

DANIEL RUEDA GARRIDO



# Forms of Life and Subjectivity

## Rethinking Sartre's Philosophy



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2021 Daniel Rueda Garrido



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Daniel Rueda Garrido, *Forms of Life and Subjectivity: Rethinking Sartre's Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0259>

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0259#copyright>. Further details about CC BY licenses are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0259#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 9781800642188

ISBN Hardback: 9781800642195

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800642201

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800642218

ISBN Digital ebook (azw3): 9781800642225

ISBN XML: 9781800642232

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0259

Cover photo by Cosmin Serban on Unsplash at [https://unsplash.com/photos/2fn\\_pxLM59g](https://unsplash.com/photos/2fn_pxLM59g)

Cover design by Anna Gatti

# 5. Dialectics, Forms of Life and Subjectivity

---

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the dialectical structure that shapes the subjectivity of a form of life. Who we are is defined by our form of life, but also by contact with other forms with which we enter into a dialectical relationship. The negation of our form of life affects our subjectivity, our way of being and acting. It is therefore necessary to analyze this dialectical relationship that constitutes us. For it is through it that we can understand the change of subjectivity that goes hand in hand with social change. However, this dialectical exploration does not cease to remain in the realm of phenomenological ontology and is therefore examined as a condition of possibility of our own subjectivity, of its change and evolution.

I begin with Sartre's revision of the dialectical reason in his 1960 philosophical work, *Critique de la raison dialectique*. The French author opposes the external dialectic, understood in the Hegel-Marx sense as relations of opposition between independent totalities, to a dialectic of internal necessity. Taking up Johann Fichte's logic in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, I propose to rethink Sartre's revised dialectic, combining both versions of the dialectic, namely as a process that besides being governed by internal laws of opposition between the whole and the parts, also confronts and assimilates external totalities. In this way, the lack of internal necessity of the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic is solved and the idealistic isolation of the Sartrean dialectic is bridged. Both characteristics allow us to understand realistically the relationship between a plurality of forms of life that oppose, assimilate and resist one another, without resorting to a universal law of progress in history or divine will. This structure of

progressive integration and assimilation of the outside (of any form of life other than itself) is, as in Sartre but for different reasons, a totalization and not a totality, since the former implies a process that is not closed a priori, but is in constant formation. Therefore, it is a necessary process according to its constitutive principle, but contingent because it depends on the free will of its subjects and, moreover, on the forms of life with which it comes into contact.

From the contact between forms of life and the assimilation of one by another arise two concepts that are also explored in this chapter, namely hegemony, when one enters into a gradual process of assimilation of a large part of the other forms of life in one's environment; and resistance, when one form of life, under the assimilation of another, persists in its being. Forms of life are neither social classes nor states; they are first of all ontological units that shape the subjectivity of a community of subjects identified with it. This difference makes me reject Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony and qualify Raymond Williams' concept of group culture.

## 2. Sartre's Dialectic

The dialectical method on which I rely to explore the different moments of the evolution of a form of life's totalization is the method rehabilitated by Sartre in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), of Hegelian-Marxist lineage. The importance of this method lies, on the one hand, in trying to infer the moments of the totalization from historical events and, in particular, from human praxis; and on the other, in considering those evolutionary moments as denials or oppositions not between distant elements or totalities external to each other but between the totalization and its parts. Sartre claims to use totalization instead of totality (which, incidentally, was preferred by György Lukács and the Marxist tradition),<sup>1</sup> because while the latter implies an inert whole that has reached its final stage, totalization implies a whole that is evolving through praxis over time and by particular determinations or oppositional relationships.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 See Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 350–51.

2 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol. I (London and New York: Verso, 2004 [1960]), p. 45.

That is, the totalizing movement requires the denial of its posited parts to be able to integrate them definitively as actualized parts of the totalization. And this is precisely one of the features of the dialectic that Sartre rehabilitated: the dialectic process arises from the praxis itself, each action entails (or presupposes) a totalization; and, furthermore, it is not an external relationship between, for example, the actions of one human group against another for an interest beyond themselves, but an opposition between the totalization and the actions of the group; that is, to continue advancing in its actualization so that all its posited parts or (constitutive) elements are manifested before the reflective consciousness, the totalization must integrate them.<sup>3</sup>

The dialectical reason is a method that seeks to critically establish the knowledge of the historical reality in which the subject lives while submitting to judgment the same subject who carries out that knowledge as a product of that reality: 'It should be recalled that the crucial discovery of dialectical investigation is that man is "mediated" by things to the same extent as things are "mediated" by man.'<sup>4</sup> In this way, Sartre criticized the external dialectic because it provides to historical reality a blind evolutionary law through transcendental opposites that gives rise to a capricious process. 'Transcendental materialism',<sup>5</sup> he writes, 'leads to the irrational, either by ignoring the thought of empirical man, or by creating a noumenal consciousness [*conscience nouménale*] which imposes its laws as a whim, or again, by discovering in Nature "without alien addition" [*sans addition étrangère*] the laws of dialectical Reason in the form of contingent facts [*sous forme de faits contingents*]'.<sup>6</sup>

---

3 *Ibid.*, I. 'action is itself the negating transcendence of contradiction, the determination of a present totalisation in the name of a future totality,' p. 80. In *Critique de la raison dialectique*, pp. 165–66.

4 *Ibid.*, I, p. 79. In *Critique de la raison dialectique*, p. 165.

5 Sartre refers to transcendental materialism as synonymous with dialectical materialism, and he understands the latter as the following of natural laws that transcend human beings and their reason.

6 Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, I, p. 32. In *Critique de la raison dialectique*, p. 128. The 'alien addition' refers mainly to humanity (as self-conscious beings); he believes Engels' *Dialectic of Nature* turns the human being into a thing: 'In other words, is humankind merely an "alien addition" to nature, as Engels would have us believe, and, if so, is not Being, as Sartre argues, then reduced to knowledge, with humans just objects in a vast array of undifferentiated objects, the study of which is no different than the study of rocks?': in William L. Remley, 'Sartre and Engels: The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and the Confrontation on the Dialectics of Nature', *Sartre Studies International*, 18:2 (2012), 19–48 (p. 21).

