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Patrick Baert: *The Existentialist Moment: The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual*
Cambridge 2015: Polity Press, 231 pp.

Patrick Baert's tenth publication on the problems of social theory and the philosophy of the social sciences is devoted to the social role of intellectuals and their public actions, especially in 20th-century France. Baert explores the impact and social influence of the group of French intellectuals—Camus, Sartre, de Beauvoir et al.—associated with the development of existentialism. The book's subtitle, *The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual*, reveals the particular angle of its approach. The period Baert focuses on runs from the late 1930s to the late 1960s. Sartre's work is closely followed from the mid-1940s (after the liberation of France from the Nazi occupation) to the 1950s, when his eminence and influence reached their peak. Sartre's life preceding that time, and what followed in the 1960s,

are left in the shade. This account does not seek to present a comprehensive biographical sketch, but rather to analyse his life during a period crucial to the broader emergence of existentialism as a new philosophical direction, coinciding with the zenith of Sartre's intellectual career.

The life of J.-P. Sartre (1905–1980) was richly interesting and peppered with fascinating events; his philosophy, art work, and public activities gave rise to many original and inspiring ideas, but also to a number of paradoxical phenomena, oddities, and incidents. It is no wonder, then, that Sartre has been the subject of large bibliographies, including works by Annie Cohen-Solal, André Guigot, Sophie Astier-Vezon, and others. What does Baert's book bring that is different, new, or innovative? First, it is a text written by a sociologist, and this manifests itself both in the questions which the author asks, and in the way in which he answers them. If literary criticism or historiography frequently means writing about the great figures of culture, in sociology this is not the case. Although the issue of individual actors as the creators of social reality is accorded an important place in 'social constructivism', it is quite normal that attention is focused mostly only on 'small' anonymous actors and their quotidian activities, observed at the micro-social level. The question of individuals with influence on the societal level, a commonplace of historical sciences, is mostly ignored. While history, so to speak, has a tendency to see social processes as the work of great historical figures, sociology tends to see these processes as a manifestation of the supra-individual social units, structures, forces, and functions of societal systems.

Baert's study is an important exception to this tendency in sociology in that it focuses attention on the significance of the individual. It recalls the idea of Norbert Elias, which involved the twin metaphors of coin and stamp. Each person in society resembles a coin that is shaped by a stamp,

representing the social pressures under which they are impacted. Conversely, however, everybody is their own stamp, and their conduct leaves an imprint on society. The figure of the great historical figure especially fits this dual concept. His/her personality is formed by contemporary influences which he/she masters and innovatively transforms and moves towards fresh forms. The role of the great figure lies in the fact that he/she is, more so than his/her contemporaries, not only a coin but also a stamp that impacts the structures surrounding his/her area of human endeavour and thus affects its further development.

Baert's sociological perspective draws on other authors and their conceptions, most notably Pierre Bourdieu and Randall Collins. Bourdieu's conception is associated with notions of cultural production, the literary field, and habitus. Actors in the field of cultural production orient their conduct using strategies that arise from their habitus. The objective of these strategies may be to maintain the current structure of the field (the strategy of established actors) or, on the contrary, to contest and change it (the heretical strategy). Collins's approach is based on the micro-analytical conception of interactional networks and interaction ritual chains. Baert himself endorses neither of these options. Instead, he develops his own approach, one source of which is a critical reflection on the debate surrounding the social status and role of the public intellectual. Baert speaks knowledgeably about the Cambridge school of history. The issue of the human individual and its impact on society is considered through Giddens's concepts of agent and agency and Latour's actor-network theory. Goffman's term 'team' is used to designate collective actors. Sometimes the author makes use of the concepts of culture, cultural trauma, and performativity, found in the work of Jeffrey Alexander, and further inspiration comes from the concept of narr-

ativity. Despite distancing himself from the approach of Bourdieu, the Baert's conceptual and methodological procedures, and especially his view of the 'intellectual arena', show quite a pronounced affinity with Bourdieu's concept of the 'field of cultural production'.

The introduction presents the author's scholarly perspective and identifies his basic research question: to explain Sartre's intellectual rise against the backdrop of the development of French culture and society at that time. Baert then assesses and evaluates recent sociological approaches in this area (Boudrieu, Collins et al.), deals with the problem of conceptualisation (particularly the concepts of 'intellectual' and 'intellectual arena'), and formulates five specific hypotheses concerning various aspects of the spread of ideas via intellectuals in their social environment. The first two chapters then bring into focus the 1940s and render Sartre's intellectual advancement understandable and explainable. The first chapter tries to uncover how the occupation of France, the establishment of the Vichy government, collaboration with the Nazi regime, and the Resistance against them, transformed the 'cultural arena', especially with regard to the differentiation of the French intellectual community. The second chapter is devoted to the subsequent purge (1944 and 1945) of the intellectual scene to deal with Nazi collaborators after the liberation of France, which was coupled with a debate on moral responsibility. Special attention is devoted to the proceedings against two writers, Robert Brasillach (executed in 1945) and Charles Maurras (death penalty commuted to life imprisonment).

