

PURE REFLECTION:  
SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND MORAL UNDERSTANDING  
IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Christopher Vaughan

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Paul Vincent Spade, Ph.D.

Doctoral  
Committee

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Paul Eisenberg, Ph.D.

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Milton Fisk, Ph.D.

---

David Pace, Ph.D.

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## PREFACE

This project began as a re-evaluation of Sartre's moral theory in an attempt to answer what appeared to me as the surprisingly unanswered question of the nature of authenticity. Sartre's moral theory has attracted vastly more comment than his metaphysics, despite the fact that Sartre had vastly less to say about it. It struck me that in the substantial body of critical literature on this topic, the basic terms of Sartre's thinking on morality had yet to be satisfactorily defined. That is what I set out to do.

In the course of my research it quickly became clear to me that the question of authenticity turned on a prior question which had been even less adequately addressed, namely, the nature of pure reflection. The concept of pure reflection is an interesting one, first because of its tantalizing obscurity but even more for its role as the conceptual link between Sartre's ontology and his never-fully developed morality. Pure reflection is the key to understanding many things in Sartre: the continuity between his ontology and his ethics, the ethical terminology he employs, and the ultimate direction his ethical thought would have taken. For this reason, any reasonably thorough interpretation of Sartre's morality must begin by settling the question of pure reflection. This had never been done, and it was hence to this question that I turned my attention.

This dissertation is thus a study of pure reflection. Through the careful reading of his texts and the consideration of his philosophical influences, I have attempted to

arrive at an interpretation which makes sense of what Sartre says and will serve as the starting-point for a more thorough study of his moral thought as a whole. In the interest of restricting my scope to the reasonable, I have not attempted to address all the outstanding questions about Sartrean ethics. I have, however, indicated in my final chapter several obvious moral conclusions which follow from my interpretation and the manner in which they address certain long-standing criticisms of Sartre. It is my hope that this will give some indication of the direction which our understanding of Sartrean ethics should take.

Since this work is almost wholly exegetical, I have foregone any attempt at criticism of Sartre's theory. There is criticism enough to be found in the body of Sartre commentary, most of which, in my opinion, suffers from a failure to fully understand what it seeks to critique. I have not so much attempted to defend Sartre as simply to explain him, but it is my sense that in the course of explanation many of the common objections raised against Sartre are adequately answered. Sartre's defenders have often complained that his work is badly understood. I agree. It is in redress of this complaint that I primarily undertook this project.

Because the nature of chapter one necessarily requires the drastic summarization of a number of theories that cannot be developed here in detail, it assumes a greater degree of background knowledge than the chapters which follow. The non-specialist reader may find it forbiddingly dense. The material contained in chapter one is important to understanding the terms of the problem which the remaining chapters address and represents an uneasy compromise between the need to provide such a background

and the limitations of space and scope. The reader who is unfamiliar with the terminology of chapter one might do well to begin with chapter two and return to the first chapter later.

I have, in my notes, cross-referenced the French editions of Sartre's texts with their English translations, although I have given all quotations from Sartre in English. Where non-standard editions of these texts exist, I have attempted to use the standard ones. I have done the same in my references to Francis Jeanson, whose special stature among Sartre's critics merits careful attention, and for certain quotations from Simone de Beauvoir where the translation is important and questionable. Where I have referenced texts by other authors not originally written in English, I have not cross-referenced the original, since nothing of import hangs on the fine points of their translation. I have, however, included the original-language editions of all works cited in my bibliography, again using standard editions where available. I have also noted in the bibliography the original publication dates of all texts where they differ from the edition cited (and is not obvious), in the interest of making clear what was available when

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This dissertation develops an interpretation of pure reflection in Sartre's early philosophy. The primary contention is that while the concept of pure reflection is not well-developed it is crucial to understanding Sartre, and that it is possible to reconstruct an understanding of pure reflection from Sartre's brief indications which is both coherent and consistent with Sartre's thought as a whole.

Chapter one presents the concept of pure reflection as a response to a specific set of problems about reflection in Sartre's phenomenology. Reflection arises in the first instance as a problem of *epistemology*. The epistemological problem of reflection is translated into an *ontological* problem in *Being and Nothingness*, and on this ground becomes a problem of *morality*. Pure reflection represents Sartre's response to the problem on all three levels. The narrow definition of the problem of reflection suggests an equally narrow definition of pure reflection.

Chapter two argues that pure reflection cannot be understood as a special case of the phenomenological reduction as it has sometimes been maintained, but rather



requires a distinct type of consciousness which is closely related to Sartre's view of conception in *The Psychology of Imagination*. Likewise, pure reflection is not arrived at through abstraction as it has also been thought, but must immediately deliver consciousness to itself without an object. On the basis of these considerations, it is argued that pure reflection is on the one hand identical to the experience of anguish and on the other represents a reflective thematization of the pre-reflective *cogito*.

Chapters three and four present the case that this reflective thematization is analogous to the notions of "intuition" in Bergson and "understanding" in Jaspers, respectively, which reflects a direct and substantial influence of Bergson and Jaspers on Sartre's thought that is often overlooked.

Chapter five develops the implications of this interpretation for Sartre's ethical theory, maintaining that the concept of authenticity is rendered more intelligible and that Sartre's understanding of moral judgment as a consequence avoids several of the serious objections that have been raised against his theory.

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
PREFACE	v
ABSTRACT	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xii
Chapter	
I.    THE PROBLEM OF REFLECTION	
HUSSERL	
THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THE EGO	
REFLECTION	
II.   PURE REFLECTION	
PERCEPTION, IMAGINATION, AND CONCEPTION	
THE PHENOMEONOLOGICAL REDUCTION	
ANGUISH	
CATHARSIS AND THE PRE-REFLECTIVE <i>COGITO</i>	
III.  BERGSON, INTUITION, AND THE FUNDAMENTAL SELF	
BERGSONIAN INTUITION	
THE FUNDAMENTAL SELF	
INTUITION AND INTELLECTUAL EFFORT	

IV. JASPERS AND UNDERSTANDING

UNDERSTANDING

REVELATION

THE UNUNDERSTANDABLE

EMPATHY AND AUTHENTICITY

V. CONVERSION, AUTHENTICITY, AND SARTREAN MORALITY

ORIGINAL CHOICE

CONVERSION

PLAY

AUTHENTICITY

SARTREAN MORALITY

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES (BY SARTRE)

OTHER PRIMARY SOURCES

SECONDARY SOURCES

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

All works are by Sartre unless otherwise noted.

- BN* *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Translated with an introduction by Hazel Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956; New York: Washington Square Press, Pocket Books, 1966. References are to the Pocket Books edition.<sup>1</sup>
- C* *Cahiers pour une morale*. Edited by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre. Bibliothèque de philosophie. Paris: NRF, Gallimard, 1983.
- CDG* *Les Carnets de la drôle de guerre: Novembre 1939–Mars 1940*. Paris: NRF, Gallimard, 1983.
- CS* “Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self.” Translated by Mary Ellen Lawrence and N. Lawrence. In *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, ed. Nathaniel Lawrence and Daniel O’Connor, 113–142. Englewood Cliffs (N.J.): Prentice-Hall, 1967.
- CDS* “Conscience de soi et connaissance de soi.” *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 42, no.3 (April–June 1948): 49–91.
- E* *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*. Translated by Bernard Frechtmann. New York: Philosophical Library, 1948; Secaucus (N.J.): Citadel Press, 1975.
- EE* *Esquisse d’une théorie des émotions*. New ed. Collection L’Esprit et la main. Paris: Hermann, 1965.
- EN* *L’Etre et le néant: Essai d’ontologie phénoménologique*. 29th edition. Bibliothèque des idées. Paris: NRF, Librairie Gallimard, 1950.

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<sup>1</sup>Early printings of the Pocket Books edition have a slightly different pagination, since Sartre’s introduction is paginated there in roman numerals. I have followed the pagination of the later printings, which are more readily available.

- GP* Karl Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, trans. J. Hoenig and Marian Hamilton. Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1963.
- I* *L'Imaginaire: Psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination*. 17th edition. Bibliothèque des idées. Paris: NRF, Gallimard, 1948.
- IM* Henri Bergson. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. 2d ed. Authorized translation by T. E. Hulme. With an introduction by Thomas Goudge. Library of Liberal Arts, 10. New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955.
- IP* *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Translated by William Alston and George Nakhnikian, with an introduction by George Nakhnikian. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973.
- NE* *Notebooks for an Ethics*. Translated by David Pellauer. With a foreword by Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- PI* *The Psychology of Imagination*. Translated by Bernard Frechtmann. Secaucus (N.J.): Citadel Press, n.d.
- PM* Francis Jeanson. *Le Problème moral et la pensée de Sartre*. With a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. Paris: Editions du myrte, 1947.
- SPM* Francis Jeanson. *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*. Translated with an introduction by Robert Stone. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.
- TE* *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*. Translated and annotated with an introduction by Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1988.
- TDE* *La Transcendence de l'ego: Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique*. Edited with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Sylvie le Bon. Bibliothèque des textes philosophiques. Paris: J. Vrin, 1965.
- TFW* Henri Bergson. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Authorized translation by F. L. Pogson. Muirhead Library of Philosophy. New York: Macmillan Co., 1910.
- WD* *The War Diaries of Jean-Paul Sartre: November 1939–March 1940*. Translated by Quintin Hoare. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

I do not know myself, and God forbid that I should.

Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM OF REFLECTION

That reflection is problematic for Sartre is clear from his earliest philosophical works, but the extent to which the problem of reflection shapes Sartre's theory of consciousness is often overlooked. While it is not fair to say that reflection is *the* problem which motivates Sartre's philosophy, it is nevertheless the case that Sartre's theory of consciousness commits him to a view of self-consciousness in which the ordinary understanding of reflection cannot be sustained, and it is to the explication of this problem and its implications that Sartre devotes a great deal of his philosophical effort. The question of reflection is one of the guiding themes of Sartre's early thought, and although Sartre's attention to this question is not always explicit, it provides the thread in terms of which much of Sartre's theory can be understood. Reflection originally appears as an *epistemological* problem in *Transcendence of the Ego*.<sup>1</sup> In *Being and*

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans. and annotated with an introduction by Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1988.) Hereafter referred to as *TE*. Idem, *La Transcendence de l'ego: Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique*, ed. with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Sylvie le Bon., Bibliothèque des textes philosophiques (Paris: J. Vrin, 1965). Hereafter referred to as *TDE*.

*Nothingness*<sup>2</sup> it is restated as an *ontological* problem, and it is on the basis of this ontological statement that reflection becomes a *moral* problem for Sartre.

Sartre's response to it on all three formulations is what he calls "pure" reflection. Pure reflection arises in Sartre as a *substitute* for what we ordinarily understand as reflection, which, because of the limitations imposed by Sartre's theory of consciousness, is inadequate to the philosophical and ultimately moral work which it is required to do. Pure reflection is thus in the first instance defined *negatively*: it is that sort of reflection which succeeds where "commonplace" (what Sartre calls "impure" or "accessory") reflection fails. It is for this reason that an understanding of the nature of pure reflection must begin with an understanding of the problem of reflection. The problem of reflection, in turn, is a specifically *phenomenological* problem which arises out of Sartre's commitment to Husserl's principles on the one hand and his rejection of Husserl's conclusions on the other.

The extent of Sartre's debt to Husserl is often understated by Sartre's critics, who attempt to read Sartre as apart from any particular phenomenological view.<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. with an introduction by Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956; Washington Square Press, Pocket Books, 1966). Hereafter referred to as *BN*. References are to later printings of the Pocket Books edition. (Earlier printings are paginated slightly differently.) Idem, *L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, 29th ed., Bibliothèque des idées (Paris: NRF, Librairie Gallimard, 1950). Hereafter referred to as *EN*. Pagination follows the original edition.

<sup>3</sup>In particular, critics of Sartre's moral theory are especially guilty of this oversight. There are, however, several excellent studies of Sartre's phenomenology with respect to Husserl. See, for example: Maurice Natanson, *A Critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's Ontology*, University of Nebraska Studies, n.s. 6 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951); idem, "Phenomenology and Existentialism: Husserl and Sartre on Intentionality," *The Modern Schoolman* 37 (1959–60): 1–10 (reprinted in his *Literature, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences: Essays in Existentialism and Phenomenology* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968], 26–33); Herbert Spiegelberg, "Husserl's Phenomenology and Existentialism," *Journal of Philosophy* 57 (January 1960): 62–74; and Gilbert Varet, *L'Ontologie de Sartre*, Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948).



critical assumption is simply and quite obviously false. *Transcendence of the Ego* is an explicit refutation of Husserl's transcendental ego on *phenomenological* grounds, and the considerations raised in that work resurface quite recognizably throughout Sartre's early work up to and including *Being and Nothingness*. In particular, the problem of reflection to which Sartre's response to Husserl gives rise cannot be understood apart from the phenomenological concerns which motivate that response. What Sartre borrows from Husserl is, on the one hand, a commitment to philosophical certainty—specifically the certainty of reflection—and on the other the doctrine of intentionality. These two principles, coupled with Sartre's rejection of the ego as an object belonging to consciousness, generate the problem of reflection in its epistemological form. Nevertheless, Sartre's refutation of the ego proceeds in phenomenological terms, and as a result reflection appears as problematic only in a phenomenological context. Thus the problem of reflection is not itself taken from Husserl but is very much a Husserlian one. Sartre's understanding of reflection is thus to a great extent a product of Sartre's understanding of Husserl.

#### HUSSERL

The Husserl to whom Sartre responds in *Transcendence of the Ego* is the later Husserl.

*The Idea of Phenomenology*<sup>4</sup> marks the transition between the early Husserl

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<sup>4</sup>Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William Alston and George Nakhnikian, with an introduction by George Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973). Hereafter referred to as *IP*. These lectures, delivered in 1907, were published as *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* in 1950 [see bibliography for complete reference]. Clearly, Sartre was not familiar with this work until well after *Being and Nothingness* if at all. Nevertheless, *The Idea of Phenomenology* is important in that it clearly reflects the transition in Husserl's thought to which Sartre responds and serves as a concise introduction to the Husserl with whom Sartre was familiar and to whom he reacts. I refer to it here out of convenience and not any special historical significance.

of *Logical Investigations* and the later Husserl of the *Ideas*. Husserl's concern, beginning with *The Idea of Phenomenology*, is the problem of cognition, specifically, the certainty of cognition (in a broad sense not limited to perception) regarding its objects as they exist in themselves. The problem of phenomenology in the later Husserl is thus very much a Cartesian problem—to guarantee the certainty of cognition. His method is correspondingly Cartesian. Husserl begins, in the manner of Descartes, by doubting or “putting into question” the validity of all cognition. And likewise in the manner of Descartes, the ultimate certainty of cognition will depend on the certainty of reflection.<sup>5</sup> The certainty of reflection is central to Husserl's account for two reasons: (1) The reflective cognition of the *cogitatio*—that there is cognition—provides the indubitable starting point for philosophical investigation and (2) the focus of philosophical investigation for Husserl is on the role which cognition plays in the phenomenal representation of objects. Phenomenology, that is, both begins in and proceeds by way of reflection, and it is the certainty of reflection which validates the phenomenological project.

The question of cognition, for Husserl, is a question of how it is that consciousness “reaches” its objects, that is, how it is that the “contents” of consciousness correspond to the objects which they represent. To the extent that objects “transcend”

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<sup>5</sup>The sketch of Husserl's theory provided here is necessarily oversimple. Husserl's view is vast and complex and cannot be done justice here. My intention is solely to provide an outline of those features of Husserl's phenomenology which figure prominently in Sartre and the discussion which follows. For a detailed introduction to Husserl, see: Marvin Farber, *The Aims of Phenomenology: The Motives, Methods, and Impact of Husserl's Thought*, The Academy Library (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1966) and idem., *The Foundation of Phenomenology: Edmund Husserl and the Quest for a Rigorous Science of Philosophy*, 2d ed., Paine-Whitman Studies in Social Science and Social Theory (New York: Paine-Whitman Publishers, 1962.) For a more general introduction to Husserl, see Nakhnikian's introduction to *The Idea of Phenomenology*.

consciousness, our cognition of objects is doubtful, since it is “in question” whether our representation of the objects in fact corresponds to the objects themselves. But objects “transcend” consciousness in two senses: (1) in the sense that objects are not wholly contained in consciousness and thus at least to some degree “outside” of consciousness and (2) in the sense that objects are not “directly given” to consciousness but rather given to consciousness as appearances behind which the object itself is intuited.<sup>6</sup> Through a discussion of “eidetic abstraction,” which need not detain us here, Husserl concludes that it is only transcendence in the *second* sense that is responsible for the dubiousness of objects. In keeping with the spirit of Descartes’ methodological doubt, phenomenology must *exclude* all doubtful cognition, which is to say, phenomenology must exclude all transcendent cognition in this second sense.<sup>7</sup> Thus Husserl proposes the “phenomenological reduction” or *epoché*: “*I must exclude all that is transcendentally posited.*”<sup>8</sup> If phenomenology is to be a certain science of cognition, it must restrict its investigations to that which is not transcendent but rather *immanent*. It is the immanence, i.e., the immediate givenness, of the *cogitatio* which guarantees its certainty.

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<sup>6</sup>There are two senses of immanence in Husserl corresponding to the two senses of transcendence: (1) *Reel Immanenz*, which refers to that which is wholly contained in something real and (2) *Evidenz*, which refers to that which is directly given to consciousness. Husserl’s discussion of this terminology is extremely confusing (see *IP*, 3ff.). To avoid this confusion, the terms “wholly contained” and “directly given” will be employed here.

<sup>7</sup>Which is not to say that phenomenology *denies* the existence of the transcendent object, merely that it *disregards* the transcendent object and makes no claims at all with respect to it.

<sup>8</sup>*IP*, 4. See also Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Macmillan, 1931; Collier Books, 1962), ch.2, sec. 4, §§ 56–62 and idem, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), § 8.

The “object” of the *cogitatio* is the phenomenon of cognition itself. The “thought” of the “I think” is directly given to consciousness, even though the object of that thought is not. It is the “thinking” which is the “absolute datum” of the *cogitatio*, and not that which is thought. By the same token, the “I” of the “I think” is transcendent in the sense that causes doubt, since “the mentally active ego, the object, the man in time, the thing among things, etc., are not absolute data; hence man’s mental activity as his activity is no absolute datum, either.”<sup>9</sup> The “thinking thing” is not directly given, is transcendent and doubtful, and is excluded by the *epoché*. But that *there is* thought is directly given and indubitable. This phenomenon of cognition (the “absolute datum”) is absolutely certain and provides the starting point of phenomenological investigation.

We take this step in agreement with a tenet of Descartes’ concerning *clear and distinct perceptions*. The “existence” of the *cogitatio* is guaranteed by its absolute *self-givenness*, by its givenness in *pure evidence (Evidenz)*. Whenever we have pure evidence (*Evidenz*), the pure viewing and grasping of something objective directly and in itself, we have the same guarantees, the same certainties.<sup>10</sup>

Reflection, therefore, is certain, but only to the extent that its object is directly given. The certainty of phenomenology is therefore guaranteed by the certainty of reflection, but only insofar as it restricts its investigations to the immediately given “absolute datum,” namely, consciousness as a pure phenomenon.

The certain starting point of phenomenology, in other words, is consciousness itself. At the same time, the question of phenomenology concerns the relationship of consciousness to its objects: how it is that consciousness “reaches” objects as they are. Husserl’s answer in his later work is the theory of *constitution*—the theory that objects

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<sup>9</sup>*IP*, 5.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

are not *discovered* but rather in some sense *made* by the consciousness which apprehends them. The phenomenon of an object is distinct from the object itself, i.e., the appearance is not the same as that which appears. The *appearance* of an object is directly given to consciousness, but the object itself is not given in that appearance. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the object *is* directly given to consciousness. The location of an object in time, for example, is not part of the appearance of the object. “The object is not a genuinely concrete part of the phenomenon; in its temporality it has something which cannot at all be found in the phenomenon or reduced to the phenomenon.”<sup>11</sup> At the same time, our perception of the object is of an object at some particular time. The object in time is not given in the phenomenon, but is given nonetheless. It is not “found” in the phenomenon, “and yet it is *constituted* within the phenomenon. It is presented therein and evidently given as ‘existing’ there.”<sup>12</sup>

Phenomena are “seen”; objects are *constituted*.

And to say that they are constituted implies that immanent data are not, as it first seemed, simply in consciousness in the sense in which things are in a box, but that all the time they are displayed in something like “appearances.” These appearances neither are nor genuinely contain the objects themselves. Rather in a shifting and remarkable structure they create objects in a certain way for the ego, insofar as appearances of just such a sort and just such a construction belong to that in which what we call “givenness” has been lying all along.<sup>13</sup>

Consciousness, that is, *contributes* to the representation of objects. That an object appears in a particular way is a product of the consciousness which perceives it and not the “raw” appearance. The object we perceive as a book *appears* as a colored shape. It is *constituted* as a book by the consciousness to which it appears, and it is the book and not a colored

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 56.

shape which is the actual object of consciousness. The constituting activity of consciousness accounts for how it is that the book *as* book can be directly given as *in* the phenomena.

Consciousness “reaches” its objects because consciousness constitutes its objects. Consciousness for Husserl is *intentional*: consciousness is consciousness *of* objects which are not in consciousness.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, objects are always transcendent. Objects, however, are directly given to consciousness through the constituting activity of consciousness itself. The study of phenomena is in reality the study of our *consciousness* of phenomena. The study of the intentional object can be *certain* only to the extent that it is a study of the *principles according to which* consciousness constitutes its objects. Thus our cognition of objects is certain because objects are directly given to consciousness through the process of constitution and our cognition of consciousness is certain because consciousness is directly given in reflection. The phenomenological enterprise is therefore necessarily reflective, and achieves its Cartesian ends only on the basis of the certainty of reflection, which in turn depends on the principle that consciousness is directly given to itself in reflection.

In the later Husserl, objects are constituted by and for a “transcendental ego” standing behind consciousness. The transcendental ego is not the phenomenal self (or *psychological ego*), but rather the “subject” for whom and by whose direction objects are constituted from appearances. On this view, constitution is an activity of the

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<sup>14</sup>See Husserl, *Ideas*, § 84.

transcendental ego, and the possibility of consciousness depends as much on the subject as on the object of consciousness. Husserl's postulation of the transcendental ego was puzzling to even his closest disciples,<sup>15</sup> particularly because this move seemed to imply an idealism which reversed the original direction of phenomenology which was the investigation of objects in their own right. In suggesting that objects were necessarily *subjective*, Husserl seemingly abandoned the original sense of intentionality, which was that consciousness was consciousness of objects "in the world."

It is to this original definition of intentionality and this understanding of phenomenology that Sartre is committed. On Sartre's view, the hypothesis of a transcendental ego does not follow from phenomenology but rather undermines the phenomenological approach. It was with the purpose of refuting Husserl's transcendental ego and re-establishing phenomenology on more appropriate grounds that Sartre wrote *Transcendence of the Ego*. The phenomenology which emerges is to a large degree defined *against* Husserl and paves the way for the philosophical concerns to which Sartre's work through *Being and Nothingness* is addressed. In particular, Sartre's denial of a transcendental subject commits him to an understanding of the self which will undermine the certainty of reflection on which phenomenology depends. If there is no subject in consciousness, the subject is *not* directly given to consciousness. Reflection, therefore, is phenomenologically inadequate. Sartre's attempt to address the inadequacy of reflection in a manner which *preserves* the self-givenness of consciousness moti-

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<sup>15</sup>For a discussion of this shift in Husserl's thought, see: Roman Ingarden, *On the Motives Which Led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism*, trans. by Arnor Hannibalsson, *Phaenomenologica*, 64 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

vates much of his theory of consciousness and ontology and culminates in the notion of pure reflection.

#### THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THE EGO

The transcendental ego of Husserl is not the *psychological* ego, i.e., the empirical self. Husserl acknowledges that the concrete self (the “me,” in Sartre’s terminology) is a transcendent object which “falls before” the *epoché*. The *transcendental* ego is rather the featureless Kantian “I” which accompanies the “I think.” For Sartre, the Kantian claim that “the I Think *must be able* to accompany all our representations”<sup>16</sup> is a claim about “*validity*” (i.e., possibility). One must be *able* to regard one’s thoughts as one’s own, as belonging to *one* consciousness in order to account for the unity of consciousness. For Husserl, it is a claim of *fact*: that “an I *in fact* inhabits all our states of consciousness and effects the supreme synthesis of our experience.”<sup>17</sup> Sartre accepts the Kantian formulation of the transcendental I but rejects the Husserlian one, arguing that the transcendental subject, like the empirical “me,” is a transcendent object which falls before the *epoché*.

Sartre rejects the transcendental I on the grounds of Husserl’s doctrine of intentionality. For Sartre, consciousness is not only intentional, consciousness *is intentionality*. That is, consciousness is *nothing more* than consciousness of objects. Consciousness is *of* objects; objects are not *in* consciousness. Therefore, Sartre argues, it is

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<sup>16</sup>TE, 32. TDE, 13. The reference is to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, §16 (B 131). See also *ibid.* §§17–18 (B136–140).

<sup>17</sup>TE, 32. TDE, 13.



not necessary to think of an I which “contains” the objects of consciousness. The transcendental I, in other words, is phenomenologically useless. Sartre’s complaint, however, is much stronger. More than useless, the transcendental I is phenomenologically impossible, again on the grounds of intentionality. Consciousness on the one hand is consciousness of an object. At the same time, consciousness is consciousness of itself *as* consciousness of the object: “All is therefore clear and lucid in consciousness: the object with its characteristic opacity is before consciousness, but consciousness is purely and simply consciousness of being consciousness of that object. This is the law of its existence.”<sup>18</sup> Consciousness, that is, is *positionally* conscious of its object (in that an object is *posited*) and *non-positionally* conscious of itself. Consciousness is not an *object* for non-positional consciousness. The object of consciousness is always by definition *outside* of consciousness. The I cannot then be an object, since the I is thought of as something *in* consciousness. Consciousness becomes an object for itself only in reflection. But if the I is an object which is *for* consciousness in reflection, it cannot be *in* consciousness. In the original, unreflected, consciousness of objects there is no I: there is only consciousness and its object. To introduce the I into consciousness is to introduce an *object* into consciousness, to make consciousness *substantial*. But this is, on Sartre’s view, to abandon the doctrine of intentionality. “All the results of phenomenology begin to crumble if the *I* is not, by the same title as the world, a relative existent: that is to say, an object *for* consciousness.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>TE, 40. TDE, 24.

<sup>19</sup>TE 42. TDE, 26.

The I, then, which is revealed in the *cogito* is not the I of the reflective consciousness but rather an object *for* the consciousness which reflects: “the consciousness which says *I Think* is precisely not the consciousness which thinks; or rather, it is not its own thought that I posits by this thetic [i.e., positional] act.”<sup>20</sup> The *cogito* is a reflective act of consciousness in which consciousness posits “itself” as an object. But the positing consciousness does not take *itself* as an object. Rather, there is a *reflecting* consciousness which is conscious of another, *reflected* consciousness. The reflecting consciousness is conscious of *itself* only non-positionally, i.e., as consciousness *of* the reflected consciousness. “All reflecting consciousness is ... itself unreflected, and a new act of the third degree is necessary to posit it.”<sup>21</sup> There are thus *two* consciousnesses involved in reflection. The reflecting consciousness can only become an object by being posited by *another* consciousness. The reflecting consciousness is never an object for itself. The I appears *only* in reflection as an object for the consciousness which reflects. On the unreflected level, there is no I. There is only consciousness.

In unreflected consciousness of a book there is only consciousness of the book. In reflecting on that same act of consciousness, the I appears, but not directly. What is “given” to reflection is consciousness of the book. The I appears *through* the reflected consciousness as something to which the consciousness of the book belongs. But the

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<sup>20</sup>TE, 45. TDE, 28. A conscious act of the *first* degree is an unreflected consciousness which is non-positionally conscious of itself. A conscious act of the *second* degree is a *reflective* consciousness, non-positionally conscious of itself and positionally conscious of the *reflected* consciousness. A conscious act of the *third* degree is positionally conscious of the *reflecting* consciousness of a second degree act. The point here is that consciousness is never conscious of itself as reflecting, but can only be posited as an object by another consciousness for which it becomes the *reflected*. See TDE, 29 n. 29.

<sup>21</sup>TE, 45. TDE, 29.

certainty of reflection extends only to what is directly given. That there was consciousness of the book is therefore certain. That *I* was conscious of the book is not.

... It is only too certain that the *I* of the *I Think* is an object grasped with neither apodictic nor adequate evidence. The evidence is not apodictic, since by saying *I* we affirm far more than we know. It is not adequate, for the *I* is presented as an opaque reality whose content would have to be unfolded.<sup>22</sup>

The *I* is an object for consciousness, but moreover it is a *transcendent* object which, like the psychological me, falls before the *epoché*. But if this is the case, there is no certain knowledge of the *I* and the *cogito* cannot serve as the certain starting point of phenomenology. “The *Cogito* affirms too much. The certain content of the pseudo-‘Cogito’ is not ‘*I have* consciousness of this chair,’ but ‘there is consciousness of this chair.’”<sup>23</sup> That *there is* consciousness is the certain conclusion of the *cogito* and nothing more can be asserted as the starting point for phenomenological investigation.

Phenomenology, then, must be a non-egological investigation. Only in this way is the certainty of the *cogito* maintained. Phenomenology itself, on Sartre’s view, requires the rejection of the transcendental ego. Which is not to say that the ego does not exist, only that “the ego is neither formally nor materially *in* consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*; it is a being of the world, like the ego of another.”<sup>24</sup> Phenomenological

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<sup>22</sup>*TE*, 51. *TDE*, 36. Evidence is apodictic when the object is given as *necessarily as it is*. Evidence is adequate when the object is *grasped in its entirety*. See Husserl, *Ideas*, § 3 and idem, *Cartesian Meditations*, § 6. See also *TE*, 115 n. 17.

<sup>23</sup>*TE*, 53–54. *TDE*, 37.

<sup>24</sup>*TE*, 31. *TDE*, 13. Sartre goes on to claim in *TE* that the ego is a “magical,” which is to say impossible, object (see *TE*, 80ff./*TDE*, 63ff.) This is a separate claim. Sartre’s claim here is that the ego exists (and only exists) as an *intentional* object. Another way to put this is that the ego can only be understood as the empirical ego. Thus Sartre rejects the *transcendental* ego but accepts the *psychological* ego, at least as an ideal object of consciousness. Sartre does, for example, accept the possibility of empirical psychology, that is, the *study* of the psychological ego *as an object*. Given Sartre’s later claim that the ego is an impossible object, Sartre’s attitude towards psychology is strange to say the least.

investigation of consciousness must proceed without appeal to the ego, which is to say, without appeal to the subject. The “subject,” insofar as the subject/object distinction can be maintained, is simply consciousness itself. The question, then, is how the subject can be understood. The problem of reflection has two sides in Sartre: (1) If reflection constitutes consciousness as an object—an ego—what is the relation of the ego to the consciousness which reflects? And (2) how is it possible to have reflective consciousness *of* consciousness given that consciousness can never be an object for itself? The first problem is the problem of *accessory* reflection. The second is the problem of *pure* reflection.

#### REFLECTION

If the transcendental ego is impossible, the ego can only be understood as the psychological ego, i.e., the empirical self or psyche. The ego, Sartre argues, is an object *for* consciousness, like an object in the world. Objects, for Husserl, are given in a series of “profiles” or *Abschattungen*.<sup>25</sup> The object, that is, is never completely given, but rather revealed in a series of appearances. It is given that *there is* an object, but the object is given *as* some particular appearance or set of appearances. The series of profiles in which an object may appear is infinite. The object itself is the ideal unity of this series. A chair, for example, is given from this or that angle, this or that point of view. The chair itself is the unity of all of its possible appearances, which can only be achieved ideally. The object is never given completely, which is to say, directly.

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<sup>25</sup>See Husserl, *Ideas*, § 41.

The ego, as an object for consciousness, is given in a (potentially infinite) series of reflections, of which the ego is the ideal and *indirect* unity.<sup>26</sup> The ego, that is, is that which all of the infinite possible reflections are reflections *of*. What is directly given in reflection is not the ego, but rather momentary acts of consciousness or *Erlebnisse*.<sup>27</sup>

“I am angry with Pierre because I hate him.” If I reflect on my anger, what immediately appears is neither my self nor my hatred of Pierre, but rather a momentary consciousness of repugnance. This momentary experience is the directly given datum of reflection. My repugnance, however, is *immediate*. It is repugnance for this particular object (namely, Pierre) before me at this particular time. *Through* this momentary experience of repugnance, my hatred appears. But my hatred transcends the momentary, immediately given, experience. Hatred gives itself as something *permanent*, as having preceded this particular experience of distaste and as surviving it into the future. Hatred, that is, is a transcendent object, of which my momentary repugnance or anger is a profile. “Hatred is credit for an infinity of angry or repulsed consciousness in the past and in the future. It is the transcendent unity of this infinity of consciousness.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>The ego is not the *direct* unity of reflected consciousness in that the ego is not simply the *totality* of reflected acts of consciousness. The ego is not *in* the reflected acts of consciousness at all, but is rather a *transcendent* unity, *behind* the reflected acts of consciousness as the “pole” around which the reflected acts are unified. For Sartre, the *direct* unity of reflected consciousness is what he calls the “state,” as described below. In some cases the direct unity may instead be what he calls an “action,” but the distinction need not divert us here. See *TE*, 60ff./*TDE*, 44ff.

<sup>27</sup>“*Erlebnis*” has no English equivalent, but is variously translated as “lived experience” or “intentional experience.” See Husserl, *Ideas*, § 36.

<sup>28</sup>*TE*, 63. *TDE*, 47.

My anger is given as *emanating* from my hatred: “I am angry *because* I hate Pierre.”<sup>29</sup>

Hatred is a *state*. Momentary conscious experiences are given as *emanating* from my states. My states, in turn, are given as the products of the *me*: “I hate Pierre.” The ego, in fact, is nothing more than the ideal unity of states and qualities, a transcendent object which unifies reflected consciousness. The momentary consciousnesses of which I am aware in reflection are given as profiles *of* various psychological states which in turn are given as *belonging* to a self from which they spring. The ego is not merely an abstract entity to which states adhere as predicates to a subject, but rather the infinite totality of states which it supports, the “principle of the series” of possible states. The ego always accompanies our acts of reflection, as that to which our reflected states belong and from which they emerge. The relation of the ego to its states, however, is not one of emanation, in the sense that states are in the ego and later emerge. The ego is rather given as *creating* its states, in a form of “poetic production.”<sup>30</sup>

The ego appears as the *origin* of states, but states are produced *ex nihilo*. Hatred is not in me prior to its appearance (in contrast to my repugnance for Pierre which was present as hatred only later to emerge as a momentary repulsion). My state of hatred

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<sup>29</sup>My states, in turn, may be given as the products of certain *qualities*: “I am hateful and therefore I hate Pierre.” In this case the quality of hatefulness serves as the transcendent unity of my various states of hatred. See *TE*, 70f./*TDE*, 52f.

<sup>30</sup>See *TE*, 77/*TDE*, 60: “It is a relation on the order of poetic production (in the sense of \* \* \* \* \* [poieîn—correcting for the translator’s \* \* \* \* \*]), or, if you like, a relation of creation.” “Poieîn” signifies production, making, or fabrication as opposed to *praxis* or doing. Sartre’s choice of *poieîn* instead of the more common *poesis* (which in modern usage is associated with poetry and art) suggests that Sartre wished to distinguish the “productive” activity of consciousness from *artistic* creation on the one hand and a *performance* (i.e., a *doing*) on the other.

“promises” hatred in the future. But there is nothing about the ego which promises hatred. Hatred appears as something *new*, which reflection unifies by giving the ego as its source. The ego appears behind its states as something which does not exist by virtue of these states but rather *beside* them and maintains them through a continuous act of creation. “The ego is the creator of its states and suspends its qualities<sup>31</sup> in existence by a sort of preserving spontaneity.”<sup>32</sup> In reflection, then, the ego appears as spontaneously producing the states from which our momentary acts of consciousness emanate. But reflection *constitutes* the ego in the opposite direction:

... the ego is an object apprehended, but also an object *constituted* by reflective consciousness. The ego is a virtual locus of unity, and consciousness constitutes it in a *direction contrary* to that actually taken by the production: *really*, consciousness are first; through these are constituted states; and then, through the latter, the ego is constituted.<sup>33</sup>

The ego, that is, is a *misrepresentation* of consciousness. Reflection constitutes the ego *as if* the ego preceded its states and *Erlebnisse*. But it is *through* these states and *Erlebnisse* that reflection constitutes the ego.

Thus the ego is, on the one hand, a *false* representation of consciousness. Insofar as reflection perceives the momentary consciousnesses which are its immediate data as emanating from states which the ego produces, reflection *misperceives* consciousness. At the same time, the ego itself *cannot be directly known*, but can only be known in the manner of an object, i.e., through profiles. But if this is the case, reflection loses its *intimacy*. In other words, reflection is not in reality *self-knowledge*.

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<sup>31</sup>See n. 16.

<sup>32</sup>TE, 78. TDE, 61.

<sup>33</sup>TE, 80–81. TDE, 63.

The *me*, as such, remains unknown to us. And this is easily understood. The *me* is given as an object. Therefore, the only method for knowing it is observation, approximation, anticipation, experience. But these procedures, which may be perfectly suited to any *non-intimate* transcendent, are not suitable here, because of the very intimacy of the *me*. It is too much present for one to succeed in taking a truly external viewpoint on it. If we step back for vantage, the *me* accompanies us in this withdrawal.<sup>34</sup>

Reflection attempts to “reconstruct” from various states and experiences the nature of the ego to which they belong, in precisely the fashion that one comes to know an *other*. “Thus ‘really to know oneself’ is inevitably to take towards oneself the point of view of others, that is to say, a point of view which is necessarily false.”<sup>35</sup> Necessarily false, that is, because the ego on which we reflect is *not* the ego of an other, but our own. The ego cannot be known *as* our own, since the ego is given as something *in* consciousness, on which no external vantage point can be taken. “If we step back for vantage, the *me* accompanies us in the withdrawal.”<sup>36</sup> One cannot step outside oneself to see the ego *in* oneself. The ego can only be seen *as* outside, i.e., as the ego of an other.

More precisely, the ego can never be known as such at all. The ego itself is never an object for consciousness. One cannot reflect on *just* the ego. One reflects on the ego *as* hating Pierre, *as* running for the train. The ego, that is, only appears *through* the reflected consciousness. It does not appear *to* reflection at all. The attempt to see the ego in isolation from its states fails because it *loses* the ego and falls back on the unreflected level. It is, in other words, to stop reflecting. The ego, then, always ap-

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<sup>34</sup>TE, 86. TDE, 68.

<sup>35</sup>TE, 87. TDE, 69.

<sup>36</sup>TE, 86. TDE, 68.



pears *in* reflection but never *to* reflection. “The ego is *by nature* fugitive.”<sup>37</sup> Again, one could say that reflection apprehends the ego in the same way that we perceive the ego of an other. What appears to me is not the “self” of Pierre, but rather Pierre’s states (e.g., *that* Pierre is angry). I am conscious that *behind* those states there is Pierre, and that the states and actions *belong* to Pierre. But to try to conceive of Pierre *without* his states is simply to stop thinking about Pierre. The ego thus appears as the ego of an other, and by the same token, never really appears at all. The ego itself is unknowable. Reflection in reality reveals nothing about the ego, and the ego adds nothing to our reflective knowledge of the momentary acts of consciousness.

Sartre’s first conclusion in *Transcendence of the Ego* is that there is no *transcendental* ego in consciousness. His second is that there is no *psychological* ego in consciousness, either. The ego can only be understood as an object outside of consciousness. Consciousness purged of the ego is *unreflected* consciousness. And unreflected consciousness cannot become the object of its own reflection. Unreflected consciousness, on Sartre’s view, is *transparent*. “In a sense, it is a *nothing*, since all physical, psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths, all values, are outside of it; since my *me* has itself ceased to be any part of it. But this nothing is *all* since it is *consciousness of* all these objects.”<sup>38</sup> Since there is no object in consciousness, there is no sense of an “inner life”; the “life of consciousness” can only be known *externally*. And since my ego is an object for me in the same way that it is an object for others, I have no

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<sup>37</sup>TE, 89. TDE, 70.

<sup>38</sup>TE, 93. TDE, 74.

“privileged status” with regard to knowledge of myself. If I and another discuss my self, we both discuss the *same* object with the *same* degree of uncertainty. There is, in other words, no *person* in unreflected (i.e., original) consciousness. Consciousness itself is *impersonal*. Hence Sartre’s thesis:

Transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity. It determines its existence at each instant, without our being able to conceive anything *before* it. Thus each instant of our conscious life reveals to us a creation *ex nihilo*. Not a new *arrangement*, but a new existence.<sup>39</sup>

This thesis poses a twofold problem for reflection: (1) It is a *phenomenological* problem in that if consciousness is conceived of as an impersonal spontaneity, without content and inaccessible as such to reflection, reflection no longer delivers certain knowledge of consciousness and it is unclear in what way if any consciousness can be directly given to itself. But if consciousness *cannot* be directly given to itself, consciousness cannot be known with certainty and the phenomenological project breaks down. (2) Reflection is a *psychological* problem in that reflection is a *misperception* of the true nature of consciousness. Reflection perceives the ego as residing *in* consciousness when in reality it does not. Reflection, as a result, *necessarily distorts* the consciousness on which it reflects. The distortion necessarily involved in reflection is illustrated in *The Emotions*,<sup>40</sup> in which the problem of reflection is applied to the reflective knowledge of emotion.

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<sup>39</sup>TE, 98–99. TDE, 79.

<sup>40</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948; Secaucus [N.J.]: Citadel Press, 1975). Hereafter referred to as *E*. References are to the Citadel Press edition. Idem, *Esquisse d’une théorie des émotions*, new ed., Collection L’Esprit et la main (Paris: Hermann, 1965). Hereafter referred to as *EE*.

Emotional consciousness is for Sartre, like all consciousness, originally unreflective: it is consciousness of the world and conscious of itself only non-positionally. "... It is always possible to take consciousness of emotion as the affective structure of consciousness, to say 'I'm angry, I'm afraid, etc.' But fear is not originally consciousness *of* being afraid, any more than the perception of this book is consciousness *of* perceiving the book."<sup>41</sup> Emotions, that is, are not in the first instance perceived as internal states of consciousness, i.e., psychic facts which act on us *because* we become aware of them. Rather, emotion is transformation of the world.

When the paths traced out become too difficult, or when we see no path, we can no longer live in so urgent and so difficult a world. All the ways are barred. However, we must act. So we try to change the world, that is, to live as if the connection between things and their potentialities were not ruled by deterministic processes, but by magic.<sup>42</sup>

Emotional consciousness unreflectively *modifies* the world by "the seizure of new connections and new exigencies,"<sup>43</sup> "magically" conferring on the world the qualities we wish it to have. Emotion, that is, operates in much the same way as the perceptual shift which occurs when looking at a "gestalt" image, e.g., two faces which can also be seen as a vase. That the image of two faces emerges is the result of an intentional shift in consciousness: we see it *as* two faces instead of a vase. We behave "as if" we were gazing at two faces, and the objects sought appear, as the result of an unreflective shift in our manner of perception and the focus of our attention. Emotion, likewise, is behaving "as if" in the face of reality, in accordance with which the desired

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<sup>41</sup>E, 50. EE, 38.

<sup>42</sup>E, 58–59. EE, 43.

<sup>43</sup>E, 60. EE, 44.

profile on the world comes into being. The man who faints before an onrushing tiger *modifies* the world in such a way that the dangerous tiger no longer exists. Unable to banish the tiger as an object of the world, he banishes *consciousness* of the tiger by fainting. In this way, the tiger no longer exists. The transformation involved is a *magical* one. The grapes beyond our reach are magically endowed with a sourness which resolves the conflict between our desire and the world. "... The origin of emotion is a spontaneous and lived degradation of consciousness in the face of the world."<sup>44</sup> Unable to change my desire, I magically change the world by *degrading* my consciousness of it.

This magical degradation is unreflective. Consciousness is not positionally aware of itself as altering the world. It is aware only of the magical alteration. "The grapes are sour." Emotional consciousness, in this sense, is not *insincere*. The emotion is *believed* and becomes part of the world for consciousness. The grapes, after all, *are* sour (from the emotional point of view). But because consciousness is not an object for itself and only "sees" itself in the world (through objects), it is impossible for consciousness to turn back on itself in the act of modifying the world and thus *escape* its emotional consciousness. "There is, in effect, a world of emotion ... one in which the relation of things to consciousness is exclusively magical."<sup>45</sup> Emotion confers on objects substantial qualities belonging to the essence of the object. In my fear, the tiger is not horrible "in this moment." The tiger is horrible in *substance*. "Horrible" be-

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<sup>44</sup>E, 77. EE, 54.

<sup>45</sup>E, 80. EE, 56.

comes a quality *of* the tiger, *in* the tiger, which *constitutes* the tiger. And it is in this direction that reflection apprehends emotion: “I am terrified *because* the tiger is horrible.”<sup>46</sup> Emotion, however, constitutes the object in the opposite direction: “it is horrible *because* I am terrified.” Emotional consciousness is barred to reflection, because reflection takes the emotion to be an object *in* consciousness in response to the world. Reflection thus *distorts* the consciousness it wishes to examine, which in reality modifies the world. Emotional consciousness is originally unreflected, and cannot be reflected *as it is*, for the reason that reflection necessarily takes an object and there is no object in consciousness.

The problem of reflection in *Transcendence of the Ego* and *The Emotions* is an *epistemological* problem: if consciousness is not an object, consciousness cannot know itself. On the one hand, consciousness cannot know itself with certainty, since consciousness is not directly given to itself. On the other hand, consciousness cannot know itself without distortion, since consciousness only appears to itself insofar as it *is* an object. This is a false representation which misrepresents the real relation of consciousness to its objects.

This same problem of reflection becomes an *ontological* problem in *Being and Nothingness*. Up to this point, reflection has been a problem for *knowledge*. In *Being and Nothingness*, reflection becomes a problem of *being*. And it is by way of this ontological statement of the problem of reflection that reflection becomes a problem of *morality*. Reflection, in the ontological framework of *Being and Nothingness*, is a

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<sup>46</sup>Much in the same way that reflection apprehends states and qualities as belonging substantially to the ego: “I am angry *because* I hate him.”

question of *self-identity*. And the self-identity of the reflecting consciousness is closely bound up with Sartre's theory of value. Reflection represents an attempt not only to *know* oneself but to *coincide* with oneself, i.e., to *be* the being which appears in reflection.

Reflection (*réflexion*) remains for the for-itself a permanent possibility, an attempt to recover being. By reflection, the for-itself, which has lost itself outside itself, attempts to put itself inside its own being. Reflection is a second attempt by the for-itself to found itself; this is, *to be for itself what it is*.<sup>47</sup>

But the attempt to *be* oneself fails for the same reason that the attempt to *know* oneself fails: consciousness perceives itself only as an object which in reality it is not. The inability of consciousness to "capture" itself reflectively constitutes the "lack" which will become the key term of Sartre's moral theory. Sartre's moral theory depends on the possibility of a successful resolution of that lack, which is to say, of the problem of reflection.

