Instead of seeing Sartre as responding to the act of terrorism perpetrated against the United States, the reaction dealt with the American response to that act—at the time, March 2002, the U.S. had invaded Afganistan, but was only beginning to make threatening noises about Iraq. Indeed, President Bush had only recently made his “axis of evil” speech. Likewise, there was a general attempt to contextualize the attack within the historical aspect of the U.S. role in world affairs. Why, in other words, did they have to resort to this? What did the U.S. do to provoke such an attack?

Ronald Aronson’s Reply:

I have found this to be a remarkable discussion. The United States has been the victim—yes, victim!—of a massive, horrifying attack on civilians. Yet, the discussion here has pointed away from the terrorism of mass murder that stunned us on September 11 and toward the US government’s response. My colleagues’ main concerns have been that the US government’s policies somehow *caused* the attack. This is called blaming the victim. Listening to President Bush after the attack and since, we’ve been confronted with an *either/or*: you’re for us or against us. And in this discussion, we see the opposite *either/or*: *either* you blame the United States *or*—and the *or* is interesting—you’re with Michael Walzer. I deliberately chose Walzer, with whom I disagree on a whole number of issues, because I believe he was correct on this point. The Left has been soft on terrorism.

I would like to begin my reply by rejecting the *either/or*. I am citing someone with whom I normally disagree—and have disagreed with in print—on the issue of terrorism to say that on this point he was correct. I want to disrupt the *either/or* that the President offered and its mirror-image many of you are now offering. Since September 11, I have been wanting to disrupt it more and more. Yes, of course, all the points made about US government policies and the global economy are correct. But a fundamental issue surfaced on September 11, which many of you are ignoring: the bizarre and dehumanized, and not only violent, but massively violent and increasingly dangerous form “the struggle” has taken. I see September 11 as the displacement of what might have been an authentic struggle, an extreme, radical, and regressive displacement, leading to a mode of struggle combining suicide and mass murder. This right-wing and anti-Semitic religious zealotry must be understood, must be analyzed, and must be combated no less than American policies.

Over forty years ago Sartre saw the FLN as mounting a struggle for a democratic and autonomous Algerian future. He was wrong to pass over the forms of struggle in Algeria. I refer to random anti-European terrorism. I refer to the FLN cutting off the genitals of people they opposed, whether French or Algerian, and stuffing them into their mouths after they killed them as a sort of demonstration of power. I refer to instances of mass murder of Algerians opponents by the FLN. In the 1950s, Sartre wrote eloquently against French torture, but he never criticized the sort of random terror exercised by the Algerians. As I said in my opening remarks, Sartre spoke positively of anti-colonial violence. But the society that emerged was not

democratic and was not socialist, and has recently been engaged in a murderous war again. What has caused Algeria's subsequent plight? Yes, we can continue to contend that the failures of the Algerian Revolution are due to the intervention of US imperialism, and so on and so forth, and this probably has some truth in it. But I would also argue a Sartrean point, namely, that the Algerian leadership, using the means at its disposal, has been making its own fate for many years now. Doesn't this have something to do with the fact that the means used in the struggle undermined the supposedly humane and democratic goals of that struggle? This issue, which Sartre mentions when discussing Trotsky in his *Notebooks for an Ethics* and in *Dirty Hands*, suggests that how a movement wages its struggle may become decisive. Yet tolerating the distorted forms of struggle used by of the FLN led to a certain wooliness towards the means used in other forms of struggle. This has led Left intellectuals to be unwilling to take seriously or even consider, as we see in this discussion, the actual nature of what al Qaeda is doing. Other goals are possible than a Right-wing Islamist state, and other forms of struggle than mass murder by suicide killers. The African National Congress, just to cite one example, has moved towards a more democratic and inclusive society and has used more humane modes of struggle.

Ronald Santoni's Reply:

Back to your major contention against me, Betsy and Bob.

First, I want to read these lines from the *Rome Lecture*, so that you'll acknowledge the ambivalence:

“Is it possible to make Terror without justification? Yes: no other justification except its necessity.” (Est-il possible de faire une Terreur sans justification? Oui: sans autre justification que sa nécessité.) (*Rome Lecture*, typescript 134))

Is this not ambivalence?

On the next page, Sartre speaks about “fraternity-terror,” appeals to “efficacy” or “effectiveness” (*efficacite*) again, and refers to Terror as “a technique totally unjustifiable outside of its effectiveness” (*un technique parfaitement injustifiable en dehors de son efficacite*) (135). And then, on the same page, he speaks immediately of “Terror becoming revolutionary justice (*justice revolutionnaire*),” and adds pointedly: “In short, the humanization of Terror is possible *in principle*” (*bref l'humanisation de la terreur est possible en principe*).

