Ian Alexander, in his article, "The Phenomenological Philosophy in France." likens the impact of Husserl on French thought to that of Wittgenstein on British thought: "the result in both cases has been to revolutionize the philosophical perspective." When he goes on to assess individual philosophers his judgment is that "of French phenomenologists Marcel and Merleau-Ponty come closest to its essential aim." This type of judgment that the fruition of phenomenology is an existential philosophy deriving from Husserl's treatment, in his last work, of the grounding of consciousness in the pre-theoretical life-world is commonplace. Sartre once made an interesting comment on his relationship to Merleau-Ponty in regard to phenomenology: "Alone, each of us was too easily persuaded of having understood the idea of phenomenology. Together, we were for each other the incarnation of its ambiguity." This ambiguity springs on the one hand from phenomenology's emphasis on lived-experience, the life-world and description, and on the other from its emphasis on the reduction, reflection and constitution. From the former emphasis there have developed philosophies (Merleau-Ponty's and Marcel's—although Marcel's work did not derive directly from Husserl's) which stress "the primacy of perception," philosophies which are considered to be an "archaeology" of the pre-reflective, tracing the roots of consciousness as they sink into
what is other than consciousness. Sartre, in his "phenomenology of imagination," has taken philosophy in another direction, toward an examination of the activity of consciousness in reduction, reflection and constitution. Without denying the situation of consciousness, he has focused on the power of transcendence, the capacity of consciousness to gain a perspective on its situation and, thereby, to gain some control over it. In Sartre's estimation the archaeological philosophy has turned toward a heteronomy and alienation of man, while he has pursued an autonomy and authentic humanism. In this project, Sartre has never claimed that he was being more faithful to Husserl than Husserl's other "disciples." In fact, Sartre was often critical of Husserl. Yet, I believe that a strong case can be made that Sartre's philosophy is, in its essential thrust, the most faithful to Husserl's program of those thinkers influenced by Husserl. I will argue this by stressing that Husserl and Sartre shared the views that the natural and phenomenological attitudes were modes of life which directly involved moral and political issues, that philosophy has as its goal the effecting of a humanistic society, and that the phenomenological reduction was the necessary (but, for Sartre, not the sufficient) means of realizing a humanistic society.

HUSSERL

It may appear odd to propose that Husserl's philosophical program is in any way similar to Sartre's. The philosopher of the cafés, the revolutionary, contrasts with the German academician, the epistemologist, and at first sight they appear to inhabit two vastly different philosophical worlds. To find a common ground between the two, we must turn to those texts where Husserl talks about the task of philosophy and, in particular, of his own philosophical "mission."

In a letter to Arnold Metzger, dated September, 1919,3 Husserl replies to Metzger who has sent his work to Husserl for comment. He tells Metzger: "It can only be that you felt, through the unadorned sobriety and radical objectivity of my writings, the personal ethos on which they rest." (ML, p. 245). Throughout this interesting letter, Husserl uses the expressions "my mission," "my true, god-sent mission," and "the deeper meaning of my work," "my original motives and needs." The writings Metzger sent Husserl dwelt on the themes of freedom, death and value. While Husserl told Metzger that the latter's "ethical radicalism . . . rejoiced my heart," nonetheless he expressed