

# The Solitary Voice of Dissent

Using Foucault and Giddens  
to Understand an Existential Moment

**Martin Kay**



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***Dedication***

*For my father*  
JOHN KAY, 1922-2014

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## Chapter 2

# Exploring Dissent

Until it can be defined further, dissent means people standing up and saying “No!”. The point about standing up is important. Those who continue in their seats and say “No.” are generally declaring their rejection of whatever dissent has been raised. Their decision is final, there is no need for further discussion. The question of power, therefore, is central to any examination of dissent – and dissenters, whether group or individual, are all characterised by relative powerlessness.

Power is control: “the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgement dictate” (Lukes, 2005: 85). In the next Chapter, we will see how Foucault takes this explanation much further – but, for the purposes of this Chapter, Lukes, who is an authoritative commentator, tells us all we need to know.

The next important point, after the distinction between standing up and staying seated, is the act of speaking out. Hannah Arendt explains how easy it is to disagree with what is being said or proposed – in other words, to feel like a dissenter – but actually to fail in the task:

Dissent implies consent, and is the hallmark of free government; one who knows that he may dissent knows also that he somehow consents when he does not dissent.

(Arendt, 1973a: 71)

So, let us now turn to those who look and sound like dissenters but may, for our purposes, be masquerading – either as radicals, reformers, resisters or simply dreamers.

Arendt shows us that dissent is not simply a ‘couch exercise’, a matter of preferring the liberal to the illiberal and doing nothing about it. But, equally, incomplete action, taken almost to the extreme of eventual radicalisation, leading possibly even to violence against the State (Cohen, 2005), is not dissent either: Cohen *nearly* became a revolutionary but didn’t in the end. Nor is dissent the phenomenon of so-called ‘dissidents’

or non-conformist individuals prominent in their *milieu*. In ‘underground movement’ form, these were notably manifest, in the modern experience, in the sense that the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 exposed (Lourie, 1974). In a similar way, in Irish memory, the activism and class struggle of James Connolly and the trades unionism of James Larkin in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century might also have been characterised by observers of that period as ‘revolutionary’ and ‘rebellious’ or, in today’s language, as ‘radically reformist’, but never as ‘dissent’.

In more recent memory, however, there was the striking and moving example of Rosa Parks who, in 1955 in Alabama, refused to move to the back of a bus, where her coloured status required her to sit and where she was instructed to remove herself. But that was resistance not dissent: it was a deliberate, obstructive act against the laws of the State that, in turn, inspired a whole upheaval of a society: “I have a dream ...” as Dr Martin Luther King, who *was* a dissenter, would later put it.

Dissent is not simply academic disagreement – as, for example, in Mitchell Cohen’s critique of Foucault’s postmodern ‘fumbling’ of the reasons behind the collapse of the Peacock Throne (2002). It is not even celebrity *angst* – for example, the international campaigning of rock-stars or the cultural power of the famous and the glamorous (see, for example, Gitlin, 1998). But read on ...

At its very origin, dissent has to come from inside the individual and be of fundamental importance to his or her being or survival: declaring dissent must constitute a critical moment for the individual and be transformative. Jean-Paul Sartre was a relentless dissenter in the face of historical, social, political and economic constraints upon human freedom. He even dissented from the Nobel Prize that was offered him – and even from himself and his earlier thoughts, acts and writing. Notwithstanding this pattern of “inconsistencies and errors” (Aronson, 2013: xxii), Sartre, as an otherwise reliable champion of freedom, describes the ‘certainty’ of the moment of dissent as the individual’s choice between a continuing void of oppression and, in the face of such peril, the personal triumph of being able still to reason out the word “No!” – and, significantly, *to commit to that declaration* (Sartre, 2007:36; Sartre, 2013a).