In the language of in-itself/for-itself which *Being and Nothingness* introduces, "reflection is the for-itself conscious *of* itself."<sup>48</sup> The question of reflective certainty, phrased in these terms, is a question of the *identity* of the reflecting and the reflected-on. Reflection is an attempt to "grasp" the consciousness which reflects. Reflection is certain only if the consciousness which is directly given to reflection is the *same* consciousness which is reflecting. But as it was shown in *Transcendence of the Ego*, the consciousness which reflects is not the reflected consciousness. Nevertheless,

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<sup>47</sup>BN, 216. EN, 200. The "first" attempt at recovery is the negation through which objects appear in the world. Consciousness first attempts to ground itself in the world, only to "lose" itself among objects. Reflection is an attempt to recover consciousness *as* consciousness. In both attempts, consciousness fails to coincide with itself, to "be for itself what it is."

<sup>48</sup>BN, 212. EN, 197.

reflective consciousness demands an “... absolute unity which alone renders conceivable the laws and the certainty of the reflective intuition.”<sup>49</sup> Given that there are two consciousnesses in reflection, the reflecting and the reflected-on, reflection fails if the relation between the two is a merely *external* relation. If the reflecting consciousness is directed on an entirely *other* consciousness, the reflected-on can only be an *approximation* for reflection. Reflection demands a unity, a “bond of being,” between the reflecting consciousness and the reflected consciousness—in short, that the reflecting *be* the reflected. Otherwise, “reflective knowledge, and in particular the *cogito* would lose their certainty and would obtain in exchange only a certain probability, scarcely definable.”<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, there cannot be a total identity of the reflecting and the reflected, in which case reflection would lose its uniquely reflective character. In the case of an *identity* of reflection-reflected, reflection is inconceivable.

Here once again we meet that type of being which defines the for-itself: reflection—if it is to be apodictic evidence—demands that the reflective *be* that which is reflected-on. But to the extent that reflection is *knowledge*, the reflected-on must necessarily be the *object* for the reflective; and this implies a separation of being. Thus it is necessary that the reflective simultaneously be and not be the reflected-on.<sup>51</sup>

The reflected-on becomes an object for reflection through a *negation* of the for-itself. It is, according to Sartre, negation which brings objects to consciousness. Conscious-

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>*BN*, 213. *EN*, 197–198. This is, in effect, a brief statement of the problem of reflection. It is Sartre’s view that reflection (i.e., *accessory* reflection) and the Cartesian *cogito* are in fact uncertain and only probable, precisely because the reflecting *is not* the reflected. Insofar as phenomenology depends on the reflective certainty of the *cogito*, it depends on a “pure” reflection.

<sup>51</sup>*BN*, 213–214. *EN*, 198.

ness of objects necessarily involves consciousness that “I am *not* this object.” But in reflection, is it precisely this identification with its object which consciousness seeks. In reflection, the for-itself *becomes* for itself an *in-itself* which “is what it is,” but wishes to capture in that object-in-itself its own consciousness or being-for-itself. “... This effort inevitably results in failure; and it is precisely this failure which is reflection.”<sup>52</sup> Reflection only captures the for-itself “in the mode of not being it,” i.e., as something other than the reflecting consciousness, namely, the “second,” reflected, consciousness of *The Transcendence of the Ego*.

In *Being and Nothingness*, then, the goal of reflection is more than cognition, it is *coincidence*. And just as the ego does not give itself to cognition, the for-itself does not give itself to *being* (i.e., in the mode of being-in-itself.) Moreover, the project of reflection here is not one of scientific investigation as in Sartre’s earlier works, but rather the project of being itself. Reflection thus becomes an *imperative*, and its ultimate impossibility is not merely an obstacle for phenomenology or psychology, but *the* problem of being. This problem of being, the futile attempt of the for-itself to capture and “recover” itself, is capsulized elsewhere by Sartre as “lack,” i.e., “the project of being-God,” and it is from this point that the problems of bad faith and, concomitantly, authenticity, derive. Thus in the ontology of *Being and Nothingness* the problem of reflection becomes an essentially *moral* problem—the problem, quite literally, of how to *be*.

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.



Sartre's solution to the problem of reflection in both its epistemological and moral formulations is the same: a *pure* reflection which will allow consciousness to apprehend itself "as in fact it is"—directly, without distortion, and without distance. This type of reflection would allow consciousness to be conscious of itself while remaining itself, to be what it appears to be. Pure reflection on the one hand preserves the certainty of the reflective *cogito*, and on the other hand holds out the possibility of self-coincidence which in the end is authenticity. The problem of reflection on both formulations is the same, and stems from the incompatibility of the principle of intentionality and the required certainty of reflection with Sartre's insistence that there is no object in consciousness. If consciousness must have an object and consciousness is not an object, consciousness is *irreflexive*. But if what consciousness apprehends in reflection is not consciousness itself, reflection is no longer certain. The question of pure reflection, obviously, is how pure reflection succeeds where impure or "accessory" reflection fails. Sartre does not address this question in his work. Pure reflection arises as an alternative to accessory reflection, but its nature is never clearly defined. Sartre's failure to develop the notion of pure reflection is largely responsible for the ambiguity of his work, particularly concerning the question of morality. Understanding the problem to which pure reflection is addressed, however, makes it possible to define what is required of pure reflection and by extension what pure reflection would have to be. The problem of reflection itself thus provides the guidelines for a theory of pure reflection, and it is with an understanding of these guidelines that an understanding of pure reflection begins to emerge.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PURE REFLECTION

One can ask two sorts of questions concerning the problem of reflection. On the one hand, it is important to understand *why it is* that reflection is problematic in Sartre, in other words, what Sartre expects of reflection that reflection as it is ordinarily understood cannot deliver. This has been the question under discussion up to this point. Reflection is important for Sartre because Sartre takes reflection to be a *privileged* sort of cognition—a cognition which *guarantees* the certainty which philosophical inquiry requires. Moreover, philosophical investigation as Sartre understands it (namely, phenomenology) demands an understanding of the processes of cognition which is necessarily reflective in nature. Thus, in Sartre's philosophical project reflective cognition must be *certain* cognition, which, on Sartre's view, reflection as it is ordinarily understood is not. This much accounts for the *motivations* behind pure reflection.

On the other hand, one can ask what precisely it is that is problematic about reflection. In other words, *what it is* about reflection that is problematic for Sartre's project. While this question has been addressed in some detail in the preceding discussion, one can put a still finer point on the problem: the problems presented by impure reflection derive from the fact that impure reflection (or reflection commonly so-

called) takes the reflected-on to be an object. The epistemological statement of the problem of reflection has two prongs: (1) the irreflexivity of consciousness is incompatible with the certainty of reflection and (2) because consciousness is irreflexive, reflection necessarily distorts. Both prongs reflect a tension between the demands of intentionality and the requirements of reflective certainty. First, reflection, by intentionality, must take an object, which, since consciousness is irreflexive, cannot be *in* consciousness. The ego, the intentional object of consciousness, is given transcendentally, as *outside* of consciousness. But the certainty of reflection is confined to that which is directly given, i.e., the immediate phenomena of reflection. Thus reflection is certain about its phenomena, and necessarily doubtful concerning its object, namely, the self.

The second claim is stronger: that reflective knowledge of the ego is not only *uncertain*, it is necessarily *false*. The ego is not only outside of consciousness and therefore dubious; the ego is outside of consciousness and is therefore *not* consciousness at all. In short, because the consciousness reflected is necessarily *not* the consciousness reflecting, the ego, which appears behind the reflected consciousness, cannot at the same time stand behind the consciousness which reflects. Reflection does not capture its *own* ego, but the ego of *another* consciousness. Reflection, therefore, cannot capture consciousness as it is, namely, as reflecting, but rather represents itself as the production of an ego which does not belong to it. Insofar as reflective consciousness seeks to capture *itself*, reflective representation is a necessarily false representation.

The metaphysical problem of reflection is similar to this second statement of the problem and likewise rests on the incompatibility between intentionality, the irreflexivity of consciousness, and the certainty of reflection. Reflective consciousness must take an object, which, because reflection is reflective, must be reflective consciousness itself. But precisely because the reflected-on appears as an object (namely, the ego), the reflected-on cannot be consciousness at all. Objects appear *as* objects for Sartre precisely because they are *not* consciousness. Consciousness cannot take itself for an object because consciousness, by definition, *is not an object*. This is, of course, the strongest formulation of the problem: reflection, more than necessarily false, is metaphysically impossible. To be clear, that is not to say that the activity of reflection cannot take place, only that reflection is not what we take it to be, namely, intimate and indubitable knowledge of the same consciousness which reflects.

What signals the failure of reflection in all three statements of the problem is the appearance of the ego as the object of reflective consciousness. The ego, Sartre maintains, necessarily appears in *any* act of reflection, pure or impure.<sup>1</sup> Impure reflection fails not because the ego appears, but because of the *manner* in which it appears—as the ultimate object of the reflective act and as that of which the immediate phenomena of reflection are merely profiles. From this standpoint, the prescription for pure reflection is simple enough: reflect in such a way that the ego is not the object of your reflection. Aside from the obvious question of how such a reflection might be achieved (which must still be addressed), the more immediate question for such a formulation is

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<sup>1</sup>See *TE*, 101/*TDE*, 82.

what *is* the object of reflection if the ego is not? It would seem that *any* object of reflection, whatever we might call it, generates the same problems as the ego. Because objects by definition neither are nor are contained in consciousness, *no* object can serve as the sort of object which reflective consciousness requires.

Nevertheless, reflective consciousness, as any act of consciousness, must take an object. What is problematic about the ego (or any object like it) as the object of reflection is that the ego lies beyond the immediate data of reflective consciousness. Indeed, the ego is constituted from those immediate data, projected as the ideal unity of an infinite series of such reflective data. The essence of the problem is this constitution of the ego. The process of constitution in Sartre is a process of *negation*. Objects appear in the world *as* objects through an act of negation on the part of the for-itself. It is an act of negation which differentiates *this* object from *that*, this object *as it is* from the same object in some *other* way, and most importantly, this *object* from the *consciousness* which beholds it. To be constituted as an object, for Sartre, is to be held at a distance from consciousness through an act of negation on the part of consciousness itself. It follows that the object of pure reflection must be an *unconstituted* object. Which is to say that in some sense the object of pure reflection is not strictly speaking an object at all.

Sartre himself makes this much clear:

... The reflective is the reflected-on in complete immanence although in the form of “not-being-in-itself.” It is this which well demonstrates that *the reflected-on is not wholly an object but a quasi-object for reflection* [emphasis added]. Actually, the consciousness reflected-on is not presented yet as something *outside* reflection—that is, as a being on which one can “take a point of view,” in relation to which one can realize a withdrawal, increase or diminish the distance which separates one from it. In order for the consciousness reflected-on to be “viewed from without,” and in order for reflection to be able to orient itself in relation to it, it would be necessary that the reflective should not be the reflected-on in the mode of not being what it is not: scissiparity will be realized only in existence *for-others*...<sup>2</sup>

So, while it is impossible that there be an act of consciousness without an object altogether, in a pure reflection consciousness takes a *different sort* of object. Clearly, we are dealing with two definitions of an object here, the distinction between which Sartre does not make altogether clear. What Sartre calls a “quasi-object” we might call an object in the *weak* sense, that is, an object for consciousness which is nevertheless *not* an object in the world. A “weak” object would then be something of which we are conscious but is at the same time not a “thing,” i.e., an in-itself. A “strong” object, by contrast, would be an object in the usual sense, a thing in the world, “outside” consciousness.<sup>3</sup> The possibility of pure reflection demands that all strong objects be weak (that objects in the world be objects of consciousness) but not all weak objects be strong (that there be objects of consciousness which are not objects in the world).

Two questions arise here: (1) whether such a distinction can be legitimately drawn and (2) in what manner the consciousness of quasi-objects takes place. To a certain degree, the first of these questions is answered in *Transcendence of the Ego*.

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<sup>2</sup>BN, 218. EN, 201–202. The context of this passage makes it clear that the reflection here is *pure* reflection.

<sup>3</sup>The crucial distinction is not whether the object is “in the world” in the sense that the object is *real*. Imaginary objects are “in the world” for Sartre in the sense which is relevant here, namely, that they are transcendent. Nor should the question of what is outside consciousness be taken as a question of mind-independence. An object “inside” consciousness simply *is* the directly given phenomenon, whereas an object “outside” consciousness claims a reality beyond that which is directly given.

Accessory reflection clearly *adds* something to what is immediately given in reflection. “Pure reflection ... keeps to the given without setting up claims for the future... [Impure reflection] effects then and there a passage to the infinite.”<sup>4</sup> There is, it would follow, first consciousness of a directly given phenomenon from which impure reflection constitutes its transcendent object. “These two reflections apprehend the same, certain data, but the one affirms *more* than it knows, directing itself through the reflected consciousness upon an object situated outside consciousness.”<sup>5</sup> The initial consciousness in *any* act of reflection is the directly given phenomenon (namely, another act of consciousness) which is nevertheless not yet an object in the stronger sense.<sup>6</sup>

The distinction appears to break down, however, if one considers that in any act of cognition the immediate phenomenon appears first, but it appears *as* some profile of an object which also appears. The object, that is, is *given in profile*, but nevertheless given *as an object*. If this is the case, the cognition of the phenomenon can be separated from the cognition of the object only in *abstraction* and not in actual appearance. I.e., one can say (later) that the profile is *only* a profile, but what actually appears is

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<sup>4</sup>*TE*, 64. *TDE*, 48. Also:

Pure reflection, the simple presence of the reflective for-itself to the for-itself reflected-on, is at once the original form of reflection and its ideal form; it is that on whose foundation impure reflection appears... . Impure reflection ... includes pure reflection but surpasses it and makes further claims. (*BN*, 218. *EN*, 201.)

<sup>5</sup>*TE*, 65. *TDE*, 48.

<sup>6</sup>This implies that impure reflection originates in pure reflection, although our experience of reflection takes place in the opposite order. “What is given first in daily life is impure or constituent reflection although this includes pure reflection as its original structure.” (*BN*, 218. *EN*, 201.)

an *object*. Thus, even if the distinction is a valid one—even if the immediately given can be *spoken of* as distinct from the object of cognition—this will not help Sartre’s case, since the weak object of consciousness in reflection necessarily carries the strong object with it, i.e., the momentary consciousness on which we reflect *necessarily* appears as the product of a transcendental ego.

Thus, it is not enough to say that the object of a pure reflection is a different manner of object. Pure reflection must represent a different sort of consciousness altogether—a consciousness which can take the momentary consciousness reflected-on as its object *only* in the weaker sense. It is not the nature of the object which makes a reflection pure, but the nature of the consciousness which reflects on it, which brings us to the second of the two questions raised above (see p. ): the nature of our consciousness of quasi-objects.

#### PERCEPTION, IMAGINATION, AND CONCEPTION

“To perceive, conceive, imagine: these are the three types of consciousness by which the same object can be given to us.”<sup>7</sup> And each presents the object in a different way. The distinction is important here. While Sartre speaks of consciousness in largely perceptual terms (e.g., he favors illustrations drawn from perception), this bias is seriously misleading. In particular, the objection above that consciousness of a phenomenon is necessarily consciousness of some profile of an object (in the strong sense) is a feature of *perception* which does not necessarily extend to all consciousness

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<sup>7</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (Secacus [N.J.]: Citadel Press, n.d.), 9. Hereafter referred to as *PI*. Idem, *L’Imaginaire: Psychologie phénoménologique de l’imagination*. 17th ed. Bibliothèque des idées. Paris: NRF, Gallimard, 1948, 18. Hereafter referred to as *I*.



whatever. “In perception I *observe* objects. By this we mean that although the object enters into my perception in its completeness, I nevertheless see it only from one side at a time.”<sup>8</sup> I see only three sides of a cube at a time. Still, it is not “three sides” but “three sides *of a cube*” that I see. The cube itself is the synthesis of all of its possible appearances: “The perception of an object is thus a phenomenon of an infinity of aspects.”<sup>9</sup> The cube, however, does not come on to me as three sides (which is the immediate phenomenon of my perception), but as the entire infinite series of possible appearances which are the cube. Consciousness, in this case, transcends the immediately given toward an ideal and infinite unity which is not “in consciousness,” much as accessory reflection passes beyond the immediate data of reflection to an ideal and transcendent ego. Accessory reflection *is* a perception—a perception of the self, and as such is subject to the limitations of perception. And it is the nature of perception that consciousness cannot *help* but apprehend the object *qua* object, i.e., it necessarily transcends the immediately given data of consciousness toward a transcendent object, be that object a cube or an ego.

But not all consciousness is perception. Perception stands in a particular relation to the aspects of its object which are not “in evidence.” While the “hidden” aspects of the object (the other sides of the cube) appear to consciousness, they appear in the form of a hypothesis. “We must *learn* objects, that is to say, multiply upon them the

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

possible points of view.”<sup>10</sup> Our perception awaits confirmation; our hypothesis might be wrong. A perception, in other words, is *in question*. An image, likewise, presents the object in profiles or *Abschattungen*, “only we no longer have to make a tour of it: the cube as an image is presented immediately for what it is.”<sup>11</sup> Which is to say that an image, just as a perception, is in question, but the *answers are already known*. An image

teaches nothing: it is organized exactly like the objects which do produce knowledge, but it is complete at the very moment of its appearance. If I amuse myself by turning over in my mind the image of the cube, if I pretend that I see its different sides, I shall be no further ahead at the close of the process than I was at the beginning: I have learned nothing.<sup>12</sup>

Both types of cognition make *promises*, so to speak. Perceptual promises imply risk; imaginative promises do not. Perception can surprise; imagination cannot.

While it is perhaps true to say that both sorts of cognition carry consciousness beyond the immediate data toward an object, the perceptual object alone is “outside” consciousness. “In a word the object of the perception overflows consciousness constantly; the object of the image is never more than the consciousness one has; it is limited by that consciousness: nothing can be learned from an image that is not already known.”<sup>13</sup> Thus in imagination the object which appears is a *directly given* object, although not identical with the immediate phenomenon. I still “see” only three sides of a

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>*PI*, 10. I, 19.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. Another way to put this is that in perception consciousness is present to an object whereas in imagination the object is present to consciousness. This formulation is important since it implies that only perception counts as *knowledge*. Imagination does not. Nor, for that matter, does pure reflection. I will return to this point later.

<sup>13</sup>*PI*, 12. I, 20–21.

cube, but three sides of a cube which is at the same time revealed to me certainly and in its entirety. And our consciousness of imaginary objects represents an entirely different attitude: “Our attitude towards the object of the image could be called ‘quasi-observation.’ Our attitude is, indeed, one of observation, but it is an observation which teaches nothing.”<sup>14</sup> This attitude is intermediate between perception and the attitude required of pure reflection. If imagination *teaches* nothing, pure reflection *asks* nothing. What is required is consciousness of an object in which the object is *not* in question, in which the immediate data of consciousness and the object which consciousness intends are one and the same. Such a consciousness is not to be found in imagination, but rather in conception.

When, on the other hand, I *think* of a cube as a concrete concept, I think of its six sides and its eight angles all at once; I think that its angles are right angles, its sides squared. I am at the center of the idea, I seize it in its entirety at one glance. This does not mean, of course, that my idea does not need to complete itself by an infinite progression. But I can think of the concrete essences in a single act of consciousness; I do not have to re-establish the appearance, I have no apprenticeship to serve.<sup>15</sup>

The conceptual object, in contrast to the object of perception or imagination, does not present itself in profile, but all at once. A concept contains nothing that is not immediately revealed. Thus, while the taking of various points of view on an image is uninformative, concepts are given *without* a point of view altogether. The imaginary object is nothing more than our consciousness of it. The conceptual object is nothing more than our *representation* of it. The distinction here is crucial. In imagination, as in perception, there is an object “behind” the phenomena of consciousness to be discov-

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<sup>14</sup>*PI*, 13. I, 21.

<sup>15</sup>*PI*, 10. I, 19.

ered, even if that discovery is a mere formality in imagination. In conception, *there is no object beyond what is revealed*. In other words, the object of a conception is a weak object and a weak object *only*. Concepts do not make “promises.” Concepts are not “in question.”<sup>16</sup>

Recall Sartre’s claim about pure reflection in *Being and Nothingness*: “... the consciousness reflected-on is not presented yet as something *outside* reflection—that is, as a being on which one can ‘take a point of view,’ in relation to which one can realize a withdrawal, increase or diminish the distance which separates one from it.”<sup>17</sup> In pure reflection, that is, the reflected-on is presented as a *concept*: wholly contained in the act of reflection, without distance, and without point of view. The object of a pure and an accessory reflection is the same. The same consciousness reflected-on appears, but in pure reflection is posited in a different way.

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<sup>16</sup>This is not to be confused with the claim that concepts cannot be *questioned*. One may ask questions of concepts, but this manner of questioning takes place in *deliberation*, which does not concern the *representation* of an object but rather follows it. The notion of deliberation will be important, and will be discussed later at greater length.

<sup>17</sup>*BN*, 218. *EN*, 201–202.

Perception posits the existence of its object: on the other hand, concepts and knowledge, posit the existence of *natures* (universal essences) composed of relationships and are indifferent to the “flesh and bone” existence of objects. To think the concept “man,” for instance, is to posit nothing but an essence; for, as Spinoza said:

(1) the true definition of each thing involves nothing and expresses nothing but the nature of a definite thing. From which follows (2) that clearly no definition involves any certain number of individuals nor expresses it...<sup>18</sup>

This is to be contrasted with imagination, as well, which posits its object as *not* existing.<sup>19</sup>

Conception, and, accordingly, pure reflection, posit no object (in the strong sense), but only *natures*, i.e., collections of relations:

To think of Peter by a concrete concept is to think of a collection of relationships. Among these relationships will be found some determinations [e.g.,] of place. (Peter is on a trip to Berlin—he is a lawyer in Rebat, etc.) But these determinations add a positive element to the concrete nature “Peter”; they never have that privative, negative character of the positional acts of the image. It is only in the realm of sensible intuition<sup>20</sup> that the words “absent,” “far from me” can have a meaning, it is only in this realm in which the idea of “not having taken place” can occur.<sup>21</sup>

Conception posits an object, but posits it only as a collection of relationships the existence of which as an object in the stronger sense is neither included nor specifically excluded from the act of consciousness. The object, in short, as an *existing* object is not at issue in the conception of it. And for this reason *negative* determinations about the object have no meaning and do not arise. Conception apprehends its object *without negation*, either in the sense of a negation which places the object outside conscious-

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<sup>18</sup>*PI*, 16. *I*, 24. Note in original: Ethics, I, Prop. VIII, Note 2, trans. Boulainvilliers.

<sup>19</sup>That is to say, imagination posits its object as non-existent, as absent, as existing elsewhere, or “neutrally,” i.e., by *not* positing the object as existing (which is still a positional act). Imagination, that is, posits its object *negatively*, whereas conception posits not the object but its *nature*. (See *PI*, 16f./*I*, 24f.)

<sup>20</sup>“Sensible intuition” includes perception and imagination, in which the object (in the strong sense) is “seen.”

<sup>21</sup>*PI*, 16–17. *I*, 24–25.

ness or a negation which differentiates the object from other objects in the world (e.g., Peter is *not* here).