Instead, Sartre's dialectic sought to establish the existential conditions by which the dialectical movement of history gained intelligibility: 'The dialectic, however, if it is to be a reason rather than a blind law, must appear as untranscendable intelligibility.'<sup>7</sup> It was, in short, to explore the dialectical relations internal to the object of study itself, to understand how this object is formed and opposed in turn to another or others. The internal dialectic, a dialectic that tries to correct the dialectic idealism of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Engels, is a realistic materialism. And with it, the object of study is made to show its own internal contradictions that explain its formation and progress. This means that the first step for a dialectical study is to understand the object as a whole, at least as a future whole in its dialectical evolution of oppositions.

The first aspect worth highlighting for our purposes is, in effect, that the whole determines its particulars. The importance of this notion is that the particular realities, first, to be able to oppose each other, must both be under the same unit; and second, neither opposite can be understood abstractly outside of that confrontation nor outside the totality or totalization movement in which they have arisen: 'On this basis, a dialectical logic of negation conceived as the relation of internal structures both to each other and to the whole within a complete totality or within a developing totalization, could be constructed.'<sup>8</sup> The particulars confronted are determinations of the totality, and as determinations are negations of the totality (following Baruch Spinoza, who considered that all determinations are negations: 'determinatio negatio est').<sup>9</sup> The totality in this sense is prior to the parts; although the

---

7 Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, I, p. 37.

8 *Ibid.*, I, p. 86.

9 With this indication, I am only echoing what Sartre himself wrote, namely, his attribution to Spinoza of this formula in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (I, p. 85). But, in fact, Sartre maintains the meaning given to this formula by Hegel, the difference between the two being that 'for Hegel the negation that comes with determination is necessary for being in any genuine sense, whereas for Spinoza the negation that comes with determination is a privation of being, a way of not being': in Robert Stern, "'Determination is Negation": The Adventures of a Doctrine from Spinoza to Hegel to the British Idealist', *Hegel Bulletin*, 37:1 (2016), 29–52 (p. 30), <https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2016.2>. For this interesting debate, see also, Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "'Omnis determinatio est negatio": Determination, Negation, and Self-Negation in Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel', in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. by Eckart Forster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 175–96.

parts give rise to the totality in its evolution, the parts are parts because they belong to a totality, and are therefore determined in their own structure and identity by the totality of which they are part.<sup>10</sup>

In the development of the object as a whole, its internal determinations are based on one of the principles that Engels identified as laws of historical development: the negation of a negation.<sup>11</sup> The first negation is that of the part by which the totality denies itself, therefore all determination is a negation of the totality. Through this dialectical principle, the first negation is in turn denied by the determined totality itself as opposed to the first negation. Double denial leads to an affirmation. And this is, in turn, in a later movement, placed as a negation to be denied: 'And it is within the totality, as the abstract unity of a field of forces and tension, that the negation of a negation becomes an affirmation.'<sup>12</sup> That negation of a negation expresses a process of integration of the parts within the totality and the movement of totalization. Thus, we must understand the affirmation as an integrating moment by which the whole is self-completing and pointing to the consummation of all its determinations: 'negation is defined on the basis of a primary force, as an opposing force of integration, and in relation to a future totality as the destiny or end of the totalizing movement'.<sup>13</sup> It is then that we understand Sartre's negation of *man* as an abstract entity; *man* exists only as posited by a totality (what I have insisted in calling subjects of a form of life), that is, within a particular existential condition given by the whole totalizing movement of which it is a part.

Furthermore, according to Sartre, it must be understood that there is no such thing as *man*; there are people, wholly defined by their society and by the historical movement which carries them along. If we do not wish the dialectic to become a divine law again, a metaphysical fate, it must proceed from individuals (although constituted by the totality)

---

10 Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, I, p. 86.

11 Friedrich Engels, *Dialectic of Nature*, in Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXV: *Engels, 1873–1883* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), pp. 313–588 (p. 356). Engels stated that dialectics has four laws: transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa, transformation of the extremes into each other, development through contradiction or negation of negation, and spiral form of development (p. 313). See also the discussion in Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, I, p. 31. For an analysis of this debate, see Remley, 'Sartre and Engels', pp. 19–48.

12 Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, I, p. 86.

13 *Ibid.*, I, p. 85.

and not from some kind of supra-individual ensemble.<sup>14</sup> The subject, and his subjectivity, which is the core of our research, from Sartre's dialectical reason, is a being that exists within a totality, which has to be posited as the one that gives to it a certain identity.<sup>15</sup> The Sartrean dialectic is thus presented as an advance on the materialist dialectic of Marxist origin in which the progressive movement is produced through the negation between external totalities governed by a law that for the French thinker can only be either arbitrary or imposed by the divinity, but not internally necessary. In this sense, Sartre bases the contingent on the necessary structure of the totality. Thus, that contingency has to do with the freedom of the individual within the totality and not with facticity or the world (what is necessary is the structure of a boxing match, what is contingent is the movement the boxer chooses to strike). This is a point that I hold to be of great importance for any re-examination of that process. For the rejection of the external dialectic seems to bring Sartre's internal dialectic into a certain isolation.<sup>16</sup> And, indeed, if the totality is determined in the concrete reality—in the world—it seems contradictory that such determinations, which are after all affirmations of the totality in each part, do not establish contact with other—external—totalities. For, as has been mentioned, for Sartre, all denials are between internal parts of a totalization that follows a necessary law. As a result, this closed and totalizing process seems powerless to explain how the universalization of certain modes of being and acting occurs, or how these are imposed on other totalities: that is to say, how the exchange, imposition and assimilation between cultures, and also between forms of life in the ontological sense set out in this book, takes place.

So far we can affirm that a form of life would progress through the integration of its subjects. The constitutive principle of such a form would gradually encompass more aspects of the subjects' lives. This would mean the progressive affirmation of the way of being and acting held in such a form of life. The Sartrean dialectic helps us to understand this internal necessity, but since the form of life (or culture, in Sartre's terms) occurs

---

14 *Ibid.*, I, p. 36.

15 See the section regarding 'existentialist totalization' in Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, pp. 331–60.

16 Note that the distinction between *internal* and *external* dialectics is used by Sartre himself in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, I.

in a context where there are other adjacent forms of life with which one comes into contact, how can this interrelationship be explained from the internal dialectical process? It seems rather that the negation that makes the totalization progress is not only the one established between the whole and the parts but also between totalizations. This consequence derives from the fact that the totalization is particularized in the concrete and material reality where other external totalizations exist. This calls into question the Sartrean idea that there is a single all-encompassing and homogenizing totalization of which the others are merely internal determinations. It is not surprising that this is the case if we remember that Sartre's totalization is a self-determined freedom that governs over the facticity and surpasses it, as well as the consciousness over existence: 'you can make something out of what you have been made into'.<sup>17</sup> This leads to losing sight of the fact that totalizations can be affected and freedom limited by other totalizations.