Perhaps certain rockstars do deserve to be excused their *angst* and admitted as dissenters, then? The individual has to be impelled by something so antithetical to what he or she believes in or perpetuates in his or her way of life that the act of responding is as unavoidable as revulsion at

the sudden discovery of the unspeakable affront in the first place. There must be plenty of local examples of this, serving also to emphasise that professional dissent is not the exclusive reserve of writers and philosophers. In *The Irish Times* of 2 January 2016, p.12, for example, there is a detailed obituary for one Paul O'Mahony "[an Irish] criminologist who argued for a humane justice system" and furthermore did something about it. The author of the obituary, citing a former colleague of O'Mahony, explains that "his work was academically rigorous but its core quality was always a seeking out of the truth, often the uncomfortable truth, and, most especially, *he spoke truth to power*" (*ibid.*, italics added). Another example, from my own experience, is Professor Bengt Flyvbjerg who spoke the truth about the urban planning culture in Aalborg, Denmark. Flyvbjerg (pronounced 'Floopberg') reappears in Chapter 8, below, as a point of reference.

The brilliant but tragic Rosa Luxemburg, who seemed to dissent from pretty much everything to both the right and even the left of working class struggle, spoke the truth like this:

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of a party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. *Freedom is always ... freedom for the one who thinks differently.*

(Luxemburg, 1940, italics added)

Appropriately and helpfully, therefore, the Soviet writer, Andrei Amalrik, viewing that same hiatus in terms of 'freedom', suggested that the origin of this impulse lies between the individual and his or her conscience (Lourie, 1972). This book argues that Amalrik's explanation of such moments of isolated, individual, transformative judgement was accurate but can be further refined. Giddens, in particular, will approve for Amalrik's is completely consistent with his own explanations (see Chapter 3, below). The transformation is the conversion of growing inner anxiety into something liberating that can itself be expressed – a shift away from (concealed) ontological insecurity on to a platform that can and must be articulated.

"No. No!"

It is possible to identify several forms of authentic dissent. First, creative dissent.

The dissenting, questioning habit of the great American novelist, Norman Mailer, grew from early revolutionary socialism through non-conformism to constant critical rebellion. We might also include the young WH Auden, George Orwell and today's Ai Weiwei in this category, as examples of artistic brilliance challenging and confronting political indifference. In contrast, there is the witty, playful dissent of Voltaire who satirised the norms of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe and its Establishment through the travels and adventures of *Candide*.

By way of extension, there is the professional dissent of later writers urged by Jean-Paul Sartre (2013b), who almost deserves a strapline to himself on the flyleaf of this book. *Detach yourselves from the accepted world of the bourgeoisie*, I can hear him insisting. *Live now, in the present, and make your impact upon the future you can change. If you fail in that, you will sink into the contemptible slough and mediocrity of contemplative relativism.*

Pablo Medina (2015), recalling the Cuban poets Padillo and Rivero, gives us many clues to the nature of dissent. Such solitary, creative dissenters as Padillo and Rivera were unlikely to have enjoyed, for example, the freedom, abundance and tolerance of life in New York that he, Medina, had enjoyed. Instead, what to write and what to think would have been prescribed. The individual's personal 'truth' would have been suppressed by intolerance and the 'tyranny' of the 'truth' imposed by the system. Words would be the only weapons left in that clash with ideological intransigence and intellectual mediocrity and stagnation: "It is not that [Padillo and Rivero] sought out confrontation, but that confrontation was forced upon them. They wrote out of conviction that the individual right to say and write what one knows and believes is sacrosanct." Such themes have no ideological foundation but, citing a German poet, Novalis, Medina explains that they "arise instead out of [...a...] sober and spontaneous encounter with the world", an encounter which deeply disturbs some transcending passion and pure ideal. "It takes courage to speak the truth where truth is considered a threat."

So pure and simple dissent, we learn, is characterised by anxiety, transformation, truth, courage and freedom. That is an impressive crescendo and not something to be condemned out of hand.

