

# **SARTRE'S *BEING AND NOTHINGNESS***

*A Reader's Guide*

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*In memory of Mark Sacks*



# CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
1. Context	1
2. Overview of Themes	10
3. Reading the Text	38
(A) The basic ontology	38
(B) Fundamental structures of the human subject	89
(C) Relation to the other	126
(D) Freedom, motivation and ethics	148
(E) Being as a whole	200
4. Reception and Influence	209
<i>Notes</i>	227
<i>Bibliography and suggestions for further reading</i>	243
<i>Index</i>	257



## PREFACE

What I have aimed to do in this short book is to provide a commentary which will help Sartre's reader to feel at home in the work, and at the same time to present *Being and Nothingness* as setting forth a metaphysical system of a traditional kind. These aims are connected. While it is possible to direct one's attention towards the phenomenologically resonant, psychologically engaging, frequently cited passages in B&N where Sartre gives free reign to his capacity for literary expression of human experience, such an approach will leave the reader with little more than an intuitive grasp of Sartre's conceptions and the text itself will remain opaque. Sartre does have, it goes without saying, a distinctive *Weltanschauung*, one which, unlike many philosophical systems, allows itself to be translated readily into a certain, powerfully felt picture of the human condition, but this can be grasped more directly and effectively by reading his plays, novels, biographical studies and literary and art criticism – the investment of time and attention required to read B&N either in whole or in substantial part makes sense only if the aim is to understand why Sartre thinks that his vision possesses philosophical truth in the strictest sense. Doubts may be entertained as to whether it is possible for a deep and satisfying comprehension of the human predicament to be given systematic philosophical formulation, but so far as the task of understanding B&N in accordance with its author's intentions goes, they are neither here nor there, and I have endeavoured throughout to show that the metaphysical system which Sartre presents is (at the very least) coherent, cogent and philosophically well-motivated, and to give at least a remote sense of the work's breathtaking profundity, subtlety and richness.

Although the structure that Sartre gives to B&N is by no means arbitrary, there is no denying that the text has a

tendency to zigzag between levels and across distinctions of topic, in ways that engage the reader but at the same time make it hard to keep its overall argument in view. It is also true that Sartre's divisions of B&N into chapters and sections do not always correspond neatly to different stages in the book's argument. In order to bring out more clearly the way in which B&N progresses argumentatively and thus make the systematic position which it presents easier to grasp, I have divided the commentary into short sections designed to highlight the work's central concepts, doctrines and arguments, and have departed to a minor degree from the order of Sartre's text. I have not apportioned the amount of detail in each section of the commentary to the corresponding number of pages in Sartre's text: some topics which Sartre deals with quickly but which are of high importance receive relatively detailed commentary, while others which Sartre discusses at length are given only brief summary. Constraints of space in any case make it necessary to say regrettably little about some large swathes of text – in particular, in the chapters on temporality, the body and concrete relations with Others – which would certainly benefit from elucidation, but which can be read with adequate understanding once the main lines of thought in B&N have been put in focus. In addition to sketching the content of B&N, I have devoted space to the exegetical and critical issues which seem to me to pose the greatest obstacles to a sympathetic appreciation of Sartre's philosophy, and indicated how one may attempt to address these. Some sections break off from the textual commentary in order to discuss themes and issues which concern B&N as a whole. My departures from Sartre's textual order consist chiefly in holding over some material from Parts One, Two and Three of B&N for discussion later in Part (D) of the commentary; for those who wish to read B&N in a straight linear order, the system of sub-headings with textual references allows the relevant sections of the commentary to be located.

The notes serve chiefly to give references and suggestions for further reading relating to the historical material and to the writings of Sartre's either predating or postdating B&N which I discuss in Chapters 1, 2 and 4. Secondary literature on



## PREFACE

Sartre – on his philosophy as a whole and on individual topics in B&N – is provided in the Bibliography.

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References in the main text given in the form, e.g., ‘252/310’, are first to the English translation by Hazel E. Barnes, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (first published, London: Methuen & Co, 1958; currently in print, London: Routledge, 1995), and second to the original French edition, *L'Être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943). (Note that the latter carries different pagination from the later Gallimard ‘Tel’ edition.) Some quotations from Barnes’ translation – which generally does fine justice to Sartre’s exact and lucid philosophical prose but nonetheless contains inaccuracies – have been modified slightly.

Full bibliographical details of all writings by Sartre referred to in the notes are given in the Bibliography. Bibliographical details of writings on Sartre referred to in the notes, when not given there, can be found in the Bibliography.

Sartre’s philosophical terminology is not as hard to penetrate as that of many philosophers; I have tried to elucidate key terms at the point of their appearance in Sartre’s text, and a rough but adequate glossary is provided in Barnes’ translation of B&N.

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I am indebted to Jim Warren for introducing me to *Being and Nothingness* a very long time ago and for helping me to appreciate the force and depth of Sartre’s ideas. I am also very grateful to my colleague Sarah Richmond for stimulating and informative exchanges about Sartre over recent years. My thanks go in addition to my family, for allowing me the necessary time to indulge a useless passion by writing a book about a book about nothing.



# CONTEXT

The philosophical world into which the nineteen-year-old Jean-Paul Sartre entered, on his arrival to study philosophy at Paris' prestigious École Normale Supérieure in 1924, exhibited a high degree of rigidity.<sup>1</sup> From roughly the end of the nineteenth century until the early 1930s, two currents had effectively dominated French philosophy: neo-Kantianism, associated chiefly with Léon Brunschvicg, and the anti-rationalism of Henri Bergson. The former offered an attenuated version of Kant in which the agenda of philosophical enquiry had contracted to the articulation of 'formal conditions' of scientific knowledge, and which through its determination of the curricula of philosophy departments throughout France maintained a firm institutional dominance; implicitly endorsed by political authority, Brunschvicg's neo-Kantianism had in effect the status of an official state philosophy in the Third Republic. Sartre, like others of his generation, was affected strongly in his understanding of Kant by Brunschvicg's rationalistic, positivist epistemology.<sup>2</sup> Bergson on the other hand had provided a spiritualistic alternative to neo-Kantianism, a philosophical home for concepts of free will, religious experience and other items whose claims to validity were either not upheld or rationalized beyond recognition by neo-Kantian epistemology, but by the 1920s Bergsonism had lost much of its philosophical prestige, due in large part to the evaporation after the First World War of the optimistic disposition expressed in Bergson's teleological vision of human development. Bergson nevertheless provides, like Brunschvicg, one of Sartre's more local points of reference, in fact more often than by name, in B&N.

Against this stable, not to say frozen background, the French philosophical landscape underwent an abrupt change in the 1930s, due to an infusion of foreign intellectuals and, accompanying them, of German philosophy. The phenomenology

of Husserl, the existential anthropology which Heidegger was interpreted as offering in *Being and Time* and the conception of historical development in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, all provided a rich new set of themes and methodological materials, sufficient in the eyes of a new generation for a revitalization of philosophy. Husserl himself came to Paris to deliver two lectures, providing an introduction to transcendental phenomenology, in February 1929.<sup>3</sup> The new wave of German-orientated philosophical activity was reflected in the publication in 1930 of Emmanuel Levinas' influential *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, and the institution of a new phenomenological journal in 1931, *Recherches philosophiques*, by the Russian émigré Alexandre Koyré; it also received strong encouragement from the only member of the staff of the Sorbonne opposed to neo-Kantianism, Jean Wahl, who urged philosophy to turn to 'the concrete' and advocated Heidegger as a non-religious successor to Kierkegaard. But above all the new development centred on a seminar series on Hegel, instituted in 1932 again by Koyré, but conducted from 1933 until 1939 by another Russian exile, Alexandre Kojève.<sup>4</sup> Kojève advanced a unified reading of *Being and Time* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which the central moment of human historical self-realization is located in the 'battle for recognition' described by Hegel in Chapter IV of his *Phenomenology*, a work which Kojève furthermore claimed to be phenomenological in Husserl's sense.<sup>5</sup> The importance of Kojève's Hegel seminar for a whole generation can hardly be exaggerated: among those who attended were Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan, Raymond Aron, Georges Bataille and André Bréton.

Sartre might have been expected to participate at the first opportunity in the endeavour to assimilate the new triple resource of Hegel-Husserl-Heidegger which others were beginning to come to terms with in France in the 1930s, but Sartre's engagement with this new philosophical development was oddly delayed.<sup>6</sup> Sartre's first philosophical attachment, formed in his school days, had been to Bergson, in whose philosophy he found above all (by his own account) less of a spiritualized world-vision than a means by which inner psychic life could be grasped and magnified; Bergson appealed to

Sartre as a philosophical counterpart of Proust. Sartre shook off this attachment rapidly after his arrival at the École, but it was not replaced by a similar, unequivocally positive enthusiasm for any other philosopher or philosophical movement for some considerable time. Sartre's study of the history of philosophy at the École was extensive, Plato, Kant and Descartes being of special importance for him.<sup>7</sup> It is of particular interest that while at the École Sartre took a course in pathological psychology, and worked with his friend Paul Nizan on a translation of Karl Jaspers' *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (*General Psychopathology*), which not only underlined the importance of mental disorder for the philosophy of mind and psychology,<sup>8</sup> but also exposed Sartre to a sophisticated formulation of the anti-naturalistic position that the key to psychological explanation lies in the discovery of non-causal connections of meaning. Sartre's eventual academic success at the École was remarkable: after failing the *agrégation* in 1928, due to a misjudged attempt at impressing with his originality, on re-attempting the examination the following year Sartre took first place (with Simone de Beauvoir, the two having by then begun their life-long involvement with one another, in second place).

For nearly a decade after his departure from the École, Sartre, pursuing the conception that he had formed of himself ever since childhood as above all a writer, achieved no particular success. The obligatory periods spent engaged in military service (from 1929 to 1931) and then as a school teacher of philosophy in the provinces (chiefly in Le Havre, from 1931 to 1936) allowed Sartre to expand further the already vast range of his reading, but his earliest writings, comprising some literary compositions and essays of a hybrid literary-philosophical character, were stylistically idiosyncratic and unfocussed, and the few pieces eventually accepted for publication did not meet with acclaim.<sup>9</sup>

In his first years post-École, the twin, interrelated themes of aesthetic consciousness (an interest in which, bordering on an attraction to aestheticism, persisted from Sartre's earlier years),<sup>10</sup> and of contingency (which had been the subject of one of Sartre's two *agrégation* dissertations at the École), dominated Sartre's reflections, but no definite philosophical orientation could yet be ascribed to him. The turning point

occurred (according to Sartrean mythology, but the event is also historically well attested) in a cafe in Paris in 1932, when Aron, using a drinks glass as an example of an object which could be submitted to phenomenological analysis, abruptly opened Sartre's eyes to Husserl's project of a return to concrete lived experience. Levinas' book allowed Sartre to make his first serious acquaintance with Husserl's ideas, and an arrangement with Aron allowed Sartre to spend the academic year 1933–34 as a researcher at the Institut Français in Berlin, immersed in the study of Husserl. In a series of philosophical writings published between 1936 and 1940, dealing with topics in the philosophy of psychology from a phenomenological, chiefly Husserlian standpoint, Sartre showed his alignment with the new, German-based development in French philosophy, while the theme of contingency which had long preoccupied Sartre achieved final literary expression in *Nausea* (1938). These writings manifested an extraordinary freshness, originality and piercing brilliance. The novel, in particular, broke boundaries by demonstrating new possibilities for the realization of philosophical ideas in literary form and by virtue of the recognizably existentialist sensibility which it expressed, and together with a collection of short stories published in 1939, earned Sartre immediate literary recognition, confirmed by favourable reviews and solicitations of articles from distinguished literary sources such as the *Nouvelle revue française*.

Sartre's upward trajectory was interrupted almost instantly, however, by the outbreak of war: mobilized in September 1939 and assigned to a meteorological unit in the Alsace, Sartre was taken prisoner in June 1940 and held in a Stalag at Trier until March 1941, when he managed to obtain release on grounds of health (impairment of his eyesight, partly feigned). Sartre thereupon returned to school teaching, and founded immediately, together with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, an intellectual group with the aim of organizing resistance to collaboration, Vichy and the Nazis, 'Socialisme et Liberté', which grew in numbers but, for want of support from established figures and in consequence of the Gestapo's repressive initiatives, was dissolved within the year.

Living in Paris under the Occupation, Sartre returned to philosophical writing.<sup>11</sup> Sartre had begun writing a work

with the title *L'Être et le néant* in 1940,<sup>12</sup> and the final text of B&N was composed between December 1941 and October 1942. With its publication in 1943 Sartre showed himself to have taken the assimilation of German philosophy a step further than any of his contemporaries. In the period which had intervened since his Husserlian texts of the 1930s, Sartre had absorbed Heidegger's philosophy, but not stopped with it.<sup>13</sup> No longer merely engaging in the kind of creative exegesis practised by Kojève, B&N formulates a philosophical position which, while acknowledging fully its several German debts, lays claim to have surpassed them definitively: both Husserl and Heidegger are charged with error and misdevelopment of their own deepest insights, and B&N contests fiercely the Hegelian thesis of a historical breakthrough to a higher level of rationality.

The philosophy of B&N, and the philosophy of Sartre, are not the same. B&N corresponds to only one point in Sartre's development, representing the culmination of his engagement with Husserl, Heidegger and the project of phenomenology. Sartre's philosophical output in the post-war years included a number of shorter published texts in which he restated and defended the position of B&N, and a large amount of unpublished material in which Sartre tried to elaborate its implications for practical philosophy, but it eventually resulted – with the publication in 1960 of the first volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, a monumental work aimed at reconstructing Marxism in terms of a new set of philosophical categories – in a philosophical standpoint which no reader of B&N could have predicted. The interplay between Sartre's academic philosophical work on the one hand, and his literary, cultural and political writings on the other, is complex, and the degree to which his later philosophical writings are either continuous with or break with the positions taken in B&N is a matter of debate. While Sartre's intense and multiple political involvements in the 1950s acted as a material spur to his formulation of a theory of the conditions of collective action, it is arguable that B&N preserves a space for, even if it does not strictly demand, the philosophy of history and collective existence presented in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Sartre's interest as a philosopher is not, therefore, exhausted by B&N; what is not open to question

is the unique and central place which it occupies in Sartre's corpus.

\* \* \*

The term existentialism is associated more closely with Sartre than with any other thinker, and in 1945 at any rate, Sartre endorsed its application to his philosophy. In the broad sense in which the term is usually employed, existentialism denotes a movement of thought whereby established values, and the world-pictures associated with them, are subjected to radical sceptical revaluation and the individual, thrown back on himself as a final resource, seeks to avoid nihilism by extrapolating from his bare self-awareness a normative orientation. What more exactly existentialism amounts to, how it differs from Kantian and other modern moral systems, and whether it has genuine utility as a philosophical category, or is better regarded as referring to a late modern mood or mentality which is of chiefly cultural and artistic importance, are not questions that need be entered into here. What it is helpful to focus on for the understanding of B&N is the tradition, or recurrent theme, in late modern philosophy, which asserts a direct and strong connection between the very abstract philosophical problems set by the concept of being or existence, and the practical and axiological concerns of the individual.

The very first suggestion that the question of how being or existence should be understood matters from the perspective of the individual's attempt to achieve an assured and positive relation to the Good, was made by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, a contemporary and critic of Kant's, and a figure of crucial importance for the German idealists.<sup>14</sup> Kant's philosophy, Jacobi argued, had merely reiterated the annihilation of the reality and freedom of the individual and of the very possibility of knowledge or value which had been enshrined earlier, albeit in a different form, in Spinoza's great system. Jacobi introduced the term 'nihilism' to refer to this grand movement of intellectual destruction. The fault of Spinoza and Kant was not, according to Jacobi, that they had developed their philosophies in ways lacking the sort of justification appropriate to conceptual activity, but that, on the contrary, they had pursued the logic of philosophical enquiry with consistency to its proper,



disastrous conclusion; and so, Jacobi argued, what we should learn from their endeavours (as Hume, on Jacobi's construal, had appreciated) is the necessity of turning our backs on philosophical reason, or at any rate, of circumscribing its legitimacy very narrowly. And what ultimately justifies this rejection of the comprehensive authority of philosophical reflection is the recognition (for which, Jacobi acknowledged, we had Kant to thank) that all of our claims to cognition, whether they are of God or the Good or the external world, rest on a basis that is *sui generis*, irreducible and non-conceptual, namely a *feeling* or directly felt intuition of *being*. Nothing can, or is needed to, demonstrate the reality of being, but without it we are left in nothingness, and with it we are restored to a meaningful world having the basic characteristics ascribed to it by Christian theism, in which the human individual enjoys full reality, freedom of will, and purpose.

Jacobi has not joined the ranks of the greatest philosophers, but his philosophical writings succeeded in another way, by setting an agenda and identifying a set of themes and issues which later, post-Kantian philosophers accepted must be grappled with. Thus the systems of the German idealists are governed to a high degree by Jacobi's concerns, in so far as they seek to show, *contra* Jacobi, that it is possible for a philosophical system not merely to avoid, but to counter-negate, the nihilism to which Jacobi says the enterprise of philosophy necessarily dooms us. The different ways in which the German idealists sought to execute this project cannot be discussed here,<sup>15</sup> but there are some particular points in the development and later reception of German idealism which deserve to be mentioned for what they show of the deep historical roots, and philosophical significance, of Sartre's philosophy in B&N.

Of all the quarrels and divisions within the ranks of German idealism, Schelling's arguments with Fichte and Hegel stand out for their relevance to Sartre. Fichte's first statement of his philosophy, what he called the *Wissenschaftslehre* ('doctrine of systematic knowledge'), involved a highly complex attempt to elaborate a comprehensive system of reality on the basis of the bare 'I' of individual self-consciousness, thus taking up Jacobi's challenge to show how philosophical systematicity could affirm the reality and purposiveness of the individual.

In a structurally similar fashion, Hegel claims that his system, or 'Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences', in the part thereof which he calls the Science of Logic, allows us to move from consideration of the bare concept of Being (*via* its dialectical opposite, the concept of Nothingness) to a complete rational understanding of reality. Against both, Schelling makes the same kind of Jacobian objection: against Fichte, that his account of the 'I' needs to be supplemented by a 'philosophy of nature' which proceeds from the being of nature given to us *a posteriori*; and against Hegel, that the merely 'negative' philosophy of his Logic, precisely because it is designed as an autonomous, exclusively conceptual structure, entirely fails to grasp actual being, as opposed to the merely hypothetical being which is projected and anticipated in the use of concepts.

Schelling's attacks on the (inter-related) putative autonomies of the self and of conceptuality ramify through nineteenth-century philosophy, and can be discovered underlying – to take one important example, known to Sartre and echoed in B&N – Schopenhauer's conception of the conscious reflective subject as set over against an alien, inimical reality. But most important, for the purpose of understanding B&N, is Kierkegaard's reprise of Schelling's anti-Hegelianism, as presented in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846). Kierkegaard refers back explicitly at the beginning of this work to Jacobi and, like Jacobi, he has it as his final objective to form in his readers a religious consciousness, but one much more problematic and anxiety-ridden than the Christian orthodoxy to which Jacobi believes we should return. The philosophical strategy employed by Kierkegaard to realize this end – and it is important to appreciate that Kierkegaard is not offering a new system but is again, like Jacobi, trying to help us find our way out of the stultifying prison of philosophical systematizing – involves an appeal to what he calls 'subjectivity'. The 'truth of subjectivity' is defined by Kierkegaard negatively, in terms of its opposition to the 'objectivity' of the Hegelianism of his contemporaries, which instructs us to take satisfaction in contemplation of the progress of Reason in human history, and positively, in terms of the individual's task of relating his existence, in a condition of intensified, passionate 'inwardness', to eternal truth. The concept of existence in its application to a human individual

is thus refashioned by Kierkegaard into a new kind of philosophical category, designating that which, grasped correctly, i.e. subjectively, reveals itself as, and expresses itself in, infinite activity and striving.<sup>16</sup>

How much of this history of philosophy Sartre knew, and how well he knew it, either at first hand or indirectly, is difficult to determine.<sup>17</sup> What is clear nonetheless is that, as will emerge in due course, in systematic terms Sartre's philosophy is situated firmly within the matrix of debates and positions just sketched.<sup>18</sup> Sartre begins, as noted above, with Husserl's project of an immanent explication of consciousness, designed to show what structures underlie consciousness' intentional directedness towards objects and how consciousness attains its target in an objective world, but as will be seen in the next chapter, in the course of the 1930s Sartre works his way through and to a large extent out of the Husserlian framework, and in B&N engages fully with the metaphysical themes of Jacobi's agenda. To anticipate, what we will find in Sartre is no simple reproduction of any earlier position in the history of philosophy, but something of fascinating originality: a complex and modified reaffirmation of the Jacobi-Schelling thesis of the priority of being, which incorporates Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelian demand that philosophy articulate the truth of subjectivity. But Sartre, *contra* Jacobi and Kierkegaard, articulates his position in a fully systematic philosophical form, one which bears strong similarity to Fichte's conception of an I-based *Wissenschaftslehre*.<sup>19</sup> And although there is a loud and clear echo of religious consciousness in Sartre's philosophy – a priest incarcerated in the Stalag with Sartre described him as 'a being like no one else, a kind of prophet'<sup>20</sup> – its theological dimension is unequivocally negative: atheism, according to Sartre, is a necessary condition for man to achieve his proper end.

## OVERVIEW OF THEMES

An extraordinary number and range of topics figure in the eight hundred or so pages that compose B&N, ranging from the structure of time and the fact that anything at all exists, to self-consciousness, knowledge of other minds, the dynamics of human sexual life and the concept of a person's character. B&N is intended nonetheless to form a whole in which all of the questions of philosophy – with the exception of ethics, which Sartre defers to a later work – receive systematic answers. The theme which gives unity to the system of B&N – its central node, on the basis of and with reference to which its theories of time, self-consciousness, sexuality and so on are developed – is, as is well known, that of human freedom. What exactly freedom is, according to Sartre, will be discussed much later, but it is helpful before embarking on B&N to have some idea of how Sartre considers that the issue of human freedom must be approached philosophically. In this chapter I will try to show, from three different angles, what the strategy of B&N consists in.

1. *Themes in Sartre's earliest writings.* In terms of his philosophical biography, as indicated in the previous chapter, Sartre did not begin with the problem of freedom, but an examination of his earliest published philosophical writings helps us to understand how and why freedom came to occupy centre stage, and I will start with a discussion of some of these. B&N does not presuppose acquaintance with any of Sartre's earlier philosophical writings, and some of the leading ideas which they present recur without modification in B&N, but a reading of the earlier writings provides an induction into the philosophical outlook of B&N, and their relative brevity, together with the philosophical simplification which results from their being devoted to familiarly defined philosophical topics – the self, emotion and imagination – recommends such an approach. (Also providing an introduction to Sartre's philosophical concerns, of a more

informal nature, are the notebooks that he kept in 1939–40, thus shortly before the writing of B&N, published posthumously as *War Diaries*.)

The most important of Sartre's early texts, from the point of view of understanding B&N, is undoubtedly *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936). This essay begins by disputing what might seem almost a technical point in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, of interest only to those working within the Husserlian programme, but on its basis Sartre unfolds an intriguing and radically original metaphysics of the human subject, which stands opposed to the ordinary conception of personal identity.

The claim of Husserl's that Sartre targets is his postulation of a 'transcendental ego', as the source and ground of all our intentional relations to objects. Within the terms of transcendental orthodoxy, this claim of Husserl's appears innocuous, and to enjoy Kant's explicit sanction: it appears merely to say that, because it must be possible for all of my states of consciousness to be thought (by me) as being mine, the field of consciousness at which we arrive through Husserlian reduction must be regarded as 'owned' by a non-empirical, hence transcendental, subject.

What provokes Sartre is the observation that, with the transposition of Kant's thesis concerning the 'I think' (the 'transcendental unity of apperception') into phenomenology, the status of the transcendental subject changes importantly. Kant's theses concerning the 'conditions of possibility' of experience and knowledge, on Sartre's reading, do not involve existential claims: they have a purely *de jure*, and no *de facto*, character.<sup>21</sup> Husserl's *phenomenological* version of the Kantian thesis does, however, involve thinking of the 'transcendental subject' as having reality, and this, Sartre argues, cannot be accepted.

Phenomenology is a descriptive science, and what it describes is whatever is given to (pure) consciousness, *qua* given. The question, then, is whether a transcendental ego meets this condition. Indisputably, my existence as an empirical, psychophysical entity is given to me; and it is also given to me that, if I reflect on my states of consciousness, then I think those states as mine (as Kant asserts to be necessary *de jure*, if empirical

knowledge is to be possible). These two data entail no transcendental ego, however: the first, because the empirical self is of course distinct from and insufficient for any transcendental self; and the second because, according to Sartre, there is no need of explanation to which it answers, and even more decisively, it in fact makes self-consciousness unintelligible.

The standard Kantian considerations to which Husserl appeals in favour of a transcendental subject, revolve around the need for something to figure as the subject-term of the synthetic acts which are required, in turn, for the unity of consciousness. Sartre rejects this argument on the grounds that: (1) Unity of consciousness can be taken to derive from the unity of objects, e.g., the unity of this pen provides for the unity of what I take to be my various perceptual experiences of it. Since phenomenology has declared consciousness to be defined by intentionality and intentionality to involve transcendence to an object, the objects of consciousness are available as an explanatory resource, in place of a transcendental ego. (2) The unity of consciousness over time – its 'duration' – does not stand in need of explanation, so long as we conceive consciousness primordially (as Husserl himself showed can be done, in his work on internal time-consciousness) as a temporally extended, rather than an instantaneous, structure.<sup>22</sup> So the transcendental 'I' is *superfluous*.

The transcendental 'I' is furthermore *incompatible* with self-consciousness: '[i]f it existed, it would violently separate consciousness from itself, it would divide it, slicing through each consciousness like an opaque blade. The transcendental I is the death of consciousness.'<sup>23</sup> Sartre's argument, explicating these metaphors, is that we do not, as a matter of phenomenological fact, encounter an 'I' in 'first order' or '*unreflective*' consciousness, e.g., of this pen on the desk,<sup>24</sup> and nor *could* we do so, because there is no space for an 'I' to occupy. The key point here is that, in order for Husserl's account to work, two conditions need to be satisfied: the 'I' (a) must not be an *object* of consciousness, for then it would be *external*, but it nonetheless (b) needs to be 'something *for* consciousness' (and not, e.g., a mere 'quality' of consciousness). The 'I', in order to be *interior* to consciousness, would need therefore to *inhabit* consciousness. But this is incompatible with the necessarily diaphanous, translucent character of

the relation of conscious intentionality – hence Sartre’s description of the ‘I’ as freezing and darkening consciousness, destroying its spontaneity, rendering it opaque and ‘ponderable’.<sup>25</sup> Sartre later adds a further argument: If an ‘I’ were present at the unreflective level, then its identity, or communication, with the ‘I’ of reflective consciousness could not be comprehended; ‘I’s would multiply without intelligible connection.<sup>26</sup>

But how, if there is no transcendental I, can Sartre hope to explain the real existence of self-consciousness in the sense of the second datum, i.e. the actual and necessary presence of an ‘I’ on each occasion when I reflect on my states of consciousness? Even more worryingly, it may seem that Sartre’s argument has overshot the mark: if self-consciousness is consciousness of a self, and if a self can neither be an object of nor inhabit my consciousness, then self-consciousness is impossible, in which case, so it seems, ‘I think’ thoughts are impossible – which obviously they are not.

Sartre’s answer is that, while there is of course a necessary connection between reflection and an ‘I’, the data are accounted for by supposing (1) that the act of reflection *creates* the ‘I’ and *inserts* or interpolates it into the unreflective field (an account that Husserl is in no position to reject, having himself argued that reflection reconfigures the consciousness to which it is directed); and (2) that the ‘I’ should be analysed as ‘bear[ing] to the concrete and psycho-physical me the same relation as does a point to three dimensions: it is an infinitely contracted *me*’.<sup>27</sup> The second part of this account explains, without appeal to a transcendental ego, why ‘I’ cannot be thought without existential import, and why it is nevertheless not the thinking of any object *as* having the properties of a concrete and psycho-physical entity. Additional support for these interpretations derives from the observation that there is a mismatch between *what* we think by means of the concept ‘I’, and the *basis* on which it is thought: the idea of an ‘I’ is of something that has a permanence beyond the consciousness that presently entertains it and indeed beyond ‘all consciousnesses’. Because the idea of the ‘I’ is that of something non-perishable which possesses a content which is not given and ‘would need to be unfolded’, its ‘type of existence’ is, as Sartre puts it, ‘much closer to that of eternal truths than to that of consciousness’.<sup>28</sup> If the metaphysics of ‘I’ and its epistemology come

apart so strikingly, then we cannot claim certainty with respect to the nature of the 'I', and ought to treat it as a problematic, philosophically suspect item.<sup>29</sup>

Important parts of Sartre's story remain undeveloped in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. For example, the idea that 'I' refers to a concrete entity, but not *as* that concrete entity, is puzzling as well as attractive – whence the peculiar mode of presentation that constitutes 'I'? And why indeed should any 'I' appear at all on the occasion of reflection? B&N will fill in these gaps, but the net achievement is already considerable: Sartre has articulated the possibility that the transcendental field of consciousness is '*without an I*' and is what makes the 'I' possible, and shown that much favours this metaphysics over Husserl's.

There are, however, two major problems with the position taken in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. The first, which threatens to take us back to Husserl's position, concerns the individuation of fields of impersonal consciousness. Sartre may have shown that a transcendental 'I' cannot explain what gives a field of consciousness its identity, and that his own model provides a better explanation of self-consciousness, but this model still presupposes the notion of a *particular* field of consciousness, and even if the ground of its individuation is not personal – Sartre has shown why we should hesitate to think that it has the character of an 'I' – it seems that there must still be *some* such ground, and in *The Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre does not say what it is: he acknowledges that consciousness constitutes a 'synthetic, individual totality', but dismisses the problem which this raises with the remark that the individuality of consciousness stems from its own nature.<sup>30</sup>

The second problem, connected with the first, is that while we may agree with Sartre that reflection cannot be understood in terms of an ordinary judgement of identity, it contains *some* element of reflexivity which Sartre appears to have missed. Sartre says that 'my reflecting consciousness does not take itself for object when I carry out the Cogito', and that what it affirms 'concerns the reflected consciousness'.<sup>31</sup> But this seems only part of what is involved: what reflection affirms *explicitly* (in Sartre's language, 'thetically') concerns only the reflected consciousness, but reflection also *implicitly* affirms something concerning itself, namely, that both it and the reflected



consciousness *belong to the same subject*. If reflection did not grasp itself as 'of the same subject' as the consciousness reflected on, then the mental stream which is presented to me by reflection on my consciousness would have the same indifferent, alien character as the external world.<sup>32</sup> This comprehension implicit in the reflective act is at least a *partial* realization of reflexivity, and it has been lost sight of in Sartre's minimalist account in *The Transcendence of the Ego*.

In B&N we will find Sartre making adjustments to the account given in *The Transcendence of the Ego* which overcome these limitations, and which at the same time make concessions to Husserl. In criticizing Husserl in *The Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre pays characteristically little attention to the philosophical intentions which Husserl actually had for the transcendental 'I', and arguably he misconstrues these: what Sartre shows is only that the transcendental 'I' cannot be justified on *narrow* phenomenological grounds, not that it cannot earn its place as a *de facto* rather than merely *de jure* entity on broader transcendental grounds, and in B&N Sartre will introduce a structure which, for all its differences from Husserl's transcendental 'I', occupies a very similar theoretical position.

The limitations of Sartre's Husserl-exegesis are, however, fortunately irrelevant to his true philosophical purpose in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, because what Sartre really has in his sights in this essay is the conception of self which is integral to *natural* consciousness.<sup>33</sup> The significance of Sartre's expunging of Husserl's transcendental 'I' is to establish a kind of atheism of consciousness, directed against our naturally theistic self-conception:<sup>34</sup> Sartre wants to undermine our profound sense of ourselves as – to put it in suitably indefinite terms – something substantial lying *behind* and *supporting* the stream of our consciousness, *in* which the flux of our mental life is housed and *from* which it flows; the conception of the self which Sartre ascribes to Husserl is of importance in its capacity as a philosophical articulation of this commonsensical conviction of one's personal reality. That this is the crucial point of *The Transcendence of the Ego* emerges with full force when Sartre explains that, if consciousness is transcendently impersonal, then the idea which we ordinarily employ, and which French moralists such as La Rochefoucauld amplify, of an absolutely

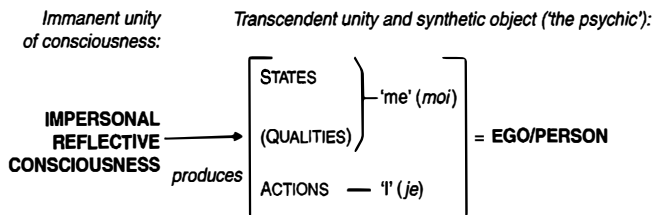
basic, 'natural' level of self-concerned or egoistic motivation in human psychology must be abandoned.<sup>35</sup> The entire structure of human personal identity must be rethought.

Commonsense psychological explanation exhibits the following pattern. On the basis of a series of unreflective conscious episodes with a certain character and content – for example: feelings of a particular quality directed towards some particular person – we in reflection take ourselves to be presented with psychological elements – for example: emotions of love or hate – which we suppose to underlie and manifest themselves in conscious episodes, in a fashion analogous to physical forces. Sartre calls these elements 'states', and notes how they are conceived not as identical with but as given 'in and by' our instantaneous consciousnesses, which our states, having a degree of permanence, extend beyond. This is what allows me to think that the love that I feel today is one and the *same* love that I felt yesterday, somewhat in the way that I can revisit experientially a physical object.<sup>36</sup> Beliefs and desires conform also to this pattern, according to commonsense psychology. States are complemented in turn (but only optionally) by the ascription of what Sartre calls 'qualities', underlying dispositions whose activation gives rise to states and to actions.

The force of this model is to allow us to cast psychological explanation in the familiar form of causal stories proceeding from a substratum of qualities which we take to constitute a person's character, and towards which our reactive attitudes (of admiration, aversion, etc.) are directed. If, however, the 'I' of reflection does not refer to anything in the hinterground of consciousness, then there is nothing to own, or to provide a subject of inherence for, our states and qualities. And from this it follows – in accordance with and as an extension of the story that Sartre has already told about the 'I' of reflection – that our states and qualities must be regarded as *transcendent products* of consciousness: the 'I' or ego or person which they compose lies exposed to my consciousness *out there in the world*, not within or behind my consciousness.

The constitution of this entity, on Sartre's complete picture, is as follows. The ego or person is a transcendent object of reflective consciousness, comprising a synthetic unity of states and actions, mediated by qualities. This psychic (rather

than psycho-physical) object has two 'faces': on the one hand, it appears (in nominative case) as 'I' (*je*), as active, and on the other (in accusative case) as 'me' (*moi*), as passive or capable of being affected.<sup>37</sup>



Common sense and the discipline of psychology are exactly wrong in their reading of the arrow: they think that it expresses only the relation of knowledge, i.e. that it is *via* consciousness that I come to *know* my states and qualities, and that the relation of *production* goes in the opposite direction, from right to left. It is, common sense tells us, *because of* my states and qualities that my consciousness is as it is; my love and hate are *what make me feel* as I do. The import of Sartre's new metaphysics of the self, and the imputation of a metaphysical illusion to common sense, are stated clearly by Sartre:

[the ego] is a virtual locus of unity, and consciousness constitutes it as going in *completely the reverse direction* from that followed by real production; what is *really* first is consciousness, through which are constituted states, then, through these, the Ego. But, as the order is reversed [ . . . ] consciousnesses are given as emanating from states, and states as produced by the Ego. As a consequence, consciousness projects its own spontaneity into the object Ego so as to confer on it the creative power [ . . . ] It is thus exactly as if consciousness constituted the Ego as a false representation of itself, as if consciousness hypnotised itself before this Ego which it has constituted, became absorbed in it, as if it made the Ego its safeguard and its law.<sup>38</sup>

The mistake of reversing the arrow is, therefore, no casual accident: it is part of the very nature of the ego, as consciousness constitutes it, that it should bear the false meaning of being the

source of consciousness.<sup>39</sup> Again, this part of the story – Why should consciousness constitute an object which incorporates a misrepresentation of their relation? – awaits completion in B&N, though Sartre makes a speculative suggestion at the end of *The Transcendence of the Ego*: consciousness takes flight from and seeks to mask its own ‘monstrous spontaneity’, ‘vertigo of possibility’ and ‘vertiginous liberty’.<sup>40</sup> This motivational explanation of our belief in the ego rules out treating it as merely an erroneous theoretical hypothesis.<sup>41</sup>

In support of his revolutionary reconstrual of the ontology of human personality,<sup>42</sup> Sartre emphasizes the epistemological gap between consciousness and state: never am I rationally *compelled* by a given consciousness to attribute to myself a certain state (it is up to me to decide what significance to ascribe to my feelings); every advance I make beyond the data of unreflective consciousness to the reflective is under-motivated by the data.<sup>43</sup> In B&N it will be argued that the undertaking of a *commitment* is what allows me to cross the gap separating consciousness from state, and much will be made of the way in which self-attributions and claims to self-knowledge take out an ontological loan which my future consciousness and conduct may or may not redeem.

It may be observed that Sartre’s argument does not rule it out that our consciousnesses are, if not grounded in a transcendental ‘I’ or substantial personhood, then grounded in non-personal *non-conscious* states of affairs – neurological states, most obviously. This leads to one final observation about *The Transcendence of the Ego*, which looks forward to what will be argued in B&N.

It is far from clear, so far, why the position taken in *The Transcendence of the Ego* regarding the self should be expected to assist the development of a theory of human freedom. If there is no transcendental ‘I’, and if the personality of human beings is an effect of consciousness rather than its ground, then our ordinary idea of ourselves as authors of our actions seems undermined.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, if the field of consciousness is transcendently impersonal, then it might seem *prima facie* that Spinoza is vindicated, that persons are mere modifications of impersonal substance and that our sense of ourselves as self-subsistent existents is consequently an illusion.<sup>45</sup> But

Sartre indicates why he is confident that the door has not been opened to Spinozism. Throughout *The Transcendence of the Ego* there are remarks, parenthetical to its argument but anticipating that of B&N, to the effect that consciousness is 'a non-substantial absolute', 'autonomous', 'a totality that has no need to be completed', self-limiting in the manner of Spinoza's substance, 'the cause of itself', 'a sphere of *absolute* existence' of 'pure spontaneities' which 'determine themselves to exist', 'a creation *ex nihilo*'.<sup>46</sup> Sartre neither explains nor justifies these claims and appears to regard them, somehow, as basic principles of phenomenology secured already by Husserl. Whether or not this is accurate, the truth is that Sartre is once again using the platform of phenomenology to stake out his own metaphysics, and in B&N Sartre will clarify, refine and attempt to make plausible his claim that consciousness is an autonomous totality.

The revisionary project of *The Transcendence of the Ego* is pursued further, and in a more pointedly moralistic direction, in *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, published in 1939. (The *Sketch* formed part of a long manuscript with the title *La Psyché* composed in 1937–38, abandoned by Sartre and apparently lost.<sup>47</sup>)

From the later perspective of B&N, it is easily seen why the topic of emotion should have attracted Sartre's attention. On the commonsense conception, emotion is a force-like state which (a) inhabits, colours and has the capacity to obscure consciousness, (b) is suffered or passively undergone, (c) typically has connections with bodily and physiological conditions and with the animality of human beings, (d) tends characteristically to promote irrationality of judgement and action and (e) potentially qualifies attributions of freedom and responsibility (as in the juridical conception of a 'crime passionel'). In all of these (closely interlinked) respects, the existence of emotion appears to speak against the conception of the absolutely free human subject which Sartre will defend in B&N, and the *Sketch* is a preliminary attempt to meet the challenge which it poses.

Emotion, Sartre argues, is not the conscious effect or correlate of a physiological occurrence, nor a behavioural mechanism, but a specific mode of consciousness of objects in which individuals and the world, or portions of it, are apprehended as having

qualities of a specific kind. The qualities in question are continuous with those that objects display in the course of our ordinary, non-emotional practical engagements: some person as needing-to-be-helped, the tram as needing-to-be-caught, the fire as having-to-be-lit and suchlike.<sup>48</sup> What specifically distinguishes emotional qualities, Sartre suggests, is a kind of purposiveness which betrays (i) the contribution of imagination, and (ii) a motivated suspension or abandonment of the practical perspective. Each type of emotion is defined by the particular set of qualities which it gives to its object, and Sartre offers analyses of the ways in which emotions such as joy, melancholy, fear and upset lend to the world a particular organization and significance which in one way or another relieves the subject of the burden of action, by re-representing the world as *not* placing a practical demand, one which poses some sort of difficulty for the subject.<sup>49</sup> Imagination in emotion goes beyond its usual function in, e.g., fictional contexts, by dint of the *belief* which accompanies it, belief in the reality of the qualities which the world is newly imagined to have.<sup>50</sup> But since, on Sartre's account, imaginative consciousness in general is conscious of itself as such – consciousness of an unreal object can be achieved only by positing the object *against* reality<sup>51</sup> – the purposive 'transformation of the world' in emotion is accompanied and underwritten by self-knowledge. Emotion is therefore very close to, if not actually an instance of, self-deception.

That Sartre has provided here the basis for a comprehensive theory of affectivity may be doubted: more plausibly, Sartre has theorized a sub-class or particular mode of emotion, or identified a potentiality which is immanent in all emotion but need not always be actualized. The important point for present purposes, however, is that the *Sketch* advances the same kind of 'error theory' explanation of natural consciousness as *The Transcendence of the Ego*, and similarly entails the need for an ethical reorientation: just as consciousness hypnotizes itself before the image of an ego, so too it misrepresents itself as passive in relation to the emotionally transfigured world; and just as recognition of the first error sets consciousness the task of 'purifying' itself of ego-hypostatizing reflection,<sup>52</sup> so too must consciousness free itself from affective self-enchancement. This pattern of translating what common sense is happy to accept,

or psychology to postulate, as brute facts of nature into purposive intentional structures, in order to eliminate what will otherwise be counted as limitations to human freedom, recurs throughout B&N, and it comprises all that remains in Sartre's phenomenology of Husserl's concept of the '*epoché*' or phenomenological reduction.<sup>53</sup>

2. *Freedom and human existence.* What separates B&N from these early writings is its development of an explicit doctrine of human freedom within a complete metaphysical context: freedom, in Sartre's view, is no mere psychological power or capacity, and its understanding requires that everything be rethought from the ground up, hence the articulation of a full philosophical system, in contrast with the relatively fragmentary analyses found in Sartre's texts of the 1930s.

The problem of human freedom presents the following methodological difficulty. It is natural to approach the problem by way of some prior conception of the entity whose freedom is under consideration: on the basis of some notion of what it is that we *are*, it is considered whether or not entities of that sort might *have freedom*. But this, Sartre considers, loads the dice against freedom: if the prior concept of what we are is formed without consideration of freedom, then it is hard to see how it can avoid representing freedom as something external and contingent, merely tacked on to our essence; even if the argument for our possession of the attribute of freedom is compelling, a puzzle must remain regarding our bond with it. Sartre regards previous philosophical attempts to solve the problem, with the (qualified) exception of Heidegger's, as defective in exactly this way: philosophical assumptions and interests extraneous to freedom have been allowed to determine reflection on the nature of man – Descartes' and Spinoza's accounts of man are guided by a (pan)theistic metaphysics of substance, Hegel's by a rationalistic and optimistic view of human history and so on – with the consequence that human freedom has been either denied or misrepresented.

This might suggest that the identity of the subject should not be fixed philosophically prior to the determination of freedom. But this encounters a problem. Some conception of what we are needs to be in position at the outset – we can hardly reverse the natural method and begin with freedom, for that would be

to ascribe freedom to something conceptualized only as 'that to which freedom is to be ascribed'. Without some independent conception of the subject term, the ascription of freedom makes no sense. We appear to be moving in circles.

If neither the attribute of freedom, nor a characterization of human identity, can be accorded priority over the other, then we must find some way of forming our conceptions of both *contemporaneously*. The judgement 'human beings are free' or 'man has freedom of will' will consequently be of the peculiar kind that Hegel calls a 'speculative' proposition, where neither the subject nor the predicate term can be presupposed without the other: such propositions are, Hegel says, not susceptible to philosophical proof in the strict sense; philosophical reflection has instead the job of showing each of the concepts unfolding into the other. In this way we can hope to make a virtue of the unavoidable methodological circularity which has emerged. Though Sartre does not describe his approach in terms of Hegel's philosophical vocabulary, this is the method which he in effect follows in B&N.

It is, however, one thing to say that freedom and human identity need to be thought alongside one another; the difficulty is to find a way of doing so. Sartre's proposal consists in a radically new kind of answer to the traditional question of the nature of man: in place of an account of which attributes differentiate human beings from other kinds of entities, Sartre gives a wholly immanent theory of what it is for a human being to exist, where the notion of existence employed embodies a number of logical peculiarities which are crucial to its role in showing the possibility of freedom. The essential points concerning Sartre's notion are the following: (1) The question of what it is for a human being to exist is tied, in Sartre's conception, to the *first person* standpoint. (2) Appearances to the contrary, 'my existence' is not a datum, fact or state of affairs in any familiar or ordinary sense: in asking what it is for me to exist, it is being asked what it is for me to *grasp* – to (have to) take up, or relate to – my existence. (3) Everything that can be said about what *kind* of thing I am is provided by an account of what it is for me to grasp *that* I am.

(1) The perspective of B&N's enquiry is from the beginning (whether or not it is so to the end – an issue which we will need



to address) that of the *I*. Provisionally, the justification for this approach derives from the need to eliminate preconceptions: only when the human being is conceived from the standpoint of the *I*, is it conceived in terms that are not borrowed from the world, i.e. in its own terms and as it is in itself. More deeply, Sartre's first person methodology is connected logically with his substantive view that what *I* am is a being that grasps itself as existing: if my existence were a fact of any ordinary kind, or if my essence were given by a set of externally observable characteristics that distinguish human beings from other kinds of being, then there would be no reason to think that the object of enquiry cannot be detached from the first person perspective, and it would be unclear why that perspective should be privileged methodologically.

(2) The question of the nature of man in its traditional formulation asks us to think of ourselves as belonging to one of the several species of thing that populate the world, and so requires us to form first a general theory of the different kinds of worldly entity. Sartre's question of what it is to exist directs our attention instead to a process or reflexive activity internal to the human subject. Cartesian doctrine, and perhaps common sense, tell us that grasping oneself as existing is an instantaneous and immediate matter, which results in an absolutely secure cognition. Sartre denies that the *cogito* is primordially an instance of knowing – as we have seen, in *The Transcendence of the Ego* he characterizes the 'I' of reflection as the projection of an ideal unity – and regards the registration in reflection of one's own existence as only the tip of a metaphysical iceberg: my existence is grasped adequately, for Sartre, only when it is understood as stretched across various, temporal and other dimensions which extend as far as an individual human life extends, and when this structure and the relations which compose it are taken up as something other than an object of knowledge. The goal of B&N, as a philosophical treatise, is to achieve theoretical knowledge of what it is for me to grasp my existence, and of what follows from this, but the relation of grasping or relating-to one's own existence is deeply practical: the self-relating, of which self-knowing is but one subsidiary and derivative instance, is effectively equivalent to what we ordinarily call a person's living their life.

(3) If Sartre's answer to the question, *What am I?*, is therefore that I am a being that, in the sense defined, grasps itself as existing, then the traditional distinction between the existence of things and their essence does not have application to human beings, or at any rate, it does not have the same kind of application as it does when we think of things in the world on the one hand as existing, and on the other as having a particular determinate character. One way of expressing this point is to say that the human subject is without an essence; alternatively, that its existence precedes its essence,<sup>54</sup> that its essence is 'the synthetic order of its possibilities', or that 'its existence implies its essence' (xxxii/22).

It is beginning to become clear how Sartre aims to co-conceive freedom and human identity: if our existence is conceptualized in the open-ended, non-determinate terms proposed by Sartre, then it is not hard to understand how, with a little amplification, the concept of a human subject might 'unfold' into that of freedom.

To what extent will this amount to, if not a proof, then at least an effective defence of human freedom? The following objection to Sartre's procedure needs to be considered. Sartre, I said, regards previous philosophical accounts as biased implicitly and unwittingly, on account of the method they adopt, against freedom. But what, it may be asked, makes Sartre's approach any less tendentious? From the standpoint of, say, Spinoza, Sartre's presumption that freedom is the appropriate concept with reference to which human identity should be fixed is just as unfounded as Spinoza's substantialism appears from Sartre's standpoint; the Spinozist will regard the manner in which Sartre's conception of man appears to have been designed in the light of his desired conclusion that man is free, as a criticism and a philosophical weakness. Clearly, we encounter here a deep and wholly general difficulty of a metaphilosophical nature – that of how any philosophical system can command assent, if it must proceed from some basis which counts, from the standpoint of some other system, as ungrounded and dogmatic. For those who are not persuaded by Hegel's claim to have worked his way beyond this problem, there is a limit to what can be done with it, and if philosophy is to get started,

it must start somewhere. I have tried to indicate above why it would be unjustified to dismiss Sartre's position as arbitrary, and this will become clearer if we now spell out what can be regarded as the 'master argument' for freedom in B&N.

The problem of human freedom presents, in the way described briefly above, and for reasons which B&N will elaborate at length, extraordinary difficulty. Reflection on the problem moves characteristically back and forth between, at the one extreme, inalienable conviction of the contentfulness, necessity and justice of our claim to freedom, and at the other, a collapse so complete in the attempt to think human freedom coherently that the only conclusion to be drawn, it seems, is that the concept is chimerical. Now, it is also true – this is something which, again, B&N will seek to persuade, or rather remind us of, since it is hardly something that can be overlooked – that human existence, when stared in the face rather than apprehended sideways on, exhibits deep traits of unintelligibility: over the horizon of our local, articulated concerns, we appear to out-strip our own conceptual grasp of what it is that we are. Sartre's strategy is to bring these two problems or *explananda* together, not in order to offer an explanation of both in terms of some third conceptual element, but with a view to getting each, in the manner of two simultaneous equations, to solve the other: that is, B&N aims to show that making our existence and identity intelligible requires us to think that the very mode in which we exist differs from that of worldly objects, and that a parallel revision of common sense regarding the concept of freedom – whereby we will be brought to see that common sense locates our freedom at too superficial a level – shows us that freedom is what defines our non-worldly mode of being. Sartre aims to carry this all the way through to the point of understanding freedom and human individuation – the distinction of your 'I' from my 'I' – in terms of one another.

This unfolding into one another of the concepts of human existence and freedom has its crux in the following point. What necessitates our understanding the judgement that man is free as a 'speculative' proposition is the impossibility of regarding either term as the mere predicate of the other. Hegel regards this breakdown of subject-predicate structure as revealing the final structure of *all* reality; Sartre regards it as revealing

the structure of the human subject. The mode of being which defines the human subject does not, on Sartre's account, have subject-predicate form: we do not, in the final analysis, exist as subjects, of which properties may be predicated. Two things follow from this. First, it follows (as argued in *The Transcendence of the Ego*) that the common sense conception of human personality, which is also the conception of the discipline of psychology, must be rejected, and that this rejection is necessary for understanding human freedom: if our existence exhibited the judgemental form of subject and predicate, then we could not think ourselves as free. Second, it follows that the verb 'exists', in application to human beings, must be understood as behaving in the grammatically peculiar way that we began to see above: to say that a human subject *exists* is already to grasp it as *active* and to say something about the mode and structure of its activity; as it may also be put, human existence itself has the character of an *event*, or occurrence, in relation to the extra-human order. (In anticipation of yet another respect in which Sartre's key philosophical propositions display conceptual irregularity: it will be argued to follow from the non-conformity of human existence to subject-predicate form, that philosophical elucidation of human being allows, indeed requires, contradictory predications.)

If we look back to *The Transcendence of the Ego*, we see how it prepares the way for this crucial idea. Husserl's account of the transcendental 'I', Sartre notes, appeals to the traditional conception of predicates as belonging to '*something*', an 'X', which is their 'bearer' and 'central point of connection', such that the predicates are 'unthinkable without' the X 'yet distinguishable from it'.<sup>55</sup> But the relation of the ego or person to their mental states, Sartre makes clear, is incongruent with this model: a subject X is necessarily *indifferent* to the properties expressed by its predicates, whereas

the action or the state turns back on to the Ego in order to qualify it [ . . . ] Every new state produced by the Ego colours and nuances the Ego in the moment the Ego produces it [ . . . ] It is not the crime committed by Raskolnikov that is incorporated into his Ego. Or rather, to be precise, it *is* the crime, but in a condensed form, in the shape of a bruise.<sup>56</sup>

States and acts are attached to the ego as to their origin, and yet 'not given as having previously been within the Ego': the Ego 'is always surpassed by what it produces, even though, from another point of view, it *is* what it produces' and cannot be anything other than what it produces;<sup>57</sup> the Ego 'maintains its qualities by a veritable continuous creation', and yet if we stripped these qualities away, 'there would be nothing left, the Ego would have vanished'.<sup>58</sup> In view of this paradoxical patterning – which forbids our conceiving the relation of the Ego to its states, qualities and acts as one of either emanation or actualization, and instead invites a comparison with poetic creation<sup>59</sup> – a better model for the unity of the human subject is provided, Sartre suggests, by melody, in which clearly there is no 'X'.<sup>60</sup>

The logic of the relation of person to their mental states is thus altogether different from, much richer and more complex than, all that we find outside the human world, and the explanation for its extreme conceptual peculiarity, on Sartre's account, is that the commonsense conception of persons is derived from consciousness through the fictionalizing operation of reflection, and consequently lacks reality (it incorporates a spontaneity, but in a 'degraded' form, a 'pseudo-spontaneity' in which a 'memory of the spontaneity of consciousness' is retained<sup>61</sup>). The commonsense conception of persons is formed by the incoherent superimposition of the traditional structure of substance onto the non-subject-predicate structure of consciousness, hence the ultimate 'irrationality' of this conception.<sup>62</sup>

Intersecting with the themes of freedom and mode of being is a third argumentative factor, which concerns the ultimately practical, broadly ethical, dimension of Sartre's system. In Sartre's view, philosophical misconceptions of human existence are of a piece with – they reinforce and underwrite the adoption of – stances and attitudes towards life which are experienced, in both the first and the third person, as defective.<sup>63</sup> Sartre intends to give a true articulation of human existence, which, he supposes, will conduce to a revision of our fundamental orientations. Philosophy cannot abolish the deficiency in human life – B&N concludes, on the contrary, that human life *is* a phenomenon of lack – but it can help us to distinguish between metaphysically necessary, and other, remediable forms

of defectiveness, and this therapeutic contribution may be taken as one measure of philosophical truth.

The argument for freedom offered in B&N consists, therefore, in a demonstration of the systematic coherence of its metaphysics, and of its capacity to resolve philosophical problems of a fundamental character which are, Sartre argues, otherwise intractable. B&N does not give a strict proof that these problems could not be got to yield other solutions, but Sartre makes it at least plausible that this is the case. This may not suffice to shake the confidence of a Spinozist, or anyone who claims not to share the basic intuition of the reality of human freedom, but if Sartre succeeds in forging in B&N a unified, synthetic view of human life as a metaphysical phenomenon, in which phenomena as miscellaneous as self-consciousness, temporality, knowledge of other minds, sexuality and emotion, are all intelligibly inter-related, and which furthermore promises a therapeutic practical reorientation, then its claim on our attention will be as strong as possible.

In pursuing its enquiry into what it is for a human subject to exist, B&N not only employs a highly abstract metaphysical language, but on various points of philosophical logic, as we have already begun to see, departs strikingly from analytic orthodoxy: Sartre distinguishes between different modes of being, i.e. denies that 'exists' has a single meaning, conceives existents of different kinds as having different degrees of reality, and regards one species of existent, the human subject, as characterized by lack of self-identity and as the subject of contradictory predicates. In all these cases, it is important to note, Sartre's position is not without historical precedent: the univocity of existence is a subject of extended controversy in medieval philosophy, while distinctions between different degrees of reality are assumed, on various grounds, all the way up from Plato to Kant, and the conceptual figure of non-self-identity, along with the idea that contradictions can inhere in reality, is famously found in Hegel. Philosophical precedent is however not of itself an explanation or excuse for Sartre's practice, and it would be foolish to deny that these conceptual forms create difficulties, if only because of the way in which they immediately complicate Sartre's claims. What should be our attitude towards them, therefore?

The response of many anglophone commentators has been to regard Sartre's logically problematic conceptual forms as no more than metaphors, and more broadly Sartre's metaphysics in B&N – since it is hard to drive a wedge between the two – as demanding translation into some other philosophical idiom, for example, that of contemporary analytic philosophy of mind. While some gains are to be made by approaching Sartre in this way, there is reason for thinking that it represents an ultimately unsatisfactory option. There is no simple method of translation which yields a coherent and interesting, original and distinctively Sartrean philosophical outlook, and the typical upshot is to make Sartre's central ideas seem under-motivated and poorly defended, mere exaggerations of plainer and tamer truths (as is acknowledged by some who take the translational approach, in so far as they describe what they are doing as offering partial reconstructions of the elements in Sartre worth salvaging).

The disinclination to take Sartre's metaphysics at face value has, it is important to note, sources distinct from the motive of avoiding complications of philosophical logic, including sympathy with naturalism, antipathy to metaphysics and scepticism regarding the possibility and utility of philosophical system-building. Also of high importance is the sense that Sartre's substantive claims – above all, regarding human freedom – are simply too strong to be countenanced. This makes it clearer what is at stake in the choice between a 'metaphysical' and a 'non-metaphysical' reading of B&N. Underlying the latter is a commitment to philosophical tenets which Sartre rejects: typically, to taking the beliefs of pre-philosophical, ordinary or 'natural' consciousness as setting the measure of philosophical credibility. Since Sartre's philosophy is an ambitious, radical project intended to challenge and revise common sense, and Sartre's metaphysics are essential to his mounting this challenge – they provide the means by which we get behind the appearances of ordinary thought – a non-metaphysical reading, which domesticates B&N and brings it into line with what we ordinarily think, contradicts Sartre's intention. Whether or not Sartre's challenge to common sense is successful, the fact is that we cannot begin to engage with it until we have a correct appreciation of the intention behind Sartre's claims and of the reasons for their strangeness.

3. *Sartre and Kant*. In the previous chapter I located Sartre within a tradition which takes the concept of existence to have practical and axiological significance, and we have just seen, in very general terms, how Sartre regards ontology as connected, *via* freedom, with value. If we now draw some comparisons of Sartre with the philosophical predecessor whose conception of the task of philosophy Sartre in large part reassumes, Kant, a fuller picture of what Sartre is proposing in B&N will emerge.

Sartre regarded himself as having moved at the end of the 1930s out of the impasse of Husserl's idealism, to embrace Heidegger's realism,<sup>64</sup> and often describes the philosophical intuition which B&N endeavours to articulate as a conviction of the truth of realism. But the realism which Sartre affirms has two components, one of which corresponds to what is usually associated with the term, *viz.* a thesis of the reality of the objects of experience, and the other of which does not. In an interview in 1969 Sartre declared that B&N had aimed to 'provide a philosophical foundation for realism [. . .] In other words, how to give man both his autonomy and reality among real objects, avoiding idealism without lapsing into mechanistic materialism'.<sup>65</sup> The realism that Sartre seeks to establish is therefore, as he understands it, opposed to naturalism, for it incorporates, as its second component, the reality of human *autonomy*, which he regards materialism as contradicting.<sup>66</sup> Sartre's concentration on the theme of human freedom and conception of it as defining the task of philosophy puts him, alongside Fichte and Schelling, squarely in a direct line of descent from Kant, in the anti-naturalistic transcendental tradition, but Sartre's take on the great Kantian opposition of Nature and Freedom – his view both of what it amounts to, and of how the problem of human freedom should be resolved – is utterly distinctive.

Kant's solution to the problem of human freedom stands on two conditions: first, on our accepting the doctrine of transcendental idealism, that is, Kant's thesis that nature – the empirical realm in which we can discover only the kind of empirical causal relations which suffice for a universal determinism – possesses only a qualified degree of reality; and second, on our accepting Kant's account of the moral law, that is, the principle which determines our duties, as presupposing human freedom, and of our awareness of this law (the



immediate respect which it commands) as in some way bringing with it an assurance that we do genuinely have this freedom. The two conditions come together in Kant's thesis that, while empirical objects are mere appearance ('phenomenal' entities), our status *qua* moral agents endowed with freedom is that of things in themselves ('noumenal' entities). Kant's strategy consists therefore in a kind of bargain: in exchange for giving up our commonsensical supposition that the empirical world has the kind of full reality ('transcendental reality') which we naively assume it to have, we gain, on the further condition that we bind our wills to the requirements of morality, the right to regard ourselves as possessing a power – to initiate a sequence of events in the world without being necessitated to do so by preceding empirical conditions; making us the genuine authors of our actions – which it would be unintelligible to ascribe to any merely natural being.

Both parts of Kant's strategy are standardly criticized: his transcendental idealism for, among other things, leaving the empirical world depleted of reality, and his moral argument for leaving human freedom with only the frailest evidential support. Sartre, endorsing both of these criticisms, takes over one key feature of Kant's solution, while regarding Kant's construal of the problem as in one basic respect mistaken. What Sartre accepts from Kant is, of course, the notion that we, and natural objects, differ ontologically; what he rejects is Kant's conception of us as enmeshed *ab initio* in the web of empirical causality, from which we need to extricate ourselves, our relation to our freedom being forever after epistemically indirect. Instead, Sartre regards our freedom as primary: rather than restricting knowledge of freedom to morality, Sartre supposes that it is implied by every instance of cognition or self-consciousness; it is unnecessary, and a mistake, to think that we need to enter a special plea for exemption from empirical causality in order to lay claim to freedom.

Put like this, it may seem doubtful that Sartre's libertarianism can avoid being merely dogmatic: surely the reality of our freedom cannot be so obvious and easy to secure. But at this point it needs to be recognized that, far from ignoring the threat of naturalistic determinism and merely counter-asserting the reality of freedom, Sartre in fact acknowledges, in a certain

sense, the truth of naturalism: the naturalist's conception of the independent reality of nature is expressed in Sartre's conception of being-in-itself, and Sartre considers that naturalism is correct in the sense that the *paradigm* of an entity with full, genuine being is indeed a material object, or, put differently, that whatever falls outside the bounds of material nature cannot have (full, genuine) being and so must be 'nothing'.

Thus far, Sartre's thought parallels in a curious way the eliminative materialism favoured by some naturalists, according to which intentionality and phenomenality – the traditional 'marks of the mental' – have no place in the fabric of reality. But Sartre takes a step further. Having made a clean sweep – having disposed of the idea that there is a unified ontological realm, an order of nature, within which we find ourselves located primordially – we are put in a position to reaffirm our own existence and to grasp correctly its ontological character: since it is true, as the naturalist says, that only material nature meets the conditions for full and genuine being, and because we nonetheless cannot help but think of ourselves as existing in *some* manner (eliminative materialism is, from the relevant angle, literally unthinkable), we are required to think of our existence as exemplifying a *different mode of being* from that of material nature, moreover, one that is in some sense antithetical to it; hence Sartre's identification of our mode of being with 'nothingness'. Sartre's strategy, in sum, is first to offer an interpretation of the philosophical intuition which underlies naturalism and grant its authority, and then – turning the tables against naturalism – to use this intuition to *reveal freedom* (in a way loosely analogous to that in which Descartes uses scepticism to reveal the true grounds of knowledge). The double advantage of Sartre's strategy over Kant's is that it leaves external reality fully intact and freedom resting on no conditions.

Sartre's strategy displays one feature which Kant's does not – Sartre simply rejects the idea, which common sense arguably (with some equivocation) upholds, that we *are* in fact entwined causally within the empirical order. From some philosophical standpoints this must count as a (catastrophic) weakness, but for the reasons given above, from Sartre's own standpoint it counts as a further strength of his position, since on his account

the assumption of our naturalness is a deeply significant point of error in ordinary consciousness. One might add, therefore, that B&N shows that what a coherent anti-naturalism demands is a reconception not of empirical reality but of *ourselves*, to which a quasi-ethical self-transformation corresponds necessarily.<sup>67</sup>

The interpretation of naturalism which Sartre proposes is not extrapolated from reflection on the results of natural science or on the epistemic virtues of scientific method, but goes back to an experience, or type of experience, which Sartre regards both as subtending the whole field of our everyday consciousness of the world, and as also available to us in a pure, explicit, acute form. This continuity between ordinary and exceptional experience is important for Sartre, and integral to the phenomenological method: the special experiential episode to which Sartre appeals no more involves a *transcendence* of ordinary experience than does Descartes' *cogito*; it remains *within* and intensifies, through isolation, the philosophically significant dimension of ordinary experience, and for that reason qualifies as (or suffices for) a 'metaphysical intuition'.<sup>68</sup> The extra-ordinary experience in question is the one which Sartre describes famously in *Nausea*, at the point where the novel's protagonist finds himself overwhelmed by the brute, primitive, alien quality of existence displayed by a tree root:

I was in the municipal park just now. The root of the chestnut tree plunged into the ground just underneath my bench. I no longer remembered that it was a root. Words had disappeared, and with them the meaning of things, the methods of using them, the feeble landmarks which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, slightly bent, my head bowed, alone in front of that black, knotty mass, which was utterly crude and frightened me. And then I had this revelation.