### 3. Rethinking Sartre's Dialectic

The surpassing of the Sartrean dialectic must have as its foundation the form of life as an ontological unit. That is to say, as an inseparable union of freedom and facticity, as well as of the subject and the group or community. Thus, if the part is an action that affirms the totality, at the same time it denies the denial of that totality (double denial), or what that totality is not. By affirming it in its particularity, it affirms it in opposition to its negation. This step between the external dialectic of Marxist origin and the internal dialectic defended by Sartre is supported by Fichte's dialectical thought.<sup>18</sup>

For Fichte, all knowledge is based on the intuition of the self or Ego.<sup>19</sup> The first dialectical movement towards the progress and foundation of

---

17 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations*, Vol. IX: *Mélanges* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 101: 'Je crois qu'un homme peut toujours faire quelque chose de ce qu'on a fait de lui.' See also, Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason*, 2 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), II, p. 178.

18 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. by A. E. Kroeger (London: Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill, 1889).

19 For Fichte's dialectic and the monism it presupposes, see Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic: Essays on its History and Theory*, trans. by H. Campbell Creighton (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977 [1974]), pp. 73–85. Also, Nectarios Limnatis, 'Fichte and the Problem of Logic: Positioning the *Wissenschaftslehre* in the Development of

knowledge or science (*Wissenschaft*) is that of the negation of the not-self (non-Ego), that is, of the external world. With the affirmation of the self, that which is not-self is denied, and in successive stages that which is not-self is assimilated into the self or Ego. That, according to the German philosopher, is the vocation of 'man' (which stands for humanity):

in every moment of his existence he tears something from the outward into his own circle; and he will continue thus to tear unto himself until he has devoured everything; until all matter shall bear the impress of his influence, and all spirits shall form one spirit with his [...] Such is man: such is everyone who can say to himself: I am man.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the same could be said with regard to forms of life, the affirmation of the form of life as a whole through one of its actions is simultaneously the negation of its negation, or the negation of what is presented as the opposite by affirming itself in a particular situation. The action with which the subject affirms his form of life, at the same time denies the opposite form of life, or that which is not his form of life. This is the denial of the principle that governs the actions of those who identify with another form of life. As in Fichte, the denial of this principle is the imposition of the principle (spirit) of the subject's form of life. This imposition is verified as an assimilation of the actions of the other form of life by the new imposed principle. This is based, I argue, on the fact that every action is meaningful or principled by its form of life. Hence, the dialectical process, by affirming the form of life in its action and principle, denies the forms of life with which it comes into contact, such denial being an assimilation. This implies that the form of life and the dialectical process that structures it is not merely internal and necessary but also external and contingent. Its process is both of integration and assimilation. In this way, the assimilation of other communities' behaviours contributes to the universalization discussed in the chapter regarding conversion (Chapter 3), by which in ethical terms the convert becomes beyond the good and evil of his previous form of life: 'In other words, it constitutes the decision to "play the

---

German Idealism', in *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*, ed. by Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 21–40.

<sup>20</sup> Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, pp. 334–35.

game” in which the categories of moral good and evil operate.<sup>21</sup> Such universalization implies that every form of life aspires to establish itself as the exclusive way of being human. Thus, the universalization of its principle is realized through the imposition of its actions, the facticity of which forces other communities to adopt the form of life that principles it. This imposition is a type of proselytism by which every subject tends to impose his form of life on those who do not follow it. That is to say, the subjects *posit* their ontological principle or way of being and acting on every human being, which triggers resistance by the communities shaped by other forms of life.

That resistance entails the assimilation as a contrary force. That is, the subjects posit their ontological principle or way of being and acting in each human being and do so in a pre-reflective manner; if you will, the subjects project their image of being human. This is experienced by the subjects of other forms of life as a denial of their intimate being and produces in them a resistance. This resistance unleashes the conscious process of assimilation by the subjects of the other form of life, who now become reflectively aware of the other as ‘not-me’, for as Fichte says, without the resistance there is no object for the subject: ‘The object is posited only in so far as an activity of the Ego meets resistance; no such activity of the Ego, no resistance [...] no resistance, no object.’<sup>22</sup> That reflective awareness leads to a struggle, the synthesis of which can only be the assimilation of one by the other, and therefore the surrender of one of them. Such a synthesis is not necessary, that is, it may not occur (can lead to an endless struggle), but the tendency to it is necessary on the part of every form of life in relation to others. Assimilation is the imposition of a behaviour as well as of the principle that governs it, which the subjects of the form of life that receives such imposition experience as a constraint on their own actions and as a questioning of their ontological principle. The latter, when understood by the subject as the impossibility of his being in this situation of struggle, leads to conversion, that is, the assimilation of the subject by the opposite form of life. This process, analyzed here exclusively from the experience of the subject, can also be described from the point of view of power, to which

---

21 Thomas R. Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 33.

22 Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, pp. 268–69.

I will return in Chapter 7 on the artistic form of life and its resistance with respect to the capitalist life and the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century.

#### 4. Subjectivity and the Struggle between Forms of Life

So, as we said above, just as for Sartre, from the standpoint of this phenomenological ontology, for the subjects to be able to freely be the incarnation of their form of life, they need everyone else to freely incarnate it as well. The imposition of facticity requires that it be freely adopted, so that the non-subject identifies with it and becomes the subject of that form of life.<sup>23</sup> Just what we have analyzed under the heading of ontological conversion and in Sartre, is put in terms of a change of project, that 'which cause[s] me totally to metamorphose my original project'.<sup>24</sup> However, it is only when the subject of the other form of life understands the imposition of the action, even if it is also the imposition of the principle that governs it, as the opening of a new possibility (and the impossibility of the previous form of life), that he will freely and spontaneously adopt it, abandoning, in turn, his previous principle of life. This is what Sartre examined under the creation of new possibilities in relation to facticity, an aspect that he mentions on several occasions but did not fully develop.<sup>25</sup> In his unfinished *Notebooks for an Ethics*, he called generosity this attitude of creating new possibilities through facticity, as Juliette Simont puts it: 'It [generosity] reveals "being-in-the-midst-of-the-world"; it "creates" contingent facticity. This is to say that it reveals and creates what did not wait for it to be.'<sup>26</sup> However, Sartre finally abandoned this idea, for he understood that all values

---

23 Regarding this condition for freedom, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. by David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 9. As I argued in Chapter 2 of this book, the condition of freedom is also the potential condition of my subjectivity. I consider myself a subject if I share with others a universal way of being a subject, and thus of being human.