Fatalistic dissent, being a somewhat subversive activity of certain people who labour, like the Cuban poets, under a disapproving regime, is closely linked to creative dissent but suggests that common sense and self-preservation may also moderate the ideal. Andrei Sinavsky (1984) de-

scribes fatalistic dissenters as “people who disagree with the system and have the courage to express themselves but often under a pseudonym. They do not consider themselves guilty of anything but recognise that the wage for their effort is imprisonment and that they will eventually be paid.” Theirs is a low-level, partisan type of thing having “an heroic, romantic and moral aura” (*ibid.*: 155). A rather insipid form of dissent, you might think, when compared with the real thing.

To emphasise the difference, let us turn to principled dissent. Consider *A Man for All Seasons* and Sir Thomas More: he lost his head for his principles. And then there was Jean Jacques Rousseau and his *Social Contract*: his dissent underpinned the Enlightenment in France and continues to be relevant and respected (to a point) in social and political thought today. Rousseau’s ‘point’, that man is born free but is everywhere in chains, needs brief elaboration from the perspective taken in this book. It was not a matter of being born free to squander man’s heritage and potential, like Marcel Proust<sup>5</sup> whom Sartre dismisses (see, for example, 2007: 37 and 2013b: 137), but born free to engage and contest. *Take responsibility for those chains!* Sartre demands of us when we recognise our inclination to remain powerless. *Man will demonstrate that he is absolute* (as distinct from relative) “... because [he] will have fought passionately within [his] own era, because [he] will have loved it passionately and accepted that [he] would perish entirely along with it” (2013b: 134).

More recently, there are the examples from British political life: from the Democratic Left, the Labour leader, Michael Foot, and his contemporary Lord Longford, a passionate defender of liberty and those who had lost it. Both Foot and Longford were frequently dismissed in contemporary British thinking as ‘no-hopers’ (Foot for his ineffectual, political leadership and unimposing presence, and Longford for his support of the loathed ‘Moors Murderer’, Myra Hindley) but you could never doubt the strength and sincerity of their principles. In more recent years, the Irish socialist politician, Deputy Joe Higgins, has provided another example of strong principles and integrity transcending his elected position. There is also Roger Baldwin’s example of lifelong opposition to tyranny, violence

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<sup>5</sup> Marcel Proust was the, then, much fêted author of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, which, if anyone who has tried to read its many pages will know, is trying in the extreme. I keep my 23 volumes, like literary bricks, to throw at those who think there is something more to them ...

and militarism, and his championing of civil liberties (Haskell, 1982). ‘Champion’ is a good word: readers will be able to recall their own national examples.

Closely allied to ‘champions’ is political dissent – notably and already mentioned, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. Her early action was characterised more by resistance but she did subsequently pursue a life-long career characterised by loud, outspoken dissent. There is also the Indian example – particularly, Jayaprakash Narayan (or ‘JP’ as he was apparently known) who demonstrated the effectiveness and appeal of non-violent Gandhi-ism in the Indian sub-continent of the 1970s. JP was a veteran revolutionary socialist who confronted Mrs Indira Gandhi’s ruling Congress Party and ‘forced’ the economic plight of millions on to the political agenda of the day (Judd, 1975).

The more one looks, the more examples can be found. Pierre Goldorf’s experiences in Fidel Castro’s prisons in the 1960s and 70s, having expressed (mildly and courteously) his disillusionment with the character of the emerging regime (Levi, 1978). Also Jean-Paul Alata’s experiences in Guinean prisons at the same time (Faux, 1977). And, of course, the much reported and world-wide profile of the experiences, over 27 years in Robben Island prison, of Nelson Mandela.

From these might be distinguished ‘Black Urban Dissent’, as seen in the career of US Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm who served the American and Black communities of central Brooklyn in “a fiery yet *ultimately accommodationist*” way (in stark contrast to the methods of the two senators vying to replace her) (Sleeper, 1983, italics added). There may be parallels in today’s ethnic recognition and human rights movements – dissent but mostly resigned acquiescence.