Which is precisely what is required of pure reflection. To put the problem in a slightly different way, what is required of pure reflection is a consciousness of consciousness in which the object which consciousness intends is identical to the consciousness which intends it. Pure reflection, it follows, must exclude any transcendent object and moreover cannot allow for any act of negation which, by definition, implies a distance between the object and the consciousness which negates. While the object of pure and impure reflection are in the weak sense the same object (the immediately given data of some consciousness reflected-on), the object must be given differently, which is to say that pure and impure reflection are quite different consciousnesses of the same phenomenal data. In short, impure reflection is a *perception* (or an attempt at one); pure reflection is a *conception*. The term “reflection” itself suggests a visual metaphor: the “picturing” of the self. If pure reflection is to be understood, this model must be abandoned in favor of a model in which reflective consciousness succeeds precisely by *declining* to “picture,” and in which the formation of a concept of consciousness is understood as a reflective conscious act.

#### THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

Conception not only provides a model of pure reflection, Sartre’s account of pure reflection suggests that this model—conception—is indeed the model he had in mind.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>In answer to the obvious question of why Sartre himself did not make the case in this way, it should be noted that Sartre very rarely refers to his earlier works in the course of his later ones, and never in such a way that knowledge of his earlier works would be assumed. His works are, to that extent, self-sufficient. Sartre is likewise slow to digress from the matter at hand, in light of which fact it is not surprising that Sartre does not speak in terms of perception and conception in, for example, *Being and Nothingness*, which to Sartre’s mind was on a different topic altogether. However clear it may be to the reader that the problem of *Transcendence of the Ego* is inherited by *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre at no time gives voice to this himself—evidence both of the continuity which exists between Sartre’s early works and of Sartre’s unwillingness to underline that fact.

An understanding of pure reflection as a species of conception answers the question of how pure reflection might be possible, i.e., the manner of object which pure reflection requires and how consciousness of such an object might be obtained. It remains to be seen how pure reflection might *come about*: by what *process* consciousness comes to reflect itself “purely.” An obvious answer, and the answer most favored by those who have addressed the question seriously, is that pure reflection is a particular application of the phenomenological reduction. Sartre does, at times, seem to suggest this interpretation, and it is clear that the notion of pure reflection is closely linked to that of phenomenological reduction. Indeed, some have suggested that pure reflection is a special case of the *epoché*, i.e., that pure reflection is merely a particular exercise in reduction. While this interpretation does illuminate the nature of pure reflection, it is far from complete. In short, the problems of reflection are not resolved by phenomenological reduction, at least on Husserl’s understanding of reduction, and the substitution of reduction for pure reflection does not fit with Sartre’s texts. It is nevertheless revealing the extent to which the reduction does overlap with pure reflection, as well as the ways in which it does not.

Thomas Busch, who is among the very few of Sartre’s commentators to recognize the importance of phenomenology in Sartre’s work, makes much of Sartre’s use of the reduction, in particular in connection with pure reflection. Busch maintains that

pure reflection simply *is* the phenomenological reduction, namely, as applied to consciousness itself. Busch relies heavily on two passages from Sartre's work in support of this view, the first from *Being and Nothingness*:

Early in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre had indicated that pure reflection would function as Husserl's epoché, snatching consciousness from an apparent obsession with its objects: "only reflective consciousness can be dissociated from what is posited by the consciousness reflected-on. It is on the reflective level only that we can attempt an \_\_\_\_\_,<sup>23</sup> a putting between parentheses, only there can we refuse what Husserl calls the *mitmachen*."<sup>24</sup>

Busch's interpretation of this passage as identifying pure reflection with the *epoché* depends on a further identification between the natural attitude and the desire to be God:<sup>25</sup>

Sartre understands this *mitmachen* to be a complicity with the natural attitude overcomable by reduction. The "natural" desire to be necessary which haunts pre-reflective existence remains, but is "bracketed." The reflective consciousness need not participate in it.<sup>26</sup>

The idea, then, is that the natural attitude *takes seriously* the desire to be God, and the reduction of that desire functions to overcome that complicity. The reduction, in effect, allows us to *suspend belief* in the desire to be necessary—to recognize but not take part in it. This suspension of the desire to be God is perhaps the most central of the ethical conclusions which are supposed to derive from pure reflection. And it is this

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<sup>23</sup>*Epoché*—literally, a check, a cessation. Here it indicates Husserl's "epoché" or "bracketing."

<sup>24</sup>Thomas Busch, *The Power of Consciousness and the Force of Circumstances in Sartre's Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 33. The passage quoted is from *BN*, 122/*EN*, 117. See also Thomas Busch, "Sartre's Use of the Reduction: *Being and Nothingness* Reconsidered," in *Jean-Paul Sartre: Contemporary Approaches to his Philosophy*, ed. Hugh Silverman and Frederick Elliston (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980), 25.

<sup>25</sup>That is, the desire to be both free and self-caused, or, more simply put, to be *substantial*. The desire to be God is Sartre's expression for the fundamental project of consciousness, which is in his view impossible and the origin of bad faith. This concept will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five. See *BN*, 721ff./*EN*, 651ff.

<sup>26</sup>Busch, *Power of Consciousness*, 33.



consideration alone which lends support to Busch's reading. The argument, in effect, is this: Pure reflection must allow us to overcome the desire to be God, which appears to us to be necessary. This desire must be placed "in parentheses," which is the role of the *epoché*. Pure reflection, accordingly, is equivalent to phenomenological reduction.

This reading, however, falls short in several respects, not the least of which is that in its haste to account for Sartre's moral conclusions it fails to account for the epistemological requirements of pure reflection set forth in *Transcendence of the Ego*. If, that is, pure reflection amounts to a reduction on the value of being God, the problem of reflection remains unanswered since it is not the desire to be God which pure reflection must in the first instance avoid, but rather the appearance of the ego as the "owner" of consciousness. What must be "suspended" in pure reflection is *the ego itself* and not *the desire* to identify the ego with consciousness. The reduction here is misapplied for the purposes of pure reflection. What must be shown is how pure reflection permits a non-egological self-consciousness and *following from that* how such a consciousness would escape the desire to be God. The central question of pure reflection—which is the problem of reflection itself—is simply unaddressed by Busch's interpretation. This interpretation, moreover, misreads the text, and for that reason alone must be rejected.

The passage Busch quotes from *Being and Nothingness* does not, on closer examination, concern pure reflection at all. It rather belongs to a more extended discussion which lays out the problem of *impure* reflection. The passage continues:

The consciousness (of) belief, while irreparably altering belief, does not distinguish itself from belief; it *exists in order to* perform the act of faith. Thus we are obliged to admit the consciousness (of) belief is belief... .

Thus consciousness (of) belief and belief are one and the same being, the characteristic of which is absolute immanence. But as soon as we wish to grasp this being, it slips between our fingers, and we find ourselves faced with a pattern of duality, with a game of reflections. For consciousness is a reflection (*reflet*), but *qua* reflection it is exactly the one reflecting (*réfléchissant*), and if we attempt to grasp it as reflecting, it vanishes and we fall back on the reflection.<sup>27</sup>

This is precisely the ontological statement of the problem of reflection, couched in terms of belief. Clearly, Busch misappropriates this passage for his own purposes, drawing on the connection between the “suspension” of the *epoché* and the required “suspension” of the desire to be God. This connection is not in fact supported in *Being and Nothingness*, or, for that matter, in any other Sartrean text. To read this passage as confirmation that pure reflection is merely a re-statement of the phenomenological reduction seems plainly wrong.<sup>28</sup>

The relationship between these concepts is made clearer (and Busch’s case correspondingly stronger) by a passage in *The Emotions*, also cited by Busch:

The *purifying reflection of the phenomenological reduction* [emphasis added] can perceive the emotion insofar as it constitutes the world in a magical form. “I find it hateful *because* I am angry.”

But this reflection is rare and necessitates special motivations. Ordinarily, we direct upon the emotive consciousness an accessory reflection which certainly perceives consciousness as consciousness, but insofar as it is motivated by the object: “I am angry *because* it is hateful.”<sup>29</sup>

Busch is not alone in taking up this connection.<sup>30</sup> It is taken up as well by Francis Jeanson, whose *Sartre and the Problem of Morality* is frequently cited as the most

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<sup>27</sup>BN, 122. EN, 117.

<sup>28</sup>As further evidence that this passage is misapplied to the question of pure reflection, one might note as well that the term “pure reflection” (*réflexion pure*) does not occur in *Being and Nothingness* at all until the section *following* this one, some ninety-three pages later (in the French edition), and in a different context altogether.

<sup>29</sup>E, 91. EE, 62–63.

<sup>30</sup>See Busch, “Sartre’s Use of the Reduction,” 21.

authoritative source on Sartre's early ethics, and with good cause.<sup>31</sup> Sartre's enthusiastic approval of Jeanson's book is recorded in his letter-forward to the first French edition:

... You have so perfectly followed the development of my thought that you have come to pass beyond the position I had taken in my books at the moment I was passing beyond it myself and to raise with regard to the relations between morality and history, the universal and the concrete transcendence, the very questions I was asking myself at the same time...

Thus I have no hesitation in recommending your work to the public... Your exposition is related to the other works on the same subject that I been able to read as genetic definitions in geometry are to purely descriptive definitions.<sup>32</sup>

No other work has such a strong claim to Sartre's personal *imprimatur*. Jeanson's work, for this reason, is widely considered to serve in many ways as a surrogate for the *Ethics* which Sartre himself never wrote.<sup>33</sup> Jeanson does not take up the question of pure reflection in great detail, but rather takes Sartre's comments regarding pure reflection—in particular in *The Emotions*—largely at face-value. Of the passage from *The Emotions* cited above, Jeanson says:

This passage is valuable because it effects the identification between the phenomenological attitude and the ethical attitude—an identification which carries in itself the conversion required by a moral action. Thus it seems that phenomenology, in describing the planes of unreflectivity and accessory reflection, makes use of a purifying reflection that is none other than Husserl's famous "reduction."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Francis Jeanson, *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, trans. with an introduction by Robert Stone, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.) Hereafter referred to as *SPM*. *La Problème morale et la pensée de Sartre*, with a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre (Paris: Editions du myrte, 1947). Hereafter referred to as *PM*.

<sup>32</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to *SPM*, xxxix–xl. *PM*, 14.

<sup>33</sup>This opinion is, however, overoptimistic. While Jeanson's book is certainly the clearest and most penetrating elucidation of Sartre's early morality, it does not go much beyond the point where Sartre himself left off or advance the terms of the discussion beyond those which Sartre himself employs. At the crucial junctures of Sartrean morality (e.g., pure reflection and authenticity) Jeanson is for the most part content to quote Sartre. The fairest judgment to make is that while Jeanson makes Sartre's case more clearly than Sartre, he does not make any more complete a case than Sartre. Thus while *Sartre and the Problem of Morality* is an indispensable supplement to Sartre's texts, it in no way stands in for Sartre's unpublished *Ethics*.

<sup>34</sup>*SPM*, 183. *PM*, 296.

And elsewhere in the same volume, also in reference to *The Emotions*:

To “accessory reflection” Sartre opposes that form of “purifying reflection” which is characteristic of the phenomenological reduction.<sup>35</sup>

Sartre’s brief comments concerning pure reflection in *The Emotions* define Jeanson’s understanding of pure reflection, and given the clarity with which pure reflection and phenomenological reduction are connected in that work, it is easy to see how Jeanson’s understanding is derived. What is not clear is to what degree the account given in *The Emotions* agrees with that given in Sartre’s other early works, and to what extent that account in *The Emotions* answers the broader questions of pure reflection which that volume does not specifically address. These questions are not taken up by Jeanson, and a close examination reveals that the connection drawn in *The Emotions* is satisfactory only in that particular context (and not entirely satisfactory there) and in light of Sartre’s other works cannot amount to the general definition of pure reflection which Busch and Jeanson both take it to provide.

In *The Emotions* itself, it is clear that what Sartre means by pure reflection is in fact a reduction. The problem raised to which pure reflection must respond is the problem of the identification of emotion with its object, a problem which reduction does in fact resolve. Emotion, recall, represents a flight from reality into magic, a flight in which consciousness finds itself caught: “... Consciousness is caught in its own trap. Precisely because it lives the new [magical] aspect of the world by *believing* in it, it is caught in its own belief, exactly as in dreaming and hysteria.”<sup>36</sup> Emotion,

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<sup>35</sup>*SPM*, 34. *PM*, 65.

<sup>36</sup>*E*, 78. *EE*, 55.

that is, modifies the world through the constitution of magical objects, and it is the *belief* in these objects which allows the emotion to effect its flight. But once so constituted, the objects captivate consciousness. It is impossible to “break the spell,” since flight from the magical objects only underlines their magical reality. “Freedom,” claims Sartre, “has to come from a purifying reflection or a total disappearance of the affecting situation.”<sup>37</sup> The emotion, that is, can be “dispelled” either by the disappearance of the object altogether or an act of consciousness which apprehends the emotion not as motivated by the object but as constituting the object in its magical form—a “purifying” reflection.

What is called for here *is* a reduction, not on the emotion itself, but on the object which the emotion constitutes in magical form. The emotion itself is directly given to consciousness—a momentary and directly given *Erlebnis*. Nothing is gained by the reduction of such an object, since the reduction is, in Husserl’s words, the process which “... completely bars me from using any judgment that concerns spatio-temporal existence (*Dasein*).”<sup>38</sup> What allows one to see the object *as it is constituted* is the phenomenological reduction of the *object*. Thus, to return to the example of Pierre, if I am angry with Pierre and find him hateful, the bracketing of my anger reveals nothing since my anger does not concern spatio-temporal existence. The bracketing of the object *Pierre*, however, will reveal that hatefulness is not given as belonging to Pierre but that he is magically *constituted* as hateful by my anger. And this revelation, in

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<sup>37</sup>E, 79. EE, 55.

<sup>38</sup>Husserl, *Ideas*, 100.

turn, allows emotion to free itself from its object by reversing the perceived connection between the emotion and the qualities of the object. That is, by *seeing* that Pierre is hateful only because I am angry, I need not *believe* that Pierre is in-himself hateful. The “spell” is broken.

Thus, the particular problem which is set for pure reflection in *The Emotions* is one which is easily resolved by reduction, and in pointing to the reduction in this connection Sartre says exactly what he means. But it is not clear in this context that what Sartre means is in fact pure reflection, at least in the same sense that he employs that term elsewhere. If the object of this particular “pure reflection” is the emotional object and not emotion itself, “pure reflection” in this context is not strictly speaking reflective. The object of consciousness is not consciousness itself but an object *for* consciousness, and what is revealed in this special act of consciousness does not concern the nature of consciousness *per se*, but the nature of the object *as constituted* by consciousness. Thus, while Busch and Jeanson take this passage to be a general definition of pure reflection, it more accurately amounts to (at best) a very special case of pure reflection in general. Rather than pointing out that pure reflection is a phenomenological reduction, Sartre seems more to be referring to reduction *by the name* of pure reflection. And this is far less informative than Busch and Jeanson take it to be.

This is perhaps made most apparent in *Transcendence of the Ego*, in which Sartre speaks of a “pure reflection (which, however, is not necessarily phenomenological reflection ...)”<sup>39</sup> Beyond neglecting to draw the same parallel he later draws in *The*

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<sup>39</sup>TE, 64. TDE, 48.

*Emotions*, Sartre's other claims concerning pure reflection make it plain that such a parallel cannot in fact be drawn. Sartre indicates in *The Emotions* that "... this [pure] reflection is rare and necessitates special motivations."<sup>40</sup> While one might wonder what such motivations would be, his claim in *Transcendence of the Ego* is much stronger still: "a reflective apprehension of spontaneous consciousness as non-personal spontaneity [i.e., pure reflection] would have to be accomplished *without any antecedent motivation*."<sup>41</sup> Which is to say that pure reflection is not a *deliberate* procedure which one can *choose* to undertake. It is not clear from the text of *The Emotions* by what procedure a pure reflection comes about. But insofar as pure reflection is understood as phenomenological reduction, it contradicts the account in *Transcendence of the Ego*. The phenomenological reduction is a philosophical technique, a particular way of looking at the world *motivated* by particular philosophical ends. One employs the *epoché* because one desires, minimally, to do phenomenology. It follows that pure reflection cannot be phenomenological reduction, at least not in the straightforwardly Husserlian sense.

The reduction as Husserl understands it, moreover, is not sufficient to uncover consciousness in the manner demanded of pure reflection, that is, in a manner which answers the problem of reflection posed by *Transcendence of the Ego*. Accessory reflection fails, in short, because it takes the ego for its object. Pure reflection must take place in such a way that the object of the reflective act is not the ego at all but

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<sup>40</sup>*E*, 91. *EE*, 62.

<sup>41</sup>*TE*, 92. *TDE*, 73.

rather a “quasi-object,” a purely given. The “bracketing” of the ego in the phenomenological reduction reveals the ego as a *constituted* object, as the ideal and magical unity of an infinity of momentary consciousnesses, but does not *supplant* the ego as the object of reflection. In other words, what an *epoché* concerning the ego reveals is the ego as Sartre discusses it in *Transcendence of the Ego*. The *epoché* does not modify the nature of the reflective act (i.e., reflection is still a matter of *perception*), but rather modifies our *judgments* about the object of reflection after the fact:

In relation to every thesis and wholly uncoerced we can use this particular \_\_\_\_\_, (epokhe—abstention), a certain refraining from judgment which is compatible with the unshaken and unshakable because self-evidencing conviction of Truth. The thesis is “put out of action,” bracketed, it passes off into the modified status a “bracketed thesis,” and the judgment simpliciter into “bracketed judgment.”<sup>42</sup>

The *epoché*, that is, does not belong to the reflection itself, but to an act of reflective *deliberation*. One must distinguish between the reflective act itself and the drawing of conclusions from the results of reflection, a distinction Sartre recognizes in *Transcendence of the Ego*: “As soon as one leaves the domain of pure or impure reflection and *meditates* on the results of reflection, one is tempted [e.g.] to confuse the transcendent meaning of the *Erlebnis* with its character as immanent.”<sup>43</sup> This “meditation” is the forming of judgments concerning the contents of reflection (or any act of consciousness, for that matter), and is distinguished from the act of consciousness itself not only temporally (i.e., meditation is *ex post facto*) but by the fact that meditation presents no

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<sup>42</sup>Husserl, *Ideas*, 98–99.

<sup>43</sup>*TE*, 65. *TDE*, 48. Emphasis added.



new object of its own. It simply presents the object meditated upon, which is in some sense already “cognized,” in a different light.<sup>44</sup>

But this is obviously not sufficient for the purposes of pure reflection. Even if one were to say that the *epoché* delivers, in meditation, a *concept* of what was previously perceived, in the case of accessory reflection what is delivered is a concept of the *ego*. Which is precisely what Sartre gives in *Transcendence of the Ego*. And an *understanding* of the ego along Sartrean lines is not tantamount to pure reflection, which requires the cognition of consciousness as apart from any transcendent object. Pure reflection, then, cannot be understood *simply* as the phenomenological reduction, at least as pure reflection is intended in *Transcendence of the Ego*. Indeed, in the context of *Transcendence of the Ego*, pure reflection cannot be phenomenological reduction at all along Husserlian lines.<sup>45</sup>

One should note here that by this same reasoning, pure reflection cannot be thought of as *any* manner of abstraction. It is not sufficient that pure reflection take the results of an ordinary, impure, reflection and *abstract away* those contents which distort. This might at first glance seem attractive, particularly in reference to the

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<sup>44</sup>Which is not to say that meditation (or deliberation) has no object—no exception to intentionality is implied. Simply that the object of reflective deliberation is *identical* to the object of the reflection which is under deliberation. Deliberation is *dependent* for its object on some prior act of reflection which brings the object to consciousness. A concise way of putting this is that the object of deliberation is not given to consciousness directly but in *memory*, *borrowed*, as it were, from some prior act of consciousness.

<sup>45</sup>The same, of course, is true with regard to *Being and Nothingness*, which presents the same problems concerning reflection in ontological terms. The conclusion can be re-cast in these terms: to answer the problem of reflection as posed by *Being and Nothingness*, pure reflection must apprehend consciousness without distance, i.e., immediately, without negation. The reduction fails as pure reflection on this criterion, as well, since in the reduction one grasps the same object, simply “bracketing” its objective existence. What is called for is to grasp consciousness without objectification altogether.

reduction which, one could argue, re-establishes the certainty of reflection by *excluding* its transcendent contents. What remains after reduction is only the immanently given data of reflection, which, as Husserl maintains and Sartre agrees, are given with utter certainty. What this omits from consideration is that cognition of consciousness as the product of an ego—as an object in the strong sense—is itself a distortion and necessarily false, whether one brackets the existence of the object or not. Pure reflection requires consciousness to be given in an entirely different manner, which cannot be accomplished through any exercise of “correcting” an already distorted reflection through the process of abstraction.

This is important to note in response to other of Sartre’s commentators, whose accounts of pure reflection are far less extended and well-considered than those of Jeanson and Busch. Pure reflection on these accounts is taken to be a simple modification in our judgments concerning the results of everyday reflection, i.e., taking our reflections not at their usual face-value but in the way that Sartre ultimately wants them to be taken. To wit:

... Accessory reflection does not call into question one’s fundamental project of attempting to be God... . It takes the project of attempting to be God for granted, and concerns itself only with the question of which of the indefinite number of secondary projects one will pursue as a means for realizing this fundamental project.

“Purifying reflection” (also called “non-accessory reflection”), by contrast, does explicitly focus on the fundamental project of attempting to be God, and calls into question the supposed necessity of this project.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>David Detmer, *Freedom as a Value: A Critique of the Ethical Theory of Jean-Paul Sartre* (La Salle [Ill.]: Open Court Publishing Co., 1986), 117–118.

Morality ideally is a reflective study of values operating with full awareness that man is their source (this full awareness Sartre calls purifying reflection).<sup>47</sup>

The temptation, then, (to which Busch and Jeanson to some degree also succumb) is to define pure reflection simply in terms of its *results*. Which suggests that reflection proceeds as normal but is “purified” by *purging* it of its undesirable contents to arrive at the conclusions which Sartre wants. This is, of course, to proceed in the same fashion as the reduction, without the same sophistication. It is likewise unacceptable, and for precisely the same reason: since it takes place on the level of deliberation, it fails to answer adequately the problem of reflection, which requires a thoroughgoing modification of the manner of consciousness involved.

Pure reflection necessarily takes place *prior* to deliberation, and for that reason cannot be understood as an *epoché* along Husserlian lines. Which is not, however, to say that pure reflection is not an *epoché* in any sense at all. Sartre links the notions of pure reflection and phenomenological reduction in *Transcendence of the Ego* in a way that suggests that pure reflection does indeed overlap with “phenomenological reduction,” but on an understanding of the reduction that has little to do with Husserl. Sartre’s treatment of the *epoché* suggests that the *epoché* itself must undergo a modification. It was a common criticism of Husserl that there is no motivation to undertake the *epoché*, a fact of which Sartre makes note as follows:

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<sup>47</sup>Thomas Anderson, *The Foundation and Structure of Sartrean Ethics* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 41.

As we know, in his article in *Kantstudien*<sup>48</sup> Fink admits, not without some melancholy, that as long as one remains in the “natural” attitude, there is no *reason*, no “motive” for exercising the \_\_\_\_\_. In fact, this natural attitude is perfectly coherent. There one will find none of the contradictions which, according to Plato, lead the philosopher to effect a philosophical conversion. Thus the \_\_\_\_\_ appears in the phenomenology of Husserl as a miracle.<sup>49</sup>

Yet Sartre concludes in *Transcendence of the Ego* that “if, on the contrary, our point of view is adopted ... we have ... a permanent motive for carrying out the phenomenological reduction.”<sup>50</sup>

What Sartre proposes, although not in so many words, is a *revised* version of the *epoché*, a version which is on the one hand motivated in daily life and on the other hand which loses its character as a strictly philosophical procedure, a feature of the Husserlian *epoché* that Sartre takes issue with as well: “Moreover, reduction seems capable of being performed only at the end of lengthy study. It appears then as a *knowledgeable* operation, which confers on it a sort of gratuitousness.”<sup>51</sup>

Underlying Sartre’s appropriation and subsequent revision of the phenomenological reduction is an understanding of the “natural attitude” which widely departs from Husserl. Sartre suggests, in the conclusion of *Transcendence of the Ego*, that the constitution of the ego is not at all a mere benign theoretical necessity but performs a more calculated role in the organization of consciousness:

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<sup>48</sup>Translator’s note: Cf. Eugen Fink, “Die Phänomenologische Philosophie Edmund Husserls In Der Gegenwärtigen Kritik. Mit Einem Vorwort Von Edmund Husserl,” *Kantstudien*, XXXVII (1933), pp. 346–351.