It took my breath away. Never, until these last few days, had I suspected what it meant to 'exist' [. . .] If anybody had asked me what existence was, I should have replied in good faith that it was nothing, just an empty form which added itself to external things, without changing anything in their nature. And then, all of a sudden, there it was, as clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost its

harmless appearance as an abstract category: it was the very stuff of things, that root was steeped in existence.

[ . . . ] It was no use my repeating to myself: 'It is a root' – that didn't work any more. I saw clearly that you could not pass from its function as a root, as a suction pump, *to that*, to that hard, compact sea-lion skin, to that oily, horny, stubborn look. The function explained nothing [ . . . ] That root, with its colour, its shape, its frozen movement, was [ . . . ] beneath all explanation.<sup>69</sup>

What is crucial here is the heterogeneity of self and object: the object is not merely distinct from me in the fashion of every external object, nor merely qualitatively different from me, but different from me at the most fundamental level, that of its mode of being, and in such a way as to make the experience one of antitheticality or repulsion. This apprehension of external physical reality, in which a perceptual object is apprehended under the sole, indeterminate concept of its mere existence, serves as a phenomenological key for Sartre's philosophical reflection, and can be regarded as containing *in nuce* the basic ontology of B&N.

Isn't this a lot to stake on what is, after all, admitted by Sartre to be, in some sense, an *abnormal* experience? And even if we grant that the experience cannot be altogether arbitrary – for it is hard to see in what way it might be merely a function of psychological idiosyncrasy or cultural history – can we be assured that philosophical conclusions derived from it have the requisite strict universality? Here it is important to appreciate that Sartre is not pretending to simply read off a metaphysics from an affectively charged perceptual state: phenomenology is not empiricism, and the phenomenological method does not consist in adducing simple empirical warrants. The *Nausea* experience discloses its putative metaphysical meaning only in a prior context of philosophical reflection. Thus Sartre argues that his interpretation of the *Nausea* experience is supported by reflection on the structure of consciousness and displays what it means for one to be faced with objective reality, and that it provides insight into the ground of human freedom: once the separation of subjectivity from objectivity has been grasped clearly and distinctly, we discover a gap, a separation

and alienation, within the self, as per *The Transcendence of the Ego*, and it is precisely in this gap, Sartre will argue, that our freedom consists.

Sartre's approach to naturalism contrasts, therefore, with that of Kant, for whom the epistemological authority of natural science belongs with the basic given data from which philosophical reflection should precede. Sartre does not include the legitimation of scientific cognition in his conception of the task of philosophy. Instead, Sartre traces back the authority of philosophical naturalism to an existential source, the foundational experience of our ordinary empirical realism, and gives this experience a new, metaphysical interpretation which entails that the human subject lies outside the sphere of natural science.

One final preliminary point is worth drawing out of the comparison of Sartre with Kant. For both thinkers, there is a sense, crucial for human freedom, in which the subject is not a *content* of the world. For Kant, this extra-mundanity consists first of all in the transcendental subjectivity disclosed by the analysis of empirical knowledge: the subject cannot belong to the empirical order of nature, in so far as the subject's *a priori* contribution is required in order for that order to be constituted. The second sense in which for Kant the subject does not belong to the world – its being a noumenal moral agent – is connected with, and presupposes, this transcendental identity.

The sense in which the Sartrean subject finds itself recessed from the world is different: as we have seen, Sartre rejects idealism, and so does not admit a horizontal distinction of levels, the one pre-mundane and constituting, and the other constituted. Instead, for Sartre the distinction of self and world is a vertical distinction of domains, corresponding to two different *modes of being*, both located on a single level.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, as it might be put, the Kantian subject, in its transcendental extra-mundanity, encompasses or *contains* the world, while the Sartrean subject, though not contained within the world, encounters it as his equal.<sup>71</sup> In this respect, it may be argued that Sartre has set himself the harder task, that of securing freedom without recourse to idealism.

This also allows it to be understood why the theme of overcoming the opposition of realism and idealism should be a prominent structural principle of B&N, invoked in virtually

every major context of discussion. In Sartre's view, while realism makes freedom impossible, idealism makes it too easy – and thus gives a false account of freedom – by virtue of its failure to appreciate the extent and quality of our immersion in the world: the objects which surround and bear on us, and in relation to which our freedom needs to be sustained, are not – as Sartre supposes they are for Kant – reducible to and functions of our knowledge of them; the reality of freedom requires that we be related to objects *qua* their being, i.e. that objects be known to be *irreducible* to our knowledge of them. Navigating between and beyond realism and idealism is thus necessary for the vindication of freedom, on Sartre's view.

\* \* \*

Whether Sartre carries through on his promise to show man's 'autonomy and reality among real objects' remains to be seen. There is a high degree of consensus regarding the points at which B&N lies open to criticism. As a perusal of the secondary literature will reveal, essentially the same three major objections are made to Sartre, with differences of formulation, by the majority of commentators, and it will help to have these in view from the outset. They are: (1) that the dualistic ontology of B&N is incoherent; (2) that Sartre's doctrine of absolute freedom is either absurd or vacuous; and (3) that Sartre renders axiological nihilism unavoidable and thus contradicts himself when he claims to have provided in B&N a foundation for ethical values.<sup>72</sup> The precise nature of these objections will emerge in due course.

All great structures of thought in the history of philosophy achieve a kind of pictorial, visionary force, and consequently allow themselves to be reduced for purposes of rapid reference to a cluster of images and bold slogans. B&N is no exception, and in the course of its reception and the conversion of existentialism into a diffuse cultural movement Sartre's early philosophy has been subjected to exceptional simplification, not to say vulgarization. It can be argued that Sartre bears some of the responsibility for this – by virtue of the purple passages in B&N where Sartre gives his literary powers free reign,<sup>73</sup> his restatements of his position for non-academic readers and audiences, and perhaps because his parallel literary work seems to imply the possibility of grasping his ideas without having to

## OVERVIEW OF THEMES

take the hard route of philosophical prose. The task in reading B&N is accordingly to restore to Sartre's ideas the subtlety and complexity which has been stripped away in the course of their popularization, for it is only then that we can gauge the force of the standard objections and the scope available for Sartre to reply to them.

## READING THE TEXT

**(A) THE BASIC ONTOLOGY**

The basis of Sartre's metaphysical position is set out in the Introduction to B&N, 'The Pursuit of Being' (xxi–xliv/11–34), and in Part One, Chapter 1, 'The Origin of Negation' (3–45/37–84). The Introduction is dense and intricate, and one of the hardest parts of the work to get clear about. Sartre operates with a set of maximally abstract terms – 'being', 'phenomenon', 'appearance', 'essence', 'trans-phenomenal' – which undergo a series of combinations and permutations, at times seeming to lead the reader into an ever-deepening maze. It is crucial, however, to grasp the moves made by Sartre in the Introduction, because it is here that Sartre advances a set of strong metaphysical theses concerning consciousness and its objects which prove essential for nearly all of the major claims which Sartre is going to make in B&N: the most striking theses of B&N, in particular concerning human freedom, are to a large extent either amplifications or direct developments of metaphysical propositions laid down in the Introduction.

Sartre's metaphysical picture reveals itself finally as considerably less complicated than the argumentation given in its support: Sartre's aim in the Introduction is to show that a range of philosophical problems and puzzles can be resolved through our acceptance of certain matters as conceptually primitive, leaving us with an austere and clear-cut ontological structure which is pregnant with implications for the interpretation of the human subject.

**§1 Sartre's conception of phenomenon**  
**[Introduction, Section I]**

B&N opens with a statement of the position which, on Sartre's account, philosophy has reached so far. This is defined by the conception of 'phenomenon' which Sartre regards as having



emerged from the work of Husserl and Heidegger. The question which this conception is designed to answer is the following: What is it for a thing to be given to and grasped by a subject as having *real, objective existence*, as *transcending* the subject? It might be supposed that the two matters, of something's having real existence, and of there being for the subject some appearance, are fundamentally *independent* of one another. In that case, we face the task of yoking together the two concepts in such a way as to make sense of our claim to be able to *know* what is the case, from which a number of traditional epistemological and metaphysical positions are born. The alternative supposition, articulated and defended in phenomenology, is that the things to which we attribute objective existence should be understood as *conceptually primitive unities of real existence and possibilities of appearance*: that is, we suppose that it is *constitutive* of something's having real existence, that it should manifest itself in appearance, and that the phenomenon '*is as it appears*' (xxvi/16).

More precisely, real, objective existence reveals itself, not of course in any finite sum of appearances, but in a particular *mode* of appearing, one where each individual appearance of an object – each presentation to the subject, each case of an object's seeming to be thus and not otherwise – refers us to an indefinite number of other possible appearances of that object, according to some 'law' or 'principle' which makes the series of appearances non-arbitrary. This law or principle, which unifies the inexhaustible possibilities of appearance of an object, is at the same time the object's 'essence', i.e., what makes it a thing of a particular kind with a particular set of qualities. Thus in my consciousness of the pen on my desk, the possibility of an infinity of ordered perceptual experiences of the pen – as seen, touched, etc., from this angle or that, in one sequence or another, as dictated by the nature of the object – is given.

This conception of the phenomenon is not argued for in any detail: Sartre's attitude is that it is already, thanks to Husserl and Heidegger, well-established, and he concentrates instead on emphasizing how it disposes of certain problems which traditionally have been at the centre of philosophical attention; it in effect does the work of a theory of knowledge. Crucially, it disposes of the distinction between appearance and reality, and

thus of the Kantian position, as Sartre understands it, according to which being is 'hidden behind' appearance and appearance is 'supported by' or grounded in being. In a symmetrical way, Sartre suggests, the problem of relating particulars and universals falls to the ground: the essence of the object, as much as the object itself, lies at the level of appearance; the object manifests itself, and its essence, at a single stroke. The same goes, according to Sartre, for the duality of the object's metaphysical 'interior' and 'exterior', and for the Aristotelian duality of 'potency and act', potentiality and actuality.

Yet, Sartre argues (xxiii-xxiv/13-14), there is a problem with the new conception of the phenomenon, which puts in doubt its claim to dissolve the problems associated with the traditional dualities, and makes it seem as if these have been merely displaced. The analysis thus far 'has replaced the *reality* of the thing by the *objectivity* of the phenomenon' (xxiii/13), and it has done so on the basis of an appeal to a hypothetical infinite series of appearances. But this notion contains a difficulty. Obviously, in perceiving my pen, no infinity of appearances is given to me in the same way that any particular appearance – the particular perceptual aspect that the pen has for me at some moment – is given to me; the infinite series does not itself appear but rather is 'indicated' by the actually given perceptual aspect. But what makes possible this relation of 'indication'? It requires an individual perceptual aspect to 'transcend itself' towards other possible appearances of the object or, to re-express this requirement in subjective terms, the subject to transcend the given individual perceptual aspect 'toward the total series of which it is a member' (xxiii/13) (for, as Sartre notes, it is necessary for me to have at least the *idea* of the totality of appearances of an object, infinite though it may be). And with this we seem to be back with at least some of the old dualisms: the object is in one sense contained within, and in another sense outside of, any given perceptual aspect; it allows itself to be thought of as a potentiality for actualization in perceptual aspects; and it is composed of an essence which, it seems, must be numerically distinct from the individual appearance which manifests it. The progress we may claim to have made so far, Sartre concludes, consists in our having got beyond only the (Kantian) conception of appearance as 'opposed to' being.

## §2 The phenomenon of being [Introduction, Section II]

The difficulty acknowledged in Section I – of grasping the structure of transcendence involved in phenomena, or as Sartre also puts it, the infinite in the finite – will be readdressed at a much later point in B&N. In Section II Sartre returns to the conception of the phenomenon with which he began, and raises a new issue regarding this conception, consideration of which leads to a further set of important, ground-clearing results.

To say that phenomena involve a constitutive connection between real existence and appearance leaves undetermined the nature of this relation: phenomenology affirms that appearance ‘has its own *being*’ (xxiv), but it must be asked, What is it for appearance to ‘have’ being? How are the concepts of ‘being’ and ‘appearance’ to be coordinated? Sartre’s aim in Section II is to make clearer the unanalysable, primitive unity with which we are here confronted, by rejecting certain misconceptions of the being of appearance.

It cannot be supposed that appearances *have being* in the same way that sugar *is sweet*: being is certainly no quality of things. What may be supposed, however, is that being, since it is grasped by us as something and not nothing, must be recognized as *itself* appearing, such that every appearance would involve the *phenomenon of its being* (which is to say: not only does *the table* appear to me; in addition, there appears to me *the being of the table*). Sartre accepts that there is such a thing as a ‘phenomenon of being’, noting that the testimony of moods, such as boredom – in which we take up an attitude towards ‘everything that exists’, registering it with a specific affect – may be appealed to as (corroborative) evidence for its phenomenological reality. This marks Sartre’s rejection of ‘deflationary’ views of being, according to which the concept of being has no extra-conceptual significance and may be analysed into a merely logical function. Thus far Sartre is in agreement with Heidegger. The next question is whether, as Heidegger supposes, the phenomenon of being is what constitutes the being of appearances.

Heidegger, as Sartre interprets him, conceives the phenomenon of being as something further in the phenomenological field, over and above the appearances of particular existents, and answers the question of how the concepts of being and

appearance should be coordinated by postulating a relation of *disclosure* between entities and Being, with the subject conceived as in some way 'surpassing' the entity in order to grasp its Being. All of this, however, Sartre rejects, on the grounds that it makes the appearance's having-of-being *relational*, and that any such conception is unintelligible: 'The object does not possess being, and its existence is not a participation in being, nor any other kind of relation. It *is*. That is the only way to define its manner of being' (xxv/15). Sartre supports this with the following argument: If Being were disclosed by appearances, then it would be possible to identify something 'about' the object that *does* the disclosing; but this is absurd, and in any case futile, since on the phenomenological understanding of objects, if the object is given to the subject, then so too is its being. This reconfirms the necessary contemporaneity of being with the possibility of its manifestation: being is of itself immediately ready and able to manifest itself (all being is, as Sartre puts it, *être-pour-dévoiler*), not something to which the possibility of manifestation needs to be added. Heidegger is thus guilty of a kind of double counting – it is true that there is a phenomenon of being, *pace* deflationism, but false that this constitutes a *further fact* about entities requiring further understanding – and the attempt in *Being and Time's* account of Dasein to make explicit the supplementary, mediating conditions which are needed for Being to be disclosed, is therefore misguided.<sup>74</sup>

In rejecting Heidegger's conception of a ('ontic-ontological') distinction of beings/entities and Being, the elucidation of which defines the fundamental task of philosophy, Sartre is rejecting Heidegger's account of what it is for appearances to have being, but not going back on his affirmation that there is indeed a 'phenomenon of being'. Certainly we may, Sartre affirms, reflectively redirect our attention to an object, such as a table, in order to focus instead on the very fact of its being; but in that case what we have before us is a new and *different* phenomenon, which cannot *itself* be that which comprises the being of the phenomenon of the table. So 'the being of the phenomenon cannot be reduced to the phenomenon of being' (xxv/16).

This major negative result – that Heidegger's conception of philosophy as 'fundamental ontology', enquiry into the

meaning of Being, is misconceived – means that Sartre is still left with the task of coordinating appearance and being, and of explaining what should be made of the ‘phenomenon of being’. Sartre proceeds to extract the following further conclusions.

The criticism of Heidegger has shown that the being of appearances is not made available to us in the form of a phenomenon of being, and this means, Sartre claims, that our relation to the being of appearances *cannot be a relation of knowledge* – for knowledge, as Sartre understands it, involves ‘determining a thing in concepts’, and anything that we determine in concepts can only be a phenomenon. The definition of knowledge employed here is relatively narrow, and contestable, but Sartre has good reason for drawing the distinction as he does: Knowledge of an object O is possible only if I stand in some kind of relation to the being of O. But the being of O cannot figure for me as an object of knowledge, since the being-of-O is a condition of there being, for me, any object for me to have any knowledge of; that O has being cannot be something *about* the object that I know. Sartre’s is not, then, the trivial point that if I know O, then O exists, and that if O does not exist, then I do not know O; it is the substantial point that the being of O must be something *for me* in a mode other than that in which I know anything about O. Our relation to the being of appearances must be therefore, in Sartre’s preferred terminology, not epistemological but ‘ontological’.

It is however also true that there *is* such a thing as the phenomenon of being: being *can* be made into a phenomenon; deflationary accounts of being are false. Sartre shows how this rules out another, non-Heideggerian way of construing the relation of being and appearance, namely the supposition of phenomenalism or idealism that real existence can be *reduced* to possibilities of appearance. If being can appear, can take the form of a phenomenon, then being cannot *consist in* phenomenality – a phenomenon which manifests nothing but the mere *possibility* of phenomena is not intelligible. Being must be, therefore, ‘trans-phenomenal’: it is false that ‘the being of the appearance is its appearing’ (xxvi/16).<sup>75</sup> Sartre writes that ‘the being of the phenomenon, although coextensive with the phenomenon, can not be subject to the phenomenal condition’ (xxvi/16), meaning that, although all being can manifest itself, it is not *because* it can do

so that it is (that there is) being. In Section VI Sartre will say more about the phenomenon of being.

### §3 Consciousness [Introduction, Section III]

Section III begins by resuming the argument with idealism or phenomenism. Sartre ascribes the claim that the being of the appearance is its appearing to Berkeley and (tendentiously) to Husserl. It might have seemed that idealism has been refuted already, on the strength of the conclusion in Section II that the being of the appearance is trans-phenomenal, but Sartre shows that in truth his business with idealism remains unfinished.

In the first place, Sartre acknowledges that the position he has defended, with its insistence on the irreducibility of being, may seem perilously close to classical realism, which he accepts is highly problematic, and also that idealism has strong attractions, on account of the more economical and straightforward story that it tells about being and appearance. Second, having opened up in Section II the question of the relation of theory of knowledge to ontology, Sartre now wants to consider idealism with respect to a different formulation of its central claim, namely as maintaining that being can be *reduced* to the knowledge which we have of it (xxvi/16), or, that being is 'measured by knowledge' (xxxiii/24). Finally and most importantly, it may be objected to Sartre that the earlier argument has not refuted idealism, because the idealist may reply that, even if it is true that knowledge of appearances requires trans-phenomenal being, this trans-phenomenal being need not lie on the side of appearances: the trans-phenomenal being of the *subject* can play the necessary role. The idealist may agree that cognition and the claiming of it cannot avoid existential commitment – that something must provide a 'basis' or 'guarantee' of 'the being of knowledge' (xxvi/17), in so far as cognitions themselves, states of knowing, must be something – but add that this is provided for within idealism, since the idealist does not seek to reduce the subject of cognition to appearance. Husserl's phenomenology does just this, Sartre says, because in referring knowledge to consciousness, it treats the knower in his capacity 'as *being*', not as an object of knowledge (xxvii/17). Sartre's earlier anti-idealist conclusion is therefore not yet secure. The result of the resumed argument with idealism is not declared until

Section V, however, and the rest of Section III is devoted to laying down the first planks of Sartre's theory of the subject.<sup>76</sup>

Following Husserl, and carrying over assumptions from his own earlier writings,<sup>77</sup> Sartre asserts the following theses regarding consciousness.

(1) Consciousness is necessarily *of* something: it is the '*positing* of a transcendent object', a 'positional consciousness of the world' (xxvii/17–18). (Regarding Sartre's terminology: *positional* consciousness is consciousness with objectual form, consciousness *of O*; *thetic* consciousness is consciousness with judgemental or propositional form, consciousness *that p*.) From this it follows directly, Sartre supposes, that 'consciousness has no "content"', and that the notion of anything's being 'in' consciousness is necessarily false; the first procedure of philosophy 'ought to be to expel things from consciousness' (xxvii/18).<sup>78</sup>

If this seems disputable, on the grounds that it seems not excluded by consciousness' having objects that it should *also* have content, Sartre's point is that consciousness must be grasped, not just as involving, but as *identical* with the relation of 'intending', of going-out-to-grasp, an object; to suppose that consciousness could also bear a different *kind* of relation, viz. that of 'containing' something, would be therefore to change topic, to talk about a *term* of some relation and not the *relating* that consciousness *is*. (We begin to see here that consciousness as Sartre understands it is by no means the same as what we commonsensically call 'the mind'. It is also noteworthy that Sartre's explicit reasons for expelling content from consciousness have nothing to do with avoiding the epistemological problems created by the traditional doctrine of the 'veil of ideas', although of course Sartre is well aware that his position disposes of the need for an account of how 'representations' latch onto worldly objects.<sup>79</sup>)

(2) Consciousness is necessarily a *consciousness of itself*, a *pre-reflective self-consciousness* – Sartre calls it *conscience (de) soi* in order to indicate the peculiarity of the 'relation' involved. This notion is innovative and differs importantly, Sartre explains, from any claim regarding the epistemology of the mental. It is a commonplace of Cartesianism that, if I am conscious of an object O, then I know that I am conscious of O. But this is not

what Sartre is claiming when he says that consciousness is self-conscious: Sartre envisions this structure as the *prior ground* of the subject's knowledge of its own consciousness, as what makes self-knowledge *possible*.

Sartre's argument for supposing that a self-relating of consciousness must be assumed begins with a *reductio* (xxviii/18–19). Suppose we identify self-consciousness in general with self-knowledge (as does, Sartre supposes, Spinoza: self-consciousness consists in 'knowing of a knowing', an 'idea of a idea'). The knowledge relation imports, however, Sartre observes, a distinction of subject (knower) and object (of knowledge), and this immediately generates, in the case of *self-knowledge*, the question: *How* does the subject of knowledge know its identity with the object of knowledge? More precisely: How does it know this identity in the requisite distinctive, infallible and immediate way? For we need to respect the obvious and fundamental differences between knowing that I am in pain or am seeing a pen, and knowing that the Evening Star is identical with and shares the properties of the Morning Star: consciousness of one's self *as oneself* is not in any way an ordinary case of coming to conclude that one thing is the same as another.

Now it might be supposed that the traditional notion of an 'act of reflection', conceived as the mind's turning-back of attention on itself, answers this question. But as Sartre notes, appeal to reflection, *la réflexion*, merely restates the puzzle: What allows the 'I' of my reflection, or my consciousness of that 'I', to know itself to be the same as – to be identical with the subject of – the consciousness which is reflected on? It seems we are pushed to introduce a 'third term', which does know their identity; but then the relation of this third, 'super'-I to the previous two terms needs to be accounted for, and an infinite regress is set in motion. Any account which takes self-knowledge to be ungrounded runs, therefore, into insurmountable difficulties, the only solution to which is to suppose that, just as we accept in the case of knowledge of objects that there must be something prior on which it is grounded, viz. consciousness of objects, so in parallel fashion we should allow a pre-epistemic ground of self-knowledge.<sup>80</sup> A primitive self-relatedness or self-inclusiveness of object-consciousness would explain the



immediacy of the transition that we are able to make from pre-reflective world-absorbed consciousness to reflective consciousness of ourselves.

Sartre gives also an argument (xxix/19–20) showing that, even if it were granted that an act of reflection is what explains sufficiently the possibility of self-knowledge, absurdities result unless we suppose a pre-reflective self-consciousness. If pre-reflective self-consciousness does not exist, then certain ordinary cognitive achievements become unintelligible. Take the case where I count twelve cigarettes, and come up with the answer '12'. For each cigarette counted, there is a corresponding object-consciousness (consciousness of the first cigarette, consciousness of the second and so on). But if these twelve object-consciousnesses were not already self-conscious, then I would need to count *them* in turn, in order to reach the result '12' – which, even if the idea of counting consciousness were intelligible, is clearly not what ordinary cognition of quantity involves, and in any case will not avoid the regress, since the second-order reflective consciousnesses themselves will need to be counted. Again the upshot is that in order for the unity of the subject to be intelligible, something must mediate the relation between positional object-consciousness and reflective awareness, and this something cannot itself be either a positional object-consciousness or an act of reflection.

Though Sartre does not spell it out, there is a broader rationale underlying and motivating his thesis of pre-reflective consciousness, which is independent from the case that he makes regarding the need for self-knowledge to be made intelligible. How are we to think of consciousness? What concept can we form of it, and on what basis must the concept be formed? It is essential, in order for consciousness to be what it is, that it be differentiated (in the right way) from everything else, since everything is to be a transcendent object for it, is to count for it as 'world'. Now the basis on which this differentiation occurs cannot be *external* to consciousness itself – for if it were, then consciousness would (absurdly) need to consult transcendent states of affairs in order to know itself to be consciousness. It follows that any distinction that we draw between one part of reality and another, which does not already incorporate the function internal to consciousness whereby it sets itself over

and against the world, cannot succeed as a conceptualization of consciousness. Our concept of consciousness must be, therefore, the concept of something which *differentiates itself* from its objects and is *conscious of itself as doing so* – that is, of something which has pre-reflective self-consciousness. The very conditions under which we can think or form a concept of consciousness entail, therefore, consciousness' reflexivity.<sup>81</sup>

(3) Consciousness is *autonomous* and an *absolute*, but a *non-substantial* absolute which *does not provide its own foundation* (xxxii-xxxiii/22–3). The first part of this claim we have seen already in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, and in B&N Sartre reiterates the point that 'it is impossible to assign to a consciousness a motivation other than itself' and that it exhibits 'determination of itself by itself' (xxxii/22), but here Sartre gives it support, by showing how it follows from his previous theses regarding consciousness: Anything that might be supposed to determine or motivate consciousness must stand in some relation to consciousness, but nothing can stand in a relation to consciousness without being its object (because consciousness *is* intentionality) and without there being conscious of this relation (because consciousness is pre-reflectively *self-conscious*); so nothing can determine consciousness from its outside (heteronomously) without being taken up and converted into consciousness' self-determination (autonomy).

Autonomy concerns the form that something takes once it has existence, and so leaves open the thing's conditions and causes of existence, but Sartre comes close to saying also that consciousness' *existence* is self-derived: '*la conscience existe par soi*', consciousness is an '*existence par soi*' (xxxii-xxxiii/22; translated by Barnes as 'The existence of consciousness comes from consciousness itself' and 'self-activated existence'). This follows, Sartre implies, for the same reason that consciousness is necessarily autonomous – nothing could stand in the relation 'cause of existence' to consciousness without being an instance of consciousness – but Sartre shows that it also follows from the premise (which his earlier argument has also secured) that consciousness is radically *ontologically original*, that is, that there is no higher concept under which it falls. It would make sense to think of consciousness as having been brought into being by some non-conscious cause only if its possibility were

written into the order of things, prior to its genesis (such that its essence would precede its existence). But consciousness is not a species of any genus on Sartre's account – there is no general 'kind of thing' of which it is one instance – and this means that the notion of an order within which the transition could be made from consciousness' potentiality to its actuality collapses.

But there is a complication here which it is very important to deal with.<sup>82</sup> If it were true *without qualification* that consciousness makes itself exist, then it would be a self-cause, *ens causa sui*, and by the rules of traditional metaphysics, this would give consciousness a sufficient defining property of God. To avoid this implication – which would put Sartre among the absolute idealists, and in addition conflict with the (oblique) account that, we will see in §9, he does later give of the genesis of consciousness – a further distinction is needed. The existential self-activatedness which Sartre wants to allow consciousness is really just a combination of its autonomy with the *negative* property of not coming or being derived from anything, and this is distinct from the much stronger property of *unconditional* existential self-sufficiency, i.e. of being such as to exist whether or not anything else exists. The latter – substantiality in the full traditional sense or what Sartre calls 'being its own foundation' – is *not* ascribed by Sartre to consciousness: it does not follow from anything that he has yet claimed, and speaking against it is the fact that consciousness is not conscious of itself as an act of bestowing existence on itself. For this reason, Sartre says that caution is required in speaking of consciousness as 'cause of self' (xxxii/22, although he continues to do so, e.g. at xl/32.)

Note that these two properties could not be held apart, if for everything that exists there is a sufficient reason for its existing: under that traditional assumption, the weaker property entails the stronger, else we have a violation of the metaphysical order of things. But Sartre pointedly and explicitly refuses unrestricted application to the principle of sufficient reason: the existence of consciousness is an absolute contingency. The non-substantiality of consciousness thus has two senses, which are connected: it refers both to the contingency of the existence of consciousness, and to its being pure appearance without a hidden supporting substratum.

§4 Against *esse est percipi* [Introduction, Section IV]

By the end of Section III, it may seem that idealism has been vindicated, since Sartre – whatever qualifications he may want to add regarding consciousness' self-causation – appears to have defended the idealistic conception of the subject as absolute. And yet Section IV begins with the declaration that 'we have escaped idealism' (xxxiii).

The idealism from which we have escaped, however, is only that which seeks to reduce being in general to *known* being,<sup>83</sup> and Sartre makes it clear that we have still not escaped from the position – which he attributes to Husserl, and which also deserves the name of idealism – according to which trans-phenomenal being is the prerogative of the subject, and objects of consciousness are reducible to appearances. Sections IV and V aim to demolish this position. Section V will offer a positive argument for the trans-phenomenality of the objects of consciousness. Section IV, less ambitiously but as a necessary preparation for the argument of Section V, seeks to show the unintelligibility of Berkeley's phenomenalist-idealist formula for objects of consciousness, that their *esse* is their *percipi*.

At an absolute minimum, Sartre points out, and granting the phenomenalist-idealist that we should only talk of objects 'as perceived', a distinction must be acknowledged between the (perceived) object of consciousness, and the knowledge of it or the synthesis that reveals it; otherwise knowledge of a table becomes knowledge *of* consciousness (and all object-consciousness becomes reflection, an absurdity). This is enough to ensure that there is *some* question concerning the being of the table. Since a direct reduction through identity – the table *is* this subjective impression; or, the being of the table *is* the being of consciousness – is ruled out, the phenomenalist-idealist reduction should be expressed, Sartre suggests, as the claim that the being of the table is *relative to* the being of the perceiving subject.

In addition to its relativity, the being of the table on the phenomenalist-idealist analysis is also *passive* – necessarily perception is something, as it were, done *to* the table, not something the table does – and this notion, Sartre argues, harbours incoherence. We can speak of 'passive being' when and *only* when an object can be thought of as being affected – that is,

as undergoing modifications the nature of which is determined by how the object is – and so as being something *in itself*. The phenomenalist-idealist cannot allow this conception of the object as supporting its modifications, as having a being which is the foundation of its affections. In addition and independently, Sartre argues, the metaphysical transaction envisaged by the phenomenalist-idealist, whereby consciousness *acts on* the object in such a way as to *give it* being or *make it* be – in a sense which must go beyond continual creation of the object, since a subject aware of itself as engaged in such activity ‘can not have even an illusion of getting out of his subjectivity’ (xxxiv/25) – implies an incoherent conception of consciousness: like a hand which can crush only on the condition that it can be crushed, consciousness could pass on being to a unity of appearance only if consciousness could in turn find itself acted on; interaction is possible only on the condition of reciprocity. And to suppose this is to contradict the unassailable, non-negotiable insight that consciousness is ‘all activity, all spontaneity’ (xxxv/26). (Sartre suggests that it is in response to this problem that Husserl introduced his notion of *hylē* – the *matter* or stuff of synthesis – but to incoherent effect, since Husserl requires it to exhibit attributes of both consciousness and a thing.<sup>84</sup>)

So it can be concluded: ‘The trans-phenomenal being of consciousness cannot provide a foundation for the trans-phenomenal being of the phenomenon’ (xxxvi/27).

### §5 Sartre’s ‘ontological proof’ [Introduction, Section V]

Section V contains an argument which Sartre, echoing Descartes, calls the ‘ontological proof’. Its proximal target is, again, phenomenism-idealism: it claims to show that the being of the object of consciousness is trans-phenomenal, but for a different reason from that given in Section IV. The being of *consciousness*, Sartre now claims, implies this directly. The remote target is scepticism regarding the external world: if the argument is sound, then such scepticism is in error. The argument is as simple as, Sartre tries to show, it is irresistible:

There is an ‘ontological proof’ to be derived not from the reflective *cogito* but from the *pre-reflective* being of the *percipiens* [= perceiving] [. . .] Consciousness is consciousness of

something. This means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is, that consciousness is born *supported by* a being which is not itself. This is what we call the ontological proof. (xxxvi–xxxvii/27–8)

This combination of simplicity with (claimed) argumentative force is tantalizing, and demands interpretation.

Here is one way of understanding the ontological proof. Earlier we noted that for Sartre consciousness must be conceived internally and perspectively. Now it is also part of the perspective of consciousness, Sartre is maintaining, that it abuts *being* (which, Section IV has shown, must be trans-phenomenal). What makes this argument quite different from either G. E. Moore's famous 'two hands' proof of the reality of the external world, or any defence of direct realism on the grounds that it is the theory of perception embedded in common sense, is that it appeals, as Sartre insists, to *pre-reflective* consciousness. It shares with Moore's argument and the direct realist argument the idea that cognition of external reality involves no inference, but it differs in that it focuses, not on reflective judgements – that 'I perceive O' and that this very judgement is of the very highest epistemic quality – but on the conditions under which consciousness is (correctly) *conceivable*. In consequence of its transcendental and perspectival character, Sartre's proof is easy either to either miss (it can seem to be no argument at all) or to mischaracterize (it can seem to be merely dogmatic, either a mere repetition of Moore's gesture or a bare unsupported assertion that the reality of the external world is given experientially).

The crux of Sartre's proof is that any thought that I entertain according to which there is (or even *could be*) a 'gap' or cognitive shortfall in my consciousness of external reality presupposes some sort of *objectification* of an item located at my end of the subject-world relation – since it involves my reflecting that this *representation* (or *belief-state* or *mental content* or whatever) of mine fails to latch onto the reality whose image it contains or in the direction of which it is intended – and thereby, on Sartre's terms, indicts itself. Sartre's counter-claim is that consciousness grasps itself pre-reflectively *in terms of* the item on which it terminates, which are terms of trans-phenomenal

being, and so, for reasons given earlier, cannot be conceived as allowing for the possibility of failing to reach its epistemic target. The perspective of consciousness reverses that of sceptical reflection.

But, it may be asked, what *guarantees* that in some particular case 'that-on-which-my-consciousness-terminates' belongs to *external* reality? What of dreams and hallucinations, i.e. states in which the intentional object of consciousness is nothing externally real? Even if Sartre is right about how things look from the perspective of consciousness, doesn't that just mean that, when reflection (of the sort found in Descartes' First Meditation) fails to support the deliverances of this perspective, we have epistemic conflict, hence grounds for scepticism? Why does Sartre consider that the perspective of pre-reflective consciousness overrides and silences the results of reflection?

A full reconstruction of Sartre's ontological proof would mobilize the following essential points. First, it is to be recalled that on Sartre's account nothing needs to be *added* to consciousness of O in order for O to be determined as belonging to external reality, in so far as the distinction of self and not-self is already articulated with the pre-reflective distinction of consciousness and object. Second, Sartre's view is (as noted earlier) that consciousness of unrealities is derivative from and dependent on consciousness of reality, and Sartre has an independent set of arguments for the theory of imagination from which this claim follows.

Third, Sartre expands the ontological proof by returning to the earlier, Husserlian thesis that the potential infinity of an object's perceptual appearances is the mark of its objective being. Sartre endorses Husserl's 'appeal to the infinite', in the sense that he agrees that it captures what it is like for consciousness to have an object which possesses objective being: it captures the phenomenological realization of that state of affairs. (Its role, note, goes deeper than that of an epistemic *criterion*: a potential infinity of appearances is not that-by-reference-to-which we may *tell* whether or not our consciousness is veridical. For Sartre, to think that we need a 'way of telling' is already to have made a mistake.) What Sartre presses Husserl on is the question of what makes

this structure *possible*: the infinity of appearances to which Husserl appeals are of course not given as actual subjective impressions but as *absent*; from which it follows, by the idealist principle that 'consciousness is constitutive of the being of the object' (xxxvi/27), that O has objective being if O exists *as a lack* in my subjectivity; and this leaves it unexplained how my consciousness of O takes itself to (i) 'come out of the subjective', in order to (ii) attain O as 'a *presence*, not an absence' (xxxvii/28). (It in addition generates a metaphysical paradox: 'how can non-being be the foundation of being?', xxxvii/28.) The only thing which can make intelligible the structure whereby consciousness seems to transcend itself towards an object in its presence is the *trans*-phenomenal being of the object. (A sceptic who goes so far as to deny that he at least *takes himself* at the most primitive level to escape from his subjectivity has, note, lost the argument, for he has avowed implicitly that he can be conscious of things only *as* mental images, and whatever we make of this, it means that we no longer share with him a condition, the correct epistemological interpretation of which we are arguing about.)<sup>85</sup>

Finally, the pre-reflective perspective trumps reflective scepticism because consciousness is primordial and reflection secondary – without object-directed first-order consciousness, reflection could not occur – and because, having retrieved the perspective of pre-reflective consciousness, we are able to understand sceptical reflection as based on an error. It is quite true that I can always continue to *think*, without any awareness of epistemic inconsistency, that my reflective sceptical judgments have an authority which my pre-reflective consciousness lacks, as Descartes does, but this is just what the ontological proof tells us to expect – since it tells us that there *cannot be* anything at the reflective plane which could count as evidence for a relation to a real external object. So in a sense, once the ontological proof has been explained, there is nothing more to be said in reply to the sceptic who continues to ask how we can know for sure that some instance of external consciousness is veridical; but we can attribute our inability to say anything more to the impossibility of satisfying the presupposition of the sceptic's question, his demand that reflection determine a matter which, in fact, it could not be reflection's business to



determine (it is as if the sceptic were asking for reflection to *produce* a real object).

## §6 Being-in-itself and being-for-itself

### [Introduction, Section VI]

With both realism and idealism officially dispatched, Sartre returns to the 'phenomenon of being' discussed in Section II, which he claims we can now grasp correctly. All of the information about being that we can derive from this phenomenon – and *all that there is* to the being of phenomena – is contained in the startlingly bare propositions that it (1) 'is (*est*)', (2) 'is in itself (*est en soi*)' and (3) 'is what it is (*est ce qu'il est*)' (xlii/34). The point of these strange formulae is neither to describe informatively nor to assert analytic truths regarding this being, but to alert us to the special, un-ordinary, *negative* character of its relation to concepts and judgement. The copula, in its application to the being of the phenomenon, serves merely as a pointer or expressive sign – it indexes being, or expresses the fact of consciousness' confrontation with it – and Sartre's propositions are designed to show us that this use of the copula (i) exhausts the function of thought with respect to this being, and (ii) does so *because* it exhausts being: thought is here at its limit, but the limit is *also* that of *being*. (Just as subject-predicate form is missing from the *subjective* pole of the subject-object relation, so too is it absent – for different, opposed reasons, and in an inverse sense – from its opposite, *objective* pole.)

The sense of Sartre's three propositions are that the being of the phenomenon exists without reason or justification: neither God nor natural law can account for it; because it simply 'is', we cannot even describe it as 'uncreated', nor as self-creating; it is an absolute plenitude, self-identical, complete without consciousness; the basic conceptual categories of activity and passivity, negation and differentiation, possibility and necessity, do not apply to it; it is beyond becoming and not subject to temporality (xlii/33–4). Its fully identical being – expressible as 'A is A' – means that it 'exists in an infinite compression with an infinite density': it requires no synthetic unification, since its unity 'disappears and passes into identity' (74/116). Sartre designates it 'being-in-itself', while observing that the hint of reflexivity ('itself') is strictly misleading (76/118).

Because it is beyond reason and modality in the sense that it cannot be thought as justified or necessitated or made possible by anything, being-in-itself is – in a special, *absolute* sense, to be contrasted with ordinary, relative judgements of contingency – *contingent*. (Note how, for all of these reasons, being-in-itself is *not* ‘matter’.)

The reason why being-in-itself is beyond explanation is, Sartre emphasizes, not that our cognitive capacities are thus and not otherwise: it ‘has nothing to do with our *position* in relation to it; it is not that we are obliged *to apprehend it* and *to observe it* because we are “without” [. . .] The in-itself has no secret’ (xlii/33).

The trans-phenomenal being of phenomena is therefore being-in-itself, *l'êtr-en-soi* (xxxix/31). In all respects it stands opposed to the trans-phenomenal being which we have discovered in consciousness, to which Sartre now gives the name ‘being-for-itself’, *l'êtr-pour-soi*. The metaphysical character of being-for-itself is the inverse of that of being-in-itself: as Part Two of B&N will explain, being-for-itself is defined as ‘being what it is not and not being what it is’, being which ‘*has to be* what it is (a à être *ce qu'il est*)’ (xli/33).

Sartre indicates how his account of being-in-itself contradicts Heidegger. Heidegger considers that our relation to Being precipitates the question of the meaning or sense, *Sinn*, of this Being; Sartre denies that it is either necessary or possible to ‘pass beyond’ being-in-itself ‘towards its meaning’ (xxxix/30). There is a deeper purpose to Sartre’s closing down of Heidegger’s question of Being. Heidegger’s conception of the relation of Dasein to Being implies that Being in some sense *needs* human being, and in asserting the primacy of the indissoluble, unanalysable, fused whole of ‘Dasein’s being-in-the-world’, Heidegger guarantees a limit to Dasein’s alienation – whatever the errors and lapses of Dasein, Being always *belongs* properly to Dasein, as Dasein does to Being, and the possibility remains in principle, however remote it may be in practice, that Dasein can make itself at home in Being. This is metaphysical optimism of a sort, and it is ruled out by Sartre: if being-in-itself exhausts itself in Sartre’s three theses and has no secret, then the world *qua* its being is unconditionally indifferent to human concerns.

## §7 Being as a whole [Introduction, Section VI, xlii–xliii/34]

The Introduction closes with a set of questions, with which Sartre launches formally the enquiry which follows in B&N:

What is the deeper meaning of these two types of being? For what reasons do they both belong to *being* in general? What is the meaning of being in so far as it includes within itself these two radically separated regions of being? If idealism and realism both fail to explain the relations which in fact unite these regions which in theory are without communication, what other solution can we find for this problem? (xliii/34)

Or as Sartre puts it when he resumes the issue slightly later, at the beginning of the chapter on nothingness (3–4/37–8): ‘What is the synthetic relation which we call being-in-the-world?’, ‘What must man and the world be in order for a relation between them to be possible?’ (4/38). As this makes clear, the notion that being forms an intelligible whole which philosophy can be expected to elucidate is entirely reasonable, since we do in fact discover a relation between the two regions of being over and above that of mere intentional consciousness, namely our ‘being-in-the-world’ (‘this totality which is man-in-the-world’, 4/38).

The peculiarity of the relation of for-itself to in-itself, the difference of Sartre’s understanding of our ‘being-in-the-world’ from that of Heidegger, and the difficulty which this poses for the notion that being forms a ‘whole’, deserve emphasis.

Sartre talks of the ‘upsurge’ (*jaillissement, surgissement*) of the for-itself, of the for-itself as ‘the absolute event’, something that ‘happens to’ (*arrive à*) being-in-itself, ‘the only possible adventure of the In-itself’ (216–17/268–9). These metaphors and syntactic forms express a point of fundamental importance to Sartre. Our ordinary conception of the world is that of an abiding entity or structure encompassing a series of changes and events, one of which is the coming into existence of human beings. Sartre rejects the notion that our coming to exist is one event in the world’s history by denying that the for-itself can be brought under any antecedent metaphysical category other than that of being: no metaphysical category provided for by being-in-itself is adequate to conceive the for-itself;

being-in-itself contains no conceptual anticipation of being-for-itself. Sartre accordingly identifies being-for-itself with the advent of a new metaphysical category, that of an *event*, such that being-for-itself is related to being-in-itself as *eventhood* is to *substantiality*. (To employ an analogy, being-for-itself is related to being-in-itself as a spatial *direction* is related to an inert *material body* – the direction does not come from the body and neither affects nor can be affected by it, yet cannot be thought without it.) Sartre's insistence that the two ontologically heterogeneous types of being are metaphysically at an angle to one another reiterates of course his anti-naturalism but it also reflects a disagreement with Heidegger: to be sure, the human subject is for Sartre, as it is for Heidegger, necessarily 'in-the-world', but the world which it is *in* (we will see in §12) is only a correlate of the upsurge which the for-itself *is*; so the preposition 'in' carries, for Sartre, no Heideggerean connotation of our *belonging* to any trans-human ontological order.

Sartre will return to the question of the sense in which being comprises a whole in the Conclusion (see §46). The following points are to be noted. First, the fact that Sartre poses the question of the whole of being at all, and privileges it as the leading question and outermost frame of the discussion in B&N, shows how close Sartre's concerns are to traditional metaphysics, and how B&N is intended as more than a philosophical anthropology: even though it is man who comprises 'the ultimate meaning' of the two types of being, Sartre wants to *show* man's metaphysical pre-eminence *in the light of* being in general. Second, it is striking that, in rejecting realism and idealism as solutions, Sartre is asserting, in a way that no earlier traditional system of metaphysics is prepared to countenance, that there is an important sense in which reality fails ultimately to cohere as a whole. We will consider where this leaves Sartre when we return to the question of being as a whole in §46.

### §8 Ontological relations and epistemology

The notion of an ontological relation which we saw Sartre introduce in Section II in contrast with relations of knowledge and which he employed in the ontological proof of Section V, deserves comment, as does the more general stance towards epistemology which Sartre adopts in B&N, since this can seem

to exhibit a certain ambiguity: as the discussion of the ontological proof has shown already, there is scope for reading Sartre as offering either an original argument in favour of a direct realist theory of knowledge, or a 'dissolution' whereby the existence of any epistemological problem is denied.<sup>86</sup>

Ontological relations are conceived by Sartre as a type of relation more primitive than relations of cognition, but which cognition presupposes and on which cognition supervenes. Considered from the point of view of the cognition they enable, ontological relations are such that the cognitions to which they give rise – the epistemic access which they facilitate of the one term to the other – is due to nothing more than the sheer *being* of each item. Notions of justification do not have application to ontological relations as such, though ontological relations are *correlated* with epistemic states possessing the attributes of certainty and indubitability. (It would be a mistake, note, to think that the concept of an ontological relation just *is* that of a privileged epistemic relation, since the whole point of talking of ontological relations is to *explain* how such epistemic relations are possible.) The form of the cognitions which supervene immediately on ontological relations is, furthermore, that of a primitive intentional 'relatedness to the object', not the complex form of a judgement of an object, i.e. it is the form of positional rather thanthetic consciousness.

Sartre's notion of an ontological relation may be understood in the light of Heidegger's critique of Husserl: Heidegger objects to Husserl that the most basic forms of intentionality cannot have a cognitive character *and so* cannot have the character of consciousness; Sartre concurs with Heidegger that basic intentionality is non-cognitive, but he upholds Husserl's identification of intentionality with consciousness, thus rejecting Heidegger's thesis that the basic forms of intentionality are pragmatic.<sup>87</sup> (Sartre comments critically on Heidegger's 'suppression' of the dimension of consciousness at 73/115–16 and 85/128.)

From all this we can see that the ambiguity of Sartre's position *vis à vis* epistemological problems does not mask any inconsistency, and also why it should resist disambiguation. The turn to ontology in Sartre is not, as it is in Heidegger, a turning away from epistemological issues as ill-formed or *nonsensical*, as

part of a broader repudiation of traditional philosophy: epistemological motives are on Sartre's agenda, and he uses the inability of other philosophical accounts to solve epistemological problems as an argument for his own ontology. But in remaining with consciousness Sartre takes a step further than Husserl away from traditional epistemology: the transcendental perspective of consciousness which Sartre uses to ground his ontology at the same time disposes, he holds, of the gap which epistemological theory attempts to close.<sup>88</sup> From this results the doubling-up just described of ontological relations (theorized by Sartre) and epistemological relations (for which Sartre offers no positive theory, but for which, he believes, none is needed).

The strategy of invoking the primacy of ontological relations – and of charging rival positions with the methodological error of assuming the 'primacy of knowledge' – will be re-deployed at key junctures in B&N, in particular regarding other minds (see §§27–29), and in the chapter on transcendence, where Sartre gives his account of the nature of knowledge, the conception of knowledge as an ontological relation will be filled out (see §19). The ontological relations which are of central interest in B&N – which concern the structure of the for-itself or its relations to the in-itself, and which double with epistemological relations – are *negative* and *internal*. An internal negation, *une négation interne*, is a relation between two beings such 'that the one which is denied to the other qualifies the other at the heart of its essence – by absence. The negation becomes then a bond of essential being since at least one of the beings on which it depends is such that it points towards the other' (175/223; see also 86/129). Note that negative ontological relations are not themselves equivalent to (though they may *support*) relations of negative *judgement* of one being by another (such a reduction would reassert the primacy of knowledge). Internal negations may furthermore exhibit a *dynamic* character, whereby the agency of one term of an ontological relation modifies, without any need of a causal intermediary or any 'representation' of the one by the other, the being of the other: an internal negation is 'a synthetic, active connection of the two terms, each one of which constitutes itself by denying that it is the other' (252/310). *External* negations, in which the relation leaves untouched the

being of the terms related – e.g. the newspaper’s not being the table on which it lies – pertain to objective empirical truth (185/234). (To complete the taxonomy: as we will see in §41 regarding the relation of ‘possession’, internal ontological relations are not exclusively negative.)

## §9 The metaphysics of nothingness

[Part One, Chapter 1, 3–24/37–60]

The basic ontology of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, which we have just been considering, is not complete until Sartre has added to it his metaphysics of nothingness. This is contained in the first half of Chapter 1 of Part One (3–24/37–60). The rest of Chapter 1 (24–45/60–84), and Chapter 2 of Part One, in which the metaphysics of nothingness are developed into a theory of freedom, we will come back to in §32 and §37.

Sartre’s central claims are that nothingness belongs to the fabric of reality, and that the possibility of real nothingness is explained by the identity of consciousness with nothingness. Sartre’s argument for the theory can be understood as proceeding in four stages: (1) Negation is an irreducible and necessary component and condition of cognition, but cannot be reduced to a function of judgement. (2) Negation is ontologically real: its reality is attested phenomenologically, for we discover nothingness as a concrete object of experience. (3) The reality of nothingness must be regarded as deriving from consciousness’ power to negate. (4) Consideration of other theories of nothingness – those of Hegel and Heidegger – leads us to conclude that consciousness has the power to negate because consciousness *is* nothingness. Finally, as a postscript to the theory, Sartre makes a speculative suggestion regarding the origin of the for-itself.

(1) The starting point of Sartre’s argument is that negation – which we can understand at the outset in neutral terms, as meaning simply the thinking of things in terms that involve ‘not’ – is omnipresent in and necessary for our cognition of the world. Sartre shows this initially with reference to the concept of a *question*. Questioning, Sartre points out, presupposes negations, including the ignorance, not-knowing, of the questioner, and the possibility of a negative reply. Since everything that can

be thought is potentially either the subject of a question or the answer to a question, everything thinkable is connected logically to actual or possible negations. Sartre includes furthermore under the heading of interrogative attitudes not just cognitive enquiry but all practical undertakings, since all dealings with things have the structure of interrogations: to anything that I attempt – e.g. to mend the car by checking the carburettor – the world may reply with a ‘no’ (7/42).

Consideration of questioning leads to further observations demonstrating the ubiquity and ineliminability of negation. In the first place, there are particular concepts which are required for a complete description of the world, such as failure, destruction and fragility, which have an irreducibly negative component: to fail is to not-succeed, to destroy is to cause something to-be-no-longer (8/42–3), to be fragile is to exhibit a probability of no-longer-being under certain circumstances (8/43). In these cases, as in the context of questioning, some relation to human subjectivity is involved, Sartre argues: even in the case of fragility, a human subject is required to relate the object in its actual state to a projected possible future state (recall here the earlier account of being-in-itself as ‘beyond negation’). Taking a step further, Sartre makes negation a transcendental condition of cognition: every concept and act of thought, Sartre argues, involves negation. Negation is presupposed in the application of any concept, either in individuating an object or in predicating something of it: to judge that X is F is to determine X as distinct from, i.e. *not* being the same as, Y, etc. Determination of a spatial distance, for example, involves the determination of limits and thus negation (20–1/56–7). Negation is necessary, therefore, for consciousness of a world of individuated, determinately propertied objects: I continually use negations ‘to isolate and determine existents, i.e., to think them’ (27/64); negation is ‘the cement which realises’ the unities of cognition (21/57). To express this transcendental claim in terms of the concept of truth: ‘truth, as differentiated from being, introduces’ non-being, for if (it is judged that) something is true, then (it is judged that) the world is ‘thus and not otherwise’ (5/40). Or in terms of knowledge: ‘What is present to me is what is not me’, and ‘this “non-being” is implied *a priori* in every theory of knowledge’ (173/222).



(2) The omnipresence and necessity of negation is therefore relatively easy to show – it is, in fact, accepted by anyone who subscribes to the traditional metaphysical formula, *omnis determinatio est negatio*. The harder task for Sartre is to show that negation amounts to something more than a feature of thought or judgement, given that the natural, default conception of negation is of something subjective. Common sense, in characteristically proto-naturalistic manner, equates reality with everything that *is*, implying that negation belongs only to our *thinking* about things, not to things themselves.<sup>89</sup> And this may seem to be supported squarely by the point, which Sartre has conceded, that negation is conditional upon human being, that some relation to a possibility of human action or cognition is required for negation to appear. Accordingly, on the judgemental account we will conceive negation as a ‘quality of judgement’ (6/40) – the employment of the category of negation in an act of judgement or thought – and the concept of nothingness will be understood as merely the ‘unity’ of all negative judgements (6/40–1).

Sartre attacks this view in the first instance on the grounds that, as the case of questioning shows, our involvement with negation extends beyond the reach of judgement: in wondering whether or not *p*, I do not *judge* that I am ignorant of the truth of *p*, and yet this consciousness is presupposed by my interrogation. We have, as Sartre puts it, ‘immediate comprehension of non-being’ (8/42), a ‘pre-judicative comprehension’ (9/44) of negation, and it is impossible, even in principle, for these pre-judicative comprehensions to be converted collectively into judgements. Second, and connectedly, Sartre insists on the point that negations are not given to us *as* subjective – the possibility of an object’s breaking, or its having been destroyed, are given to me as *in the world*, as ‘an *objective fact* and not a thought’ (9/44). Third, Sartre asks what on the judgemental account gives basic intelligibility to the category of negation, on the supposition that ‘all is plenitude of being and positivity’: If everything that reality contains, inclusive of our mental states, is of a positive character, how can ‘we even conceive of the negative form of judgement’ (11/46)?

These points are forceful, but probably insufficient to force a rejection of the judgemental theory, on behalf of which it may

be said that, so long as we treat negation as an *a priori* category (or innate idea), no account of how it gains its intelligibility is owing, and that in cases such as those of destruction and fragility, a distinction may be drawn between the events themselves, the reconfigurations of matter which are indeed in-the-world, and our negative modes of thinking of them, which are not.

What allows us to 'decide with certainty' against the judgemental theory (9/44), Sartre claims, is the fact that nothingness assumes *concrete* forms. The famous, forceful illustration Sartre gives in support of his phenomenological claim that nothingness figures as a positional object of experience is that of my entering a cafe to meet someone whom I see not to be there (9-10/44-5). I discover Pierre's absence from the cafe in a way quite different from that in which I might infer, from a complete list of the cafe's patrons, or from a report of Pierre's location elsewhere, that Pierre is not here. Nor is it given to me in the way that some item in or region of the cafe, in its fullness of being, may be given: I do not see Pierre's absence at some location or sum of locations in the cafe in the way that I may see a man sitting in the corner. Pierre's absence comes to me *via* the cafe as a whole, which is organized as a synthetic totality not-containing-him: it 'fixes the cafe', which 'carries' and 'presents' the demanded figure of Pierre, who raises 'himself as nothingness on the ground of the nihilation of the café'; 'what is offered to intuition is a flickering of nothingness' which serves as *foundation* for the judgement that 'Pierre is not here' (10/45). Pierre's absence from the cafe is thus given to me in a way that distinguishes it from the infinite number of merely *abstract* negative facts which are also true of the cafe (the Duke of Wellington is not in it, etc.); the judgemental theory can account for these abstract negations, but not for concrete negativity. The example 'is sufficient to show that non-being does not come to things by a negative judgement; it is the negative judgement, on the contrary, which is conditioned and supported by non-being' (11/46).

It is not clear what reply the judgemental theory can make to this, if it is not to be either a denial of the integrity of the phenomenology (along the lines of: we do not *experience* Pierre's absence, but merely *think* him to be absent, and somehow *confuse* this thinking with the experience of the cafe), or a denial

that phenomenological and logical negation are two forms of the same thing (phenomenological 'negativity', it might be said, is one thing, a mere quality of experience, related only contingently, perhaps only metaphorically, to genuine, judgemental negation). Both responses are strained, however, and in any case we are now in a position to see the strengths of Sartre's own account of negation.

(3) Pierre's absence is an instance of what Sartre calls a *négativité*, a 'negated' – a 'negativised' state of affairs, incorporating and constituted by negation (21/57). *Négativités* presuppose expectations and other human orientations but, once again, are transcendent *objects* of positional consciousness – not experiences but what certain experiences are *of*; Pierre's absence is 'a real event concerning this café', 'an objective fact' (10/45). The concept of *nothingness* (*le néant*), in distinction from *negation* (*négation*), now enters, as referring to the ontological kind and status of that which constitutes the negativity of *négativités*: nothingness is a 'component of the real' (5/40) or 'the structure of the real' (7/41). As the analysis showed, *négativités* are not self-sufficient units of pure nothingness unmixed with being: Pierre's absence is not 'an intuition of *nothing* (*rien*)' (9/44) – all negativity is that *of* some being (of the café, and of Pierre). The operation by which some being is reconstituted with negativity Sartre calls 'nihilation' (*néantisation*), and in view of the reference of *négativités* to some or other human orientation, the natural inference (11/46) is that *consciousness* is the vehicle of negativity, i.e. is what has the power to nihilate (*néantir*, *néantiser*).

Now it does not follow from the fact that nothingness underpins negative judgements in the case of concrete *négativités*, that it is the ontological foundation of all negative judgements, and Sartre does allow that '– is not' *can* be 'merely *thought*' (11/45) (as in 'Pegasus does not exist'). But once the metaphysical reality of nothingness has been accepted, there is every reason to regard nothingness and the power of nihilation as answering Sartre's question of what makes the negative form of judgement conceivable. We gain thereby a unified theory of understanding and sensibility: negation becomes a single transcendental condition of conceptuality (of judgement and concept application) and of perception (negation provides a form of intuition not unlike but even more basic than those of space and time).

(4) Sartre turns next to two accounts of nothingness which do, correctly, accord it the reality denied it by the judgemental theory, i.e. treat it as something non-subjective, but which, Sartre argues, are nonetheless inadequate or incomplete, and whose defects can only be eliminated by pushing the metaphysics of nothingness just described one step further.

Hegel's *Logic* describes nothingness as the dialectical contrary of being, these two categories in their full abstraction exhibiting one and the same total indetermination, hence emptiness; and so, by dint of this identity and emptiness of content, collapsing in their distinction from one another, yielding the category of becoming. On Sartre's interpretation (Section III: 12–16/47–52) Hegel's account asserts a *symmetry* between being and nothingness, treating them as 'two strictly contemporary notions' and as 'complementary components of the real, like dark and light', which cannot be considered in isolation and are somehow 'united in the production of existents' (12/47).

Sartre puts several objections to Hegel, which include taking issue with Hegel's idealist claim, as Sartre understands it, that being *consists in* manifestation of essence (13–14/49). Sartre's main and most powerful objection, however, is that Hegel's schema reduces nothingness to something existing alongside being, which therefore *is*, or *has being* – thus obliterating the distinction between being and nothingness. Now, put one way, this is exactly what Hegel himself is maintaining – that the posited distinction disappears. But Sartre's point is that what this collapse of distinction should be taken to show is the initial error of putting being and nothingness 'on the same plane' (15/51), specifically, of failing to see that their respective undifferentiations are different: abstract being is empty of all *determinations*, but nothingness is 'empty of *being*' (15/51). Their true relation is consequently one of asymmetrical contradiction, not symmetrical opposition: negation is *of* what antecedently *is*; nothingness is 'logically subsequent' to being (15/51). Hegel's underlying methodological error – reflected in his reduction of being to manifestation of essence – is, therefore, to have assimilated *being* to the *concept* of being, or put differently, to have failed to grasp the *uniqueness* of the concept of being (we go back here to Sartre's arguments against idealism in the Introduction, described in §§2–5).

In order to think coherently the distinction of being from nothingness, it is necessary, Sartre argues, to conceive them as conceptually *asymmetrical* – and this requires us to say that, whereas being *is*, nothingness *is not* (15/51); it ‘can have only a borrowed existence’, ‘it gets its being from being’ (16/52). Sartre’s idea is that, if ‘is’ provides the conceptual pointer to being, then ‘is’ cannot *also* be used to point to nothingness – in order to index nothingness, we must employ the *negation* of ‘is’. This yields a conception of reality that includes both what ‘is’ and what ‘is not’, but in which nothingness *depends* on being and comes about (as per the analysis of Pierre’s absence) through being’s having been nihilated.

The problems with Hegel’s account – its symmetricalization of being and nothingness, and conceptual reductionism – are avoided by Heidegger (Section IV: 16–21/52–8), who attaches nothingness to human reality. Dasein, defined as being-in-the-world, finds itself *in* being and ‘*invested* with being’ (17/53), but the world arises only because Dasein has the structure of transcendence – Dasein surpasses being towards its own future, and the distance which it thereby takes from being, on Heidegger’s account, introduces nothingness in the form of ‘that by which the world receives its outlines as the world’ (18/54).

The defect that Sartre finds with Heidegger’s account is finer than that presented by Hegel’s and pertains to Heidegger’s order of explanation. Both Sartre and Heidegger make nothingness a transcendental, but for Heidegger its position is merely secondary and derivative: Dasein’s self-surpassing transcendence is ordinary, and nothingness is merely *implied* by it, ‘supported and conditioned by transcendence’ (17/53), ‘a sort of intentional correlate of transcendence’ (19/55). To dispute this view, it suffices for Sartre to show that the positive terms which Heidegger uses to describe Dasein’s transcendence ‘hide all the implicit negations’ (18/54): in order to surpass the world, Dasein must originally posit itself as ‘*not being in itself* and as *not being the world*’ (18/54). Sartre adds the observation that Heidegger’s account leaves nothingness ‘surrounding being on every side and at the same time expelled from being’ (18/54), and that such ‘extra-mundane nothingness’ (19/55) fails to account for ‘those little pools of non-being which we encounter’ concretely *in* rather than *beyond* the world (19/55). (These mistakes are on

Sartre's diagnosis repeated systematically: Heidegger fails to see that his conception of the world as primordially an 'equipmental totality' of entities 'ready-to-hand' presupposes a cutting into being which is possible only on the basis of the for-itself's negativity (200/250-1; see §21); and Heidegger's failure to connect the extra-mundane or 'ontological' with the intra-mundane or 'ontic' recurs, we will see in §28, in the context of other minds.)

Having shown the limitations of Hegel's and Heidegger's non-subjectivist accounts of nothingness, Sartre is in a position to draw a further inference. Sartre has argued that reality contains negations because consciousness has the power to negate, and consciousness has this power, Sartre now contends, because it is *nothingness*: '*the being by which Nothingness comes to the world must be its own Nothingness*' (23/59). This ontological identification – which goes beyond the claim that consciousness is the *vehicle* of negativity, which is compatible with nothingness' being merely 'a perpetual presence in us' (11/47) – is needed to explain how Dasein can import nothingness into reality, as Heidegger claims it does. (Sartre's argument here, which proceeds by elimination of alternatives, is given in detail at 22-3/58-9.)

Finally, returning to the question of how being-in-itself and being-for-itself are related (§7), Sartre makes a suggestion regarding the genesis of being-for-itself, which one might initially call Sartre's 'de-creation myth': he proposes that being-for-itself is *being-in-itself that has undergone a nihilation*. Only being which has itself been nihilated, Sartre argues, could itself have the power to nihilate. Human being is, Sartre therefore implies, a 'fallen', negated form of being-in-itself – it is as if it had once been a thing, but had undergone a kind of metaphysical destruction, so that it now exists on the earth in the form of consciousness as a kind of ghost or shadow, robbed of being. This, then, is one element of the 'synthetic relation' between the two regions of being-as-a-whole: being-for-itself is tied to being-in-itself by virtue of having been created out of it through having undergone nihilation.