Clearly, political dissent has its limits and these may not be dictated by the colour of one’s skin but by events and varying agenda. By way of a contrasting example, we might introduce here the phenomenon of radically chic dissent. Nicolaus Mills (1983) cites an earlier essay by Tom Wolfe describing a New York Park Avenue collection point in support of the Black Panther revolutionary movement.

And then there is civil disobedience, which seems closer to political dissent and more authentic for it. Civil disobedience entailed staying within the law, rather than breaking it in the sense that Rosa Parks demonstrated. One notable example of civil disobedience lies with Ignazio Silone, the founder of the Italian Communist Party who devoted himself to the

struggle with Fascism and then, inevitably, Nazism. Silone is Case Study 4 in this book. Silone saw an immensely powerful tool in civil disobedience, if widely adopted. It was, above all, “a transformation of the spirit, a refusal to acquiesce to (*sic*) a regime that is contrary to reason and conscience” (2006). Silone was a self-proclaimed and demonstrable “partisan of democracy and liberty” (*ibid.*) and yet the basis of his teaching in Christian thought was deemed sufficiently dangerous and inimical by Moscow, to Stalinist plans for the spread of totalitarianism after World War II, to have Silone spectacularly betrayed and neutralised. More recently, there are the similar examples of Vaclav Havel, Gyorgy Konrad, Adam Michnik and others – political personalities at that point of clash and confrontation between freedom and oppression:

... in the conflict between totalitarian regimes and democracy you must not hesitate to declare which side you are on. Even if a dictatorship is not an ideal typical one, and even if the democratic countries are ruled by people whom you do not like.

(Cushman citing Michnik, 2004).

From examples such as these, the themes of transformation, courage and freedom are reinforced – and something we can call for the moment ‘conscience’<sup>6</sup>, as the cause of anxiety and the impetus to dissent, introduced.

“No!”

In fact, one does not actually have to physically speak the word, as two striking examples of symbolic dissent make clear. First, there was the Tiananmen Square incident in Beijing where that courageous young man halted a column of tanks by force of his presence and personality. And a second, subtle but no less powerful example from China where dissenters reportedly place songbirds in cages (Siedelman, 1989). Symbolic dissent is not the exclusive preserve of the East: remember the empty pairs of shoes lined up around La Place de la République in Paris, after the November 2015 attacks by Islamic State and when *les citoyens* were forbidden to

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<sup>6</sup> We shall see how Giddens takes the question of ‘conscience’ further in Chapter 4, in a discussion of ‘practical consciousness’.



demonstrate by the state of emergency then in force. But for most purposes in the western experience, the solitary dissenter will actually say it.

There is an intellectual element to authentic dissent as we know it – a reasoning and inner debate based upon the ontological insecurity that is beginning to emerge. The Italian novelist, thinker and writer, Silone, Case Study 4, exposes this quality of intellectual dissent dramatically and movingly:

It is terrible when God loses his patience and he cries out into the soul of someone; he begins to shout and command like a woman giving birth; it is something that cannot be recounted; it is something that must be experienced to understand what it means; to understand how, with that voice in one's soul, *one can forget even promises made to the police ...*

We might read this in the following way<sup>7</sup> – that the inner turmoil can be such as to rupture ingrained civil obedience and the quality of being law-abiding (by way of explanation, Silone's status as a refugee in Switzerland forbade any political activity of the sort that Stalin manufactured against him). Silone continued by emphasising, for the purposes of his search for truth, how even-handed, honourable and fair his inner quest for truth became – almost as a deliberate, apologetic correction to this rupture:

... In any case, I realize, in my high esteem for the authorities of this country, that in the painful struggle between the democratic police and democratic, political militants, the hardest role is not that of those who go to prison. *I am aware that to go to prison and suffer persecution for the sake of liberty is easier than to persecute and to imprison.*  
(2006)

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, Chapter 7 will explain that Silone's words require a different interpretation, although the point about truth remains valid. The 'different interpretation' is a reflection of the life of two halves, referred to earlier.