24 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956 [1943]), p. 475.

25 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1960 [1946]), pp. 41–42; Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, pp. 309, 317, 333; Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 41, 288, 469.

26 Juliette Simont, 'Sartrean Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. by Christina Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 178–210 (p. 193).

become alienating as obligations, which was at odds with his attempt at elaborating an ethics of freedom.<sup>27</sup>

For example, on the question of anti-Semitism, Sartre suggests that society is responsible for the situation of the Jews, and that a change in that situation would have meant a change in their behaviour and even in the way they understand themselves:

The fact remains, you may answer, that the Jew is free: he can choose to be authentic. That is true, but we must understand first of all that that does not concern us. The prisoner is always free to try to run away, if it is clearly understood that he risks death in crawling under the barbed wire. Is his jailer any less guilty on that account?<sup>28</sup>

The text shows that Sartre considered it possible for the behaviour of some to influence a community of subjects, even though this influence never suppressed their freedom. What is curious is that the analogy of the prison and the prisoner with respect to the Jews conveys a certain deprivation of freedom, at least a limitation of movement, although one can always decide to escape. The prisoner's behaviour is obviously different from what it would be if he were not in prison. Therefore, being locked up in prison has conditioned his decisions and even possibly, elaborating on the text (which is confirmed below), his way of understanding himself, as he now sees himself as a prisoner of a form of life that is not that which he would lead if he were outside of prison. Thus, in writings like this, Sartre seems to bear in mind the possibility that facticity, when it comes to human actions and deeds, not only constrains the movement, that is, the way of acting, but also affects the subject's way of being. This leads him to make society (at least the French society of his time) responsible for the attitude and intrinsic qualities of the contemporary Jew:

We have created this variety of men who have no meaning except as artificial products of a capitalist (or feudal) society, whose only reason for existing is to serve as scapegoat for a still prelogical community [...]. In this situation there is not one of us who is not totally guilty and even criminal; the Jewish blood that the Nazis shed falls on all our heads.<sup>29</sup>

---

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 189, 193.

28 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. by George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1976 [1944]), p. 98.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Here we see that while the Jews remain free in their decisions, Sartre makes them dependent on the behaviour of others. And he holds others responsible for the possibilities given to the Jewish minority. The Jews would be living off the possibilities opened up by the social community in which they are inserted. A change in those possibilities would mean a change in the Jews. This interdependence between the two therefore affects the conditions of possibility of that freedom more than of freedom itself. These conditions would be the facticity. And it is so much so that it affirms that the Jew is the one that the community recognizes as a Jew: 'If they have a common bond, if all of them deserve the name of Jew, it is because they have in common the situation of a Jew, that is, they live in a community which takes them for Jews.'<sup>30</sup> If this recognition is accompanied by rejection and anti-Semitic feelings, being a Jew will be confronted with that reality. That is their condition as Jews, and therefore, being authentic means not denying that condition: 'Jewish authenticity consists in choosing oneself as Jew—that is, in realizing one's Jewish condition.'<sup>31</sup> This seems to bring Sartre close to the other extreme with respect to the defence of freedom prevalent in previous writings. For, if being a Jew is what society recognizes as Jewish, it seems that the very subjectivity of the subject is strongly conditioned by what groups other than Jews themselves think and do. And if this can be shared from the presuppositions of this book, it cannot be that the authenticity lies precisely in accommodating the image that other groups have of the Jews. In any case, it would be accommodating to the image that the Jewish people have of themselves. The Jews who accommodate to their external conditioning are Jews already alienated from themselves and their form of life. They are Jews who never cease to be strangers to society and to their own Jewish community. They would be negatively assimilated (living like the others in their society without ever becoming like the others).

And, in fact, the latter seems to be the Jew Sartre has in mind. And yet he believes that the former has not been assimilated by society because of anti-Semitism: 'so long as there is anti-Semitism, assimilation cannot be realized'.<sup>32</sup> However, as I would like to argue, it is through anti-

---

30 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

Semitism that the Jew has been assimilated into Western societies. That is, the Jew would have been assimilated into society precisely through anti-Semitism. This would be a Jew who has been denied in his being and assimilated in his opposite under the ontological principle of the hegemonic form. For all assimilation, as we have seen above, implies the denial of the ontological principle of the form of life to be assimilated, and such denial is equivalent to the affirmation of its opposite under the principle of the form of life it assimilates. There is no assimilation without negation. The form denied is assimilated through its opposite. The one who has been assimilated does not recognize himself in what he was; and, more specifically, a Jew who is the opposite of being a Jew. In the same way, those who have not been assimilated remain on the margins, almost invisible, but affirmed in their own being. Assimilation in this way would be the negation of the ontological principle of the Jews, which is a mode of the principle of maximizing the benefits for the glory of their god. Such a denial would imply the affirmation of its opposite (not maximization for the glory of god), namely the pursuit of self-interest without regard to the glory of a god; in a word: secularism.<sup>33</sup> This affirmation of Jewish secularism is the Jewish version that would have been assimilated under the principle of economic maximization of first state and then liberal capitalism.<sup>34</sup> So, if being Jewish is something distinctive, then that means incarnating a particular form of life, with its values, feelings, habits, etc. This shared form of life is what defines a Jew. If one of its members ceases to identify with that form, he or she would be authentic only by abandoning it and embracing another. The conditioning of one's own form must therefore be distinguished from the conditioning of the forms of life with which that form comes into contact. In the first case, conditioning is positive, because it confirms the image that one has of oneself; in the second case, it is negative, because it denies that image and either imposes a new image of being human

---

33 In the next chapter, I give more examples about this structure of assimilation through the affirmation of the opposite under the ontological principle of the form of life that performs the assimilation.

