



# **The Desire to be God: Freedom and the Other in Sartre and Berdyaev (American University Studies)**

*James Morse McLachlan*

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Jean-Paul Sartre and Nicholas Berdyaev were contemporaries in the Paris of the thirties and forties. Sartre became the most famous existentialist author and was also a politically active Marxist. Berdyaev had been a Marxist and political activist but converted to Christianity and became one of the inspirations of the French personalist movement and a key exponent of religious existentialism. This study focuses on the central concern of both philosophers: the question of freedom. Sartre argued in *Being and Nothingness* that God is incompatible with human freedom. Berdyaev argues that God is not only compatible but necessary to freedom. This study reveals two ironies: Berdyaev's God is a more radical departure from traditional Western theism than Sartre's atheism. And Berdyaev's idea of freedom presents the more radical alternative to that tradition.

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