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Most philosophers live and die in relative obscurity. If they are both insightful and fortunate, they sometimes achieve a measure of fame and posterity afterwards. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) bucked this trend. Perhaps no other philosopher was as famous in his own time as Sartre, or so we would claim. Fame, of course, does not entail or denote value, whether it be philosophical value or otherwise. It can also be fleeting, as the posthumous life of Henri Bergson showed, at least for quite some years. Sartre also seemed “dead” in academic circles, perhaps twenty years ago, and much earlier in France. Sartre himself would no doubt have been unhappy to learn of this posthumous fate; after all, in his beautifully crafted autobiography, entitled Words (1964), he positioned his life’s work as a writer as rooted in his desire to achieve a kind of immortality through his writings, which would survive him into posterity. It became fashionable to declare that we have “been there and done that”, as far as the study of Sartre’s life and works are concerned, and have long since moved on.

Yet those declaring that all there was to be known about Sartre had already been written (whether by Sartre himself or by others) were arguably doing so from a position of “bad faith”, as Sartre might have said. Perhaps those dismissing Sartre as irrelevant had read and enjoyed some of Sartre’s short stories, plays or novels, such as Nausea (La Nausée; Sartre 1938, 1965a). Maybe they had read Sartre’s famous public lecture, Existentialism and Humanism (L’Existentialisme est un humanisme; Sartre 1946b, 1973), or even thumbed their way through parts of Being and Nothingness (L’Être et le néant; Sartre 1943a, 1958a). Few, though, would have examined Sartre’s earlier, psychologically
motivated philosophical works in any real depth, such as *Imagination* (*L'Imagination*; Sartre 1936, 1972a) or its sequel, *The Imaginary* (*L'Imaginaire*; Sartre 1940, 2004a); then there is *The Transcendence of the Ego* ("La Transcendance de l'ego"; Sartre 1936–7, 1957a) to be considered, not to mention his *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (*Esquisse d'une théorie des emotions*; Sartre 1939a, 2002). Fewer still have attempted to grapple with Sartre's later works, including his massive two-volume *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (*Critique de la raison dialectique*; vol. 1: Sartre 1960b, 1960c; vol. 2: Sartre 1985b, 2006), or his multi-volume masterpiece, *The Family Idiot* (*L'Idiot de la famille*; Sartre 1971–2, 1981c, 1987, 1989a, 1991a, 1993c). Indeed, parts of Sartre's body of work—particularly those projects that he had started but simply never finished—only appeared quite some years after his death; the *Notebooks for an Ethics* (*Cahiers pour une morale*; written during 1947–8, but only published in 1983 in French, and in 1992 in English translation), which Sartre composed while initially trying to construct an ethical philosophy, provide an important example of the extent to which Sartre's body of work has continued to grow and develop, even in his absence. So, then, those claiming to have "exhausted" Sartre's body of work, thereby safely confining his intellectual figure to a halcyon period, had typically read and understood only a fraction of his vast, and ongoing contributions, made across multiple fields of inquiry.

Since Sartre's works have yet to be understood and appreciated in their full depth as the totality they represent, we would argue that Sartre is very much *alive*, particularly for those willing to resist these persistent claims of irrelevancy. Today, there are new biographies and scholarly interpretations that extend understanding of his thought into texts that simply never received the attention they deserved, there are reissues of his earlier works, and various books on Sartre and existentialism continue to appear. Recently, *Les Temps modernes* (*Modern Times*), the journal founded by Sartre and his life-long partner Simone de Beauvoir, published a special edition entitled *The Readers of Sartre*, intended to rebut the claim that Sartre is no longer read, either in France or elsewhere. The current editorial director of *Les Temps modernes*, famed documentary filmmaker Claude Lanzmann (himself a close friend to Sartre), asserted that "it is simply not true" that Sartre has faded into obscurity.