34 The state capitalism I am referring to is what can also be called state mercantilism, which incarnates a form of life of maximizing the state as an individual entity, typical of the European absolute monarchies. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011 [1974]), p. 193.

or denies and deforms the image that one has (giving rise to a state of constant doubt and insecurity). Both of these conditions are part of the facticity, 'as an ensemble of limits and restrictions',<sup>35</sup> but also possibilities, I would say, together with Eric Nelson and François Raffoul:

If it is the case that facticity is the horizon of philosophizing, and that philosophy is itself rooted in facticity, then facticity cannot be 'reduced' through some idealistic or transcendental intellectual operation. Nor can facticity be overcome by a transcendent freedom, as Sartre at times implied, if facticity is a condition of that freedom.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, when facticity is understood as the habitual behaviour that constitutes a form of life, this conception of facticity takes a turn with respect to Sartre. For, a human action as that which we perceive is not pure facticity, it emerges from a form of life; therefore, it is an action endowed with meaning. When subjects of another form of life are exposed to these actions or forced to carry them out, they are denied, in the first case, in the principle of their form of life, and in the second case, both in the principle and the actions. It is not a question of surpassing facticity, but of being assimilated by it or resisting it, since facticity tends to impose its ontological principle, its meaning. Facticity thus understood is never neutral but is born from a consciousness or an anthropical image and is impregnated with its meaning. That is why, elaborating on Sartre, it can be said that it is possible to create new possibilities by imposing the facticity that shapes a particular way of being and acting. The subjects of another form of life, being denied in their constitutive principle, can freely adopt the new form of life or reject it and fight it. To adopt it freely means to have understood the impossibility of their previous form of life in their new situation. This seems to be the understanding of those Jews who flee from their Jewish form of life and convert to the hegemonic one, with which they begin to identify. For Sartre these would be inauthentic Jews:

In a word, the inauthentic Jews are men whom other men take for Jews and who have decided to run away from this insupportable situation. The result is that they display various types of behavior not all of which

---

<sup>35</sup> Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking Facticity*, ed. by François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), pp. 1–23 (p. 1).

are present at the same time in the same person but each of which may be characterized as an avenue of flight.<sup>37</sup>

The French author takes as his point of departure here an identity that can be considered as alienated, that of giving oneself a being with which one does not identify. For, he says, these are men that other men 'take for Jews'; they reify them. It is not the identity they give themselves. This is contradictory to the premise held in this book that one is who one is because one has spontaneously given oneself a way of being and acting with which one identifies, and if that latter is that of the Jewish community, then the subject will consider himself a Jew, but if he does not identify with it, despite his conditioning, he will not be a Jew.

The latter means, I insist, that in the struggle between forms of life,<sup>38</sup> it is not freedom that is denied but the ontological principle that the subjects have given themselves freely: in a word, their subjectivity. The latter, as in Sartre and Fichte, remain free even when they understand the impossibility of their form of life and therefore their abandonment and conversion to another form. This brings us back to the theme of ontological conversion in relation to the assimilation of one form of life by another. This is the case, for example, as I elaborate in the following chapter, with the imposition on agricultural life of the principle of maximizing economic profits by a new way of working and living in eighteenth-century England. The peasants saw their previous life assimilated by the incipient agricultural capitalism.

## 5. The Dialectical Structure of a Form of Life

The logical element of this dialectic that I have briefly expounded refers precisely to this need to impose the principle of the form of life: that is, to the logic of negativity that I have just conveyed. By this logic, we deduce that between A (as form of life) and A' (as regular action or habit) there is a relationship of necessity. And that, therefore, to deny A is to deny A' and that to deny that an action of the type A' is a necessary

---

<sup>37</sup> Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, pp. 66–67.

<sup>38</sup> The struggle between forms of life is a struggle of resistance-assimilation, but this has to be distinguished from the struggle between the subjects of a form of life, which is then a struggle for identification. The latter will be dealt with in a separate book examining the power structure of the form of life.

possibility is to deny its principle of being. But we must remember that  $A'$  is a determination of  $A$  because  $A'$  is the negation of its negation. That is,  $A'$  is necessary for  $A$  because the denial of  $A'$  as a necessary possibility is not possible. A necessary possibility implies a series of possible actions of which at least one needs to be taken. Thus, in a form of life whose principle is that of survival, not wearing fur to protect oneself from the severity of the weather is possible, but not wearing anything or not covering the body at all is impossible (for this goes against one's survival). This is the logic that the form of life exhibits with respect to its determinations. The pre-logical element, on the other hand, refers to that same logic but as a lived experience of the subject. That is, not only as logical deductions but also as action or praxis that constitutes a form of life. I call this element pre-logical because it is formed in the pre-reflective consciousness, which has priority over the reflective one. Thus, the pre-logical element refers to the dialectic of our daily behaviour in a particular form of life. Both the logical and the pre-logical elements shape a dialectic of life or, if you will, a living dialectic.

This dialectic of life has its concern for concrete existence in common with the existentialist dialectic. Sartre established the rehabilitation of the dialectic as a process of totalization in which the dialectic movement is not only conceptual but also real, albeit all-encompassing and therefore infinite. In both dialectics, it is fundamental to consider being-in-itself in its inextricable relationship with the being-for-itself. But, as discussed above, Sartre understands it as a constant surpassing of the for-itself with respect to the in-itself, whereas I hold that the two are mutually necessary and mutually enabling. If the dialectic of forms of life is intended to be an advance with respect to Sartre, the dialectic of the French author is nevertheless paramount.

Now, if the dialectic of forms of life is an advance, how is it so? The main reason is that, as stated above, it is not a dialectic whose process consists exclusively of internal determination. Rather, such a determination or affirmation of the form of life is always 'in the midst of the world', for 'to be in-the-midst-of-the world is to be one with the world as in the case of objects'.<sup>39</sup> That is to say, to be in contact with other realities. In this way, the form of life must also admit the external dialectical process between different, independent totalizations. This has the advantage of

---

39 Hazel E. Barnes, 'Introduction' to Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. xiii.

showing how forms of life develop precisely by assimilating those with which they come into contact; an assimilation that is brought about by the structural need to universalize the principle or image of the human being that constitutes them. The dialectical process of the form of life, I claim, has greater explanatory power when the need for the internal process is understood precisely from the contingency of the forms of life with which it comes into contact and which it assimilates. If the internal process leads the subject to affirm the whole itself through action (A), the external process leads the subject to affirm the whole through the denial of what is not the whole (not-not-A). This implies the assimilation of the non-whole into the whole (not-not-A = A).