Characteristically Sartre encourages the thought that the annihilation of being-in-itself has taken place for reasons which are somehow moral or theological – it is as if a wrong has been

committed, whether by us (the Fall of Man narrative<sup>90</sup>) or to us (the story of Prometheus). Sartre does not pursue this suggestion, however, and it is quite clear that his basic ontology precludes any account of who or what effected the annihilation of our being. Sartre's anthropogenetic suggestion concerning the origin of the for-itself consequently exhibits an uncertain status in B&N. On the one hand, it may seem that it should be regarded as a mere 'as if', a metaphysical fiction designed only to reflect a felt quality of human experience, and at this early point in the text, it may appear to be no more than that. Later, however, in Part Two, we will see that the account of our annihilation out of the in-itself is presupposed by Sartre's accounts of self-consciousness (79/121; see §14), of 'lack' as a structure of the for-itself (86ff./129ff.; see §17), and of the metaphysics of human motivation which Sartre builds upon this basis (see §38). It is also deployed, in an entirely non-fictional way, as a direct metaphysical explanation of one of the structures of the for-itself, our 'facticity' (84/127; see §16). We will return to the issue of how much weight the annihilation story bears, and ask whether Sartre is right to allow his dualism to veto all further speculation on the origin of the for-itself, in the final section (§48).

### §10 Consciousness as nothingness

An obvious initial problem appears to be created by Sartre's theory of nothingness. Nothingness, Sartre says, 'is not', i.e. has no being, and if something has no being, then it does not exist. Thus, if consciousness *is* nothingness, then it has no being, and does not exist. And yet surely Sartre affirms that *there is* consciousness: Sartre may have affinities with eliminative materialism, but he can hardly wish to deny that 'consciousness exists' expresses a truth.

Undoubtedly, Sartre wants to allow a shadow of paradox to hang over his claim that consciousness is nothingness – to serve as a continual reminder of our ontological peculiarity – but the sense of his position can be rendered without paradox, if we recall his commitment to the doctrine that existence has multiple modes, and recognize that his conception of nothingness is that of a *mode* of being, and that the function of 'is not', as appended to 'nothingness', is to express this mode. Since the concept of nothingness as Sartre understands it does not

acquire its original philosophical sense from a form of judgement, the identification of consciousness with nothingness is not equivalent to the claim that consciousness does not exist: reality, the totality of existents, includes both things that exist in the *mode of being* ('exist<sup>IS</sup>') and things that exist in the *mode of nothingness* ('exist<sup>IS-NOT</sup>').

Sartre's identification of the particular mode of being possessed by consciousness with nothingness thus avoids contradiction. It has also a powerful and intelligible motivation, independent from and more direct than the genetic inference regarding the origin of nothingness described in §9.

Consciousness, Sartre has claimed in the Introduction, is dependent ontologically on its object, in a particular (intentional and reflexive) manner. Now our concept of consciousness – in so far as its sense is phenomenological, and for reasons given earlier, Sartre considers that the concept of consciousness is one which can have *only* a phenomenological sense – must mirror that dependence. A phenomenologically formulated concept of consciousness must accordingly register its taking itself to *not be* its object, its primordial 'otherness-than' and 'distinction-from' its object. Now the objects of consciousness have the status of being-in-itself, and this, we know, is only one mode of being, not being as such and in general; which is why it does not follow from the fact that consciousness is 'other than being-in-itself', that it is other than being as such and so non-existent. However, this distinction between being-in-itself and other modes of being can be formulated only later in the day: only through philosophical reflection are we able to say that the being of the objects of consciousness is merely *one* mode of being. In the transcendently primitive scenario, by contrast, the *only* conception of being available – to consciousness, as it differentiates itself from its object – is that of its object.

Hence the warrant for Sartre's designation of consciousness as nothingness: primordially consciousness must experience itself in *negative relation* to that which exemplifies for consciousness what it is to *be*, and so must experience itself as *being nothingness*. And because of the subjectivity-honouring constraints that Sartre places on philosophical thought, this conception cannot be overtaken: B&N will move on to uncover a panoply of deeper structures in relation to which bare object-consciousness will



appear relatively superficial, but with these Sartre's conception of consciousness as nothingness is elaborated, not revoked. The original experience that consciousness has of itself as nothingness will be employed to grasp the more intricate structures of our subjectivity, and these will be argued to be intelligible only as forms of, or ways of being, nothingness.

The line of thought just sketched becomes explicit in the later chapter on transcendence (see §§20–21), where consciousness is reinterpreted in light of the structures of the for-itself (see especially 173–4/222–3 and 180–3/229–32). We can, of course, think of objects of knowledge, Sartre notes, as '*not being* consciousness', i.e. apply negativity to the object rather than to consciousness, but this judgement could only be *primary* if 'the for-itself were a substance already fully formed': the *original* negation is that by which 'the for-itself constitutes itself as *not being* the thing' (174/222). The for-itself – individualizing itself – denies 'concretely that it is a *particular* being' (180/229), namely *this* being, the one that there is now consciousness of. The indexical feature, the 'thisness' of the object, is the work of the for-itself; consciousness is a kind of act of ostension, but with the further difference from an ordinary act of, say, pointing to a thing, that it is *reflexive* and *negative* – consciousness 'says', as it were, of *itself*, that it *is not* this thing.

It is clear that Sartre's concept of nothingness is not the same as that of ordinary thought, whatever that may be exactly: it is a specifically *philosophical* concept which is going to receive extensive development in B&N, only at the end of which will its full sense be available. (We will see also, in §14, how Sartre's theory of the self permits a refinement of the metaphysics of nothingness; this is presented at 78–9/120–1.) If the philosophy of B&N were to be reconstructed in the form of a system based on a single principle, that principle would be the identification of human being with nothingness. The gain and intelligibility of Sartre's designation of the mode of being of consciousness and the for-itself as nothingness consequently could not be, and does not need to be, secured definitively at this early point, and certainly cannot be evaluated until it has been seen how negativity functions in all of the contexts which B&N is going to explore. For example, and in particular, we

will see in §14 that Sartre is able also to use *self*-consciousness as a basis for his identification of the for-itself with nothingness. If some alternative ontological notion could be suggested in place of nothingness, capable of playing the same comprehensive set of analytical and unifying roles, then little would be lost for Sartre. But it is hard to see what that notion could be; and to that extent, Sartre's metaphysics of nothingness has sound motivation.

### §11 The standard criticisms of Sartre's ontology

As remarked earlier, criticism of Sartre tends to follow well-established lines. Regarding the ontology, Wahl suggested in 1949 that Sartre is led by Husserl into 'a kind of idealism which may not be completely consonant with the elements' which Sartre derives from Heidegger.<sup>91</sup> The problem is this:

Which is primary, the 'in-itself' or the 'for-itself'? This is one of the most difficult of all problems to resolve in the philosophy of Sartre. When he says that the 'in-itself' is primary, he classifies himself as a realist; when he emphasises the 'for-itself', he classifies himself as an idealist [ . . . ] Inasmuch as these two forms of being are absolutely opposed to each other in all their characteristics, one is tempted to task if it is proper to call both of them Being. If ontology is the science of a unique being, can there be any ontology in this ontological theory?

In the second place, one may question if there actually is something in reality which can be the 'in-itself' as defined by Sartre [ . . . ] No doubt, Sartre's affirmation of the 'in-itself' responds to an epistemological concern on his part, and answered the need to affirm a reality independent of thought; but has one the right to pass from this assertion to the notion that this reality is what it is, and is uniquely so – is, in fact, something massive and stable?<sup>92</sup>

The interconnected complaints are, therefore, that (a) Sartre's metaphysics involves a confusion of realism and idealism, (b) the sharpness of Sartre's dualism reaches the point of incoherence, and (c) Sartre's conception of being-in-itself lacks support.

Wahl offers Sartre the following way out of these difficulties:

Perhaps the duality of Sartre's philosophy is one of its intrinsic characteristics, and not to be disprised. A search for justification and the impossibility of justification are recurrent *motifs* in the philosophy of Sartre. His philosophy is one of the incarnations of problematism and of the ambiguity of contemporary thought (for Man does seem, to the contemporary mind, to be ambiguous).

This is not to say that an effort by Sartre to dispel ambiguity is either inadvisable or improbable [ . . . ] There may yet be a Sartre who will go beyond ambiguity.<sup>93</sup>

Wahl regards it as part of what defines existentialism, that it departs from classical philosophy by virtue of a commitment of fidelity to personal lived experience.<sup>94</sup> Sartre did not, however, ever dispel or seek to go beyond the ambiguity alleged by Wahl, and as another of Sartre's contemporary critics noted, the price of validating Sartre's thought in the merely subjective way proposed by Wahl is that it would thereby lose its 'metaphysical bearing'.<sup>95</sup> A metaphysics without metaphysical bearing, or a philosophy without justification, would be a peculiar fiction, and there is no reason for thinking that Sartre would be interested in any such thing; so there is no alternative to attempting to see whether Sartre's ontology can be saved from the charges of incoherence. And, as we have seen already in §7, Sartre is by no means oblivious to the issues Wahl raises.

## §12 Realism, idealism and the intelligibly differentiated world of objects

It is clear nonetheless why Sartre may be thought to be in trouble as regards his relations to realism and idealism.<sup>96</sup> The following deep difficulty presents itself. Sartre has affirmed that the being of the phenomenon is being-in-itself. Being-in-itself has been described as neither active nor passive, 'beyond negation', 'beyond becoming', 'not subject to temporality', 'glued to itself', '*solid*(massif)', exhibiting 'undifferentiation' (xl-xlii/32-3). This surely precludes the identification of being-in-itself with empirical reality, the manifold of phenomena which comprises the

differentiated world of objects. Where, then, does this world of objects come from?

The only possible answer seems to be: From the subject. Sartre's affirmation of being-in-itself seemed to get him the realism that he needs in order to be able to deny that his ontology is idealistic, but now it seems that he is forced to backtrack by offering a thoroughly idealist account of empirical reality: in some way the for-itself must 'introduce' into being-in-itself an intelligibly differentiated world of objects.

Now this is not immediately disastrous. Certainly it interferes with Sartre's claim to have gone strictly *beyond* realism and idealism, but Sartre may still claim to have rescued the truth contained in each and to have formulated a *combination* of realism with idealism, 'escaping' the one-sidedness of each and getting beyond the antinomy which they jointly form. In addition, it may seem that this is exactly what Sartre has in mind: as we saw in §9, he affirms that nothingness is required even for the formation and application of the concept of a spatial line, suggesting that he envisages empirical reality as presupposing an *a priori* contribution of subjectivity; a similar line is taken regarding possibility (§18) and temporality (§22). Further supporting this construal of Sartre as a kind of idealist is the observation that, when Sartre talks of avoiding realism and of its incoherence, what he has in mind is a position which construes objects as existing independently of consciousness just *as we are conscious of them as being*, and our cognition of them as due to their exercising some *causality* which is accidental to their intrinsic nature (see 151/197, 223/277; and the definition of realism at 588/677).<sup>97</sup> This corresponds to the position which Kant describes as treating objects of experience as 'things in themselves' and calls 'transcendental realism'. So it may seem reasonable to interpret Sartre as rejecting transcendental realism – as well as of course the merely empirical idealism of Berkeley – and as affirming a combination of *transcendental* idealism with *empirical* realism, all on the familiar pattern of Kant.

One additional motive for attributing this position to Sartre is that of allowing him to, as it were, borrow from Kant as needed. Even if we grant Sartre the 'ontological relations' strategy discussed in §8, answers are still owed, arguably, to

certain traditional epistemological questions which Sartre has neglected. As will be seen in §20, Sartre offers only a (comparatively) thin account of the (causal, spatial, etc.) form of experience. A transcendental idealist interpretation of Sartre would remove these problems, if that is what they are, at a stroke, by inserting at the level of pre-reflective consciousness a function of transcendental form-giving and object-constitution (whose operation would, at the same time, have a necessary connection with the individuation of the for-itself).

The Kantian interpretation of Sartre faces, however, the difficulties that Sartre denies that his position counts as idealism, makes explicit anti-idealist statements – ‘subjectivity is powerless to constitute the objective’ (xxxviii/29); the for-itself ‘adds nothing to being’ (209/260) – and offers arguments against the Kantian subject of knowledge.

Arguably, Sartre’s rejection of the label can be disregarded, and a distinction between different senses of ‘constitution’ (transcendental vs. empirical) can be applied in interpreting his rejection of idealism, while the third difficulty can be met with the observation that Sartre’s anti-Kantian arguments are in any case of doubtful force. Sartre’s principal reasons for rejecting Kant’s metaphysics of the subject are that it involves a transcendental ego and that it imports ‘categories’ and ‘laws’ – transcendental concepts and principles specifying the form (e.g. causal) of objects of experience – into consciousness, contradicting consciousness’ necessary emptiness (xxxii/22 and 11/46). But it is perfectly arguable that the Kantian transcendental subject is not an entity but a mere function, a long way off the ‘personal’ ego Sartre attacks in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, and that the structure which Kant gives to consciousness is no different in kind from Sartre’s own *a priori* ‘immediate structures of the for-itself’ discussed below in Part (B), which it in fact complements. These corrections to Sartre’s self-understanding are, plausibly, a small price to pay for releasing his metaphysics from the contradiction which otherwise threatens.<sup>98</sup>

The real problem, however, is that the particular combination of realism and idealism formulated by Sartre does not look stable, or at the very least, it appears very puzzling. Sartre wanted categorically, it seemed, to identify the *object*

of consciousness with being-in-itself (see §5), and to assert our consciousness of being-in-itself *as* undifferentiated (see §6). If so, it is hard to understand how being-in-itself and the differentiated world of objects come together. If we are conscious of being-in-itself as without form, then they cannot come together as content and form (there cannot be consciousness of a *formed* content of a phenomenon *as* unformed or formless). Nor can they be related as noumenal ground and phenomenal appearance: Sartre denies that being-in-itself is noumenal (xxxviii/29), as he must, for his theory that the basic metaphysical categories are inapplicable to being-in-itself means that its being cannot be intellectual. And if being-in-itself is interpreted as a *ground* of the world of objects, distinct from it, then there is an epistemological problem: How can we *know*, as Sartre insists that we do, that this ground has all of the negative characteristics Sartre ascribes to it? (Speculative possibilities repudiated by Sartre – e.g. that what he calls being-in-itself is mental in character, perhaps a Divine Mind – would then open up.) It seems that Sartre's picture is one on which a Spinozist or Parmenidean One lurks, somehow still visible and showing through from behind a thin phantasmagoria of phenomenal objects projected onto it. Even if there is no immediate logical inconsistency in this picture, still it seems barely coherent.<sup>99</sup>

Some critics have suggested that this is where Sartre's metaphysics terminate, but if we retrace our steps, an alternative can be brought into view.

The present problem has arisen because at the outset we focussed on the contrast between being-in-itself and the differentiated object-world and treated this distinction as if it were of two (sets of) *objects*, one opaque and formless, the other intelligibly formed, leading us to ask why it is that we ever experience the latter in place of the former. But plausibly this is a mistake. The basic ontology of B&N, I suggested in Chapter 2, is contained in prototype in the tree root passage from *Nausea*, and what this passage suggests is that the distinction should be understood *in the first instance* as a matter of two *modes of apprehension* of one and the same (determinately differentiated) thing: Sartre does not contrast a conceptualized, determinately propertied object, with a raw, property-less substrate or bare matter; the tree root *qua* nauseating and contingent retains

its primary and even its secondary qualities. What makes the difference between an ordinary perception of the tree root and its philosophical perception as nauseating is the subtler contrast between its having and lacking *intelligibility*: to apprehend being-in-itself is to apprehend some object as not participating in any way in human reality, as having no meaning or significance for consciousness, as not concerning us or being 'for' us. And this fits with Sartre's statement that being-in-itself is 'undifferentiated', for what this may be taken to mean is that, with regard to a thing *qua* being-in-itself, whatever differentiation there may be in the thing *is nothing to us*: the thing *might just as well* be propertied in any other way or not be propertied at all.

If this is correct, then the better model for understanding the contrast is provided by switches in aspect-perception, or better, between states in which we are unable to recognize an aspect – the figure in the rock face or the tea-leaves – and states in which we can do so.

We cannot stop here, however, since being-in-itself and intelligible object-differentiation are for Sartre not *just* subjective modes of our apprehension, but also modes of the *object* of consciousness itself. What is it then that we are grasping, when we apprehend some object 'under the aspect of' its being-in-itself?

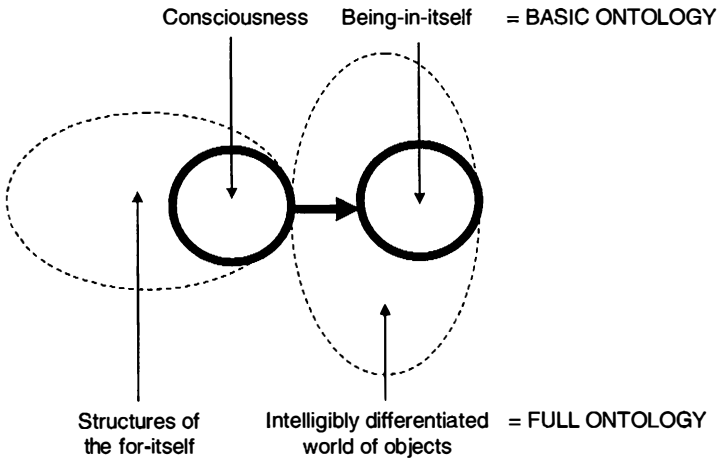
Being-in-itself may be understood as the mode or way of being which characterizes the differentiated object-world, where the concept of this mode of being does not simply designate the basic conceptual characteristics of the object-world, but refers to the *ground* of these characteristics. Sartre's insight is that a concept is needed to designate that in ontology which *makes it possible* for being to assume determinate forms, i.e. for the simple judgements of empirical reality – the sugar is white, the pen is on the desk – to be true. Put differently, being-in-itself is the ground of the fixity of predicates ('on the desk') in relation to subjects ('the pen'): the object *as* being-in-itself – the being-in-itself *of* the object – is what allows objects to possess and exhibit the structure which corresponds to our judgements that O is F; it is the dimension in things which makes possible their metaphysical conformity to subject-predicate judgement. And if this is what the concept

of being-in-itself expresses, then it is easy to see why Sartre should deny that being-in-itself is structured or differentiated or has a constitution: whatever ontological ground makes it possible *for there to be determinacy* cannot be conceived as itself sharing the structured, differentiated character of the object-world, on pain of being assimilated to it (thus requiring an ontological ground of its own and generating a regress).<sup>100</sup> So when Sartre says that 'the existent', a content of the differentiated object-world, is distinguished from the 'being' which is its 'foundation' (xxxviii/30), the sense of foundation here is not that of a distinct ground: the idea is instead that the object's having being-in-itself as its mode of being grounds transcendently its determinate differentiation. (The line of thought just described collapses, note, if differentiated determinate being is taken as absolutely given and not requiring philosophical explanation; and we might be entitled to proceed in this way, *if we knew and could conceive of no other mode of being*; but Sartre's position is that we can and *do* know another mode of being, viz. the non-self-identical, non-determinate mode of being of the for-itself.)

This interpretation of being-in-itself shows that our original question concerning the source of the intelligibly differentiated world of objects was misconceived: being-in-itself is not some (formless) 'thing' that could exist apart from the differentiated object-world, so we should not think of the world of objects as coming *from* it. Our original question is also, it may be added, posed prematurely, in so far as Sartre has not yet meant to explain its relation to being-in-itself. What has misled us is the fact that Sartre, in getting us to focus on being-in-itself, has talked about 'appearances' in the plural (as he had to do, since on his account there is no independent route of access to being-in-itself). What he has been trying to grasp about phenomena so far, however, is *only* their dimension of being-in-itself. The Introduction has been meant to give us only an understanding of the fundamental opposition of consciousness and being-in-itself, the *basic ontology* of B&N; a *further* set of ontological structures – the immediate structures of the for-itself – will be added to consciousness in Part Two of the work. The differentiated object-world belongs at the same level as these structures; together they comprise



what may be called the *full ontology* of B&N. The full ontological picture will accordingly look like this:



The key point, in relation to our present question, is that the differentiated object-world is correlated, *not* with consciousness, but with the immediate structures of the for-itself. As Sartre puts it: 'a world; that is, the upsurge of a For-itself' (207/258); 'knowledge is the *world*' (181/230); the world is 'a correlate of the for-itself (183/232); 'without selfness, without the person, there is no world' (104/149); the for-itself, 'by denying that it is being, makes there be a world' (306/368). So it is a mistake to raise the question of the intelligibly differentiated object-world at the level of consciousness. The nothingness of consciousness needs to be 'routed' through the structures of the for-itself in order for objects to emerge.

But how far has this taken us, as regards Sartre's relation to realism and idealism? The immediate problem which seemed to call for idealist solution may have been disposed of – if being-in-itself is not some *thing* of which it is true that it *has no structure or properties*, then there is no task of explaining how it comes to have or to seem to have structure and properties. But there is another way of posing the original question, which is equally effective in supporting the idealist interpretation of Sartre. When we switch aspects and recover the differentiated

object-world, what is this due to? Sartre cannot give the realist answer that it is due to the world's being-thus independently of us – since differentiation presupposes nothingness, and because, as I will consider in a moment, Sartre includes in the object-world qualities which are indexed to the projects of an individual for-itself – so it seems, once again, that the object-world must be due to the subject. As the diagram indicates, there is an asymmetry between the two parts of the full ontology: whereas the full ontology of the *subject* is independent from being-in-itself, the full ontology of the *object* – the elaboration of being-in-itself into the differentiated object-world – is extended in the direction of the subject; the intelligibly differentiated object-world appears to be conditional, transcendently, upon the for-itself.

The Kantian transcendental idealist interpretation of Sartre is tenable, but before concluding with it, one final review of this difficult but – for several sets of reasons – crucial issue is in order.

Sartre wants to combine (1) the claim that, *pace* realism, the 'problem of the connection of consciousness with existents independent of it' is 'insoluble' (xxxv/26), in so far as 'transcendent being could not act on consciousness' (171/219), with (2) the claim that, *pace* idealism, 'subjectivity is powerless to constitute the objective' (xxxviii/29) and 'consciousness could not "construct" the transcendent by objectivising elements borrowed from its subjectivity' (171/219). In addition, I have argued, Sartre envisages (3) a *correlation* of the intelligibly differentiated object-world with the fundamental structures of the human subject. On the Kantian transcendental idealist interpretation, this correlation should be understood as a relation of *constitution* – which requires Sartre to give up or to qualify (2). But before we settle on this interpretation, we should make quite sure that there really is no other option – if only because Sartre's refusal to sign up to idealism suggests so strongly that he, at any rate, considers that the correlation *can* be understood non-idealistically.

The following possibilities suggest themselves: that the correlation of the object-world with human subjectivity (i) is due to the structures of subjectivity, but is secured by some means other than a relation of object-constitution; (ii) is an instance

of pre-established harmony, of some sort or other; or (iii) does not need to be regarded as 'due to' anything, because it does not stand in need of explanation.

The first possibility carries an echo of idealism, but it would be understandable if, in the absence of object-constitutive activity, Sartre considered it sufficiently remote from Kant and Husserl for the label to be dropped. It requires, nonetheless, a positive account of the manner in which the subject determines, without constituting, its objects. Similarly, the second possibility needs amplification, since if a harmony has been established, something must have established it.

Now we will see later that there is a definite suggestion of a combination of the first two possibilities in Sartre's doctrine of my 'responsibility for the (my) world' (see §35). What this may be interpreted as claiming is that the correlation is established, not by God, but by my *freedom*: the accord between for-itself and object-world is established in a way analogous to that in which the author of a fictional work engineers coherence within the fiction between characters and scene or plot; the harmony is established not *within* the (fictional) world – as realism and idealism mistakenly suppose – but from a point *outside* it, i.e. by my pre-mundane subjectivity (in my 'original choice of self', as Sartre calls it).

But there is also a strong suggestion in Sartre of the third possibility. If the *explanandum* of realism and idealism can be rejected, then so can these metaphysical positions, and Sartre's ambition of transcending the opposition of realism and idealism would then be properly fulfilled. Whether Sartre can get away with this is a delicate matter. Sartre can plausibly claim to have accounted, in terms that presuppose neither realism nor idealism, for many things that these positions are traditionally invoked to explain. The epistemological aspect of the correlation – the possibility of our 'access' to objects, of their being 'in communication' with us – is explained jointly by the fact that transcendence is a structure of consciousness and that phenomena are conceptually primitive unities of real existence and possibilities of appearance. The possibility of there being any such thing as an intelligibly differentiated world of objects is explained jointly by being-in-itself, which makes determinate being possible, and by the structures of the for-itself,

including its power of negation, which allows differentiated being. The one thing which, arguably, remains unaccounted for by Sartre is the Kantian *explanandum* cited earlier: the fact that our object-world has a *particular conceptual character*, that of (in particular) necessary causal order. Perhaps Sartre can deny this necessity, i.e. include causal order in the global 'contingency' of the being of the for-itself. Or perhaps he can, again, appeal to the 'original choice of self' as the explanation. There are textual indications of both attitudes. What we think of this – especially: whether we think it wise to allow Sartre's 'responsibility for the world' doctrine to assume such a large metaphysical burden – is decisive for whether or not we consider that, in the very last resort, Sartre avoids being forced back into Kantian transcendental idealism.

We have dealt with the main source of the realism/idealism confusion which Wahl claims can be detected in Sartre, but there is another aspect which needs to be addressed, and which has a simpler solution. Wahl asked also, 'Which is primary, the in-itself or the for-itself?', and he alleged that Sartre inconsistently claims the primacy of both.

It is quite true that Sartre goes in both directions, but it is not clear that there is any contradiction here: Sartre's view is that the for-itself has *methodological* primacy – 'the *cogito* must be our point of departure' (73–4/116) – while the in-itself has *ontological* primacy (619/713). Throughout the Introduction the *concepts* of being-in-itself and being-for-itself are formulated with reference to one another and are managed interdependently or dialectically – neither has primacy, for in order to explain either mode of being, we must contrast it with the other – but there is no doubt as to the ontological dependence of the for-itself on the in-itself. If it is asked – in particular, a Hegelian might put this objection – how, given the symmetry between the concepts of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, we can suppose an ontological *asymmetry*, and why we should not simply carry over the dialectic of concepts into the ontology to which they refer, then the answer is given already by Sartre in his ontological proof: the perspective of pre-reflective consciousness – which is *not* a perspective from within any *concept* – demands this asymmetry.

There is one more twist to the issue of Sartre's relation to realism and idealism, which reveals how interestingly strange and

uncommonsensical his position is. Included among the objects of consciousness are *négalités* and the qualities of things (their charm, hatefulness, etc.) which we have seen Sartre invoke in order to account for emotion. These qualities are 'transcendent', and so presumably belong to the differentiated object-world, yet obviously egocentric: if you do not share my expectation of finding Pierre in the cafe, then you will not intuit his absence from it in the way that I do. Similarly we will find later, in Part Two, Chapter 3, that Sartre runs his account of objective physical reality directly into his account of the world as containing particular tasks to be performed (see §§20–21).

This raises the question: Is there *one* differentiated object-world, which is intersubjective common property? Or does *each* for-itself have its *own* object-world?

One obvious suggestion would be to distinguish between different levels of reality within the object-world – a level of intersubjective 'full' objectivity on the one hand, comprising *the* world, and a supervening 'quasi'-objective level of egocentric qualities on the other, comprising *my* 'world' – but it is not a distinction introduced by Sartre himself, and in the light of his other claims, we can understand why he does not do so. Sartre's view is that, in the case of a tram grasped as 'needing-to-be-caught', there is no relation of efficient causality between the object's having that quality, and any psychological state of the subject: 'desirability characteristics' of objects cannot on Sartre's account cause consciousness to desire, and Sartre also rejects the idea of a mechanism of projection whereby desires would cause quasi-perceptual appearances of objects (see 604–5/695–7). Nevertheless, it is of course true for Sartre that in some sense the quality of needing-to-be-caught is 'due to' my tram-catching project, and on the interpretation suggested above, Sartre's claim is that my 'original choice of self' is what 'pre-establishes' the harmony between my subjective project and the transcendent quality of the object (a relation which, from the intra-mundane point of view, must appear 'magical': as Sartre indeed describes it).

If this is what Sartre thinks, then it is clear why Sartre should have no interest in grading the reality of items in the object-world according to their intersubjective accessibility, and why it would be acceptable to him that there is no strict identity of

object-worlds across different subjects. The worry of solipsism has yet to be dealt with (see §29), but it is not aggravated by Sartre's erosion of the common sense conviction that we share a world by virtue of all being contained within one and the same empirical matrix, since Sartre rejects this realist-naturalist account of reality, and this notion of world-sharing is in any case (Sartre will argue) incapable of putting a dent in solipsism (see §27). It is also to be emphasized that the intersubjective variation of object-worlds allowed by Sartre entails nothing whatever regarding their mutual intelligibility – my object-world is not *private*, and to that extent sense it is *not* just *my* world.

### §13 The metaphilosophy of B&N

Consideration of the problem of realism and idealism leads directly to another, distinct but connected issue, which both creates difficulty and, again, goes to the heart of Sartre's project. This concerns the combination of standpoints from which Sartre's philosophy appears to be made out.

On the one hand, it is clear that Sartre regards the philosophical outlook which he articulates in B&N as encompassing and making transparent reality in its entirety.<sup>101</sup> It is true that Sartre regards some matters as final, surd, brute, ultimate 'facts', to be accepted without further explanation: for instance, at the very highest level, the existence and nature of the in-itself, and the advent of the for-itself. These he calls 'contingencies'. But the ultimacy of these matters is *not* due, for Sartre, to any failure or our representational, epistemic, explanatory, conceptual, linguistic or other abilities to keep pace with the projected objects of our knowledge: Sartre acknowledges no limits to human or philosophical cognition; when we reach a terminus in our attempt to grasp matters philosophically, it is not because we have run out of epistemic-cum-cognitive resources, but because that is where the end of things lies in reality. It is not, therefore, that the in-itself has a concealed constitution which God or perhaps some future physical science could grasp but which we are unable to make out: as we saw, according to Sartre there is *nothing more* to the in-itself than is expressed in his three theses. The same goes for consciousness, and the coming-to-be of the for-itself. For Sartre, 'all is there, luminous' in the broad daylight of consciousness (571/658).<sup>102</sup>

There are, moreover, deep reasons why it is of paramount importance for Sartre that the claims of B&N should be unqualified. For one thing, Sartre's thesis of absolute freedom needs to be able to withstand sceptical doubt, and any concession that his philosophy offers only a limited view of our situation will fail to rule out the possibility that the freedom which he claims for us is absent from reality and merely composes a great, systematic, human illusion. More generally, Sartre needs the contingencies which he describes to be interpreted as metaphysically ultimate, in order to be able to claim for them the crucial significance of exposing the metaphysical loneliness of the human situation, the humanly restricted scope of the principle of sufficient reason, an unclouded appreciation of which Sartre regards as essential for our assumption of self-responsibility. Anything less than metaphysical ultimacy will open the door to speculative possibilities – which Sartre associates with theology and with Hegel, and wants to exclude at all costs – to the effect that there is after all a rational structure in reality at large which transcends the being of the for-itself, and which may be regarded as grounding and rationalizing human existence, thereby relieving us of the task of self-determination at the most fundamental level. This is enough to explain why, as we saw in §7, Sartre should aim to locate man's place in relation to being as a whole.

And yet, it is also the case that a very great deal of what Sartre says about the various phenomena that he discusses is thoroughly *perspectival* – Sartre offers accounts of how things appear and require themselves to be conceived, which are emphatically conditional upon our grasping them from such-and-such an angle. Much of Sartre's philosophical labour is directed towards taking us inside the correct angle of philosophical vision and of inducing in us a heightened awareness of the *perspectival character* of phenomena. Philosophical reflection itself, for Sartre, should not relinquish the practical standpoint in favour of a contemplative stance. This restoration and purification of subjectivity may be said to comprise, as noted earlier, Sartre's version of the phenomenological reduction. The perspective in question is the subjective, first person, practical perspective which on Sartre's view constitutes the foundation of the human standpoint. (By way of illustration,

consider Sartre's statement that 'there is no question here of a freedom which could be undetermined and which would pre-exist its choice. We shall never apprehend ourselves except as a choice in the making' (479/558) – which is naturally read as demanding that we shift from attempting to conceive freedom as an aperspectival metaphysical fact, to a perspectival appreciation of freedom. Numerous examples of this kind of argumentation in B&N could be given, and in a late interview Sartre said that in B&N he 'wished to define [consciousness] as it presents itself to us, for you, for me'.<sup>103</sup>)

It is accordingly natural to think that Sartre's claims about the objects of our knowledge are strictly claims about objects *as relative to*, or constituted by, our cognitive-practical perspective. Sartre's use of the language of paradox (see §23) also suggests, in a different way, that his claims should be interpreted as epistemically modest: in so far as Sartre is understood merely as saying that such and such *invites* a contradictory description, the paradox serving to draw attention to the existence of a tension in how *we think* about things, the real nature of the thing is allowed to be non-contradictory, and the problematic character of Sartre's contradictory assertions is discharged.

There is therefore a puzzle, in so far as Sartre appears to offer at one and the same time a *view from nowhere* or absolute conception of reality, and a *view from somewhere* or perspectival conception. These two standpoints are not distributed across different sets of phenomena or relativized to different topics of discussion: it is not that Sartre enters a full-fledged reality claim only with respect to some things, and a qualified, epistemically modest, merely perspectival claim with respect to other things; characteristically both standpoints are combined within the breadth of a single paragraph or even sentence. In historical terms, the two standpoints are aligned with quite different philosophical traditions. The perspectival view suggests an adoption of Kant's strategy of a Copernican revolution in philosophical method, a conception of the task of philosophy as an elucidation *of* the human point of view, *from* and *for* the human point of view, rendering all God's eye conceptions null and void; while the absolute view suggests the metaphysical ambition of early modern rationalist philosophy or of Hegel. Which, then, represents Sartre's true metaphilosophical view?



Is Sartre on the side of Kant, in kinship with the forms of transcendental idealism found in post-Kantians like Fichte and Husserl, or that of Spinoza?<sup>104</sup> Is his metaphilosophy that of transcendental idealism, or of some kind of realism?

The answer, I suggest, is that Sartre regards the two standpoints as equally necessary and not as *excluding* one another but as in the final analysis *coinciding* – Sartre wishes to claim precisely that it is by (and only by) taking up and intensifying the perspectival standpoint that we can come to grasp aperspectival reality. The sub-title of B&N – ‘An essay in phenomenological ontology’ – should be read not as defining a modest, innocuous programme of merely describing how we should suppose things to be in the light of how they appear to us, but as expressing Sartre’s metaphilosophical conviction that when, and only when, the grounds of things are laid bare in their full perspectival character, can we know things as they are in themselves, as they would be if apprehended ‘from nowhere’. Thus when Sartre states that his intention in B&N is to define consciousness ‘as it presents itself to us, for you, for me’, this is also to define it *as it is*. This interpretation makes immediate sense of Sartre’s disavowal of the traditional labels of either ‘idealism’ or ‘realism’, and of his claim to have dissolved this very opposition. It accords also with the way in which he, in the Introduction, makes substantial metaphysical claims on no other basis than that of how things are directly implied to be by the nature of our consciousness.<sup>105</sup>

It is another question whether this position, as Sartre himself works it out or in any other form that it might conceivably take, is coherent and defensible, but at least some of Sartre’s reasons for considering it to be so have emerged already in the Introduction. For we have seen how Sartre thinks that the concept of phenomenon, which represents a conceptual primitive, involves a meeting point of perspectival and aperspectival, and more generally how the basic ontology presented in the Introduction, which insists on both the absolute fact of being-in-itself and the perspectival character of consciousness, implies the necessity of accepting, in some fashion, the reality of both aperspectival and perspectival. There is in addition the point that Sartre finds in the being of consciousness not merely a meeting point, but a kind of *identity*, of perspectival

and aperspectivity. Though it is quite true that none of these points are enough to explain how, at a metaphysical level, perspectivity and aperspectivity can be thought to coincide, they at least provide a clue to why Sartre's thinking should take that direction. Later (in §46) we will return to the question of whether Sartre has succeeded in harmonizing the two standpoints.<sup>106</sup>

From the point we have reached, there are two directions that Sartre might take in developing the next stage of his argument in B&N. One is to show how the metaphysics of nothingness can be developed directly into a *theory of freedom*. The other is to examine the *structures of the for-itself*, which identify the *form* taken by nothingness in human subjectivity, and to show how this form, and our ontological negativity, make one another intelligible. The two tasks can be pursued independently of one another up to a point, but eventually they will join, before arriving at the same point of conclusion, viz. the identity of our mode of being with our freedom – as per the argument schema given in the previous chapter (pp. 22–7).

What Sartre in fact does is to give a condensed account of the relation of nothingness to freedom in the remainder of the chapter we have just been discussing (24–45/60–84), reserving the full discussion of freedom for Part Four of B&N, by which point the structures of the for-itself have been explicated. It is more straightforward, however, to proceed directly to the structures of the for-itself, and to consider in one place all of the textual material concerning freedom, as I will do in Part (D).

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Are Sartre's central claims regarding consciousness well founded? What other views of consciousness are rejected by Sartre, and are his criticisms of these effective?
2. How is Sartre's concept of being-in-itself best understood, and is his account of the fundamental opposition which it forms with being-for-itself adequately justified?
3. Why, and with what justification, does Sartre introduce the concept of nothingness into his account of consciousness?
4. Assess Sartre's claim to have given an account of the relation of subject and object which transcends the opposition of realism and idealism.

## (B) FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURES OF THE HUMAN SUBJECT

On the basis of the basic ontology drawn up in the Introduction and Part One, Part Two of B&N specifies the most abstract metaphysical structures of the human subject. These include *selfhood*, *temporality* and *transcendence*; selfhood is correlated with the structures of *facticity*, *value* and *possibility*, while transcendence takes us to *knowledge*. Sartre's aim is to show that these structures are necessary for conscious being, though not by alleging conceptual connections. In place of any attempt to deduce, e.g., 'S's experience is temporal' from 'S has consciousness of objects', Sartre's properly *phenomenological* transcendental method is to bring us to realize that *our* consciousness could not fail to be temporal, value-orientated, etc., by giving us insight into the ways in which our consciousness is connected *internally* with our temporality, value-orientation, etc. This is achieved by showing how what it is for us to be conscious, and what it is for there to be time, value, etc. for us, make one another intelligible.<sup>107</sup> (Thus leaving it open that there is some thinkable sense in which the conscious experience of *some* entity might not be temporal: Sartre is indifferent to this possibility, for, if he is right, it cannot intersect with *our* mode of being.)

The relation between the basic ontology, with which we have been concerned hitherto, and the full ontology, to which the fundamental structures of the for-itself belong, needs clarification: In what sense is the basic ontology prior? Is the full ontology derived from it, as the organization of B&N might lead us to expect?

We have seen already in §12 that the part of the full ontology which falls on the side of the object, viz. the differentiated object-world, is grounded on, but not derived directly from, being-in-itself; it springs into being only on the condition of and in relation to the for-itself. And the subjective side of the full ontology, viz. the structures of the for-itself – this becomes clear immediately in Part Two – is no more constructed out of than it is deduced from the bare concept of consciousness. Instead, Sartre uses the basic ontology as a platform from which to survey the field of human reality, by means of which relations of *explanation* will emerge: the structure of bare intentional

consciousness will be shown to be *grounded* on structures of the for-itself. (The term 'human reality' – *la réalité humaine* – is used by Sartre in a semi-technical sense, roughly equivalent to Heidegger's *Dasein*, to refer to both human beings and the world *qua* object of cognition, scene of action and so forth.) Sartre's purpose in beginning in B&N by isolating bare consciousness and the phenomenon – which are, Sartre acknowledges, in one sense 'abstractions' (171/219) – was to purify our philosophical vision: the vantage point of the basic ontology ensures that we grasp our subjectivity correctly. The priority of the basic ontology is therefore methodological, and the derivation of the full ontology from it an epistemological matter: ontologically, the relation of consciousness to for-itself is that of part to whole; consciousness comprises, as Sartre puts it, the 'instantaneous nucleus' of the for-itself (70/111). At the same time as Part Two traces the expansion of this nucleus into the structured for-itself, it also elucidates the concept of consciousness, which the Introduction merely took for granted (173/221) – we learn what consciousness and the nothingness which comprises its being really consist in.

#### §14 The self [Part Two, Chapter 1, Sections I and V]

The sections on selfhood in B&N modify the position of *The Transcendence of the Ego* in two ways (which resolve the difficulties with Sartre's earlier metaphysics of the self noted in Chapter 2). First, Sartre *personalizes* the reflexive structure of the pre-reflective *cogito*, in other words, identifies it *as* a self or, more precisely and in words closer to Sartre's, as an instance of selfhood. Second, as we will see in §15, Sartre *identifies* the reflexive relation which comprises the pre-reflective *cogito*, with the reflexive relation which comprises reflection: both are different forms of one and the same reflexive relation.

This may appear to bring Sartre's position closer to common sense's Strawsonian view of selves or persons. *Rapprochement* with common sense is, however, characteristically far from being Sartre's motive, and his account of the self, or selfhood, involves a further and deeper inversion of our natural conception of personhood.

As a preliminary, an important general point regarding Sartre's method of enquiry henceforth should be noted. Aside

from Sartre's speculative account of the origin of the for-itself (§9), B&N has adopted hitherto a *descriptive* approach, venturing claims about what *is* on the basis of the *cogito* and the phenomena given to it. Throughout Part Two and in many later contexts, by contrast, B&N accords primacy to *teleological* explanation, i.e. explanation in terms of ends and relations of the form 'X in order that Y' – in Sartre's language, characterization as a *project, un projet*. All of the fundamental structures of the human subject that Sartre introduces in Part Two make essential use of the notion of directedness towards an end. To take a point where this thesis is made fully explicit, Sartre in concluding his treatment of reflection says that it is not a 'capricious upsurge' but 'arises in the perspective of a *for* (pour)': reflection has a *meaning*, which is its 'being-for', *être-pour*, and more generally the for-itself is 'the being which in its being is the foundation of a *for*', *le fondement d'un pour* (160/207).

Several points are to be noted in this regard. First, Sartre does not apply teleology to the human subject because he thinks it universally true that whatever exists has a telos – being-in-itself refutes that supposition – but because the specific nature of the for-itself, as that term already implies, demands it; the for-itself is always the foundation of a *pour*. Second, Sartrean explanation is teleological *without* being functional. Sartre does not proceed, as a naturalist might, by first determining the function of the human subject in light of the reality which surrounds it, and then inferring what roles are played by its various features in facilitating the discharge of its function. For Sartre, on the contrary, subjectivity *can have no* function. Sartre considers, furthermore, that the teleological structures which constitute human subjectivity do not in fact succeed in realizing any telos. The human subject is *purposive* without actually having *any purpose*. Third, Sartre's view of teleology differs from that of common sense, in so far as the latter thinks of teleological properties as appended to a mechanistically describable substructure, the reality of which provides the vehicle on which teleological processes depend: Sartre's position (of obvious significance for his doctrine of freedom) is that the reality of the various dimensions of the for-itself *consists* in their being projections towards a certain end.

Sartre's theory of the self develops in stages, and comprises some of the most difficult and intriguing passages in the whole of B&N:

(1) Section I, 74–6/117–18: Sartre begins by revisiting the structure of pre-reflective consciousness. As we know from §3, Sartre claims it to be 'the law of the pre-reflective cogito' (69/110) that every relation to an object doubles back on itself: consciousness-of-O implies consciousness of consciousness-of-O. This entails that, in so far as I am not merely abstractly and indeterminately conscious of O, but conscious of O in some particular *mode* – conscious of O *with pleasure* or as an object of *belief* or *desire*, etc. – my consciousness-of-O is consciousness-of-pleasure, consciousness-of-believing, etc. And conversely, if there is consciousness of believing, then there must be belief (xxviii/18). Belief, and consciousness of believing, are therefore necessary and sufficient for one another. But this merely logical description of the relationship does not explain it to us, and Sartre argues that we encounter here a difficulty which allows of only one metaphysical resolution, which involves the introduction of teleology.

Our rule of method must be, as argued in §3 and §10, to conceive consciousness in accordance with its own perspective. Now the peculiarity of the structure comprised by belief and consciousness-of-believing is that it must be conceived as both *unitary* and *dual*. The two terms must of course comprise a totality – since each is both necessary and sufficient for the other – and at the same time they must comprise a duality: not for the reason that we, as theorists of the mental, are able to impose a distinction on the structure, but because consciousness-of-believing *itself* must differentiate itself from the believing which it is consciousness of. Sartre supposes additionally that we cannot resolve this contradiction by saying that there is unity in one sense and duality in another, which would allow us to say that there exists 'a unity which contains a duality', i.e. to conceive the structure simply as a synthesis (76/118). The basis on which we count belief and consciousness-of-believing as unitary is the very same as that on which we count them as dual: application of a single principle of individuation leads to conflicting results. How are we to make this paradoxical structure intelligible?

Only, according to Sartre, by switching to a conception of consciousness in terms of ends. (The passage containing this transition begins half way down page 75 and runs to the middle of page 76.) Consciousness of believing is essentially an attempt to *reflect* belief, not in the sense of an act of thought (*réfléchir*), but in the sense of a mirroring (*refléter*). (The use of a single term in English to translate these two quite different notions is hard to avoid but very confusing, so I will use 'to mirror' for *refléter* and Sartre's French terms for the nouns formed from it: *le reflet*, the reflection, and *le reflétant*, the reflecting. See Barnes' translator's note, 151n8.) This mirroring carries over the project of the consciousness of which it is the *reflet*. Thus Sartre writes: consciousness of believing 'exists in order to perform the act of faith' which belief consists in (75/117).

This allows us to grasp the both-unitary-and-dual structure as an unconsummated teleological process. In the complex analogy to which Sartre is alluding, consciousness-of-believing is an attempt to hold up a mirror to belief, only to discover, on the one hand, that the object (belief) cannot exist without being mirrored, and on the other, that the mirroring itself (consciousness-of-believing) is nothing apart from what it mirrors, with the result that no stable image can be captured – the project of mirroring fails.

This means, as Sartre puts it (75/117), that we can say neither that belief *is*, or *is belief*, nor that consciousness-of-believing *is*, or *is consciousness-of-believing*. The copula and identity relation signal here, as in other Sartrean contexts, possession of substantial being, both in the strong sense of existential self-sufficiency and also in the weaker sense of possession of some set of intrinsic, non-relational properties.

Since belief and consciousness-of-believing can be identified neither with themselves nor with one another, they must be conceived instead as *having to be* one another, in a sense similar to that in which we may say of something that it *is supposed to be*, or *should be*, such and such (Sartre uses frequently the construction noted in §6, *avoir à être*, to express this idea). As Sartre puts it in a later and somewhat clearer passage, each term in the dyad of *reflet-reflétant* points to and 'engages its being in the being of the other', but this being is just what is

missing: the *reflet* consists in 'being-in-order-to-be-mirrored (*être-pour se refléter*)' in the *reflétant*, but this end could be achieved only if the *reflet* were 'something (*quelque chose*)', which is impossible, since if the *reflet* were *quelque chose*, then it would be in-itself and the *cogito* would be destroyed (173/221). Belief and consciousness of believing thus comprise 'a game of mirroring', 'a double game of reference' in which '[e]ach of the terms refers to the other and passes into the other, and yet each term is different from the other' (75/118), or as Sartre also puts it, each term, while positing itself *for* the other, *becomes* the other (151–2/198).

Sartre's profound but difficult thesis is, therefore, that the ocular concept of perspective, which we have found it essential to employ in explicating his view of consciousness, is in the final resort misleading, or at any rate limited – to have or comprise a perspective in the sense of consciousness is not ultimately just a quasi-visual, perceptual, contemplative matter: it is closer to what it is to be *under an obligation* or *subject to a demand* (consciousness is 'that precise obligation to be a revealing intuition of something, i.e., of a transcendent being', xxxvii/29; for consciousness 'there is no being except for this precise obligation to be a revealing intuition of something', 618/712).

(2) Section I, 76–7/118–19: The ground is now prepared for the theoretical introduction of the self as *what is implied in the mutual reference* of the two terms *reflet* and *reflétant*. The relation between a vase and the mirror that reflects it is purely external – the mirror does not reflect the vase *as being* the mirror itself. The *reflet* and *reflétant* of pre-reflective consciousness, by contrast, relate to one another *as* members of a single unity, and this unity is indicated not as a mere aggregate that they might create by conjoining with one another, but as the (their) *subject*. This indicated subject cannot be however the metaphysical subject of properties, for reasons that we saw in the discussion of *The Transcendence of the Ego* in Chapter 2, and nor can it be a property. The subject is instead indicated as *relation-to-oneself*, and the appropriate linguistic symbol of this self-relating is, Sartre notes, the reflexive pronoun, as in *il s'ennuie*. The relation designated by the reflexive pronoun is the meaning of, and what gives sense to, the mutual reference of the



*reflet* and the *reflétant*. Sartre calls this self-relating at the level of pre-reflective consciousness 'presence to itself', *présence à soi*. The self or 'oneself', *le soi*, is presence to itself, a structure of 'perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of a multiplicity' (77/119). It follows that the *soi* has being neither as a subject of predicates nor as a predicate, and can neither be, nor be apprehended as, a 'real existent'.

(3) Section I, 77–9/120–1: Thus far Sartre's theory may sound similar to so-called 'no-ownership' theories of the self, such as Hume's, which deny reference to the 'I', but this is not the case, for Sartre's theory of the self is not exhausted by the predominantly negative claims which we have just spelled out.

The *soi* has been defined in terms of a self-relation intermediate between the Oneness of identity and the Many-in-Oneness of synthetic unity, the key to which is the distance from self implied in *présence à soi*, and this distance allows itself to be analysed in terms of Sartre's metaphysics of nothingness and his teleology of the for-itself. What separates the self from itself is, in a sense, nothing, *rien*. I cannot detect or isolate any *thing* setting me apart from myself. In contrast with spatial distances, and temporal or psychological differences, I cannot even identify and express the separation indirectly in terms of positive items which stand in separation from one another. What we must say therefore, Sartre argues, is that *nothingness* constitutes the separation – a particular, *personalized* nothingness, the nothingness that *I* am or, in Sartre's teleological and quasi-deontological idiom, *have-to-be*. This constitutes a further development of Sartre's metaphysics of nothingness (§§9–10): nowhere but in self-consciousness, Sartre says, can we grasp nothingness 'in such purity' (78/120).

*Contra* the no-ownership theory, therefore, the place of the self is not ontologically vacant. In Sartre's terms, Hume is led to conclude that the self is *rien* because he fails to see that its being is of the type 'obligation' (78/121), or in other words, that the self is, as Sartre puts it later, 'the *reason* for the infinite movement' of mutual reference between *reflet* and *reflétant* (103/148).

Finally Sartre refers this theory of the self to the anthropogenetic story concerning the origin of the for-itself (§9): the *néant*

which I have-to-be in the form of a *soi*, is made to be (*est été*) by the original 'ontological act' by which the in-itself 'degenerates into presence to itself' (79/121).

(4) Section V, 103–4/148–9: Before introducing the next element in his theory, Sartre refers to *The Transcendence of the Ego* and reiterates its conclusion that the ego is transcendent, not an inhabitant of consciousness which provides subjectivity with an immanent centre (102–3/147–8). (Later, at 162–3/209–11, Sartre will restate his earlier view of the ego; see §24.)

Sartre then explains how he has modified his earlier outlook. The fact that the *ego* is not what personalizes consciousness does not mean that there is nothing which does so and that consciousness is therefore 'impersonal': *présence à soi* confers personality, *personnalité*, on consciousness, and it is because it does so that the transcendent ego can also have a personal character, i.e. that I am able to think of *that* ego as *my* ego. In B&N Sartre separates, therefore, the issue of whether consciousness is personal or impersonal, from the issue of whether it is inhabited by an ego bearing a relation of ownership to states of consciousness. In *The Transcendence of the Ego* these issues were identified.

Sartre then adds (103–4/148–9) a further teleological dimension to the self-relation which presence to itself comprises, which he calls 'selfness', *ipséité*, and describes as 'the second essential aspect of the person' (104/148). Earlier in Chapter 1 Sartre has argued (as we will see in §17) that the for-itself is orientated necessarily towards itself *as* self-coincident. Selfness consists in my relation to this ideal entity in so far as it is present to me as absent, an '*absent-presence*' (103/148). From this derives the subject's sense of itself as being perpetually 'referred on', *renvoyé*, beyond its own grasp.

In so far as I project myself towards this metaphysically ideal Self, I must do so *via* the world: indeed, it is because of this projection that there *is* a world, and that this world is in some measure 'my' world (104/148–9). The structure whereby I seek to loop back to myself across the world, traversing the totality of being in order to achieve identity with myself, Sartre calls the 'circuit of selfness', *le circuit d'ipséité* (104/148; see also 102/146–7).

§15 Reflection [Part Two, Chapter 2,  
Section III, 150–8/196–205]

The theory of the self just outlined concerns pre-reflective consciousness. What is still missing from Sartre's theory of the self is an account of reflection (*réflexion* in the sense of *réfléchir*), and this is supplied later, in Section III of the chapter on temporality.

The existence of reflection is encountered in fact, but we must ask, first, why there should be any such structure, and second, how it is possible (150–2/197–8). Reflective consciousness is, after all, not implied directly by the existence of pre-reflective consciousness, since the latter is not subject to the principle *esse est percipi*. Nor can we understand the relation of reflection to the consciousness reflected on as, originally, that of a thinking subject to a representation: if that were so, then the two would belong to different ranks of being, and reflection would fail to comprise a self-relation. More generally, reflective and pre-reflective consciousness exemplify the pattern of duality-in-unity which we saw in the context of the *reflet-reflétant* (§14): their unity cannot be grasped as compounded out of two independent existences (which would make their relation external, and destroy the certainty which characterizes reflective intuition of one's consciousness), and yet it must stop short of a total identification (which would collapse reflection into pre-reflective consciousness) (151/197–8).

To appreciate fully the force of Sartre's transcendental questions concerning reflection we need to recognize why the ordinary conception of reflection, which allows us to suppose that we understand what it is and why it exists, is in Sartre's terms inadequate. Our ordinary conception of reflection is that of an *epistemic medium*: reflection is *that which enables* the subject of mental states to gain *knowledge* of its mental states. Sartre, we saw in §3, rejects the notion that reflection explains the possibility of self-knowledge, maintaining that the question of what makes self-knowledge possible leads ultimately not to reflection but to *conscience (de) soi*. He also, we saw in §8, regards epistemological relations as secondary and derivative, from which it follows that the demands of self-knowledge cannot be used to account for reflection without erroneously assuming the 'primacy of knowledge'.

However, reflection is not merely caused to exist by some independent, mechanical, non-conscious cause, and if reflection is neither a product of efficient causality nor explained by reference to an epistemological end, then the only possibility is that its explanation lies in some other, non-epistemological end.

Sartre gives the following account of what that end is at 153–4/199–201. Pre-reflective consciousness undergoes what Sartre calls ‘an original dispersion’ (153/199). Because the structure of *reflet-reflétant* is evanescent, the for-itself is obliged to look for its being elsewhere, but it finds that – in its presence to being-in-itself and in the flow of its temporality – it ‘has lost itself outside itself’ (153/200). Accordingly the for-itself aims to ‘recover being’ and to that end it employs *reflection*: reflection is the means by which the for-itself ‘attempts to put itself inside its own being’ (153/200) by gathering itself into a *unity* and *beholding* itself as a totality. The goal of the for-itself in reflection is thus to make of itself ‘a *given*, a given which finally *is what it is*’ (153/200). If this attempt succeeded, then the for-itself would ‘be to itself as an object-in-itself’ within its own interiority (154/200). In reflection the subject is attempting, therefore, to be its own foundation – the reflective gaze aims to create the for-itself as an object with which it, the gaze itself, would be identical. The ‘objectivation’ and ‘interiorisation’ of itself (154/200) at which the for-itself aims in reflection cannot, however, be achieved, in the first place because reflection itself is not atemporal but is itself dispersed in the flow of temporality, and more generally because reflection is being-for-itself and as such its own structure is non-self-identical. (See Sartre’s later restatement of these ideas at 298/359–60.)

In the passages that follow (155–8/201–5) Sartre analyses the distance from oneself which reflection involves, the laws and limits of self-knowledge, and the muted sense in which the reflected-on, *le réfléchi*, is ‘outside’ reflection. In §24 we will see how these considerations provide the basis for the (mis)representation of oneself as a ‘psychological’ object.

Our natural picture of reflection is thus also defective in suggesting that reflection involves ‘an addition of being’, in the form of an extra mental faculty or tier of mental representations: instead we must think of it as ‘an intra-structural modification’ of the for-itself (153/199), the possibility of which is contained

in the *reflet-reflétant* structure of pre-reflective consciousness. The modification effected by reflection redeploys the nothingness which inhabits pre-reflective consciousness, nihilating the unity *reflet-reflétant* for the sake of a superior (but unachieved) unity (152/199). Sartre's account allows us to see that pre-reflective and reflective consciousness share a structure, implicit in the former and explicit in the latter, and that a single, personalized reflexive relation is involved in both types of consciousness: it appears in pre-reflective consciousness as the structure *reflet-reflétant*, and in reflection as the structure *réflexif-réfléchi* (153/199). The problem which we found in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, namely that Sartre left it unexplained why reflection should create an 'I', is thus resolved. Pre-reflective and reflective consciousness are referred back to a more basic, unitary teleological ground, which realizes itself originally as pre-reflective consciousness, and then, because this takes it no closer to its projected end, as reflective consciousness. This ground provides the *explanans* of reflexivity in general. The for-itself is in this way an *organic unity*, but only an *aspirant, would-be* organic unity, not an achieved whole.

### §16 Facticity [Part Two, Chapter 1, Section II]

At one level the term facticity refers to the for-itself's condition of being *situated in particularity*: facticity in this descriptive sense is simply what is exemplified by the fact of my being here at this table in this cafe, of my being either a French bourgeois in 1942 or a Berlin worker in 1870 or a cafe waiter and not a diplomat. Facticity thus comprehends our physical, spatio-temporal insertion in the world and all of the particular interpersonal, social, cultural, institutional, political and historical relations in which we each stand. But Sartre also envisages the concept as referring, more abstractly, to the *necessity* of our always being thus situated in particularity, and explanatorily, to *what it is* about the for-itself (concerning its being and structure) that necessitates its particular situatedness. This last is what attempts Sartre to explicate in Section II. It is through affirming facticity in this sense that Sartre means to express the truth, which he supposes idealism to fail to grasp, concerning the way in which the human subject finds itself existing at a level of (unaccountable, 'unjustified') particularity. (The concept of

situation just employed to explicate facticity appears ahead of time, since strictly on Sartre's analysis 'situation' is what results from the conjunction of facticity with *freedom*; thus the section in Part Two only begins the discussion of facticity, which is resumed and completed in Part Four; see §33.)

We grasp our facticity, in the sense of the transcendental ground of our particular situatedness, by putting our contingency together with Sartre's anthropogenetic suggestion that being-for-itself is negated being-in-itself (§9). The (difficult) line of thought that Sartre presents to join these two ideas begins with his axiom (§3) that the for-itself apprehends 'itself as not being its own foundation' and therefore as a contingent existent (79/122). This insight is incorporated in Descartes' reflective *cogito* and drives his cosmological proof of God's existence, but Sartre argues that self-founding or necessary being is a contradictory notion (80–1/123). If necessary being is impossible, then it cannot provide the foundation of my contingent being. But Sartre does not allow enquiry to come to a halt here, as it might have seemed that it must – our contingency needs to be, and can be, Sartre thinks, accounted for in some manner. Now the for-itself apprehends itself *also* as being self-nihilating, 'the foundation of its own nothingness' (80/123), and this enables us to take one step beyond mere recognition of our contingency, by allowing the teleological schema of Sartre's annihilation 'myth' to be applied: 'The for-itself is the in-itself losing itself as in-itself in order to found itself as consciousness' (82/124). And this, finally, allows us to see why, at a transcendental level, the for-itself should be necessarily always situated in particularity. My particular situatedness is always an instance of contingency – there may be reasons why I am now working as a cafe waiter, but they do not go back all the way to what it is to be a for-itself; *qua* my being as a for-itself, my being-a-waiter is a contingent matter. And this contingency of mine *just is* the contingency of the *in-itself*, ontologically displaced and *re-expressed* at the level of the for-itself which it has become: 'the effort of an in-itself to found itself' gives rise to the 'factual necessity', *le nécessité de fait*, of the for-itself; facticity 'is what *remains* of the in-itself in the for-itself' (84/127).

This contingent facticity of mine, Sartre adds, can never be fully 'realised' or grasped 'in its brute nudity' (83/126) – to

grasp my contingency as the sheer obtaining of certain facts and nothing more, would be to constitute myself as a block of in-itself. I can apprehend my facticity 'only by recovering it in the sub-structure of the *pre-reflective cogito*', whereby I confer on it 'its meaning and its resistance' (83/126). Nonetheless, facticity is what ensures that consciousness cannot 'choose its attachments in the world in the same way as the souls in Plato's *Republic* choose their condition'; the for-itself cannot determine itself to be, for example, 'born a bourgeois' (83/126).

Facticity, note, is therefore indifferent to choice. Necessarily we begin to make choices under conditions, such as the historical age in which we live, which we have not chosen, but making choices does not *reduce the quantity* of our facticity: the contents of my choices take up particularities offered by the being of the world to my nothingness, and so always presuppose facticity. Contingency would be overcome, and facticity thereupon eliminated, only if the *being* of the objects of (all) my choices were my creation. (Sartre's conception of the 'original choice of self', we will see in §34, totalizes my choices and gives them necessity in relation to *one another*, but it does not claim the *being* of my world as a matter of choice, and so does not conflict with his theory of facticity.)

Sartre's conception of facticity leads, we will see in §31, directly into his account of embodiment.

### §17 Lack and value [Part Two, Chapter 1, Section III]

Section III aims to account for value, *la valeur*, as a feature of the world, and to lay the ground for the motivational theory that we are going to come to in §38.

The section begins (85–9/128–33) by providing a crucial deepening and clarification of his metaphysics of nothingness, in which the nothingness of the for-itself is redetermined as (a) *deficiency* or *lack of being*, (*un*) *défaut* or *manque d'être*.

Sartre's presentation of the argument suggests that two directions are involved in the transition from nothingness to lack. On the one hand it is to be understood as a sideways move, an extrapolation of what is *implied* by our being nothingness, and on the other as a move downwards, to a deeper explanatory level.

Sartre begins by reminding us that the for-itself stands in a relation of negative ontological dependence to the in-itself.

The for-itself 'is perpetually determining itself not to be the in-itself', meaning that the for-itself can establish itself 'only in terms of the in-itself and against the in-itself' (85/128). And this reveals immediately, Sartre claims (86/128–9), that the for-itself is a lack of being: if the for-itself exists, not by virtue of receiving ontological support from the in-itself, but by virtue of making itself not-be the in-itself, then the for-itself exists (only) in so far as it does not have, i.e. is lacking in, the being of the in-itself.

And at the same time, the teleological story of its origin provides another angle, from which the for-itself can be grasped directly as an instance of lack, and in *consequence* of that, also as nothingness. The teleological story establishes the for-itself as lack on the basis that the endeavour of the in-itself is not to give rise to being-for-itself *for its own sake*, but rather *in order to rid itself of contingency* and thereby found itself (84/127). From this it follows that the being of the for-itself is constituted in the very first instance by an aim which its existence fails to realize: the for-itself exists in order that being should be rid of contingency, but its being is just as contingent as that of the in-itself, so it exists as the *non-fulfilment* of an aim. The for-itself exists therefore as a state of affairs consisting in something's being unattained or missing, i.e. it exists as *defective*, and therefore as something which exists *negatively*.

This is enough to introduce the category of value, in indefinite terms. In so far as the for-itself is a lack, positive value is set on that which is lacked, and negative value on the being of the lack. Sartre gives however a full account (90–5/133–9) of the path which leads from the for-itself's being lack to its concrete consciousness of value in the world, in the course of which the concept of the for-itself as 'Self' which we referred to ahead of time, in §14, is introduced and reveals its importance.

If being-for-itself is lack, what exactly is it that is lacked (*le manqué*)? In one sense, of course, it is simply the fulfilment of the in-itself's original aim, viz. 'being in-itself rid of contingency and self-founding'. But once being-for-itself has come into existence, determining and founding itself autonomously and in accordance with the negative nature that it discovers itself with, the object of lack is reformulated and must be respecified: what the for-itself lacks, Sartre argues, is itself *as*



being-in-itself, 'itself in the mode of identity', self-coincident, *le soi comme être-en-soi* or *soi-même comme en-soi* (88–9/132). Sartre refers to this (we saw in §14) as 'Self', *Soi* (100/145).