Despite these positive developments, much remains to be done in the field of Sartre scholarship. Perhaps the most important of these tasks is to try to grasp Sartre's works as the totality we have just now asserted they represent. While we do not claim in this concise volume to achieve
anything approaching a totalizing perspective on Sartre’s works, we do seek to make a small start toward this immense project, by attempting to make Sartre’s broader body of work accessible to a wider audience. By bringing together a diverse group of philosophers working across multiple disciplines, we hope to introduce those new to Sartre to works of his beyond those that appear regularly in the public domain, such as the *Existentialism and Humanism* lecture or *Nausea*. At the same time, we hope to provide those familiar with Sartre’s works with a range of perspectives which may serve to spur new insights and further research.

With these goals of achieving a balance of both breadth and depth in mind, we have sought to organize the essays in this volume thematically, rather than in terms of a strict chronology of Sartre’s works. Nevertheless, the three parts may be loosely defined as representing Sartre’s early philosophy (in Part I), Sartre’s “middle period” as a mature thinker (in Part II) and, finally, Sartre’s later thought (in Part III).

Part I, Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Literature, deals primarily with Sartre’s efforts to give an account of the human condition in terms of a phenomenological psychology and existential psychoanalysis. This part encompasses Sartre’s early perspectives on the imagination, self-hood, and the emotions and so on, as well as Sartre’s dramatization of these themes in literary form in *Nausea*.

Part II, Ontology: Freedom, Authenticity and Self-Creation, deals with the development of Sartre’s early phenomenology into a mature phenomenological ontology, particularly as it appears in *Being and Nothingness*. The conceptual terrain covered here includes Sartre’s conceptualizations of “bad faith”, authenticity and the fundamental project, along with Sartre’s account of inter-social relations via his notion of “the look”. Part II concludes with an account of Sartre’s intellectual trajectory from a relatively apolitical writer to a politically engaged provocateur *par excellence*.

In Part III, Ethics and Politics, the overview of Sartre’s political progression initially continues; particular attention paid to his post-war works, including *What Is Literature?* (*Qu’est-ce que la littérature?*; Sartre 1948a, 1988), *Anti-Semite and Jew* (*Réflexions sur la question juive*; Sartre 1946a, 1948b) and “Materialism and Revolution” (“Matérialisme et révolution”; Sartre 1946c, 1962a). Then, Sartre’s theory of groups is considered, bringing to light Sartre’s conceptualizations of revolutionary praxis and institutional power, particularly in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, but also in *The Family Idiot*. Sartre’s attempt to produce an ethics guided by his view of Marxian dialectics then follows, in which Sartre’s concepts of “need” and “scarcity” serve as the main elements in his vision for an ethical society, under socialism.
Part III concludes with a perspective on Sartre’s final efforts towards an ethics, as chronicled in his final interviews in 1980. Sartre’s concepts of “need” and “scarcity” that featured in his dialectical ethics are complemented in these interviews by his concept of “reciprocity” (alternatively described as an ethics of the “We”). Ethical action is driven here by the ideal that individuals may relate to each other in a way that positions the Other’s interests and needs as continuous with one’s own. In this “fraternal” mode of being-together, the objective of ending scarcity and lack would become goals shared in common by all of humanity, bringing about truly ethical relations between human beings.

Although the essays in this volume are organized according to a thematic and loosely chronological order as we have noted, the essays may also be read as self-contained articles, should readers so desire. Søren Overgaard’s chapter on “the look”, for example, provides context on the development of Sartre’s ontology, such that the central concept of the look is sufficiently explained, without the need to refer to subsequent chapters. At the same time, though, each chapter is designed to build on the one that precedes it; suggested further readings at the end of each chapter are designed to both explore the ideas covered in a particular chapter, and to encourage further research and discovery.

In his moving obituary for his friend and colleague Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61), entitled “Merleau-Ponty vivant” – that is, “Merleau-Ponty alive”, or “Merleau-Ponty lives” – Sartre asserted that “Merleau is still too much alive for anyone to be able to describe him” (Sartre 1961). We assert that the same may be said of Sartre himself, even now, over three decades after his death. Even a volume many thousands of words longer than this collection would still leave something of Sartre fleeing beyond one’s grasp, so to speak. Nevertheless, this posthumous elusiveness of Sartre is confirmation for us – and, no doubt, for the marvellous group of contributors appearing in this collection – of one thing: Jean-Paul Sartre vivant!