<sup>49</sup>*TE*, 102. *TDE*, 83. What is to be understood by the claim that there is no motive to exercise the *epoché* is that there is no motive to leave the natural attitude. One exercises the reduction in order to achieve certain phenomenological results. But that one desires those results presumes that one has *already* left the natural attitude. The reduction is unmotivated to the extent that *phenomenology* is unmotivated.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*TE*, 103. *TDE*, 83.

Perhaps, in reality, the essential function of the ego is not so much theoretical but practical. We have noticed, indeed, that it does not bind up the unity of phenomena; that it is limited to reflecting an *ideal* unity, whereas the real and concrete unity had long been effected. But perhaps the essential role of the ego is to mask from consciousness its very spontaneity... .

Everything happens, therefore, as if consciousness constituted the ego as a false representation of itself, as if consciousness hypnotized itself before this ego which it has constituted, absorbing itself in the ego as if to make the ego its guardian and its law.<sup>52</sup>

Consciousness, then, constitutes the ego—which is a theoretical impossibility—in such a way that the ego conceals consciousness from awareness of itself as an impersonal spontaneity, in other words, as if the distortion of impure reflection were the *purpose* behind the constitution of the ego. And it is the distorted perspective of accessory reflection which Sartre calls the “natural attitude.” “... The ‘natural attitude,’” Sartre notes, “appears wholly as an effort made by consciousness to escape from itself by projecting itself into the *me* and becoming absorbed there... .”<sup>53</sup> This clearly contrasts with Husserl, for whom the thesis of the natural attitude is that “this ‘fact-world,’ as the world already tells us, I find to *be out there*, and also *take it just as it gives itself to me as something that exists out there*.”<sup>54</sup> Sartre’s use of the “natural attitude” does not concern the “fact-world” as such, but restricts itself to the consciousness of the ego characterized by accessory reflection. And this “provincial” definition of the natural attitude allows Sartre to re-formulate the *epoché* in a way that overcomes the limitations suffered by Husserl’s formulation.

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<sup>52</sup>*TE*, 100–101. *TDE*, 81–82. The “as if” in this passage is important. This is a device which Sartre resorts to frequently, much to the confusion of his readers. Sartre is here making use of metaphor in place of concrete description. It should not be thought that Sartre is ascribing psychological motivations to unreflected consciousness. On his own account, it is difficult to make any sense of “desire” on the part of the unreflected.

<sup>53</sup>*TE*, 103. *TDE*, 83.

<sup>54</sup>Husserl, *Ideas*, 96.

While on Husserl's view the natural attitude is perfectly coherent, on Sartre's view it is not. The Sartrean natural attitude depends on a theoretical impossibility, a "magical" object which can never completely contain consciousness. The natural attitude on Sartre's formulation is inherently inconsistent and moreover unstable. It is possible that consciousness might at any time "catch" itself in the act of flight, at which point the natural attitude breaks down. Herein lies both the solution to the gratuitousness of the *epoché* and the core of Sartre's revision:

... If a simple act of reflection suffices in order for conscious spontaneity to tear itself away from the *I* and be given as independent, then the \_\_\_\_\_ is no longer a miracle, an intellectual method, an erudite procedure: it is an anxiety which is imposed on us and which we cannot avoid: it is both a pure event of transcendental origin and an ever possible accident of our daily life.<sup>55</sup>

The *epoché*, in other words, is equivalent to pure reflection, but Sartre's *epoché* is not equivalent to Husserl's. This disparity between Sartre's and Husserl's uses of the reduction has been noted before, although perhaps not in this exact light. David Detmer notes five distinct and fundamental differences: (1) Husserl brackets some views he considers true or partly true, while Sartre brackets views he considers false. (2) For Husserl, the beliefs bracketed cannot be shown to be true or false, while for Sartre the beliefs are demonstrably false. (3) For Husserl, the reduction is the suspension of belief whereas for Sartre it is the explicit reflection on a belief. (4) Husserl uses the reduction to study questions other than those bracketed; Sartre uses it to show the need for rejecting the bracketed beliefs. And (5) they apply the reduction to different issues. Husserl brackets the existence of the objects of experience, while Sartre foregoes this

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<sup>55</sup>TE, 103. TDE, 84.

use but instead applies the reduction to psychic life, the life-world, and the ideal value of absolute being.<sup>56</sup>

These differences are in fact so great that it is difficult to say by what right they should be called the same thing at all. The similarities which Detmer points out, that “Husserl and Sartre both use the reduction as a means of going beyond the uncritical, conventional standpoint of common sense,” and “similarly, both Husserl and Sartre use the reduction to delineate sharply the boundaries of their respective investigations,”<sup>57</sup> are perhaps correct but trivial. The case should be made more strongly: Sartre makes use of Husserl’s reduction only in a derivative sense, appropriating the term and the *spirit* of phenomenological reduction for very different purposes than Husserl had in mind.

The “spirit” of the reduction which is apparent in Sartre is what Husserl termed the “*phenomenological point of view*, according to which, all transcendences having been disconnected, the glance is directed in reflection upon the absolute pure consciousness, giving us the apperception of an absolute experience in its intimate subjective flow... .”<sup>58</sup> This is obviously the sense of the reduction which Sartre wished to preserve, and to that extent Sartre and Husserl share the same goals in their formulations of the *epoché*.<sup>59</sup> That Sartre departs from Husserl and in precisely the way that he

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<sup>56</sup>Detmer, 121–122.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>58</sup>Husserl, *Ideas*, 151.

<sup>59</sup>Witness Sartre’s account of Husserl’s reduction in the opening pages of *Transcendence of the Ego*: Husserl, too, discovers the transcendental consciousness of Kant, and grasps it by the \_\_\_\_\_. But this consciousness is no longer a set of logical conditions. It is a fact which is absolute. Nor is this transcendental consciousness a hypostatization of validity, an unconscious which floats between the real and the ideal. It is a real consciousness accessible to each of us as soon as the “reduction” is performed. (*TE*, 35. *TDE*, 18.)

does is perfectly in keeping with his understanding of Husserl's phenomenology in general, and in particular, with the attraction that Husserl's philosophy initially held for him, namely, the realism suggested by intentionality:

Imagine for a moment a connected series of bursts which tear us out of ourselves, which do not even allow to an "ourselves" the leisure of composing ourselves behind them, but which instead throw us beyond them into the dry dust of the world, on to the plain earth, amidst things. Imagine us thus rejected and abandoned by our own nature in an indifferent, hostile, and restive world—you will then grasp the profound meaning of the discovery which Husserl expresses in his famous phrase, "All consciousness is consciousness *of* something." No more is necessary to dispose of the effeminate philosophy of immanence, where everything happens by compromise, by protoplasmic transformations, by a tepid cellular chemistry. The philosophy of transcendence throws us on to the highway, in the midst of dangers, under a dazzling light.<sup>60</sup>

Phenomenology, for Sartre, represented first and foremost an escape from the idealism which dominated French philosophy "... For centuries we have not felt in philosophy so realistic a current. The phenomenologists have plunged man back into the world; they have given full measure to man's agonies and also to his rebellions."<sup>61</sup>

From this perspective, it should not be surprising that Sartre resists Husserl's formulation of the *epoché*, which seemingly works against the realist tendency of phenomenology. By demanding the suspension of belief in the existence of objects in the world, Husserl's *epoché* once again distances man from the world the reality of which, on Sartre's view, intentionality has laudably restored. Sartre makes precisely

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<sup>60</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology," trans. Joseph Fell, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 1 (May 1970), 5. Idem, "Une Idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: L'Intentionnalité," *La Nouvelle Revue française*, no. 304 (January 1939), 130. (Also reprinted in *Situations*. Vol. 1. [Paris: NRF, Gallimard, 1949.])

<sup>61</sup>*TE*, 105. *TDE*, 86.



this complaint about Husserl's reduction in his 1947 lecture "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self":

[In Husserl] we start from a world of knowledge. We get beyond it by way of the phenomenological *epoché*, and we never return to the world by starting with the phenomenological *epoché*. We are a bit like those philosophers escaped from the cave of Plato who will refuse afterwards to return to the cave, even though, in fact, it is certainly only in the cave that it is necessary to think and act.<sup>62</sup>

Sartre succeeds in remaining faithful to the idea of a phenomenological reduction and at the same time preserving the realism implicit in intentionality by formulating the reduction in such a way that the reduction *uncovers* consciousness as "in-the-world" rather than abstracting the world away from consciousness.

... As long as the *I* remains a structure of absolute consciousness, one will still be able to reproach phenomenology for being an escapist doctrine, for again pulling a part of man out of the world and, in that way, turning our attention from the real problems. It seems to us that this reproach no longer has any justification if one makes the *me* an existent, strictly contemporaneous with the world, whose existence has the same characteristics as the world.<sup>63</sup>

Sartre's reduction—which is equivalent to pure reflection—"purifies" consciousness of the subject, which, on Sartre's view, re-establishes the self as "in-the-world" among objects:

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<sup>62</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self," trans. Mary Ellen Lawrence and N. Lawrence, in *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, ed. Nathaniel Lawrence and Daniel O'Connor (Englewood Cliffs [N.J.]: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 118. Hereafter referred to as *CS*. Idem, "Conscience de soi et connaissance de soi." *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 42, no. 3 (April-June 1948), 55–56. Hereafter referred to as *CDS*. See also *BN*, 9/*EN*, 16: "This is simply a way of choosing new words to clothe the old '*Esse est percipi*' of Berkeley. And it is in fact just what Husserl and his followers are doing when, after having effected the phenomenological reduction, they treat the noema as *unreal* and declare that its *esse* is *percipi*."

<sup>63</sup>*TE*, 105. *TDE*, 86.

... Absolute consciousness, when it is purified of the *I*, no longer has anything of the *subject*. It is no longer a collection of representations. It is quite simply a first condition and an absolute source of existence. And the relation of interdependence established by this absolute consciousness between the *me* and the World is sufficient for the *me* to appear as “endangered” before the World, for the *me* (indirectly and through the intermediary of states) to draw the whole of its content from the World.<sup>64</sup>

That Sartre interprets the reduction in this way is in perfect keeping with the reaction to Husserl which motivates *Transcendence of the Ego* as a whole, namely, that Husserl, by embracing the transcendental ego, betrays the spirit of phenomenology embodied in the intentional definition of consciousness:

... If the *I* were a necessary structure of consciousness, this opaque *I* would at once be raised to the rank of an absolute. We would then be in the presence of a monad. And this, indeed, is unfortunately the orientation of the new thought of Husserl (see *Cartesianische Meditationen*).<sup>65</sup> Consciousness is loaded down; consciousness has lost that character which rendered it the absolute existent *by virtue of non-existence*. It is heavy and *ponderable*. All the results of phenomenology begin to crumble if the *I* is not, by the same title as the world, a relative existent: that is to say, an object *for* consciousness.<sup>66</sup>

Sartre’s deep commitment to phenomenology is to his own, rather strong, interpretation of phenomenology, in accordance with which he employs the terminology of the reduction. The project of *Transcendence of the Ego*, then, goes beyond its stated purpose of refuting the idealism of Husserl’s transcendental ego, but involves a re-interpretation of Husserl’s phenomenology in general which is faithful to Sartre’s vision of the true value of the phenomenological method.

This analysis answers the debate among Sartre’s critics as to whether Sartre accepted the phenomenological reduction or not. It is, in fact, the consensus among

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<sup>64</sup>TE, 106. TDE, 87.

<sup>65</sup>Translator’s note: Cf. *op. cit.*, “Meditation V.”

<sup>66</sup>TE, 42. TDE, 25–26.

Sartre's critics that he did not.<sup>67</sup> This view is obviously as oversimplified as the view that Sartre adopted the reduction in its unmodified Husserlian form. The truth lies somewhere in between: Sartre adopts the reduction *in principle*, but not in a form which Husserl would accept.<sup>68</sup> With this in mind, that Sartre identifies pure reflection with the phenomenological reduction tells us more about the reduction than about pure reflection. We cannot conclude that pure reflection amounts to a reduction which we can understand on Husserl's terms. Rather, we must conclude that in Sartre's usage the reduction is equivalent to pure reflection, which, while illuminating Sartre's phenomenology, offers no real definition of pure reflection.

#### ANGUISH

The most revealing claim about pure reflection, in fact, concerns the manner in which pure reflection *differs* from phenomenological reduction on Husserl's view. The reduction becomes, on Sartre's view, "an anxiety imposed on us and which we cannot avoid ... an ever possible accident of our daily life."<sup>69</sup> This reduction, which is to say pure reflection, is not a process undertaken so much as an experience which is under-

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<sup>67</sup>See Wilfred Desan, *The Tragic Finale: An Essay on the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 5; Maurice Natanson, op. cit., 70; Joseph Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 8.

<sup>68</sup>It should be noted that Sartre is not entirely unambiguous in his use of the reduction. Early in *Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre accepts Husserl's conclusion "... that our psychic and psycho-physical *me* is a transcendent object which must fall before the \_\_\_\_\_." (*TE*, 36/*TDE*, 18.) This claim, which is taken directly from Husserl (see Husserl, *Ideas*, 213ff.), clearly stands on Husserl's use of the reduction—the bracketing of the existence of all transcendent objects. Sartre's employment of the reduction for his own purposes, however, rests on Sartre's own understanding of the reduction, which has already been discussed.

<sup>69</sup>*TE*, 103. *TDE*, 84.

gone. It is in these terms alone—i.e., as an *event*—that Sartre offers what might be considered a *description* of pure reflection:

But it can happen that consciousness suddenly produces itself on the pure reflective level... . Then consciousness, noting what could be called the fatality of its spontaneity, is suddenly anguished: it is this dread, absolute and without remedy, this fear of itself, which seems to us constitutive of pure consciousness... .<sup>70</sup>

And it is precisely this anguish which provides, as Sartre goes on to claim, the “permanent motive for carrying out the phenomenological reduction.”<sup>71</sup> The pure reflective experience is tantamount to the experience of anguish, which, like the very problem of reflection, grows out of Sartre’s understanding of consciousness as an egoless and ungrounded spontaneity.

Among the conclusions Sartre draws from his conception of the ego is that consciousness itself is “transparent.”

In a sense, it is a *nothing*, since all physical, psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths, all values are outside it; since my *me* has itself ceased to be any part of it. But this nothing is *all* since it is *consciousness* of all these objects. There is no longer an “inner life” in the sense in which Brunschvig opposes “inner life” and “spiritual life,” because there is no longer anything which is an *object* which can at the same time partake of the intimacy of consciousness.<sup>72</sup>

“Transcendental” consciousness (as opposed to “psychological” consciousness) is “a sphere of ‘pure spontaneities’ which are never objects and which determine their own existence.”<sup>73</sup> There is nothing, that is, *before* consciousness, no unconscious from

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<sup>70</sup>TE, 101–102. TDE, 82–83.

<sup>71</sup>TE, 102. TDE, 83.

<sup>72</sup>TE., 93. TDE, 74.

<sup>73</sup>TE, 96. TDE, 77. The spontaneity of consciousness does not refer to the gratuitousness of consciousness. Sartre defines spontaneity as that which “*is* what it produces and can be nothing else.” (TE, 79/TDE, 62.)

which consciousness springs. Consciousness can only be thought of as spontaneously producing *itself*.

Thus each instant of our conscious life reveals to us a creation *ex nihilo*. Not a new *arrangement*, but a new existence. There is something distressing for each of us, to catch in the act this tireless creation of existence of which *we* are not the creators. At this level man has the impression of ceaselessly escaping from himself, of overflowing himself, of being surprised by riches which are always unexpected.<sup>74</sup>

The workings of consciousness can at no time be captured in a concept of a psyche. Conscious life cannot be “contained” within the me. While it would seem that this is the truth which pure reflection ought to reveal, it at the same time provides an account of how the spontaneity of consciousness reveals *itself*.

Indeed, the experiences which Sartre points to as indicative of this “overflowing of consciousness” are those experiences of “being surprised at oneself” that are often explained in terms of the unconscious. Sartre’s own example is drawn from Janet: the example of the “prostitute-bride.” A young bride is terrified of sitting at the window when her husband leaves her alone, for fear of summoning passers-by like a prostitute, although nothing in her experience or character supplies a reason for this fear. Sartre accounts for her terror not in terms of an unconscious desire, but rather a “vertigo of possibility” upon realizing, perhaps quite accidentally, her freedom to do exactly what she fears she might—summon the passers-by as a prostitute would do. The young bride’s consciousness, Sartre explains, “suddenly appeared to itself as infinitely overflowing in its possibilities the *I* which ordinarily serves as its unity.”<sup>75</sup> In other words,

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<sup>74</sup>TE, 98–99. TDE, 79.

<sup>75</sup>TE, 100. TDE, 81.

the spontaneity of consciousness need not be uncovered philosophically but rather presents itself in the course of everyday life.

It is not necessary to say that the only examples which could be brought to bear are examples of psychasthenic illness. In lieu of the prostitute-bride, one might as easily return to Sartre's previous example "'I, I could do that!' 'I, I could hate my father!'—etc."<sup>76</sup> which serves as well. Sartre makes use of these "classic surprises" to illustrate the unintelligible spontaneity which links the ego to its states, but at the same time these examples reveal the rather more intelligible spontaneity of transcendental consciousness. This spontaneity, by dint of which the hatred surpasses the ego which "produces" it, is irrational with respect to the ego, but becomes intelligible in the context of an egoless consciousness.<sup>77</sup> What is important here is that because this spontaneity not only can but does "overflow" the ego at all times, it is present to behold in *any* act of reflection. That is, the failure of consciousness to coincide with its object in accessory reflection is not only the motive but the origin of pure reflection. Consciousness is revealed to itself as "pure spontaneity" precisely at the point where accessory reflection breaks down. This failure, then, *in itself* constitutes a pure reflection. The motivation and mechanism of pure reflection are thus "built-in" to the nature of reflective consciousness. Indeed, if Sartre is correct, a conscious effort must be

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<sup>76</sup>*TE*, 80. *TDE*, 62.

<sup>77</sup>This view, that the spontaneity of consciousness which invalidates impure reflection and the spontaneity apprehended by pure reflection are one and the same, explains Sartre's comment that on the pure reflective level consciousness appears "perhaps not without the ego, yet as escaping from the ego on all sides, as dominating the ego and maintaining the ego outside the consciousness by a continued creation." (*TE*, 101/*TDE*, 82.) The ego appears in pure reflection not as the intentional object of the reflection but as an object which is *surpassed* by the reflected consciousness.

taken *not* to apprehend consciousness as an egoless spontaneity, which is exactly what happens in Sartre's account of anguish.

"... It is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself."<sup>78</sup> Though the language in *Being and Nothingness* changes, the sense does not. "Freedom is," for Sartre, "the being of consciousness," in which the human being stands "opposite his past and his future, as being both this past and this future and as not being them."<sup>79</sup> Cast in metaphysical and temporal terms, this is precisely the situation of consciousness in respect to the ego detailed in *Transcendence of the Ego*: the possibilities which present themselves to consciousness are neither contained in nor derive from the ego, but rather, along with the ego, are freely (i.e., spontaneously) created by consciousness itself. An egoless consciousness is a consciousness without an *essence*:

... Freedom, which manifests itself through anguish, is characterized by a constantly renewed obligation to remake the *Self* which designates the free being... . This *self* with its *a priori* and historical content is the *essence* of man. Anguish as the manifestation of freedom in the face of self means that man is always separated by a nothingness from his essence.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, consciousness is prior to and independent of any concept of self which might define it, which fact is revealed in pure reflection, or, alternatively, in anguish.

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<sup>78</sup>BN, 65. EN, 66.

<sup>79</sup>BN, 65. EN, 65.

<sup>80</sup>BN, 72. EN, 72.

... Anguish appears as an apprehension of self inasmuch as it exists in the perpetual mode of detachment from what is; better yet, in so far as it makes itself exist as such. For we can never apprehend an *Erlebnis* as a living consequence of the *nature* which is ours. The overflow of our consciousness progressively constitutes that nature, but it remains always behind us and it dwells in us as the permanent object of our retrospective comprehension. It is in so far as this nature is a demand without being a recourse that it is apprehended in anguish.<sup>81</sup>

It would seem, again, that consciousness could not *avoid* apprehending itself in this manner if, in fact, accessory reflection *always* fails and every human act is an expression of human freedom which is this detachment from ourselves, a fact which Sartre recognizes. “We should not, however, conclude that being brought on to the reflective plane and envisaging one’s distant or immediate possibilities suffice to apprehend oneself in *pure* anguish.”<sup>82</sup> While it might be the case that each act of reflection is the occasion for anguish, it is nevertheless possible to forestall anguish, much as the constitution of the ego serves to obstruct pure reflection.

In each instance of reflection anguish is born as a structure of the reflective consciousness in so far as the latter considers consciousness an object of reflection; but it still remains possible for me to maintain various types of conduct with respect to my anguish—in particular, patterns of flight. Everything takes place, in fact, as if our essential and immediate behavior with respect to anguish is flight.<sup>83</sup>

The language of this passage resembles the language of that portion of *Transcendence of the Ego* where Sartre proposes the permanent possibility of pure reflection which is, in the end, the *epoché*.<sup>84</sup> And with good reason: the point to be made is the same. The structure of reflection is such that reflection attempts to apprehend consciousness as an object, but this attempt necessarily fails. It is this failure that gives rise to anguish,

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<sup>81</sup>BN, 72–73. EN, 73.

<sup>82</sup>BN, 78. EN, 77–78.

<sup>83</sup>BN, 78. EN, 78.

<sup>84</sup>See TE, 101ff./TDE, 82ff.



which, nevertheless, can be fled by refusing to accept that ultimate failure of reflection. In *Transcendence of the Ego*, this flight is the constitution of the ego in impure reflection; in *Being and Nothingness*, it is bad faith. Both of which amount to the same thing: "... We flee from anguish by attempting to apprehend ourselves from without as an Other or as *a thing*."<sup>85</sup> And both attempts necessarily fail. "In a word, I flee in order not to know, but I cannot avoid knowing that I am fleeing; and the flight from anguish is only a mode of becoming conscious of anguish. Thus anguish, properly speaking, can be neither hidden nor avoided."<sup>86</sup>

It would seem, then, that pure reflection is *inevitable*—that since we are aware of our anguish and cannot successfully flee, we have no genuine alternative but to reflect purely (whether we like it or not). This is, however, clearly not Sartre's understanding. For while bad faith cannot ultimately succeed, it seems also impossible to avoid.<sup>87</sup> While it might be the case that pure reflection *underlies* every act of impure reflection, *uncovering* pure reflection as such is neither automatic nor, as we have seen, a matter of abstraction or "purifying" an *ex post facto* judgment. "... Pure reflection can be attained only as the result of a modification which it effects on itself and is in the form of a katharsis."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>BN, 82. EN, 81. Sartre acknowledges that impure reflection is bad faith in exactly those words: "... this [impure] reflection is in bad faith." (BN, 225/EN, 208.)