This 'object' can be redescribed more finely: what the for-itself wants is not that it should 'lose itself in the in-itself of identity' – that consciousness should be annihilated – but that it should be preserved *as* for-itself in the condition of being-in-itself, in other words, that it should 'be this self as substantial being' (90/133). What would be required, therefore, in order for the for-itself to carry forward the original project of the in-itself of which it is the intended vehicle, is 'the impossible synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself' (90/133). Our ordinary, pre-philosophical concept of such a totality, one which 'combines in itself the incompatible characteristics of the in-itself and the for-itself', Sartre observes, is *God*, a being that founds itself and combines absolute self-identity with self-consciousness.

It may seem natural to deny the for-itself-as-Self any ontological status, precisely because it is unrealized and unrealizable, and Sartre refers to it as a 'meaning', *un sens* (87/130) – it is the 'meaning of the missing act of founding' (89/132), the very meaning *of* consciousness rather than a meaning conferred *by* consciousness (91/134). This might be supposed to make it categorially non-ontological, but Sartre insists that ontological commitment cannot be evaded (90–1/134). One compelling reason for this is that, unless the for-itself-as-Self possesses being of some sort, it cannot be regarded as something *transcendent* towards which the for-itself directs itself, and must instead be regarded as a 'mere idea', contrary to Sartre's programme of philosophical explanation at the level of ontological structure in place of subjective representation. Conceiving lack in terms of an internal ontological relation whereby the for-itself projects itself towards itself-as-Self – neither term of the relation being able to exist without the other, and neither having priority over the other (91/134) – allows Sartre to claim that we discover here 'the origin of transcendence' in general (89/132).

The ontological status of the for-itself-as-Self provides the basis for Sartre's account of value and our consciousness of it. If the for-itself-as-Self has being, then it must be of some kind not yet defined in B&N, since it is neither being-in-itself nor being-for-itself, and therefore belongs to the full ontology, but

it is comparable neither to the entities composing the differentiated object-world nor to the 'degraded' pseudo-beings which compose what Sartre calls the 'psychic' (see §24). The unique and peculiar mode of being of the for-itself-as-Self corresponds exactly, Sartre argues in detail, to that of value (92-5/136-9). By value Sartre understands nothing specifically moral but simply whatever exercises a normative power over the subject, the correlates of its projects. Sartre's claim here concerns furthermore not value as an object of *thetic* consciousness – the values we avow, uphold, claim knowledge of, etc., which presuppose reflection (95/138-9) – but to value as a *non-thetic, pre-reflective* dimension of our being-in-the-world. At this primordial level value 'haunts' the for-itself, 'is consubstantial with it' without being posited by it and 'out of reach' (94-5/138-9). As Sartre puts it later, value is 'a phantom-being which surrounds and penetrates the for-itself through and through' (203/254).

A further, independent and corroborative route to the conclusion that the for-itself is lack is provided, Sartre argues, by the phenomena of desire and suffering, analyses of which are intercalated in Section III (at 87-8/130-1 and 90-2/134-6 respectively; see §24).

Sartre's theory of desire shows especially clearly how his ontological idiom contradicts the entrenched tendency of ordinary and philosophical thought to reductively psychologize features of human subjectivity. According to Sartre, it is false that we lack *only in so far as* we desire without fulfilment, the implication of which would be that our lacking *reduces to* our desiring. Rather, we only desire at all because we *exist* as instances of something's being 'missing', in a sense comparable to that in which the crescent moon exists as lacking its missing quarter. Similarly and more broadly, Sartre's theory of lack allows transcendence to be grasped as an *objective* ontological structure of the for-itself: as Sartre puts it, the for-itself 'is indissolubly linked to being-in-itself, not as a thought to its object [ . . . ] but as a lack to that which defines its lack' (89/133). This, note, underlines the reality of the transcendence asserted in Sartre's ontological proof (§5): it is not merely that we *seem* to ourselves to transcend towards objects; our 'reaching towards being' is an event belonging to reality and not merely to our subjectivity. Sartre's affirmation of the

objective character of the structures of the for-itself illustrates his identification of the perspectival and absolute standpoints discussed in §13: in our existence as a lack of being which reaches towards being, the way that things are in the internal view of the human subject, and the way that they are in the view from nowhere, coincide.

Though Schopenhauer is not mentioned by name, it is clear that in the passages on desire and suffering Sartre is consciously reworking Schopenhauer's thesis of the necessity and ubiquity of human suffering, in a form which shakes off the empiricist elements of Schopenhauer's claim, and on a basis which is arguably more rigorous. The sense in which being-for-itself *as such* is suffering, on Sartre's account, is quite independent of any introspection of a pervasive negative hedonic quality in our experience and is instead connected *a priori* with what it is to be conscious of a world. (Sartre refers in this context to the 'unhappy consciousness', *la conscience malheureuse*, of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 90/134, which he has re-interpreted in non-rationalist, Schopenhauerian terms, as an inescapable, rather than dialectically surpassable condition.)

In §38 we will pursue the implications of Sartre's theory of the for-itself-as-Self and in §44 discuss briefly the conditions for ethical value. (B&N does not devote a separate section to aesthetic value, though it contains many remarks on aesthetic matters; of particular note is Sartre's account at 194–5/244–5 of beauty as 'an ideal realisation of the for-itself' or 'imaginary realisation of myself as a totality in-itself and for-itself'.)

### §18 Possibility [Part Two, Chapter 1, Section IV]

Sartre's discussion of possibility runs in close parallel to his treatment of negation. Possibilities, both in the human realm and that of extra-human empirical fact, are given to us as concrete transcendent realities, and consciousness of these is presupposed by the abstract concept of possibility and the corresponding form of modal judgement. Reductive subjective or epistemic analyses of possibility – those of Leibniz and Spinoza – are in any case ruled out, because they are either circular or fail to distinguish possibilities from other, non-modal states of affairs. On the other hand, Sartre argues, possibility cannot be conceived as having its source within

actual being-in-itself. Realist analyses of possibility in terms of Aristotelian potentialities must therefore be rejected.

By elimination, then, possibility must be traced back to a *a priori* features of human subjectivity. Sartre's metaphysics shows possibility to be intelligible in the following way. In the first place, possibility presupposes nihilation, as noted in §9, and its appearance in the world is made further intelligible, Sartre argues, in terms of the for-itself's structure as lack. As we saw in §17, the for-itself is a lack of self-coincidence to which corresponds the for-itself-as-Self, and the for-itself's projection of itself towards this quasi-entity in the form of desires for worldly objects, Sartre claims, is what causes 'the Possible' to arise in the world (100–2/145–7). The structure of possibility thus derives from my self-relation, the internal relation of myself-as-lack to myself-as-replete: 'The possible is the *something* which the For-itself lacks *in order* to be itself' (102/147). (Sartre's ontology of possibles contributes in turn to his theory of action and freedom: see §32.)

### §19 Knowledge [Part Two, Chapter 3, Sections I and V]

Sartre's treatment of knowledge in Chapter 3 of Part Two is, in an important sense, non-epistemological. The question which Sartre addresses is not that of *whether* we have knowledge, *pace* the sceptic, nor that of the conditions under which it is *rational* to form beliefs with whatever degree of epistemic confidence, the task of a theory of rational belief. Rather Sartre is concerned with *what* knowledge *is*. The knowledge-relation is considered by Sartre in abstraction from our normative interest in belief-formation, and the result is a *metaphysics of cognition*, as distinct from, in the usual sense of the term, a theory of knowledge. As Sartre puts it, 'knowledge is reabsorbed in being' (216/268), and 'the *ontological* problem of knowledge is resolved by the affirmation of the ontological primacy of the in-itself over the for-itself' (619/713).

Because Sartre's conception of consciousness, which he has already explained to us, is that of an unmediated and internally structureless relation to a transcendent object, which is furthermore conscious of itself as such, there is by Sartre's lights nothing more that needs to be done, or that can be said, regarding the basic possibility of knowledge. Cognition involves no

two-stage process of, for example, first sensing and then having to either bring concepts to bear on sensory data, or render this data clear and distinct, or give it appropriate unity; so there is nothing in Sartre corresponding to empiricist abstraction, the rationalist theory of inspection of ideas or Kantian synthesis. What Sartre can add and does supply in his treatment of knowledge is an account of why it should be true in the first place that there is this transcendent consciousness, and of what in broader terms it amounts to. (Note that, because Sartre rejects causal analyses of intentionality, it is ruled out for him that knowledge is merely an empirical relation with a distinctive normative coating.)

Transcendence as a structure of consciousness is explained by Sartre as a structure of the for-itself: consciousness intends an object *because* the teleology of the for-itself demands its transcendence, one aspect of which is the *knowing* of the object. Knowledge is 'intuition', 'the presence of consciousness to the thing' (172/221), and this immediate presence – which, Sartre explains, must be understood negatively: consciousness designates itself as *not* being that object (see §10) – is necessitated by the for-itself's having to produce itself originally 'on the foundation of a relation to the in-itself' (172/220), i.e. to constitute 'itself as *not being* the thing' (174/222).

Knowledge on Sartre's conception is therefore not a supplementary relation between pre-existent beings, nor an activity or attribute or function, but a 'mode of being' of the subject (174/222), identical with the upsurge of the for-itself and as such 'an absolute and primitive event' (216/268).

This brings Sartre, as he acknowledges, into agreement with idealism on two scores: the being of the for-itself is indeed co-extensive with knowledge (216/268), and knowledge bears the significance of *affirmation* – the in-itself's being-known and intentionally affirmed as 'world' is 'the reverse of the internal negation' of consciousness; all proceeds as if being-in-itself had negated itself and given birth to the for-itself just in order that it might receive affirmation (216–17/269). What separates Sartre from the absolute idealism on which his position here borders so closely is, first, his insistence that the teleological process witnessed 'exists only *for* the For-itself' and 'disappears with it' (217/269); and second, his realist, anti-constitutive thesis that

nothing is added to being by its being-known 'except the very fact that *there is In-itself*' (217/269), for which reason the human subject experiences itself as 'weighed down on' and 'invested' with being 'from every side' (217–18/269–70) in a sense which, Sartre believes, idealism is unable to account for.

## §20 Empirical reality [Part Two, Chapter 3, Sections I–IV]

On the basis of and in close connection with his account of cognition, Sartre gives in the middle sections of the chapter on transcendence an account of the intelligibly differentiated object-world, 'the *thing in the world*' (198/248). This encompasses: (1) spatiality (184–5/233–4, 211–13/262–5); (2) empirical determinacy, that is, an empirical thing's being itself and not another thing, and its being thus and not otherwise (Section II); (3) the qualitative and quantitative features of empirical reality (Section III); (4) its temporal structure, i.e. the temporality discovered '*on*' being (204/255) by pre-reflective consciousness, what Sartre calls 'universal time' or 'the time of the world', as opposed to the reflectively disclosed temporality of the for-itself (Section IV); and (5) the very status of 'the world' as a unity or totality (180–3/228–32). Also included in Sartre's discussion are the distinction of the abstract and the concrete (188–9/238–9), permanence (193–4/243–4, 204–6/255–7), abstraction and empirical concept formation (193–4/243–4), potentiality and probability (196–7/246–7), the principle of causality (207–8/259) and motion (209–14/260–5).

The central notion employed throughout Sartre's analyses is that of negation – in general terms, empirical determinacy is an instance of 'external' negation (§8) – and since negation is the prerogative of the for-itself, it is here that the interdependence of the world with the for-itself – their complementary and correlated positions in the full ontology (§12) – emerges explicitly.

The account given by Sartre is transcendental in the sense that empirical reality, with respect to its formal features, is traced back to *a priori* ontological conditions, viz. the structures and mode of being of the for-itself. As noted earlier, Sartre is not concerned to demonstrate the necessity of those features in the strong sense of showing the conceptual *impossibility* of any alternatives – the impossibility, for example, of non-spatial awareness of the in-itself, or of experience which

does not conform to the principle of causality. What Sartre's analyses show instead is the way in which the formal features of empirical reality and the structures of the for-itself interlock, and how the latter make the former intelligible, and this supports at least some weak claims regarding the necessary conditions of experience: to the extent that Sartre shows, for example, how spatialization of the in-itself is what *for us* plays the role of allowing being-for-itself to make itself co-present with being-in-itself, and how the principle of causality mirrors the temporal structure of the for-itself, Sartre can be said to establish the necessity, in some albeit weak sense, of space and causality for empirical reality.

### §21 Instrumentality [Part Two, Chapter 3, Section III]

The account given hitherto in Chapter 3 may seem to suggest, or to be consistent with, the 'primacy' of 'the *representative*', that is, the view that dis-interested contemplative consciousness of the world is the primordial condition of the for-itself (198/248). Sartre reminds us why this is to be rejected: the world appears 'inside the circuit of selfness' (198/248) – the perceived 'is like a conductor in the circuit of selfness' (192/242) – and with this circuit the for-itself constitutes itself as *lack* and thus as *practically* orientated.

This has direct implications for how the world is configured. The for-itself's relation to lack cannot be a relation to a *given* object – if it were, then lack would be an *external* relation, i.e. not the for-itself's own *lacking*. Sartre allows that a privileged kind of (pure) reflection (see §43) might apprehend directly being-for-itself as lack, but for *pre-reflective* consciousness, i.e. consciousness of the world, the lack can appear 'only in projection', as a transcendent structure. This explains the empirical identification of *particular* determinate lacks, in other words, the population of the world with *tasks*, 'voids to be filled' by the for-itself (199/249–50).

Things are therefore, equiprimordially with their being objects of knowledge, also *instruments* or utensils (200/250–1). Sartre's Kantian account of empirical reality is thereby integrated with a Heideggerian account of the world as an equipmental matrix – both of which Sartre may claim to have provided with a new (and *unified*) foundation.

## §22 Temporality [Part Two, Chapter 2, Sections I–II]

Sartre's discussion of temporality is highly detailed, but culminates in a thesis which can be summarized as follows: Time must be understood in terms of ('original') temporality, a structure of the for-itself, and original temporality in turn must be understood in terms of the for-itself's reflexivity, specifically, its 'temporalisation' of itself. The following points are basic to Sartre's discussion of this topic.

1. Realism, Sartre argues (107/155, 124/168), delivers the conclusion that time does not exist, since it will show that the past is no longer and that the future is not yet, while the reality of the present will fall prey to the paradox of division into infinitesimals.

The constraints which Sartre puts on realism are disputable, but Sartre's subtler and most effective point in justification of his rejection of realism about time is that (in accordance with Sartre's basic rule of method) an intelligible conception of time must show its connection with *consciousness* of time, and that none of the materials available to realism are adequate to this purpose. Our consciousness of time could not be restricted to the observation of its continuous passage – as one watches the movement of a clock hand or the advance of a progress bar. Time is not an *object* of consciousness: consciousness is in time and time is in consciousness. Furthermore, necessarily we are conscious of time as *articulated* in three dimensions – back there is the past, here is the present, and ahead lies the future – and a *dynamic* character: time *passes*, the present becomes the past, etc. Such consciousness cannot be made intelligible on the basis of 'representations' presently contained within the subject – memory images, images of future states of affairs, etc. – since an antecedent time-consciousness would be required for the subject to grasp those mental representations as having past or future reference (108–9/151–2, 124–5/169). Consciousness of the past and the future are therefore relations of being, not of representation (146/192).

2. Deriving time from the for-itself leaves various options open, one of which is Kant's treatment of time as a transcendental condition of objective knowledge. Consistently with his general position *vis à vis* Kantian idealism, and his



teleological conception of being-for-itself, Sartre looks for a *non-epistemological* basis for temporality.

3. Sartre holds that a theory of time must answer the questions of *why* there is time, of *why* time has its three dimensions and no others, and of *why* time consists in a process of becoming-past, a 'passage to the past' (120/164, 142/188, 144/190). The ordinary, commonsensical picture of time as a flowing, invisible, linear medium along which things in the world pass or within which they are carried, merely takes time as a given, and has no potential for answering these questions. If time must be conceived in terms of the structure 'past-present-future', evidently it cannot be regarded as a mere aggregate of three independent elements. From this it follows that we must 'approach it as a totality which dominates its secondary structures and confers on them their meaning' (107/150).

Having clarified Sartre's constraints on a theory of time – that it should derive time from the for-itself but not reduce time to a condition for knowledge, and should explain why time exists at all and does so tridimensionally – it is intelligible that Sartre should locate time in a dynamic, end-directed structure of the for-itself deriving from its basic character as a nihilation of the in-itself. Sartre gives an account, not of what it is for a subject to be conscious of an objective sequence (say, a ship travelling downstream), but of what it is for a *subject* to *relate itself* to its own past, present and future, i.e. for me to relate myself to something as belonging to *my* Past, Present or Future. The preceding remarks allow us to understand why this means neither that Sartre is describing the 'psychology' of time in place of addressing philosophical question of what time is, nor that Sartre has 'subjectivised' time in Berkeley's manner – certainly Sartre follows the idealist principle that the ultimate *ground* of time must be located in the subject, but it is out of the question for Sartre that time should be collapsed into *contents* of subjectivity.

The text of Sections I and II has a complex organization. (Section III of the chapter is concerned with the construction of non-original, 'psychic' temporality, discussed below in §24.) After a rapid sketch of his position in the opening paragraph (107/150), Section I gives a phenomenological, 'pre-ontological'

description of the three temporal dimensions in turn, designed to provide a 'provisional' and 'preliminary clarification' of time (107/150). The sense in which this section is phenomenological rather than ontological is weak, however, since it includes a set of *negative* conclusions regarding the ontology of time, based on their incompatibility with the phenomenology, and descriptions of the meaning of each of the temporal dimensions in terms of what we already know of the ontology of the for-itself:

(1) 112–20/156–64: The meaning of the past lies in the way that a being which *has* a past in the manner of the for-itself relates to it as something for which it is responsible and which it finds in the present, and which it 'has to be' (114/158) – but whose 'being is no longer for itself', since it no longer exists as *reflet-reflétant*, and so counts as 'for-itself become in-itself'; the past is 'what I am without being able to live it' (119/163). Relation to the past thus exemplifies Sartre formula of contradictory predication of the for-itself: what I *was* is what I have to be in order to not-be-it, and have not-to-be in order to be it (117/161).

(2) 120–3/165–8: The present bears the simpler meaning of 'the presence of the For-itself to being-in-itself' (121/164), an internal bond to *all* being-in-itself, which cannot be analysed in terms of the being of a 'present instant', and which has the meaning of *flight* in face of being, a 'flight outside of co-present being and from the being which it was' towards the future (123/168).

(3) 127–9/172–4: The future, it follows, has initially the meaning of being the 'outside' of the present-and-past towards which the for-itself takes flight, and so of being 'beyond being' (126/170). But in order to provide for the sense in which this 'outside' is in addition *awaited* and *anticipated* and *unrealised* – i.e. not simply related to as a 'homogeneous and chronologically ordered succession of moments to come' (129/174) – the full meaning of the future must be, Sartre argues, that of the future *for-itself*, i.e. of myself *as I will be*. Yet this future self cannot, again, simply be a self of the same ontological character as what I am in the mode of my past (if it were, then 'looking to the future' would be indistinguishable from looking at the past). And so, Sartre claims, the future must be understood in terms of his

teleological theory of the for-itself-as-Self and 'the Possible' (§§17–18): the future is 'the ideal point' of self-coincidence, at which the Self will 'arise as the existence in-itself of the for-itself' (128/172). Hence the sense in which the Future is always *still* to come, unachieved, a 'continual possibilisation of possibles' (129/174).

Section II, officially moving from phenomenology to ontology, is concerned in its first sub-section, on 'static temporality' (130–42/175–88), with refuting accounts, either realist or idealist, of time as a formal *order*; and in its second sub-section, on 'dynamic temporality' (142–9/188–96), with amplifying the ontology of the three temporal dimensions in such a way as to (a) *explain* the meanings of past, present and future described in Section I, and (b) resolve *problems* raised by these descriptions. The passages at 136–7/181–3 and 147–9/193–6 give the crux of Sartre's conception of temporality. Here Sartre characterizes time as 'a unifying act' which has 'the structure of selfness', 'the intra-structure of a being which has to be its own being' (136/181–2), and which 'temporalises itself' as an 'incomplete totality' (149/196). Sartre applies this structure to the three temporal dimensions – to the past at 137–41/183–7, the future at 141–2/187–8, and the present at 142/188 – showing that temporality can be grasped as a unitary 'metamorphosis' of being. Of particular importance in this context is Sartre's account of why, once we have recognized time's identity with the for-itself, the transcendental questions of why there is time, why it has the dimensions it does and why time passes, are answered: see 147–9/193–6.

Sartre may be described as seeking to identify the 'story' which constitutes time. Narratives as we ordinarily conceive them concern the form of events *within* time, but Sartre's notion is that time is defined by a fundamental narrative (or teleological) form, which is responsible for its having the shape 'past-present-future'.

A term borrowed from Heidegger is used by Sartre in the chapter on temporality: 'ekstasis', meaning the condition of standing outside of oneself (or, in some contexts in B&N, the attempt to achieve that condition). Temporality is the first of the three ekstases which constitute the for-itself, the second

being reflection, and the third being being-for-others (see Sartre's summary at 298/359). Past, present and future comprise the three *temporal* ekstases (137/183).

The important idea which accompanies the terminology of ekstasis – which is otherwise merely a synonym for non-self-coincidence – concerns the teleology of the for-itself. As we have seen, Sartre describes the telos of the for-itself as the self-coincidence or self-identity of a Self. But Sartre's accounts of this movement presuppose, it must always be remembered, a *prior* movement of 'flight' from being which comprises the more basic teleology of the for-itself and which yields an initial tendency towards *disintegration* of the for-itself – a multiplication of parts, falling away from unity towards mutual dissociation (but which, like all of the for-itself's teleology, is not and cannot be completed).

Note that by the end of Chapter 2, Sartre has still not dealt with 'objective' temporality: this 'universal time' or 'the time of the world' – which is distinct (but not independent) from both original temporality and its 'degraded', 'psychic' version (§24) – we referred to in §20 as belonging to Sartre's theory of empirical reality.

### §23 Contradictory predication of the for-itself

Sartre employs, we have seen, a great deal of contradictory predication of the for-itself. Reflection both *is* and *is not* the reflected-on. The for-itself both *is* and *is not* its past and its future, and both *is* and *is not* the contingent being which composes its facticity. The being of consciousness 'does not coincide with itself' and lacks the self-identity of the in-itself (74/116), implying that the for-itself both *is* and *is not* itself. Contradictory predication will recur later in the context of the body: I both *am* and *am not* my body (§31). In the most general terms, Sartre describes being-for-itself as 'being which is what it is not and which is not what it is' (58/97). (Sartre regards the 'is' of identity and the 'is' of predication as linked, if not interconvertible, so what I am calling his thesis of contradictory predication may equally be called his thesis of non-self-identity.)

This practice has not helped Sartre to be taken seriously by philosophers outside the post-Kantian tradition, within which such forms of expression are more familiar, above all

from Hegel. We have seen, however, that Sartre's contradictory predications of the for-itself are not empty and pointless in the manner of contradictory predications of the in-itself: they get their sense from Sartre's *theories* of the structures of the for-itself, which explain the sense in which reflection *is* and the sense in which it is *not* the reflected-on, in which I *am* and am *not* my past, and so on.

An important question nonetheless remains. When proper account is taken of the theories correlated with Sartre's contradictory predications, does contradiction in the strict sense *disappear*? In other words, can Sartre's metaphysics be reexpressed in a way that *eliminates* contradiction from his account of what is real? While Sartre's metaphysics of course need to be construed as *themselves* consistent, hence free from contradiction, it is a further question whether these metaphysics *include the statement* that there is a type of being in which *contradiction inheres* (whose structure *is contradictory*). If this is indeed Sartre's claim, then Sartre's theoretical elucidations do not eliminate contradiction by telling us how to paraphrase away the contradictory predications attached to the for-itself, rather they *presuppose* and *specify* it. If so, then to say for example that the for-itself is and is not its past is to express one of the ways in which the for-itself *exists contradictorily*, and when we relativize the contradictory predicates of the for-itself by saying that *in one respect* (*qua* my facticity) I am my past and *in another respect* (*qua* my transcendence) I am not my past, contradictoriness is still needed precisely in order to grasp the *relation* of mutual exclusion between the two relativized predicates.

If Sartre does affirm the contradictoriness of the for-itself, then this is a claim which is distinct from and goes beyond his doctrine of the multiplicity of modes of being, his metaphysics of nothingness, and his thesis that the human subject lacks subject-predicate form: to say that we exist in a unique mode, that our being is that of nothingness, and that we are not metaphysical subjects of properties, is not to say that contradictions are true of us.

It is hard to come to a decision on this issue. In support of the view that Sartre is serious about the reality of contradiction, the case can be made that Sartre models the contradictoriness of the for-itself on the idea of a contradiction obtaining in the

in-itself. It is true that the reason why I both am and am not my past cannot be gleaned by consideration of the past of a tree root: 'is and is not F' cannot be true of a tree root in the way that it can be true of me, if only because, on Sartre's view, no predicate which is true of me can be true of a piece of in-itself and *vice versa*. But at the level of *meaning*, Sartre may well be telling us to understand what it is to exist in the mode of being-for-itself by reference to what it would be for a contradiction to be true of the in-itself, just as, we saw in §§9–10, Sartre's concept of nothingness is semantically parasitic on our grasp of the being of the in-itself.

Second, it may be argued that, if the mode of being of the for-itself did not involve contradiction, then it would not be *problematic* in the way that Sartre time and again insists that it is: without contradiction, our mode of being – our 'having-to-be' our being – arguably would not present deep *metaphysical* difficulty. On this view, contradiction is what makes human existence a problem in need of a solution and supplies the motivational engine the for-itself.

We should, here as ever, be wary of under-representing the strangeness of Sartre's views, but motives other than philosophical timidity may lead us to think that justice can be done to the problematic character of our mode of being without infracting the principle of non-contradiction. Use of the 'is and is not' formula may be regarded as Sartre's way of highlighting the parallels between the various structures of the for-itself, their sharing of a certain *form* which makes the for-itself heterogeneous with the in-itself, but which need not be identified with the obtaining of a contradiction. Contradictory predication as a conceptual device carries in addition the heuristic advantage that it registers the problematic character of *any* predication of the for-itself and so reminds us that the human subject is not a subject of properties. It may even be wondered whether contradiction does succeed in capturing the problematic, internally dynamic character of the for-itself's mode of being: if a contradiction is determinately true of me, isn't that a kind of final conceptual stabilization, bringing me to rest? A strong case can be made also, therefore, for leaving contradiction out of the final interpretative picture.

It is worth noting how closely this issue is connected with two metaphilosophical issues, our view of which may make

a difference to what we think about Sartrean contradiction. The first concerns Sartre's relation to Hegel. As noted above, contradictory predication has a firm and defensible place in Hegel's logic, and if Sartre can be thought to subscribe to this much of Hegel without thereby committing himself to any objectionable (in Sartre's eyes) substantive Hegelian metaphysics, then Sartre's use of contradiction would allow itself to be understood and defended on Hegelian grounds. There is room for doubt that the terms and conditions of the Hegelian dialectical apparatus are metaphysically neutral, but consideration of this issue would take us too far afield.

The second is the metaphilosophical issue discussed in §13. One natural way of taking contradictory predication of the for-itself is as an account merely of *how we must think*, i.e. as identifying merely ways in which we *conceive* and *experience* ourselves (factually or transcendentally, etc.). These conceptions or modes of presentation may be superimposed incoherently upon one another, or we may alternative between them, such that it sometimes seems to me that the one is true (that I am my past) and at other times that the other is true (that I am not my past). Sartre is of course not positioning himself neutrally above these conceptions and merely observing our thought patterns: he is affirming their interdependent *necessity* and so also *endorsing* them, i.e. saying that, *relative to the phenomena* of our self-experience and our *capacity* for self-understanding, the contradictory conceptions need to be accepted, by that measure, as true. But on the exclusively perspectival or Copernican reading of Sartre's philosophical project, this does not commit Sartre to locating these contradictions within reality: Sartre's final thesis, we may say, is only that *we cannot conceive or experience* ourselves without contradiction, in other words, that human subjectivity cannot make itself theoretically perspicuous; whether or not in reality as disclosed to 'the view from nowhere' the human subject has contradictory structure is not Sartre's concern, and is neither denied nor affirmed by him.

#### §24 Psychology, 'psychological facts' and the Psyche [Part Two, Chapter 2, Section III, 158–70/205–18]

The thesis of *The Transcendence of the Ego* that there are two antithetical ways of approaching what we may neutrally call

'the mental' – one that assimilates it to worldly objects, and another that grasps it through and as subjectivity – and that the former amounts to a misconception, albeit one founded on an operation which natural consciousness performs upon itself, is maintained in B&N, as we have seen. The claim returns as a recurrent theme in Sartre's analyses, and some passages in particular may be singled out as prime exemplifications and key elements of Sartre's critique of what he calls the 'psychological' or 'psychic', as opposed to phenomenological, conception of the mental.

1. As we saw in §14, Sartre argues that pre-reflective consciousness as such involves teleological instability. When the structure of *reflet-reflétant* is witnessed in the case of pleasure (xxx–xxxi/20–1), we get the result that pleasure, and our consciousness of pleasure, form together 'an indivisible, indissoluble being' (xxxi/21), precluding the possibility of separation, but neither term reducing to the other. In order for pleasure to exist – in order for me to feel pleasure – it is necessary for me to participate in (more precisely: to *be*) the movement of mutual reference of the two moments of this totality. This peculiarity of the mode of being of pleasure – reflected in the way that I can neither stand back from my pleasure as if before a foreign object, nor strictly lose myself in it – precludes pleasure's being conceived as a fact bearing any resemblance to an object's possession of a quality or having of a content.

2. In the case of belief, the law of the pre-reflective *cogito* gives the same kind of result, but with more complex implications (see 68–70/109–11 and 74–75/117–18). Belief that *p* implies consciousness-of-believing-that-*p*, and to be conscious that I believe that *p* is to *know* that I believe that *p*. At this point, however, belief-that-*p* converts itself into a putative *fact* of consciousness, a 'subjective determination' of my mind, split off from its 'external correlative', i.e. from *p* itself (69/110). And with this I am alienated from my belief, in so far as it now stands *in question* for me: 'Thus the non-thetic consciousness (of) believing is destructive of belief. But at the same time the very law of the pre-reflective *cogito* implies that the being of believing ought to be the consciousness of believing' (69/110).



This feature of belief – its instability or ‘troubled’ character (75/117), the necessity and difficulty of my *maintaining* my belief in a non-causal manner which no worldly state of affairs could require from me – does not show itself in the case of such plain empirical (‘intuitively founded’, in Sartre’s language) beliefs as that the cat is on the mat, but it is, in Sartre’s view, essential for the possibility of bad faith or self-deception (see §37) and responsible for the way in which our doxastic lives generally fail to run a smooth course.

3. Desire too, Sartre maintains, exhibits a deep structure which commonsense psychology does not recognize and which the psychological conception of the mental cannot accommodate (see 87–8/130–1, 101–2/145–6, 198–9/248–9, and the discussion of sexual desire at 382–98/451–68). *Contra* the conceptions of desire as either a force or a rational response to a judgement of an object’s desirability, Sartre regards desire as such – even in its most ‘rudimentary’ pre-reflective forms, e.g. thirst or sexual desire – as conditioned and made possible by the structure of metaphysical lack, as noted in §17 (see 101–2/145–6). Lack becomes motivationally effective, Sartre argues, through the for-itself’s negation of itself: the for-itself negates itself *as* lack, in order to *be* that-which-it-lacks, resulting in ‘the empirical establishment of particular lacks as lacks *endured or suffered*’ and providing ‘the foundation of affectivity in general’ (199/249).

Empirical lacks are reinterpreted in the terms of psychology as ‘*drives*’, ‘*appetites*’ or ‘*forces*’ (199/249). What shows these psychological posits to be mere ‘idols’ and ‘phantoms’ (199/249), Sartre argues, is the complexity of aim in desire: to be thirsty is, of course, to want a drink, but the aim of the desire is not simply the object, a drink, nor is it merely that consumption of the object should cause the desire to vanish. Rather thirst seeks to *unite itself* with consciousness-of-drinking: ‘What the desire wishes to be is a filled emptiness’ which ‘shapes its repletion as a mould shapes the bronze which has been poured inside it’ (101/146). In this sense, Sartre observes, it belongs to the teleology of desire to *perpetuate*, not to suppress, itself (‘man clings ferociously to his desires’, 101/146). The richness and complexity of what it means for a human subject to desire, and for its desire to ‘be satisfied’, requires in Sartre’s view a metaphysical

account from which it follows that thirst 'as an organic phenomenon, as a "physiological" need of water, does not exist' (87/130). In §41 we will see in more detail what this involves.

A full survey of the topics in the philosophy of mind approached in this manner by Sartre would be extensive. In the previous chapter we mentioned Sartre's early treatments of imagination and emotion. Sartre also mounts, we will see in §37, a critical challenge to the concept of character, or at any rate to its putative empirical explanatory employment. In the chapter on the body, Sartre discusses at length the psychological conception of sensory experience and concept of sensation (310–20/372–83). Regarding action and its explanation, we will see (§32) that Sartre argues in Part Four in the context of his theory of freedom that psychological causal determination is strictly inconceivable, and later this is followed by a critique of the attempt to explain individuals in terms of psychological laws (§34).

It is notable, therefore, and important for the strength of his case, that Sartre takes the trouble to argue in two directions – both down from metaphysics to ordinary concepts of the mental, and upwards from a critique of these to his metaphysics – and both directions need to be taken account of in assessing Sartre's position.

It is often observed that elements in Sartre's view of the mental agree strikingly with many of Wittgenstein's observations regarding the logical peculiarities or distinctive 'grammar' of mental concepts. But in pursuing this comparison the difference should not be lost sight of that, in Sartre's view, the grounds of the grammar must be rediscovered *in the phenomena*, and that Sartre considers that nothing short of a metaphysical system can provide the therapy which Wittgenstein thinks we stand in philosophical need of. In part this is because Sartre regards our need for existential transformation as much greater than Wittgenstein supposes it to be, but it is also because, according to Sartre, mental phenomena make sense only if their subject is grasped as having the strange metaphysical form of non-self-identity which Part Two has attempted to bring to light, and this form in turn makes sense, Sartre believes, only on the basis of his metaphysics of nothingness.

What Sartre's analyses of pleasure, belief and desire bring to light is the elusive, complex character of the 'mineness' of my mental states, which in Sartre's view the psychological conception either overlooks or actively strips away from the mental in order that the human subject may be regarded as presenting *explananda* of the same kind as those presented by non-human empirical objects; it conceives the human subject on the subject-predicate model, and correlatively, considers truths about the mental as statements of fact concerned with states of affairs which obtain in the very same sense as, and share the mode of being of, non-conscious states of affairs. The mineness of the mental becomes accordingly, a secondary, supplementary, inessential feature.

Sartre's point is, therefore, not merely that ordinary and scientific psychology take an overly simple view of the mental, which might be corrected by increased theoretical sophistication: it is that there is *no such thing* as a 'psychological fact' or 'psychological state'.<sup>108</sup> What there is instead, comprising the object of scientific psychology, is the field of *virtual* phenomena that Sartre calls 'the psychic'.

The psychic receives its fullest treatment in Part Two, Chapter 2, Section III, in the context of Sartre's theory of temporality, for the reason that it is the combination of the structure of reflection with temporality which, on Sartre's account, makes possible the for-itself's apprehension of itself as a psychic existent.

Sartre gives a complex and detailed account of how the psychic is constituted: (1) 150–4/197–201: As we saw in §15, reflection arises with the aim of completing an 'objectivation' and 'interiorisation' of itself, which cannot however be achieved, since reflection is being-for-itself and its structure is non-self-identical. (2) 158ff./205ff.: What results from reflection's failure to realize its telos is instead the apprehension of the consciousness reflected-on as an objective succession of psychic facts, fixed in a duration which is the object ofthetic consciousness, called by Sartre 'psychic temporality' or 'psychic duration' and distinguished from the original temporality of non-thetic, pre-reflective consciousness. Reflection endows the reflected-on with the in-itself characteristics of the for-itself's past, as if putting consciousness in the past tense (119/163). The error of psychology may be described as that of ascribing to the mental in general

the mode of being of pastness. (3) 160–1/207–8. Finally reflection severs the bond between – it deepens the nothing which separates – reflection and reflected-on, allowing the latter to descend to the level of being-in-itself.

More precisely, this is what results from the type of reflection which Sartre calls 'impure', 'accessory' (complicit, *complice*) (155/201) or 'constituting' (*constituante*) (159/206), to which he contrasts 'pure reflection' (see §43). The 'degraded representation' of reflected-on consciousness which issues from impure reflection is marked by a degree of externality, such that its presence to my consciousness involves a degree of detachment from me and is akin to a 'visitation' (158/205). When the psychic has been unified on the model of a substance with properties, so that it exhibits 'the cohesive unity of an organism' (165/213), we have the entity which Sartre in *The Transcendence of the Ego* called the ego but now calls 'the Psyche'. Sartre recapitulates his earlier analysis of it into states, qualities and acts (162–3/209–11). The Psyche presents itself indifferently from any temporal perspective (165/212–13), and invites the mental 'chemistry' of Proust (169/217).

Though non-identical with the ekstastic for-itself, Sartre grants that the Psyche cannot be considered an illusion, if only because it has 'intersubjective reality': psychological facts provide the basis for concrete relations between people and the goal of certain acts; my plans take account of *Pierre's resentment of me*, I do everything I can to *make Annie love me*, etc. (158–9/205–6). Sartre describes the Psyche's mode of existence as 'virtual' but not abstract (161–3/208–11), and as oscillating ambiguously between mere 'ideality' and the artifactual being of something '*made-to-be*' – though in one sense a 'phantom world', the Psyche also constitutes a '*real situation*' of the for-itself (170/218).

## §25 The critique of Freud [Part One, Chapter 2, Section I]

The overall conception of the human subject developed in Part Two can be brought into focus by going back to Sartre's discussion of Freud in Part One (50–4/88–93).

Sartre's critique of Freud is deservedly well known. By means of a succinct and incisive argument, Sartre claims to dispose of psychoanalytic theory. Though there is much to be said in Freud's defence, it cannot be doubted that Sartre identifies a

conceptual feature of psychoanalytic explanation which is genuinely problematic.

Sartre's argument, briefly, is that Freud's metapsychology – either of *Cs.*, *Pcs.* and *Ucs.*, or of ego and id – introduces a radical division of the mind into distinct parts, which are conceived as related to one another somewhat in the way that different persons are related: 'Freud has cut the psychic mass into two' (50/89), and psychoanalysis 'places me in the same relation to myself that the Other is in respect to me', for it 'introduces into my subjectivity the deepest structure of intersubjectivity' (51/90). Sartre gives as an illustration the case of an analysand who, in psychoanalytic terms, manifests resistance to an analyst's interpretation in order to maintain the repression of some instinctually charged, anxiety-eliciting mental content (51–2/90–1). On the basis of this reading – which is correct in so far as Freud does think that the mind has parts, and that these are not necessarily integrated and engage in non-transparent dynamic interaction – Sartre argues that Freudian explanation reflects a conceptual confusion and yields mere pseudo-explanation. The nub of the argument is that any theory which postulates distinct parts of the mind in order to explain failures of self-knowledge assumes logically the existence of a kind of 'homunculus' – a little man, buried away in the psychic apparatus, identified in the version of psychoanalytic theory considered by Sartre with what Freud calls the 'censor mechanism' – and that in order for this homunculus to do the explanatory work needed, it needs to be credited with a capacity for rationality, which renders the explanation, Sartre argues, either vacuous or incoherent – the postulated rational homunculus has all of the attributes of the person as a whole and merely *is* the conscious subject under a certain description.

Concretely: The censor mechanism, in its orchestrated coordination of the two functions of resistance and repression, needs rationality, and therefore self-consciousness. Since it is acting on behalf of the person's conscious mind – it does what it does for the sake of the analysand's peace of mind – and since it requires access to the totality of their mental states – it needs to know what is under threat, and what routes of approach constitute a threat, in order to know what needs to be defended

against and what measures of defence to employ – the censor effectively reduplicates the person: though nominally a mere part of the person, in truth it is indistinguishable from the person as a whole.

If on the other hand it is insisted that the censor lacks rationality and is a genuine *mechanism*, then Freud's division of the mind faces the insuperable problem 'of accounting for the unity of the total phenomenon (repression of the drive which disguises itself and "passes" in symbolic form)', and in order to 'establish comprehensible connections' among its different parts, Freud will be 'obliged to imply everywhere a magic unity linking distant phenomena across obstacles' (53/93).<sup>109</sup>

Freud's notion of the unconscious, Sartre concludes, rests on a mere verbal trick, and the metapsychology's postulated division of the mind is a nothing but a screen imposed by a 'materialistic (*chosiste*) mythology' (52/91), behind which lies the person in their complete unity and with full responsibility for their duplicitous self-relation and all of the behaviour which follows from it. As regards the question which this leaves us with – of how we may then hope to explain irrationality and failures of self-knowledge – Sartre's answer in brief is that failures of self-knowledge are never real in the sense that might seem to force on us the partitive conception of the subject: they are always products of choice, reflexive appearances that the subject freely creates. And as regard the philosophical problem that this may be thought to raise – the classic, much discussed paradox of lying to oneself – this is what Sartre's theory of bad faith (see §37) will try to deal with, taking the place of psychoanalysis in uncovering the motivational sources of irrationality in a way that preserves the unity of the self and unconditional personal responsibility. (See also in this connection the later discussion at 472–6/550–5 of Adler's psychoanalytic theory.)

Sartre has attempted here an internal critique of Freud. Its success is not, note, required for the overall argument of B&N: strictly, for Sartre, Freud's theories fall to the ground directly, since, as the Introduction showed, the very idea of unconscious mental states is unintelligible. Sartre is willing to employ this much more standard objection,<sup>110</sup> but he has reasons for dwelling on Freud in B&N and for giving psychoanalysis more of a run for its money. Sartre is in spite of everything greatly impressed

by the explanatory power of psychoanalysis: Sartre approves Freud's attempt at a depth psychology, the psychoanalytic practice of interpretation of psychological phenomena, and the psychoanalytic call to undertake the (ethical) task of knowing oneself. Sartre considers however that these achievements are properly independent both of Freud's partitive conception of the mind and of Freud's naturalistic metapsychology. The further purpose of Sartre's critique of Freud is consequently twofold: (1) To meet head-on the challenge of naturalistic psychology in one of its most explanatorily impressive forms, and by meeting this challenge through the exhibition of a logical paradox, to further undermine the credentials of philosophical naturalism: the incoherence of Freud's objectified topography of the self – its conception of the psyche as an aggregate of mental contents, in the depths of which an instinctual in-itself gets translated into intentional consciousness – is supposed to show once again the incongruence of the for-itself's mode of being with the metaphysics of subject-predicate form. Freud's theory is, Sartre recognizes, continuous to a large extent with commonsense ways of conceiving the mental – it magnifies and increases explicitly the explanatory burden of such ordinary psychological notions as that we are 'driven' by emotions, 'unable to recognise' our own motives, prefer to keep certain matters 'out of mind' and so forth – and so, by discrediting psychoanalytic theory, Sartre is also highlighting proto-naturalistic elements of ordinary consciousness which must be discarded. (2) To prepare the way for Sartre's own theory of bad faith and his 'existential psychoanalysis', where the psychoanalytic mode of explanation will be reattached to the metaphysics of the for-itself. More will be said about these points in §37 and §40.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. On what basis does Sartre develop his theory of the structures of the for-itself, and how is this theory related to his theory of consciousness?
2. What is the self, according to Sartre?
3. What, on Sartre's account, does the reality of time consist in?
4. How is Sartre's claim that the for-itself 'is what it is not' and 'is not what it is' best understood?

5. Does Sartre refute Freud? More generally, does Sartre make an effective case against scientific psychology?

### (C) RELATION TO THE OTHER

By any measure, and whatever is thought of Sartre's pessimistic view of human relationships, the treatment of the for-itself's relation to Others in Part Three of B&N is a masterpiece, with which very few other treatments of the topic in the post-Kantian tradition begin to compare.

Sartre begins with and devotes a great deal of space to the epistemological problem of intersubjective consciousness, the 'problem of other minds'. In terms of Sartre's usual order of approach, this is an exception – as we have seen, Sartre's typical strategy is to sweep up and (dis)solve epistemological problems *en passant*, in the course of explicating ontological structures. There is a structural reason for this. B&N proceeds from the first person perspective, but intersubjectivity appears to call for some sort of relaxation, if not outright abandonment, of the first person boundedness of philosophical reflection. Moreover, when Sartre gave his account of the ontological structures of the for-itself in Part Two, no trace of the Other was discovered in the bare formal structures of selfness, facticity, transcendence, temporality and so on. All of Sartre's resources for addressing the problem of other minds may thus appear to have been used up. The threat of solipsism looms large for anyone as firmly wedded to Cartesian methodology as Sartre appears to be, and it is consequently imperative that Sartre establish the possibility of consciousness of Others from *within* the first person perspective. The very statement of this task implies the depth of the problem, but its difficulty is aggravated further by the fact that Sartre sets an extremely high standard of adequacy for an account of knowledge of Others: no account which fails to do justice to the *immediacy* of our consciousness of the Other, or which fails to explain how the mutual imbrication of self and Other characteristic of intersubjective life is possible, has any claim on our attention, in Sartre's eyes. This rich and demanding conception of the target of a theory of intersubjectivity is connected closely with the fact that Sartre, following Hegel, is interested in the epistemological problem of the Other not in isolation but as part of a general problem concerning the



*metaphysical* relation of the self to the Other. Although the epistemological puzzle is discussed intensively, it is in a sense a mere prelude: at the top of Sartre's agenda is a demonstration of the necessary failure, in a metaphysical sense, of human relationships, and of the inevitability of intersubjective conflict.

**§26 The problem: being-for-others**  
**[Part Three, Chapter 1, Section I]**

Chapter 1 of Part Three, 'The Existence of Others', contains Sartre's treatment of the epistemological aspect of the relation of self to Other (*Autrui*). Sartre's own solution to the problem of other minds emerges from a detailed critique of other solutions, and consists in an argument by elimination: Sartre tries to show that his account must be accepted, because all other possible accounts fail, and because it coheres uniquely with the metaphysics of B&N (which are thereby provided with additional support).

The initial task is to define the problem in appropriate terms. Sartre introduces the problem of other minds in Section I with reference to the experience of shame: I perform a vulgar gesture and, noticing that I have been witnessed, feel ashamed of myself (221/276).

Analysis shows shame to be an intentional, non-positional, pre-reflective self-consciousness, one which presupposes, of course, the existence of the Other. Shame in its original and primitive form is *of oneself before* the Other, and it involves consciousness of myself as an *object* given to the consciousness of the Other, who thereby *mediates* my relation to myself. The 'aspect of *my being*' discovered through shame (221/275) belongs to a dimension of the for-itself not yet studied in B&N, namely its *being-for-others, être-pour-l'autre*. Obviously there are a vast multitude of properties which the for-itself can have only by virtue of relations to Others – only through the mediation of Others can I be trustworthy or untrustworthy, amiable or cold, etc. This intersubjectively constituted dimension of the for-itself has the ontological peculiarity that it is *of* the for-itself (the shameful act is *mine*) but not *for* the for-itself (my shame is not for me but on the contrary *for the Other*).

Reflection, Sartre argues, cannot provide the key to such consciousness. While certainly it is possible for me in general

to reflect on how I appear to Others, and for such reflection to induce shame, in the simple case that Sartre describes no reflection intervenes, and no act of my reflection could itself make me *present* to the Other in the way that I am experienced as being in shame (see §15). In fact 'the presence of another in my consciousness' is 'incompatible with the reflective attitude' (221–2/276): as soon as I have regained enough self-possession to reflect on my gesture – which was perhaps not so vulgar after all – the Other in his immediacy has been expelled from my consciousness. Being-for-others represents, therefore, a structure distinct and underivable from reflection.

Sartre emphasizes furthermore the absence of any gap between my self and the object that I am for the Other in a case like shame (which is representative of the basic fabric of everyday being with Others). It is not as if there were two separate things which I am independently conscious of, on the one hand, myself as I am for myself, and on the other, an 'image' or representation of myself in the Other's consciousness, which I need to connect with each other in order for shame to arise: the shameful self-consciousness I have in the presence of the Other does not depend upon any 'concrete psychic operation' (222/276) of judgemental or inferential correlation of my self with another's mental representation. Instead there is a direct and genuinely *reflexive* consciousness of myself *through* the Other, which is why I am 'touched to the quick' and experience my shame as 'an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot' (222/276).

This immediately throws up the question: How is it possible for the Other to be involved in my consciousness in such a way as to constitute an experience like shame, and to endow me with a whole new order of being?

## §27 Realism, idealism and the problem of solipsism [Part Three, Chapter 1, Section II]

By starting with an other-involving self-experience like shame, rather than with a plain ascription of a mental state to another person such as 'John is in pain', Sartre has taken an indirect approach to the problem of other minds. But the problem comes up all the same: if shame is possible, then it must be possible for me to have consciousness, hence knowledge, of the

Other. In Section II, 'The Reef of Solipsism', Sartre tries to show that realism and idealism make knowledge of the Other strictly impossible.

(1) Realism (223–5/277–9): Realism is bound by its very definition (§12) to claim that consciousness of Others is produced by the action of an ontologically independent world on my consciousness. This, Sartre thinks, renders the problem of other minds insoluble. The reasons are familiar from discussion of the argument from analogy: at best the realist can show that other minds are a good hypothesis, but this idea fails to accommodate our immediate recognition of Others as present to us, let alone to validate the certainty regarding the Other's existence which Sartre's analysis of shame brought to light (see also 250–1/307–8).

The underlying problem is that the realist is attempting to make awareness of Others proceed *via* the body, while the body as the realist conceives it is just one more physical object, which has nothing more *intrinsically* to do with consciousness than any other portion of the in-itself – as Sartre notes, even if the Other's body is linked internally to a thinking substance, its relation to *me* is merely external (223/277). Even if it could be shown that other minds are a reasonable conjecture, all that would follow is that we have good reason to believe that there are other minds in the same way as we have good reason to believe that there are electrons; we would not get to the idea that the Other is *present* in their body, and it is this – the difference between intuiting a stone or tree, and intuiting 'the *Other's* body' (224/278) – that needs to be accounted for.

The merely probable character of the knowledge which realism leaves us with cannot be squared with our intuitive certainty of the existence of Others. Realism, Sartre suggests, thus resolves itself 'by a curious reversal' into idealism when it confronts the problem of the Other: the realist has no choice but to concede that, in the case of the Other, the object's *esse* is its *percipi* (224/279).

(2) Idealism (225–30/279–85): Sartre explores in some detail how Kant stands with respect to the problem of intersubjective cognition (which he in fact neglected to deal with), and considers whether the Other might be treated either as a category

constitutive of experience like causality or as a regulative concept (226–8/280–3). Either way, Sartre shows, the situation of idealism is essentially as straightforwardly hopeless as that of realism. For idealism, ‘the Other becomes a pure representation’ (224/279), and even if idealism can furnish rational grounds for my deploying this representation – as facilitating the unification of my experience into coherent systems of representation, prediction of my future representations and so on – it must fail at the limit to allow the possibility of a ‘real relation’ to the Other: the Other may be conceived by idealism as real and as a subject, but it is never given in intuition and it is always thought of as an object (229/283–4). If the Other depends on me for my being, as idealism requires of all objects of consciousness, then I and the Other are metaphysically different kinds of thing – I am a constituting consciousness, and every so-called Other is an object constituted by my consciousness. Which is as much as to say that I am the only true subject or mind, i.e. to affirm solipsism.

Just as realism dissolved into idealism, so the threat of solipsism ‘explodes’ idealism, which is forced either to make desperate appeal to ‘common sense’, or alternatively, to resolve itself back into metaphysical realism by positing without warrant a multiplicity of systems of representations, on the model of Leibniz’s monadology (229–30/284–5). Either way, idealism surrenders to dogmatism.

(3) God (230–2/285–8): In the aftermath of realist and idealist attempts to make sense of the Other, Sartre identifies their shared presupposition: both suppose that the relation to the Other is an external negation, i.e. that there is a primordial given element separating me from the Other, which derives its origin neither from me nor from the Other. For the realist, this element is of the same order as the space separating bodies; for the idealist, it is the discreteness of different systems of representation. On both accounts, it is possible for the Other to affect me only ‘by appearing as an object to my knowledge’, thereby reducing the Other for me to ‘an image’ (231/287). What would overcome this externality, Sartre notes, is the introduction of God into the picture – God, through creating both me and the Other, would establish our internal ontological relatedness – though this, Sartre notes, either gives rise to a new dilemma

(how does God relate himself to me, once I have been created?) or abandons us to Spinozism (the Other and I are both annihilated by our fusion into divine substance).

Section II is called 'The Reef of Solipsism' because, in Sartre's view, realism and idealism are seen to founder *conclusively* on the problem of solipsism. It might seem that, if both realism and idealism leave us trapped in solipsism, then the sceptic is correct and other minds are unknowable. This *would* follow if realism and idealism were the only options, but we have seen that Sartre believes that in general their opposition can be transcended.

**§28 Sartre's critique of his predecessors [Part Three, Chapter 1, Section III, 233–50/288–307]**

Following the pattern laid down in the Introduction, Sartre explores a third way, between and beyond realism and idealism. The failure of realism and idealism shows that my 'original relation to the Other' must be envisaged as an *internal negation*: 'the original distinction between the Other and myself' must be 'such that it determines me by means of the Other and determines the Other by means of me' (232/288). In other words, the 'transcending connection with the Other' must be understood as 'constitutive of each consciousness in its very upsurge' (233/288).

Sartre gives due credit to Husserl, Hegel and Heidegger for having attempted to understand the connection between self and Other in this way, and in this respect he is following in the footsteps of his predecessors. However, to say that the Other is 'constitutive of my consciousness' is only to say what *sort* of solution is required, and in Section III Sartre rejects the specific solutions of Husserl, Hegel and Heidegger.

(1) Husserl (233–55/288–91): Sartre allows that Husserl's solution is different from and improves on that of Kantian idealism. Husserl aims to show that 'a referral to the Other is the indispensable condition for the constitution of the world', because 'the Other is always there as a layer of constitutive meanings which belongs to the very object which I consider' – indeed, for Husserl, 'the Other is the veritable guarantee of the object's objectivity' (233/288). If the Other is presupposed and implicated in the constitution of a world, then I must have intersubjective

awareness prior to and independently of any encounter with a particular concrete Other.

Nevertheless, there is a deep problem with Husserl's account, similar to that which Sartre located with Kantian idealism, due to Husserl's retention of the transcendental subject. Sartre's point is that, even if Husserl's account of the Other as a condition of objectivity is granted, still it does not follow that solipsism is overcome. Two problems stand in Husserl's way. The first concerns the *status* of the Other which he has shown to be presupposed. The transcendental subject in Husserl, as in Kant, is 'beyond experience' and 'radically distinct from' the empirical self (234/289). From this it follows, Sartre argues, that the Other *qua* presupposed is a mere 'meaning (*signification*)', a kind of 'absence', a 'supplementary category' and not a 'real being' (234–5/289–90).

Second, Husserl's idealism, on Sartre's reading, takes knowledge to provide the measure of being, and since it remains the case on Husserl's account that I cannot know the Other *as* he knows himself, viz. from the inside or in interiority, it follows that I cannot know the Other *simpliciter*: whatever I conceive as the Other and take myself to know, must be, once again, a mere 'meaning' correlated with *my* consciousness, leaving me stranded in solipsism. (See also the later comments on Husserl at 271–3/330–2, where Sartre denies that the Other can be made to fall under the phenomenological reduction.)

(2) Hegel (235–44/291–301): Sartre praises Hegel for having made 'immense progress' over Husserl (238/293). What Sartre has in mind is Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic, or dialectic of desire and recognition, in Chapter IV of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. This takes the form of a story – a conceptual sequence in narrative form – in which the self-conscious subject, driven by a desire for recognition as a free and independent being, engages in a struggle with the Other which results in the domination of the one subject by the other. The master-slave relationship which is thereby formed gives way eventually, according to Hegel, to a relationship of reciprocity – Hegel supposes that intersubjective conflict is necessarily overcome, at least at the fundamental metaphysical level, and that what takes its place is social life based on mutual respect, regulated by principles of right.

Sartre uses the occasion to launch a highly general, concentrated attack on Hegel's philosophy, which extends to its basic principles, and cannot be explored here. In so far as Sartre's critique of Hegel is connected specifically to the problem of intersubjective cognition, the main objections are, first, that Hegel's idealism, by turning consciousness of the Other (as well as self-consciousness) into a relation of knowledge (238–9/294–5), reduces the self and the Other to *objects*, and even on that basis does not succeed in showing that the epistemological aim of mutual knowing, required for Hegelian recognition, can be realized (240–3/296–9; see §39). Second, Hegel's very method involves, Sartre argues, an initial misidentification of the problem which stands in need of solution: in considering the multiplicity of self-consciousnesses, Hegel adopts a God's eye, 'totalitarian' point of view, writing his own self-consciousness out of the picture, which means that 'he does not raise the question of the relation between his own consciousness and that of the Other' and so that he has failed to address the real problem (243–4/299–300).

(3) Heidegger (244–50/301–7): The shared fault of Husserl and Hegel is that they continue to regard the relation of self and Other, even though they conceive it correctly as internal, as 'realised through knowledge' (233/288). Heidegger carries over Hegel's 'brilliant intuition' that I 'depend on the Other in my being' (237/293), while finally freeing this ontological relation from the assumption of the primacy of knowledge.

Heidegger in *Being and Time* claims that the world of Dasein is a 'with-world', *Mitwelt*, and that Dasein has 'being-with', *Mitsein* or *Mitdasein*, as one of its fundamental modes; we are *with* one another in a sense in which we are not with stones or hammers. This is a further instance of Heidegger's strategy of undercutting epistemological problems by going back to the existential structures of Dasein, and Sartre agrees that this allows 'the problem of the Other' to be viewed as 'a false problem' (245/301).

Sartre's opening objection to Heidegger is that he mischaracterizes the ontological relation of self and Other, like Hegel wrongly representing the fundamental mode of intersubjective existence as non-conflictual (245–7/301–4). Heidegger takes one particular *kind* of ontic relation – the relation of being *with* another – and

projects this onto the primordial, *ontological* level of the relation of self and Other. Sartre rejects this as arbitrary, since being *with* another is only one of many possible relations: there exists also, for example, being *against* the Other, being *for* the Other, the Other's being *for* me and so on; no justification has been given for regarding these asymmetrical or conflictual modes of relating to the Other as any less primordial than being *with*. Heidegger's image of human intersubjectivity, Sartre suggests, is that of a mute 'crew', of persons as united in an 'oblique interdependence' in place of *frontal* opposition, of a 'we' instead of 'you and me', of mere 'co-existence' in 'ontological solidarity' (245–6/302–3). (Sartre gives his own analysis of first-person-plural consciousness much later, in Chapter 3 of Part Three: see §39.)

Second, and more importantly, Sartre objects that – even if we waive the first objection – Heidegger has no right to regard the problem of my ontic relation of being-with any *particular* Dasein as solved by the ontological relation of 'being-with-others' in *general* (247–50/304–7). Since the possibility of being-with-Pierre cannot be contained in the general notion of being-with-others, 'the relation of the *Mit-Sein* can be of absolutely no use to us in resolving the psychological, concrete problem of the recognition of the Other' (248/305).

A general point against Heidegger's philosophy as a whole thus emerges. Sartre's claim is that Heidegger has *in general* no right to regard the ontic as derivable from the ontological, and that Heidegger's distinction of ontological and ontic relations results, just as in Kantian and Husserlian idealism, in 'two incommunicable levels and two problems which demand separate solutions' (248/305). This general problem of Heidegger's philosophy 'bursts forth', Sartre says, in the context of self and Other (248/305). Sartre has then again used the inability of a philosophical position to solve the specific problem of other minds as a way of exposing its underlying weakness.

### §29 Sartre's theory of the Other

[Part Three, Chapter 1, Section III, 250–2/307–10 and Part Three, Chapter 1, Section IV]

In *The Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre made an original attempt to refute solipsism, arguing that his relocation of the



'I' in the world and outside consciousness renders me no less accessible to the intuitive cognition of Others than I am to my own attempts at self-knowledge.<sup>111</sup>

While the new metaphysics of the self in *The Transcendence of the Ego* does overcome some important barriers to knowledge of Others – since it disposes of the idea that what Sartre calls my 'states' and 'qualities' are locked up in the interior of my subjectivity – it encounters the serious limitation that the transcendental field of consciousness *itself* is left beyond the Other's reach. Impersonal it may be, but transcendental consciousness is nonetheless individualized. The upshot is that solipsism has been refined, not refuted, since my situation is now that only one of the several psychic unities of states, qualities and acts which I cognise in the world – namely, my *own* psychic unity – can be known to be the production of a transcendental consciousness. Sartre seems moreover to force scepticism regarding other minds to convert itself into transcendental solipsism: if, as Sartre says, a 'consciousness can conceive of no other consciousness but itself',<sup>112</sup> then the hypothesis that *this* consciousness, the one that I designate as *mine*, might not be the only consciousness, cannot even be formulated. The re-personalization of the field of consciousness in B&N (§14) does not change the situation, and at 235/290–1 Sartre acknowledges the failure of his earlier proposal.

Sartre's new solution is adumbrated in the concluding pages of Section III (250–2/307–10) and then explicated from several different angles in Section IV. It comes into view when Sartre's analytical redescriptions of the phenomenology of intersubjective consciousness is followed through to a point where our understanding of the phenomenology intersects with the abstract, metaphysical appreciation of the problem of the Other which we have gained from the critique of previous attempts at a solution.

In order to provide us with a grip on the relevant phenomenology, Sartre describes two contrasting scenarios in which I have awareness of the Other. In the first, which is characteristic of how the Other appears to me ordinarily, I become aware of a figure across the way from me in the park as another subject (254–6/311–13). This effects a limited transformation of the world: the lawn assumes a new orientation towards a

remote point with which I am not identical, and there is a 'fixed sliding' away from me as the world 'drains' out of my grasp. This 'decentralisation of the world' (255/313) undermines my own centralization of it, but it is brought to a halt as soon as I contain the Other within his empirical determinacy – I fix the Other as 'that man at a distance from me on that bench reading that newspaper, etc.'. The Other is thereby consolidated for me as a 'partial structure of the world', i.e. as an *object* (256/313). (Sartre refines his account of this form of consciousness of the Other in the chapter on the body: see §31.)

The second scenario returns to the example of shame (259–60/317–18). Moved by jealousy or curiosity, I peer through a keyhole and press my ear to the door – the world is organized around my end of discovering what is being said within. Footsteps in the hall tell me that I have been seen, and I am suddenly 'affected in my being (*atteint dans mon être*): my own structure undergoes 'essential modifications', for I now have pre-reflective consciousness of myself *as an object of the look of the Other* (260/318).

The shame/keyhole scenario, though it comes later in Sartre's text, has priority: according to Sartre it is because and *only* because I have the awareness of the Other exemplified in that scenario, that I can have the form of awareness exemplified in the park scenario. In the park, I am aware of the 'Other-as-object', in the keyhole case, of the 'Other-as-subject', and it is only because consciousness of the Other-as-subject (*conscience-sujet*, of *l'autrui-sujet*) is possible, that consciousness of the Other-as-object (*conscience-objet*, of *l'autrui-objet*) is possible. Awareness of the Other-as-object is a metaphysically and epistemologically secondary form of awareness of the Other, 'the result of the conversion and the degradation of that original relation' to the Other-as-subject (257/315), in rough parallel to the relation between the psychic and consciousness.

We will have no difficulty agreeing that in contexts like the keyhole case we achieve maximal certainty of the existence of the Other. But what, precisely, is the solution to the problem of intersubjectivity which the shame/keyhole illustration allows us to grasp? Ultimately it is simply this: 'certain particular consciousnesses – for example, "shame-consciousness" – bear indubitable witness to the *cogito* both of themselves and of the

existence of the Other' (273/332); I am capable of 'something like a *cogito* concerning' the Other (251/308); 'the *cogito* a little expanded (*un peu élargi*) [. . .] reveals to me as a fact the existence of the Other' (282/342); 'the *cogito* of the Other's existence is merged with (*se confond avec*) my own *cogito*' (251/308); awareness of the Other thus 'shares in the apodicticity of the *cogito* itself, that is, its indubitability' (250/307).

Sartre is, however, not supposing that I migrate into the Other, nor that there occurs a telepathic transfer of the Other's consciousness and 'I' into my own consciousness. To grasp how his solution is supposed to work, the following points are key:

1. Intersubjective awareness consists primordially in an *immediate subject-subject* relation: 'If the Other is to be capable of being given to us, it is by means of a direct apprehension' (250/307); 'the Other must be given to me directly as a subject although in connection with me' (253/311); 'The Other is present to me without any intermediary as a transcendence *which is not mine*' (270/329); 'I experience the inapprehensible subjectivity of the Other directly and with my being' (270/329); 'consciousnesses experience one another without intermediary' (301/362); the Other 'is given not as a being of my universe but as a pure subject' (270/329).