This latter theme, of exposing for popular critique, the frailties, inconsistencies and difficulties of the status quo and reemphasising strongly the need to overturn entrenched practices, was echoed by Mitchell Cohen in his explanation of smart dissent (2014). Smart dissent “debunks but always seeks ways to make lives—or more generally, the framework of life—better”. Cohen saw dissent as “a humanist venture and not a static one”, an intrinsically left-wing activity championing the rights of suppressed liberty and equality. (In expanded form, humanist thinking emphasises the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively: it prefers critical questioning to the unthinking acceptance of dogma and superstition. Self-evidently, humanism is close to Sartre’s existentialism: he even delivered a world-renowned lecture in 1945 with both words in the title, which is included in the bibliography of this book.)

Cohen’s reasoning, we are told, has been conditioned by the experience of Post-WW2 America – by McCarthyism, capitalism, the Police State, neo-conservatism and any other ‘ism’ that afflicted the vaguely socialist ideal. In similar vein, Herbert Marcuse, from the ex-Weimar Republic, the Frankfurt School and then America and the 1960s showed the left, in *One-Dimensional Man*, how any protest must commence with recognition of how impoverished and empty life had become under the notionally benign democracies of the West. Equally, the American writer and academic Michael Walzer understands dissent to rest upon debate and discussion, definition and defence (see for example, Walzer, 2013). For Walzer, it is an essentially group activity dependent always upon reasoned argument – which seems to reveal a passion for collective method rather than an individual reaction. We might term Marcuse’s position pedagogic dissent and Walzer’s procedural but they both still fall, it would seem, within the umbrella of intellectual.

It is worth noting that the procedural element in Walzer’s position is strongly supported by Hannah Arendt. For Arendt, the crucial consideration lay in whether individuals could collectively make a transition from insecurity to dissent (1973b: 60) – a question of passion, courage, communication and ‘in-betweenness’. (By ‘in-betweenness’, she meant speech, action and mutuality.) For Ó Broin and Kirby, the crucial consideration was a challenge for a vigorous, independent civil society (2009) – in other, similar words, people acting spontaneously together to articulate a freely agreed position.

In whatever way we choose to categorise it, this idea of procedure, progression, independence and collectivisation is still consistent with the

dimensions of dissent that have already been identified above. But the solitary dissenter is, again self-evidently, driven by something distinctly more internal: he or she is condemned to a circular, silent debate until the moment arrives to speak out. Silone explained this movingly, above. Isaiah Berlin, in the 1950s, may have undergone a similar experience in his dissent from the decay of political theory but his situation did at least enable him to express his dismay publicly and at an earlier stage.

In a similar way to Berlin, Sheldon Wolin, a notable US, intellectual, political theorist, dissented from the treatment of political philosophy by mainstream political science. Writing in the 1960s, he surveyed politics' "tradition of discourse" which he considered that in Western hands had become anti-democratic and anti-political<sup>8</sup>. "Classical political philosophy and modern political economy emerged in moments of institutional crisis, when the reigning powers were becoming increasingly illegitimate and civil war was on the horizon. They sought, therefore, not to democratize politics but to close it off" (Marcus, 2015). For Wolin, therefore, dissent was public opinion borne of a sense of public safety, if not also public defiance – "the contestation, differences and disputes inherent in political life" (*ibid.*). This recalls the stance of Cicero in ancient Rome in, for example, his consular attack upon the dishonest subversive, Catiline. It is even closer to the words of Victor Hugo in 1870, when Prussian forces were advancing on Paris (Paris again!), recalled by Lara Marlowe in *The Irish Times* of 11 January 2016, page 1:

To save Paris means more than saving France ... It means saving the world. Paris is the very centre of humanity. Paris is the sacred city. Who attacks Paris attacks the human race in its entirety ... I ask but one thing of you, unity! Through unity you will triumph!