There is ambivalence, here, and it is, as I've been arguing, typically Sartrean. So against Bob Stone's claim that “for Sartre terror is never justified,” Sartre's ambivalence or ambiguity includes a side of justifying terror. Sartre seems to want it both ways. So I part from Bob and Betsy in regard to this issue, and I repeat a point I've already made: The *Rome Lecture* comes as close as anything Sartre has written—including his “Preface” to Fanon's *Wretched*—offering a moral justification of Terror in certain extreme situations, assuming four strongly qualifying conditions that he delineates.

Now, with respect to how I ended my initial presentation, I want to make a couple of additional comments to elucidate my abrupt ending. Please don't misunderstand me (I do wear a peace medallion around my neck!), September 11 was terribly troublesome to me. I regard that “event” as criminal, heinous, and as qualifying for many of the other adjectives that U.S. leaders have used. But—and my view has not changed since my initial response at a university chapel gathering on the afternoon of 9/11—we must not fail to see that horrific event in relation to perceived injustices and inequities in the world: e.g., the divide between the rich and the poor, the American-backed Israeli assault on the Palestinians in the Middle East, the United States' pattern of being on the side of the oppressors and victimizers rather than of the oppressed, and the United States' becoming—the paradigm of capitalism gone wild.

In this vein—and I am not a disciple of Sartre—I think that Sartre would have been in a bind, had he been alive during this catastrophe. Because of his well-known disdain for many of the United States’ governments’ actions throughout the world, and because of his feeling that the United States of America was one of the principal agents of dehumanization in global affairs, he would have been tempted to offer a *defense*, if not a justification, for the destruction. But the ambivalence of his position, and his last statement on violence in the *Hope Now* Interviews, would likely have prohibited him from doing so. The bringing together of “fraternity” or “community” with Terror would not do: they are “contradictions” or “opposites.” And, mindful of what he said in the *Rome Lecture*, he doubtless would have worried about the consequences of using Terror as a means for attaining the goal of “integral humanity”. Would not Terror “denature” that end? But, as I’ve pointed out, there’s ambivalence even in the contentions and conditions regarding the justifiability of Terror in that *Lecture*. To be sure, as Stone points out, means and ends, for Sartre, are parts of an “unfolding totalization” in which the end, in synthetic unity with the means, can check and qualify the means. But, as I said, Sartre is concerned with how far, using violence, the oppressed can go to overcome their oppression without “denaturing” the human “end”? As early as *Materialism and Revolution*, Sartre, as I pointed out, suggests limits and reminds the reader of the humanity of even the oppressor. And in the *Rome Lecture*, he certainly refers to terror as a “revolutionary pause” (p. 135). But that does not eliminate Sartre’s talk of “terror becoming revolutionary justice,” or his claim there that “the humanization of terror is possible,” at least *in principle*. Nor does Sartre’s ambivalence allow Stone’s contention that “Sartre never finds Terror justified.” We have seen him describe it as “presenting itself as justified” in more than one work.

So the best, I think, we can say is that, on the basis of his final statement on Terror in the *Hope Now* Interviews of 1980, he would not have approved morally of 9/11. But, as in the case of the violence and Terror of the “tortured” Algerian people against the French, he might not have condemned it outright. One thing is certain: the position he would have taken is not unambiguous or “for sure.” And given his overall philosophical corpus on violence, the possibility of his approving some of the “causes” to which the 9/11 terrorists were committed cannot be ruled out.

Notes

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, “Preface” to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon, trans. Constance Farrington (Grove Press: New York, 1966), 18.
2. FLN is the “Front de libération national,” or National Liberation Front. It is the Algerian resistance group who led the Algerians to victory in their anti-colonial war against the French. (All notes are the translator’s.)
3. “Feddayin” refers to the Palestinians.
4. Albert Memmi was a 20th century Jewish Tunisian writer whose 1957 book, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Sartre had prefaced. Reprinted in Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer and Terry McWilliams, (London and New York: Routledge), 2001.
5. At the time, there was considerable confusion about the role the Munich police played in the killings.
6. “Morale et histoire” was the title Sartre wrote at the top of the typescript he sent for printing in proceedings of the “Morality and Society” conference, organized by Rome’s Gramsci Institute, at which he had spoken May 23, 1964. Elizabeth Bowman uncovered this text in the Institute’s archives in November 2002. Since Sartre gave the same title to lectures scheduled for the next March and April at Cornell University, and since their contents overlap with The 1964 *Rome Lecture*, we label them as two versions of the same writing project. The later writing is thus best titled: *Morality and History, Version II: The 1965 Cornell Lectures*.
7. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, tr. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948).
8. *Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 131, 155.
9. See, for example, *The State of the World’s Children 1998*, United Nations Children’s Fund Report (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 11.
10. For an analysis of the crisis of middle class unemployment and growing political disaffection facing the Saudi monarchy, published on the eve of its fateful decision in 1998 to open its oil industry to non-Islamic investment, especially from the U.S., see Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1997). See also, George Caffentzis, “Crude Truths,” in *First of the Month*, February 26, 2002, pp. 4-5.