2. From which it follows that the subject-subject relation is *extra-mundane*: 'it is not in the world that the Other is first to be sought but at the side of consciousness' (273/332); when the Other 'looks at me, he is separated from me by no distance, by no object of the world – whether real or ideal – by no body in the world, but by the sole fact of his nature as Other' (270/3328). This follows from the description of Other-awareness as *cogito*-like, and the contrast of the park case, where I look 'across the world' to the Other, with the shame/keyhole case, where the Other appears on my inside, brings out the point. The natural, realist supposition that the world of objects must furnish the epistemological vehicle of intersubjective cognition reflects a misconception of the for-itself as intra-mundane in the same sense as an inkpot.

3. Consciousness of the Other is achieved through the *ontological transformation of my own consciousness*. This is not a metaphor, and not reducible to anything epistemological, i.e.

to any formula concerned merely with how I *think about* my consciousness. The specific transformation effected by the Other consists in the formation, out of my consciousness, of something with characteristics of being-in-itself, on the model of the formation of the 'degraded' psychic effected by my own impure reflection (§24), but with the difference that here the newly formed ontological items have an *unrevealed* and *in principle inaccessible* dimension (they are for me 'unknowable as such', *inconnaissable comme tel*, 263/321). At 260–8/318–27 Sartre explains in detail what this amounts to: the Other has given me a 'nature' (263/321), which I am 'not in the mode of "was" or of "having-to-be" but *in-itself*' (262/320); the Other's look fixes and alienates me from my possibilities (263–4/321–2), spatializes me and inserts me into 'universal time' (266–7/324–6); I become, finally, 'a temporal-spatial object in the world' (267/326). My being is now, as Sartre puts it, 'written in and by the Other's freedom' (262/320). The newly created properties of the human subject in its being-for-others, like other items in Sartre's ontology, subsist in the gulf that separates being-in-itself and being-for-itself, and are not to be conceived as pre-existing, even in a latent form, the intersubjective relation (222/276): the 'discovery' (221/275) of the new ontological domain opened up by intersubjectivity is a non-arbitrary pre-reflective *construction*, one which brings with it a new set of possibilities, somewhat in the sense that one may speak of inventing a new game to be played. (Later Sartre spells out the necessary connection of the relation with the Other with affectivity: 288ff./348ff.)

4. The relation obtaining primordially between individual for-itself is, as noted, a *negative and internal ontological* relation, as opposed to a relation of knowledge – Sartre talks of being 'affected by' the upsurge of the Other (231/286), and of the appearance of the Other as 'undermining' my centralization of the world (255/313). In the full, intricate account of the ontological relation which Sartre gives later in Section IV (282–97/342–58), being-for-others is described as a 'refusal of the Other' (283/343) and as 'a negation effected by me upon myself' (283/343): the Other is a '*refused self*', a 'Not-Me-non-object' which grasps me objectually and hence in alienated form, but I cannot decline to assume responsibility for the 'alienated Me' which the Other delivers back to me without engendering 'the

collapse of Myself' (284–5/344–6). The bond of self and Other, which from one angle has the bare simplicity of the *cogito*, has therefore, in the full view, a dialectical complexity.

The dynamic ontological relations analysed by Sartre are of course open to being registered epistemically by the for-itself – the transparency of consciousness ensures that whenever it is transformed ontologically, it is conscious of itself as undergoing its transformation and therefore in a position to make it an item of knowledge – but they are not themselves epistemic events. Consequently for Sartre it is wrong to say, at the level of philosophical explanation, that I feel shame (in the keyhole/shame scenario) *because of what I know (think, believe etc.) of what the Other thinks of me*, i.e. to interpret 'the effect that another has on me' as an effect that is achieved through my *knowing* of the Other. We are misled easily into thinking that the significance of the Other's gaze is epistemic, but Sartre does not conceive vision as an epistemic power, and the shame I feel is not due to my *knowing* or believing that the Other *knows* or believes me to be peeping. The meaning of the Other's look is instead that of an action. Sartre thus reverses the commonsense order of explanation: on his account, it is not because we gain knowledge of Others that we are ('psychologically') affected by them; it is because we are affected by Others ontologically (and not merely 'psychologically') that we have knowledge of them. That I *do* have knowledge of the Other is therefore not denied by Sartre, but is counted into the total configuration – knowledge is the *correlate* of the other's ontological effect on me, not the cause of that effect.

This point is crucial for Sartre's conception of the depth of the Other's penetration: if the impact of the Other on me is not filtered through my cognition, and is at the disposal of the Other's freedom, then intersubjectivity sets an absolute limit to my freedom (see §33).

5. It follows that it is *not the body* which provides the key to knowledge of Others. The body, like the objectual world at large, plays no epistemic role in Sartre's account (223–4/277–9, 230–1/286, 339–40/405–6): it is neither what hides one mind from another, nor what reveals one mind to another – 'the body is not that which first manifests the Other to me' (339/405). Sartre's positive account of the body will be considered shortly.

### §30 Sartre's solution appraised

To recapitulate Sartre's solution: realism and idealism each try to account for the Other in terms of a *unidirectional arrow* going, in the case of realism, from the Other to me, and in that of idealism, from me to the Other. Both fail, so the solution must lie in conceiving the relation of self to Other in some set of terms that has them co-established at the outset. The attempts of Husserl and Hegel to do just this are unsuccessful, however, because their co-establishment of self and Other is cast in terms of knowledge. The relation of self to Other must be, therefore, a relation of being, meaning that consciousness of others cannot be accounted for by giving *reasons* for believing in the existence of Others. Instead, and accordingly, we turn to the *factual necessity* of the Other which Sartre's analysis showed to be present in our phenomenology, conjoined with Sartre's *metaphysical* account of how such consciousness is possible.

The problem of the seeming unknowability of the Other, we are thereby brought to understand, is ultimately illusory. Correctly viewed, my being-for-others neither creates a need, nor affords scope for a 'new *proof*' of the existence of the Other (250–1/307–8). The impression we have of a non-traversable epistemic gulf between self and Other, issuing in scepticism about other minds, results from mistaking what is in fact a negative ontological relation for the absence of an epistemological relation; and this is a consequence of the more general mistake of identifying consciousness with knowledge, and of supposing that the relation of self to Other is mundane.

The question of whether Sartre's account shows that there must *really be* an Other, or only that my experience compels me to *take it as certain* that there is an Other, is thereby refused application – within Sartre's framework, to raise that question, to doubt the existence of the Other, is to deny the *being* of one's own pre-reflective consciousness: 'I experience the inapprehensible subjectivity of the Other directly and with my being' (270/329) and thereby 'discover the transcendental relation to the Other as constituting my own being' (245/301). The genius of Sartre's solution lies in the way that it preserves and exploits the philosophical intuition on which Cartesianism rests, in order to show, by means of a subtle adjustment, the possibility

that 'absolute immanence' throws us into 'absolute transcendence' (251/309).

The strategy is therefore the same as that employed in the ontological proof given in the Introduction (§5). What has made its execution a much more protracted business is two things. First, the immensely greater conceptual complexity of the Other, as compared with a bare physical object, made it necessary for Sartre to get us clear about *what* exactly is in question – it needed to be shown that a discursive justification of our mere *beliefs* regarding others would be of no avail, i.e. leave genuine solipsism untouched. Sartre had to get us to acknowledge that '[i]n my own inmost depths I must find not *reasons for believing* that the Other exists, but the Other himself as not being me' (251/309). Second, whereas ordinary perceptual consciousness to a degree explains its own possibility – meaning that the ontological proof could be accepted by us as sound, even without insight into the for-itself's structure of transcendence – common sense lacks the conceptual resources to grasp the '*cogito* of the Other's existence' which grounds intersubjective cognition. Hence the necessity of importing the non-naturalistic metaphysical apparatus of B&N – the concepts of internal negation and so forth – in order to assure us that intersubjective cognition is not magical, or, more exactly, to show us that, although it *is* magical from the standpoint of common sense, this standpoint is a philosophically limited one.

Questions nevertheless remain regarding Sartre's account. One concerns the empirical determination of the Other and the possibility of error – e.g., I find I was mistaken in thinking that I heard footsteps; or, I wonder if I am being observed from that house on the hill; or, I am fooled momentarily by a waxwork model, etc. Consideration of this issue requires that attention be paid to Sartre's discussion at 275–82/334–42, where a distinction is drawn between the indubitability of the existence of the Other-as-subject, and the merely probable character of all objects in the world, including the concrete Other-as-object.

A further question which Sartre's theory might be expected to answer concerns the multiplicity of for-itselfes. Why *are* there Others? Why are there *many* for-itselfes? And what *necessity*, if any, is there to the existence of the Other?

The first part of Sartre's response to this question goes some of the way towards an answer. The existence of Others is simply a 'contingent necessity' or 'factual necessity' (250/307, 282/342). Generally speaking, phenomenological ontology leads to ontological discoveries which have aspects of both contingency and necessity: all being is contingent in so far as it lacks internal self-necessitation (none of them is *ens causa sui*), but some being acquires necessity in some of its relations to other being (e.g. being-in-itself is necessary in relation to being-for-itself). To say that the existence of Others is a 'contingent necessity' is thus to say that the existence of Others in general is a very high-level 'brute fact' of the same sort as Sartre's enquiry has elsewhere brought into view.

At one point Sartre may seem to give a different answer, in so far as at 283–5/343–6 he describes a process of 'refusal' of the Other and consequent 'reinforcement' of selfness, which might be taken to suggest that for-itselfs are mutually individuating and co-responsible for one another's existence. This would be a very Hegelian view, however, and Sartre denies clearly that being-for-others is an ontological structure of the for-itself as such: 'We can not think of deriving being-for-others from a being-for-itself nor conversely [. . .] of deriving being-for-itself from being-for-others' (282/342). Sartre's 'reinforcement of selfness' pertains, therefore, to a later stage in the dialectic of self and Other, for which the existence of the Other is already presupposed. We will return to it in §39.

The second part of Sartre's answer is to be found in the 'metaphysical' discussion of intersubjectivity at 297–302/358–64 that closes Chapter 1. Here Sartre observes that our being-for-others can be regarded as the third of the for-itself's ekstases (298/359), and thought of as 'reflective scissiparity pushed further' (299/360): when I become an object for the Other, it is *as if* the endeavour of my reflection to 'objectivate' myself (§16) had finally been realized. This would allow consciousness of the Other to be regarded as a further extension of the non-self-coincidence of the for-itself and thus explained in terms of its intrinsic teleology. Sartre has however reservations about this account, taken as a metaphysical explanation of the existence of a multiplicity of Others, which we will come to in §46.



The final point to be made is this. On the one hand, Sartre's theory of the Other looks to be both *a posteriori* and rigorously perspectival: its linchpin is my appreciation of the Other's invasion, through the look, of my subjectivity, and this is something which I simply *discover to have occurred*. From another angle, however, Sartre would seem to have availed himself, in expositing his theory, of a trans-individual point of view with respect to which the existence of a multiplicity of inter-penetrating for-itselfs is effectively *a priori* – it is, after all, assumed in Sartre's account that the Other who directs his look at me has *already* grasped me as a being-for-itself. In the context of intersubjectivity too, therefore, we find in Sartre's thinking the doubling of perspectival and aperspectival standpoints noted in §13.<sup>113</sup>

### §31 The body [Part Three, Chapter 2]

Nowhere does Sartre's opposition to naturalism and revisionary attitude towards ordinary thought come out more clearly than in his discussion of the body and treatment of the 'mind-body relation'. The common sense of our naturalistic times is that the human body is the foundation and underlying reality of the mind, that the body conceived as an animal organism comes first in the order of things and, by way of cerebral activity – thus on the condition of the evolutionary history that made this remarkable organ possible – gives rise to mental activity, perhaps even – depending on how far this picture is pushed in the direction of a thorough-going materialism – not merely supporting but actually constituting the mind, such that the mind can be understood in terms of a special set of properties or descriptions of brain events, and thus as identical with (a part of) the body.

As part of his rejection of this picture, Sartre denies the priority of the body in its objective, scientific conception – which is, in Sartre's terms, a conception of the body as being-in-itself. In its place Sartre offers in Chapter 2 of Part Three an account which treats the body in terms of three moments, set in the following order:

- (1) Section I: The body as *for-itself* or *for-me* (*le corps comme être-pour-soi, mon corps pour-moi*) is the body as I originally 'exist' it.

The body in this mode is 'that by which things are revealed to me' (304/66), 'the individualisation of my engagement in the world' (310/372), 'the centre of reference' indicated by the 'instrumental-objects of the world' (339/405), and is correlated directly with the spatial orientation of things in the world (306–8/368–70).

At the level of its explanation, Sartre refers embodiment to his theory of facticity (§16): the body-as-for-itself *is* my facticity, '*the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency*' (309/371), entailing that the necessity that I be embodied is just the necessity that I exist contingently.<sup>114</sup>

It follows also that my relation to my body-as-for-itself reproduces the general character of facticity. This means that, on the one hand, I am 'wholly body' in a sense which leaves no room for the thought of the for-itself's being merely '*united with a body*' (305/368), and that the body 'is nothing other than the for-itself' (309/371). But at the same time, the distance at which I stand from my facticity in general, viz. of *being* it by way of having to *assume* it, reappears in my relation to my body: my body is what I 'nihilate' and 'surpass', and so cannot know as a given but must 'reapprehend' in my upsurge (309/372). The 'very nature of the for-itself', as a 'nihilating escape from being', 'demands that it be body' (309/372), and this teleological (as opposed to conceptual) necessity – the demand placed by the for-itself – interposes a distance from my body which is incompatible with plain identity. This complex structure is developed further in Sartre's discussion at 328–30/393–5 of what it is to *have consciousness of one's body* and of the sense in which the body is a *point of view*. (It is here that Sartre talks of my body as something that consciousness must be said to 'exist' in a transitive sense: 329/394.)

Section I attempts to show in detail how this conception of the body can be applied to yield accounts of sense knowledge (310–20/372–83), of physical action (320–5/383–9) and of pain and physical affectivity (330–9/395–404).

(2) Section II: My body as *the-body-for-the-Other* (*le corps-pour-autrui*), has the character of an object, 'a thing among other things' (304–5/366–7).

To show what is involved when my body is produced for me in this form, Sartre returns to the discussion of my

consciousness of the Other, and characterizes in detail the Other's body (340–9/406–15). This, Sartre says, appears to me originally, on the occasion when I have made the Other an object, a 'transcendence-transcended', as belonging to the order of *instruments*, as something which I can 'utilise' or which 'resists' me, and which is 'indicated laterally by the instrumental-things of my universe' (340–1/406–7). This thin apprehension of the Other's body, compatible with the Other's bodily absence (as when I survey the desk at which you write), is transformed when the Other becomes present 'in flesh and blood', at which point the facticity of the Other, the contingency of the Other's being, becomes explicit (342/408–9). The body of the Other as present to me is necessarily '*a body in situation*' which is '*meaningful*' in the sense of being exhausted in movements of transcendence (you raise your hand to wave, etc.) and irreducible to any sum of organic components (344–6/408–13). The Other's body is thereby 'given to us immediately as what the Other *is*' (347/414).

This explication of the body of the Other for me is at the same time, Sartre says, an account of *my* body for-the-Other, since 'the structures of my being-for-the-Other are identical to those of the Other's being-for-me' (339/405).

(3) Section III: My body in so far as I 'exist for myself as a body known by the Other' (351/419) is needed to complete the account.

The impact of the Other's objectivation of me is not restricted to my consciousness as transcendence (my shame at peeping through the keyhole): the Other-as-subject's ontological transformation of me also penetrates me 'in my very facticity' (351/418). Thus, to continue with the example of shame, I 'feel myself blushing', where the other's look is written into my consciousness of my body (353/420).

The body in this third, alienated mode is thus the product of my internalizing, or incorporating, (2) into (1). Sartre explains that the formation of my body existed-by-me-as-known-by-the-Other presupposes linguistic communication with the Other (354/421–2), and that it marks the point where I can, for example, judge a pain to be 'in my stomach' in the sense of an anatomical location (355–9/423–7).

It might be supposed that Sartre intends this ordered set of distinctions to map a merely conceptual progression, providing an account of how we work up from a psychologically and epistemically primitive (infantile) conception of our bodies, to a more complete conception which makes our bodies accessible to natural science and allows us to form such complex thoughts as that I am now enduring an ache in a broken vertebrochondral rib. Were that so, Sartre would have no argument as such with the commonsense naturalistic view, which might incorporate Sartre's account as a chapter in developmental cognitive psychology. Sartre is entirely clear, however, that his account maps ontological levels and relations – the 'order of our reflections [. . .] conforms to the order of being' (305/367); the body-for-me and the body-for-the-Other comprise 'two essentially different orders of reality', 'are radically distinct' (304/366).<sup>115</sup> Our ordinary view is, Sartre notes, that the body-for-the-other is the real body, i.e. that Others see us '*as we are*' (353–4/421), but the whole thrust of his account is to show that it is not ontologically primary.

It is sometimes worried that Sartre – on account of his general dualistic metaphysics, and the analysis of embodiment just seen – may be committed to the kind of famously problematic mind-body dualism which virtually all contemporary philosophy of mind sets itself the task of avoiding.

Without equivocation Sartre denies that the for-itself is identical with the body in the sense understood by physicalism. But with equal clarity Sartre rejects Descartes' and all traditional forms of dualism: unextendedness is, Sartre explains, not a cognition of any intrinsic property or structure of the for-itself, but a proleptical consideration of the for-itself in terms of the determinations of the in-itself – the for-itself *as such* is '*aspatial*', 'neither extended nor unextended' (179/228). The categorial inapplicability of spatial notions to the for-itself is due ultimately to its non-substantial mode of being – which is specifically such that the for-itself can *be* the body only in the mode of having-to-be-it. Thus, where classical metaphysical dualism attempts to express the heterogeneity of the mental and the physical in terms of differences of types of substance or essential properties, and modern anti-physicalism appeals to distinctions of forms of explanation to do the same work, Sartre

pushes the mental/physical heterogeneity all the way back to a difference of mode of existence. This, Sartre maintains, promises to allow the non-physicality of the human subject to be grasped as fundamentally unified with its freedom, practicality, temporality, reflexivity and so on.

There is one sense in which Sartre is in agreement with physicalism in its opposition to dualism, namely, in rejecting Descartes' claim that the mind might exist in separation from the body (306/368). For Sartre, however, this 'identity' – the subject's being 'wholly body' – rests on the thoroughly non-physicalist notion of 'having-to-be', and the body in question is, once again, not the organism of anatomy and physiology but the body as for-itself.

Does this mean that Sartre has done everything that needs to be done in order to meet the challenge of explaining how 'mind and body are related'? The puzzles of substantial interaction – How can two heterogeneous kinds of stuff interact? – or of emergence – How can a mental stream with all of its singular attributes emerge from brain-stuff? – can no longer be formulated, on Sartre's account. And if the question is put to Sartre: How is it that the body in one of its three modes can come to be correlated with the body in its other modes – e.g., that what the orthopaedic surgeon reports as the mending of my rib corresponds to my having ceased to feel that ache – unless these modes are really just different ways of experiencing and thinking of one identical entity, situated at a single ontological level?, Sartre's reply will be that to suppose that explanation must take such a form is simply to beg the question against his general metaphysical position. The mind-body problem – How is this locus of thought, sensation, etc., related to that respiring, metabolizing, etc. organic system? – is resolved, Sartre claims, by grasping the distinctions of ontological level corresponding to the three modes of bodily existence (303–4/365–6).

The situation here is therefore the same as with Sartre's account of other minds, where it would be similarly inappropriate to object that Sartre has left unexplained how it is that we are able to perform a kind of *cogito* concerning the Other. Again the picture offered by Sartre appeals to relations which, by ordinary lights, count as magical, and again

Sartre's defence lies in pointing out that the 'magic' is already actually there in the structure of our experience, cannot be comprehended by common sense without a hypostatization of subjectivity, but becomes intelligible in the metaphysical terms offered in B&N.

The worry concerning Sartre's proximity to Descartes is misplaced, therefore, to the extent that, from the standpoint which objects to Descartes' mind-body dualism that it is incapable of making intelligible the empirical causal relations between the mental and physical, and that it contradicts unacceptably the unity of natural law, Sartre's metaphysics of the mind/body relation will appear objectionable many times over, since it presupposes a general metaphysics which contradicts the basic tenets of physicalism.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Evaluate Sartre's claim that both realism and idealism, and all of his predecessors, fail to provide an adequate conception of the relation of self to Other.
2. Does Sartre provide a solution to the traditional problem of other minds?
3. Is Sartre's account of the body and of its relation to consciousness consistent and convincing?

### **(D) FREEDOM, MOTIVATION AND ETHICS**

Sartre does not employ the distinction, important for many post-Kantians, between theoretical and practical philosophy, for the reason, as we have seen, that Sartre considers that the various issues concerning agency and practical reason which other philosophers bring under the heading of 'practical philosophy' reveal themselves already at the level of ontology, and to that extent he rejects the distinction. It is helpful nonetheless to distinguish in B&N between the themes most closely related to general epistemological and metaphysical issues – the topics discussed thus far – and those with more immediate bearing on action and the question of how I should act, or more broadly, on the attitude to be taken towards our lives. Here in part (D) I discuss the latter, which in textual terms involves chiefly Part Four but also some earlier sections of B&N.

§32 The theory of freedom [Part One, Chapter 1, Section V, 24–45/60–84 and Part Four, Chapter 1, Section I]

For Sartre, as we have noted previously:

What we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the *being* of 'human reality'. Man does not exist *first* in order to be free *subsequently*; there is no difference between the being of man and his *being-free*. (25/61; see also 486/566)

Sartre rejects accordingly any conception of freedom as 'a faculty of the human soul to be envisaged and described in isolation', 'a *property* which belongs among others to the essence of the human being' (25/61; see also 439/514), and the concept of will, as the faculty which bears uniquely the property of freedom, has no place in Sartre's account.

Sartre's initial exposition of his theory of freedom in 24–45/60–84 of Part One, Chapter 1, Section V, 'The Origin of Nothingness', constructs a route to freedom from nothingness, an entailment which, though not conceptually immediate, is not hard to grasp in outline: the negativity of the for-itself entails that, with regard to any existent, the human subject is 'not subject to it', cannot be acted on by it, can 'put himself out of circuit in relation to' it, and so can 'modify it' (24/61).<sup>116</sup>

This rapid sketch, Sartre acknowledges, gives us freedom only as 'a word' (25/61), and a more detailed exposition is needed to clarify and substantiate it.

Sartre begins with the point that we can be free in relation to the things of the *world*, only if our *self*-relation contains freedom: 'human reality can detach itself from the world [. . .] only if its own nature is that of self-detachment' (25/61). Sartre understands this in unrestricted and unconditional terms – the for-itself must be able, not merely to pit one part of its being against another, but to detach itself from *all* that it *is*. In order to show this to be possible, it is necessary to refute the very idea of psychological causal determination (and therewith any compatibilist account which would identify freedom with a species of psychological causation).

Sartre's argument comprises, first (26–7/62–4), an appeal to his earlier analysis in *The Imaginary*, which shows directly, with reference to imaginative consciousness, the for-itself's

power to nihilate reflexively (a thesis which will be supported also by his account of bad faith: see §37). A mental image of Pierre involves multiple nihilations: of the world (which *is not* the locus of the image), of Pierre (who *is not here*), and of the image itself (which *is not* a perception). The existence of subjective as well as worldly *néгатités* entails, therefore, that there is a power of self-detachment in at least *some*, e.g. imaginary, forms of consciousness.

Second (27–8/64–5), Sartre broadens the scope of his argument by giving an analysis of agency or practical reason which imports his analysis of temporality as a structure of the for-itself. Sartre's argument in brief is that any description of a putatively deterministic psychological causal sequence – e.g. motivation M → intention I → action A – omits what is implied by the subjective articulation of this temporal structure: at each point there is a 'cleavage between the immediate psychic past and the present' which 'is precisely nothingness' (27/64), and it is necessary 'that conscious being constitute itself in relation to its past as separated from this past by a nothingness' (28/65). The prior consciousness is '*there*' with its modification of 'pastness', and so 'put out of the game, out of the circuit, in parentheses' (28/65). *Contra* the thesis of psychological determinism, the relation of past and present consciousness is a 'relation of interpretation', meaning that it is always and necessarily a question for me how I should relate myself to my psychic past (28/65).

Nor, in fact, is temporal extendedness a strict condition for freedom: on Sartre's analysis, in a crucial passage at 34/71–2, the same freedom-constituting cleavage is encountered in the synchronic structure of motivation. What it is for me to 'have' a motive M – it follows from Sartre's account of consciousness as without content – is for there to be pre-reflective consciousness of M: motives thus are not *in* but *for* consciousness; M is *mine*, and not part of external spatial reality, but it is mine *as* 'a correlate of consciousness', an instance of the psychic 'transcendence in immanence' discussed in §24, and the nihilation implied by its being a transcendence entails that motives 'can arise only as appearance' and hence are, considered in themselves, 'ineffective' (34/71–2). The structures of temporality and of pre-reflective consciousness (which of course, in Sartre's full



picture, imply one another) are therefore both individually sufficient for freedom.

Note that it cannot be objected that, while Sartre may have shown that negation is required for psychological causality, he has failed to show that exercises of the power of negation are causally unconditioned, i.e. that he has 'not excluded the possibility of a determinism of nihilations' (27/64). Sartre's metaphysics of nothingness have shown that negativity cannot be an *effect of being*, from which it follows that 'every nihilating process must derive its source only from itself' (27/64). Hence the importance of the rejection of the judgemental theory of negation discussed in §9, which is compatible with a determinism of negative judgements.

Third, Sartre observes that it is an implication of his account (by way of his thesis of pre-reflective self-consciousness) that we have *consciousness* of the freedom he has described, and this arguably sets a challenge, since our everyday awareness of ourselves as agents obviously does not reproduce the fractured phenomenology implied by Sartre, and arguably is accompanied by a positive belief in psychological determinism.

Sartre's reply is to offer detailed analyses of conditions, which he calls 'anguish', in which the experience of freedom is acute and explicit. Sartre gives by way of illustration the case of vertigo at the edge of a precipice, where I am gripped, not by fear of falling, but by horror at the possibility of my casting myself over the edge (29–32/66–9), and that of a gambler who becomes conscious of the possibility of abandoning his earlier decision to quit (32–3/69–71). In these scenarios I am confronted with what Sartre calls my 'possibles' – not possible states of the *world*, but possible *being* which I can determine for *myself* and to which I am related ontologically (30–1/67–8; see §18), of one who resumes the life of a gambler, etc.

The purpose of Sartre's case studies is to put a magnifying lens on the fundamental structure of practical consciousness. Though in one sense exceptional, they are obviously not intrinsically different from ordinary practical consciousness: what makes them distinctive is just that reflection has thematized the structure of practical reason in such a way as to display its points of cleavage; I who experience vertigo am *conscious* that my horror is '*not determinant* in relation to my possible

conduct' (31/68); the gambler is *conscious* of the relation of his psychic past to his present *as* problematic, etc.

Anguish is not, Sartre insists, 'a *proof* of human freedom': it merely, but importantly, establishes the possibility of 'a specific consciousness of freedom', as Sartre's account requires (33/71).

This allows it to be seen that the *appearance* of psychological causality in natural consciousness is due to a particular structure, which is ontologically *secondary*. In 'the world of the immediate' which is given to unreflective consciousness, we appear 'in situation', i.e. in a world 'peopled with demands', and engaged in projects (39/76). In the most common situations of life our consciousness is '*in action*', meaning that we apprehend our possibilities only in so far as we are actively *realising them* – 'acts reveal my possibilities to me at the very instant when they are realised' (35–6/73–4). This structure of course does not abolish freedom, since the possibility of withdrawing from all these activities remains intact (36–7/74), but it precludes the reflective apprehension of freedom in which anguish consists.

Sartre's account of why anguish is not our ordinary condition, even though it is consciousness of what is most metaphysically fundamental, extends further, to an account of our 'flight from anguish' and thence to Sartre's theory of bad faith (see §37).

The flight to which Sartre refers to is not the familiar empirical attempt to suppress or repress an emotional state, but the attempt of the for-itself to reconfigure its entire structure. Sartre claims that it involves psychological determinism at the level of reflection, not as a philosophical thesis, but in the form of a primitive 'faith' built around the subject-predicate metaphysics of the human subject critiqued in *The Transcendence of the Ego*: 'it asserts that there are within us antagonistic forces whose type of existence is comparable to that of things', that there is 'a *nature* productive of our acts' which establishes the links between our past and future (40/78), and even that there is in the depths of each of us a true self, *un Moi profond*, which is the origin of our acts (42/80).

We must now turn to the difficult question of how in positive conceptual terms Sartre's conception of freedom is to be expressed.

As we have seen, Sartre talks of freedom as involving some forcible break with the world – a 'permanent rupture in

determinism' (33/70), the subject 'dissociating himself from the causal series' (23/59) – and this may lead us to think that Sartre occupies the box in the free will debate standardly labelled 'incompatibilist indeterministic libertarianism': according to which, freedom is the concept of an event which is (empirically) causally undetermined and so incompatible with universal (empirical) causal determination, and yet actually realized in human action.

This is highly misleading, however, for it implies that Sartre *accepts*, methodologically and metaphysically, the priority and reality of the natural causal order, which would commit him to conceiving freedom as a causal *gap* in the natural order, out of which the free agent steps and/or into which she intervenes. But this could not be Sartre's view, since he rejects *ab initio* the idea that we belong to the natural or any other causal order of being – he even denies that there *is*, prior to and independently of our being-as-freedom, any unitary order which includes both us and being-in-itself. Our 'rupture' with being refers therefore to Sartre's metaphysical thesis that nothingness is nihilation *of* being (§9), not to causal breaks within the natural order. Sartre's conception of freedom presupposes the unintelligibility of psychological determinism, but it involves no thesis *at all* concerning either determination or indetermination. When Sartre talks of 'rupture' and 'dissociation', it is in order to convey what freedom requires *from the point of view* and in the language of those who proceed from the (false, for Sartre) assumption that *prima facie* human agency may be subsumed within a universal deterministic causal matrix. Even the traditional formulation of freedom as involving the truth of 'she could have done otherwise' is, therefore, inadequate as a gloss on Sartrean freedom: in Sartre's terms, it merely *restates* the agent's freedom, without *analysing* this attribution.

When Sartre turns to face the question of 'what this *nothing* (*rien*) is which provides a foundation for freedom' (34/71), he first observes that, in one sense, his position entails that there is nothing (no positive structure) to be described, and then, crucially, he introduces the notion which provides the terminus of his analysis of freedom: 'this nothing is *made-to-be* (*est été*) by the human being in his relation to himself' (34/71), adding that this self-relation has the character of an *obligation* – 'a constantly

renewed obligation to remake the Self' (35/72). ('By definition the for-itself exists with the obligation of assuming its being', *existe sous l'obligation d'assumer son être*, 118/162.)

This difficult notion of obligation, which we encountered in §14, represents a transcendental limit to our understanding of the for-itself (and, on the aperspectival reading of B&N, the final ground of the very being of the for-itself).

Sartre's thought is that we come to a point where we recognize a *necessity* which can be characterized partially but which resists full analysis. It is of course not physical, but nor is it a rational necessity as such: Sartre uses the term 'obligation' as the closest approximation available in order to bring out the shadow of normativity which this necessity casts, but his claim is not that we *judge* in the light of any moral or other *principle* that we ought to give ourselves being, that it is *right* for us to do so. It thus supplies a 'point of indifference' between the theoretical and practical dimensions of the for-itself: our having-to-give-ourselves-being is what underlies both our *cognitive* transcendence and our *action*. Because this necessity constitutes us at the most fundamental level, we cannot detach ourselves from it in the way required for our compliance with it to be subject to our choice; hence Sartre's frequently repeated claim that we are *condemned* to freedom ('we are not free to cease being free', 439/515).

It is because we are nothingness and lack (§17) that we are obliged to (re)make our selves, but this being-lack is not a *distinct* metaphysical cause of the experience of obligation. We do not first discover ourselves to be nothingness, and on that basis *judge* that we need to acquire being. Lack is just a different way of expressing the insight into our being-as-obligation: we *lack* being, as opposed to merely finding ourselves composed of nothingness, only in so far as we already relate to ourselves as obliged-to-give-ourselves-being.

The image of the for-itself as a 'decompression of being' which Sartre uses so often to characterize the for-itself (e.g. xli/32) underscores the ontological character of the obligation, but the point to be clear about, which no physical analogy can convey, is that the for-itself's *obligation* is part of ontology: Sartre's strange, non-commonsensical idea (which has an important historical precedent in Fichte) is that an 'ought' or 'having-to',

a fact or structure describable only in a practical, imperatival idiom, belongs to the fabric of reality. (A point which goes back to the earlier observation, in §14, that teleology for Sartre constitutes the reality of the for-itself.)

When Sartre returns to make a frontal attack on the question of freedom in Part Four, Chapter 1, Section I, the ideas sketched above are amplified greatly. In particular:

(1) 433–8/508–13, 445–50/522–7: The account of agency or practical reason is developed, with historical illustrations (433–5/508–10), in terms of a distinction of *mobiles*, ‘motives’, which are subjective projections of ends (‘the ensemble of the desires, emotions, and passions which urge me to accomplish a certain act’, 446/522–3), and *motifs*, translated by Barnes as ‘causes’ in order to indicate their externality to the subject (a *motif* is ‘objective’, a ‘state of contemporary things as it is revealed to a consciousness’, 447/524), but defined by Sartre as ‘the *reason* for the act; that is, the ensemble of rational considerations which justify it’ (445–6/522).

The difficulty, Sartre insists, is to grasp how *motifs* and *mobiles* conjoin without slipping into an incoherent dualism (447/523–4). Its unique solution, he argues, is to see that they are ‘correlative’ in exactly the way that thetic object-consciousness is correlated with non-thetic self-consciousness: the for-itself’s apprehension of the objective *motif* is simply the other side of its ‘non-thetic consciousness of itself as a project towards an end’, i.e. of its *mobile*, and *vice versa* (449/525). From this it follows that the three terms *motif*, *mobile* and end (*une fin*), form an ‘indissoluble’ unity which refers us to the upsurge of the for-itself in the world and its projection of itself towards its possibilities; whence, again, the unintelligibility of determinism (the illusion of which, Sartre re-explains as the result of converting the *mobile* into an object of empirical knowledge, 449–50/526: the *mobile* is ‘made-past (*passéifié*) and fixed in in-itself’, 450/526).

(2) 444–5/521: The analysis of emotion from Sartre’s early *Sketch* is restated, with emphasis put on the point that the decision to adopt either a magical or a rational strategy in face of difficulty cannot be determined by the world and must belong to the project of the for-itself: ‘My fear *is* free and manifests my

freedom [. . .] In relation to freedom there is no privileged psychic phenomenon' (445/521).

(3) 450–2/527–9: The operation of will, in the sense of the undertaking of a course of action with deliberative voluntariness, is rejected as a necessary condition of freedom: 'the will is not a privileged manifestation of freedom' (452/529).<sup>117</sup> Because freedom is expressed already in the configuration of, and values assigned to, situational and subjective elements, prior to my activity of 'weighing them up' in deliberation, Sartre argues that voluntariness and involuntary spontaneity are merely two different routes or *methods* of pursuing my ends, between which I choose freely. (A more detailed discussion, which includes an account of akrasia, is found at 472–6/550–5.)

The only terms from ordinary psychology referring to the psychological antecedents of action which Sartre is prepared to allow as necessary conditions of freedom are *intention* and *choice*. Their joint constitutive role in freedom is explained at 476–8/555–7: the intention chooses and posits the end, and chooses itself, 'by a single unitary upsurge' (478/557). When Sartre uses these terms, he is of course not thinking of them as special kinds of psychological state, whose existence can be detected empirically and which would provide a marker for freedom. On Sartre's account, freedom is not something for whose presence or absence there *could be* criteria (just as, Sartre argued, consciousness of Others must be *beyond criteria* in order to be possible).

(4) 441–4/517–21: At a higher level of generality, Sartre targets the pronounced tendency of ordinary thought to distribute freedom and determination across different *parts* of the self, and so to understand free action as presupposing a domination of determined psychological parts by free psychological parts (reason's mastery of the passions, etc.).

Beyond the immediate problem that we hereby conceive, apparently, a being both free and determined, and contradict directly the unity of the for-itself (in the manner of Freud: see §25), the problem of relating 'unconditioned freedom and the determined processes of psychic life' to one another intelligibly (441/517), Sartre argues, has no solution, for it cannot be explained how a free spontaneity could gain the requisite direct purchase on a deterministically constituted psychic fact, any

more than it can on external being-in-itself. From this it follows that 'two solutions and only two are possible: either man is wholly determined [ . . . ] or else man is wholly free' (442/518).

(5) 453–4/530–1, 464/542: The traditional 'could have done otherwise' condition on freedom is finessed by Sartre in terms of the subject's original, higher-level project which gives intelligible unity to my actions (see §34). It is false that I could have done otherwise without some change in my original project; but true that I could have changed my original project; and so true conditionally – but on a condition that implies no diminution or qualification of my freedom – that I could have acted otherwise. The debate as to whether, at the level of an empirical choice, an agent could have done otherwise is thus 'based on incorrect premises' (454/530). The 'could have done otherwise' condition remains therefore a secondary conceptual implication, not an essence-giving analysis, of freedom.

Before we go on to assess Sartre's account of freedom, further components of the theory, providing it with important extensions, need to be added.

### §33 Freedom: facticity and situation

#### [Part Four, Chapter 1, Section II]

Sartre's claim that 'absolute freedom' is 'the very being of the person' (581/670) may prompt us to picture the Sartrean subject as enjoying total sovereignty, surveying a transparent world and lord of its own domain. This hyperbolic conception has been attributed to Sartre and drawn vehement criticism, but the discussion of freedom and facticity in Section II, 'Freedom and Facticity: the Situation', makes it abundantly clear that no such megalomaniacal elevation of the self follows from Sartre's theory of freedom.

The text of Section II divides into four parts: (1) 481–4/561–4: An account of how the theory of freedom contradicts 'common sense' beliefs regarding freedom and of why these do not provide effective grounds of objection to the theory. (2) 484–9/564–71: An extension of the theory of freedom showing its relation to the factual given, in which the concept of 'situation' is introduced. (3) 489–548/570–633: A lengthy and detailed account of the fundamental structures of facticity,

namely my 'place', my past, my position as determined by Others, my fundamental relation with the Other, and my death. (4) 548–53/633–8: A summary of what our 'being-in-situation' comprises.

Though all of this material is of high interest and importance (in particular Sartre's account of death, 531–48/615–33, in criticism of Heidegger's notion of 'being-towards-death'), it is the discussion in (1) and (2) which is absolutely crucial for the theory of freedom.

As we saw in §16, Sartre's account of facticity shows why it does not merely *happen* to be the case that the for-itself, when it begins the task of conferring meanings and determining situations, finds itself with being which is not of its choosing: it is metaphysically *necessary* that the for-itself should *not* choose its 'position' (83/126). Now the question for Sartre is simply: If this is so, then why does it not follow that my freedom has *limits* and is *conditioned*, in a sense which contradicts, and shows the erroneousness of, Sartre's claim, entailed by his thesis of the identity of my freedom with my being, of the *unconditioned* and hence *unlimited* character of human freedom?

Sartre agrees that I cannot 'choose to be tall if I am short', that 'I am born a worker, a Frenchman' or whatever, that the world offers resistance to my projects (there is a 'coefficient of adversity of things': I cannot scale every crag), that it may be impossible for me to escape 'the lot of my class, of my nation, of my family', that a prisoner is not always 'free to go out of prison' (481/561, 483/563). But the question is how all of this should be conceptualized. Common sense regards these facts as limits to my freedom, and it does so with consistency, since it conceives freedom in terms of *power*, a conception which Sartre has, however, subjected to criticism. The first point to make is therefore that the *ontological* freedom theorized by Sartre does not and is not intended to correspond to the freedom of which we speak ordinarily when we talk of a person's freedom as bounded by their capacities and powers or as being susceptible to increase and decrease: a distinction must be drawn between 'freedom of action' and 'freedom itself' (482/562), the 'empirical and popular' concept of freedom and the 'technical and philosophical' concept of freedom (483/563). The omnipresence of ontological freedom does not imply, therefore, the absurdity that we are



each as free to travel to the moon as we are to scratch our little fingers.

But disentangling ontological from empirical freedom is not, Sartre recognizes, enough to dispose of the problem (484/564). His theory of freedom asserts, after all, 'something like an ontological conditioning of freedom', in so far as it affirms that freedom requires a *given* (478/558), and it thereby seems to assert 'a kind of ontological priority of the in-itself over the for-itself' (484/564) – which may seem to force us back into the picture of freedom as having a certain *extent*, limited by the facts about how things are, such that 'we can be free only in relation to a state of things and in spite of this state of things' (486/566). Were that so, freedom would be conditioned by things.

The decisive issue, it emerges from Sartre's extraordinarily subtle discussion, is whether or not there is something *in the given* which is both (i) independent of my freedom, and (ii) determinant of my choices. And this is exactly what Sartre is equipped by the metaphysics of B&N to deny: the given figures only by virtue of a *nihilation* and in relation to some freely chosen *end* of mine. Though it is true that 'an unnamable and unthinkable *residuum*' belongs to the given *as being-in-itself* (482/562), this residue does not belong to my *situation* and 'in no way enters into the constitution of freedom' (487/567). Facticity, as Sartre put it in Part Two, cannot be 'grasped in its brute nudity, since all that we will find of it is already recovered and freely constituted': the resistance which it presents is not strictly a '*resistance* of fact' (83/125–6), and the 'given is nothing other than the in-itself nihilated by the for-itself', not a 'pure *datum*' (487/567–8). It would, Sartre says, be absolutely useless 'to seek to define or to describe the "quid" of this facticity "*before*" freedom turns back upon it in order to apprehend it as a determined deficiency' (494/575).

Sartre's concept of 'situation' (formally defined at 487/568; see also 259–60/317) is accordingly not that of a *condition* of freedom – rather my situation is an *expression* and *realization* of my *unconditioned* freedom.

It follows also that questions of what portion of my situation is facticity and what portion is my freedom are ill-formed: analysis of my situation does not peel away layers of soft inefficacious subjective meanings in order to disclose a hard

determining objectivity. On the contrary, as we will see in §34, it leads upwards into subjectivity, towards the for-itself's 'original project'. Hence 'it is impossible to determine in each particular case what comes from freedom and what comes from the brute being of the for-itself' (488/568). Freedom and facticity cannot compete, since '*freedom is the apprehension of my facticity*' (494/575).

Sartre's defence of his thesis of the unconditioned character of freedom implies that freedom is not limited in the ways ordinarily thought, but not, note, that freedom has *no* limits: in fact, Sartre explains, there is a '*real*' and '*true*' limit to my freedom, provided by the Other's transcendence of me, 'the very fact that the Other apprehends me as the Other-as-object' (524–5/607–8; see also 262/320). By virtue of its distribution across intersubjectivity, freedom is therefore *self-limiting*.

Nor does it follow from Sartre's account that the ordinary concept of freedom has no place. The distinction which is needed is between the ontological freedom which B&N seeks to explicate, and freedom as something *realized*. Having isolated the freedom which makes possible human agency, responsibility and existence, another concept of freedom – corresponding more closely to what is ordinarily meant when freedom is talked of as something desirable, which can be lost or gained, increased or decreased, etc. – can then be formulated. But this conception of freedom as positively realized or expressed, and of there being certain conditions under which such realization or expression is possible and others under which it is not, is quite evidently a separate matter, requiring a separate story, from ontological freedom: it will require an account of ontological freedom as variably *carried over* into the products, upshots, conditions or contents of actions; and because, on Sartre's view, this takes us into the realm of ethics, he does not give it consideration in B&N (with the unfortunate result, however, that Sartre's conception of freedom is misunderstood as *identifying* freedom-as-realized with ontological freedom).

That our situations are compounded of, fractured and criss-crossed by, a multiplicity of objective structures – culture, tradition, language, class, race, gender and so on – is therefore in no way denied by Sartre. Nor is it denied that these structures, the products of a historical development which has

unfolded without any providential direction, may not allow themselves to be conquered, either practically or cognitively, by the individual. Whether the web of social and historical structures in which the individual finds himself can be grasped in a way that secures for her the power to reshape them in accordance with her own ends (empirical freedom, a practical power), as opposed to merely setting herself over and against them (ontological freedom), is a further matter, belonging to the philosophy of history and to political and social theory, which B&N does not pursue, although the text gives indication enough that Sartre's view is not naive.

It has been argued, as we will see in the next chapter that Sartre revises his understanding of freedom in his post-B&N writings, and that the later Sartre's concern to understand the logic of freedom in concrete situations requires B&N's account of freedom to be reworked. But it is doubtful that the account of freedom in B&N is inconsistent with the more nuanced descriptions of freedom found in the later Sartre, his view that our *social and historical being* involves a union of freedom with necessity. What Sartre cannot allow is only – and this is what sets him in dispute with later French, structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers – that freedom is without priority and that the relation of subjectivity to objective structure is symmetrical all the way down, i.e. a relation of interaction between ontological equals (let alone, of course, that subjectivity is a mere 'effect' of those structures).

**§34 The original project and choice of myself [Part Four, Chapter 1, Section I, 457–67/534–46 and 479–81/559–60, and Part Four, Chapter 2, Section I, 557–64/643–51]**

It might be suggested that, while Sartre's account of freedom serves to elucidate the first person practical standpoint, the perspective of agents conscious of themselves as having choices to make, there is also a need for psychological explanation from the non-practical, third person standpoint. Do we in that context have to reintroduce the psychological conception of the mental (§24) repudiated by Sartre? If so, then the perspective of freedom is undercut, or at least problematically set in opposition to an objectivist, 'psychic' view of the mental which is

equally indispensable. The challenge for Sartre, therefore, is to show that freedom can serve also in this second capacity, as the basis of *theoretical* understanding of the for-itself.

The section 'Existential Psychoanalysis' (Part Four, Chapter 2, Section I) opens with a critique of the attempt to explain individuals in familiar psychological terms. Psychology first analyses the subject into basic motivational factors and dispositions of an abstract kind, and then appeals to inductively supported psychological types and psychological laws, in order to construct explanations of individual instances of behaviour. (Note that Sartre has in mind here non-reductionist intentional psychology, not hard reductive naturalism; even Jaspers is included, 559/645.)

Holding aside his *a priori* metaphysical objections to such theorizing, Sartre concentrates on the point that this style of explanation necessarily terminates with the postulation of 'inexplicable original givens' – for example: 'ambition', 'a need for intense feeling' – the objection to which is not that we thereby fail to satisfy the principle of sufficient reason – Sartre accepts that 'we have to stop somewhere; it is the very contingency of real existence' (560/646) – but that these irreducibles are of the *wrong sort*: so long as 'ambition', for instance, is conceived as a *property*, something which may have been 'received from' social or physiological quarters, its *relation* to the subject and hence *meaning* is necessarily unintelligible, and the explanation is a failure.

Sartre provides then his clearest restatement in B&N of the thesis of *The Transcendence of the Ego* concerning the non-conformity of human subjectivity to subject-predicate metaphysics, arguing that this metaphysics entails one of two equally unacceptable conceptions of the human subject, as either an unqualified 'substratum', or a 'bundle' of drives and tendencies (561/647). Elsewhere the alternatives are expressed as those of understanding myself either as 'a supporting substance for a flow, a substance deprived of the meaning of its modes', or as 'a horizontal flux of phenomena' (459/536).

What we need, Sartre claims, is 'a *veritable* irreducible; that is, an irreducible of which the irreducibility would be *evident* to us' (560/647) and this, he claims, can only be a '*free unification*' (561/648). So we are led to the concept of a unitary 'original project' (561/648) or 'fundamental project' which is 'purely

individual and unique' to each for-itself (563/650). To grasp an individual in the light of their original project, according to Sartre, is to grasp 'the totality of his impulse toward being, his original relation to himself, to the world, and to the Other', in such a way, furthermore, that this whole can be rediscovered in every part – 'in each inclination, in each tendency the person expresses himself completely, although from a different angle' (563/650).

Mention is made early in B&N of the notion of a single, self-defining choice – e.g., 'I emerge alone and in anguish confronting the unique and primary project which constitutes my being' (39/77) – but it is only in Part Four that Sartre argues for it and clarifies its status.

In Sartre's first statement of the theory (Part Four, Chapter 1, Section I, 457–67/534–46), the original choice of myself, *le choix originel de moi-même* (464/542), is presented as a component of the theory of freedom, one which allows Sartre, as noted in §32, to give an account of the possibility of having acted otherwise. In the second presentation (Part Four, Chapter 2, Section I, 557–64/643–51), Sartre provides it with an independent argument, namely, as we have seen, that it is uniquely compatible with the reality of the human subject as a personal unity, which every empirical form of psychological explanation destroys.

We can think of our original choice, Sartre says, borrowing and amending a concept from Kant, as 'the choice of an intelligible character', so long as we identify this character with 'the unique pattern of the subject's empirical existence' and do not locate the choice at an ontologically prior and distinct level of noumenal existence or unconscious subjectivity (563–4/650, 480/559). If we ask *when* the original choice of self is made, Sartre's answer is that it is contemporaneous with the upsurge of the for-itself in question, and so is made *at no time*, though *not outside* time: 'we must conceive of the original choice as unfolding time and as being one with the unity of the three ekstases' (465/543); the original choice is neither instantaneous nor co-extensive with an entire life but is 'constantly renewed' (480/560). Again, if we ask *why* the original choice of myself is made – why it is *that* choice and not another – no answer can be given in terms of *mobiles* or *motifs*, since these already presuppose a choice of self (462/539). The original choice cannot, however,

be regarded as *deprived* of reasons and causes: it is a 'spontaneous invention' of these, within its own compass (470/549). The choice must consequently express a meaning which 'refers only to itself' and requires no interpretation (457/534–5), its intelligibility deriving from the fact that the original project is 'always the outline of a solution of the problem of being' (463/540). My original choice therefore includes, Sartre notes, the rules for the interpretation, or criteria for determining the meaning of my empirical choices (471/549).

The original choice constitutes 'a *non-substantial absolute* (*un absolu non substantiel*)' (561/648), a description applied in the Introduction to consciousness (xxxii/23), though it is true also, Sartre emphasizes, that the choice must be apprehended as '*unjustifiable*' and thus in anguish, in so far as we apprehend it as 'not deriving from any prior reality' (464/542).

As regards our knowledge of our original choice, Sartre's position is that we lack explicit, thetic ('analytical and differentiated') knowledge of it – necessarily, since it does not *exist* in pre-conceived, atemporal form in order to be subsequently realized – but that we have non-thetic consciousness of it, which (since 'our being is precisely our original choice') is simply identical with our self-consciousness (461–3/539–40). Importantly, this explains why we do not experience our lives as the unfolding of a script with which we are already familiar, why our existence has the character of '*choosing* ourselves', i.e. of responsibility, and not of '*being-chosen*' (464/541), and why, in a complex sense which Sartre describes with care and precision (466–7/544–6 and 469–70/548–9), 'radical modification' of the original choice of myself is possible. Because my original choice of myself lies neither in my past nor outside my temporality, there is no reason why, at each instant of my taking it up and unfolding it, I cannot break with and reverse my previous projects – by quitting gambling or whatever. But at the same time, if my original choice *is* the *total* (rather than merely the *past*) pattern in my empirical choices, and if this pattern has the character of a Gestalt rather than a straightforward iteration, then it cannot strictly be said that I now make, or become, a *different* original choice – any more than a novelist who abruptly changes the direction of a plot thereby writes a different novel. If I quit gambling, I reconfigure my past, which now acquires

the meaning 'renounced'. As it may be put: I can modify at any instant what I *take* my original project to be, but my original project *itself* is not finally determined so long as I am still able to make choices, and to that extent cannot be said to be either modifiable or unmodifiable.

The concept of an original choice of self provides therefore Sartre's reply to the challenge of accounting for the possibility of psychological explanation, by allowing freedom to be *explanatory*. (Sartre later described exactly this as the aim of his biography of Jean Genet: 'I have tried to do the following: to indicate the limits of psychoanalytical interpretation and Marxist explanation and to demonstrate that freedom alone can account for a person in his totality.'<sup>118</sup>)

### §35 Responsibility for the world

#### [Part Four, Chapter 1, Section III]

The extension of the theory of freedom which Sartre makes in the short third section of the freedom chapter is dramatic and, despite a brief intimation at 463/541, unexpected. Sartre informs us that 'man is responsible for the world' (553/639), not merely in the general sense that the being of a world requires being-for-itself, but at the level of the *individualized* for-itself: 'I am responsible for everything, in fact, except for my very responsibility'; I find myself 'engaged in a world for which I bear the whole responsibility' (555/641); 'the responsibility of the for-itself extends to the entire world as a peopled-world' (556/642).

What might incline us to take these provocative remarks at less than face value – to think, for example, that Sartre is offering here a fiction with some sort of exhortative or regulative function for our ethical dispositions, not a piece of metaphysics – is Sartre's statement at the outset that his remarks are 'primarily of interest to the ethicist' (553/638), and his use at some places of the conjunction 'as if', *comme si* ('as if I bore the entire responsibility for this war', 554/640). Sartre's idea would then be comparable to Nietzsche's famous life-affirmative doctrine of eternal recurrence, which Sartre must have known, and which is generally agreed not to be a cosmological thesis but rather a hypothetical thought the entertaining of which has existential import.

Sartre's intention in declaring us responsible for the world is certainly to purge us of a certain attitude, that of taking distance from our lives on the grounds that its fabric has been composed by accident or historical externality, rendering it something alien. But an anti-realist reading of the doctrine would be a mistake, for Sartre says quite clearly that he is 'taking the word "responsibility" in its ordinary sense as "consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or an object"' (553/639), and consideration of the thesis of world-responsibility shows it to be an intelligible and defensible development of his theory of freedom.

Clearly the thesis that each is responsible for the world cannot be understood on the same basis as the responsibility that each has for themselves, since the world is not given to me as a nothingness under the obligation of having-to-be, but rather *as* being; nor even on the basis that the object-world is subject-dependent, since whatever story it is that Sartre ultimately wants to tell about objectivity (§12), he is not an empirical idealist and his position is that the for-itself stands over and against the objective realm, as the facticity correlated with its freedom (§33). World-responsibility must therefore come indirectly.

The following point is in the foreground of Sartre's discussion: responsibility for *the* world derives from my responsibility for *my* world, and responsibility for *my* world from the consideration that it is 'the image of the free choice of myself' (554/639). Now this might lead us to think that the thesis of world-responsibility is simply a logical implication of Sartre's original-project doctrine and that this is all that provides it with support. Although the entailment is certainly affirmed by Sartre, and defensible, there is more going on in this section, and it is important that world-responsibility should receive independent support (if only in order that it should not be taken to provide a *reductio* of the idea of an original choice of self).

Sartre's affirmation that I am responsible for the world in the sense of being its *author* is meant to entail that 'this war is *my* war', but not of course that it was I who declared war (554/639). What is this transcendental sense of authorship-cum-responsibility?

It needs first to be remembered that the theistic or deistic candidate for the world's authorship is excluded (see §47), that



the world on Sartre's account does not simply inflict itself on my passivity, and that I cannot decline world-responsibility on the grounds that I have determined my being independently of the world and already stand in a condition of normative completeness. Still, it may be asked: Why do I have to take *any* sort of quasi-practical attitude here? Why can't I just think, contemplatively: 'Here is the fact of the/my world'? (Granting perhaps that its appearance is epistemically conditional on my subjectivity, but thinking nothing about questions of responsibility.)

Here, yet again, Sartre's rejection of naturalism and realism is crucial. If Sartre's view were that theoretical cognition is an independent, self-sufficient, autonomous mode of consciousness, the world being merely its object, then there would be no compulsion to 'attitudinise' the world beyond having-knowledge-of-it. Similarly, if the world were the essentially non-human nature of philosophical naturalism, then, as Sartre notes (554/639), a relation of responsibility to it would be unintelligible. But the world belongs to *human reality*, and as we saw in §17 and §19, cognition is merely a sub-structure in the relation of the for-itself to the in-itself, the general character of which is *practical*. So it is both possible and necessary, in general terms, that the world be thought under practical categories. This means that something must fill the otherwise empty space which appears when I form the thought of 'that which stands to the world in a relation of responsibility'.

On this account, the unjustifiability of the for-itself (the lack of reason for its existence) and of the world (its merely 'given', contingent character), which common sense may take precisely as reasons for *refusing* world-responsibility ('I did not ask to be born', 555/641), flips over into its opposite: *because* I am not the foundation of my being and so must transcendently 'take up' the world on which I depend in order to discharge my obligation-to-be, and *because* the world lacks the self-sufficiency of Spinoza's One Substance, and finally, *because* there is nothing else that might assume responsibility for the world, I am obliged to do so.

Put slightly differently: Sartre's claim concerns what emerges when we explicate what is involved in my thinking my world to be *mine*, and it is that, because realism is to be rejected (this world is not mine by virtue of its *impinging* on me, nor of its *containing* me spatio-temporally, etc.), the relation must have

a character which is both *internal* and *practical*, and that only some conception modelled on responsibility – albeit of a relatively indeterminate kind – provides an approximation to what needs to be thought.

Note finally that, if Sartre's thesis of world-responsibility stands independently of his thesis of the original choice of self, then these two extensions of the theory of freedom can be regarded as mutually supporting. Jointly they conduce to an orientation which precludes common attitudes of 'remorse or regret or excuse' (556/642), of dwelling on counter-factuals and identifying ourselves with unactualized trajectories that our lives could have taken but did not, and so on. The result is an extraordinary distillation and synthesis of stoicism with intensified active self-determination.

It remains to be considered whether the new attitude of responsibility for the world, beyond its cathartic role in undoing my alienation from my contingency-filled life, has other-regarding, moral implications. Sartre's view, we will see in §44, is that it does, which is where his world-responsibility parts company with Nietzsche's eternal recurrence.

### §36 Sartrean freedom appraised

The objection was put by one of Sartre's earliest critics, Gabriel Marcel, that his notion of freedom is 'inexplicable' and 'deeply unintelligible', and that by treating freedom as omnipresent in human reality, Sartre 'debases' it.<sup>119</sup>

As an initial reaction this is understandable, but nothing can be decided regarding the value of Sartre's theory of freedom until it has become clear exactly what he is and is not saying, and the theory has been set in the context of both Sartre's philosophical project and the problem of human freedom as such. This is too large a brief to be executed here, but there are some important points which can be made and added to the observations made in Chapter 2 regarding the general methodological difficulty presented by the problem of freedom and Sartre's radical response to it.

First, concerning the issue of explicability and intelligibility, it needs to be emphasized that what is to count as philosophical explanation or its failure must be relativized to the context at hand – and that Sartre's entire design is to reposition freedom

as a final *explanans*, and to explain why it is mistaken to think of freedom, in the final analysis, as an *explanandum* of any sort. This means, not that the concept of freedom is isolated in indefinability, but that it is locked into horizontal relations with other fundamental concepts, and the measure of success of Sartre's strategy is that we should reach a point where these merge into one another, as they do, he claims, on his account: 'Thus freedom, choice, nihilation, temporalisation are all one and the same thing' (465/543); 'Choice and consciousness are one and the same thing' (462/539); 'What we have expressed in Part Two in terms of lack can be just as well expressed in terms of *freedom*' (565/652).

This gives the concept of freedom a strange status in relation to ordinary empirical concepts, but Sartre acknowledges this and explains why it is not problematic in his discussion of the issue at 438–9/513–14. Freedom can have 'no essence', for to cognize it as having one would be to make it a quasi-object – to conceive it as constituted, like a doing or an action – and the question would then return, as to what power is responsible for this constituting, generating an infinite regress. What philosophical reflection can do in place of identifying an essence or universal is to refer us back reflexively to '*my* particular consciousness' (438/514), and specifically to my existence as disclosed in non-thetic pre-reflective consciousness, where freedom is grasped as 'a pure factual necessity' (439/514). We possess therefore 'a certain comprehension of freedom' (439/514), which corresponds in exact degree and kind to what Sartre's metaphysics of freedom implies it is philosophically possible to achieve.

It is to be noted how Sartre's view accords with the peculiar epistemology of freedom. Our knowledge that we are free has the same immediate and certain, yet contentless and transparent character as our knowledge of our own selfhood and existence. Turning reflection on myself in an endeavour to locate what it is about me, or within me, that makes me free, necessarily I come up with nothing; nothing that I could bring to light through introspection or 'inner' intuition could *be* my freedom.

Knowledge that we are free entails that our freedom must have a ground, yet we can have no determinate conception of

that ground. One option would be to interpret the epistemology of our freedom in terms of our possession of a special kind of *idea*, one without any empirical content, and which the necessary sensory conditions on human knowledge forbid our ever grasping as realized, but which we are rationally required to conceive ourselves in the light of. In place of this strategy, which is Kant's, Sartre identifies our freedom with the mode of being which he calls nothingness and in so doing translates a phenomenological characterization (freedom is contentless and transparent) into a metaphysical explanation (freedom is grounded on nothingness): if, when I try to grasp what my freedom consists in, I find nothing determinate – nothing but the shape of my selfhood and the other structures of the for-itself – then the ground of my freedom cannot be anything other than my very existence and mode of being.

Second, concerning Sartre's alleged promiscuity with the notion, we saw in §33 that Sartrean ontological freedom is not intended to correspond to the freedom of which we speak ordinarily when we talk of a person's freedom as bounded by their capacities and powers, or as being susceptible to increase and decrease, let alone of political freedoms as having greater or lesser scope. Similarly, ontological freedom is dissociated (at the present stage of enquiry) from the notion of freedom as a good. The omnipresence of ontological freedom does not imply, therefore, the absurdity or 'debasement' that would have resulted if Sartre had claimed that slaves are not in need of emancipation because their freedom is already complete.

That said, Sartre's theory of freedom is intended to be contra-commonsensical, and acceptance of it entails revising our judgements of responsibility and culpability, praising and blaming on a different pattern, and giving different psychological explanations of human behaviour from those previously regarded as correct. (A second and distinct set of changes occurs through the application of existential psychoanalysis: see §41 and §42.)

Determining the impact of Sartre's theory on ordinary thought is however not an altogether straightforward matter. Grasping ontological freedom is not like making an empirical discovery on a par with, say, Freud's discovery of the ubiquity of sexual motivation, or Marx's discovery of the role

of economic motives in determining systems of moral and religious belief. It is a *philosophical* discovery, which effects changes in different ways at different levels. In the first place, it effects an everything-and-nothing transcendental change, whereby all of human reality in one sense remains the same while being cast in a new, non-empirical light, such that we assume responsibility for the world. Second, it entails a differential and selective change in our psychological and practical description and evaluation, which involves expunging some (deterministic) conceptions and modes of thought. Portions of the language of ordinary psychology are required to undergo modification, at least to the extent that the genuine sense of predicates such as 'lazy', 'homosexual', etc., and of judgements of psychological capacity and incapacity, must be recognized as elusive and redetermined more finely. B&N does not include a rule-book for revising ordinary judgement, and Sartre's theory explains why it would not be possible to draw one up: if ontological freedom is a transcendental, not a psychological concept, then no algorithm can be provided for extracting determinate empirical implications from it; to the extent that this leaves a gap in Sartre's theory, it is one that his fiction may be held to fill. The third change made by ontological freedom, which presupposes no grasp of philosophical theory, is expressed in Sartre's concept of pure reflection (see §43), which refers to a non-discursive, intuitive discovery of one's *own* ontological freedom, a privileged reflexive cognition of the sort that entails a change in one's practical orientation.

If Sartre's discussion of freedom is compared with much of the contemporary literature on the topic, one is struck by the absence of any explicit reference by Sartre to the theme of rationality. This is not because Sartre thinks there is no connection of freedom with reason: as we have seen, reason is comprehended firmly *within* Sartrean freedom, in so far as it is presupposed by the unity of *motif*, *mobile* and *fin* that constitutes action; nothing without rationality could have the character of a project.

That Sartre does not talk of rationality as a constitutive condition of freedom has several explanations. Sartre does not think of freedom in terms of filling gaps in the causal order with reasons for action, nor of reasons as elements in

psychological sequences. The more general absence from B&N of any discussion of reason or rationality is in part a reflection of Sartre's attitude to epistemology (§8), and in other part due to the fact that his methodology and metaphysics make it unnecessary for him to invoke our possession of a superadded 'faculty of reason' in order to explain how we differ from animals and other unfree beings. Ultimately, Sartre gives no independent account of rationality as a distinct capacity because he regards it as emerging necessarily with freedom: freedom is undetermined responsibility for determination, and as such *constitutes the space of reasons* – which is why being-in-itself falls outside this space, i.e. can neither have nor lack reasons. Shortly we will see the specific sense in which Sartre accords priority to freedom over reason (§§37–8).

On a favourable estimate, then, Sartre's theory of freedom escapes the charges of unintelligibility and absurdity, and the case for human freedom made in B&N is strong enough to shift the burden of argument onto those who deny that freedom exists in the form claimed by Sartre; in which case it would be necessary, in order to challenge Sartre's account, either to offer alternative accounts of the ground of responsibility and the apparently distinctive character of human existence, or to demonstrate that these notions are illusory.