<sup>86</sup>BN, 83. EN, 82.

<sup>87</sup>The details of Sartre's account of bad faith and sincerity need not detain us here. Sartre's claim, in brief, is that the attempt to be "sincere" and thus avoid bad faith is simply another attempt to achieve substantiality. Sincerity is therefore an effort made in bad faith. See BN/EN, part 1, ch. 2.

<sup>88</sup>BN, 224. EN, 206.

CATHARSIS AND THE PRE-REFLECTIVE *COGITO*

Sartre says nothing more about this “katharsis.” One can only suppose that Sartre intends it in the sense of the original \_\_\_\_\_, i.e., a cleansing or purifying. What is to be purged is clear enough. It is the “intuition of the for-itself in in-itself,”<sup>89</sup> the ego, consciousness as “other.” Again we are confronted with the difficulty of how such a catharsis can take place in a manner which is not a form of abstraction, in which consciousness is wholly and directly given to itself without transcending itself toward an object. It is Jeanson’s view that “from Sartre’s viewpoint, this is the return to consciousness, the initial stance of the pre-reflective *cogito*.”<sup>90</sup> And it is indeed in terms of a pre-reflective *cogito* that we can make sense of a reflection which exercises a catharsis “on itself.”

“... All the writers who have described the *Cogito* have dealt with it as a reflective operation, that is to say, as an operation of the second degree. Such a *Cogito* is performed by consciousness *directed upon consciousness*, a consciousness which takes consciousness as an object.”<sup>91</sup> The *cogito* of Husserl and Descartes is an act of reflection but an act of *accessory* reflection. Indeed, the Cartesian *cogito* underlines the non-identity of the reflecting and reflected consciousnesses which signals the failure of accessory reflection. The consciousness reflected-on, the “I think,” is not the consciousness which reflects. To re-state the problem of reflection: accessory reflection

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<sup>89</sup>BN, 226. EN, 208. The original French is “*pour-soi en en-soi*” which is not to be confused with “*en-soi pour-soi*” (in-itself for-itself) which signifies the ideal and impossible self-cause that is God.

<sup>90</sup>SPM, 183. PM, 296.

<sup>91</sup>TE, 44. TDE, 27–28.

can never capture the reflecting consciousness. This is not to say, however, that the reflecting consciousness is in no way conscious of itself.

All reflecting consciousness is, indeed, in itself unreflected, and a new act of the third degree is necessary in order to posit it. Moreover, there is no infinite regress here, since a consciousness has no need at all of a reflecting consciousness in order to be conscious of itself. It simply does not posit itself as an object.<sup>92</sup>

Every act of consciousness is consciousness of an object but is at the same time *non-positionally* conscious of itself. There is, to rephrase, consciousness of consciousness *prior* to reflection. I am aware immediately of my perceptions as perceptions *before* I formulate any judgments concerning them, which judgments take place only in reflection. And it is this non-positional (or *non-thetic*) consciousness which is the condition of any act of reflection.

It is not reflection which reveals the consciousness reflected-on to itself. Quite the contrary, it is the non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection possible; there is a *pre-reflective cogito* which is the condition of the Cartesian *cogito*.<sup>93</sup>

It is this pre-reflective *cogito* that defines consciousness for Sartre. Consciousness, that is, is nothing more than an awareness of objects which is at the same time aware of being aware. It is in this sense that consciousness is “for” itself—consciousness is, by definition, *presence* to itself.<sup>94</sup> But presence to self implies a certain non-identity in the subject. “Presence to self ... supposes that an impalpable fissure has slipped into being. If being is present to itself, it is because it is not wholly itself. Presence is an immediate deterioration of coincidence, for it supposes separa-

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<sup>92</sup>*TE*, 45. *TDE*, 29.

<sup>93</sup>*BN*, 13. *EN*, 20. Emphasis added.

<sup>94</sup>See *BN*, 124f./*EN*, 119f.

tion.”<sup>95</sup> There is thus a negation internal to the being of the for-itself. The for-itself exists as presence to itself because of a negation which it exercises on itself. What is crucial here is that the negation involved is an *internal* negation.<sup>96</sup> It does not give us an object. At the level of the pre-reflective *cogito*, consciousness is not an “other” to itself. On the contrary, as the Sartrean formula holds, the for-itself “is not what it is and is what it is not.” That is, this internal negation does not oppose consciousness to a transcendent object. This negation *is* the definition of consciousness, viz., that which never fully coincides with itself.

What emerges in the pre-reflective *cogito* is a non-egological notion of “self.” The “self” of which consciousness is non-thetically aware, the “self” which is present to itself is clearly not an ego in any sense (since the ego is a product of reflection), but moreover this self cannot be understood as a subject. This notion of selfness requires a *relation* of the self to itself. A self which is thought of as entirely a subject loses this sense of relation and becomes in-itself. At the same time, “self” cannot be understood only as a predicate, since the self identifies the subject to itself.

The *self* therefore represents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of *not being his own coincidence*, of escaping identity while positing it as unity—in short, of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of multiplicity. This is what we call presence to itself.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>BN, 124. EN, 119.

<sup>96</sup>“Internal negation,” Sartre’s own term, signifies “... a type of negation which establishes an internal relation between what one denies and that concerning which the denial is made.” (BN, 135/EN, 129.) The idea here is along the lines of Hegelian “opposition.” See BN, 135 n. 10/EN, 129 n. 1.

<sup>97</sup>BN, 123–24. EN, 119.

The self must be understood as the “reflexive” self, e.g., the “*se*” in “*il s’ennuie,*” in which the subject and object are distinct in sense (i.e., the one boring and the one being bored) but nevertheless identical. However odd the construction, the “self” is nothing more than its own presence to itself.

Which is to say that consciousness is non-thetically aware of itself *exactly as it is*. There is nothing more to consciousness than what is revealed in the pre-reflective *cogito*, which is nothing more than the non-positional consciousness of consciousness. And it is *only* in this way that consciousness can become aware of itself without the distortion which inevitably accompanies accessory reflection. It is only at this level that consciousness can appear as a “self” which is at the same time not a subject, an *I*. The Cartesian *cogito* fails in this regard:

When Descartes performs the *Cogito*, he performs it in conjunction with methodological doubt, with the ambition of “advancing science,” etc., which are *actions* and *states*. Thus the Cartesian method, doubt, etc. are by nature given as undertakings of an *I*. It is quite natural that the *Cogito*, which appears at the end of these undertakings, and *which is given as logically bound to methodological doubt*, sees an *I* appear on its horizon... . In a word, the *Cogito* is impure.<sup>98</sup>

The Cartesian *cogito*, that is, fails because it is *motivated*. Pure reflection is “the simple presence of the reflective for-itself to the for itself reflected-on,” but “it is that also which is never first *given*.”<sup>99</sup> The relation between pure reflection and the pre-reflective *cogito* is therefore not a simple identity. While the *contents* of pure reflection and the pre-reflective *cogito* are the same, namely, “pure” consciousness as spontaneous presence to self, what is given pre-reflectively must be “won by a sort of

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<sup>98</sup>*TE*, 92. *TDE*, 73.

<sup>99</sup>*BN*, 218. *EN*, 201.

katharsis”<sup>100</sup> to count as pure reflection. That is, the pre-reflective *cogito* must be *thematized* in a way which is nevertheless unmotivated, i.e., which does not presume an object of *knowledge*.

Here again we encounter the failure of the Cartesian *cogito*:

Doubt appears on the foundation of a pre-ontological comprehension of *knowing* and of requirements concerning truth. This comprehension and these requirements, which give all its meaning to doubt, engage the totality of human reality and its being in the world; they suppose the existence of an *object* of knowledge and of doubt... . To discover oneself doubting is already to be ... outside of oneself in the world as presence to the object which one doubts.<sup>101</sup>

But this failure is instructive with regard to any act of impure reflection. An act of reflection which assumes an object of *knowledge* has already left the pre-reflective *cogito* at which level alone “pure” consciousness is revealed. Hence Sartre’s claim that “pure reflection is never anything but a quasi-knowledge.”<sup>102</sup> Pure reflection is a “quasi” knowledge in much the same way that the object of pure reflection is a “quasi” object: it is given immediately and in its totality.<sup>103</sup> The “quasi” object of pure reflection is not “wholly” an object (i.e., not an object in the strong sense) because the process by which consciousness constitutes its object is “interrupted.” The object is not completely constituted, which is to say, the negation which consciousness inserts between itself and its constituted objects is withheld. Consciousness, that is, makes no *affirmations* concerning its quasi-object, since every affirmation involves a negation

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>*BN*, 219–20. *EN*, 203.

<sup>102</sup>*BN*, 226. *EN*, 209.

<sup>103</sup>It is significant that Sartre uses the modifier “quasi” consistently. See also Sartre’s discussion of “quasi-object” in relation to the body, *BN*, 465/*EN*, 422.

(namely, that the object affirmed is *not* the affirming consciousness). And a quasi-knowledge is precisely the awareness of an object without affirmation:

Its affirmation is stopped halfway because its negation is not entirely realized. It does not then detach itself completely from the reflected-on, and it can not grasp the reflected on “from a point of view.” Its knowledge is a totality; it is a lightning intuition without relief, without point of departure and without point of arrival. Everything is given at once in a sort of absolute proximity.<sup>104</sup>

All of which is to say that quasi-knowledge, i.e., pure reflection, is a matter of conception.

This claim, which has already been made, becomes clearer in the context of the current discussion:

What we ordinarily call *knowing* supposes reliefs, levels, an order, a hierarchy. Even mathematical essences are revealed to us with an orientation in relation to other truths, to certain consequences; they are never disclosed with all their characteristics at once. But the reflection which delivers the reflected-on to us, not as a given but as the being which we have to be, in indistinction without a point of view, is a knowledge overflowing itself and without explanation. At the same time it is never surprised by itself; it does not *teach* us anything but only *posits*. In the knowledge of a transcendent object indeed there is a *revelation* of the object, and the object revealed can deceive or surprise us. But in the reflective revelation there is a positing of a being whose being was already a revelation.<sup>105</sup>

The parallels, of course, are obvious. They are also revealing. If, as Sartre claims, nothing *new* is delivered in a concept, if a concept presents to consciousness only that which is (in some sense) already known, then, as the last line of the passage above suggests, the content of pure reflection is already contained in consciousness. Pure

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<sup>104</sup>*BN*, 218. *EN*, 202.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 218–219. *EN*, 202. Sartre’s comments here concerning mathematical essences are noteworthy. Whereas in *Psychology of Imagination* Sartre makes use of mathematical essences to illustrate conception, his remarks here suggest that mathematical essences actually fail to meet the criteria of conception in important ways. This does not imply that the category of conception is not a valid one, only that his choice of examples is not as apt as it might have been. Pure reflection itself is obviously a better candidate, and it is not implausible that this is in fact what Sartre had in mind, nor is it difficult to understand why Sartre would decline to make use of an example which is itself fairly obscure.

reflection, that is, is nothing more than (that is, strictly limits itself to) the awareness of what has already been pre-reflectively revealed.

[Pure] reflection is limited to making this revelation exist for itself; the revealed being is not revealed as a given but with the character of the “already revealed.” Reflection is a recognition rather than knowledge. It implies as the original motivation of the recovery a pre-reflective comprehension of what it wishes to recover.<sup>106</sup>

The “thematizing” of the pre-reflective *cogito* which characterizes pure reflection must then be understood as the reflective “recognition” of non-thetic (and non-reflective) consciousness. It is non-positional consciousness *made* positional, but one must be careful here. What is “posited” is not the non-thetic consciousness, for this is simply to reinvoke the reflection-reflecting dyad at another level. What must be posited is the *object* of non-thetic consciousness, namely, consciousness as presence to itself.<sup>107</sup> It is in this way that Sartre can preserve both the principle of intentionality and the necessary identity of the consciousness reflected and the consciousness reflected-on. Pure reflection is consciousness *of* an object, but an object which is immanent to consciousness. And the identity of the reflecting and the reflected is maintained “without distance,” since the unreflected consciousness is by definition this presence to itself. To be pre-reflectively present to self is not to divide consciousness but simply to *be* consciousness.

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<sup>106</sup>*BN*, 219. *EN*, 203.

<sup>107</sup>Sartre’s language is limiting here. Non-thetic consciousness is non-thetic in the sense that it does not posit any object. At the same time, it is consciousness of *something*, namely, itself. When speaking of non-thetic consciousness of self, Sartre uses the construction *conscience (de) soi* with “the ‘of’ inside parentheses to show that it merely satisfies a grammatical requirement.” (*BN*, 14/*EN*, 20; see also *CS*, 123/*CDS*, 62.) It is in this restricted sense that I use “object” here.



Sartre's language hinders the clarification of this idea. In particular, Sartre's appropriation of "knowledge" for strictly technical purposes makes it difficult to define the sense of the "recognition" and "awareness" involved here. Likewise, Sartre's reservation of the term "positional" for that which actually *posits* an object (that is to say *affirms* an object) further obscures the sense in which non-thetic consciousness can be made thetic without the appearance of a transcendent object. This latter problem is somewhat overcome by use of the strong object/weak object distinction earlier introduced. The ambiguities concerning knowledge are more difficult. What one *wishes* to say is that consciousness pre-reflectively *knows* itself (in one sense), and that this knowledge is "brought to light" as *reflective* knowledge (in a different sense), *neither* of which senses implies the knowledge obtained through perception (which would be a third sense altogether). Sartre's reluctance to draw such fine distinctions obscures his own account and makes it awkward to re-state his position without either violating the boundaries of his technical use of terms or partaking in Sartre's own ambiguity. It is important to make the point here that this account is not as clear as it might be and identify the cause. One possible resolution is to suggest that what Sartre is pursuing is a sense of self-knowledge not unlike Jaspers' "*Verstehen*" while declining to follow Jaspers' careful division of the senses of understanding and explanation. I will argue in the following chapters that this solution is a historically plausible one and clarifies Sartre's meaning considerably.

There remains to explain, however, the nature of the "katharsis" by which pure reflection takes place. In light of what has been said, it is easier to see in what sense

pure reflection might be called “cathartic,” since pure reflection *obtains* nothing, i.e., *gives* nothing new to consciousness. Pure reflection rather involves a *taking away* from consciousness, a “stripping away” until what remains is the presence to itself that defines the unreflected consciousness and has “been there” all along. What is “purged” is the “natural attitude” as Sartre understands it, which is the recognition of consciousness as the product of the ego. Since for Sartre (unlike Husserl) the natural attitude is not the original attitude but rather rests on the unreflected self-consciousness which is the pre-reflective *cogito*, what remains is “the simple presence of the reflective to the reflected-on” which is constitutive of pure reflection.

The problem is not that of seeking the existence of the non-thetic consciousness of self; everyone *is* it at each instant; everyone *enjoys* it, if I may say so. The problem will be to understand how we are able to pass from nonthetic consciousness of self, which is the being of consciousness, to reflexive knowledge, which is based on itself. . . .

... The philosopher who first had recourse to this nonthetic awareness of self, Husserl, who especially mentions it in *Internal Time Consciousness*, has often shown that characteristic of an *erlebnis*, which is to say, in short, a lived and reflected-upon consciousness, is that which gives itself as having already existed, as already being there.<sup>108</sup>

The momentary *Erlebnisse* of consciousness (my repugnance for Pierre) are the immediate data of reflection, existing prior to accessory reflection, although they are “given” to impure reflection as emanating from psychological states. But the *Erlebnis* of my repugnance is not merely a repulsed consciousness of Pierre, but a repulsed consciousness which is *conscious of itself* as repulsed. In other words, the momentary *Erlebnis* itself contains the “data” of pure reflection—simple presence to itself—and taken as *only Erlebnis* (i.e., absent of the consciousness of states and qualities which ordinarily

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<sup>108</sup>CS, 123. CDS, 63.

accompany our reflection), reveals a consciousness of consciousness in its “original” form.

The problem, of course, concerns the reflective thematization of this non-thetic consciousness itself: in what way can non-thetic consciousness of self be made reflective?

I am engaged in reading. I tell you “I’m reading” when you ask me what I’m doing. I become conscious of my reading, but not instantaneously. I become conscious of something of which I have had consciousness for a long time, that is to say, that I pass beyond the level of thematization to the reflexive position and to knowledge about a thing which already existed before, as Husserl says.<sup>109</sup>

Non-thetic consciousness of self must not only be “purged” but must subsequently be “brought to light,” that is, made the explicit object of an act of reflective consciousness. *Transcendence of the Ego* provides what serves as an analogue if not a model for this catharsis and thematization. “... Every unreflected consciousness, being non-thetic consciousness of itself, leaves a non-thetic memory that one can consult.”<sup>110</sup> One can, Sartre claims, recall such a non-thetic memory by recreating the complete moment at which the unreflected consciousness appeared, e.g., a moment absorbed in reading a book. In recalling the complete situation, one recalls also the unreflected consciousness to which they appeared, since the objects could only have appeared *to a* consciousness. “That consciousness must not be posited as an object of reflection. On the contrary, I must direct my attention to the revived objects but *without losing sight of the unreflected consciousness...*”<sup>111</sup> That is, by positing only what was posited in the original

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>*TE*, 46. *TDE*, 30.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

consciousness, one can re-construct that of which the original consciousness was non-thetically aware. “I can now make these a-thetically apprehended results the object of a thesis ... ,”<sup>112</sup> in the example, that there was no *I* in unreflected consciousness. This example is valuable in demonstrating that the object of non-thetic consciousness can in fact be made the object of a thetic consciousness without distortion. The thematized recollection of non-thetic consciousness is not the same as a simple reflection on that same consciousness—non-thetic recollections are not infected with the *I*. This procedure is analogous to the process of pure reflection, in which the non-thetic presence to self becomes the object of a thematic and thetic consciousness.

At the same time, this example cannot be taken as a *model* of pure reflection for two reasons. First, the procedure which the example demonstrates takes place in *memory*, while it is clear that pure reflection is reflection on *present* consciousness. Moreover, it has already been established that the pure reflective catharsis cannot be a deliberative process of abstraction along the lines of the Cartesian *cogito* or Husserl’s *epoché*. And it is for this reason that Sartre speaks of pure reflection as exercising a catharsis *on itself*.<sup>113</sup> The “modification” involved is that by which the non-thetic consciousness of self becomes thematized and thetic, and this modification can *only* be effected by a spontaneous movement of the unreflected consciousness if the shortcomings of the Cartesian *cogito* are not to be repeated. Pure reflection can only be under-

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<sup>112</sup>*TE*, 47. *TDE*, 30–31.

<sup>113</sup>*BN*, 224. *EN*, 201.

stood, if, as Sartre says, "... consciousness suddenly produces itself on the pure reflective level."<sup>114</sup>

It is fair to ask *why* this spontaneous movement of consciousness should ever take place. Sartre provides two answers to this question. The first is simply the evidence that it does. I have argued that the experience of pure reflection is at the same time the experience of anguish, which is "an ever possible accident of our daily life."<sup>115</sup> One need only take note of Sartre's own examples in support of this claim. At the same time, this does not entirely answer the question. Even granting that the pure reflective catharsis occurs, it is not clear why it *should* or that this "accident" is one to which *any* consciousness is prone.<sup>116</sup> The answer here lies in Sartre's analysis of accessory reflection, according to which accessory reflection is not merely ineffective but impossible. The question of why the unreflective consciousness should engage in pure reflection is, in essence, another way of asking what motivates the phenomenological reduction. Sartre answers this question in *Transcendence of the Ego*: every act of consciousness "overflows" the ego. The real question is not how this comes to light but how it is *avoided*. Sartre's answer is bad faith, which also necessarily fails and for the same reasons as accessory reflection. Consciousness cannot deceive itself because

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<sup>114</sup>TE, 101. TDE, 82.

<sup>115</sup>TE, 103. TDE, 84.

<sup>116</sup>Pure reflection is, on Sartre's view, always *possible*. It is clear, however, that Sartre does not think pure reflection is a *common* experience, let alone one to be expected: "What is most frequently encountered is, I believe, people who pass calmly from the immediate to impure reflection... I can't imagine the individual going on from this to see the ontological reality of his being." (CS, 142/CDS, 90–91.) See also TE, 92/TDE, 73 and E, 91/EE, 62f.

it is *aware* of the deception. Bad faith is, in Sartre's phrase, a "*metastable*" condition,<sup>117</sup> prone to dissolve at any moment and requiring a constant (and entirely conscious) effort to maintain. Pure reflection "is at once the original form of reflection and its ideal form; it is that on whose foundation impure reflection appears... ." <sup>118</sup> Impure reflection represents a radical departure from the original consciousness of self, which remains "at the heart" of every impure reflection, the "recovery" of which remains a permanent and present possibility.<sup>119</sup>

Pure reflection appears in Sartre's work as a response to the problem of reflection which arises out of Sartre's two-fold commitment to the principle of intentionality and the irreflexivity of consciousness. The underlying question is one that is crucial not only for Sartre's own thought, but, as Sartre perceives it, for phenomenology: how is it possible to reconcile these seemingly incompatible tenets with the certainty of reflection which anchors the phenomenological enterprise? Sartre's solution is to push the question of reflection to a deeper level, to the level of being instead of knowledge. This is the deep meaning of Sartre's well-known claim that "we must abandon the primacy of knowledge if we wish to establish that knowledge."<sup>120</sup> Consciousness is prior to knowledge and consciousness of self is prior to knowledge of self. It is only at

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<sup>117</sup>*BN*, 90. *EN*, 88.

<sup>118</sup>*BN*, 218. *EN*, 202.

<sup>119</sup>It is no accident that Sartre speaks of authenticity in terms of a "self-recovery" (see, e.g., *BN*, 116 n. 9/*EN*, 111 n.1). It is a recovery in just this sense that he has in mind. This will be discussed later in more detail.

<sup>120</sup>*BN*, 10–11. *EN*, 17.

the level of knowledge, i.e., the level of *impure* reflection, that consciousness is truly irreflexive. Unreflected or *pure* consciousness is, at its core, a reflection—a presence to itself. If what is desired is a certain grasp of consciousness, what must be sought first is not knowledge of consciousness but the simple presence to itself which is the being of consciousness. Pure reflection is the bridge between being and knowledge, the means by which pre-reflective consciousness can be brought to reflection, that is, can be known. Sartre's construction of consciousness is such that the possibility of pure reflection is a permanent feature of its structure, a "lightning intuition" which might at any moment emerge out of the failure of consciousness to "capture" itself as an object of knowledge, which vain pursuit is equally a structure of consciousness.

The solution to the problem of reflection is, then, the equation of being and self-consciousness, of which pure reflection is merely a *recognition*. Bearing this in mind, it is more easily understood why it is that Sartre makes so little of pure reflection if pure reflection is in fact so crucial to his philosophy. The equation of being and self-consciousness in Sartre presents itself not only as the answer to the question of reflective certitude, but rather as the foundation of his ontology as a whole: consciousness exists *as* for-itself. And in this sense the question of pure reflection is secondary and derivative, the "by-product," as it were, of an ontological view perhaps motivated by but not confined to responding to the problem of reflection. Pure reflection as such is not the cornerstone of Sartre's ontology, which is the product of a *philosophical* but not necessarily *pure* reflection,<sup>121</sup> as demonstrated by the fact that the need for a pure

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<sup>121</sup>Sartre himself recognizes this distinction. See *TE*, 64/*TDE*, 48.

reflection is presented as a *consequence* of Sartre's ontology. The deep conclusions to be drawn from pure reflection are *moral* conclusions, with which Sartre is not unconcerned, but are not the substance of his early work. We must then take Sartre at his word when he repeatedly claims that "this is not the place" for a discussion of pure reflection, for indeed it is not. It is a different thing to grasp *that* consciousness is a pure spontaneity (which is the project of Sartre's early work) than to grasp consciousness *as* a pure spontaneity (which is the role of pure reflection). The *philosophical* work to be done by pure reflection is "on the ethical plane."<sup>122</sup> In postponing a fuller account of pure reflection to a future, ethical, discussion, Sartre is not in bad faith.