However, if we follow the models of dialectics mentioned above, we could be accused of a dialectic without totalization because, as Sartre argues, if no totalization, no dialectics: 'If dialectical Reason exists, then, from the ontological point of view, it can only be a developing totalisation [*la totalisation en cours*], occurring where the totalisation occurs [*là où cette totalisation a lieu*]'.<sup>40</sup> The external dialectic would need to enter into a totalization in order for the relationship of opposition to occur. And Fichte says the same:

Since we discovered, in the development of our third principle, that the act of uniting opposites in a third is not possible without the act of opposing [sic], and vice versa, it also follows that *in logic antithesis and synthesis are inseparable. No antithesis—no positing of equals as opposites—without synthesis—without the previous positing of the equals as equals. No synthesis—no positing of opposites as equals—without antithesis—without the previous positing of the opposites as opposites.*<sup>41</sup>

This allows us to explore in a little more detail the dialectical conception that I propose and with which I will analyze concrete historical examples in the following chapters. The solution to this predicament is that the dialectic that I have called external is only dialectic insofar as a form of life becomes the object of assimilation. This means that if the very tendency of the form of life to assert itself in its actions (which deny or determine the totalization) puts it in the position of facing another form of life, it does so only under the situation of *assimilation-resistance*. That situation is included in the form of life as totalization or, better,

---

40 Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, I, p. 47. In *Critique de la raison dialectique*, I, p. 139.

41 Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, p. 87. The italics are mine.

it is the totalization in that situation. Thus, if in a pre-reflective way, the subjects of a form of life posit their ontological principle in subjects of another form of life, such positing presupposes a totality that only becomes reflective when the subjects of the other form of life resist. Such resistance presupposes the totalization that seeks to assimilate the other. Otherwise, both totalizations are independent and do not become an antithesis. For, although every form of life denies a priori that which is not itself, it does not enter into an antithetical relationship with another form of life except when they come into contact. Only when the situation arises in which one tries to assimilate the other and this one resists, then the latter enters into the totalization of the former in the mode of resistance, that is, as an antithetical relationship. Again, in themselves they would not be antithetical in an actual way but only potentially, as a form of life versus everything that is not it.

Thus, what I call external dialectics, when it is dialectic, is no longer external. The external dialectic is then the way in which the internal dialectic would advance in its universalization, for after all, dialectic is the process by which the form of life tends towards its universality. It could not be otherwise, for its ontological principle is an image of what it is to be human for the community that adopts a particular form of life. This principle seeks to become universal in every situation in which presumed human beings come into contact. Otherwise, it would be denied at its very core. For, it must be remembered that this image is not simply that which I have of myself, but that which I have of myself as the epitome of the universal human being. And therefore, the one that I posit as the only properly human way of being and acting, which prefigures my community, the 'We'.

The above dialectic is relevant also because the actions and the ontological principle are taken as constituents of the form of life, making it a specific object of study. Unlike Sartre, this dialectic allows a subject to be studied and understood from his own habits as a subject of a form of life, and not as an isolated individual. Isolated characteristics refer not to subjectivity but to variations within it. It is no longer a question of studying a whole society, culture and historical time in order to understand a subject, or vice versa, to understand a whole worldview from the work of the individual. Rather, this dialectic allows us to understand that within the same 'historical time' and

within the same 'civilization' there are diverse forms of life, and that these respond to specific actions or habits galvanized in each of them by different principles. The consequence of the latter is that a totalization of totalizations is considered redundant, unlike in Sartre. For this reason, there can only be posited separate and independent totalizations of which, on a certain occasion, one rises above the others by assimilating them or establishing an assimilation-resistance relationship with them, or some of them. For there have always been forms of life that have lived their own totalization until they have been assimilated by a new form established as hegemonic. This might be the case, for instance, of the so-called pre-Columbian forms of life. This implies that there is not one History but many histories. This complex topic would need a separate study, centred on the philosophy of history, so the above will suffice for our purpose for the time being.

The term hegemonic form of life mentioned above in relation to its constitutive anthropological image has resonances with the concept of cultural hegemony, or hegemonic culture, of which Gramsci wrote. But I would like to warn that it would be a mistake to take his definition to convey what I mean by a hegemonic form of life, for the latter depends specifically on the ontological and dialectical structure that this book is dealing with. That is, for the Italian author hegemony has to do mainly with a social class which, in struggle with another, tries to substitute one ideology for another through praxis:

Ideologies are anything but arbitrary; they are real historical facts which must be combated and their nature as instruments of domination revealed, not for reasons of morality, etc., but for reasons of political struggle: in order to make the governed intellectually independent of the governing, in order to destroy one hegemony and create another one, as a necessary moment in the revolutionizing praxis.<sup>42</sup>

This substitution of one ideology for another would be at the level of the superstructure, so that its change would have repercussions on the structure, that is, on the means of production and the economic system (but he never manages to clarify the specific relationship between the two). Hegemony means substitution in the superstructure but through

---

42 Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935*, ed. by D. Forgacs and E. J. Hobsbawm (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 196.

the consent of the subjects and not through mere authority. In Gramsci's opinion, the Marxist philosophy of praxis has precisely the objective of revealing and opposing the strategies of creating consent by the ruling class:

It is not an instrument of government of dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over subaltern classes; it is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even unpleasant ones, and in avoiding deceptions (impossible) by the ruling class and even more by themselves.<sup>43</sup>

In the above sense, Gramsci's concept has interesting aspects for the understanding of a hegemonic form of life. For the latter is a form of life that has been freely and spontaneously adopted by most of the subjects in a given population or society. This is equivalent to Gramsci's notion of consent. Likewise, the hegemonic form of life has more to do with the superstructure than with the structure, in Marxist terms. What separates, however, the hegemony of the form of life from the concept used by Gramsci is that, in the first place, the one I hold is ontological, and therefore refers to a way of being and acting shared by a community that cannot necessarily be identified with a social class. Therefore, it cannot be equivalent to the state either, whose power relationships seem to underpin Gramsci's concept of hegemony, according to Boothman:

This concept, stemming from ancient Greece, of hegemony as the system of power relations between competing—or between dominant and vassal—states is found in the Notebooks in sections, for example, on how U.S. power was created [...] and on the history of subaltern states explained by that of hegemonic ones.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, although the hegemonic form of life establishes certain behaviours, feelings and values, it does not seek to preserve and strengthen an economic structure, but to preserve and strengthen itself. This means that the hegemonic form of life has an end in itself, persisting

---

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197. In Gramsci, the forging of consent is moreover inextricably linked to domination, as Derek Boothman explains: 'the two aspects—dominance and leadership, involving force and consent, respectively—that for Gramsci were to characterize hegemony are thus present'; in 'The Sources of Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony', *Rethinking Marxism*, 20:2 (2008), 201–15 (p. 205).