### §37 Bad faith [Part One, Chapter 2, Sections II–III]

We saw in Part (B) that Sartre regards human motivation as having a metaphysical source; indeed this claim goes back to his axiom that consciousness can derive its motivation only from itself (§3). B&N presents a detailed theory of human motivation in several stages, the first of which is the theory of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*).

In the first of the two sections on bad faith (Section II) Sartre sketches the 'patterns' (*conduites*) of bad faith in a series of portraits. Best known is the waiter whom Sartre describes as striving to render his being a pure incarnation of the essence of 'waiter-ness': 'All his behaviour seems to us a game [ . . . ] the waiter in the cafe plays with his condition in order to *realise* it'; he seeks to 'be a cafe waiter in the sense in which this inkwell *is* an inkwell' (59/99). A more complex case is that of a woman on a date, whose companion takes her hand but whose mind is not

made up regarding the question of how she should respond to his sexual intentions:

the young woman leaves her hand there, but she *does not notice herself* leaving it [ . . . ] the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion – neither consenting nor resisting – a thing [ . . . ] She has disarmed the actions of her companion by reducing them to being only what they are, that is, to existing in the mode of the in-itself [ . . . ] she realises herself as *not being* (*comme n'étant pas*) her own body, and she contemplates it as though from above as a passive object to which events can *happen*, but which can neither provoke them nor avoid them, because all its possibilities are outside of it. (55–6/95)

Further instances are given in the form of a complex dialectic (63–6/103–6) between the 'homosexual', motivated by guilt and fear of public condemnation to refuse to draw from the facts of his behaviour 'the conclusion which they impose' (63/104), and the 'champion of sincerity' who urges him to confess his homosexuality on the basis that doing so will effect in him a self-transcendence, rendering him an (incoherent) amalgam of freedom and psychosexual thinghood (64–5/104–6).

What all these cases (and that of the psychoanalytic analysand: see §25) have in common is not that they involve outright self-deception – that would be a very strained description of the waiter, or of the champion of sincerity – but that they all involve consciousness of human subjectivity in the thing-like terms of being-in-itself. This consciousness is *intended*, a *project* of the for-itself's: all bad faith manifests a *choice*, made not on the reflective, voluntary level but pre-reflectively as a 'spontaneous determination of our being' (68/109). And because veridical consciousness of oneself is retained at the pre-reflective level, the theory of bad faith protects Sartre's doctrine that self-knowledge is inescapable, ensuring that personal responsibility remains wholly intact. (Bad faith is the first form in which freedom fails to affirm itself, the second being ethical failure: in the case of bad faith, it is the for-itself's own freedom which it fails to affirm, while in the ethical case, it is the freedom of Others; see §44.)

*Mauvaise foi* and self-deception do not, therefore, express the same concept. Self-deception names a problematic configuration of beliefs and (arguably) intentions, a pattern of psychological attributions which we find it necessary to employ in some instances. Bad faith, though also employed by Sartre in a more superficial, descriptive sense where it means simply and roughly 'a person's not being honest with themselves', is in its full meaning a strictly theoretical concept of Sartre's, inseparable from his metaphysics of the human subject. Nevertheless, the concepts are interlinked – at least some instances of bad faith involve patent self-deception – and the issues they raise are connected very closely.

Sartre is fully aware of the paradoxical character of self-deception, indeed he spells it out in terms so clear that his descriptions are often quoted by philosophers pursuing the challenge of reinterpreting the propositional attitudes which self-deception involves in non-paradoxical terms. And yet Sartre does not begin to provide it with a formal resolution, of the sort that one finds explored in the large literature on self-deception. Why is this?

Sartre wishes to argue that the only way of grasping how the attitudes in question are possible, is by grasping the human subject as a non-self-identical for-itself: if the paradox of self-deception is, as Sartre supposes, formally insoluble, then this is grist to Sartre's mill, for it means that the actuality of self-deception puts pressure on the traditional metaphysics of the human subject. It does so, specifically, by showing that belief must be understood not as a 'psychological fact' but as the problematic structure we saw earlier in §24. This conception of belief, Sartre argues in Section III, allows us to grasp the 'conditions for the possibility' (68/109) of bad faith. As Sartre puts it, the 'faith' of bad faith – meaning: the stance we take towards belief *as such*, the manner in which we construe *what it is* for us to believe, in so far as we pursue a project in bad faith – consists in determining 'that non-persuasion is the structure of all convictions' (68/109). And this is possible only in light of the 'self-destructive' teleology of belief *per se*: 'the primitive project of bad faith is the utilisation of this self-destruction of the fact of consciousness' (69/110); the subtle self-annihilation of bad faith – 'I believe in order not to believe' and 'I do not believe *in order to* believe' – 'exists at the basis of all faith' (69–70/110).



The metaphysics of the for-itself thus explains bad faith at two levels, or in two respects: (1) it explains the doxastic 'how' of self-deception, the 'faith' of bad faith; and (2) it identifies the 'why' of bad faith, viz. the end of becoming in-itself. In the diversity of *conduites* in bad faith, these can combine in different ways: (i) The end of becoming in-itself may be pursued *for its own sake*, either doxastically (the homosexual, the champion of sincerity) or sub-doxastically, at the level of consciousness rather than belief (the waiter). (ii) Becoming in-itself may be employed *instrumentally*, in a project whose end is provided by motives directed towards ordinary, non-metaphysical ends (the woman on the date). Or (iii) bad faith may consist simply in the 'faith of bad faith', as in the case of ordinary, non-Sartrean self-deception, where I twist my beliefs at the behest of some ordinary motive and employ no other, non-doxastic techniques; for example, I believe that I am courageous when I know that I am not.

The great interest of bad faith, the reason why Sartre dwells on it, at such an early point in B&N, is therefore that it points up the *limits* of ordinary psychology: belief is not the 'psychological fact' we ordinarily think it is. This point deserves development.

Bad faith involves, at a deeper level than the doxastic contradictions which lie at its surface, a *pragmatic* contradiction – freedom seeks to negate itself, yet it expresses itself in this very seeking. In §38 we will see the deeper thesis of Sartre's in the light of which freedom's self-negation, despite its contradictoriness, is made intelligible.

The net result is to force us to recognize that ordinary psychology is not basic and autonomous in the way we assume it to be. On the ordinary picture, expressed in many positions in the philosophy of mind, psychological explanation turns on a formal rational structure, expressed in the execution of practical syllogisms, which receives its content from the particular beliefs and desires formed by agents, but which is itself unconditioned; in the relevant, non-contingent sense, there is nothing prior to it.

Self-deception and other forms of irrationality pose an explanatory problem for this conception, which it is Sartre's strategy to exploit in order to present that conception with a philosophical challenge. Sartre does not deny that psychological explanation hinges on rationality: he accepts that

reason, rather than waves of passion or whatever, is what necessarily moves us to and explains our actions. What he denies is the explanatory self-sufficiency of the ordinary conception of the agent as a practical reasoner. Bad faith, according to Sartre's argument, displays the ungroundedness in rationality of human action *per se*: the 'paradoxicality' which characterizes self-deception is really a feature which underlies *all* human action; beyond ordinary psychology we discover a 'paradoxicality', that of freedom in the form of the fundamental project, of freedom negating itself, which ordinary psychology cannot make intelligible.

In this sense, freedom is beyond reason, and supplies the condition for any application of ordinary psychology. Our rationality rests on a freedom which transcends reason, and is not autonomous. (At 570/657-8, Sartre describes the original choice of myself as 'prior to all logic', 'a prelogical synthesis'; 'choice is that by which all foundations and all reasons come into being', 479/559.) It should, accordingly, be no surprise that our psychological existences include bad faith, since freedom has a structure of its own, which is broader than and independent from that of reason; the illusion of reason's explanatory self-sufficiency is what makes self-deception seem 'unaccountable'.

It is to be noted how this strategy also gives Sartre an edge over Freud, who is similarly occupied in using phenomena on the edge of ordinary psychology, poorly accommodated in the matrix of practical reasoning, to penetrate to a level below ordinary rational explanation. Psychoanalytic explanations of human irrationality lead back to unconscious processes, governed by non-rational laws (the pleasure principle, primary process, the laws of phantasy, etc.). What it leaves conceptually obscure is the interface between these processes and the conscious ego, which is beholden to the norms of rationality. Sartre's metaphysics, by contrast, allow irrationality to be grasped as immanent in *self-conscious being*; and this resolves the puzzle of how I, a self-conscious rational being, can nevertheless 'surrender myself' (willingly) to irrational motivation.

Finally, a word in this context on the concept of character, which Sartre finds enormously important. Sartre's metaphysical rejection of the assumption of underlying mental dispositions and abiding personality entails his rejection of any *explanatory*

reality for the concepts of character or personality traits, and of attributions of individual character. If character traits were explanatory, then, Sartre supposes, they would explain actions in the way that the fragility of glass explains its breaking. But, as the conflictual dialectic between the 'homosexual' and the 'champion of sincerity' shows, Sartre does not think that character is a fiction with which we can *dispense* – the issue contested by the homosexual and the champion of sincerity cannot be simply dropped. And nor does Sartre think that character ascriptions lack *objectivity*: at least across a certain range, the facts *do fix* what characterizations are true of me; characterization of persons is not arbitrary and I cannot make it true that the facts of my behaviour mean whatever I wish them to mean (§33). It is, according to Sartre, metaphysically and not merely psychologically necessary that we think of ourselves as cowards, heroes, homosexuals, heterosexuals, successes, failures and so on. We are thus like figures in a novel who know themselves to be fictions, and find themselves perpetually torn between immersing themselves in, and seeking to exit from, the fictional existences which they sustain. (The necessity of character presupposes, of course, our being-for-others: see 349–51/416–18 and 552/637.)

It follows that, in rejecting character, Sartre is not denying that anybody has ever really been, for example, brave or sincere.<sup>120</sup> Sartre is not, like the French moralists, operating within ordinary psychological understanding, but going beyond it. His aim is to show how ordinary notions of character are inhabited and haunted by a tension, which shows itself at the level of reflective scrutiny, and which is inseparable from their dynamic role in human life and the *interest* which they hold for us. The importance of Sartre's theory of character lies, then, in (1) its explanation of why we play the language-game of personal characterization at all, and do so with such ferocity; (2) its identification of the internal possibilities which the game contains, of our coming to experience it as puzzling, frustrating, contra-purposive and even as collapsing altogether.

### §38 The fundamental project of the for-itself

#### [Part Four, Chapter 2, Section I, 564–8/651–5]

The theory of bad faith shows the metaphysical motivation of *some* instances of human behaviour, but not that human

motivation *per se* is ultimately metaphysical. That all human motives do go back ultimately to metaphysical sources is, however, a direct implication of Sartre's claim that 'it is impossible to assign to a consciousness a motivation other than itself' (xxxi/22): the original project of each individual for-itself, Sartre points out, is an 'original project of being', *un projet originel d'être*, which 'can aim only at its being', *qui ne peut viser que son être* (564–5/651–2).

Now it is Sartre's further claim – a deduction from his metaphysics of value (§17) – that the for-itself's motivation is of a single fundamental kind:

it is as consciousness that it wishes to have the impermeability and infinite density of the in-itself; it is as the nihilation of the in-itself and a perpetual evasion of contingency and of facticity that it wishes to be its own foundation. This is why the possible is projected in general as what the for-itself lacks in order to become in-itself-for-itself (*en-soi-pour-soi*); and the fundamental value which presides over this project is exactly the in-itself-for-itself, that is, the ideal of a consciousness which would be the foundation of its own being-in-itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself. It is this ideal which can be called God. Thus the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God [ . . . ] man fundamentally is the desire to be God. (566/653–4)

The fundamental project of being God is *universal* – the project of being-for-itself as such or 'of human reality' – in contrast with the *individual* original project that defines each for-itself. The latter is related to the former as a variation on a theme.

The idea that a single motive provides the source of each and every motive that we have may seem improbable, but before anything more is said about this there is a potential confusion which needs to be removed. It is not part of Sartre's agenda to deny that we want to drink because we feel thirsty, or to stop on a hike because we are fatigued. Thirst and fatigue are however, as we have seen, admitted by Sartre as part of our facticity, and do not *themselves* motivate: motivation begins only with our reconstituting them as *mobiles*, and only at *that* point does

Sartre's metaphysical motivation thesis come into play. Put another way, it is a mistake to think that Sartre's motivational monism commits him to saying that metaphysical structures of the human subject provide *directly all of the content* of all reasons for action. Rather, Sartre's thesis concerns (a) the *form* of all human motivation, or in other words, how all content must be conditioned in so far as it is motivational, and (b) *some* of the *direct* content of human motivation and *all* of the *ultimate* content of our most important motivation. The relation of concrete empirical desires to the fundamental desire to be God involves, Sartre explains (567/654), the mediation of our situations and 'symbolisation' of the original choice of self of each individual for-itself, in ways that call for existential psychoanalysis (§§40–41).

In order to see what this means materially as regards the interpretation of human beings, one should turn to Sartre's fiction and biographical studies. There is however more to be found on this topic in B&N: in order to show why we should think it true that our motivation has the metaphysical character he claims, Sartre also offers a detailed account of interpersonal motivation (§39), and a systematic analysis of the basic categories of desire (§41).

### §39 Human relationships [Part Three, Chapter 3]

Sartre's account of human relationships is given in Chapter 3 of Part Three, 'Concrete Relations with Others'. Essentially what Sartre attempts here is a *metaphysical* analysis of human relationships, as opposed to a mere psychology or anthropology. A foretaste of the material in Chapter 3 was given in the homosexual/sincerity dialectic (§37), which Sartre compared to Hegel's master/slave dialectic (65/105), and its underlying thesis emerged in Sartre's critique of Hegel's account of the Other (242–3/299). Sartre's profound disagreement with Hegel's optimism regarding the relation of self to Other turns on the possibility of mutual recognition, of my recognizing the Other as a subject-recognizing-me-as-a-subject. The dilemma of intersubjectivity, according to Sartre, is simply that 'one must either transcend the Other or allow oneself to be transcended by him. The essence of the relations between consciousnesses is not *Mitsein*, it is conflict' (429/502).

Sartre's thesis of the existentially problematic nature of relation to the Other brings together two elements which are originally distinct, but capable of complex combination.

The first and most important is Sartre's elaboration at 283–5/343–6 of the basic disjunction which emerged in his account of the epistemology of the Other, viz. consciousness of the Other either as-object or as-subject (§29).

As we saw in §14, Sartre holds that there is a 'circuit of selfness' which is prior to intersubjectivity. Now the Other, as Sartre puts it, 'reinforces' this selfness. This reinforcing takes place because, when I encounter an Other, I encounter the *selfness* of the Other, and this allows me to differentiate *my* selfness from that of the Other: I identify *that* self as *not* being *my* self. As Sartre puts it, I 'refuse' the selfness of the Other. In this way, the intersubjective relation engages with the teleology of self-consciousness, and the Other enables me to be myself more fully – I enjoy the more profound experience of selfhood that comes from being able to say not merely 'I am I', but 'I am *this* I', 'I am I and *not* you.'

The problem arises because this self-affirmation through the mediation of the Other is possible only on the condition that the Other is a self that also, reciprocally, *refuses me*. The Other must do this, since otherwise he would not be a self, and so would not provide me with the opportunity for self-affirmation. As Sartre puts it: 'I make myself not-be a being who is making himself not-be me' (285/345).

But this renders the 'double negation' of self and Other – my negation of the Other, his negation of me – 'self-destructive' (285/345): the Other enables me to reinforce my selfness, but when I refuse the Other, I reduce the Other to an *object*, the effect of which is to undermine my self-affirmation, since the Other is no longer a subject who provides me with a self to refuse. The for-itself therefore has to continually *resurrect* the Other as a subject in order to repeat its original self-affirmation, which involves – since I thereby affirm the self of the Other – a negation of my *own* self; which then stands in need of re-affirmation, the whole process repeating itself *ad infinitum*.

I thus oscillate back and forth between two polar conditions – either reducing the Other to an object and affirming my freedom, or being reduced by the Other and losing my freedom;

either reinforcing my self, or being denied a self by the Other. This is not a dialectic in Hegel's sense, because it is never mediated – no progress is made – rather it comprises, in Sartre's image, a 'circle' of ever-increasing convolution (363/430). (For succinct basic statements of this contradictory process and the 'two primitive attitudes' which I may take towards the Other, see 363/430 and 408/478–9.)

This establishes that the basic motivational stance of the for-itself with respect to the Other cannot be one of indifference: I cannot simply *look away* from the Other. The Other has something of mine which I am in need of, viz. my fuller, reinforced selfness.

The contradiction of my freedom and that of the Other is sufficient to generate the intersubjective dynamics described in Chapter 3, but it involves also a second element, deriving from the fundamental project of being-for-itself described in §38. This project, Sartre demonstrates, assumes baroque forms in the context of human relationships: intersubjectivity, since it incorporates necessarily *both* my being-for-itself *and* the in-itself aspect which the Other has bestowed upon me, provides a *channel* for the fundamental project, offering us a sphere in which we may seek to realize our aim of becoming in-itself-for-itself. For example, since in the Other's look I am in-itself and the Other is for-itself, and my relation to the Other is an internal ontological relation, the *totality* 'I-and-the-Other' – *if* I could somehow identify myself with it – would establish me as in-itself-for-itself.

Sections I and II, the detail of which cannot be entered into here, show how the dialectic of self and Other absorbs and fuses the twin motives of seeking reinforced selfness and the fundamental project of being-for-itself, taking concrete form in the projects of love and hatred, masochism and sadism, indifference and desire. Very briefly: discovering myself to be possessed by the Other, I attempt initially to recover my freedom by absorbing or assimilating the Other's freedom, i.e. the Other-as-looking-at-me (364–6/431–3), first in the project of love (366–77/433–45) and then in that of masochism (377–9/445–7); the necessary failure of these endeavours leads me to attempt to retrieve my freedom by instead making an object of the Other, which takes me to the attitude of 'blindness'

towards Others *qua* their freedom (380–2/448–51), to sexual desire (382–9/451–68), to sadism (399–406/469–77), and finally to hate (410–12/481–4). Though Sartre's exposition takes this sequential, narrative form, he makes it clear that there is no question of real temporal priority (379/448): the 'circle of relations' which love, hate, etc. form is in a sense 'integrated in *all* attitudes towards Others' (408/478).

In Section III of Chapter 3 Sartre gives his analysis of collective, first-person-plural consciousness, which, Sartre acknowledges, may be thought to show not only that his theory of the Other is so far incomplete, but also that Sartre is wrong to imprison intersubjective relations within the dialectic of the look, since in thoughts of 'us' as engaged in a common action or as undergoing a common experience, 'nobody is the object': in such cases, where my being-for-others takes the form of being-*with*-others, *être-avec-l'autre* or *Mitsein*, it appears that I am 'not in conflict with the Other but in community with him', and that all 'recognise one another as subjectivities' (413/484), as per Hegel's concept of Spirit.

Sartre's aim in Section III is therefore to give an analysis of collectivity which gives it its due as a genuine phenomenon but defuses the objection.

Sartre's argument is that, on the contrary, collectivity *confirms* the dialectic of transcending/being-transcended. The crucial distinction for Sartre's purposes is between two radically different forms of experience, on the one hand of the 'we' as an object, *le nous-object*, or 'us' – as when we understand ourselves to be members of an oppressed class – and on the other hand of the 'we' as a subject, *le nous-sujet* – as when I experience signage in public places.

The former, Sartre shows (415–23/486–25), can be arrived at through adding a witnessing third party to the simple situation in which I am alone confronting the Other. This takes place by various routes, depending on whether this 'Third', *le Tiers*, looks at me or at the Other, but the final result in all cases is that I make a transition to grasping both myself and the Other jointly and equally from the *outside*, as comprising 'an objective situation-form in the world of the Third': 'I exist engaged in a form which like the Other I agree to constitute', e.g. 'We are fighting each other' (418/489).



The *nous-sujet* according to Sartre (423–9/495–501) is manifest in situations where I engage with manufactured objects: for example, a subway sign tells me (us) that we who wish to travel to Sèvres-Babylon must change at La Motte-Picquet, or that the exit is to my (our) left. The marks and limitations of such experiences are that I find myself ‘aimed at’ not in the freedom of my personal projects, but only in so far as I am an ‘undifferentiated’ ‘anybody’, an exemplification of the ‘human species’ or *quelconque* inserted into the human stream (427/499–500). Such anonymized experience of oneself – theorized by Heidegger as the ‘They’ (*das Man*, as in the German article *man* or the French *on*) – is fleeting and unstable, Sartre says, and certainly does not provide, *contra* Heidegger, a foundation for consciousness of the Other.

So, although ‘we’-consciousness is real in the sense that there are indeed *experiences* of the ‘we’, analysis of these reveals nothing inconsistent with Sartre’s account: the *nous-objet* is ‘a simple enrichment’ of the being-for-others explained in Sartre’s theory of the Other, while the *nous-sujet* is a ‘purely subjective’ experience without metaphysical significance (429/502).

The upshot of the chapter is, therefore, that the movement in which an individual for-itself consists primordially, viz. of nihilating flight from the in-itself, doubles up with a counter-movement which puts the first into reverse: as soon as the Other appears, the for-itself is ‘entirely reapprehended by the in-itself and fixed in in-itself’, and receives ‘a being-in-itself-in-the-midst-of-the-world as a thing among things’ – ‘petrification in in-itself by the Other’s look is the profound meaning of the myth of Medusa’ (429–30/502).

If Sartre’s theory of consciousness of the Other is correct, then the difficulty is clear. Though individuals may associate successfully in certain instrumental regards – you may help me to move this wardrobe – it appears that human relationships *as such* are incapable of fulfilment, in two respects: (1) intersubjectively defined ends (e.g. the achievement of a harmonious partnership based on love and mutual respect) are metaphysically unrealizable, and (2) human relationships cannot undo the alienation from myself which is effected in me by the original upsurge of the Other, let alone fulfil the teleology of the for-itself by completing my circuit of selfness.

To what extent, though, is this dark conclusion strictly unavoidable in Sartre's terms? It is true that, in abstraction, awareness of the Other-as-object and of the Other-as-subject are strictly exclusive, just as a light must be either on or off. But as Sartre emphasizes (408/479), the for-itself cannot fix itself in either one of these conditions to the exclusion of the other: rather they represent opposite, and mutually presupposing poles of intersubjective experience; intersubjective life consists in a perpetual movement back and forth between them, and consciousness' reconfiguration in one mode or the other is typically not instantaneous but a temporally extended process.

To that extent we might reasonably think that the see-saw of objectification of/by the Other is not the only possibility, and that a mode of intersubjective consciousness which holds awareness of the Other's subject-being and her object-being in some sort of equilibrium is not unimaginable (just as Sartre says of facticity and transcendence that they are two aspects of human reality which 'are and ought to be capable of a valid coordination', 56/95).

What does follow from Sartre's metaphysics is, first, that this equilibrium, if it can be achieved, will never amount to a *synthesis* (302/364) – *contra* Hegel, the original tension will never be overcome. And second, it must be acknowledged that, so long as the for-itself's engagement with Others is determined in accordance with the fundamental project described in §38, the see-saw is inescapable. So, if equilibrium can be attained, this will not be because it is the 'natural state' of the for-itself: a motivational counter-force to the fundamental project will be required to set the teleology of intersubjective relations off on a new tack, and this on Sartre's account can be supplied only by the affirmation of freedom (see §44).

If this is correct, then the chapter on 'concrete relations with others' shows us so to speak the default settings or raw elements of intersubjectivity, the *overcoming* of which would take us to ethically mature sociality, which is not described in B&N but belongs to its ethical sequel (see §44). What B&N has shown us is that ethical sociality cannot be based on 'sympathy' or 'love for fellow man', and can be achieved only through a negation of the circles of conflict described by Sartre. At the same time, Sartre's account allows us to understand better certain

important enclaves of intersubjective experience – including (at least some) sexual relations, and catastrophic passionate pathologies in human relations – as regressions to the conflictual foundations of intersubjectivity. The explanatory strategy which Sartre employs here, of reversing common sense by first analysing what are by its lights abnormalities, is of course characteristic of B&N.

**§40 Existential psychoanalysis [Part Four, Chapter 2, Section 1, 568–75/655–63]**

Everything that Sartre has told us about the individual's original choice of self is strictly compatible with its unknowability: it is possible that we can make out our original choices, at best, only partially and indistinctly. Sartre's theory of freedom would be in no worse position if this were so, nor would it oblige us to treat the concept as merely regulative: my original choice of myself can be fully real, even if my endeavours to grasp it – to say what my life means or amounts to – leave a residue of surd unintelligibility.

While emphasizing its difficulty, Sartre does consider however that the task of determining a person's original choice can be pursued with some success, the necessary means being provided by existential as opposed to Freudian or 'empirical' psychoanalysis.

In an earlier important passage concerned with the differences between existential and empirical psychoanalysis, at 458–60/535–7, Sartre declares that he restricts himself to taking 'the psychoanalytic *method*' as his inspiration and that he applies it '*in a reverse sense*' (458–9/536). In Part Four, Chapter 2, Section 1, Sartre states the methodological principles of existential psychoanalysis (568–9/656), and describes its similarities with (569–71/657–9) and differences from (571–5/659–63) empirical psychoanalysis.

It emerges that the methodological overlap with Freud is considerable: existential psychoanalysis centres on the hermeneutic 'deciphering' of the 'symbols' of psychic life, fixes conceptually the meanings derived therefrom, understands the human subject as a historical structure, regards the event of infancy as 'crucial' for psychic crystallization (569/657), and accepts as significant data 'dreams, bungled actions, obsessions, and

neuroses' alongside the thoughts and successful actions of waking life (575/663). The differences are that existential psychoanalysis aims finally at the discovery of 'a *choice* and not a *state*' (573/661), takes symbolizations to be of one's original project, and repudiates mechanical causality at all levels (572–3/660–1) – as required, according to Sartre, if the subject is to be treated as 'a totality and not a collection' (568/656).

Sartre said, many years later, that in his biographical study of Flaubert, the germs of which we find in B&N, he had wanted 'to give the idea of a whole whose surface is completely conscious, while the rest is opaque to this consciousness and, without being part of the unconscious, is hidden from you'.<sup>121</sup> Sartre's language here – the talk of opacity, consciousness as lying at the surface, hidden contents – is so redolent of Freud that it may be asked whether Sartre was right to oppose his way of thinking in B&N so sharply to Freudian metapsychology, as we saw him do in §25.<sup>122</sup> Is the difference at the end of the day between Freud's unconscious and the deep constitution of the subject brought to light in existential psychoanalysis really so great? Could the differences of the two conceptions perhaps be merely terminological?

The answer is that from the point of view of common sense, it is natural that Sartre and Freud should appear so close, since both depart greatly from ordinary psychology, and in some similarly revisionary ways. But their philosophical difference is irreducible. Sartre's deepest complaint against psychoanalytic theory is that it fails to consider how what it calls the unconscious is presented *in the perspective of consciousness*. This is not the incoherent demand that it should present the unconscious *as* consciousness, but the reasonable demand that it should explain to us how we should think of ourselves as being *related* to our 'Ucs.' – some answer is needed to the question: What is this *Ucs. for me*? To the extent that Freud has an answer to this question, it is that I should think of my *Ucs.* through naturalistic lenses and thus in the same way that the Other would view my 'mental states'. Sartre has a different answer to the question. His image of an opaque whole presented to consciousness is the same as that which he employed in *The Transcendence of the Ego* in explaining his theory of the ego as transcendent,<sup>123</sup> which has developed into B&N's theory of the Psyche. What

Sartre offers, therefore, is a way of thinking about the 'contents of my unconscious' which makes it intelligible that those 'contents' *are* me.

This account resolves Freud's problem of explaining how unconscious mental states are possible, by giving my 'unconscious' the same status as my states and qualities. And the further, ethical importance of this is of course that Sartre's existential reconceptualization of psychoanalysis forbids me thinking of my 'unconscious' as something behind my back that expresses itself in a force-like manner *through* the medium of my consciousness: it says instead that my 'unconscious' *is mine* only in so far as I freely *take it up*.

#### §41 Doing, having, and being

##### [Part Four, Chapter 2, Section II]

The material and formal objects of desires as we find them are diverse: I can desire this apple or that person, to write a novel or to go for a walk, to acquire knowledge or uncover an explanation, to be a world leader or a waiter, and so on. Sartre's metaphysics implies, however, that the human subject's overarching desire is to be in-itself-for-itself (§38). What needs to be shown therefore – again, in order to protect Sartre's metaphysics from *a posteriori* refutation – is that Sartre's motivational monism can be squared with the multiplicity of kinds of desire attributed in commonsense psychology. Sartre argues accordingly, in the section 'Doing and Having: Possession', as follows:

(1) 575–6/663–4: All desires can be resolved into three fundamental types, viz. desires to do or make (*faire*), to have (*avoir*) and to be (*être*).

(2) 576–85/664–75: Desires to do or to make, Sartre argues, become intelligible only when the subject's *relation* to what is done or made is factored into the object of desire (576–7/665–6). The relation in question is always, Sartre claims, an instance of *avoir* – I seek to *have-as-mine* the products and upshots of my doing, or the doings themselves. This schema applies also to epistemic desires – knowledge appropriates its object (577–80/666–9). Play, which in its pure form at any rate involves no *avoir*, must be understood, Sartre suggests, with Schiller

in mind, as directed to *être*, namely to my being as absolute freedom (580–1/669–70). *Faire*-desires can be reduced therefore directly and without remainder either to *avoir*-desires or to *être*-desires.

(3) 586–97/675–88: The meaning of 'possession', of the relation in which I stand to objects that I *have* or are *mine*, consists, Sartre argues, of an 'internal, ontological bond' which realizes – though only in a *symbolic* manner and at the *ideal* level of the meaning symbolized – the value 'being-in-itself-for-itself': to desire to have O is to desire that *I-be-united-with-O*, and this unity 'possessor-possessed' involves a superimposition of in-itself and for-itself features corresponding exactly to a for-itself-as-Self – O is on the one hand an 'emanation' and on the other hand wholly independent of me (590–2/680–2). Put another way, the structure 'possessor-possession-possessed' is a conceptual image of what the human subject would be if it conformed to a subject-predicate metaphysics: my having or ownership of objects mirrors the having or owning of 'psychological states' which results from the degradation of consciousness to the Psyche; by possessing things, I become, symbolically, a being which exists substantially, as its own foundation, i.e. as God. *Avoir*-desires are reducible therefore to *être*-desires, in the sense that the former are a form of *être*-desire in which the circuit of selfness is established by way of a detour through the world (598–9/689). Sartre adds that – since the for-itself exists in and through the world – desires to be are necessarily accompanied by desires to have (599/689), i.e. that *être* implicates *avoir* instrumentally.

*Être* is therefore the fundamental and final formal object of human desire. The results of Sartre's analysis supply rules for the interpretation of concrete individuals, and provide thereby 'the first principles of existential psychoanalysis' (575/664).

It is essential for a correct appreciation of Sartre's analysis, that the category of being should be understood in Sartre's terms, not those of commonsense psychology, since the notion that all desire aims at being is in ordinary terms obviously either false or unintelligible. We tend ordinarily to conceive desires in general as elaborations and conceptual embellishments of the

rudimentary case of object-directed, need-motivated desire, the object and psychological state standing in causal reciprocity – the apple activates a disposition in me, which causes me to eat it. Desires where the desiring subject is included within the content or object of the desire, reflexive desires, are regarded as conceptually secondary, a special case. Sartre, who considers that desires as we merely find them empirically lack full intelligibility (§34), reverses this order, making reflexivity primary and essential to desire, by making it part of the transcendental explanation of *why there is* such a thing as desire (§24). The force of Sartre's discussion in Section II is thus to challenge the adequacy of our ordinary understanding of why we desire and of what it is to desire.

#### §42 The existential symbolism of things: quality [Part Four, Chapter 2, Section III]

Sartre's account of how existential psychoanalysis lays bare the individual's version of the fundamental project of being-for-itself, and more specifically his theory of possession, introduce *symbolism* as a structure of human reality. Sartre regards the symbols in question as 'undecipherable by the subject himself' without recourse to existential psychoanalysis (595/685). The pseudo-failure of self-knowledge on the part of the subject which this implies – my ignorance of the ontological meanings carried by my own concrete projects – is accounted for by Sartre not of course in terms of the unconscious, but in terms of the distinctions of knowledge from consciousness, and of reflective from pre-reflective consciousness.

The final section of Part Four adds a further layer to Sartre's theory of symbolism: things, too, carry '*ontological meaning*' (599/690) and constitute an 'existential symbolism' (603/694) which is formal and *a priori* (606/697).

Following the example of Gaston Bachelard, Sartre gives a set of particular analyses – of snow, water, sliminess or viscosity (*le visqueux*), and holes – which explain why the topic of Section III is brought under the heading of 'quality', *qualité*. The phenomena on which Sartre focuses are constituted, not by the primary or secondary qualities of material objects, but by a certain kind of phenomenal aspect pregnant with an immediate, non-discursive, affective significance – holes

are existentially symbolic by virtue of their *gapingness*, their *demanding-to-be-filled*, etc.

Unlike the symbolic objects of desires, *qualités* are not objects of choice or ends of a project, and so are not necessarily symbolic realizations of being-in-itself-for-itself or disguised wish-fulfillments. Rather they incarnate in an intuitive, sensory form various *possibilities* regarding the relation of the for-itself to the in-itself – the slimy, for example, is a concretion of what it would be for being-for-itself to undergo absorption by the in-itself, a mode of being the meaning of which would be 'Antivalue' (611/703). Sartre acknowledges the close connection of *qualités* with children's consciousness (612/703–4), sexuality (613–14/705–6) and the human body (see 400–2/470–2, regarding grace and obscenity). *Qualités* occupy roughly the same ontological niche (see 606–7/698) as the transcendent emotional qualities and 'needing-to-be-caught' of the tram discussed earlier (§12) – they owe their existence to the subject's transcendence, while being in no way either contents of subjectivity or 'projections' thereof (604–5/695–77) – but they differ in so far as they are 'universal' (605/697), that is, independent from the particular project of any individual for-itself.

The import of this final addition to the full ontology is to account for the *aesthetic* dimension of the world – Sartre refers explicitly to an individual's taste, i.e. their particular affective relations to the *qualités* of things, as being under discussion (614/706) – and to do so moreover in a way which shows the aesthetic to be rooted metaphysically in the nature of the world and human subjectivity.

### §43 Pure reflection and radical conversion

Sartre's conception of existential psychoanalysis may, in principle, allow the human subject to be made finally intelligible, but it does not offer itself as a form of treatment – it provides a basis for biographical study, not therapeutic practice. The reason for this is that in existential psychoanalysis, even when self-applied, the subject is apprehended '*from the point of view of the Other*', thus as an '*object*' having '*objective existence*' rather than existence-for-itself (571/659), and so not in the mode of freedom, as would be required for a modification of the subject's projects. The subject-transforming role of Freudian



psychoanalysis is occupied in Sartre's system by his conceptions of 'pure reflection' and 'radical conversion'.

As we saw in §24, reflection defaults to the type which Sartre calls 'impure' or 'accessory' (155/201). Pure reflection by contrast consists in 'the simple presence of the reflective for-itself to the for-itself reflected-on': it abstains from any hypostatization of consciousness and constituting of the Psyche (155/201). Though it is the 'foundation' of impure reflection, in the sense of being the 'original form' of reflection presupposed by it (155/201), pure reflection is never 'given first in daily life' and can be attained 'only as the result of a modification which it effects on itself and which is in the form of a katharsis' (159-60/206-7). Pure reflection would apprehend being-for-itself directly as lack (199/249), *as* being-for, *être-pour* (160/207), and in original, 'non-substantial' temporality rather than psychic temporality (158/204).<sup>124</sup>

Sartre defers to another place consideration of 'the motivation and the structure' of pure reflection (160/207), and although at 150-8/197-205 Sartre describes reflection in its original metaphysical form (see §15), very little is said in B&N about what it is to *recover* purity of reflection *after* it has made itself impure. Sartre does however talk about an event which he calls 'radical conversion', *conversion radicale* (464/542, 475-6/554-5), and which appears to correspond to what results when pure reflection is sustained and realized, breaking the hold of bad faith: radical conversion involves my making, in anguish, 'another choice of myself and my ends' (464/542), the collapse and metamorphosis of my original project in an 'extraordinary and marvellous' instant (476/555). At 70n/111n Sartre talks of a 'recovery of being', *reprise de l'être*, and of a de-corruption of consciousness, as radically escaping bad faith. Sartre here calls this condition 'authenticity', *authenticité* (elsewhere criticizing Heidegger's understanding of authenticity, 531/614, 564/651), and at 412n/484n radical conversion is linked explicitly with ethics.<sup>125</sup>

Under-described though it may be, the systematic importance of Sartre's conception of a purified self-relation is therefore very great. Sartre's concept of the for-itself's fundamental project as directed towards an impossible fusion of being-for-itself with being-in-itself recalls Hume and Schopenhauer. If that project

supplies the outer boundary and ultimate condition for all motivation, then reason is the slave, if not of multiple empirical passions, then at least of a single, overarching, *a priori* metaphysical passion. And Sartre shares with Schopenhauer the idea that reason is an instrument of a will which is 'blind', since, in so far as the telos of the for-itself's passion is metaphysically incoherent, the for-itself is heading nowhere in pursuing it. But Sartre's affirmation of the possibility of pure reflection shows that he also thinks – against Hume, but with Schopenhauer – that this situation can be changed, and that the human subject can in principle overcome its 'useless passion' (615/708), and that when it does so, it will gain an ethical orientation.

#### §44 Ethics [Conclusion, Section II]

A full account of pure (or 'purifying') reflection belongs, Sartre says, to an 'Ethics' (581/670). Sartre was no doubt tempted to follow the design of Spinoza's work even further than he does already in B&N, by incorporating within it an ethical system. However, Sartre's statements about ethics in B&N are restricted in number and detail – aside from the two or so pages which comprise Section II of the Conclusion, we find only a passage on the exclusion of 'ethical anguish' by 'everyday' morality (38/75–6), a short discussion of whether the Good falls under the category of 'being' or of 'doing' (431/507), and miscellaneous scattered remarks (see 80/122, 92/136, 94/138, 409–10/480, 441/517, 444/520, 553/638, 564/651). In the concluding sentence of B&N, the problem of an ethics is deferred to a 'future work' (628/722).

It is important nonetheless to broach the question of B&N's relation to ethics, since Sartre does affirm that it *is* possible to derive an ethics from the work, and also because the claim has been made, as noted previously, that the practical outlook which follows unavoidably from B&N is an unqualified axiological subjectivism properly indistinguishable from nihilism, and if this were true, then Sartre's philosophical position in B&N would be severely problematic. (To cite one example of the characterization of Sartre as affirming that everything without exception is permitted: Marcel claimed that Sartre's doctrine of the 'creation of values' is of a kind with Nietzsche's, adding that Nietzsche's position is 'less untenable' because he

at least bids farewell, as Sartre does not, to the issue of rational foundations.<sup>126</sup>)

Sartre's statements about ethics in B&N need to be read with care, and the suggestion which they have been taken to make of radical subjectivism is abetted by the misreading, noted previously (§36), of Sartre's theory of *ontological* freedom as a theory of freedom in *all* senses – which would indeed imply, given the omnipresence of freedom in the for-itself, that the Good is realized in whatever project the for-itself may choose. I argued, however, that the freedom which B&N attempts to put in focus is buried so deep that it can have no immediate connection with any moral-political doctrine – on its own it implies, for example, neither emancipatory politics nor a theory of individual rights. Another stage of philosophical reflection is required before any such implications can be extracted.

In pursuing the question of what ethics B&N may or may not support once this further stage has been added, we can not only extrapolate from the text but also legitimately take into consideration two later writings, the very short 1946 lecture *Existentialism and Humanism*, and the posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics* from 1947–48 and *Truth and Existence* from 1948. In addition there is the option of taking into account a work of Beauvoir's from the same period, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), as a source of suggestion regarding (though not of course as a statement of) Sartre's ethical views.

The account of value examined in §17 shows that, in one important sense, the description of Sartre as a subjectivist could not be wider of the mark – to the contrary, Sartre's metaphysics of value is better described as a kind of Kantianised Platonism: value exists as a transcendent object of consciousness, and not only is its existence metaphysically necessary in relation to human subjectivity (value is made to be by the same unconditioned freedom which makes me exist, 94/138), but its necessity derives in the final instance from an extra-subjective ground, namely the in-itself's attempt to found itself.

The real point of the subjectivism charge, however, is of course to assert that Sartre is unable to set any restrictions on the for-itself's choice of determinate values. But this too must be disputed.

The key to ethics, the Conclusion tells us, is provided by the notion of a freedom which takes itself as a value or end, which wills and affirms and is conscious of itself (627–8/722). As it is put in *Existentialism and Humanism*: 'I declare that freedom [. . .] can have no other end and aim but itself; and when a man has seen that values depend upon himself [. . .] he can will only one thing, and that is freedom as the foundation of all values.'<sup>127</sup> This is of course a highly Kantian notion, and the *Existentialism and Humanism* lecture invokes in a deliberate and thorough manner central concepts of Kant's ethics – morality has variable content but a universal form, the act of lying 'implies the universal value which it denies', I must consider my actions as if humanity were to regulate itself by what I do, 'I cannot not will the freedom of others', we are obliged to pursue the collective realization of freedom, as per Kant's kingdom of ends and so on.<sup>128</sup>

Sartre's relation to Kant in this text is unstraightforward, however. While taking pains to echo the various formulae of Kant's categorical imperative, Sartre rejects Kant's view that moral judgement consists in the subsumption of individual cases under universal moral principles, arguing that concrete particularity is ineliminable from ethical thinking. The impression given is that Sartre wishes to uphold the spirit of Kant's ethical theory while abjuring much of its letter.

Though it is not clear in *Existentialism and Humanism* how action is to be determined at a concrete level, what *is* clear is that Sartre believes the ethical implications of B&N to be no weaker than those of Kant's metaphysics of morals and no less inconsistent with an arbitrary subjectivism. Sartre may be mistaken in supposing that practical judgement can dispense with Kant's apparatus of universal principles, but the more fundamental question to be considered here is whether he is justified in thinking that the basic standpoint of Kantian moral agency – that is, a concern that one's reasons for action meet the condition of objectivity, taken to entail a trans-individual, impersonal commitment to the freedom of all rational agents – can be secured on the basis of B&N. Since Sartre does not refer to Kant's analysis of practical reason, how can he hope to show that I must conceive myself as choosing and 'responsible for all men' and for 'mankind as a whole',<sup>129</sup> and accordingly constrain my projects in accordance with the freedom of Others?

Sartre may be regarded as proceeding once again by elimination, and in a broadly Kantian fashion:

1. We begin by assuming a for-itself that has achieved pure reflection and undergone radical conversion, at least to the degree that it no longer takes its concrete projects as self-validating. This is the perfectionist precondition of Sartre's ethics. With the application of existential psychoanalysis, or through equivalent insight into human motivation available to the ordinary non-philosophical subject, it will appear furthermore that all human activities, *in so far as* they manifest being-for-itself's fundamental project of becoming God, are 'equivalent' and 'doomed to failure', and *to that extent* it will be thought that 'it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations' (627/721).

One option might then seem to be Schopenhauer's ideal of resignation, but this is excluded by Sartre's metaphysics of the for-itself: if the being of the for-itself *is* the being of a project, then only death can release the subject from the pull of teleology, by extinguishing its freedom. The subject thus confronts the task of determining its reasons for action – of answering the question, How should I act? – on a basis consistent with the metaphysics of B&N.

2. These metaphysics entail directly the rejection of all (Platonistic, Aristotelian, theological or in other ways metaphysically realist) grounds for value, and also, more interestingly, the rejection of any theory which requires or even permits us to *experience* value in the mode of being-in-itself (see 38–9/75–7). Sartre's critique extends accordingly to some forms of humanism,<sup>130</sup> and indeed to theories that base the Good on freedom but conceive freedom in non-Sartrean terms.<sup>131</sup>

3. Equally excluded (626/720) – by Sartre's critique of the 'psychic' conception of the subject (§24) – is the option of treating value as a function of affective subjective states: utilitarianism, sentimentalist (e.g. Humean) conceptions of value, and any position which (like Nietzsche's, on some accounts) grounds judgements of value on the same broad kind of subjective states as underlie aesthetic judgements, are undermined by Sartre's account of the permeation of 'the psychic' by freedom;

consciousness cannot fill itself with desire or become a plenitude of passion in the way that these positions require.

4. Egoism, as a principle of practical reason, is undermined from several directions: my inclinations are, as psychic facts, motivationally weightless; there is no substantial ego that would rationalize egoism metaphysically by supplying an object *for the sake of which* I should act; and in the absence of any intrinsic empirical or metaphysical differences of my being from the Other's being, no justification remains for privileging my interest over that of the Other.<sup>132</sup> The plane of reflection which B&N forces us to occupy is 'beyond egoism and altruism' (626/720).

5. With the motivational slate wiped fully clean, and the asymmetry of self and Other removed, freedom is all that remains as a candidate for a value. And given the necessity of valuation – I must affirm *some* value, and this value cannot be relative to my particular self – the affirmation of freedom *per se*, and not merely of *my* freedom, follows necessarily. It does so not only by default – as it were, for want of anything better – but also because of the intrinsic appropriateness of its occupying a fundamental axiological role: freedom is all that being-for-itself *is*, and freedom *is* the end-directedness in the light of which questions of value arise, the very ontological stuff of action. On Sartre's account, therefore, no further *reason* for placing value on freedom is owing – freedom is, as we have seen (§§36–38), anterior to all reasons, and it will be grasped immediately and non-inferentially *as* a value by any agent that has purified fully its phenomenological vision. For Sartre, just as no argument for other minds can be given, no discursive persuasion into the ethical domain is either possible or necessary: the sheer immediacy of B&N's ethical implications obviates the need for a further, separate argumentative exposition and defence of the ethical (a point which goes towards explaining why B&N has been misinterpreted as ethically indifferent).

6. The final move which Sartre must make – to the possibility of my *actually* affirming the freedom of a concrete Other in a concrete situation – requires that I be able to relate to the Other *non-conflictually*. As we saw in §39, though B&N gives the impression that conflict is the final form of intersubjectivity, the logic of Sartre's position entails that, so long as I have renounced the fundamental project of becoming God, there is

a possibility that I will be able to relate to the Other-as-subject without attempting their objectification – the purified for-itself can, in principle, remain *conscious* of the intersubjectively constituted quasi-being-in-itself of the Other, without *reducing* the Other to it.

This is of course only a rough sketch, in need of development, and in Sartre's post-B&N ethical writings (and Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*) a further goal, that of the disclosure or revealing of being, *le dévoilement d'être*, becomes central to the rationale for affirming freedom and hence ethics. It is also a further matter how, and whether, Sartre can advance from the necessity that I should *will* the freedom of the Other, to the stronger claim that my freedom *presupposes* the freedom of the Other – a line of thought developed in the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, and emphasized by Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.<sup>133</sup>

#### §45 Salvation

Assuming that it is correct to read Sartre as a kind of Kantian – who treats freedom as both the foundation of ethics and the end which properly determines how I should act in regard to the Other – a further question comes into view, elicited by Sartre's description of the normative outlook prepared for in B&N as 'an ethics of deliverance and salvation', *une morale de la délivrance et du salut* (412n/484n).

The religious terminology is used by Sartre without irony, to signal his claim that the philosophy of B&N has implications which lie on the same *plane* as religious doctrine, and furthermore that it entails at least the possibility of man's realizing his good. The latter claim may seem especially surprising in view of all that has been said in B&N regarding the metaphysical hopelessness of the fundamental project of the for-itself: even if radical conversion is possible, and engenders ethical constraints, in what way does B&N restore intrinsic value to human existence? In what sense is the apparently tragic character of Sartre's vision of the human situation either overcome or supplemented by a promise of redemption? Is the for-itself's affirmation of freedom really enough to count as its *salvation*?

It is helpful to contrast two views of what is grasped, and of what is involved axiologically, when our freedom affirms itself.

The one view, which tends to be emphasized in Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, is that the moment of freedom's self-affirmation is one of *rational enlightenment*. Beauvoir suggests that when we pass from the naivety of common sense's value realism and its (theistic, etc.) metaphysical counterparts to an existentialist ethics, we are liberated from a *mistake* – we achieve a correct understanding of what values *are*, and cease to be in the grip of a false picture according to which values can be objective only if they are God-ordained or in some other way written into the fabric of being-in-itself.<sup>134</sup> On this view, B&N offers a familiar kind of Kantian Enlightenment critique and therapy, allowing us to embrace our existence in a new spirit of sober self-awareness and maturity, without any experience of fundamental loss. The tragic quality which human existence seemed to have when apprehended through Sartrean lenses is then only an appearance, and the sense in which human existence is either in need of or susceptible to 'salvation' is correspondingly thin: on this account, what needs to be appreciated is that we already have everything that we need axiologically, since the only sense in which the existence of a human subject *could* intelligibly have value is by representing itself as valuable on account of its freedom and by determining itself on that basis; our inalienable autonomy is itself, we should realize, all that there is or *could be* to salvation. On this view, then, it is as if we had resolved a conceptual confusion which has been responsible for our playing a game the rules of which ensured that we could not win, leaving us free to now embark on a new game, one which in principle we can win.

The alternative view, which has a stronger claim to being Sartre's, makes sense of the talk of salvation and deliverance, but is less straightforward. The view offered by Beauvoir can certainly be read out of Sartre, but it involves sidelining Sartre's insistence on the abortive character of the teleology which defines human existence. On Sartre's own account, the tragic quality of human existence, the reality of its axiological deficit, is presupposed and *not cancelled out* by the moment of salvation. The value which can be realized through affirmation of our freedom is always in *compensation for* our original metaphysical loss, a kind of axiological second-best which we embrace under metaphysical duress. It nevertheless possesses



*some* positive value: the fact that we can hold in check the abortive teleology which gives rise to being-for-itself, and then introduce into being a different, intelligible telos, namely our freedom, amounts to a *kind* of salvation.

These two views imply different ways of experiencing our freedom. Beauvoir implies that affirming freedom is a *fulfilment*. Sartre's view is that consciousness of our metaphysical failure can never be eliminated,<sup>135</sup> for which reason the freedom which we affirm is something to which we must also think of ourselves as being *condemned*.<sup>136</sup>

It should be noted how the two views are related once again to the two metaphilosophical standpoints distinguished in §13. If the standpoint of B&N is properly Copernican, then Beauvoir's account of Sartre's position is correct. Sartre's tragic view presupposes instead that we can take up a standpoint which is not merely that of a human subject: if it does not make sense to consider the existence of human subjectivity, in abstraction from its perspective on itself, as either of positive or of negative value, then there is no sense in the idea that man's very existence is absurd. The tragic view demands, therefore, that sense be attached to the idea that it would, in some sense, have been better if we had been capable of becoming God, and Sartre seems to be prepared to defend this thought. Sartre's thinking seems to be that the metaphysically correct and complete way to relate to the Good is to *be* the Good, to *incarnate* Value, and that this is something which only God can do; we can relate to the Good only in the inferior mode of *positing* values. (If God existed, then his freedom would *be* the Good; there would be no need for him to *affirm* his freedom, as we need to do.)

Sartre's willingness to entertain a trans-Copernican, non-perspectival conception of value is reflected in his talk of the 'disclosure of being' as a rationale for affirming freedom. Beauvoir's reading of Sartre's position is more straightforwardly optimistic and humanistic. Sartre's tragic view contains an inverted theological residue.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What distinguishes Sartre's treatment of the concept of human freedom? To what extent does Sartre's theory of freedom improve on other theories?

2. Does Sartre defend adequately his claims that I make an 'original choice of myself' and that I am 'responsible for the world'?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Sartre's account of human motivation?
4. What ethical outlook, if any, is implied by the metaphysics of B&N?

## (E) BEING AS A WHOLE

### §46 The unity of being as a 'detotalised totality'

#### [Conclusion, Section I]

We saw in §7 that at the end of the Introduction Sartre poses the question of the unity of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, and in §11, that doubts may be entertained regarding Sartre's claim to have provided a unified ontology. The latter are developed at length by Merleau-Ponty, who argues that Sartre simply has no right to a concept of being as a whole – given that nothingness and being in B&N 'are always absolutely other than one another', they cannot be 'really united'.<sup>137</sup>

In the Conclusion Sartre returns to the question of whether or not Being, 'as a general category belonging to all existents', is divided by a hiatus into 'two incommunicable regions, in each of which the notion of Being must be taken in an original and unique sense' (617/711). Sartre declares that our research in the course of the book allows us to answer the question of how the two regions are related to one another: 'the For-Itself and the In-itself are reunited by a synthetic connection which is nothing other than the For-itself itself' (617/711). This relation has the character of 'a tiny nihilation which has its origin at the heart of Being', a nihilation '*made-to-be* by the in-itself' 'sufficient to cause a total upheaval to *happen* to the In-itself. This upheaval is the world' (617–18/711–12).

This provides a sense in which being forms a whole: being-for-itself and being-in-itself are really united, and not without communication, in so far as (i) being-for-itself is related to being-in-itself as the latter's *nihilation*, (ii) being-in-itself contains the *origin* of this nihilation. The unity of being as a whole is thereby grasped, as it needs to be in order for Wahl and Merleau-Ponty's objection to be met, from *both* sides.

Sartre acknowledges that this account immediately gives rise to a 'metaphysical problem which could be formulated thus: Why does the for-itself arise from being (*à partir de l'être*)?' (619/713). What is the *ground* in Being of the nihilation in which the for-itself consists?

Sartre's discussion of this question (619–25/713–24) consists of a critique of some attempts to answer it, alongside an account of why, in fact, we should suppose that the question does not *need* to be answered. The key to Sartre's argument is a distinction which he formulates, implied in the quotation above, between ontology and metaphysics, Sartre's claim being that metaphysical questions are, if not empty, then at least philosophically secondary.

What distinguishes metaphysics from ontology? Sartre writes: 'We in fact apply the term "metaphysical" to the study of individual processes which have given birth to *this* world as a concrete and particular totality. In this sense metaphysics is to ontology as history is to sociology' (619/713). As he puts it slightly later, ontology is concerned with 'structures of a being', and metaphysics with 'events' (620/714), though obviously not in a strictly temporal sense; since 'temporality comes into being through the for-itself', historical becoming is not what is at issue in metaphysics (621/715; note also the differently drawn distinction of ontology and metaphysics at 297/358–9).

Sartre's somewhat unclear official distinction of ontology and metaphysics is less important than his attempt to show that a line should be drawn under the question of why the upsurge of the for-itself takes place. Sartre establishes that there is only one candidate for an answer to this question, which we have met with already in §16 and §17: namely that being-in-itself gives rise to being-for-itself in order to rid itself of contingency, thus to 'found itself', to become God or cause-of-itself. Moreover, Sartre argues, it is *only* 'by making itself for-itself that being can aspire to be the cause of itself': 'if the in-itself were to found itself, it could attempt to do so only by making itself consciousness' (620/714).

The in-itself's motive of seeking to rid itself of contingency provides a necessary and sufficient condition for the emergence of the for-itself. The implications of this account run, however, directly contrary to fundamental Sartrean tenets. First, if the 'synthetic connection' of being-for-itself with being-in-itself 'is

nothing other than the For-itself itself', then the for-itself is thus 'both one of the terms of the relation' obtaining between the two regions of Being 'and the relation itself' (624/719). To say this is on the face of it much the same as to say that the for-itself is the *self-relation* of the in-itself, the way in which the in-itself relates to itself. But on Sartre's account this is impossible, since the identity which prevails in the in-itself is so absolute as to preclude any trace of reflexivity (§6).

Second, and in any case, the in-itself's generation of the for-itself has been conceived as a *purposive project*, and the attribution of a project to the in-itself contradicts of course Sartre's conception of being-in-itself. So:

ontology here comes up against a profound contradiction since it is through the for-itself that the possibility of a foundation comes to the world. In order to be a project of founding itself, the in-itself would of necessity have to be originally a presence to itself, i.e., it would have to be already consciousness. (620-1/715)

This is why, having articulated the only possible condition under which the advent of the for-itself can be explained – and also the only possible basis on which we can conceive being as comprising a genuinely unified whole – Sartre refuses to affirm the antecedent. Sartre says that ontology 'will therefore limit itself to declaring that *everything takes place as if* the in-itself, in a project to found itself, gave itself the modification of the for-itself' (621/715).

But what is the force of the 'as if' in this statement? One might have expected Sartre to declare that metaphysical enquiry into the origin of the for-itself is impossible, since, on his own account, there is only one possible answer to the question, and that answer is a 'profound contradiction' of what he holds to be a solid, unrevisable result of ontological enquiry, viz. the non-consciousness of the in-itself. What he in fact does is to grant that there is indeed a further task of metaphysical enquiry, while at the same time implying its limited worth if not futility:

It is up to metaphysics to form the *hypotheses* which will allow us to conceive of this process [i.e. the upsurge of the

For-itself] as the absolute event [ . . . ] It goes without saying that these hypotheses will remain hypotheses since we can not expect either further validation or invalidation. What will make their *validity* is only the possibility which they will offer us of unifying the *givens* of ontology [ . . . ] But metaphysics must nevertheless attempt to determine the nature and the meaning of this prehistoric process [ . . . ] In particular the task belongs to the metaphysician of deciding whether the movement is or is not a first 'attempt' on the part of the in-itself to found itself [ . . . ] (621/715)

The remainder of Section I reconsiders the question of the unity of being, our situation with regard to which, Sartre says, is as follows. In order to give sense to the concept of being in general, there must be a concept of the *totality of being*, and the concept of *totality* is that of a whole whose parts cannot exist independently of one another or of the whole, i.e. whose parts are all internally related. Thus, Sartre continues, to conceive being as a totality is equivalent to conceiving it as an '*ens causa sui*' (622/717), and this conception is of course unacceptable to Sartre, not only because for him the very concept of self-cause is contradictory ('*impossible*', 622/717) but also because, if being is conceived as a totality which includes being-for-itself and being-in-itself, then the in-itself is ontologically dependent on the for-itself: 'the in-itself would receive its existence from the nihilation which caused there to be consciousness of it' (622/716). The totality of being would then be an 'ideal being', with 'the in-itself founded by the for-itself and identical with the for-itself which founds it' (623/717), contradicting Sartre's claim that while consciousness is bound to the in-itself, the in-itself is in no way dependent on the for-itself.

The totality of being must be conceived therefore, Sartre proposes next, as a 'detotalised totality', and he offers various formulae and analogies to explain this idea. A 'detotalised totality' is the form which results from the destruction of a totality, where the destruction is incomplete and extends not to the *existence* of its components but only to their *inter-relation*, the partial destruction, therefore, of a form rather than of its contents. Sartre calls it 'a decapitated notion, in perpetual disintegration', a 'disintegrated ensemble' (623/718) and so on.

The contradiction which dwells according to Sartre in the concept of self-cause is not avoided by this move, however, since something can be conceived as a *detotalized* totality only if the original totality from which it is supposed to have proceeded is at least genuinely *conceivable*, which requires that it be free from contradiction. Sartre backs off from the paradoxical claim that being is thinkable only in terms of a contradictory concept by using, as before, the formula 'as if', *comme si*, in formulating his claims:

Everything happens as if the world, man, and man-in-the-world succeeded in realising only a missing God. Everything happens as if the in-itself and the for-itself presented themselves in a state of *disintegration* in relation to an ideal synthesis. (623/717)

Sartre closes the discussion by reinvoking the ontology/metaphysics distinction, reminding us that the question of totality 'does not belong to the province of ontology' and suggesting that it is a matter of indifference whether we think of being as 'a well marked *duality* or as a disintegrated being' (624/719).

Sartre has told us, however, that the dualist conception is untenable, which leaves detotalized totality as the only concept which we can employ. Yet this concept is contradictory. It appears that something has to give, and in §48 we will consider what Sartre's options are.

#### §47 God

Clearly, the interlocked problems of the origin of the for-itself and of being as a whole, and the task of the metaphysician just described, lead naturally in the direction of theology. So it is appropriate at this point to take stock of the discussion of God in B&N, and to clarify Sartre's atheism.

B&N gives an account of how the idea of God is formed, the implication of which is that religious belief hypostatizes a concept whose proper reference is humanity itself in an idealized form (90/133–4, 566/655–6; see §17, and 423/495 on humanity and God as reciprocal and correlative limiting-concepts).

This kind of Feuerbachian or Left Hegelian strategy does not, however, amount to a direct theoretical argument against

God's existence, but B&N may be regarded as offering elsewhere two such arguments. The first, which concerns the impossibility of a *causa sui* or necessarily existing being (80–1/123), rests on assumptions which will be rejected by traditional theists as tendentious. The second, more interesting and original argument attempts to show that the concept of God is that of an 'in-itself-for-itself' (see 90/133), and that since in light of the basic ontology this is impossible, 'the idea of God is contradictory' (615/708).

Whatever the force of these arguments, it is important to see that considerations of such a sort are not what sustain Sartre's atheism at a fundamental level. Sartre's atheism is not arrived at through arguments concerning metaphysical explanation, but rests on a claim of the same *order* as Jacobi's assertion that the being of God is intuited directly, but with an exactly opposite *content*. In a late interview Sartre asserted that the atheism of B&N is not an 'idealist atheism', i.e. one which merely expels the *idea* of God from the world and replaces it with the idea of his absence, but a 'materialist atheism': Sartre describes himself as having realized that the 'absence of God could be read everywhere. Things were alone, and above all man was alone. Was alone like an absolute.'<sup>138</sup> This revelation harks back to the tree root passage in *Nausea*: 'Absurdity was not an idea in my head, or the sound of a voice, but that long dead snake at my feet [ . . . ] all that I was able to grasp afterwards comes down to this fundamental absurdity [ . . . ] I should like to establish the absolute character of this absurdity.'<sup>139</sup>

There are then, for Sartre, two basic revelatory experiences with positive content: of the absoluteness of man, and of the 'absurd' character of being-in-itself. Neither is directly and explicitly an intuition of the absence of God. Each is nonetheless incompatible with the existence of God *qua* creator of man and his world: if man is revealed as something that (i) cannot be surpassed and (ii) cannot stand in any intelligible relation to a transcendent Good,<sup>140</sup> and if being-in-itself expresses (i) its own brute un-designedness and (ii) its unconditional indifference to man, then, even if a substantial *causa sui*, or a being-in-itself-for-itself, might exist, it can have no thinkable relation to us or our world.

God's absence from the world is therefore not like that of Pierre from the cafe. This is important, for if that were Sartre's

claim, then it could be argued – in application of Sartre's own principles – that the presence to my consciousness of God's absence is a mode of consciousness of Him, i.e. a negative theology could be developed on the basis of B&N.<sup>141</sup> But Sartre leaves no God-shaped hole in the world through which God may be held to appear. The purpose of Sartre's multitudinous references to God in B&N is to show how any relation of man to God would destroy freedom, intersubjectivity and all the structures of human reality, i.e. that man's situation in the world positively *repugns* the existence of the God of theism or deism (see e.g. 232/278–8, regarding Leibniz's theistic solution to the problem of the Other).<sup>142</sup>

#### §48 Beyond Sartre's metaphysics?

The importance of the distinction drawn in §13 between the perspectival and aperspectival or absolute standpoints has shown itself at several points in B&N. Some contexts seem to demand one of these standpoints rather than the other, in others the two standpoints coincide intelligibly, and on some occasions they appear to be in tension. The question of which standpoint is ultimately Sartre's – or of whether Sartre can occupy both, as I suggested his intention to be – becomes especially salient in the context of being as a whole, and is decisive for whether or not we accept Sartre's claim that B&N achieves metaphysical closure.

As we saw in §46, the problem of the unity or totality of being and of the origin of the for-itself creates acute difficulty for Sartre: it needs to be resolved, but for all that we are able to discern, its only possible resolution involves a contradiction. Sartre is driven thereby to improvise a distinction of ontology from metaphysics, and to equivocation regarding the necessity and legitimacy of the latter. It needs to be considered what is responsible for Sartre's predicament, and what might allow him to escape it.

There is one way in which, it may seem, Sartre could have brought matters to a consistent and unequivocal conclusion, and some hints of this line of thinking can be detected, we saw in §46, in the Conclusion. Namely, the position could have been taken that all questions which cannot be answered in terms of the contents and purposes of the human point of view can and



should be dismissed, and so that enquiry into and speculation about the ground of the in-itself's generation of the for-itself must be regarded as merely the empty play of conceptual forms without genuine content. The 'profound contradiction' which Sartre's metaphysical reasoning brought to light would thereupon be denied all significance.