The suppression of dissent was achieved through political organisation, in contrast with the encouragement of dissent through participation. So, pure dissent (that is, genuinely independent political thought and opinion) was denied a role in political life. Accordingly, Wolin devoted his life to academic research and supporting political activism by student

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, it will be seen in Chapter 3 that 'discourse', by Foucault's explanation of discourse, could only become so.

interests: he was one of a number of democratic radicals “dispirited by the disappointments of the 1960s” (*ibid.*).

As we pursue inner turmoil and such disappointments leading to that moment of truth, we have discovered one or two key phrases and expressions. Transformational. Humanist. Championing. Defence. Liberty. Equality. Clearly, we are beginning to close in on a more sophisticated way of describing what is happening when the solitary voice speaks out. Husserl’s phenomenology tells us that dissent cannot remain a hidden thing. Instead it must burst out: “All consciousness is consciousness of something” (Sartre, 2013a: 4; see also Flynn, 2006: 17) and an acknowledgement of Other. By his reasoning, it is a quality of ‘intentionality’ that must also be added to the mix – a consciousness of something in the world, as opposed to consciousness of nothing. A consciousness of nothing implies existence in a passive, vegetative state, whereas a consciousness of something implies engagement and the potential to contest. To put it another way, being conscious is a way of being in the world: being ‘out of it’ means ... well, you take the point.

Jean-Paul Sartre found this quality of intentionality in existentialism, which sounds as if it has a left-bank (Paris again), rather dated flavour to it. To be sure, existentialism was associated with some leading philosophers of the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of them French. But it has been argued that, despite being something of “a period-piece”, it continues today as a respectable defence for the individual against the demands of mass communication and conformity (Flynn, 2006: 105). The idea will resurface buoyantly in the final pages of this book. Sartre explains that:

... every object has an essence and an existence. An essence is an intelligible and unchanging unity of properties; and existence is a certain, actual presence in the world. ...

[In contrast with established thought,] existentialism ... maintains that in man – *and in man alone* – existence precedes essence.

(2013c: 88, italics added)

It follows that “man must create his own essence: ... in throwing himself into the world, suffering there, struggling there, [he] gradually defines what this man *is* before he dies, or what mankind *is* before it [finally disappears]” (*ibid.*: 88, italics original). In other words, you stand up and say “No!” and define yourself for ever – or you stay seated, then slink away

unheard of and of no particular consequence at all. Crucially, Sartre associates this existential moment with a pre-condition of “anguish”<sup>9</sup> and a “crushing responsibility” to do something about it: “existentialism is no mournful delectation but a humanist philosophy of action, effort, combat and solidarity” (*ibid.*: 91). And, as we are seeing from other examples, declaring dissent is, too.

We can see particularly how this happened in Sartre’s own experience from Aronson’s introduction to his selection of Sartre’s essays and from his description of the moment in occupied Paris (it’s that city again), when the tide turned finally against the Nazi occupation. After four years of silently saying “No”, after four years of knowing that at some point or other each Frenchman and woman had at some point been in possession of information that could have condemned them to imprisonment, interrogation and worse, “after four years of repression and humiliation, Parisians [rose up] to demonstrate to themselves the power of their own freedom” (Aronson, 2013: xiii). In Sartre’s own words:

... they wanted to affirm the sovereignty of the French people; and they understood that the only means they had of legitimizing the power of the people was to shed their own blood

(*ibid.*: xiii, citing Sartre)

Truth, defining moments, transformation, life or death, freedom: “... they were doing what they had to do” (Sartre, 2013d: 116) in “...[an] explosion of freedom [... and ...] disruption of the established order” (*ibid.*: 118). Evidently, this business of dissent is a vital and empowering one but,

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<sup>9</sup> It may be helpful to explain here that existential anguish is considered a technical term, meaning our “experience of the possible as the locus of freedom” (Flynn, 2006: 66). For Sartre, however, anguish is more red-blooded. It means “full and profound responsibility” to humanity to deliver Flynn’s ‘possibility’ (2007: 25). Elsewhere he calls it “... anguish pure and simple, of the kind experienced by all who have borne responsibilities ...” (*ibid.*: 27). By way of amplification, Sartre offers the example of military leaders having to send people, inevitably, to their deaths.

for the solitary dissenter, life still can be tough and uncertain, and leave many questions to be answered.