<sup>44</sup> Boothman, 'The Sources of Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony', p. 203.

in its being; or what is the same, it seeks to preserve and universalize its anthropological image. And in any case, the economic structure and the control of the means of production emerge from that image or ontological principle with which its subjects identify. In a word, the hegemony of a form of life responds to its assimilation of other forms with which it comes into contact in a given space and time, and that implies power but not necessarily a government nor the control of the means of production. The latter is rather a consequence. If we were to apply the hegemony of forms of life to one social class and its political leaders, it would still differ from Gramsci's conception that the struggle is not against a subordinate or an opposing form of life but against all forms of life that are different, and there are more forms of life than social classes.

So the process illuminated by Gramsci's philosophy of praxis in terms of replacing the ruling class, would only be part of the tendency of every form of life to universalize. For all forms of life deny and resist each other, and the one that is hegemonic at a given moment may not be so later on, with another one rising equally in pursuit of preserving its hegemony and progressing in the assimilation of those that resist: a mere Manichean dualism between the dominated class and the ruling class cannot be applied. The latter is rather a reduction of the complexity of ways of being and acting that exist in a given population, even under the hegemony of one of them (there are always subjects that resist assimilation, let us call them 'the dissidents'). One might believe that there are different forms of life coexisting peacefully and harmoniously, but this is based on the fact that they have all been assimilated and, as a consequence, transformed and homogenized, or simply because they are under the pressure of the hegemonic one. In the latter case, there would also be a relationship of resistance between them.

This distinction I have just made between hegemony in Gramsci and the relation of assimilation-resistance between forms of life, as a plurality of ontological units that tend towards the persistence of their being through resistance and universalization, must necessarily be distinguished from the concept of cultural hegemony or culture as hegemony defended by Raymond Williams, and which gave rise in the 1980s to the shift towards cultural studies. Williams combines the

American conception of culture, as real totalities that give identity to a population or social group, and the Marxist concept of ideology as values and praxis,<sup>45</sup> so that for him the strongest culture is the hegemonic one, which leaves on the margins the cultures shared by minority groups or dominated social classes:

Hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of 'ideology', nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as 'manipulation' or 'indoctrination'. It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. It is, that is to say, in the strongest sense a 'culture', but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes.<sup>46</sup>

In Williams, therefore, the concept of class struggle is understood as resistance to the hegemonic culture. This is not a mere mechanism of imposition and indoctrination, but culture shapes the lived experience and world of those who share it. And, in a way, social groups and classes on the margins proudly resist the hegemonic culture.<sup>47</sup> This brings the position advocated in this book and Williams' conception of cultural hegemony very close. Both coincide in pointing to a process by which the Marxist class struggle is reinterpreted from the subjectivity of individuals, and their lived experience. Hegemony moves from the realm of economics and politics to culture as a lived reality with which domination is not external but internal, which is also close to the Foucauldian distinction between disciplinary society (external mechanisms of power) and society of control (internalization of the mechanisms of power):<sup>48</sup>

---

45 Sherry Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 113, 120.

46 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 110.

47 Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory*, p. 114.

48 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995 [1978]).

All these active experiences and practices, which make up so much of the reality of a culture and its cultural production can be seen as they are, without reduction to other categories of content, and without the characteristic straining to fit them (directly as reflection, indirectly as mediation or typification or analogy) to other and determining manifest economic and political relationships.<sup>49</sup>

However, the resemblance is rather superficial. And here is why. In the first place, because of the problematic nature of his concept of culture as ideology, which still refers to a class structure. As I have insisted from the outset, a form of life is an onto-phenomenological concept, and is therefore neither identical nor reducible to the concept of culture, which implies a social and political-institutional level. In any case, the latter level requires the presence of the former. That is to say, it requires the identification of the subject with an ontological principle from which a particular way of being and acting derives. Even if culture is understood with Williams as a 'system of lived meanings and values', it still does not explain its homogeneity or the way in which it is constituted. Culture as what shapes the everyday lives of most individuals is sufficiently ambiguous to make any explanatory sense with respect to hegemony. On the other hand, this concept of culture has a derivative meaning—which further deviates it from its ontological sense—related to the distinction between high and low culture, for, in later publications, it is referred to as the set of creative activities and intellectual work of a society. These activities would reflect a common spirit, something that brings it closer to a certain cultural phenomenology, such as that of Steven Connor, discussed in the Introduction to this book:

We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life—the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning—the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction.<sup>50</sup>

---

49 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 111.

50 Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. by Robin Gable (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 4. This is confirmed by the entry on culture in his *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015 [1976]), pp. 49–54. These senses of culture he claims to refer to what might be considered the division between civilization and material culture. Williams' concept of culture would have the sense of the material

Secondly, culture and society are not the same thing; however, this identification is explicitly stated in *Resources of Hope*, in which culture is understood as the shape, purpose and meaning of a society: 'Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings.'<sup>51</sup> Society, in any case, should be treated as a concept that encompasses a number of 'cultures', in the sense of forms of life, and one of which is considered the hegemonic one. However, in Williams' approach, hegemonic culture is attributed to a social group in relation to which there is a 'subordination of particular classes' (retrieving the first quotation). However, a form of life is not reducible to a class or social group. If by culture we mean the form of life of a class or social group that is also imposed in order to dominate other classes or social groups, then, although progress has been made with respect to Gramsci's duality between the dominant and the dominated class, the paradigm of the domination of classes and social groups is definitely maintained. For culture is understood as the instrument of domination over marginal groups that resist. But this loses sight of the fact that the form of life, beyond being an instrument, is the way of being and acting of those subjects who identify with it, and therefore do not have as their goal an objective outside of it, but to persist in their own being. Nor does it explain the nature of the resistance, which is not mere pride or satisfaction in being different,<sup>52</sup> but the need to be what one has imposed on oneself, that is, to want to be what one should be.