It is striking that this Copernican resolution is exactly what we do find in Sartre's discussion in Part Three of the 'metaphysical' question of why there are Others (297–302/358–64). Here Sartre asserts his conviction 'that any metaphysics must conclude with a "that is", i.e. with a direct intuition of that contingency' (297/359). He then proceeds to show that 'metaphysical' enquiry into the ground of a plurality of consciousness, when followed through, leads to a 'contradictory conclusion' (301/362), and finally he explains *why* the metaphysical question regarding the totality of for-itselfs which leads to the contradiction is meaningless (302/363): namely, it assumes that 'it is possible for us to *take a point of view* on the totality [of for-itselfs], that is, to consider it from outside', but in fact this is *not* possible, because I myself exist only 'on the foundation of this totality and to the extent that I am engaged with it' (301–2/363). (Nor can we suppose that God grasp this totality, since for him it does not exist.)

So why does Sartre not say the same in the Conclusion? There is a deep and clear reason of consistency why, in the context of being as a whole, if not in that of being-for-others, Copernicanism cannot be Sartre's final position, and a compelling strategic reason why adopting Copernicanism would weaken his position in overall terms.

To appreciate the first point, it suffices to observe that Sartre himself has shown that the human point of view *itself* demands a coherent conception of being as a whole, i.e. leads *out of itself* to the absolute standpoint. In order to explicate the nothingness, selfhood, facticity and lack of the for-itself, Sartre found it necessary to refer to the anthropogenetic story of the origin of the for-itself in the in-itself. So the human standpoint cannot be regarded as sealed off from speculation about the totality of being.

The strategic reason goes back to remarks made in Chapter 2 about Sartre's concern to establish the reality of human

freedom against Spinoza by developing a comprehensive account of human reality within an ontological framework. If the basis of Sartre's ontology were Copernican, and this were taken to foreclose questions about the unity and totality of being, then his position would be vulnerable in an important respect. On Sartre's own account, as we have seen, the Copernican standpoint leads us to affirm the ontological primacy of the for-itself, and a 'profound contradiction' appears when we attempt to understand how freedom can arise from that which is ontologically primary; and this is more than enough to motivate the Spinozistic-cum-eliminativist thought that the whole edifice of so-called 'human reality' is merely a vast *illusion*, i.e. that all of Sartre's theory of nothingness, freedom, the mode of being of the for-itself, etc., is empty, there being in reality nothing but being-in-itself.

If this is correct, then the only way forward for Sartre is to accept and to attempt to meet the demands of the a-perspectival, absolute standpoint: Sartre must fill out and make intelligible the origin of for-itself. Where this might lead ultimately is another question, but to think that it would necessarily oblige Sartre to relinquish anything in his ontological framework which is of final importance for his philosophical ends, let alone to embrace any of the 'ontologically optimistic', theistic or Hegelian metaphysical positions to which B&N is so implacably opposed, would be to take too narrow a view of the options.<sup>143</sup>

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is Sartre justified in his claim that the implication of B&N is atheistic rather than merely agnostic?
2. Is the ontology of B&N complete?

Having completed a reading of B&N, it makes sense to read Sartre's 'Consciousness of self and knowledge of self' (1948), the text of a lecture delivered to the Société Française de la Philosophie in which Sartre gives a synoptic summary of the principal theses of B&N.

## RECEPTION AND INFLUENCE

Given the accordance of Sartre's illusionless perspective on human life with the devastation of the post-war world, and of his doctrine of freedom with the mood of an age occupied with reconstruction and reassuming responsibility for determining its future – as well as confronting questions of accountability for past action and inaction – it is not surprising that the philosophy of B&N should have been received with intense interest, of a degree that had been enjoyed by no other French philosophical work since Bergson's *Creative Evolution* at the turn of the century, and, indeed, that few other great works in the history of philosophy have met with.

Recognition of the importance of B&N was not, however, instantaneous – it attracted barely any attention in 1943–44 – but formed in the wake of Sartre's rise to fame after the Liberation.<sup>144</sup> It is hard, consequently, to disentangle the contribution of B&N in particular to the establishing of Sartre's soaring reputation in the post-war years, since it was only one part – the most academic and intellectually demanding – of a rapidly growing and internally unified body of work. Sartre's literary output in the 1940s included the play *No Exit (Huis clos)*, a spectacular success on its first performance in May 1944, and the trilogy of novels, *The Roads to Freedom (Les Chemins de la liberté)*, while the leftist (but party-unaffiliated) journal which Sartre had founded with Beauvoir, Aron and Merleau-Ponty in 1943 and thereafter edited, *Les Temps modernes*, gained a significant readership. In 1944 Sartre determined that he could make a living as a writer, and gave up his teaching post. The post-war years saw Sartre's profile rise exponentially, with, in addition to many literary projects, lecture tours in North America and Europe, political commentary, art criticism, invitations to write film scripts, broadcasts on state national radio, and even, for a short period in 1947, leadership of a new,

unaligned political movement, *Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire*.<sup>145</sup>

Accompanying Sartre's popularity – inevitably, and appropriately in view of the sharp critical import of his ideas – came hostility from several quarters.<sup>146</sup> In 1944 the Communist weekly *Action* denounced Sartre,<sup>147</sup> who had kept his distance from Marx's ideas and communist political practice in the 1920s and 30s, and would continue to do so for some time more, until 1952.<sup>148</sup> Attacks on Sartre appeared also in the established national press, and the Roman Catholic Church confirmed Sartre's importance in 1948 by placing his books on its Index.<sup>149</sup> The lecture which Sartre gave in Paris in October 1945 and had printed in 1946, *Existentialism and Humanism* (the title translates literally, and more pointedly, as *Existentialism Is a Humanism*), attempted to clarify the content of his existentialism, the identity of which had been obscured in the course of the polemics that had surrounded it, and to answer squarely his critics' charges of nihilism, immoralism and political indifference.<sup>150</sup>

Interest in the philosophy of B&N has not only outlasted the early post-war years: its influence on intellectual culture in the second half of the twentieth century – if not by dint of the letter of its text, then as relayed through Sartre's lectures, shorter philosophical writings and literary works – is as considerable as that of any other single philosophical work of the period. To the extent that B&N could be taken as modelling the consciousness and predicament of the Occupied French, it could serve equally as a template for interpreting the situation of other groups subject to domination, as Sartre's visits to the United States in 1945–46 and travels in the racially segregated south impressed upon him. In 1946 Sartre published a critique of anti-semitism, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, the limitations of which are perhaps clear to present-day readers, but which in context achieved something of considerable importance, by offering an original analysis of what is involved subjectively in the construction of repressive, recognition-denying social identities.<sup>151</sup> One of the most important, best-known and enduring socio-political dimensions of influence of Sartre's philosophy of freedom was on feminist thinking: Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) established, on grounds that owe much to B&N, the principle, which has subsequently become a commonplace,

that one is not born but rather becomes a woman,<sup>152</sup> through a process of construction in which woman is positioned non-reciprocally as the objectual Other of man-as-subject.

1. *Philosophical critiques of Being and Nothingness.* If we now look historically downstream, rather than back to what Sartre took from Husserl and Heidegger, the following philosophers in particular stand out as in critical dialogue with Sartre's philosophy in B&N.

(a) *Marcel: Christian existentialism.* A kind of phenomenological, existentialist philosophy had been developed, independently of Heidegger, in the pre-war years by the Catholic French philosopher Marcel, whose 'Existence and human freedom' (1946) is an early and perceptive critique of the philosophy of B&N from such a standpoint. (Some of Marcel's criticisms were noted in §36 and §44.) In this essay Marcel accepts that B&N is founded on a certain basic, revelatory experience of the character of being, the one described in *Nausea*, and that even though the genuineness of this experience must be admitted, Sartre (first) has gone astray in the weight that he has assigned to it and in his elaboration of its significance, and (second) has excluded dogmatically another, competing range of basic experiences, specifically, those that point towards Marcel's own Christian existentialism. B&N is diagnosed as an incoherent superimposition of idealism on a covert materialist foundation. Ultimately Marcel is denunciatory: Sartre is charged with an axiological nihilism which poses a spiritual threat to the youth of the day.<sup>153</sup>

I suggested in §47 that Sartre may be regarded as contesting Jacobi's claims, and one may consider Marcel as, so to speak, replying to Sartre on Jacobi's behalf. This attempt to reclaim for theology the territory of existential phenomenology recurs in later French phenomenology, in the work of Jean-Luc Marion. One important issue that may be regarded as emerging in this context is the question of how much needs to be put up in order to meet the challenge that B&N poses to our ordinary, commonsensical conception of the world and the value of humanity: though Marcel does not appeal to any theological assumptions in his critique of Sartre, he does suppose that appeal to some set of privileged, revelatory experiences – of 'communion' and

'grace' – is needed to counter Sartre. Marcel does not think that the unassisted standpoint of 'common sense' provides any sort of answer to Sartre: he and Sartre are in agreement that there is no middle ground.<sup>154</sup>

(b) *Merleau-Ponty: monism.* One issue which has arisen repeatedly in our review of the various themes in B&N is that of what to make of phenomena belonging to B&N's full ontology, which may appear to combine the two kinds of being, in-itself and for-itself, which Sartre regards as, in the final analysis, exclusive, exhaustive and immiscible. Phenomena such as embodiment and affectivity, which may appear to involve essentially both forms of being, pose a *prima facie* challenge, and we have seen that Sartre seeks to explain these in terms which allow him to maintain the sharp dualism of the basic ontology.

Leaving aside the question of whether Sartre's explanations are successful, it may be observed that one option which suggests itself in the light of this recurring pattern, is to invert Sartre's dualistic analyses: that is, instead of starting with two discrete and heterogeneous forms of being, and proceeding to offer explanations for why they might appear to be fused in some contexts, one might instead begin by positing a single original mode of being which subsequently undergoes differentiation, eventually yielding the two poles which, it could then be said, Sartre mistakes for a fundamental ontological opposition.

Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, published in 1945, thus only two years after B&N, may be read as, among other things, an extended critical reply to Sartre along just these lines. Where Sartre sees *appearances* of ontological ambiguity that need to be disambiguated, Merleau-Ponty sees an original given *unity* which comes to be conceived in terms of metaphysical dualisms only by dint of various reflective operations of abstraction and conceptual remoulding. Thus, to take the central topic of his work, perception is regarded by Merleau-Ponty as a primordial, undecomposable point of unity of the subject (for-itself) and object (in-itself) which analytical reflection cannot penetrate. Similarly regarding the body: when conceived appropriately, viz. as the primitive bearer of intentionality, the body combines in one indissoluble unity, according to Merleau-Ponty, the features of corporeality and

mentality which philosophical reflection mistakenly separates out and reifies as two distinct substances, mind (for-itself) and matter (in-itself).

Much would be needed to determine whether Merleau-Ponty's approach is coherent, and whether it carries advantages over Sartre's dualism. Prescinding from the details of Merleau-Ponty's account, one important critical observation which can be made on his monistic strategy is that it does not promise to establish, as securely as does Sartre's, the reality of freedom: to the extent that we pursue an approach which treats metaphysical concepts as functions of abstraction, we are, it seems, bound to treat them as standing at a remove from reality, i.e. to construe them anti-realistically. To determine whether this charge sticks, it is necessary to examine the final chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, 'Freedom', which though mentioning Sartre by name only once is directed clearly against Sartre's extremism and defends an anti-Sartrean view of human agency as inextricably caught up in the world and yet free. It may be replied on Sartre's behalf that what Merleau-Ponty says here either reduces freedom to a limiting case without actual realization, or at least leaves it unexplained how freedom can combine with something else, other than freedom but no less basic, without being destroyed; either way, it is plausible that Merleau-Ponty leaves in doubt the reality of freedom.<sup>155</sup>

Whatever assessment is made of Merleau-Ponty's ambitious project, the criticisms of Sartre made in *Phenomenology of Perception* still need to be addressed, since they can be, and have been frequently, levelled independently. Merleau-Ponty's case against Sartre was re-presented by him ten years later, in a more explicit, semi-polemical form, in a chapter of his *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955) titled 'Sartre and ultrabol-shevism'. Merleau-Ponty's primary target in this essay, as the title implies, is Sartre's attitude to the Soviet Union, but he traces Sartre's alleged political misguidance and irresponsibility back to the philosophy of the subject found in B&N, which, he argues, underlies Sartre's politics, and which he describes as the 'madness of the *cogito*'.<sup>156</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's most fully amplified critique of B&N is contained in 'Interrogation and dialectic', drafted in 1959-61 and published after Merleau-Ponty's death in *The Visible and*

*the Invisible*. Here an exceptionally subtle and well-elaborated case is made in support of the objection that the severe dualism of B&N's basic ontology is fatal to its philosophical purposes of vindicating freedom, explicating intersubjectivity and so on. The moral drawn by Merleau-Ponty is that the aperspectival metaphilosophical standpoint of what he calls 'analytical reflection' must be abandoned, implying that Sartre's fundamental mistake was to remain within the orbit of traditional metaphysical explanation.<sup>157</sup>

There may well be reasons, I suggested in §48, why Sartre's ontological dualism should be referred back ultimately to an original point of unity, but this is a different matter from accepting Merleau-Ponty's 'philosophy of ambiguity', as it has been called. To concede that Sartre's dualism, when thought through to its limit, yields to an ultimate metaphysical monism, is not to impugn the dualistic path, and is compatible with a rejection of Merleau-Ponty's monistic phenomenology.

(c) *Levinas: the Other*. As has been seen, one of the most striking theses of B&N concerns the existential quality of human relationships, and for this reason Levinas – whose early book on Husserl was important for Sartre – represents a second development in the phenomenological tradition which is especially well located in relation to B&N. Levinas paid close attention to Sartre's philosophy and engaged with Sartre's ideas about imagination and Jewish identity in essays of the 1940s,<sup>158</sup> and in his major philosophical work, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), he presents an original philosophical position which amounts to a partial inversion of B&N, as radical as Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* but with a different, ethical set of priorities.

Some idea of what this amounts to can be got if we consider the structure of B&N's ontology. Sartre sets out first, in the basic ontology, the relation of self to world, and later introduces the connection to the Other. Yet, as we saw in §29, the self-other relation is construed by Sartre as trans-empirical and trans-mundane: my *cogito*-like awareness of the Other-as-subject owes nothing to the world. What might be supposed, therefore, is that this expository and ontological order could be modified or even reversed, in other words, that the relation to the Other should be regarded as belonging properly to the



basic ontology and perhaps even as having precedence over the relation of consciousness to being-in-itself. In the latter case, if the relation to the Other has this priority, then consciousness of the Other does not have to be set into a prior context where consciousness is already in the business of objectification, and on such a basis it would be intelligible to suppose that primitive consciousness-of-the-Other need not have necessarily the conflictual character theorized by Sartre. Certainly, more is needed to take us to Levinas' full position – which is, that the primordial consciousness of the Other is a consciousness of infinite obligation, and that 'ethics precedes ontology' – but the door would be open to such a development, and it could reasonably be conjectured that Sartre, sharing Levinas' sense of the weight and universal scope of human responsibility, might at this point not offer stiff resistance: although Sartre does not in fact, in B&N, characterize the experience of the Other's look in ethical terms, there is a significant phenomenological kinship between Sartre's characterization of my consciousness of the Other-as-subject as overwhelming, and Levinas' characterization of the Other as taking the form of an indeterminate, infinite demand place upon me; both Sartre and Levinas think that consciousness of the Other involves at the deepest level an awareness of the asymmetry and heterogeneity of self and Other.<sup>159</sup>

(d) *Heidegger's reply to Sartre*. Merleau-Ponty and Levinas can be regarded, therefore, as proposing ways in which we might escape from the arguable ontological and ethical impasses of Sartre's philosophy. A third response to B&N from within the phenomenological tradition which deserves attention, but which by contrast categorically rejects Sartre's philosophy at ground level, is Heidegger's.

Heidegger's *Letter on 'Humanism'* – originally, in 1946, a letter replying to questions posed by the French philosopher Jean Beaufret concerning Heidegger's view of French existentialism, expanded for publication in 1947 – was in part a reply to Sartre's *Existentialism and Humanism*.<sup>160</sup> Heidegger's rejection of Sartre turns on two key points. First, Heidegger argues that Sartre has begun with and merely sought to modify the (traditionally given) concept of 'human being', thereby failing to put in question the basic, and inadequate, terms within which his reflection proceeds.<sup>161</sup> Second, Heidegger objects to the

conception of value which Sartre shares with all humanism, whereby value is held to be brought into the world through and with human being. This strategy, Heidegger claims, is doomed to fail, because 'valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivising'; Sartre fails to go back to the necessary primordial point, before the distinction of fact and value, of the theoretical and the practical, is drawn.<sup>162</sup>

In both respects, Heidegger reads Sartre (accurately) as remaining, in his employment of concepts such as essence, within the Western philosophical tradition of 'metaphysics' (in Heidegger's critical sense).<sup>163</sup> Heidegger's repudiation of this tradition turns on his distinction of Being from beings. Heidegger is thus, at one level, simply returning Sartre's compliment: the project of enquiry into the meaning of Being, which Sartre had rejected in Section II of the Introduction to B&N (§2), not without argument but ultimately in a somewhat cursory manner, is counter-asserted by Heidegger as the basis for a philosophical standpoint which he claims to be higher than that occupied by Sartre.

The further and more interesting point which emerges from the *Letter* is that Heidegger has – depending on how much continuity one is prepared to see in Heidegger's development – either changed his position since *Being and Time*, or clarified its status. Sartre's mistake, Heidegger implies, was to fail to see that the concept of Dasein is merely preparatory, 'pre-cursory', to the true task of thinking Being. Sartre's conception of the for-itself, which appears to occupy the same position as Heidegger's Dasein, is in fact a conception of a quite different, lower order, for Dasein properly conceived, Heidegger now tells us, is *not* a conception of *human beings*, as is Sartre's concept of the for-itself, but a conception of an *ontological function* which Being 'gives' to human beings and which human beings merely 'sustain'. The difference of Heidegger from Sartre, then, is that while the concept of the for-itself is that of an absolute, a final reality incapable of any deeper explication, the concept of Dasein (in the later Heidegger if not in *Being and Time*) gets its sense from a further and more basic thinking of 'the truth of Being'. For this reason, Heidegger feels able to claim that the basic tenets of B&N and those of *Being and Time* have 'nothing at all in common', and describes the merely self-concerned,

self-asserting human subject of Sartre's existentialism as 'the tyrant of being'.<sup>164</sup>

(e) *Lukács and Marcuse: Marxism*. Heidegger's criticism of B&N is, therefore, in no sense an internal one: it rests squarely on an assumption which Sartre (whether rightly or wrongly) rejects. The same externality tends to characterize the critical angles on B&N which were developed in the 1940s from within the Marxist tradition, in philosophical writings which appeared in parallel with the French Communist Party's early attacks on Sartre, of which the most important are György Lukács' *Existentialisme ou marxisme?* (1948) and Herbert Marcuse's 'Existentialism: remarks on Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Être et le néant*' (1948).<sup>165</sup>

The common threads in Marxist appraisals of B&N consist, as might be expected, of complaints of its 'idealism', in consequence of Sartre's refusal to integrate human reality into natural being and to derive consciousness from matter; of its isolation of the individual, and contraction of political morality to a sphere of 'abstract' individual human rights; and of its consequent inability to do justice to the reality of social phenomena and human history as conceived in dialectical materialism, and to establish the necessary conditions for collective (class) action. Lukács added for good measure the charge of 'irrationalism', incurred on account of Sartre's rejection of objective historical development as a source of normativity.

Marcuse's equally influential neo-Marxist appraisal of B&N appeared in the same year. While recognizing that Sartre is not an irrationalist, at least in so far as he (by contrast with Albert Camus) thinks that the truths of existentialism can be expressed in philosophy and not merely in literature, Marcuse criticizes Sartre for failing to see that the articulation of a theory of freedom in abstraction from man's actual, concrete socio-historical conditions of unfreedom, reduces B&N to an ideological mystification of the same order as the stoic and Christian conceptions that Sartre attacks.<sup>166</sup> Marcuse allows, however, that Sartre's project is, within its own terms, 'ontologically correct' and 'successful'; the inference to be drawn, according to Marcuse, is that the whole (necessarily 'idealist') procedure of philosophy in employing concepts which have not

been drawn from a prior theory of society, and of attempting to think reality in abstraction from history, is cognitively vain and ideologically negative.<sup>167</sup>

2. Being and Nothingness *and the later Sartre*. It is necessary to consider Sartre himself as a critic of the philosophy of B&N. In interviews conducted in his later years, Sartre acknowledges errors in the position of B&N, to the point of apparently accepting some of the fundamental criticisms made by his Marxist opponents. Thus in a 1975 interview Sartre says that B&N's 'specifically social chapters, on the "we"', were 'particularly bad', that the problems of the possibility of forgetting and of animal consciousness were not addressed in B&N, and that B&N contains no treatment of organic life and the existence of Nature, nor of the relation of consciousness to the brain.<sup>168</sup> In terms of its philosophical methodology, B&N fails in the eyes of the later Sartre to qualify as dialectical, and must be regarded as an unfinished work:<sup>169</sup> it is, Sartre says, merely 'a rationalist philosophy of consciousness', a 'monument of rationality'.<sup>170</sup>

Even more important are Sartre's later comments on B&N's doctrine of freedom. In 1966, Sartre declares that 'a sort of substantial I, or central category, always more or less given', 'has been dead for a long time' and that 'the subject or subjectivity constitutes itself *from a basis anterior to itself*'.<sup>171</sup> And in 1969:

I concluded [in the 1940s, under the Occupation] that in any circumstances, there is always a possible choice. Which is false. Indeed, it is so false that I later wanted precisely to refute myself by creating a character in *Le Diable et le bon dieu*, Heinrich, [. . .] who will never choose. He is *totally conditioned* by his situation. However, I understood all this only much later [. . .] I believe that a man can always make something out of *what is made of him*. This is the limit I would today accord to freedom: the small movement which makes of a *totally conditioned social being* someone who does not render back completely what his conditioning has given him [. . .] the small margin in an operation whereby an interiorisation re-exteriorises itself in an act [. . .] The individual interiorises his social determinations: he interiorises the relations of production, the family of his childhood, the historical past, the contemporary institutions, and he then re-exteriorises these

in acts and options which necessarily refer us back to them. None of this existed in *L'Être et le néant*.<sup>172</sup>

Along with this newly restricted freedom goes an acceptance of determining structures: 'There is no doubt that structure produces actions'; 'Lacan has clarified the unconscious as a discourse which separates by means of language [. . .] Verbal forms [*ensembles*] are structured as a form of the practico-inert through the act of speaking. These forms express or constitute intentions that *determine me* without being mine.'<sup>173</sup>

What should be made of these statements? We should hesitate before either agreeing with Sartre's retrospective self-assessments, or claiming that his later statements show that a conversion of philosophical standpoint has taken place.

In the first place it must be emphasized that the self-criticism of the later Sartre consists of acknowledgements of the putative limitations of B&N – of respects in which its claims were too simple, or exaggerated, and require complexification or modification – accompanied by no new set of fundamental doctrines to replace those of B&N, nor even by a suggestion that the problem of human freedom might yield to a different solution

In consequence, what Sartre's deprecations of the achievement of B&N may be taken to show is simply the incompatibility of its system of freedom with the Marxist conception of historical development – in other words, that the de-mythologization of historical materialism at which Sartre aimed in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is impossible on the basis of B&N. And this leaves it open for us (if not for Sartre, given the new weighting of his philosophical priorities after he had been 'remade by politics'<sup>174</sup>) to think that the problem lies, not with B&N, but with Marxist theory, or even, more generally, with the attempt to think man as an object of social theory. Indeed, what gives the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* a philosophical profundity not often found in writings in social theory, compensating to some degree for the obscurity of the work, is Sartre's sense of the depth of the difficulty presented by the transcendental questions of what it is for a social entity or human history to have reality and of how the existence of such things can be so much as possible – and it is because Sartre refuses to relinquish the insights of B&N in considering social ontology in

his *Critique* that the work puts this difficulty into such sharp focus.<sup>175</sup>

If this is correct, then the conclusion to draw is not that B&N failed in the philosophical task it set itself, but rather that there is a further philosophical problem concerning the reality of the socio-historical which Sartre did not solve.<sup>176</sup>

Equally important is the point that it is most uncertain that what Sartre later says about freedom *does* contradict his position in B&N. As the quotations above show, Sartre begins in the 1960s to talk of the subject as having a 'basis anterior to itself', as being 'made', 'determined', 'conditioned' and so forth. But we must ask how this should be interpreted. What meaning does Sartre want to give these terms? More specifically, why should the anterior basis of the subject, and the determining structures which it confronts, not be understood in terms of the view of freedom and facticity presented in B&N (§33)?

When Sartre revisited the problem of freedom in conversations with Beauvoir in 1974, he described his theory of freedom in B&N as having failed to express what he had meant, saying that he used out of convenience an 'artless', 'textbook' theory of freedom, according to which 'one always chooses what one does, one is free with regard to the Other': 'I then believed that one is always free [. . .] On this point I've changed very much. I think in fact that there are situations in which one cannot be free.' Sartre's real meaning, he now claims, had been that, even when one's actions are 'provoked' by something external, one is still 'responsible for oneself'.<sup>177</sup>

However, since self-responsibility *does* therefore always remain, it is not clear that Sartre *is* revoking anything, or why he thinks that the theory of freedom in B&N was simplistic. Moreover, Sartre adds here that, even in responding to something external, 'there is something that comes from our remotest depths and that is related to our primary freedom'. What is this primary freedom, if not the freedom of B&N? At such points it almost seems that Sartre has confused the ontological freedom of B&N with a denial that one may be powerless with respect to external states of affairs. And other remarks suggest that nothing has changed from B&N: those who do not feel free, Sartre says, are merely 'confused', because only awareness of freedom, not freedom itself, can be missing.<sup>178</sup> When Beauvoir points out

to Sartre that in his biography of Genet, Genet's external circumstances and externally derived experiences are described so thickly that they appear to be determining, Sartre reaffirms that Genet's transformation of these circumstances is 'the work of freedom'<sup>179</sup> – a freedom which, B&N has argued compellingly, cannot have come into being at any logically later stage than the external circumstances themselves.

Because his later position is opaque, it is possible therefore to dissent respectfully when Sartre suggests that he had been in error with respect to the doctrine of freedom in B&N. Pending an account of how one can think of freedom as something limited by conditioning factors without encountering all of the powerful objections detailed in B&N, the philosophical authority of Sartre's later recantation of B&N's doctrine of freedom is limited.

3. *The structuralist and post-structuralist repudiation of Being and Nothingness.* Despite the new impetus which B&N gave to the programme of existential phenomenology, and the fruitfulness of the debates to which it gave rise – in particular, with Merleau-Ponty and Levinas – Sartre's dominant position on the scene of academic philosophy in France was not of long duration. French philosophy turned in a relatively short space of time firmly against the whole project of a subject- or consciousness-based philosophy.<sup>180</sup>

To some degree the structuralist revolt against existential phenomenology had been prepared for by Merleau-Ponty – once the Sartrean for-itself has been exchanged for a subject as thickly embedded in the world as Merleau-Ponty conceives it to be, the methodological privilege of consciousness has been largely surrendered. In this spirit, Claude Lévi-Strauss attacked Sartre in *The Savage Mind* (1962) as failing to see that phenomenology is blind to, and incapable of grasping, the sorts of objective structures exemplified by natural language and identified by Marx and Freud. The limitations of Sartre's later attempt to grasp the social and historical in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* reveals Sartre to have been in B&N, and to have since remained, 'the prisoner of his Cogito', according to Lévi-Strauss: 'He who begins by steeping himself in the allegedly self-evident truths of introspection never emerges from them'; 'caught up in the snare of personal identity', Sartre has 'shut the door on the knowledge of man'.<sup>181</sup>

Again, Michel Foucault's analytical-historical study of the human sciences in *The Order of Things* (1966) alleged that phenomenology remains caught in a basic contradiction (of the subject's simultaneous inclusion in and exclusion from the world) common to all forms of transcendental thought,<sup>182</sup> and Jacques Derrida's critique of the axiomatic Husserlian assumption of consciousness' presence-to-itself undermined B&N at a stroke.<sup>183</sup>

One extremely important factor in this turnaround was Heidegger's *Letter*, and Beaufret's work in spreading Heidegger's ideas in the 1950s: though most French philosophers did not subscribe to Heideggerianism so much as explore it with fascination, the double lesson was taken that Sartrean anthropocentric existentialism had failed to encompass Heidegger's philosophy, and that Sartre's humanism did not have the last word and could not hold its own against more radical, non-subject-centred alternatives.<sup>184</sup>

4. Being and Nothingness *and contemporary philosophy*. There remains the question of Sartre's importance for contemporary philosophy.

The centenary of Sartre's birth in 1905 having passed and been celebrated, the importance of Sartre as a figure in intellectual history, and his virtues as a contributor to public life, have been appreciated anew. Sartre's importance for contemporary philosophy, however, both in anglophone analytic and in Continental circles, is not great, and it is very improbable that Sartre's philosophical prestige will return in the foreseeable future to anything like the level that it enjoyed in the early-post-war period. The reasons for this have nothing to do with the quality or limitations of Sartre's thought, and everything to do with the nature of the philosophical project that Sartre pursues in B&N. First, as argued in Chapter 2, Sartre's philosophy is premised on an uncompromising rejection of naturalism. Second, Sartre is committed, methodologically and doctrinally, to subjectivity as the overarching principle of philosophical thought. Third, Sartre sets himself at a distance from the epistemological tradition of modern European philosophy, and in addition B&N shows no sympathy or engagement with either the historical turn of nineteenth century or the logico-linguistic turn of twentieth-century philosophy. Fourth, as I have tried to



show, Sartre's aim in B&N was to construct a revisionary metaphysical system in a very strong sense, and the viability of such an enterprise has increasingly, since the end of Hegelianism in the middle of the nineteenth century, been denied. As Levinas put it, Sartre was philosophically exceptional in so far as he 'did not think metaphysics was absolutely finished'.<sup>185</sup>

For all of these interconnected reasons, it is fully intelligible that Sartre should fall outside the orbit of philosophical programmes orientated either towards exploring the contribution of the natural and human sciences to philosophical knowledge, or the attempts of Nietzsche and Heidegger to bring to a close the project of Western philosophy, or the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Kantian philosophy in a postmetaphysical form.

The following high tribute paid to Sartre by Jürgen Habermas testifies indirectly to Sartre's dissociation from the dominant trajectories of contemporary philosophy:

Sartre's work does not allow itself to be adapted to deconstructionist tendencies. For this discourse, he represents an adversary who is not easily assimilable. His writings contain ideas that not only have not been surpassed but that also point beyond the historicist and contextualist approaches that are so widespread today. This is true especially for the existentialist understanding of freedom, which – following a trajectory from Fichte and Kierkegaard – expresses in a pregnant and radical version an undeniable component of the modern self-understanding. I admire the fact that Sartre resisted in an exemplary way the temptation to fall back behind the conditions of postmetaphysical thinking.<sup>186</sup>

For contemporary postmetaphysical thinkers, Sartre's achievement can consist only and at most in his having given exceptionally clear and forceful expression to *one* component of modern self-understanding, namely its notion of individual autonomy; and this is neither sufficient for Sartre's own universalistic purposes, nor enough to make Sartre a significant philosophical resource for thinkers seeking to resolve the contradictions of modern thought without recourse to metaphysics, who are bound to regard Sartre as having paid too high a price in sacrificing the overcoming of traditional metaphysics which,

on the postmetaphysical view, is another, necessary part of late modernity's self-understanding.

Is it possible to insert Sartre's leading ideas into the context of a fundamentally different kind of philosophical project, more closely attuned with contemporary trends, and to do so without emptying them of their proper significance? Some readers of Sartre sympathetic to postmodernism maintain that the gap between a Sartrean and a postmodernist conception of subjectivity is not as wide as it may appear, or as Sartre's early structuralist and post-structuralist adversaries supposed it to be, and have argued not merely that the aporiae of B&N precipitate the leap into postmodern philosophy, but that the trajectory of Sartre himself is towards postmodernism.<sup>187</sup>

One thing sometimes taken to situate B&N on the postmodern side of the fence is Sartre's doctrine of the non-self-identity of the for-itself – which is read as anticipating the non-integral, fractured, multiple self which results from Lacanian theory and deconstructionist critique. However, if what I have been arguing in this book is correct, then this is a misreading: Sartre's description of the subject as non-self-identical has a different, metaphysical sense from the postmodern thesis of the subject's decentredness, even if the words employed to express the two claims are the same. This is shown by the fact that Sartre takes his thesis to effect a conceptual *closure* – to provide a complete and final *positive* specification of what the for-itself *is* – and that such a philosophical achievement is precisely what postmodern theory, in its sophisticated forms at any rate, denies the possibility of. Alternatively, if there truly is no difference between the Sartrean for-itself and the deconstructed subject, then the question arises whether postmodern theories of the (death of the) subject have rightly described themselves as postmetaphysical, and the burden lies on postmodern thought to explain afresh what it means by 'going beyond metaphysics'.<sup>188</sup> More plausible endeavours to shift Sartre in a postmodern direction ignore B&N and focus instead on the human subject that emerges in Sartre's later works, and on the B&N-critical statements made by Sartre in later years, although I have suggested that the probative value of the latter is questionable.<sup>189</sup>

Parallel remarks apply to attempts to integrate Sartre's ideas into the context of contemporary analytic, or mainstream

anglophone, philosophy.<sup>190</sup> While it is of interest to highlight convergences of Sartre's thinking with contemporary analytic philosophy of mind and action, or, more ambitiously, to offer reconstructions of Sartre's ideas in a non-Sartrean idiom, the question remains, of what we should then think of the historical Sartre, and the *prima facie* implication of an analytic regrounding or reconstruction of Sartrean claims which dispenses with the ontological heavy machinery of B&N is that Sartre's project is not, in fact, well conceived. The characteristic tendency of analytic discussion of Sartre is, accordingly, critical – Sartre is made to seem to have mis-stated and obscured his insights through inflated ontological formulation.

This reflects a key disagreement regarding what attitude should be taken towards our ordinary conception of the world, the characteristic analytic assumption being that the world as commonsensically conceived is self-standing, the onus lying entirely on Sartre to show the categorical necessity of his proposed revisions, while Sartre takes the commonsensical world to be inadequate in both existential and theoretical respects, and so to already of itself demand a philosophical reappraisal.

With regard to the complaint, commonly voiced by analytic philosophers, that Sartre's metaphysics of the human subject relies to an unacceptable degree on metaphor, the short answer is that – if this is not just another way of objecting to Sartre's view that metaphysics must break with the conceptual scheme of common sense – what counts in philosophical contexts as a metaphorical use of terms depends altogether on the nature of that which we are attempting to conceptualize. The challenge to translate Sartre's ideas without loss into plainer terms lies open, but until it is met, Sartre is entitled to reply that his terminological innovations are indispensable if the phenomenon of subjectivity is to be fixed in philosophical concepts, and so that his metaphysics is no more metaphorical in relation to its singular, unparalleled non-empirical object, viz. subjectivity, than empirical descriptions are in relation to empirical objects. As Sartre might put it: the metaphysics of B&N are what result from taking subjectivity literally.

I have suggested in this book that the context required in order for Sartre's philosophical position – taken as an integrated whole rather than in dismantled form – to appear again

a live option, would involve a return to the sorts of debates that occupied Kant's successors, the German idealists and the German romantics, in the last decade of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, where the task of philosophy was conceived in terms of the formulation of an anti-naturalistic 'system of freedom' which would resolve the problems of Kant's idealism, rebutting Jacobi's charge of nihilism and allowing full metaphysical sense to be made of Kant's idea of human autonomy. If Sartre is now condemned to belong to the history but not to the actuality of philosophy, he lies at least in good company.

## NOTES

1. On the period and developments in French philosophy described in this chapter, see Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, Introduction and chs. 1–3; Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Part I; Janicaud, *Heidegger en France*, vol. 1, chs. 1–2; Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, ch. 1; Kelly, *Hegel in France*, chs. 5–6; and Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy*, chs. 1–4. For biographical information on Sartre concerning the period from 1924 until the publication of B&N in 1943, see Leak, *Sartre*, pp. 20–59, and in greater detail, Cohen-Solal, *Sartre*, Parts I–II, and Hayman, *Writing Against*, chs. 4–14. Sartre describes his philosophical influences in ‘An interview with Jean-Paul Sartre’ (1975), pp. 5ff.; on these, see also Lévy, *Sartre*, Part I, ch. 4, and Renaut, *Sartre, le Dernier Philosophe*, Part 1.
2. While rejecting a complacent Brunschvicg’s picture of the human situation: see *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 50–1.
3. *The Paris Lectures* (1929). Reworked and expanded, these were published in French in 1931 as *Méditations cartésiennes (Cartesian Meditations)*, one of Husserl’s most important later writings.
4. On Koyré, Kojève, and the history of the seminar, see Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, pp. 58ff.
5. See Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.
6. Sartre did not attend Kojève’s Hegel seminar (though his enforced absences from Paris for much of the 1930s provide some explanation for this), and Heidegger’s *What is Metaphysics?*, which appeared in French translation in 1931 and was read by Sartre, failed to command his interest until very much later. See the autobiographical account given by Sartre of the process of his absorption of Husserl and Heidegger in *War Diaries*, pp. 182–7.
7. See ‘An interview with Jean-Paul Sartre’, p. 8. Hayman, *Writing Against*, pp. 53–5, gives evidence that, in addition, Spinoza, Rousseau, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, were important for Sartre, and that Sartre was also strongly interested in the surrealists.
8. Hayman, *Writing Against*, pp. 53, 61, 67. Sartre experimented in 1935 with mescaline (see the 1972 interview in *Sartre By Himself*, pp. 37–8); his interest in psychological abnormality shows itself in *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, and *The Imaginary*, pp. 148–59. Non-normal states of mind are referred to for their philosophical significance frequently in B&N.
9. See for example Sartre’s ‘The legend of truth’ (1931), a speculative, Nietzschean account of how the value of truth came to be formed.
10. See, e.g., ‘Motion picture art’ (1931). The conclusion of *Nausea* (pp. 246–53) entertains the Nietzschean idea of a justification

of existence through art, but in terms so uncertain and alienated that no basis is provided for ascribing any such conviction to Sartre. Sartre's philosophical repudiation of aestheticism is explicit in *The Imaginary*, pp. 188–94.

11. Why would Sartre turn from active resistance to (mere) philosophy? On this crucial period, see Lévy, *Adventures on the Freedom Road*, pp. 231–8, and Sartre, pp. 289–94, setting the record straight.
12. Sartre mentions his work on B&N in letters to Beauvoir in July 1940 (*Quiet Moments in a War*, pp. 234, 235, 237) and in 1974 claimed that he both conceived and wrote B&N in the phoney war and the Stalag ('Conversations with Sartre', pp. 156–7).
13. This reading, or re-reading with endorsement, of Heidegger occurs between 1938 and 1940. See *War Diaries*, pp. 183–6, where Sartre says that it was only once he had discovered the 'impasse' in Husserl (viz. its idealism and solipsism) that he 'turned towards Heidegger' (p. 184). For reasons of space I have not attempted to record systematically in my commentary Sartre's borrowings from Heidegger, but the size of the debt is very considerable, as a reading of Heidegger's 1929 text, *What is Metaphysics?*, will reveal. Nor have I given an account of the philosophical differences of Sartre from Heidegger, beyond those implied by the criticisms made of Heidegger in B&N discussed in my text. What may be said very briefly is that, while Sartre's philosophy involves a substantial duplication of Heideggerean themes, the sense of these is always changed and of ten fundamentally reversed in the process. Sartre's appropriations are selective, involve major excisions, and result in a more sharply outlined philosophical position. The relative definiteness of Sartre's philosophical commitments in comparison with Heidegger's is due at root to the metaphilosophical difference, that Heidegger's intentions are destructive in relation to a traditional conception of philosophy which Sartre has no quarrel with. Thus each time Sartre encounters a structure in Heidegger's account of Dasein that he considers fit for incorporation into the system of B&N, he asks how it must appear in the perspective of consciousness, and reconceives it accordingly; and since Heidegger's analytic of Dasein is designed to erode the Husserlian and more generally the modern philosophical framework, the result is – depending on one's estimate of Sartre's success – either an incoherent, or a revolutionized and regenerated, Cartesianism: from Sartre's point of view, Heidegger's insights are only partially articulated, and his claims lack genuine determinate sense, until they are re-expressed in terms of consciousness and subjectivity; from Heidegger's, Sartre fails to appreciate that subjectivity is part of the problem, and cannot be prized apart from the blindness to the question of the meaning of Being which needs to be overcome. At times the upshot of Sartre's 'subjectivisation' of Heidegger appears

- to be a retrieval of Kierkegaard, as the 1939 entry in *War Diaries*, pp. 131–4, illustrates with respect to the theme of nothingness. On why Sartre may, for better or worse, be charged with having seriously misread Heidegger, see Chapter 4.
14. Selections from Jacobi's writings are available in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*.
  15. For a full account of Jacobi and post-Kantian idealism, see Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).
  16. See *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 84–6, for a succinct statement of this idea. Kierkegaard's thesis of the practical, task-shaped nature of the 'I' goes back to Fichte.
  17. It is clear at least that Sartre knew Kierkegaard, since in the *War Diaries* for 1939 (pp. 120, 124, 133–4, 139) Sartre records his reflections on Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread* and Wahl's 1938 study of Kierkegaard. Sartre's essay on Kierkegaard, 'Kierkegaard and the singular universal', dates from 1966, but makes clear exactly how B&N can be regarded as a reprise of Kierkegaard's philosophy.
  18. One major historical figure absent from the sketch just drawn of Sartre's philosophical ancestors, but with whom Sartre is often associated, is Nietzsche. Sartre and Nietzsche share some common ground – their ideas concerning the importance of the death of God and the weight of self-responsibility have similarities, and there is a convergence of Sartre's idea of absolute freedom with Nietzsche's life-affirmative ideal of eternal recurrence (see §35) – but they are set far apart by their quite different stances towards naturalism, the scope of philosophical reason and the possibility of systematic philosophy. It is particularly important not to import into our understanding of Sartre the combination of moral subjectivism with self-creationism which (whether or not it is really his view) is standardly attributed to Nietzsche (see §44). For a fair assessment of Sartre's relation to Nietzsche, see Lévy, *Sartre*, pp. 127–33.
  19. An illuminating study of the Fichte-Sartre relation may be found in Daniel Breazeale, 'Vom Idealismus zum Existenzialismus Direttissima: Fichte/Sartre', in *Fichte-Studien* 22, 2003, 171–92.
  20. Quoted in Cohen-Solal, *Sartre*, p. 154.
  21. *Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 2–3. Sartre takes pains to emphasize that he has no argument with Kant, even declaring himself 'happy to believe in the existence of a constituting consciousness' (p. 4). This is somewhat misleading, for it sounds as if Sartre is signing up to transcendental idealism, whereas in fact (as emerges shortly) Sartre denies that objects in general are constituted by the subject; really Sartre is only granting the subject of Kantian idealism provisionally and for the sake of argument. It is noteworthy – because this issue arises also with respect to B&N, and

- is not merely terminological – that Sartre reveals here an understanding of the concept of ‘transcendental’ which dissociates it entirely from idealism, while retaining the idea of ‘pre-mundanity’: the transcendental is what pertains to subjectivity prior to (independently of, in abstraction from) its immersion in and engagement with the actual concrete world, or in other words, to the purely formal dimensions of subjectivity. I will return to this point later.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
  24. Sartre also introduces, *ibid.*, pp. 7–8, the idea (stated earlier in *Imagination*, p. 115) that such consciousness is also *conscious of itself*, but here without argument; this is supplied later in B&N (see §3). Note also the argument given on pp. 11–13, meeting the objection that experience cannot validate his contention that pre-reflective consciousness of objects is free of an ‘I’, since any consultation of it involves reflection and thus shows us an ‘I’.
  25. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9. This leads Sartre on rare occasion (e.g. *ibid.*, p. 51) to reject the term ‘subject’ altogether, but also and more often Sartre continues to talk of a subject and of subjectivity, understood simply as consciousness: this ‘is no longer the subject in Kant’s meaning of the term, but it is subjectivity itself’ (B&N xxxiii/24), and ‘Subjectivity is not *in* consciousness: it *is* consciousness’ (‘An interview with Jean-Paul Sartre’, 1975, p. 11).
  26. *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 15. Note that this further argument is independent from the previous argument only if Husserl’s transcendental ‘I’ is supposed to be offered in *explanation* for the possibility of my taking myself to be both subject and object, and it may be doubted that Husserl intended it to play this role. But Sartre is quite right to say that the identity of the self in its double guise of subject and object is an *explanandum* entailed by Husserl’s model, for which it suggests no obvious *explanans*.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
  28. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 15. The argumentation which lies behind this claim of Sartre’s is contained in Kant’s Paralogisms of Pure Reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.
  30. *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 7.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
  32. Sartre notes the relevant datum – the fact that the ego ‘is given as intimate’ (*ibid.*, p. 37) – but leaves it unaccounted for.
  33. Sartre’s target thus takes in various familiar conceptions of persons, such as P. F. Strawson’s well-known view and influential view, argued for in chapter 3 of *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959).
  34. The parallel of belief in the ‘I’ with belief in God is noted by Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 37.
  35. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–20.
  36. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–6.



37. Ibid., pp. 20–8.
38. Ibid., pp. 34–5, 48.
39. See also *Imagination*, pp. 4–5, where the false metaphysics of imagination – ‘naive ontology’ and ‘thing-ish view’ of images – is said to be ‘that of the man on the street’.
40. *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 46–8.
41. An interpretation which does not, in any case, make sense, since nothing is achieved for explanation by the hypostatization (ibid., pp. 31–2).
42. Lévy, *Sartre*, pp. 186–90, gives a good idea of the subversion implied by *The Transcendence of the Ego*.
43. *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 23–4.
44. This implication emerges when Sartre suggests that ‘pure reflection’ would involve the elimination of ‘I’ thoughts (ibid., pp. 41–2). The question, then, is whether such a consciousness could still sponsor actions, since if it could not, it would appear to have lost its freedom.
45. Sartre acknowledges the appeal of an ‘impersonal consciousness’, ibid., p. 46.
46. Ibid., pp. 7, 8, 19, 35, 45, 46.
47. See *War Diaries*, pp. 184 and 209.
48. *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 13, 41, and *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, pp. 61–3.
49. Sartre’s most persuasive example is that of melancholy, in which, he says, ‘I make the world into an affectively neutral reality, a system which is, affectively, in complete equilibrium [. . .] In other words, lacking both the ability and the will to carry out the projects I formerly entertained, I behave in such a manner that the universe requires nothing more from me’, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, p. 69.
50. See ibid., pp. 75–80. In the background lies what Sartre calls a belief in magic: see pp. 63, 66, 72. The concept of magic is ubiquitous in Sartre’s writings, and appears in both negative and positive guises: sometimes, as here, Sartre criticizes forms of consciousness as magical, but on other occasions he adduces magicality as an element of correct explanations. Sartre’s underlying view is that *in a sense* magic is ‘true’: if magic is the power of consciousness to determine reality in accordance with choice independently of any physical causal medium, then Sartre, anti-naturalistically, believes in it. And it is *because* this is so, that it is possible for consciousness to ‘abuse’ its ‘magical powers’, as it does in emotion.
51. See *The Imaginary*, esp. pp. 148ff.
52. See *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 23–4, 41–2, 48–9, 51–2.
53. See ibid., p. 49.
54. See *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 26.
55. *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 29; Sartre is quoting from Husserl’s *Ideas*.
56. Ibid., pp. 35–6.

57. *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 32–4.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 32–3.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 35.
62. Sartre has a particular interest in abnormal experience of thinking, where thoughts are experienced objectually and consequently as alien: see ‘The legend of truth’, pp. 40ff., *Nausea*, pp. 144–5, and *The Imaginary*, pp. 155–6. The pathological relationships of thinker to thought which Sartre describes in these places express the phenomenology which is implied by the subject-predicate model.
63. For the efforts that consciousness makes in its ‘natural attitude’ to absorb itself in the *me* are ‘never completely rewarded’ (*The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 49).
64. See *War Diaries*, p. 184.
65. ‘The itinerary of a thought’ (1969), pp. 36–7.
66. At any rate, materialism of a ‘mechanistic’ sort; and the only other species of materialism that Sartre admits is dialectical materialism, whose ‘dialectic of nature’ – ‘a natural process which produces and resolves man into an ensemble of physical laws’ – Sartre also rejects (*ibid.*, p. 37). Sartre’s unconditional rejection of naturalism is expressed clearly in *War Diaries*, pp. 21, 25ff.: Sartre describes the conception of man as a ‘species’ as an ‘abasement of human nature’, a ‘degradation’ of the human condition. It is notable that Sartre’s objection concerns a matter of value rather than of theoretical philosophy (just as his move from Husserl to Heidegger has a value-orientation: see *War Diaries*, p. 185, where he says that in 1938 he sought ‘a philosophy that was not just a contemplation but a wisdom, a heroism, a holiness – anything that might allow me to hold out’).
67. Lévy, *Sartre*, p. 404, aptly describes the philosophy of B&N as ‘the very epitome of a coherent anti-naturalism’.
68. Sartre uses this term in, e.g., *What is Literature?*, p. 230, n18.
69. *Nausea*, pp. 182–3, 186.
70. Confirming that Sartre’s philosophy nevertheless deserves to be described as genuinely *transcendental*, see B&N 175–6, where Sartre says that his study is concerned with establishing what ‘must render all experience possible’ and ‘how in general an object can exist for consciousness’ and that ‘what makes all experience possible’ is *a priori* (viz. the ‘original upsurge of the for-itself’). Sartre’s original move is to designate these transcendental conditions *ontological* (he argues that this follows from the necessity of *there being* transcendental conditions, i.e. that to accept the transcendental is to accept that the transcendental is ontological).
71. The idealist conception of the subject as containing its world has a loose equivalent in Sartre’s idea of the subject as *responsible for*

- the world (see §35); but this idea enters in *consequence* of the doctrine of freedom, not as a condition for it.
72. For clear statements of these objections, see the quotations from Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, pp. 28–30, below in §11, and at greater length, Marcel, 'Existence and human freedom', and Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ch. 2.
  73. As Janicaud puts it, B&N is both impossible to read and too easy to read ('à la fois illisible et trop lisible', *Heidegger en France I*, p. 60). In an interview in 1975 Sartre reproached himself for 'using literary phrases in a text whose language should have been strictly technical' ('Self-portrait at seventy', p. 9).
  74. What Sartre has shown here, I suggest, is less the absurdity of Heidegger's position, than the distance at which Heidegger's claims stand, in terms of their philosophical grammar, from traditional metaphysical propositions: because Sartre is committed (as said above, note 13) to pursuing a relatively traditional kind of philosophical enquiry, he has no interest in extending interpretative charity to Heidegger. (It is of note that in *War Diaries*, p. 183, Sartre says that he had been unable initially, in 1934, to penetrate *Being and Time* because he had been unable to recognize in it any of the 'traditional problems', of consciousness, knowledge, realism and idealism, etc.)
  75. Differently put, what Sartre's argument shows is that the phenomenalist is committed to a deflationary account of being.
  76. Sartre uses the Scholastic terminology, which I have avoided: *percipere* (active infinitive) = to perceive; *percipi* (passive infinitive) = to be perceived; *percipiens* (present participle) = perceiving; *perceptum* (perfect participle) = that which is perceived, the object of perception.
  77. Especially *The Transcendence of the Ego* and 'Intentionality'.
  78. The purgative and visionary quality of this 'expulsion' is emphasized in 'Intentionality'.
  79. See 'Intentionality', pp. 4–5, where the ('digestive') philosophy of 'contents of consciousness' and the 'internal life' is rejected on grounds of pure phenomenological falsity, and the epistemological problems it creates are not even referred to. Again in Sartre's attack in *Imagination* on the 'thing-image' conception of imagination, epistemological considerations enter only obliquely: Sartre charges this conception with being unable to account for the phenomenologically actual spontaneity and certainty with which images are distinguished from perceptions (see e.g. pp. 94–101), but not with unavoidable sceptical implications (hence the work's sub-title, 'a psychological critique').
  80. Manfred Frank explains Sartre's view, and refers it back to earlier post-Kantian thinkers, in *What is Neostructuralism?*, trans. Sabine Wilke and Richard Gray (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1989), pp. 194–5.
  81. It is worth pointing out that when Sartre talks of consciousness, he is never thinking of it *qua* a state that we *ascribe* to ourselves

or others: Sartre is endeavouring to locate the *pre*-ascriptive phenomenon of consciousness, consciousness as it is independently of and prior to its judgemental imputation. In Sartre's view, philosophical reflection of the non-phenomenological kind that we find in the philosophy of mind, instead of grasping the phenomenon of consciousness itself, slides into consideration of the conditions under which it can be *thought that* there is, or that a person has, consciousness of some object, and of what is implied by this. The upshot is that we form a conception of even our own consciousness tainted with a third-personal character, i.e. of what Sartre calls 'the psychic'; see §24.

82. The complex combination of claims described here is clear in *War Diaries*, p. 109: consciousness or human reality (i) 'motivates itself without being its own foundation . . . there is a consciousness that motivates its own structure', and in addition (ii) can have no foundation – 'any transcendent foundation of consciousness would kill consciousness with its own hands, while giving birth to it'; so the fact of consciousness is 'irreducible and absurd'.
83. The idealism Sartre has in mind is that which conceives transcendental conditions in *de jure*, rather than *de facto* terms, i.e. Kant's.
84. Sartre had originally accepted the existence of *hylē*: see *Imagination*, pp. 132–3.
85. There is also a difference, Sartre points out, of his ontological proof from Kant's Refutation of Idealism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: the latter establishes merely *de jure* transcendental conditions, identifying an epistemic demand without showing it to be satisfied (xxxvii/28–9); Sartre's proof shows the *de facto* status of the transcendental, its ontological actuality. It is of interest, and characteristic of Sartre's reconception of the transcendental, that he builds the Kantian normative element into the ontological fabric of consciousness: see §14 on consciousness as 'obligation'.
86. See also note 79 above, regarding the oblique relation of phenomenology to epistemology.
87. Sartre explains how he stands exactly between (and beyond) Husserl and Heidegger, employing the terms of each to (re)interpret the other, in 'Intentionality': our being is that of 'being-in-the-world', but this 'being-in' must be understood as 'movement', specifically, the movement which consciousness *is*, for consciousness is nothing but 'a movement of fleeing itself'. See also 'Consciousness of self', p. 132.
88. For which reason, Merleau-Ponty is one way correct and in another misleading when he claims that 'Sartre expects to account for our primordial access to things' by means of his dualist ontology (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 52).
89. Clarifying what is at issue, see Gert Buchdahl, 'The problem of negation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 22, 1961, 163–78.
90. This identification is explicit in *Notebooks for an Ethics*, p. 11.
91. 'The roots of existentialism', p. 24.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 24. Wahl adds that Sartre's realism-idealism 'impasse' leads to 'on certain points a return, perhaps even a recoil, from the conceptions of Heidegger towards those of Hegel and Husserl' (p. 28).
93. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 26.
95. Marcel, 'Existence and human freedom', p. 62.
96. On the realism/idealism ambiguity in B&N, see Natanson, *A Critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's Ontology*, ch. 9.
97. See 'Intentionality', p. 4: 'Husserl is not a realist: this tree on its bit of parched earth is not an absolute which would subsequently enter into communication with us.'
98. Sartre also objects to the conception of the subject as sovereign, standing above the world, extricated from the weight of reality, which he discovers in transcendental idealism. It is, however, questionable that this image is accurate, and, to the extent that it is, that transcendental idealism thereby differs from Sartre's own conception of the subject (the very same complaint that Sartre makes against Kant has been made frequently of Sartre himself: see Chapter 4, regarding Merleau-Ponty).
99. Kant's transcendental idealism may be incoherent too, but it is not incoherent in the same way, since Kant does not assert that we have consciousness of the *ground* of the sensations which provide the matter of phenomena.
100. Sartre is engaged, therefore, with the traditional metaphysical problem concerning the relation of the One and the Many, as it appears in for example Plato's *Parmenides*.
101. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes this in *The Visible and the Invisible*, saying that B&N attempts to 'think the total being – what is totally' and so takes up a standpoint 'outside' of being (p. 74); its philosophy is 'installed in pure vision, in the aerial view of the panorama' (p. 77), 'high-altitude thinking' (p. 91). Merleau-Ponty regards this as the *only* standpoint occupied in B&N, contrary to what I argue below.
102. This unrestricted ambition for his philosophy goes hand in hand with Sartre's commitment to the primacy of *ontology*, as he emphasizes in his 1975 'An interview with Jean-Paul Sartre' (pp. 14, 24).
103. Leaving it to others to attempt to 'try to explain it within a materialist system' ('An interview with Jean-Paul Sartre', 1975, p. 40). Also: 'The field of philosophy has its limits set by [est borné par] man' ('L'anthropologie', p. 83).
104. Thus Natanson: 'Sartre's "Copernican revolution" is essentially the attempt to formulate at the ontological level what Kant attempted to show at the epistemological level' (*A Critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's Ontology*, p. 93).
105. The same sort of realism regarding perspectival form, it is worth noting, figures also, and more explicitly, in Merleau-Ponty, who claims that 'indeterminacy' or 'ambiguity' – properties which

- we naturally relegate to epistemology – inhere *in the world*, not merely in our apprehension or conception of things.
106. A related question of metaphilosophy concerns Sartre's relation to the 'primacy of practical reason'. Does Sartre think that the rationality of beliefs about theoretical matters is properly determined (at least in part) by our practical interests; or does he regard theoretical enquiry as autonomous in relation to the practical? Again there appears to be a split: on the one hand, Sartre can seem to be proceeding in B&N on the basis of an attempt to determine how we must think of things *in order that* we can deem ourselves free; on the other hand, the structure of B&N, by virtue of beginning with ontology and moving slowly towards an ethics, seems to imply the autonomy of theoretical reason (see also 'An interview with Jean-Paul Sartre', 1975, p. 45, where Sartre affirms that ontology is authoritative for practice). But again it seems that Sartre does not consider that he needs to choose: because he thinks that the correct ontology is the one that proceeds from consciousness, and because consciousness is already practical and value-orientated (see §17), practical and theoretical reason are fundamentally one.
  107. On this construal of Sartre's transcendental method, see Sacks, 'Sartre, Strawson and others'.
  108. See Sartre's emphatic repudiation of psychology in 'An interview with Jean-Paul Sartre' (1975), pp. 8 and 38: 'Psychology does not exist'; 'I do not believe in the existence of psychology. I have not done it and I do not believe it exists.'
  109. See Sartre's earlier critical discussion of psychoanalysis in *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, pp. 48–55.
  110. See 'Consciousness of self and knowledge of self' (1948), pp. 138–40.
  111. *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 43–5, 50.
  112. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
  113. For fuller discussion of the material in §§ 29–30, see my 'Sartre, intersubjectivity, and German idealism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 43, 2005, 325–51.
  114. The account in B&N of the necessity of the body contrasts with its semi-accidental status in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 40–1, where the body is theorized only as a 'visible and tangible symbol for the I'.
  115. Sartre's account does not, therefore, reduce to the view that the body is to be identified unreservedly with an element of the objective order, which is merely *known* in two different ways: see Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 266n.
  116. Sartre's conception of negativity as the essence (in a certain sense) of freedom is re-expounded in his later, complex essay 'Cartesian freedom' (1945), which attempts to retrieve from Descartes' conceptions of divine freedom the correct formula for human freedom, viz. of 'negativity as productive' (p. 180).

117. The dissociation of freedom from will occurs in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 47–8, *The Imaginary*, pp. 153–4, and *War Diaries*, pp. 33–6.
118. *Saint Genet*, p. 584.
119. Marcel, 'Existence and human freedom', pp. 61–3.
120. Marcel seems to misunderstand Sartre in this way, 'Existence and human freedom', pp. 46–9.
121. 1971 interview 'On The Idiot of the Family', p. 127.
122. In Sartre's many later comments on Freud, the tone is more conciliatory and the attitude more complex: see, e.g., 'The itinerary of a thought' (1969), pp. 36–42.
123. See *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 36–7.
124. See also the description of pure reflection in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 41–2, 48–9.
125. Pure reflection is central to Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics*: see esp. p. 5 and pp. 471–82; 'conversion may arise from the perpetual failure of every one of the For-itself's attempts to be' (p. 472). In *Saint Genet* we are given what seems to be an account of the achievement: see the chapter 'My victory is verbal . . .', esp. pp. 577ff. See also Sartre's remarks in his 1971 interview 'On *The Idiot of the Family*', p. 122, which talks of 'nonaccessory' reflection as 'the critical work one can do on oneself during one's entire life through *praxis*', rather than the abrupt convulsion suggested in B&N. Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* emphasizes the importance of radical conversion; see ch. 1.
126. 'Existence and human freedom', p. 64.
127. *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 51.
128. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–2, 51–2. See also *What is Literature?*, pp. 203–6, where Sartre adopts Kant's language of the kingdom of ends and notion of the good will, confining his disagreement with Kant to the question of their conditions of realization.
129. *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 29.
130. See *ibid.*, pp. 27–8, 33–4, and B&N 423/495.
131. Arguably Kant himself is implicated here. See *Notebooks for an Ethics*, p. 49, and the detailed critique of deontological conceptions of value, pp. 246–58 and 469: obligation and duty comprise, Sartre argues, an alienating mystification of freedom.
132. See in this connection *The Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 16–21, arguing that the impersonalization of the field of consciousness undermines the idea of egoistic (*amour propre*-derived) motivation employed in the moral psychology of French moralists such as La Rochefoucauld.
133. A helpful account of the *Notebooks for an Ethics* is provided by William McBride in *Sartre's Political Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 60–84.
134. See, e.g., Beauvoir's criticism of 'the nihilist attitude', *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 57, and of 'false objectivity', p. 157.

135. See, e.g., *What is Literature?*, pp. 23–5 note 4, and ‘Kierkegaard: the singular universal’. As Sartre put it later: ‘Freedom is not a triumph’ (‘The itinerary of a thought’, p. 35).
136. Marcel, in ‘Existence and human freedom’, pp. 56–7, objects to Sartre that we can only be condemned to freedom, if freedom is a loss or deprivation. But this is exactly Sartre’s position.
137. *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 68–9; and see pp. 74ff.
138. ‘Conversations with Sartre’ (1974), p. 435. Sartre describes B&N as attempting to ‘vindicate’ this intuition (p. 437), through its argument concerning the impossibility of an ‘in-itself-for-itself’.
139. *Nausea*, p. 185.
140. *War Diaries*, p. 108: ‘the existence of morality, far from proving God, keeps him at a distance’.
141. See Christina Howells, ‘Sartre and negative theology’, *Modern Languages Review* 76, 1981, 549–55.
142. God’s existence is, as Sartre puts it, *refused*: see ‘Materialism and revolution’, p. 187.
143. I discuss this issue further in ‘Sartre, Schelling, and onto-theology’, *Religious Studies* 42, 2006, 247–71.
144. See Janicaud, *Heidegger en France*, vol. 1, p. 79.
145. Showing how novel and promising a philosophical movement existentialism appeared in the 1940s, see Wahl, ‘The roots of existentialism’ (1949). A good sense of what Sartre’s existentialism amounted to as a cultural movement can be got by looking at the art of the period and Sartre’s involvement with it: see *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945–55*, ed. Frances Morris (London: Tate Gallery, 1993).
146. Lévy, *Sartre*, pp. 17–38, gives a vivid account of Sartre’s popularity and notoriety. See also Beauvoir, *The Force of Circumstance*, pp. 38ff.
147. See Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, pp. 109–12.
148. Thus in his reflections on ‘The situation of the writer in 1947’, in *What is Literature?*, pp. 186ff., Sartre describes ‘the politics of Stalinist Communism’ as ‘incompatible with the honest practice of the literary craft’ (p. 189), and current Marxist theory as presupposing ‘a stupid determinism’ and ‘elementary scientism’ (p. 194); the (French) writer’s task is to undo the current ‘mystifications’ of Nazism, Gaullism, Catholicism and French communism (p. 211). See also ‘Materialism and revolution’ (1946), esp. pp. 188–9, where dialectical materialism is charged with eliminating subjectivity and thus turning man into an object.
149. For biographical information concerning the early post-B&N period, see Leak, *Sartre*, pp. 59ff., Cohen-Solal, *Sartre*, Part III, and Hayman, *Writing Against*, chs. 15–18.
150. Also belonging to Sartre’s defence of existentialism – specifically, against his Marxist critics – is ‘Materialism and revolution’ (1948).
151. See also the remarks of Lévy in *Sartre*, pp. 301–6.