There is, however, another line of response to Sartre's silence on the question of pure reflection. I have argued that much of the confusion with which Sartre's commentators encounter the problem of pure reflection and his ethics in general stems from a lack of appreciation for the fundamentally phenomenological nature of his thought. What seems obscure to the modern analytic philosopher might have seemed less so to one steeped in French phenomenology. Perhaps more than most historical figures in philosophy, Sartre has been interpreted with little regard for the intellectual climate in which he wrote. That climate was for Sartre, and one presumes his audience, Husserlian phenomenology. At the same time, recognizing that Sartre departs from Husserl in important ways, the question of the background against which Sartre wrote and the influences to which he was beholden is far from closed. The question can be posed as a two-sided one: if the notion of pure reflection was not derived wholly from Husserl,

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<sup>122</sup>BN, 798. EN, 722.



from where did it derive? And what, if anything, in the common intellectual currency of Sartre's time might excuse the swiftness with which he deals with pure reflection? The answer lies in the work of Karl Jaspers and Henri Bergson, the former who had a powerful influence on Sartre, the latter on all of France.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BERGSON, INTUITION, AND THE FUNDAMENTAL SELF

In the problems the philosopher has stated we recognize the questions that were being discussed around him. In the solutions he gives to them we think we recognize, arranged or disarranged, but only slightly modified, the elements of previous or contemporary philosophies. Such a view must have been given to him by this one, another has been suggested by someone else. With what we read, heard and learned we could doubtless reproduce most of what he did. We therefore set to work, we go back to the sources, we weigh the influences, we extract the similitudes, and in the end, we distinctly see in the doctrine what we were looking for: a more or less original synthesis of the ideas among which the philosopher lived.<sup>1</sup>

It is unquestionable (although often overlooked) that the most important and most direct influence on Sartre's thought was Husserl. And while it is true that Sartre cannot be well understood apart from Husserl's influence, it has been made plain in the previous discussion that Sartre can likewise not be understood as a mere disciple of Husserl. It is not only the case that Sartre explicitly and frequently differs with Husserl in his writings. That portion of Husserl's terminology and philosophical agenda which Sartre does adopt diverges at times quite radically from Husserl in its Sartrean form. The problem of reflection to which the notion of pure reflection speaks is at heart a Husserlian problem. The solution which pure reflection represents is not, however, a Husserlian one. Thus it is not to Husserl that we must look for the genesis and illumination of Sartre's concept of pure reflection. If we take to heart the position taken by

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<sup>1</sup>Henri Bergson, "Philosophical Intuition," chap. in *The Creative Mind*, trans. by Mabelle Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 127.

Bergson in the passage quoted above, we should be led to wonder which ideas they are that find their synthesis in Sartre's pure reflection and to whom those ideas belonged. And in keeping with the spirit of that passage, in answer to that question we must look to the ideas among which Sartre lived.

Alongside of the purely historical question of the origins of Sartre's notion, there is the question of Sartre's reticence to discuss pure reflection at greater length. The matter is certainly curious, given the importance of the role which pure reflection plays, both as an epistemological solution and a bridge to what Sartre considers the truly ethical. Coupled with Sartre's obvious lack of shyness about explaining himself at length (to which *Being and Nothingness* itself bears ample witness), it becomes all the more difficult to explain Sartre's relative silence on the topic of pure reflection. There are two obvious responses to give. The first is that Sartre failed to explain the notion fully for the reason that the notion was not fully developed. This is, in general, the line of response that Sartre's commentators have taken, although there are several perspectives which one might take. There are many who have taken it that pure reflection is an *ad hoc* notion which serves only to mark the locations where Sartre's train of thought breaks down. There are others who have maintained that Sartre merely postponed the full development of his concept for a later, ethical, discussion to which he never in fact returned. The first interpretation is adequately refuted by the argument of the previous chapter. And while there is certainly a degree of truth to the second, it does not account for the liberty with which Sartre employs pure reflection *as if* his meaning would be understood.

The second main line of response, which has not been forwarded before, is that Sartre's assumption of comprehension on the part of his readers was a justified one. That is, that Sartre's reference to pure reflection appealed to a concept in general intellectual currency which his readers would have recognized without further explanation, that pure reflection was a notion closely aligned with the "ideas among which the philosopher lived."

The ideas which surrounded the early Sartre can be quite clearly divided into two philosophical schools. On the one hand, the neo-Kantianism of the schools perhaps best personified in Léon Brunschvicg, and on the other, the intuitionism of Henri Bergson.<sup>2</sup> The importance of Brunschvicg's philosophy and of Léon Brunschvicg himself should not be understated. It was neo-Kantianism which dominated the syllabus of the *classe de philosophie* and Brunschvicg in person who presided over the *jury d'agrégation* before which aspiring teachers of philosophy (including Sartre) had to pass.<sup>3</sup> It was this neo-Kantian rationalism in which Sartre was steeped by his education, and against which he (along with many others of his generation) was quick to react.

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<sup>2</sup>Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, vol. 2, *Phaenomenologia*, 6 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 398–399.

<sup>3</sup>Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 6.

... To know is to eat. After a hundred years of academicism, French philosophy remains at that point. We have all read Brunschvicg, Lalande, and Meyerson, we have all believed that the spidery mind trapped things in its web, covered them with a white spit and slowly swallowed them, reducing them to its own substance. What is a table, a rock, a house? A certain assemblage of “contents of consciousness,” a class of such contents. O digestive philosophy! ... The simplest and plainest among us vainly looked for something solid, something not just mental, but would encounter everywhere only a soft and very genteel mist: themselves.<sup>4</sup>

This “academicism” was to Sartre as scholasticism was to Descartes: a point of reaction, a view against which to stand. And it was in reaction to what Sartre saw as the shortcomings of the dominant view of the schools that he enthusiastically embraced the thought of Husserl as he ultimately did.

Equally pervasive, however, was the philosophy of Henri Bergson. If neo-Kantianism dominated the academy, it was Bergson who dominated French intellectual life as a whole, exercising its influence as much through literature as through academic philosophy.<sup>5</sup> The extent and depth of Bergson’s impact on French intellectual life is difficult to exaggerate, as is well-illustrated in the opening passages of Edouard Le Roy’s *The New Philosophy of Henri Bergson*, which was itself to become a widely-read popular introduction to Bergson:

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<sup>4</sup>Sartre, “Intentionality,” 4. Idem, “Intentionnalité,” 29.

<sup>5</sup>Spiegelberg, *Phenomenological Movement*, 99. On Bergson’s influence on French literature, see Anthony Pilkington, *Bergson and His Influence: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.)

There is a thinker whose name is to-day on everybody's lips, who is deemed by acknowledged philosophers worthy of comparison with the greatest, and who, with his pen as well as his brain, has overleapt all technical obstacles, and won himself a reading both outside and inside the schools. Beyond any doubt and by common consent, Mr. Henri Bergson's work will appear to future eyes among the most characteristic, fertile, and glorious of our era... . Twenty years have sufficed to make its results felt far beyond traditional limits: and now its influence is alive and working from one pole of thought to the other... .<sup>6</sup>

“... In the eyes of Europe's educated public, he was clearly *the* philosopher, the intellectual spokesman *par excellence* of the era.”<sup>7</sup> Bergson's thought enjoyed its greatest popularity following the publication of *Creative Evolution* in 1907, but remained widely influential throughout the 1920's–30's, and was not to fade completely from the intellectual scene until after the Second World War.<sup>8</sup>

If there is a “common denominator” between Sartre and his audience, it is Bergson and perhaps only Bergson whose philosophy was broadly assimilated enough into French intellectual life to serve as a common conceptual background and to bear reference without mention. In light of this philosophical climate, it would be surprising if we did *not* find Bergsonian themes in Sartre's work, and in the particular case of pure reflection, the affinity between Sartre and Bergson is apparent. The Bergsonian notion which pure reflection recalls is that of intuition.

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<sup>6</sup>Edouard Le Roy, *The New Philosophy of Henri Bergson*, trans. Vincent Benson (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1913), 1–2. The French edition appeared in 1912 (see bibliography for complete reference).

<sup>7</sup>Leszek Kolokowski, *Bergson*, Past Masters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1 and 110.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. See also: Marvin Farber, ed., *Philosophic Thought in France and the United States: Essays Representing Major Trends in Contemporary French and American Philosophy*, 2d ed., enlarged (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1968), 35–36.

## BERGSONIAN INTUITION

There are, according to Bergson,

... two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies that we move round the object; the second, that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on any point of view nor relies on any symbol. The first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the *relative*; the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the *absolute*.<sup>9</sup>

The first is the method of analysis, the second of intuition.<sup>10</sup> In analysis, we reduce the object to elements which are already known, taking “snapshots,” as it were, of the object from a variety of points of view which we then compare to other objects that we believe we know already.

Analysis, then, is a process of *translation*, the expression of a thing “as a function of something other than itself.”<sup>11</sup> Analysis, at best, arrives at a *symbolic* representation, a series of perspectives which stand for the object analyzed but contain none of the reality of the object itself. While analysis represents its object, it necessarily fails to capture it:

In its eternally unsatisfied desire to embrace the object around which it is compelled to turn, analysis multiplies without end the number of its points of view in order to complete its always incomplete representation, and ceaselessly varies its symbols that it may perfect the always imperfect translation. It goes on, therefore, to infinity.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, if (to take an example from Bergson) we were to take a series of photographs of a town from every possible point of view, they would never be equivalent to the town itself. The object “itself” in this sense is given only in *intuition*.

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<sup>9</sup>Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 2d ed, authorized trans. by T. E. Hulme, with an introduction by Thomas Goudge, Library of Liberal Arts, 10 (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), 21. Hereafter referred to as *IM*.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

“By intuition is meant the kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible.”<sup>13</sup> Intuition apprehends the object *from the point of view of the object*. This point of view Bergson terms the *absolute*. “... The absolute, which is the object and not its representation, the original and not its translation, is perfect, by being wholly what it is.”<sup>14</sup> The absolute, that is, coincides with itself. A character in a novel, to take another example, can be described by means of any number of traits, words, and actions which lead me to a sense of his character and personality, but which will never reproduce the experience of *being* that character. Were it possible to *identify* with the character,

the character would be given to me all at once, in its entirety, and the thousand incidents which manifest it, instead of adding themselves to the idea and so enriching it, would seem to me, on the contrary, to detach themselves from it, without, however, exhausting it or impoverishing its essence.<sup>15</sup>

The traits which describe the character are points of view from which he is observed, but only as he is observed from *without*. From the *character's* point of view, his traits are not elements which *compose* him but rather incidents which take place *around* him. What remains, abstracting his observable traits, is “that which is properly himself, that which constitutes his essence, cannot be perceived from without, being internal by definition, nor be expressed by symbols, being incommensurable with everything

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 22.



else.”<sup>16</sup> The absolute is the character as he is and not as he is observed, and “coincidence alone would give me the absolute.”<sup>17</sup> It is in this sense that intuition “enters into” the object. In intuition we coincide with the object. We do not so much *observe* it as *participate* in it.

There is much here which recalls Sartre’s account of pure reflection. Bergson’s distinction between analysis and intuition roughly parallels Sartre’s distinction between impure and pure reflection. In analysis, as in impure reflection, the object is observed from without, and *for that reason* necessarily fails to grasp the object as it is. Indeed, analysis and impure reflection share the same shortcoming: in both cases, the method of observation involves the taking of “points of view” (Sartre’s *Abschattungen*) of which the object itself is the ideal and infinite unity that our observation never captures completely and never as it actually is. Where analysis renders a symbolic representation of the object, accessory reflection delivers the ego which represents, imperfectly, the consciousness to which it belongs. Which is to say impure reflection apprehends consciousness in terms of something *other than what it is*, namely, the ego, just as analysis “translates” its object into terms which the object resembles but do not properly belong to the object itself.

The language in which Bergson couches his description of intuition is equally striking in its similarity to Sartre’s account of pure reflection. Intuition, like pure

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

reflection, delivers the object “all at once” and “in its entirety.”<sup>18</sup> In intuition the “observing” consciousness *coincides* with the object—is the object—and captures the object as it is in (and more importantly *to*) itself. Pure reflection is pure precisely because the object (reflected consciousness) and the observer (consciousness reflected) are identical. The relation is an *internal* one. And the momentary *Erlebnisse* which in impure reflection compose the “person” who is reflected on, from the point of view of a pure reflection “detach” themselves from the reflecting consciousness and appear as “pure spontaneities,” just as the “traits” of the character in Bergson’s example. The term “absolute” itself, which for Bergson is the perspective of intuition, reappears in Sartre as the viewpoint of pure reflection in which “the appearance is the absolute.”<sup>19</sup>

Striking as these similarities are, one might be slow to credit them to Bergson’s influence on Sartre in the absence of independent reasons to believe such an influence existed. That Sartre was familiar with Bergson’s work could be surmised simply from Bergson’s prominence on the intellectual horizon, but is evidenced by his frequent references to Bergson throughout his work, including extended discussions of Bergson on images and consciousness in *Imagination: A Psychological Critique*.<sup>20</sup> The connection between Bergson and Sartre, however, can be formulated still more strongly.

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. *BN*, 729/*EN*, 658.

<sup>19</sup>*TE*, 101. *TDE*, 81.

<sup>20</sup>See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Imagination: A Psychological Critique*, trans. with an introduction by Forrest Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 37–64. Idem, *L’Imagination*, *Nouvelle Encyclopédie philosophique* (Paris: Library Félix Alcan, 1936), 41–71.

Sartre's first encounter with Bergson was at a very young age and was, by Sartre's own account, what initially inspired him to pursue a philosophical career:

My ambition was to become a professor of literature. Then I came across a book by Henri Bergson [viz., *Time and Free Will*] in which he describes in a concrete way how time is experienced in one's mind. I recognized the truth of this in myself. A little later I discovered "phenomenology." That is, I learned that one could talk in a concrete way about any subject whatever...<sup>21</sup>

His interest in Bergson continued throughout his formal education, only well after which was he to "discover" phenomenology.<sup>22</sup> Sartre's interest in Bergson thus significantly antedates his interest in phenomenology, and while Sartre takes frequent issue with Bergson (as he does with Husserl) throughout his work, he was never to repudiate Bergsonism as he repudiated neo-Kantian idealism. If we say that Husserl's influence on Sartre was decisive, we must say that Bergson's influence on Sartre was formative.

While Bergson's influence on existentialism in general has to some degree been recognized and discussed,<sup>23</sup> his specific influence on Sartre's thought has not. While

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<sup>21</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, "A Candid Conversation," interview in *Playboy* 12 (May 1965), 70. By Sartre's recollection, he was sixteen at the time. See also Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, trans. Anna Cancogni, ed. Norman McAfee (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 57.

<sup>22</sup>See Cohen-Solal, 91. Sartre received his *agrégation* in 1929, and was not to learn of Husserl until 1932 (ibid.). See also Jean-Paul Sartre, "An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre," interview by Michel Rybalka, Oreste Pucciani, and Susan Gruenheck, in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, Library of Living Philosophers, 26 (La Salle [Ill.]: Open Court Press, 1981), 6. (The interview itself was given in 1975.)

<sup>23</sup>See, for example, Joseph Baruzi, "Jean Hyppolite, 'Henri Bergson et l'existentialisme,'" *Etudes Bergsoniennes* 2 (1949): 208–215; Auguste Cornu, "Bergsonism and Existentialism," in *French Philosophy*, vol. 2 of *Philosophic Thought in France and the United States: Essays Representing Major Trends in Contemporary French and American Philosophy*, ed. Marvin Farber, 2d ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1968), 164–183; Jean Hyppolite, "Du Bergsonisme à l'existentialisme," *Mercure de France* no. 1031 (July 1948): 403–416; Henri Mougín, "The French Origin of Existentialism," trans. H. F. Mins, Jr., *Science and Society* 11 (Spring 1947): 127–143, esp. 128–130; and Jacques Taminaux, "De Bergson à la phénoménologie existentielle," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 54 (February 1956): 26–85.

this is not the place for such a study, it is significant to point out the *manner* in which Bergson so strongly affected Sartre, namely, as a *psychologist*:

I ... read Bergson's *Essay sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, and it was certainly that which abruptly made me want to do philosophy. In that book I found the description of what I believed to be my psychological life. I was struck by it, and it became a subject for me on which I reflected at great length. I decided that I would study philosophy, considering it at that point to be simply a methodological description of man's inner states, of his psychological life...<sup>24</sup>

That is, it was Bergson's account of the inner states of consciousness and the way that they might be accounted for that had a profound effect on Sartre, which was to be the subject-matter of so much of Sartre's early work and in particular of the questions in which we are interested here:

What struck me was the immediate data of consciousness... . From then on, I was interested in the data of consciousness, in the study of what went on inside my head, in the way ideas are formed, how feelings appear, disappear, and so on. In Bergson I found reflections on duration, consciousness, what a state of consciousness was, and the like, and that certainly influenced me a great deal.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, in addition to Bergson's general influence in the development of Sartre's thought, we can point to a specific influence along the lines which lead to the questions of the apprehension of states of consciousness, reflection, and ultimately, pure reflection. In light of these considerations the similarities we find between Bergson's thoughts on intuition and Sartre's thoughts on reflection appear less coincidental and more worthy of serious consideration. A closer examination of Bergson reveals that the similarity is more than a superficial one. Bergson's and Sartre's accounts at

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<sup>24</sup>“An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre,” interview by Michel Rybalka, Oreste Pucciani, and Susan Gruenheck, in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, Library of Living Philosophers, 26 (La Salle [Ill.]: Open Court Press, 1981), 6. The interview itself was given in 1975.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

times overlap in surprising detail, and encompass not only the general sense of “immediate consciousness” but also the definition of the self.

#### THE FUNDAMENTAL SELF

There is one reality, at least, which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by simple analysis. It is our own personality flowing through time—our self which endures. We may sympathize intellectually with nothing else, but we certainly sympathize with our own selves.<sup>26</sup>

The self with which we “sympathize” in intuition is not the same self we contemplate in analytic observation, i.e., reflection. Reflection is for Bergson, as for Sartre, a matter of perception. The self perceived is a collection of material perceptions, memories, and actions intertwined with one another which together form “... a crust solidified on the surface... . They rest on the surface of my mind without being absolutely myself.”<sup>27</sup> These perceptual observations are clear and distinct but at the same time not the self. Again we find, as in Sartre, that these perceptual observations do not truly reflect the self at all:

Radiating, as they do, from within outward, they form, collectively, the surface of a sphere which tends to grow larger and lose itself in the exterior world. But if I draw myself in from the periphery towards the center, if I search in the depth of my being that which is most uniformly, most constantly, and most enduringly myself, I find an altogether different thing.<sup>28</sup>

What we find at the core is a continuous flux, a succession of states which permeate one another and which are continually in the making. This “inner life,” as Bergson terms it, defies description. It cannot be represented either by images or concepts, but is accessible solely to intuition. There are, then, two aspects of conscious

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<sup>26</sup>*IM*, 24–25.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

life, two distinct “selves,” “the one clear and precise but impersonal; the other confused, ever-changing, and inexpressible, because language cannot get hold of it without arresting its mobility or fit it into common-place forms without making it into public property.”<sup>29</sup> Bergson’s account here has much in common with Sartre’s in *Transcendence of the Ego*. Sartre describes the immediate unity of the self as “the flux of consciousness,” noting that the ego is irrational since it appears as a spontaneity which is at the same time passive.<sup>30</sup> The idea that the self (in Sartre’s case, unreflected consciousness) can only be expressed in *public* terms also appears in *Transcendence of the Ego*, where Sartre argues that “‘really to know oneself’ is invariably to take the point of view of others” and that “my emotions and states, my ego itself, cease to be my exclusive property.”<sup>31</sup> This similarity extends beyond the description of the self to the way in which the self is *lived*. Bergson, like Sartre, maintains that the “true” self is generally obscured and requires a special act of consciousness in order to “recover” it.

The “inner” self is the “fundamental” self, of which the observable (or reflected) self is merely a projection, a social representation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, authorized trans. by F. L. Pogson, Muirhead Library of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan Co., 1910), 129. Hereafter referred to as *TFW*.

<sup>30</sup>See *TE*, 60 and 79–81/*TDE*, 45 and 62.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 87 and 94.

<sup>32</sup>See *TFW*, 231.

We reach the former by deep introspection, which leads us to grasp our inner states as living things, constantly *becoming*, as states not amenable to measure... . But the moments at which we grasp ourselves are rare, and that is just why we are rarely free. The greater part of our time we live outside of ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost, a colourless shadow which pure duration projects... .<sup>33</sup>

Most of the time we content ourselves with this “shadow” of the self which is the self reflected-on, with the “symbol” in place of the “reality,” since the symbol is better suited to language and social life. At the same time, we only act autonomously if we grasp the fundamental self, since freedom is the expression of self. Each act, each conscious state, expresses the whole of the person, and a free act is the outward manifestation of the inner state of the person, i.e., expresses the person as he is grasped from *within*.<sup>34</sup> “To act freely is to recover possession of oneself and to get back into pure duration.”<sup>35</sup>

Thus the situation of the self in Bergson and Sartre is identical. On the one hand, the self is inscrutable: impossible to observe and inexpressible in language. The fundamental (i.e., unobserved) self is not a composite of clearly defined states and actions, but rather a constant flux of “becoming,” a mobile reality which cannot be made passive. What passes for the self—the self upon which we reflect and through which we understand ourselves—is in fact a distorted, incomplete, and indeed impossible representation of the “real” or “true” self which does not appear to perception at all.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>See *ibid.*, 165–166. Cf. Sartre on existential psychoanalysis: “The *principle* of this psychoanalysis is that man is a totality and not a collection. Consequently he expresses himself as a whole in even his most insignificant and most superficial behavior. In other words there is not a taste, a mannerism, or a human act which is not revealing.” (*BN*, 726/*EN*, 656.) The parallel is significant. I will return to it later.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 231–32. Bergson’s equation here of freedom with the “recovery” of the self is extremely interesting in light of Sartre’s comments about freedom and authenticity. I will return to this point in the following chapter.

On the other hand, true self-knowledge is necessary not only for philosophy but moreover for human freedom. The fundamental self is “lost” and requires “recovery” by a special act of consciousness which will grasp the self directly and with certainty. This recovery, in turn, is the prerequisite for a genuine philosophy of consciousness and genuine human freedom. The key to this recovery is for Bergson intuition and for Sartre pure reflection, which, as I have just shown, proceed in similar ways.

These obvious parallels, I suggest, are not coincidental but rather represent a direct and deep-seated Bergsonian influence in Sartre’s thought. Indeed, those aspects of Sartre’s view which appear as a non-sequitur in a Husserlian context—e.g., the notion of self-recovery and an egoless self—follow directly from a Bergsonian view. We find no counterpart for pure reflection in Husserl; we find a clear and compelling one in Bergson. Whereas pure reflection is a response to a Husserlian problem, it is a response which is framed in Bergsonian terms or at least along Bergsonian lines. Thus, while the problem of reflection must be understood in terms of Husserl, the solution must be understood in terms of Bergson.