Thirdly, and as a consequence of the previous two, Williams' concept of hegemony is not explanatory, but is limited to pointing to a cultural homogeneity, supposedly used as an instrument of domination over other classes or social groups. The cultural hegemony thus expressed is inconsistent from the point of view of a social ontology since it does not show an explanation of the necessity of such hegemony or of its resistance, but rather seems to come to justify a hypothesis or premise already accepted in advance, inherited from the Marxist tradition. Moreover, its condition, independent of internal and external processes

---

development and way of life of peoples together with the sense of the development of artistic and intellectual activities, related to the German *Kultur*.

51 Williams, *Resources of Hope*, p. 4.

52 Satisfaction or even joy and pleasure I consider as emotions that come with the affirmation of one's own way of being and acting, but not as the goal or end. I am devoting a separate book to emotions with regard to our form of life.

such as the dialectical ones discussed in this chapter, makes such hegemony a kind of *deus ex machina*; a level not only independent of the economic and political but of any ontological structure. Its appearance seems to be the justification of a power that is somehow considered obvious.

Moreover, this hegemony is not only not understood, from Williams' standpoint, as a necessary process from culture itself—as, on the other hand, we have shown to be the case from the conceptualization of the form of life—but neither is its necessity explained from the very being and existence of the subjects. That is, the missing answer to the question: What makes the subjects impose their form of life on each other? And it seems even less necessary if culture is understood as artistic and intellectual productions and activities, for then it seems rather to be mixing under the label of culture different forms of life, namely the intellectual and the artistic; consequently, art and intellectual activities do not necessarily have to reflect that common spirit of society Williams refers to (this statement will make more sense after reading my exploration of particular forms of life in the following chapters).

With Sartre, one could therefore make the same critique that he made of dialectical materialism, namely, the lack of internal necessity. This approach of Williams gives rise to what has been called 'popular cultures' in opposition to hegemonic culture. But precisely because of the lack of internal necessity that characterizes these groups studied, what unites them are externalities such as race, gender, age and the place where they live: 'These are studies of the local worlds of subjects and groups who, however much they are dominated or marginalized, seek to make meaningful lives for themselves: race and ethnic cultures, working-class cultures, and youth cultures.'<sup>53</sup> This has the danger of taking as essential what is accidental, and above all of losing sight of the fact that it is the subjects who spontaneously and freely identify with their community and self-impose their ontological principle (the principle that guides their lives). Thus, their ethnicity or skin colour is not equivalent to a culture, let alone a form of life, as individuals of the same race can and do lead very different forms of life, even at the same time and in the same geographical area. Moreover, this explains that a Latino in the United States, for example, will not, because of his race and

---

53 Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory*, p. 114.

geographical origin, cease to be a subject identified with the community that incarnates the capitalist form of life. What it indicates, perhaps, is that, integrated into that form, he or she will have to compete to incarnate it more perfectly, and will therefore be exposed to the constant attraction-repulsion that characterizes the relationship with those we take as models of our way of being and acting. This relationship of dependence thus also extends to the model, i.e., to those who are seen as models of that form of life, let us say, its elite (who are dependent on the followers). Therefore, it would not be a matter of differentiating the form of life of the Latino with respect to his model, but of both at different levels of integration in the same form of life, in which they find themselves in a situation of attraction-repulsion.

This review of Williams' concepts of culture and hegemony, together with his sociology of culture, by no means intends to deny any value to his contribution, for it certainly does have value, and its development has been of great importance in recent decades for research in cultural studies. What I mean is that for this kind of sociological approach to reveal culture as a process driven by an internal necessity, it needs an ontological approach that grounds its condition of possibility. These remarks suffice for now to distinguish and highlight the conception of hegemony that derives from the struggle between forms of life as ontological units and the constitution of their subjectivities.

To sum up, hegemony is not only imposition but assimilation in the sense that the subjects of the other forms of life convert to the hegemonic one; a conversion that is ontological, as we have seen in Chapter 2. And such assimilation is governed by the dialectical process expressed above. Thus, the dialectic of the form of life, as elaborated in dialogue with Sartre and Fichte, will allow me to examine the capitalist form of life in its intrinsic subjectivity and in the stages through which it has been integrated by assimilating in its path the forms of life of other communities. This dialectic will also allow me to distinguish the capitalist form of life from others that have been assimilated and from others that have not been assimilated in the process of its history, the latter being rather excluded until a certain moment from the universalization of the capitalist form of life and its subjectivity. This subjectivity is the hegemonic one, today at a global scale (that is, it shapes and constitutes the experiences of most people), and that is why it is so important to

deal with it. With the analysis of its dialectical process, I intend, among other things, to show how its principle of economic maximization is in permanent structural contradiction with its process of reification.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on Fichte's philosophy, this chapter has involved a rethinking of Sartre's dialectic in order to reveal the structure of a form of life and the configuration of its subjectivity. I have argued that while Sartre's dialectic provides necessity to the dialectical process by making it dependent on the relationship between a totalization and its constituent parts—being the totalization, the universal history and, being the parts, the social groups and nations—it turns all groups in their infinite heterogeneity into a homogeneous whole from the outset as the historical totalization of humanity. Thus, all are homogenized within that unitary History and its driving principle. The dialectic I have suggested seeks to reconcile Sartre's internal dialectical process with the process of the external dialectic of Hegelian-Marxist lineage. In this way, homogenization occurs a posteriori, through the assimilation of the different forms of life (constituent of groups and nations) under the same principle, that of the hegemonic form of life in its process of universalization.

The latter allows the distinction between forms of life to be preserved, as a true distinction of identity and subjectivity, while explaining that homogenization is not a priori but precisely the product of this process of assimilation. Moreover, it ratifies that there is no History but the histories of each form of life and its assimilations. This also respects the limits between forms of life, even when they have been assimilated under the hegemonic principle. The assimilated form of life remains, however, always possible, within its own totalization. The forms of life are thus independent, and therefore are not within a totalization that we could call universal history, but can become part of the process of integration and universalization of a hegemonic form. The consequence of this for our purposes is that the assimilations of other forms of life partially modify subjectivity, incorporating new characteristics under the same principle. Different moments bring different features. And these moments are not part of a triadic progression as in Hegel, but part of the necessary process of universalization of forms of life by the assimilations of others.