So let us turn now to those questions in so far as they are dealt with in this book.

‘Where did the following accounts of solitary dissent originate, and why?’ is the principal question in this book. ‘What combination of events and impulses caused the solitary voice to be raised?’

‘Who is the author of that seminal moment?’ is the next. ‘And in the event that the author is not the person dissenting, can anything be said about the relationship between them?’

‘Can any common factors between the following case studies and interviews be isolated and described?’ will generate the conclusion. ‘What can we learn from the evidence adduced and the methodology employed?’

If ever there was a case for using the ‘first person singular’ to explore such issues, then this is it. It is not comfortable, standing up when other witnesses retreat, because, in the context of this book, the person standing up has chosen to confront a greater power or organisation. As sociologists might say, only the ‘I’ can identify the start of that sequence and attempt to illuminate the inner consciousness that responded. Only the ‘I’ can ruminate this deeply in an effort to understand himself and his “point of anchorage” (Sartre, 2013e: 312-3, reflecting on Merleau-Ponty). And that is the technique I use in Chapter 4 to explicate the turmoil I experienced myself. There was no other alternative open to me. I could only speak *from* my inner turmoil and *to* my responsibility to confront its source – and you will have to take what I say with all the raw emotion it caused in me:

Since we are each of us ambiguous histories – good and bad fortune, reason and unreason – the origin of which never lies in knowing but in events, *it isn't even imaginable that we could express our lives ... in terms of knowledge.*

(Sartre, 2013e, italics added)

The ‘ground under the feet’<sup>10</sup> of the person now standing up is central, therefore, to understanding why some inner warning was ignored or overruled – and the ground under the feet has to be grasped in terms the subject is comfortable about using, not language imposed by convention, discourse or other external authority. The more direct those ‘terms’, the better.

Even more interesting than the directness of the language used by the subject is the possibility that the potential for solitary dissent may be more widely dispersed. There may, just possibly, be a distinguishable trigger which can exceptionally override an individual’s self-control and motor responses. Whatever this may be, it could lie latent within other people’s inner consciousness, too, and might, without much warning, propel them into some other hostile spotlight’s glare. That is an impulse which only the ‘I’ could attempt to put into words.

This investigation is post-modern in the sense that it shows how to deconstruct both the silence that surrounds the impulse and the attendant crises and explanations. For Giddens, this was no more than a matter of modernity struggling with its unfinished task. But the text may be better understood, in view of the utility of Foucault’s thinking to the questions set out above, as post-structuralist – a disruption of “the continuous chronology of reason” (Foucault, 2002: 9)<sup>11</sup>.

Foucault’s value lies in his relentless scrutiny of power, in his explanation of its further effects, and in his grasp of the significance of apparently random, raw events dispersed through time. To claim to be post-structuralist, however, might seem to be inconsistent with the central role announced for the ‘I’. This is because Foucault sees such a personality as an historical construction (Bennet and Royle, 1999: 24), a creature of

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase comes from Professor Bengt Flyvbjerg (1998: 222), in his exposition of the relevance of Michel Foucault’s work to understanding local government planning practices, and is explored in Chapter 8 below.

<sup>11</sup> It needs to be said that Foucault himself would resist any label like ‘post-structuralist’. For example, he lambasts certain French commentators for calling him ‘structuralist’ but is careful to avoid asserting, in the same sentence, that he is ‘post-structuralist’ (2002: xv). Foucault is, well, Foucault: he is simply his own obscure, difficult but brilliant self. (The commentators called him ‘structuralist’, incidentally, because he was concerned with the relationship or ‘order’ that might underpin outwardly unconnected events.)

structure and, therefore, laden with power-considerations. But it is the not-so-encumbered reader, still, who will have the last word once the actors in the following dramas have all had theirs.