152. *The Second Sex*, p. 295; see Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 165–80. That in this work Beauvoir is merely applying Sartre's ideas, without criticism or modification, may be contested: see Sonia Kruks, 'Simone de Beauvoir and the limits of freedom', *Social Text* 17, 1987, 111–22.
153. See 'Existence and human freedom', pp. 33, 47, 49, 52, 53, 61.
154. In contrast with, especially, analytic-anglophone critiques of Sartre, as noted below.
155. The doubt is well expressed by Lévy in *Sartre*, pp. 199–200.
156. Several of Merleau-Ponty's criticisms of Sartre have been referred to already: see notes 72, 88, 101.
157. The volume edited by Stewart, *The Debate between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, contains the relevant primary texts relating to the argument of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, including Beauvoir's counter-attack on Sartre's behalf (which accuses Merleau-Ponty of fundamental misunderstandings of Sartre's position), as well as helpful critical commentary. For a synoptic view of the issues, see Margaret Whitford, 'Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre's philosophy: an interpretative account', *French Studies* 33, 1979, 305–18, reprinted in Stewart ed., or at greater length, *Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Sartre's Philosophy* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1982), and Monika Langer, 'Sartre and Merleau-Ponty: a reappraisal', in Schilpp ed., *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, and reprinted in Stewart ed.
158. See *Unforeseen History*, Part 3.
159. See Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, pp. 39–40 and 49–55. On the relation of Sartre with Levinas, see Christina Howells, 'Sartre and Levinas', in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood ed., *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* (London: Routledge 1988), and David Jopling, 'Levinas, Sartre, and understanding the other', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 24, 1993, 214–31.
160. The historical circumstance of the *Letter* is relevant: Heidegger, to whom a copy of B&N had been given in 1945, had written to Sartre asking him to intervene on Heidegger's behalf in his de-Nazification process. Sartre did not reply. On the *Letter*, see Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, pp. 184–99.
161. *Letter*, pp. 245ff.
162. *Letter*, p. 265; see pp. 263ff.
163. See *Letter*, pp. 245, 250.
164. See *Letter*, pp. 250–2.
165. The writings in question (by Henri Mougín, Henri Lefebvre and Jean Kanapa, as well as Lukács) are well discussed in Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, pp. 112–25.
166. See Marcuse, 'Existentialism', 329–30. Marcuse's charge is certainly unjustified: stoic and Christian doctrine says that man can achieve his *telos*, i.e. fulfil his freedom, independently of objective circumstance; Sartre says nothing of the sort.

167. See 'Existentialism', 322 and 334–5: 'philosophy does not possess the conceptual instruments for comprehending' human existence (334). Sartre's retort to Marcuse's historicist repudiation of philosophy is, of course, to ask whence it derives, and how it proposes to ground, the concept of freedom in the name of which it condemns concrete social forms as unfree. In the Postscript added later to the essay, Marcuse attributes to Sartre the transformation of philosophy into politics which he recommends, but the evidence of the *Critique* counts decisively against this interpretation.
168. 'An interview with Jean-Paul Sartre' (1975), pp. 9, 18, 23, 28–9, 39–40.
169. 'Conversations with Jean-Paul Sartre' (1974), pp. 173, 410, and 'An interview with Jean-Paul Sartre' (1975), p. 9, 18.
170. 'The itinerary of a thought' (1969), pp. 41–2. In the 1972 interview in *Sartre By Himself*, p. 76, Sartre says that in B&N he 'tried to offer a certain number of generalities about man's existence, without taking into account the fact that that existence is always situated historically'.
171. 'Jean-Paul Sartre répond' (1966), p. 93; italics added.
172. 'The itinerary of a thought' (1969), pp. 34–5; italics added. Sartre here describes himself as at the time of B&N in the grip of a 'myth of heroism' (p. 34), through which he had to, and has now, passed, and as 'truly scandalised' (p. 33) by his own earlier statement that a man is always free to choose to be a traitor or not. Equally forthright criticism of his earlier view of freedom is contained in the 1972 interview, *Sartre By Himself*, pp. 58–9.
173. 'L'anthropologie' (1966), pp. 86, 97; italics added. To understand how the later Sartre himself conceives structures, see, in addition to 'L'anthropologie', *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 1, bk. II, ch. 3, sect. 3, esp. pp. 479–80, 487–91.
174. 'The itinerary of a thought' (1969), p. 64.
175. The *explanandum* of the *Critique* thus makes its project broader than the Marxist project of understanding social conditions *qua* alienating, the social experienced as objective power. For a brief summary of the leading ideas of the *Critique*, see Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), ch. 6, and Sartre's clear and succinct statements in the interview 'The itinerary of a thought' (1969), pp. 51–6.
176. And it may be asked which philosopher has solved it on humanistically acceptable terms. Lévy makes the relevant suggestion, in *Sartre*, Part III, ch. 3 (pp. 381ff.), that there is in Sartre's philosophical personality a second basic intuition and impetus, distinct from that which animates B&N, which gives priority to the experience of sociality and solidarity, and which gains the upper hand in Sartre's later thinking.
177. 'Conversations with Jean-Paul Sartre' (1974), pp. 352–61.

178. 'Conversations with Jean-Paul Sartre' (1974), pp. 358, 360, 361. Especially confusing is Sartre's claim that 'I say that freedom represents something that doesn't exist but that gradually creates itself' (p. 361). In the terms of B&N it should be said instead that freedom exists already in the mode of the for-itself, and *in addition* may create itself gradually in a worldly form in so far as it is realized in human conduct. See also Sartre's remarks on freedom in a 1980 interview, *Hope Now*, p. 72.
179. 'Conversations with Jean-Paul Sartre' (1974), p. 354.
180. The literature on the advent of structuralism and post-structuralism is extensive; for a clear, detailed account see Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Part III. Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, ch. 8, tracks the developments in relation to Sartre's Marxism.
181. *The Savage Mind*, p. 249; the bulk of chapter 9 of this book is directed against the later Sartre's conceptions of history and dialectical reason.
182. See *The Order of Things*, ch. 9, esp. pp. 324–6 (regarding the failure of phenomenology), and pp. 361ff. (regarding the primacy of the non-conscious), and 'Truth and power' (1977), pp. 116–17: 'One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself', even the historicized subject of Sartre's *Critique*. Summarizing the disagreement and documenting the mutual criticism of Sartre and Foucault, see Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, 1: Toward an Existentialist Theory of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), ch. 10.
183. Derrida's 1968 lecture, 'The ends of man', condemns Sartre's 'humanist distortion' and 'anthropological misinterpretation' of Heidegger, and indeed also of Hegel and Husserl (39): Sartre had 'not even been able to take account of the very first paragraphs' of *Being and Time* (38). The deconstructive change of philosophical key does not entail an abandonment of Sartre's philosophical preoccupations, however, as the Derridean treatment of the great Sartrean theme of freedom in Nancy's *The Experience of Freedom* shows. The degree to which deconstruction has nonetheless transformed the ground-rules of philosophical discourse is shown by Nancy's discussion of Sartre, pp. 96–105, where Sartrean freedom is dissociated from all ideas of causality and possibility of action, and described as positively resistant to (conceptual) representation. For reasons given earlier, in §36, it is partly understandable why Nancy should take this line, but from Sartre's standpoint the position that results amounts to a denial of the reality of freedom.
184. See Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, ch. 5, and Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy*, chs. 5–7. Sartre comments critically on the structuralist development (Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Lacan, Althusser) in the 1966 interview 'Jean-Paul Sartre répond'; see also 'L'anthropologie' (1966).

## NOTES

185. *Unforeseen History*, p. 97.
186. 'Jürgen Habermas on the Legacy of Jean-Paul Sartre', in *Political Theory* vol. 20, no. 3, August 1992, 496–501, pp. 498–9 ['Rencontre de Sartre', *Les Temps modernes* 46, June 1991, 154–60].
187. The view of Sartre as a proto-postmodernist may be found, in differing forms, in Christina Howells, 'Conclusion: Sartre and the deconstruction of the subject', in Howells ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, Nik Farrell Fox, *The New Sartre: Explorations in Postmodernism* (London: Continuum, 2003), Introduction and ch. 1, and Peter Bürger, *Sartre. Eine Philosophie des Als-ob* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007), ch. 2. Bürger claims Sartre as a thinker who in the course of his development comes to give answers to questions later formulated by postmodern authors (p. 26). A cautious case for regarding Sartre as converging with structuralism (though not with post-structuralism) is made by Peter Caws in 'Sartrean structuralism?', in Howells ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*.
188. The situation becomes especially hard to understand when it is suggested that postmodernism, faced with its own aporiae, needs to return to Sartre: see, e.g., Bürger, *Sartre*, pp. 15–18.
189. I have spoken of 'the postmodern subject' as if there were a single such thing conceptually. It is doubtful in fact that the negations of the subject in Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze and so on are all of a piece, but I am simply following the terms of discussion employed by those who wish to postmodernize Sartre.
190. See, as especially worthwhile: Phyllis Morris' early book, *Sartre's Concept of the Person: An Analytic Approach*, the discussions of perception in McCulloch, *Using Sartre*, and Moran's reflections on Sartre's understanding of self-knowledge in *Authority and Estrangement*.

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# INDEX

- a priori* 62, 64, 74, 75, 106, 108, 143, 189, 192, 232 n. 70
- abnormal experience,  
philosophical significance  
of 3, 33–4, 151, 185, 227 n. 8,  
232 n. 62
- absence  
God's 205–6  
phenomenological 60, 64–5, 83,  
96, 132
- absolute  
contingency 49, 56  
event 107, 203  
man as 205, 216  
non-substantial 19, 48, 164  
*see also* freedom, absolute;  
standpoint, absolute
- abstract (*vs.* concrete) 108
- abstraction 108
- absurdity 199, 205, 234 n. 82
- action  
acts/actions 17, 26–7, 122,  
144, 150  
agency/action 150, 154, 155  
psychological antecedents  
of 156  
unity of 155, 171  
voluntary 156
- Action* 210
- actuality, and potentiality 40
- Adler, Alfred 124
- aesthetics, aesthetic 3, 105, 190  
aestheticism 3, 227–8 n. 10
- affect, affectivity 19–20, 41,  
50–1, 119, 136, 138–9, 189,  
190, 212  
physical 144
- akrasia 156
- alienation 56, 118, 138, 145,  
168, 183
- Althusser, Louis, Sartre's criticism  
of 241 n. 184
- altruism 196
- amour propre* 237 n. 132
- analytic philosophy, and B&N 28,  
29, 222, 224–5, 233–4 n. 81,  
239 n. 154
- anguish 151–2, 164, 191, 192
- 'anthropogenetic story' *see*  
being-for-itself, genesis of
- 'L'anthropologie' 235 n. 103, 240 n.  
173, 241 n. 184
- Anti-Semite and Jew* 210
- appearance(s) 31, 39  
being of 41–4  
and essence 40  
of psychological  
determinism 150, 152  
series of, infinite 39, 40, 53–4  
totality of 40
- appearance/reality  
distinction 39–40
- apperception 11
- appetite 119
- Aristotle, Aristotelian 40,  
106, 195
- Aron, Raymond 2, 4, 209
- art 227–8 n. 10  
post-war 238 n. 145
- 'as if' (*comme si*) 69, 107, 142, 165,  
202, 204
- atheism 9, 15, 204, 205  
idealist *vs.* materialist 205
- authenticity 191
- autonomy  
of consciousness 19, 48, 49  
human 30, 198, 223, 226
- axiology, axiological *see* ethics;  
value
- Bachelard, Gaston 189
- bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) 119,  
124, 125, 150, 152,  
172–7, 191

- bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) *continued*  
 'champion of sincerity' 173, 177, 179  
*conduites* ('patterns') 172–3, 175  
 'homosexual' 173, 177, 179  
 relation to self-deception 173–5
- Barnes, Hazel xi 93
- Bataille, Georges 2
- Beaufret, Jean 215, 222
- beauty 105
- Beauvoir, Simone de 3, 193, 197, 198, 199, 209, 210, 220, 238 n. 146, 239 n. 157  
*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 193, 197, 198, 237 nn. 125, 134  
*The Second Sex* 210–11, 239 n. 152
- being  
 and appearance 39  
 of appearance 41, 43  
 concept of 6, 7, 8, 9  
 conceptual irreducibility of, relation to concepts and judgements 7, 8, 9, 43, 55  
 contingent 142  
 deflationary views of 41, 42, 43, 233 n. 75  
 desire of 187, 188  
 disclosure/revealing of (*dévoilement d'être*) 197, 199  
 knowledge of 43  
 meaning/*Sinn* of (Heidegger's question) 56  
 measured by knowledge (idealism) 44, 50, 132  
 modes of, multiple 25, 28, 32, 35, 69, 70, 170  
 as necessary (self-founding) 100  
 as passive 17, 20, 50–1, 73, 173  
 of phenomenon 42, 43, 51, 55, 73  
 phenomenon of 41–4, 55  
 relations of *see* ontological relations  
 as relative to subject 50  
 totality of/as a whole/in general 57–8, 68, 85, 96, 200, 203, 204, 206, 207, 208  
 trans-phenomenal, of consciousness/subject 50, 51  
 trans-phenomenal, of objects of consciousness 43, 44, 51–4, 56  
 unity of 200, 203, 206, 208  
*see also* being-for-itself; being-in-itself; existence; ontic/ontological distinction
- being-for-itself 56, 58, 114, 191, 196  
 contingency of 100  
 genesis of ('anthropogenetic story') 68–9, 95–6, 100, 102, 200–3, 206–7, 208  
 immediate structures of for-itself 75, 78–9, 88, 126, 206  
 individuation of (the for-itself) 75, 165  
 non-self-identical 28, 78, 98, 114, 121, 174, 224  
 practically orientated 109  
 primacy, methodological 82  
 unity of 156  
*see also* fundamental project; lack; nothingness; self; teleology, of for-itself; upsurge
- being-for-others,  
 being-for-the-Other 114, 127, 128, 138, 140, 142, 145, 177, 182
- being-in-itself 32, 55–6, 58, 70, 73, 74, 76–80, 84  
 absolute contingency of 56, 102  
 attempt to found itself 102, 201, 202  
 beyond metaphysical categories 55–6, 73, 76, 172  
 beyond negation 55, 62, 73  
 not matter 56  
 not noumenal 76  
 and object-world/empirical reality 73–9, 89  
 primacy, ontological 82  
 self-identical 55

- unity of 55  
 Wahl's criticism of 72  
 being-in-itself-for-itself 103, 178,  
 181, 187, 188, 205, 238n. 138  
 being-in-the-world 56, 57, 58,  
 234n. 87  
 belief 16, 20, 52, 92–4, 106,  
 118–19, 120, 141, 174, 175,  
 236n. 106  
   in magic 231n. 50  
 Bergson, Henri 1, 2–3  
   *Creative Evolution* 209  
 Berkeley, George 44, 50, 111  
 biography, biographical 190  
   of Flaubert 186  
   of Genet 165, 221  
   studies of Sartre's 179  
 body 114, 129, 139, 143–8, 173,  
 190, 212, 236nn. 114, 115  
 brain 143, 147, 218  
 Breazeale, Daniel 229n. 19  
 Bréton, André 2  
 Brunschvicg, Léon 1, 227n. 2  
 Buchdahl, Gert 234n. 89  
 Bürger, Peter 242nn. 187, 188  
  
 Camus, Albert 217  
 'Cartesian freedom' 236n. 116  
 Cartesianism, Cartesian 23,  
 45, 126  
   Sartre's methodological 82,  
 91, 126, 133, 140, 221, 222,  
 228n. 13  
 categories (Kantian) 75, 129  
 Catholicism, Catholic 210, 211,  
 238n. 148  
*causa sui* 49, 142, 203, 204, 205  
 causality  
   empirical 31, 82, 108  
   psychological 150–2  
 Caws, Peter 242n. 187  
 censor mechanism 123–4  
 character 10, 120, 176–7  
   intelligible 163  
   traits 177  
 choice 86, 101, 124, 156,  
 157, 161, 169, 173, 186, 218  
   empirical 164  
   original, of myself *see* original  
   project  
 Christianity, Christian 7, 8, 217,  
 239n. 166  
   existentialism 211  
 'circuit of selfness' (*circuit*  
*d'ipséité*) 96, 109, 180,  
 183, 188  
 class 160, 182, 217  
 'coefficient of adversity' 158  
*cogito* 14, 23, 33, 82, 91, 94, 213, 221  
   pre-reflective 45–8, 90, 92–5,  
   98–9, 118, 127, 136, 150,  
   151, 169  
   reflective 51, 100  
   *see also* Other, *cogito* regarding;  
   reflection  
 cognition *see* knowledge  
 Cohen-Solal, Annie 227n. 1,  
 238n. 149  
 collectivity, collective 5, 134,  
 182–3, 194, 217  
 common sense, Sartre's critique  
   of 29, 147–8, 154, 185,  
   211–12, 225  
   body 143, 146  
   desire 119, 187, 188–9  
   emotion 19, 20–1  
   freedom 25, 151–2, 155, 156, 157,  
   158, 160  
   intersubjectivity 84  
   proto-naturalistic 63  
   psychology/self 15–16, 17, 19,  
   27, 32–3, 45, 90, 104, 117–18,  
   125, 143, 151–2, 156, 162,  
   175–6, 231nn. 39, 42  
   reality 63  
   reflection 97, 98  
   relation to Other 137, 139, 141  
   responsibility 167, 170  
   teleology 91  
   time 111  
 communism 238n. 148 *see*  
   *also* French Communist  
   Party; Marx; materialism,  
   dialectical; politics, Sartre's  
 community 182  
 compatibilism 149

- concepts  
   empirical 108  
   regulative 130, 185  
 concrete (vs. abstract) 108  
 concrete relations with  
   Others 122, 126, 127,  
   179–85 *see also* conflict  
 conditions of possibility 11–12,  
   174, 232n. 70 *see also*  
   transcendental  
 conflict (intersubjective) 127, 132,  
   133–4, 177, 179, 182, 184,  
   185, 196, 215  
 consciousness  
   autonomy of 48  
   children's 190  
   and choice 169  
   concept of, transcendental and  
   perspectival 47–8, 52, 70,  
   87, 92, 94, 233–4n. 81  
   contingency of 49  
   first person plural 134, 182–3  
   as impersonal *see The*  
   *Transcendence of the Ego*  
   modes of 92  
   motivation/determination of 48,  
   172, 178, 234n. 82  
   natural *see* common sense  
   non-substantial absolute 19, 48  
   non-thetic 104, 118, 121, 155,  
   164, 169  
   and nothingness 61, 68,  
   69–72, 79  
   and obligation 94, 95, 153–5  
   positional 45, 47, 59, 64, 65  
   pre-reflective/  
   unreflective 12–13, 16, 18,  
   51–2, 53–4, 75, 92–5, 97,  
   98–9, 101, 104, 108, 109, 118,  
   119, 121, 140, 150, 152, 169,  
   173, 189, 230n. 24  
   reflective *see* reflection  
   reflexivity of 48, 71  
   relation to for-itself 90  
   Sartre's basic theses  
   concerning 45–9  
   self-activated but not  
   self-cause 48–9  
   spontaneity of 18, 27, 51  
   teleological 93  
   thetic 14, 45, 59, 104, 121,  
   155, 164  
   transparency/emptiness of 12,  
   45, 75, 139  
   trans-phenomenal being  
   of 50, 51  
   unity of 12, 17  
   *see also* collectivity;  
   contradictory  
   predication; reflection;  
   self-consciousness; *The*  
   *Transcendence of the*  
   *Ego*, impersonality of  
   consciousness thesis;  
   unconscious  
 'Consciousness of self and  
   knowledge of self' 208,  
   234n. 87, 236n. 110  
 constitution (of objects) 75, 80–1,  
   229–30n. 21  
 contingency 3, 4, 84, 85, 142, 162,  
   168, 207  
   of being-in-itself 56, 102  
   of consciousness 49  
   of for-itself 100–1, 144  
   for-itself's evasion of 178  
   in-itself's attempt to rid itself  
   of 102, 201  
   of Others 142, 145  
 contradictory predication (of  
   for-itself) 26, 28, 86, 112,  
   114–17  
 conversion, radical 191, 195, 197,  
   237n. 125  
 Copernican(ism) *see* standpoint,  
   perspectival  
 criteria 53, 156, 164  
 criticism of B&N 36, 210, 211–22  
   Derrida 222  
   Foucault 222  
   Heidegger 215–17  
   Lévi-Strauss 221  
   Lukács 217  
   Marcel 168, 192–3, 211–12,  
   233n. 72, 237n. 120,  
   238n. 136, 239n. 153

- Marcuse 217–18  
 Marxist 217–18  
 Merleau-Ponty 200, 212–14, 215,  
 233 n. 72, 234 n. 88, 235 n.  
 101, 239 n. 157  
 of ontology 36, 72–3, 200,  
 211–17  
 of philosophical method  
 214–18, 221, 222  
 post-structuralist 221, 222  
 of practical (ethical & political)  
 implications 192–3, 210–11,  
 213, 215–17  
 Sartre's own later 218–21,  
 240 n. 172  
 structuralist 221  
 of theory of freedom 36, 157,  
 168, 213, 217, 218–21,  
 240 n. 172  
 Wahl 72–3, 82, 200, 235 n. 92  
*Critique of Dialectical Reason* 5,  
 219–20, 221, 240 nn. 167, 173,  
 175, 241 n. 182  
 culture 160
- Dasein 42, 56, 67, 68, 90, 133, 134,  
 216, 228 n. 13  
*de facto/de jure* 11, 15, 234 nn. 83, 85  
 death 158, 195  
 'decompression of being' 154  
 deconstruction 222, 223, 224,  
 241 n. 183  
 deism 166, 206  
 Derrida, Jacques 222  
 criticism of Sartre 222,  
 241 n. 183  
 'The ends of man' 241 n. 183  
 Descartes, René 3, 21, 23, 32, 51,  
 53, 54, 100, 236 n. 116  
 and mind-body relation 146–8  
 desire 16, 83, 104, 105, 106, 119,  
 120, 132, 155, 175, 179, 181,  
 187–9, 196  
 objects of 187–9  
 reflexive 189  
 transcendental explanation  
 of 189  
 destruction 62, 64
- determinacy, empirical 62, 76–8,  
 108, 136  
 determinism 18, 24, 28, 30, 31,  
 150, 151, 152, 153, 155, 157,  
 171, 238 n. 148  
 'detotalised totality' 203–4  
 dialectic, dialectical 181, 218  
 master/slave (Hegel's) 132, 179  
 materialism 217, 219, 232 n. 66,  
 238 n. 148  
 disclosure of being (*dévoilement  
 d'être*) 197, 199  
 doing (*faire*) 187, 188  
 dreams 53, 185  
 drives 119, 125, 162  
 dualism  
 mind-body 146–8  
 of Sartre's ontology 36, 57–8,  
 69, 72–3, 146, 200, 204,  
 212–14, 234 n. 88  
 traditional dualisms,  
 overcome 39–40  
 Wahl's criticism 72–3  
 duty 237 n. 131
- École Normale Supérieure 1, 3  
 ego  
 Freud's concept 123  
*see also* 'I'; self  
 egoism 16, 196, 237 n. 132  
 ekstasis 113–14, 142, 163  
 eliminativism 32, 69, 208  
 embodiment *see* body  
 emotion 10, 16, 19–20, 125, 155–6,  
 231 n. 50  
 end (*fin*) 155, 171  
 Enlightenment 198  
*ens causa sui* 49, 142, 203, 204, 205  
 epistemology 1, 35  
 epistemological relations (vs.  
 ontological) 43, 58–60, 97,  
 133, 137, 138, 140,  
 235 n. 104  
 metaphysics of cognition 106  
 Sartre's view of, and approach  
 to problems of 45, 53, 54,  
 58–60, 72, 74–5, 81, 84,  
 97–8, 106, 111, 126–7,

- epistemology *continued*  
 133–4, 139, 140–1, 156, 172,  
 222, 233 n. 79, 234 n. 85  
*see also* knowledge; ‘primacy of  
 knowledge’
- epoché see* reduction,  
 phenomenological
- equipment, equipmental 68, 109
- esse est percipi* 50
- essence  
 and existence, of human  
 subject 24, 49, 149, 169,  
 236 n. 116  
 of objects, in relation to  
 appearance 39, 40, 66
- eternal recurrence (Nietzsche’s  
 doctrine of) 165, 168,  
 229 n. 18
- ethics, ethical 173, 191, 192–7,  
 214–15, 236 n. 106  
 aim of Sartre’s philosophy 20,  
 27, 33, 187, 192  
 God and 238 n. 140  
 implications of B&N 10, 36,  
 160, 165, 168, 184, 187,  
 192–9  
 Sartre’s, in relation to  
 Kant’s 193, 194, 195, 198  
 Sartre’s, whether  
 subjectivist 192, 193, 194,  
 229 n. 18  
 Sartre’s criticism of other  
 ethical theories 31, 195,  
 237 n. 131
- Evans, Gareth 236 n. 115
- existence 6, 8, 28, 30, 84  
 human 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 32, 85,  
 172, 197, 198–9,  
 240 n. 170  
*Nausea* revelation of 33–4  
 precedes essence, in human  
 subject 24, 49  
*see also* being
- existentialism, existential 6, 36,  
 210, 215, 217, 223,  
 238 n. 145  
 phenomenology 211, 221  
 Wahl’s definition 73
- Existentialism and Humanism* 193,  
 194, 210, 215, 231 n. 54
- facticity 69, 89, 99–101, 114, 126,  
 144, 145, 157–61, 166, 178,  
 207, 220  
 relation to transcendence 115,  
 173, 184
- factual necessity (*nécessité de  
 fait*) 100, 140, 142, 169
- fatigue 178
- feminism 210–11
- Feuerbach, Ludwig 204
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 7–8, 9,  
 30, 87, 154, 223,  
 229 n. 16, 19  
*Wissenschaftslehre* 7, 9
- fiction  
 and metaphysics 69, 73, 165  
 Sartre’s 3, 4, 5, 36, 85, 171, 179,  
 209, 210
- first person (perspective) 22–3,  
 126, 161
- first person plural *see* ‘we’
- First World War 1
- Flaubert, Gustave 186
- flight, for-itself’s 18, 112, 114, 152,  
 183, 234 n. 87
- Flynn, Thomas R. 240 n. 175,  
 241 n. 182
- for-itself *see* being-for-itself;  
 structures of the for-itself
- Foucault, Michel 222,  
 241 n. 182  
 criticism of Sartre 222  
*The Order of Things* 222,  
 241 n. 182  
 Sartre’s criticism of 241 n. 184  
 ‘Truth and power’ 241 n. 182
- Fox, Nik Farrell 242 n. 187
- fragility 62, 64
- Frank, Manfred 233 n. 80
- Franks, Paul 229 n. 15
- freedom 7, 10, 18, 21–35, 149–61,  
 168–72, 206, 218–21, 223,  
 236 n. 116, 238 n. 135  
 absolute 36, 85, 157, 188  
 of action 158



- affirmation of 173, 180, 184,  
194, 196, 197–9
- collective realization of 194
- consciousness/experience  
of 151–2
- 'could have done otherwise'  
153, 157
- empirical 158–9, 161
- epistemology of 21–2, 24–8,  
31, 32, 34, 85, 86, 88,  
149–54, 169–70, 207–8,  
213, 231 n. 44, 241 n. 183
- without essence 169
- as explanatory 165, 169
- gambler scenario 151–2
- and idealism 30–1, 35–6
- limits of 139, 158–9, 160,  
218–21
- 'master argument' for 25
- and nothingness 88, 149, 151,  
153, 154, 236 n. 116
- ontological 158–9, 160, 170,  
193, 220
- Other as limiting 139, 160
- political 170
- as presupposing freedom of  
Other 197
- and realism 30, 35–6
- and reason/rationality 171–2,  
176, 196
- reflectively apprehended  
(anguish) 151–2
- Sartre's later discussion of 161,  
218–21, 240 n. 172
- Sartre's theory of criticised 157,  
168, 213, 217, 218–21,  
240 n. 172
- self-negating 175, 176
- unconditioned 158–9, 160, 218
- vertigo scenario 151–2
- and will 149, 156, 237 n. 117
- French Communist Party 210,  
217, 238 n. 148
- French moralists 15, 177,  
237 n. 132
- Freud, Sigmund 122–5, 156, 176,  
185–7, 190, 221, 236 n. 109,  
237 n. 122
- fundamental project (of becoming  
God) 176–9, 181, 184, 188,  
191, 195, 196, 197
- future 67, 110–14
- gender 160
- Genet, Jean 165, 221
- German idealism 6, 7–8, 226 *see*  
*also* Fichte; Hegel; Schelling
- German romantics 226
- Gestapo 4
- given, the 159
- God 7, 49, 55, 84, 100, 103, 130–1,  
178, 204–6, 207, 229 n. 18,  
230 n. 34, 238 n. 142
- and morality 238 n. 140
- see also* fundamental project (of  
becoming God)
- Good, the 6, 192, 193, 195, 197,  
199, 205
- grace 190
- Gutting, Gary 227 n. 1, 239 n. 152,  
241 n. 180
- Habermas, Jürgen 223
- hatred 181, 182
- having (*avoir*) 187, 188
- 'having to be' (*avoir à être*) 56,  
93, 95
- Le Havre 3
- Hayman, Ronald 227 nn. 1, 7, 8,  
238 n. 149
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm  
Friedrich 2, 5, 7, 8, 21, 22,  
24, 25, 28, 66, 82, 85, 86,  
105, 115, 117, 126, 131, 132,  
140, 142, 181, 182, 184, 208,  
223, 235 n. 92, 241 n. 183
- Encyclopaedia 8
- Logic 8, 66
- Phenomenology of Spirit* 2,  
105, 132
- Sartre's criticism of 66–7, 133,  
140, 179, 181, 184
- Heidegger, Martin 2, 5, 21, 30, 39,  
72, 90, 109, 113, 131, 158,  
222, 223, 227 n. 6, 234 n. 87,  
235 n. 92, 239 n. 160

- Heidegger, Martin *continued*  
*Being and Time* 2, 42, 133, 216,  
 233 n. 74, 241 n. 83  
 criticism of Sartre 215–17,  
 228 n. 13  
*Letter on 'Humanism'* 215–17,  
 222, 239 n. 160  
 ontic/ontological (entities/  
 Being) distinction 41–2,  
 68, 216  
 Sartre's criticism of 41–3, 56,  
 58, 59, 67–8, 133–4, 158,  
 183, 191, 228–9 n. 13,  
 233 n. 74  
*What is Metaphysics?* 227 n. 6,  
 228 n. 13  
*see also* Dasein
- Heinrich (*Le diable et le bon  
 dieu*) 218
- historicism 223, 240 n. 167
- history 8, 160, 161, 217, 219–20,  
 241 n. 181  
 philosophy of 5, 161
- holes 189–90
- Howells, Christine 238 n. 141,  
 239 n. 159, 242 n. 187
- human reality (*réalité  
 humaine*) 90, 149, 167, 178,  
 187, 206, 208, 217
- humanism 195, 199, 216, 222,  
 241 n. 183
- Hume, David 7, 95, 191, 192, 195
- Husserl, Edmund 2, 4, 5, 9,  
 11–15, 19, 30, 39, 44, 45,  
 60, 72, 87, 131–2, 222,  
 227 nn. 3, 6, 235 nn. 92,  
 97, 241 n. 183  
*Cartesian Mediations* 227 n. 3  
*The Paris Lectures* 227 n. 3  
 Sartre's criticism of 11–13, 15,  
 21, 26, 30, 50–1, 53–4, 59,  
 132, 133, 140, 228 n. 13,  
 230 n. 26, 232 n. 66,  
 234 n. 87
- hylē* (Husserl's concept of) 51,  
 234 n. 84
- hypotheses, of  
 metaphysics 202–3
- 'I' 11–17, 23, 25, 46, 99,  
 230 nn. 26, 34, 231 n. 44  
 (*je*), distinguished from 'me'  
 (*moi*) 17  
 Fichte's concept of 7–8, 229 n. 16  
 'I think' (Kant) 11  
*see also* self
- id (Freud's concept of) 123
- idealism 43, 50  
 absolute 49, 107  
 Berkeleyan/empirical 44, 50, 74,  
 111, 166  
 and the Other 129–30, 132,  
 133, 140  
 Sartre and 72, 73–5, 79–82, 107,  
 211, 228 n. 13  
 Sartre's rejection of, and  
 arguments against 30,  
 35–6, 43, 44, 50–4, 57, 66,  
 75, 80, 108, 110–11, 129–30,  
 131, 132, 133, 140, 230 n. 21,  
 235 n. 98  
*see also* German idealism;  
 phenomenism; realism/  
 idealism opposition;  
 transcendental, idealism
- The Imaginary* 149, 227 n. 8,  
 228 n. 10, 231 n. 51,  
 232 n. 62, 237 n. 117
- imagination 10, 20, 53, 149–50,  
 214, 231 n. 39, 233 n. 79
- Imagination* 230 n. 24, 231 n. 39,  
 233 n. 79, 234 n. 84
- inclination 163, 196
- incompatibilism 153
- indetermination,  
 indeterminism 153
- indifference 181
- infancy 185
- in-itself-for-itself  
 (*en-soi-pour-soi*) 103, 178,  
 181, 187, 188, 205, 238 n. 138
- instrumentality 109, 144, 145
- intention 150, 156
- intentionality 12–13, 32, 45, 48, 59,  
 107, 212
- 'Intentionality' 233 nn. 77, 78, 79,  
 234 n. 87, 235 n. 97

- interrogative 61–2  
intersubjectivity 126–43, 144–6,  
179–85, 196–7, 206, 214  
of world 83–4  
*see also* conflict; Other(s)  
intuition 7, 64, 65, 94, 107, 129,  
130, 205  
metaphysical/philosophical 28,  
30, 32, 33, 133, 140, 205, 207,  
238 n. 138, 240 n. 176  
involuntariness 156  
*ipséité* *see* selfness, circuit of  
irrationalism 217  
irrationality, human 27, 124, 176  
‘irreducibles’ 162
- Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich 6–7, 8,  
9, 205, 211, 226, 229 nn. 14,  
15, 233–4 n. 81  
Janicaud, Dominique 227 n. 1,  
233 n. 73, 238 n. 144  
Jaspers, Karl 3, 162  
Jewish identity 210, 214  
Jopling, David 239 n. 159  
judgement 45, 55, 59, 62, 154  
modal 105  
and negation 60, 61, 63–5,  
69–70, 77, 151  
practical 194  
*see also* subject-predicate form
- Kanapa, Jean 239 n. 165  
Kant, Immanuel 1, 6–7, 11–12,  
28, 40, 129, 226, 235 n. 99,  
237 n. 131  
*Critique of Pure Reason*  
230 n. 29, 234 n. 85  
ethics 30–1, 194, 237 n. 128  
Paralogisms of Pure  
Reason 230 n. 29  
Refutation of Idealism 234 n. 85  
Sartre’s criticism of 31, 36,  
39–40, 75, 110–11, 129–30,  
132, 194, 229 n. 21,  
230 n. 25, 234 n. 85,  
235 n. 98, 237 nn. 128, 131  
Sartre’s relation to 3, 30–1,  
35–6, 74–5, 80–1, 82, 86–7,  
107, 109, 163, 170, 193, 194,  
197, 198, 226, 229–30 n. 21,  
230 n. 29, 234 n. 85,  
235 n. 104, 237 n. 128
- katharsis 191  
Kelly, Michael 227 n. 1  
Kierkegaard, Søren 2, 8–9, 223,  
229 nn. 13, 16, 17  
*The Concept of Dread* 229 n. 17  
*Concluding Unscientific*  
*Postscript* 8, 229 n. 16  
‘Kierkegaard and the singular  
universal’ 229 n. 17,  
238 n. 135  
kingdom of ends 194, 237 n. 128  
Kleinberg, Ethan 227 nn. 1, 4,  
239 n. 160, 241 n. 184  
knowledge 1, 6, 11, 23, 32, 35, 43,  
46, 50, 62, 71, 79, 89, 106–8  
and appropriation 187  
limits of 84, 86  
primacy of, assumption 36, 44,  
60, 97  
relations of *see* epistemological  
relations  
sensory 140  
*see also* freedom, epistemology  
of; Other, epistemology  
of; self-knowledge;  
transcendental, conditions
- Kojève, Alexandre 2, 5, 227 n. 4  
Koyré, Alexandre 2, 227 n. 4  
Kruks, Sonia 239 n. 152
- La Psyché* 19  
Lacan, Jacques 2, 219, 224  
Sartre’s criticism of 241 n. 184  
lack (of being) (*manque d’être*) 27,  
69, 101–5, 106, 109, 119–20,  
154, 169, 191, 207  
Langer, Monika 239 n. 157  
language 145, 160, 219, 221  
law(s)  
moral (Kant’s) 30–1  
natural/of nature 55, 148,  
232 n. 66  
of pre-reflective cogito 92, 118  
psychological 120, 162, 176

- law(s) *continued*  
 of series of appearances 39  
 transcendental (Kant's) 75  
*Le diable et le bon dieu* 218  
 Leak, Andrew 227n. 1, 238n. 149  
 Lefebvre, Henri 239n. 165  
 Left Hegelian 204  
 'The legend of truth' 227n. 9,  
 232n. 62  
 Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 105,  
 130, 206  
*Les Temps modernes* 209  
 Levinas, Emmanuel 2, 4, 214–15,  
 223, 239n. 159  
*Totality and Infinity* 214  
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude 221  
 criticism of Sartre 221  
 Sartre's criticism of 241n. 184  
*The Savage Mind* 221, 241n. 181  
 Lévy, Bernard-Henri 227n. 1,  
 228n. 11, 229n. 18,  
 231n. 42, 232n. 67,  
 238n. 146, 238n. 151,  
 239n. 155, 240n. 176  
 Liberation 209  
 libertarianism 153  
 literary works, Sartre's 3, 4, 5, 36,  
 171, 179, 209, 210, 238n. 148  
 logic 176  
 look, of Other 138, 139, 143, 145,  
 181, 182, 183, 215  
 love 181  
 Lukács, György 217  
 criticism of Sartre 217  
 McBride 237n. 133  
 McCulloch 242n. 190  
 magic 83, 124, 141, 147–8, 155,  
 231n. 50  
 Marcel, Gabriel 168  
 criticism of Sartre 168, 192–3,  
 211–12, 233n. 72, 237n. 120,  
 238n. 136, 239n. 153  
 'Existentialism and human  
 freedom' 211  
 Marcuse, Herbert 217–18,  
 239n. 166, 240n. 167  
 criticism of Sartre 217–18  
 Marion, Jean-Luc 211  
 Marx, Marxism, Marxist 221  
 criticism of Sartre 217–18  
 Sartre and 5, 165, 210, 219,  
 238nn. 148, 150, 241n. 180  
 masochism 181  
 master/slave dialectic 132, 179  
 materialism, materialist 30,  
 124, 143, 211, 232n. 66,  
 235n. 103  
 atheism 205  
 dialectical/historical 217, 219,  
 232n. 66, 238n. 148  
 eliminativist 32, 69, 208  
 'Materialism and  
 revolution' 238nn. 142, 148  
*mauvaise foi* *see* bad faith  
 'me' (*moi*) 17, 152  
 melancholy 20, 231n. 49  
 mental image 150, 233n. 79  
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 2, 4,  
 200, 209, 212–14, 221,  
 235–6n. 105  
 criticism of Sartre 200, 212–14,  
 215, 233n. 72, 234n. 88,  
 235n. 101, 239n. 157  
 'Interrogation and  
 dialectic' 213  
*Phenomenology of  
 Perception* 212, 213  
 'Sartre and  
 ultrabolshevism' 213  
*The Visible and the Invisible*  
 213–14, 233n. 72, 234n. 88,  
 235n. 101  
 mescaline 227n. 8  
 metaphilosophy 24  
 of B&N 84–8, 116–17, 214,  
 228n. 13, 236n. 106  
*see also* standpoint(s) of B&N  
 metaphor, in B&N 225  
 metaphysics  
 of cognition 106  
 fictional/as fiction 69, 73, 165  
 hypotheses of 202–3  
 vs. ontology 201, 202, 204, 206  
 metapsychology (Freud's) 123–5,  
 186–7

- methodology, Sartre's 22–3, 82, 90, 126, 218, 222  
*see also* Cartesianism;  
 perspective/perspectivity;  
 transcendental,  
 argumentation/method in  
 Sartre
- mind, mental *see* consciousness;  
 Psyche; psychology
- mind-body problem/relation 143,  
 146–8
- 'mine', 'mineness' 11, 121, 135,  
 150, 187, 188, 219  
 of world 167–8
- mirroring (of *reflet-reflétant*) 93–4
- mobiles* 155, 163, 171, 178
- monad, monadology 130
- monism 212–13, 214; *see also*  
 Spinoza  
 motivational 179, 187
- mood 41
- Moore, G. E. 52
- morality *see* ethics
- Moran, Richard 242 n. 190
- Morris, Phyllis Sutton 242 n. 190
- motifs* 155, 163, 171
- motion 108
- 'Motion picture art' 227 n. 10
- motivation 16, 69, 101, 116, 119,  
 150, 162, 172, 176, 177–9,  
 192, 195, 196, 237 n. 132  
 intersubjective 179–82,  
 184–5  
 irrational 124, 176  
 metaphysical 177–8, 179,  
 187–9  
 monism of 179, 187  
*see also* consciousness,  
 motivation of
- motives (*mobiles*) 150, 155, 163,  
 171, 178
- Mougin, Henri 239 n. 165
- Nancy, Jean-Luc 241 n. 183
- Natanson, Maurice 235 nn. 96, 104
- naturalism 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35,  
 91, 186, 226, 229 n. 18,  
 231 n. 50  
 Sartre's critique of 30, 31–3, 35,  
 91, 125, 143, 145, 146, 167,  
 222, 232 nn. 66, 67
- nature 218  
 natural order 153  
 philosophy of 8
- Nausea* 4, 33–4, 76, 205, 211,  
 227 n. 10, 232 n. 62
- Nazis, Nazism 4, 238 n. 148
- necessity, necessary 141–2, 154  
 being 100  
 contingent 142  
 factual 100, 140, 142, 169  
 of my contingency 144  
 teleological 144  
 transcendental 108–9, 232 n. 70
- negation 61–5, 66, 67, 71, 234 n. 89  
*a priori* 62  
 external 60–1, 108, 130  
 internal 60, 131, 138, 141, 180  
 intersubjective 138, 180  
 and judgement 60, 61, 63–5,  
 69–70, 77, 151  
 and motivation 150–1  
 power of *see* nihilism  
 reflexive 138, 175, 176
- néгатités* 65, 83, 150
- neo-Kantianism 1, 2
- neurosis 186
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 165, 168,  
 192–3, 195, 223, 227 nn. 7, 9,  
 227–8 n. 10, 229 n. 18  
*see also* eternal recurrence
- nihilation (*néantisation*) 65, 68,  
 82, 106, 111, 150, 151, 153,  
 159, 169, 200, 201, 203
- nihilism 6–7, 36, 192, 210, 211,  
 226, 237 n. 134
- No Exit (Huis clos)* 209
- non-self-identity 28, 78, 98, 114,  
 121, 174, 224
- non-substantial absolute 19, 48, 164
- Notebooks for an Ethics* 193, 197,  
 234 n. 90, 237 nn. 125,  
 131, 133
- nothingness (*le néant*) 32, 61–72,  
 74, 88, 90, 95, 99, 101–2, 149,  
 150, 151, 153, 154

- nothingness (*le néant*) *continued*  
 concrete 64–5, 67  
 and freedom 88, 149, 151, 153,  
 154, 236n. 11  
 Hegel's theory of 66–7  
 Heidegger's theory of 67–8  
 self (*soi*) as 95  
*see also* consciousness, as  
 nothingness
- noumena, noumenal 31, 35,  
 76, 163
- Nouvelle revue française* 4
- objectivity, objective existence 8,  
 39, 40, 53, 63  
 and intersubjectivity 83–4
- object-world *see* world
- obligation (consciousness as) 94,  
 95, 153–5, 166, 167
- obligation, moral 237n. 131
- obscenity 190
- Occupation 4, 210, 218
- omnis determinatio est negatio* 63
- ontic/ontological (entities/  
 Being) distinction  
 (Heidegger's) 41–2, 68,  
 134, 216
- ontological meaning 189
- ontological proof 51–5, 58–9, 82,  
 104–5, 141, 234n. 85
- ontological relations (*vs.*  
 epistemological) 43,  
 58–61, 103, 133, 138–9,  
 140, 151  
 dynamic 60, 139  
 external 60–1  
 internal 60, 103, 138  
 negative 60, 138, 140  
 to Other 133–4, 138–9, 140
- ontology  
 basic 34, 38–58, 61, 76–80, 87,  
 89–90, 212, 214  
 full 78–80, 89–90, 103, 108,  
 190, 212  
*vs.* metaphysics 201, 202,  
 204, 206  
 monistic 212–13, 214  
 primacy of 235n. 102  
*see also* dualism, of Sartre's  
 ontology
- optimism 1, 21, 56, 179, 199  
 'ontological' 208
- organism, organic 143,  
 144, 147  
 form/unity 99, 122  
 life/phenomena 120, 122, 218
- original project (choice of  
 myself) 81, 82, 83,  
 101, 157, 160, 161–5,  
 166, 168, 176, 178, 179,  
 185, 191  
 prelogical 176  
 radical modification of 164
- Other(s) 126–43, 144–6, 158,  
 214–15  
*cogito* regarding 136–7, 139, 141,  
 147, 214  
 concrete relations with 122, 126,  
 127, 179–85  
 contingency of 142, 145  
 epistemology of 126–43, 156  
 idealism and 129–30, 132,  
 133, 140  
 'metaphysical' question of why  
 there are Others 142, 207  
 multiplicity of 141–2, 143, 207  
 necessity of 140, 141–2  
 ontological relation to 133–4,  
 138–9, 140  
 Other-as-object 136, 141, 160,  
 180, 184  
 Other-as-subject 136, 141, 145,  
 180, 184, 197, 215  
 park scenario 135–6, 137  
 presence of 126, 128, 129,  
 137, 145  
 realism and 129, 130, 131,  
 137, 140  
 refusal of 138, 142, 180  
 shame/keyhole scenario 136,  
 137, 139, 145  
 woman as 211  
*see also* 'we'
- ownership (of mental states) 96,  
 121, 188  
*see also* possession

- pain 144, 145, 146  
 Parmenides, Parmenidean 76,  
   235 n. 100  
 passion 155, 156, 176, 192, 196  
 past 111–14, 115–16, 117, 121, 150,  
   152, 158, 164  
 perception 12, 39, 40, 65, 141, 212,  
   233 n. 79, 242 n. 190  
*percipere* (etc.) 233 n. 76  
 permanence 108  
 person/personality/  
   personhood 18, 26, 96, 176  
   *see also* self  
   unity of 15, 16–17, 23, 27, 47,  
   124, 157, 162–3  
 perspective/perspectivity, in  
   Sartre's arguments 52–3,  
   54, 60, 82, 85–8, 92, 94, 186,  
   228 n. 13  
   *see also* standpoint, perspectival  
 phenomenalism 43, 44, 50–1,  
   233 n. 75  
 phenomenology,  
   phenomenological  
   existential 211, 221  
   method 1–2, 4, 5, 11, 15, 19, 33  
   ontology 87, 142  
   reduction (*epoché*) 11, 21, 85, 132  
   tradition after Sartre 212–17  
   *see also* Heidegger; Husserl  
 phenomenon 38–40, 87, 90  
   of being 41–4, 55  
   being of 42, 43, 44, 51–4, 56, 73  
   objectivity of 40  
 physicalism *see* materialism  
 'place' 158  
 Plato, Platonistic 3, 28, 101, 193,  
   195, 235 n. 100  
 play 187  
 pleasure 92, 118, 120  
 politics  
   political implications of  
     B&N 193, 210  
   political theory 161  
   Sartre's 4, 5, 209, 210, 213,  
   217, 219, 238 n. 148,  
   240 n. 167  
 'position' 158  
 possession 61, 188, 189  
 possibility, 'the Possible', 'my  
   possibles' 74, 105–6, 113,  
   151, 152, 178  
 Poster, Mark 227 n. 1, 238 n. 147,  
   239 n. 165, 241 n. 180  
 postmetaphysical  
   philosophy 223, 224  
 postmodernism 224, 242 nn. 187,  
   188, 189  
 post-structuralism 221, 222,  
   241 n. 180  
 post-war  
   art 238 n. 145  
   years 209–10  
 potentiality (potency) 40,  
   106, 108  
 practical 6, 20, 23, 62, 109,  
   151, 154–5, 161, 167–8,  
   229 n. 16  
   aim of B&N 27–8, 85, 168,  
   170–1, 192  
   judgement 194  
   primacy of 236 n. 106  
   reason 150–1, 155, 175–6,  
   195–6  
   relation to theoretical 85, 148,  
   154, 216, 236 n. 106  
   syllogism 175  
   *see also* ethics; responsibility;  
   value  
 pre-established harmony 81, 83  
 presence  
   of for-itself to in-itself 98,  
   107, 112  
   of me to Other 128  
   of Other to me 126, 128, 129,  
   137, 145  
   of reflection to reflected-on 191  
   of Self 96  
 presence to itself (*présence à  
   soi*) 95, 96, 202, 222  
 present 110, 111, 112, 113, 150  
 'primacy of knowledge' 60, 97,  
   133, 140  
 principle of sufficient reason 49,  
   85, 162  
 probability 108

- problem of other minds 126, 127,  
 128, 129, 134  
 project 91  
   of in-itself, to found itself  
     201, 202  
   *see also* fundamental project;  
     original project  
 projection (mechanism of) 83, 190  
 proof 22, 140  
   and freedom 22, 24, 152  
   *see also* ontological proof  
 Proust, Marcel 3, 122  
 Psyche/the psychic 17, 104, 111,  
 118, 121–2, 123, 125, 128,  
 135, 138, 150, 152, 156, 161,  
 186, 188, 191, 195, 196,  
 234n. 81  
 psychoanalysis  
   empirical (Freudian) 122–5, 156,  
     176, 185–7, 190, 221, 236n.  
     109, 237n. 122  
   existential 125, 162, 170, 179,  
     185–7, 188, 189, 190, 195  
   method of 185  
   *see also* symbolism  
 psychology, psychological 3, 17,  
 26, 117–22, 125, 146, 161,  
 162, 163, 236n. 108  
   ‘facts’/states 118, 121, 174, 175,  
     233–4n. 81  
   forces 16, 119, 152  
   laws 120, 162, 176  
   types 162  
   *see also* common sense,  
     psychology; Psyche  
 qualities  
   of person (mental/psychic) 16,  
     17, 27, 122, 135  
   symbolism of 189–90  
   of things (affective,  
     ‘needing-to-be-caught’,  
     etc.) 20, 80, 83, 190  
 quality, in empirical reality 39, 108  
 race 160  
 radical conversion 191, 195, 197,  
 237n. 125  
*Rassemblement Démocratique  
 Révolutionnaire* 210  
 rationality *see* reason  
 realism  
   direct 52, 59  
   empirical 35, 74  
   and the Other 129, 130, 131,  
     137, 140  
   Sartre and 30, 44, 72, 73–5,  
     79–80, 81–2, 87, 107–8,  
     233n. 74  
   Sartre’s rejection of, and  
     arguments against 36, 57,  
     80, 110, 129, 131, 167, 198  
   transcendental 74  
 realism/idealism opposition,  
   Sartre’s aim of  
   transcending 35–6, 73–84,  
   87, 105–6, 113, 129–31, 140,  
   235nn. 92, 96  
 reality  
   empirical 73–4, 77, 108–9, 114  
   transcendental 31  
 reason(s) 164, 171–2, 175–6, 192  
   for action 155, 171, 179, 194, 195  
   dialectical 241n. 181  
   faculty of 172  
   practical 150–1, 155, 175–6,  
     195–6  
   presupposes freedom 172,  
     176, 196  
   space of 172  
   *see also* practical, reason  
*Recherches philosophiques* 2  
 recognition (intersubjective) 2,  
 132, 133, 179, 182, 210  
 reduction, phenomenological 11,  
 21, 85, 132  
 The Reef of Solipsism 129, 131  
 reflection (*réflexion*) 11, 13, 14–15,  
 23, 46–7, 90, 93, 97–9,  
 114–15, 121–2  
   and consciousness of  
     freedom 151–2  
   and consciousness of  
     Other 127–8  
 ekstasis 113–14  
 impure/accessory 27, 122, 191



- pure 109, 122, 171, 191, 192, 195,  
 231 n. 44, 237 nn. 124, 125  
*réfléchir vs. refléter* 93  
 and scepticism 52–5  
 teleology of 91, 98, 142  
*reflet-reflétant, refléter* 93–5,  
 97–8, 99, 112, 118  
 reflexivity *see* self-relation  
 regulative 130, 185  
 relations  
   of being *see* ontological  
   relations  
   external 60–1, 94, 108, 109, 130  
   *extra-mundane* 137  
   internal 60, 131, 133, 138, 168,  
   188, 203  
   of knowledge *see* epistemology,  
   epistemological relations  
   subject-subject 137  
   *see also* concrete relations with  
   Others; negation  
 relationships, human *see* concrete  
   relations with Others;  
   conflict  
 religion, religious  
   consciousness 1, 7, 8, 9, 197,  
   204 *see also* deism; God;  
   theism; theology  
 Renault, Alain 227 n. 1  
 representations, mental 45, 52, 60,  
 97, 98, 110, 122, 128, 130  
 repression 123–4  
 resignation 195  
 resistance (psychoanalytic) 123  
 Resistance, French 4, 228 n. 11  
 responsibility 85, 124, 160, 164,  
 170, 172, 173, 187, 215, 220,  
 229 n. 18  
   defined, as authorship 166  
   for mankind 194  
   for past 112  
   transcendental sense of 166, 171  
   for the world 81, 82, 165–8, 171,  
   232–3 n. 71  
 Richmond, Sarah x  
*The Roads to Freedom* 209  
 La Rochefoucauld, François  
   de 15, 237 n. 132  
 Rockmore, Tom 227 n. 1,  
   241 n. 184  
 Roman Catholic Church 210  
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 227 n. 7  
 Sacks, Mark 236 n. 107  
 sadism 181, 182  
*Saint Genet* 237 n. 125  
 salvation 197–9  
 scepticism 32, 106  
   about external world 51–5  
   about human freedom 85, 208  
   about other minds 131,  
   135, 140  
 Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm  
   Joseph 7–8, 9, 30  
 Schiller, Friedrich 187  
 Schopenhauer, Arthur 8, 105,  
 191–2, 195, 227 n. 7  
 science, natural 33, 35, 146  
 Second World War 4  
 self, selfhood 89, 90–6  
   ‘bundle’ theory of 162  
   ‘circuit of selfness’ (*circuit*  
   *d’ipséité*) 96, 109, 180,  
   183, 188  
   lacks subject-predicate  
   form 26–7  
   ‘no-ownership’ theories of 95  
   and nothingness 95  
   original choice of *see* original  
   project  
   partitive conception of 124, 125,  
   152, 156  
   presence to itself (*présence à*  
   *soi*) 95, 96, 202, 222  
   reinforcement of, by Other 142,  
   180, 181  
   Self (metaphysical ideal) 96,  
   102–3, 113, 114, 154, 188  
   self-affirmation 180  
   self/world distinction 35  
   selfness (*ipséité*) 79, 90, 96, 113,  
   126, 142  
   spatio-temporal 99, 138, 167  
   ‘substratum’ theory of 162  
   teleological 95  
   transcendent (ego) 16–17, 96

- self, selfhood *continued*  
 transcendental self/subject/self/  
 ego 11–15, 18, 26, 35, 75,  
 132, 230n. 26  
 ‘true self’ (*Moi profond*) 152  
*see also* self-consciousness;  
 self-relation; *The*  
*Transcendence of the Ego*  
 self-cause *see ens causa sui*  
 self-consciousness 11–15, 69,  
 72, 90–9  
 duality-in-unity 92–3, 97  
 pre-reflective (*conscience*  
*(de) soi*) (pre-reflective  
 cogito) 45–8, 90, 92–5,  
 98–9, 118, 127, 136, 150,  
 151, 169  
 reflective *see* reflection  
 self-deception 20, 119, 124, 173–6  
 paradox of 124, 174, 176  
 self-identity 55, 114 *see also*  
 being-for-itself,  
 non-self-identical  
 self-knowledge 18, 23, 45–6, 97,  
 98, 125, 135, 173, 242n. 90  
 failures of 20, 123, 124, 189  
 self-relation (reflexivity) 14–15,  
 23, 46, 48, 55, 71, 90, 94, 95,  
 96, 97, 99, 106, 110, 111, 124,  
 128, 149, 150, 153, 169, 171,  
 189, 191, 202  
 sensation 120  
 sense experience/sensory  
 knowledge 120, 144  
 sexuality, sexual relations 10, 119,  
 173, 182, 185, 190  
 shame 127–8, 136, 137, 139, 145  
 sincerity 173, 179  
 situation, situatedness 99–100,  
 122, 145, 152, 156, 157–61,  
 179, 182, 196, 218, 220  
*Sketch for a Theory of the*  
*Emotions* 19–20, 155,  
 227n. 8, 231n. 49, 236n. 109  
 sliminess (*le visqueux*) 189, 190  
 ‘Socialisme et Liberté’ 4  
 sociality, social 184  
 being 99, 161, 210, 218  
 phenomena 217, 219–20  
 theory 161, 218, 219  
*see also* ‘we’  
 Société Française de la  
 Philosophie 208  
 solipsism 84, 126, 130, 131, 132,  
 134–5, 141  
 space, spatiality 62, 74, 75, 108,  
 109, 144, 146  
 of reasons 172  
 speculative proposition 22, 25  
 Spinoza, Baruch, Spinozism 6,  
 18–19, 21, 24, 28, 46, 76,  
 87, 105, 131, 167, 192, 208,  
 227n. 7  
 Spirit (Hegel’s concept of) 182  
 spontaneity 13, 17, 18, 19, 27, 51,  
 156, 164, 173, 233n. 79  
 involuntary 156  
 pseudo-/degraded 27  
 Stalag 4, 9, 228n. 12  
 standpoint(s) of B&N,  
 metaphilosophical 84–8,  
 105, 143, 199, 206–8, 235nn.  
 101, 104  
 absolute (aperspectival) 84–5,  
 86–8, 143, 154, 199, 207,  
 208, 214  
 perspectival (Copernican) 85–8,  
 117, 143, 199, 206–8,  
 235n. 104  
 states (mental/psychic) 16, 17,  
 26–7, 122, 135, 186  
 stoicism, stoic 168, 217, 239n. 166  
 Strawson, P. F. 90, 230n. 33  
 structuralism 161, 221, 224,  
 241n. 180, 242n. 187  
 criticism of Sartre 221  
 Sartre’s criticism of 241n. 184  
 structures, objective 160–1, 219,  
 220, 221, 240n. 173  
 structures of the for-itself  
 immediate 75, 78–9, 88, 126, 206  
 intersubjectivity 126, 142, 206  
 subject, subjectivity 230n. 25  
 death of 221–2, 218, 224,  
 241n. 182, 242n. 189  
 Kierkegaard’s concept of 8–9

- see also* being-for-itself;  
 consciousness; self
- subject(ivity)/object(ivity)  
   distinction, and relation 34,  
   55, 70, 75, 80
- subject-predicate form/  
   structure 22, 26, 27, 55, 77,  
   95, 121, 125, 152, 162, 188,  
   232 n. 62
- substance, substantiality 19, 27,  
   49, 93, 122 *see also*  
   subject-predicate form
- suffering 104, 105
- surrealists 227 n. 7
- symbolism, symbolisation 124,  
   179, 185–6, 188, 189–90  
   existential 189  
   Freudian 124  
   of things 189–90
- sympathy 184
- synthesis, synthetic 92, 103  
   of being-in-itself and  
   being-for-itself 103, 200,  
   201, 204  
   impossibility of  
   intersubjective 184  
   Kantian 12, 107  
   prelogical 176  
   of transcendent ego 16–17  
   unity of consciousness 14
- system/systematicity,  
   philosophical 7–8, 24, 226  
   opposition to 29  
   Sartre's commitment to ix 9,  
   10, 21, 28, 71, 120, 223, 226,  
   229 n. 18
- tasks 109
- taste 190
- teleology, teleological  
   abortive 198, 199  
   explanation of body 144  
   explanation of Other 142  
   of for-itself 91, 93–4, 96, 99, 100,  
   102, 107, 111–14, 118–19, 155,  
   174, 180, 183, 195  
   of intersubjective relations 184  
   of temporality 111–14
- temporality, temporalisation 55,  
   74, 89, 98, 108, 110–14, 121,  
   150, 169, 191, 201  
   dynamic vs. static 113  
   as formal order 113  
   idealist view of 110–11, 113  
   ontological account of 113  
   original 110, 191  
   phenomenological account  
   of 111–13  
   psychic 111, 121, 191  
   realist view of 110, 113  
   'time of the world' (objective,  
   'universal') 108, 114, 138  
   as totality 111, 113
- theism 7, 15, 166, 204, 205,  
   206, 208
- theology 9, 85, 195, 199, 204, 211  
   negative 206  
   *see also* deism; theism
- things in themselves 31, 74
- Third, the (*le Tiers*) 182
- Third Republic 1
- third person (perspective) 161,  
   233–4 n. 81
- thirst 119–20, 178
- time *see* temporality
- totality  
   of appearances 40  
   of being *see* being, totality of  
   consciousness as 14, 19  
   defined 203  
   'detotalised' 203–4  
   of existents (reality) 70  
   for-itself as 98  
   of for-itself 207  
   'I-and-Other' 181  
   person/subject as 163, 165, 186  
   time as 111, 113  
   world as 108, 201
- tragedy, tragic 197–9
- transcendence (structure of  
   for-itself) 12, 41, 52, 67, 71  
   81, 89, 103, 104, 107, 126,  
   141, 145, 150, 154  
   of consciousness, towards  
   object 39, 40  
   of ego 16–17

- transcendence (structure of for-itself) *continued*  
 Other's, of me 137, 160  
 relation to facticity 115, 173, 184  
 'transcendence in immanence' 150  
 transcendence-transcended 145  
*The Transcendence of the Ego*  
 11–19, 23, 26, 90, 96, 99, 117–18, 122, 134–5, 152, 162, 186, 227 n. 2, 230 nn. 26, 34, 231 n. 42, 232 n. 63, 233 n. 77, 236 n. 114, 237 nn. 117, 132  
 impersonality of consciousness  
 thesis 12–15, 17, 18, 96, 135, 230 n. 24, 231 n. 45, 237 n. 132  
 transcendental  
 argumentation/method in  
 Sartre 48, 52–3, 70, 75, 89, 97, 108–9, 113, 230 n. 21, 232 n. 70, 234 n. 85  
 conditions/grounds 11–12, 62, 65, 100, 108–9, 110, 113, 232 n. 70  
 idealism 30, 31, 74, 75, 80, 82, 87, 229 n. 21, 235 nn. 98, 99  
 necessity 108–9, 232 n. 70  
 realism/reality 31, 74  
 social theory 219  
 tradition 30  
*see also* self, transcendental  
 Trier 4  
 truth 62  
*Truth and Existence* 193  
  
*Ucs.* 123, 186  
 unconscious 124, 163, 176, 186–7, 189, 219  
 'unhappy consciousness'  
 (*conscience malheureuse*) 105  
 United States 210  
 unity  
 of being 200, 203, 206, 208  
 of being and appearance 39, 41  
 of being-in-itself 55  
 of consciousness 12, 17  
 of for-itself 156  
 -in-duality of self-  
 consciousness 92–9, 114  
 of *mobile*, *motif* and *fin* 155, 171  
 organic 99  
 of person/self/subject 15, 16–17, 23, 27, 47, 124, 157, 162–3  
 of Psyche 122  
 of world 108  
 unjustifiability 99, 164, 167  
 upsurge, of for-itself 57, 58, 79, 107, 131, 155, 156, 163, 201, 202–3, 232 n. 70  
 'us' (*nous-objet*) 182, 183  
 utilitarianism 195  
  
 value 6, 30, 89, 101, 102–5, 156, 178, 188, 192–6, 197–9, 216, 227 n. 9, 232 n. 66, 236 n. 106, 237 n. 131  
 'Antivalue' 190  
*see also* aesthetics; ethics  
 'veil of ideas' 45  
 Vichy 4  
 'view from nowhere' 86, 105, 117  
 virtual 17, 122  
 viscosity (*le visqueux*) 189, 190  
 volition *see* will  
  
 Wahl, Jean 2, 229 n. 17, 238 n. 145  
 criticism of Sartre 72–3, 82, 200, 235 n. 92  
 'The roots of existentialism' 235 n. 92, 238 n. 145  
*Vers le concret* 2  
*War Diaries* 11, 227 n. 6, 228 n. 13, 229 nn. 13, 17, 231 n. 47, 232 nn. 64, 66, 233 n. 74, 234 n. 82, 237 n. 117, 238 n. 140  
 Warren, Jim xi  
 'we' 134, 182–3  
 as object (*nous-objet*) 182–3  
 as subject (*nous-sujet*) 182–3

## INDEX

- What is Literature?* 232 n. 68,  
237 n. 128, 238 nn. 135, 148
- Whitford, Margaret 239 n. 157
- will 149, 156, 237 n. 117
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig 120
- world, object-world 73–4,  
76–83, 89, 107, 108–9,  
200, 201
- relation to being-in-itself  
73–9, 89
- and selfness 79, 96
- shared 83–4
- as totality 108, 201
- unity of 108
- see also* responsibility, for the  
world