

REVIEW of Books 1/28/65

REBEL by George Lichtheim, a review of THE EXISM OF J*P S by Wilfrid Desan (Doubleday, \$4.95)

"Desan's work is /// verbose, rhetorical & awestruck."

B/E, "that great, inflated, word-intoxicated essay in which Sartre--writing in Paris during the German Occupation--introduced his countrymen to the mysteries of Ger. metaphysics."

Desan "has been unduly impressed by S's public status as the central figure of Fr. intellectual life."

J-S "is the Callas of Fr. lit: a star whose bravura performances make up for the frequent lack of an adequate libretto." ~~It is not only the quality of the 2 eggs: J-PS & DeG & yet without them Lichtheim believes Fr would sink into "mediocrity".~~ "I am skeptical nonetheless about the claims made for Sartre, by Mr. Desan & others, in the domain of phil. properly so-called."

"I find it difficult to take S seriously as an expositor of either Hegel or Husserl. In any case it is notorious... that both S & Merleau-Ponty learned all they knew about Hegel from Alexandre Kojève's celebrated lecture course at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes bet. '33 & '39... (published in bk. form in 1947)"

"In recent yrs. then the Fr. intellectual elite has been in possession of a key to Hegel which, by a singularly fortunate coincidence, also made possible an interpretation of Marx at a level far above the crudities of the Leninist school."

"The tone (of Desan) is too deferential, the difficulties are too systematically eluded, & above all, the paradoxical nature of S's relationship to C-ism (as distinct from Marxism) is not brought out."

S's desire is "to get beyond the Communist version of Exism."

On the positive side, he (J-PS) has carried further the destruction of the simplified M-L-ist ontology which serves the C-ist movement as an ersatz religion... Hence there

is now in progress a perfectly genuine, & very interesting 3-cornered debate among Exists, Catholics & Existentialists in France."

"Negatively, S has dazzled & confused an entire generation of intellectuals by a species of intellectual sleight-of-hand, by liberatrian posture in the service of totalitarianism, & by a combination of phil. fellow-travelling with respectable Cartesian metaphysics."

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