It may be helpful to comment further in this section on 'structure'. In the sense used here, structure means something that is conceived, fashioned, developed, acquired and even learned – a 'rationality' that is created and reproduced in the way we lead our lives and in the choices we make. Such rationalities can be, for example, legal, economic, political or social (Gray, 1998: 17) and, being normative<sup>12</sup>, will specify and, indeed, be structured themselves, by sanctions. Structures, therefore, whether they exist within the mind or within society or within a prescribed area for action, are the creations of power. The accompanying concept is 'agency' – the capacity of people and their potential for action in the spaces available to them. Dissent falls within the scope of agency, whereas the opposing power must lie within structure.

This is where Giddens comes in: Giddens is the master of structure and agency and his theory of structuration will emerge eventually as the complete answer to the problem.

To summarise the ground covered in this Chapter, we have seen that dissent is borne of powerlessness and yet also, if you do not declare your dissent, of the risk of continuing 'subjugation' (Foucault's word, as we will see in Chapter 3). It must follow, therefore, that even though your original powerlessness remains, the mere act of declaring your dissent is liberating in itself. In a moment of transformation, it brings freedom to the soul. And it is in the 'soul', or practical consciousness, that the anxiety began. That may be why some creative dissenters in particular have found it possible to continue incarcerated physically in prison having liberated their souls.

Freedom is more readily in sight for those who get together, articulate their concerns and reach a common standpoint. Indeed, that sense of doing something about whatever has led to their dissent is extremely em-

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<sup>12</sup> This word 'normative' hovers above many of the ideas introduced in this chapter and needs to be grasped from the outset. 'Normative' means accepted and expected standards of behaviour within a given society. It follows that anyone who does not 'do it our way' immediately places himself or herself in a difficult position: anyone who dissents is going to find life 'interesting', as that old Chinese curse has it.



powering. A vibrant civil society is one way of describing their situation (provided that blossoming of the people's voice is uncontrolled, which is quite a separate debate), as they convert their inner anxieties into group strength and certainty. But freedom is a vastly more elusive thing for those who remain standing on their feet, the sole objectors to whatever has been decreed or imposed by those with greater power. Their anguish is condemned to twist and burn for longer still – and yet, we learn from very prestigious comment, something approaching liberation can still be found in that moment of certainty, courage and speaking out, whatever the consequences. For the solitary dissenter, it is a question of being true to yourself and to everything you stand for. Those who turn away without raising their voice are even going so far as to deny their very existence.

The Chapter was able to isolate a number of forms of authentic dissent – for example, creative, professional, fatalistic, principled, championing, political, the radically chic, the radically black, the radically smart, civil disobedience and even silent, symbolic dissent which we cannot deny can rise in beauty above the tragedy of it all. We shall note, in Chapter 4, that it is also possible to imagine environmental dissent. And, in addition to my environmental dissenter, Rachel Carson, I can certainly think of some other courageous women who have dissented in their various different fields – for example, the (then) Constance Gore-Booth, Martha Gelhorn, the (then) Mother Teresa, Mary Robinson and so on. And simply to be provocative, I personally do not think that Simone Weil, Simone de Beauvoir, Erica Jong or Germaine Greer did.

There will be more categories of dissent and much debate about them but however more and however much does not really matter. It is the integrity of the process leading to dissent that is important, a process which can be so overwhelming that it changes ingrained practice and habits. It will lead the individual through inner turmoil, to a progressively clearer consciousness that something must be confronted, to a moment of existential significance. In the words of the great existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre, you start with 'anguish' and end up with a 'crushing responsibility' to do something about it.

The next Chapter will show us how to discover more about that anguish and how to pin it down for analysis. The Chapter turns, first, to Foucault and, second, to Giddens. As already hinted, it also signals and justifies a greater degree of intimacy in Case Study 1, through use of the first person singular, than we might normally expect. Given Sartre's crackling

endorsement of the path the solitary dissenter is bound to tread, it could be no other way.

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