

## **JEAN-PAUL SARTRE ON ABSOLUTE FREEDOM (from his work *Situations*)**

We were never more free than under the German Occupation. We had lost all our rights, above all the right to speak; we were insulted daily and had to remain silent, we were deported, because we were workers, because we were Jews, because we were political prisoners. All around us on the walls, in the newspapers, on the screen, we met that foul and insipid image that our oppressors wanted us to accept as ourselves. Because of all this we were free. Since the Nazi poison was seeping into our thinking, each accurate thought was a victory; since an all-powerful police was trying to force silence upon us, each word became precious as a declaration of principle; since we were hunted, each gesture had the weight of a commitment. The often frightful circumstances of our struggle enabled us finally to live, undisguised and unconcealed, that anxious, unbearable situation which is called the human predicament. Exile, captivity, death, which in happier times are skillfully hidden, were our perpetual concern, and we learned that they are not avoidable accidents nor an external menace; in them we had to recognize our lot, our destiny, the deep source of our reality as men. At each moment we were living to the full the meaning of that banal little phrase: "All men are mortal." The choice that each of us made of himself was authentic, because it was made in the presence of death, since it could always be expressed in the form, "Rather death than ---." I am not speaking here of the elite who were actual Resistants, but of all those Frenchmen who by day and by night, for four years, said "No." The cruelty of our enemy drove us to the limits of our condition, forcing us to ask those questions which can be avoided in peace. All those who were aware - and what Frenchman was not, at one time or another - of some information about the Resistance, asked himself anxiously, "If they torture me, can I hold out?" Thus the question of freedom was posed, and we were brought to the edge of the deepest knowledge that a man can have of himself. For the secret of a man is not his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex, it is the limit of his freedom, his ability to resist torture and death. For those involved in the underground activity, the circumstances of their struggle were a new experience: they were not fighting in the open as soldiers; hunted alone, arrested alone, they resisted torture in the most complete abandonment; alone and naked before torturers who were clean-shaven, well-fed, well-dressed, who regarded this wretched flesh with contempt - torturers whose smug consciences and enormous social power gave every appearance of their being right. Nevertheless, at the depth of this solitude, others were present, all the comrades of the Resistance they were defending; a single word was enough to trigger ten, a hundred arrests. This total responsibility in total solitude, is it not the revelation of our freedom?

### ***Treatise on Human Nature, Hume***

We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. As this opinion may appear somewhat extraordinary, it may not be improper to confirm it by some other considerations.

### ***Nicomachean Ethics: Aristotle***

Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education.

### ***Republic: Book 7, 519b (Plato)***

And must there not be some art which will effect conversion in the easiest and quickest manner; not implanting the faculty of sight, for that exists already, but has been turned in the wrong direction, and is looking away from the truth?

Yes, he said, such an art may be presumed.

And whereas the other so-called virtues of the soul seem to be akin to bodily qualities, for even when they are not originally innate they can be implanted later by habit and exercise, the of

wisdom more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains, and by this conversion is rendered useful and profitable; or, on the other hand, hurtful and useless. Did you never observe the narrow intelligence flashing from the keen eye of a clever rogue --how eager he is, how clearly his paltry soul sees the way to his end; he is the reverse of blind, but his keen eyesight is forced into the service of evil, and he is mischievous in proportion to his cleverness.

Very true, he said.

But what if there had been a circumcision of such natures in the days of their youth; and they had been severed from those sensual pleasures, such as eating and drinking, which, like leaden weights, were attached to them at their birth, and which drag them down and turn the vision of their souls upon the things that are below --if, I say, they had been released from these impediments and turned in the opposite direction, the very same faculty in them would have seen the truth as keenly as they see what their eyes are turned to now.

### ***De Anima: Book 3 (Aristotle)***

Both of these then are capable of originating local movement, mind and appetite: (1) mind, that is, which calculates means to an end, i.e. mind practical (it differs from mind speculative in the character of its end); while (2) appetite is in every form of it relative to an end: for that which is the object of appetite is the stimulant of mind practical; and that which is last in the process of thinking is the beginning of the action. It follows that there is a justification for regarding these two as the sources of movement, i.e. appetite and practical thought; for the object of appetite starts a movement and as a result of that thought gives rise to movement, the object of appetite being it a source of stimulation. So too when imagination originates movement, it necessarily involves appetite.