The first two chapters of the book hardly mention Sartre, with the exception of a brief reference on p. 38. Baert instead prioritises the sociological perspective arising from a broader analysis of the social and cultural conditions in which the key protagonist is situated and which deter-

mined him; only then can we turn to the question of how he actively adapted to the existing conditions. Sartre only 'emerges' in the third chapter, dedicated to mapping the discussions that developed within the purging process, which represented a significant intellectual shift in post-war France. The pre-war and wartime periods of Sartre's life are purposely bypassed. The reader learns about the most important intellectual fruits of this period—in particular the literary works *Nausea* (1938) and *The Wall* (1939), the drama *The Flies* (1943), and the philosophical text *Being and Nothingness* (1943)—only in retrospective notes. Baert begins tracing Sartre's intellectual path from the moment when he embarks on his journalistic path after the liberation of France and publishes texts ('La République du silence'; 'Paris sous l'occupation'; 'Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur'), which corresponded to the nature of the times and resonated with the prevailing mood of the public.

Sartre's post-war career culminated in the fall of 1945; a period his companion Simone de Beauvoir called an 'existentialist offensive'. At that time, existentialism controlled the French intellectual scene through the activities and texts that sprung up within a relatively short period. De Beauvoir brought out her second novella *The Blood of Others* and debuted her piece *The Useless Mouths* at the Théâtre des Carrefours. Sartre meanwhile published the first two parts of the novel *The Roads to Freedom*, of which Baert says that it 'brought home the fact that Sartre's existentialism was not merely an abstract philosophy but relevant to contemporary experiences' (p. 93). In October 1945, at Gallimard, Sartre launched the magazine *Modern Times* (*Les Temps modernes*), with an editorial team consisting also of Raymond Aron, Michel Leris, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Albert Ollivier, and Jean Paulhan. On 29 October 1945, in a very influential public lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Sartre presented

himself to the public as a committed intellectual, legitimised by his links to the Resistance movement, and introduced his interpretation of existentialist philosophy.

The fifth chapter describes how Sartre anchored his position as a socially engaged intellectual in the years 1946 to 1947, publishing the essays *What Is Literature?* (focusing on the topic of literary engagement and 'committed writing') and *Anti-Semite and Jew* (critically engaging with issues of anti-Semitism). Baert then reviews the factors and influences that first enabled Sartre to rise to the top of the French intellectual scene, and then led to his subsequent descent; a process which started in the early 1960s and was among other things accompanied by a rise in the influence and popularity of French structuralism and post-structuralism.

The final chapter is largely theoretical. Baert presents a general theory to conceptualise and explain the general features of the behaviour of individual actors in the intellectual arena, including their performative aspects and the effects of their interventions. In Baert's view, such a theory needs, above all, to overcome five recurrent problems in intellectual history: empiricist bias, motivational bias, structural fallacy, authenticity bias, and stability bias. The problem of empirical bias lies in the fact that studies of a narrow type may be insufficiently anchored in theoretical thought, thus excluding from attention the wider context. Motivational bias occurs when we assume the stability and constancy of human responses through time and do not take sufficient account of the historical context of human thinking and behaviour. Structural fallacy, meanwhile, is associated with a tendency to explain human behaviour—in conformity with Durkheimian sociology—as a clear response to the pressures arising from social structures and functional imperatives, forgetting that not all individuals respond to these pressures in like manner. Authenticity bias is often

associated with the belief that individuals' accounts must in principle be authentic, and are therefore not in question. Lastly, stability bias arises from the inadequate assumption that once a self-conception or habit is established in its direction, it tends to maintain itself in a stable form over the course of life and manifests itself in a consistent manner through the author's creativity.

One of the key concepts in Baert's own approach is the term 'positioning'. He knowingly takes a concept established in marketing communications, where the task is to create in the customer's mind a brand position different from the positions of other competitive brands. Baert introduces the idea that intellectual intervention, self-presentation, and critical attitudes towards the views of others are also positioning of a kind, one which, however, takes place in the specific environment of the intellectual arena. Other concepts which form part of Baert's theoretical apparatus are 'performative tools', 'narratives', 'cooperation', and 'individualisation'.

Overall, Baert's new book is well worth reading. It is an attractive narration of Sartre's intellectual history and offers a penetrating and revealing look at the French intellectual scene of the 1940s and 1950s. Baert also makes an innovative contribution to social science theory and methodology, and he provides a model for others who are interested in studying public figures from a sociological perspective. Lastly, this is a book written in an appealing manner, to catch the imagination and grip the minds of its readers. It achieves its goals admirably.

Jiří Šubrt

Charles University, Prague
Jiri.Subrt@fhs.cuni.cz

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Pablo Beramendi, Silja Häusermann, Herbert Kitschelt and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds): *The Politics of Advanced Capitalism*

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This book embodies the ambitious project of explaining the differences between advanced capitalist democracies. The project is ambitious because it deals with an environment of 'external constraints as well as internal dynamics of its political forces and institutional reforms' (p. 1). Under circumstances of economic recession, the normal processes of change turn out to be central and determinant for the future of advanced economies. Demography, partisanship, labour-market regulation, economic institutions, among many other fundamentals, are changing. To analyse the formation of party coalitions, the editors offer a reinterpretation of the extensive existing accounts of democratic post-industrial economies. They develop a framework that differentiates between the demand and the supply side of politics and derive an equilibrium policy mix from the bi-dimensional policy space they use for the analysis. On one hand there is the designation of who benefits from policies—are these particularistic or universal? On the other hand, there is the design of policies. Are these focused on strengthening the beneficiaries' ability to generate income or substitute labour-market income? To make matters more complex, they also ask who produces the policies—the market or the state?

Three familiar concepts are part of these two bi-dimensional analyses. A shared dimension, dealing with who is in charge of the provision of goods and services, goes from *strong to weak state intervention in the economy*, or simply from state to market. The specific dimension of the supply side (the politicians) goes from *investment to consumption* policies. This is a renaming of the *commodification-decommod-*