If we accept this view, two conclusions follow: (1) We can then account for Sartre’s relative silence on the question of pure reflection. If, as I suggest, what Sartre means by pure reflection is an adaptation of Bergsonian intuition, this connection would have been obvious and immediately understood by Sartre’s readers. Intuition was a centerpiece of Bergson’s philosophy, and Bergson’s philosophy, as I have pointed out, was the centerpiece of French intellectual life. The notion of “intuition” would have been a commonplace, an allusion to which could legitimately and not surprisingly



have been made without significant comment or explanation. Moreover and perhaps more significantly, (2) if pure reflection is to a certain degree an analogue of intuition, Bergson's account of intuition should, to the same degree, illuminate pure reflection. That is, we should find in Bergson's description of the workings of intuition a rudimentary model for pure reflection. Sartre provides no such model; Bergson does. Bergson's discussion of the "intellectual effort" involved in conceptualizing intuition suggests a possible way of understanding how it is that the "lightning intuition" of Sartre's pure reflection can amount to conceptual self-understanding.

#### INTUITION AND INTELLECTUAL EFFORT

... There are two intellectual functions, the one the inverse of the other, for mind thinks mind only in climbing back up the slope of habits acquired in contact with matter... Is it not better to designate by another name a function which is certainly not what one ordinarily calls intelligence? I call it intuition. It represents the attention that the mind gives to itself, over and above, while it is fixed upon matter, its object. This supplementary attention can be methodically cultivated and developed.<sup>36</sup>

Which is to say, in Sartrean terms, that intuition is a non-positional consciousness.<sup>37</sup> The question which arises is how this non-positional consciousness, this attention that the mind gives to itself, becomes conceptualized. That is, given that intuition is not the

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<sup>36</sup>Henri Bergson, "Introduction II: The Stating of Problems," chapter in idem., *The Creative Mind*, 92.

<sup>37</sup>Of course, the idea of a non-positional consciousness is equally a Husserlian one. The similarity between Bergson and Husserl on this point, and in general concerning the emphasis on the immediate data of consciousness, has not been overlooked. Husserl is said to have proclaimed on hearing of Bergson's philosophy: "we are the true Bergsonians" (Jean Héring, "La Phénoménologie il y a trente ans," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 1 (1939), 368). The affinities are obvious and in part account for the readiness with which phenomenology was accepted in France (Spiegelberg, 399). It seems improbable that they were lost on Sartre. See also: Gaston Berger, "La Progrès de la réflexion chez Bergson et chez Husserl," in *Henri Bergson: Essais et témoignages*, ed. Albert Béguin and Pierre Thévenaz, Les Cahiers du Rhône (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1943), 257–371; J. de Marneffe, "Bergson's and Husserl's Concepts of Intuition," *Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1960): 169–180; and Mario Sancipriano, "The Activity of Consciousness: Husserl and Bergson," *Analectica Husserliana* 3 (1974): 161–167.

“normal” mode of self-consciousness, how does it come to be that we direct our attention on *this* aspect rather than any other, how does the attention of the mind “over and above” its consciousness of objects become the object of consciousness, and how it is that *this* mode of self-consciousness becomes our mode of self-understanding?

Here the single aim of the philosopher should be to promote a certain effort, which in most men is usually fettered by habits of mind more useful to life. . . . We shall gradually accustom consciousness to a particular and clearly-defined disposition—that precisely which it must adopt in order to appear to itself as it really is, without any veil. But then, consciousness must at least consent to make the effort.<sup>38</sup>

Which is to say that the intuition of the fundamental self is not sufficient—intuitive consciousness of the self must be *cultivated*, a certain *disposition* developed, which development requires an intellectual effort.

It is not enough, that is, to obtain an intuitive grasp of the self. This grasp must be incorporated into our general self-understanding by a process which is not automatic. Here again we find a parallel with Sartre, for whom the spontaneous eruption of a pure reflection does not in itself account for the moral “conversion” to which pure reflection ideally leads. Pure reflection is not tantamount to authenticity, although authenticity depends on pure reflection. The transition between an act of reflection and a “way of being” is not clear in Sartre. Indeed, it is not clear in what way anything whatsoever follows from a singular act of pure reflection. For a pure reflective experience to be *productive* in this sense, the experience must, one assumes, be cultivated in a manner similar to the cultivation of intuition in Bergson.

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<sup>38</sup>*IM*, 27–28.

It would seem, from what has been said above, that the cultivation of intuition amounts to an attitude of *receptivity*. But this is not the case. Our “natural attitude” (although this is not Bergson’s term) is the analytic attitude which professes, futilely, “... to reconstruct reality—which is tendency and consequently mobility—with percepts and concepts whose function is to make it stationary.”<sup>39</sup> Although one might say that we are naturally in the intuitive attitude—since intuition is the point of view from within and we are by definition inside ourselves—this is only to say that intuition is always a possibility. To become *aware* of this immediate knowledge of ourselves, to bring intuition to consciousness, requires the explicit *rejection* of the analytic point of view in practice. Our mind

... can place itself within the mobile reality, and adopt its ceaselessly changing direction; in short, can grasp it by means of that *intellectual sympathy* which we call intuition. This is extremely difficult. The mind has to do violence to itself, has to reverse the direction of the operation by which it habitually thinks, has perpetually to revise, or rather to recast, all its categories. But in this way it will attain to fluid concepts, capable of following reality in all its sinuosities and of adopting the very movement of the inward life of things.<sup>40</sup>

In other words, to accrue the benefits of that intellectual sympathy in which we of necessity are with ourselves, an *effort* must be made to bring our thinking into line with our intuitive grasp.

Pure reflection is very much like intuition in this regard, in that pure reflection is the “original” form of reflection, conceptually prior to accessory reflection, and to that degree we always purely reflect, although only on occasion do we become aware of

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<sup>39</sup>*IM*, 50–51.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

it.<sup>41</sup> Yet these momentary “flashes” of pure reflective intuition (which appear as anguish) in themselves are not enlightening. In order for pure reflection to lend itself to a conceptual *understanding* of the self, our pure reflections must be “taken to heart,” i.e., made part of our everyday self-concept. We must, as Bergson says, “reverse the normal operation” of thought, at least insofar as it concerns the self. Recall here Sartre’s claim in the *Emotions*: I am not angry because it is hateful, it is hateful because I am angry.<sup>42</sup> One must, in short, make a *practice* of pure reflection. This practice of pure reflection is what Sartre will call authenticity, to which I will return at greater length in the closing chapter.

It is worth pointing out here, however, that to identify authenticity with the practice or cultivation of pure reflection is already to extend Sartre’s own account. Taking Bergson’s intuition as a loose model for pure reflection, we can extend the account still further. Of intuition Bergson says:

... There is nothing mysterious in this faculty. Every one of us has had occasion to exercise it to a certain extent. Any one of us, for instance, who has attempted literary composition, knows that when the subject has been studied at length, the materials all collected, and the notes all made, something more is needed to set about the work of composition itself ... an impulse, after which we need only let ourselves go. This impulse, once received, starts the mind on a path where it rediscovers all the information it has collected, and a thousand other details besides; develops and analyzes itself into terms which could be enumerated indefinitely. The further we go, the more terms we discover ... and yet, if we turn back suddenly upon the impulse that we feel behind us, and try to seize it, it is gone; for it was not a thing but the direction of a movement, and though indefinitely extensible, it is infinitely simple.<sup>43</sup>

The fundamental self reveals itself in intuition as an impulse which is not a drive or motivation but a “direction of movement” which cannot be made stationary (as a

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<sup>41</sup>That is, we always reflect purely to the extent that pure reflection is non-thetic consciousness of self.

<sup>42</sup>See *E*, 91. *EE*, 62.

<sup>43</sup>*IM*, 60–61.

concept or thing) but must rather be captured “in motion.” To return to “pure duration” (which is the standpoint of the fundamental self) is to “let go,” i.e., to remain aware of ourselves in motion without attempting to freeze the movement. This, then, is to be the outcome of the intellectual effort of recovery, the “violent reversal” of our ordinary process of thought: a view of the self as a ceaseless motion, which is not and cannot be made static nor captured in static terms.

This notion of recovery will also carry over to Sartre, for whom the unreflected consciousness is a “spontaneity,” a “wind blowing toward objects,” and for whom the substance of morality will be to recognize and acquiesce to this fundamental spontaneity of consciousness.<sup>44</sup> It is here perhaps most of all that we will discover the interpretive fruits of the Bergsonian strain in Sartre’s thought. It is not accurate to say that Sartre’s notion of pure reflection is a simple appropriation of Bergson’s intuition. The notions are not interchangeable. There is, however, sufficient affinity between them to allow us to conclude that the coincidence is not accidental and that the direction which Bergson’s notion takes serves as a guide for the direction which Sartre’s notion takes. The extent of Bergson’s influence on Sartre is a historical question which the facts of Sartre’s biography and the details of the texts suggest was substantial. The degree to which this allows us to advance our interpretation of Sartre can be measured only by the success of the interpretation—whether the importation of Bergsonian concepts makes sense of Sartre’s text. I have argued here that with respect to pure reflection it

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<sup>44</sup>In particular, the idea that the standpoint of the fundamental self is one of “letting go” will be clearly revisited in Sartre’s notion of “play,” which is an extremely significant moral notion for Sartre, but nevertheless difficult to understand by itself.

does. It will be part of my argument in the final chapter that the recognition of Sartre's debt to Bergson will clarify Sartre's moral thinking as well.

If it is true that pure reflection is not a Husserlian notion, it is equally true that it is not entirely a Bergsonian notion, either. To the extent that pure reflection is a synthesis of the ideas among which Sartre lived, it makes sense to wonder what other elements Sartre drew upon in its formulation. In the catalog of figures whose influence on Sartre was substantial, alongside Husserl and Bergson there is another whose impact on Sartre is less well recognized but no less well established. That figure is Karl Jaspers, in whose psychology Sartre discovered the idea of "understanding," which has as much in common with pure reflection as Bergson's intuition does.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### JASPERS AND UNDERSTANDING

Phenomenology presents us with a series of isolated fragments broken out from a person's total psychic *experience*. Other studies present us with data of a different order, e.g., psychological performances, somato-psychic events, expressive gestures, psychotic actions and inner worlds. How are all these various data to be related? In some cases the meaning is clear and we understand directly how *one psychic event emerges from another*. This mode of understanding is only possible with psychic events... . In phenomenology we scrutinize a number of qualities or states and the understanding that accompanies this has a *static* quality. But in this question of connectedness, we grasp a psychic perturbation, a psyche in motion, a psychic connection, the actual emergence of one thing from another. Here our understanding has a *genetic* quality.<sup>1</sup>

The lingering question about pure reflection can be put in this way: in what manner does pure reflection constitute an *understanding*, and in particular a *moral* understanding? In other words, in what way does the “thematization” of pure reflection discussed in chapter two (see p. ff.) take place? If, that is, pure reflection is characterized as a presence to self which does not constitute knowledge since it posits no object, how can this presence to self be made *itself* an object of consciousness and therefore *become* knowledge? In the previous chapter it was argued that there is a “practice” of pure reflection, that pure reflection must in some sense be “cultivated” and incorporated into our self-understanding. If pure reflection is to function as moral reflection, it is necessary that the experience of pure reflection have moral implications, that certain *conclusions* be drawn from what is revealed in pure reflection. But

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, trans. J. Hoenig and Marian Hamilton (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1963), 27. Hereafter referred to as *GP*.

pure reflection is never more than a “quasi-knowledge,” a consciousness which affirms nothing and teaches nothing. Pure reflection itself is inarticulate. It has already been pointed out that Sartre’s reservation of the term “knowledge” for the presence of consciousness to an object makes it difficult to articulate the sense in which pure reflection lends itself to *cognition* (see p. ). Clearly, what Sartre has in mind is a *special* type of cognition, perhaps reserved only to pure reflection, which allows us to grasp the content of the pre-reflective *cogito* and incorporate that content into our concept of ourselves, but which avoids positing the self as an object and therefore does not constitute self-“knowledge.” Bergson’s intuition provides a partial model for this “special” cognition. We find another, perhaps more suitable, one in Jaspers, namely, the concept of *Verstehen*.<sup>2</sup>

#### UNDERSTANDING

In order to be clear we shall keep the expression ‘*understanding*’ (Verstehen) solely for the understanding of psychic events ‘from within’. The expression will never be used for the appreciation of objective causal connections, which as we have said can only be seen ‘from without’. For these we shall reserve the expression ‘*explanation*’ (Erklären).<sup>3</sup>

Understanding arises in Jaspers as the opposite of causal explanation. “These represent totally different, ultimate sources of knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> “Explanation” is always causal explanation: the drawing from observation of certain connections which are taken to be

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<sup>2</sup>Jaspers’ term *Verstehen* is variously translated “understanding,” “comprehension,” and “intuition.” Its meaning in Jaspers’ usage is not entirely captured by any of these terms, lying somewhere in between them. I have chosen to use “understanding” here for the sake of consistency with the translators of *General Psychopathology*, who reserve “comprehend” for the German *Begreifen*, a slightly broader concept that Jaspers on occasion uses synonymously with *Verstehen*.

<sup>3</sup>*GP*, 28.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*



necessary. The relations uncovered by “understanding” are relations of *meaning* in which no causal link is necessarily evident. Thus, the recognition of a connection between fatigue and deterioration of performance is an explanation in Jaspers’ sense.<sup>5</sup> At the same time we can *understand* how the one who is tired does not work as quickly. There are two senses, however, to understanding. “The *static mode* denotes the presentation to oneself of psychic states, the objectifying to oneself of psychic qualities.”<sup>6</sup> This is the standpoint of phenomenology. In Sartrean terms, it is the standpoint of accessory reflection. In *static* understanding we grasp the *psyche*: a collection of states and qualities. “The *genetic mode*,” on the other hand, is “that of empathy, of perceiving the meaning of psychic connections and the emergence of one psychic phenomenon from another.”<sup>7</sup>

What is understood in genetic understanding is not the psychic state but how it is that the psychic state comes about, without necessarily being able to point to a relationship of cause and effect:

Psychic events ‘emerge’ out of each other in a way which we understand. Attacked people become angry and spring to the defence, cheated persons grow suspicious. The way in which such an emergence takes place is understood by us, *our understanding is genetic*. Thus we understand psychic reactions to experience, we understand the development of passion, the growth of an error, the content of delusion and dream; we understand the effects of suggestion, an abnormal personality in its own context or the inner necessities of someone’s life.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ludwig Lefebre, “The Psychology of Karl Jaspers,” in *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, augmented ed., ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, Library of Living Philosophers (La Salle [Ill.]: Open Court Publishing Co., 1981), 475–76.

<sup>6</sup>*GP*, 27.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 302–303.

Genetic understanding is thus not a matter of observation, scientific or phenomenological, but a grasping of the psychological situation as it is lived from within and not as it appears from without. As such, genetic understanding (which from now on I will call simply “understanding”) is a special sort of cognition, which is neither perceptual nor strictly-speaking conceptual since no static idea of the psyche is formed. It is rather an *empathic* cognition, a “standing-within” the psychic situation which in some sense involves imagination (since I place myself in the situation of another) but is not itself imaginative, since it is not the situation itself which is the object of my understanding but how the situation lends itself to certain psychic events.

While the notion of understanding is not in the first instance a reflective one, but rather a means of understanding *others*, the cognitive model which understanding presents lends itself to the discussion of pure reflection. If the understanding gleaned from accessory reflection is a static one, the understanding gleaned from pure reflection is genetic, in which we grasp a psyche in motion and not in terms of static qualities and states, and in which what is grasped is the *emerging* of psychic events. Most importantly, what understanding offers is a model of non-perceptual cognition of the self which is nevertheless *articulate*. We can draw conclusions from our understanding. Understanding *is* knowledge, although knowledge of a very different sort.

Sartre encountered Jaspers' psychology in 1927, and the notion of understanding in particular had a powerful effect on him.<sup>9</sup> In her memoirs, Simone de Beauvoir reports that

what interested him above all was people. He wanted to replace the dry-as-dust analytical psychology taught at the Sorbonne with a concrete, hence synthetic, *apprehension* of individuals. He stumbled on this notion in Jaspers, whose monograph *Psychopathology* (1913) had been translated into French in 1927: he and Nizan had read proof for the French edition. Against the causal etiology employed by science, Jaspers set up a different method of thought: this did not rest on any universal principle, but worked through independent connections between isolated sets of facts, relying on intuitive guesses which had more emotion than logic about them, and which were presented as self-evident, irrefutable truths. Jaspers defined and justified his system as a new departure in the field of phenomenology. Sartre knew nothing about this brand of philosophical thought, but the notion of "apprehension" stuck in his mind, and now he was trying to apply it.<sup>10</sup>

We see re-emphasized here the same concern with psychology which marked Sartre's first encounter with Bergson (see p. ). His view of philosophy as a primarily *psychological* endeavor is evident in his early works (which are until *Being and Nothingness* entirely devoted to psychological questions) and permeates *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre's first encounter with Husserl's phenomenology did not take place until 1932.<sup>11</sup> The question of the origins of Sartre's notion of pure reflection is in large part a question of the influences under which Sartre worked before that time, which is to say, the ideas Sartre brought to his reading of Husserl which would account for the

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<sup>9</sup>Jaspers had nothing like Bergson's widespread influence on France. For a discussion of Jaspers' reception in France, see: Jean Wahl, "Karl Jaspers en France," *Critique*, no. 25 (June 1948): 521–530. Jaspers' influence on Sartre has gone entirely unnoticed by Sartre's critics, but as the following pages will show, it was significant.

<sup>10</sup>Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1962), 39. The translation of Jaspers mentioned is *Psychopathologie générale*, trans. from the third German edition by A. Kastler and J. Mendousse (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1927). The word which is translated here as "apprehension" is in the original "compréhension" (see idem, *La Force de l'âge*, [Paris: NRF, Gallimard, 1960], 47). The obvious translation is "comprehension." The concept in question is clearly *Verstehen*.

<sup>11</sup>Namely, through his reading of Levinas' *La Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1930). See Cohen-Solal, 91 and Sartre, "Interview," 10.

objections he would raise and in particular the solutions he would propose. Sartre the phenomenologist is an outgrowth of Sartre the psychologist. The concerns Sartre brought to Husserl were *psychological* concerns. On the one hand, Sartre's psychology reflects the influence of Bergson, whom Sartre took to be a psychologist. On the other hand, his psychology reflects the influence of Jaspers, perhaps to a lesser degree, but in a way which is of particular interest for the present discussion.

Sartre did not accept Jaspers' notion of understanding in whole, but the concept proved to be the genesis of a new direction in Sartre's thought. Again, from Simone de Beauvoir:

The concept of "apprehension," borrowed from Jaspers, we found far too vague a guide. In order to synthesize our knowledge of people without losing sight of their individual qualities, we needed a systematic plan; and this we did not possess. During these years our labors were directed toward isolating and creating such a pattern, and I believe this did more for us than any amount of reading or external advice. Sartre worked out the notion of dishonesty [*mauvaise foi*] which, according to him, embraced all those phenomena which other people attributed to the unconscious mind.<sup>12</sup>

That is, it was Sartre's psychological project to *formalize* Jaspers' notion of understanding, a project which we see carried into his ontological formulations. Regarding the psychology of others, we see this attempt emerge in the discussion of bad faith (as de Beauvoir points out) and likewise the discussion of existential psychoanalysis (to which I will return). Regarding the psychology of the self, we see no less the influence of Jaspers, for whom self-understanding amounts to a "revelation" not unlike Sartre's pure reflection.

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<sup>12</sup>De Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 106–107. Idem, *Force de l'âge*, 106. "*Mauvaise foi*" is generally translated "bad faith"—a technical notion in Sartre which the translator neglects to allude to.

## REVELATION

Self-reflection is something essentially different from knowledge. ‘To know that one knows’ is not the same thing as knowledge itself. Knowledge requires an object which will continue to exist and be available. But self-reflection is that kind of knowing which makes itself the object and changes at the same time. It never reaches, therefore, the quiet stability of a knowledge of something which continues to be as it is, that something ‘which I am’ but remains with us as a continually prodding spur.

To change our metaphor, self-reflection acts like a ferment, whereby something merely given is turned into something accepted, mere happening into history, and the sequence of life into a biography.<sup>13</sup>

Here we see revisited Sartre’s claim that reflection (i.e., pure reflection) is not knowledge. The object of reflection is essentially unlike the objects of knowledge. “Knowable” objects are durable and static; the self is not. There is reflection in the sense of self-observation, which Sartre would call accessory reflection, but in this sort of reflection, “there is a distance between myself and what I observe as an external object in myself... .”<sup>14</sup> Self-observation is merely the perception of fact, in which the phenomena of the self are viewed *externally*. The ascription of meaningful connections between these phenomena is a matter of self-*understanding*. But the attempt to understand the self in ordinary terms (i.e., as we would understand another) also fails to “capture” the self or attain the solidity of knowledge.

... Meaningful interpretation of myself is also endless and always relative. In the last resort I neither know what I am nor what moves me nor which motives are the decisive ones. Everything at all possible I can recognize within myself somewhere, hidden perhaps, but still a possibility. The mere wanting to know robs all self-understanding of its ground.<sup>15</sup>

For Jaspers, then, reflection encounters the same limitations it encounters in Sartre. The self cannot be observed. The self cannot be known. The self, moreover, cannot be

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<sup>13</sup>*GP*, 349.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 349–350.

understood, even genetically, except insofar as our attempt at understanding provides a starting point for self-revelation.

Passive self-understanding provides the medium for actual self-revelation. This occurs through profound involvement with an activity which philosophy describes as a form of inner behaviour, the absoluteness of decision; in psychology such activity eludes definition though the crises of self-understanding with all their obscurities and inversion are accessible enough.<sup>16</sup>

Much as the failure of accessory reflection can be the occasion of pure reflection in Sartre, revelation in Jaspers takes place on the occasion of a crisis in self-understanding.<sup>17</sup> This revelation requires the active participation of the self, the “taking up” or “involvement” with what is understood in reflection.

If we are mere spectators, revelation does not come to us. I am only revealed to myself by an inner activity which also transforms me. Apparent revelation, unembarrassed exposures of the inward self, lavish self-confessions, endless introspection and self-description, revelling in the observation of inner events, usually cover a lurking attempt at concealment with no intention to reveal the self. Revelation is not an objective event, like a scientific finding, but rather a form of inward behaviour, a grasp of the self, a self-election, a self-appropriation. Uninhibited expressions of what is supposed to be the brutal truth are only pseudo-honesty; the fixed nature of the assertion already carries falsity.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 350. This “crisis of self-understanding” appears in Jaspers’ later, more strictly philosophical, works in the guise of the “ultimate situation” (*Grenzsituation*). The ultimate situation is a limit which one encounters that can neither be explained nor overcome, against which one “founders” (*Scheitert*). It is this foundering which ultimately leads to self-realization and authenticity. It is interesting to note here that Jaspers’ philosophical extension of the crises of self-understanding is not entirely unlike Sartre’s. See: Jaspers’ *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, 3d ed. (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1925), ch. 3 and *Philosophy*, vol. 2, trans. E. B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), ch. 7.

<sup>17</sup>Jaspers, interestingly, makes reference here to Kierkegaard as the model for his concept of revelation. (See also Jaspers’ *Psychologie*, 419–32.) While Sartre was clearly familiar with the writings of Kierkegaard after 1939–40 (Sartre, “Interview,” 10) the degree to which he was influenced by Kierkegaard has been debated. See, e.g.: Robert Cumming, “Existence and Communication,” *Ethics* 65 (1955): 79–101; Curtis Larson, “Kierkegaard and Sartre,” *The Personalist* 35 (Spring 1954): 128–136; Regin Prenter, “Sartre’s Concept of Freedom Considered in Light of Kierkegaard’s Thought,” in *A Kierkegaard Critique: An International Selection of Essays Interpreting Kierkegaard*, ed. Howard Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (New York: Harper, 1962), 130–140; and William Shearson, *The Notion of Encounter: An Inquiry into the Nature and Structure of the Human Situation and Existential Knowledge in Existential Metaphysics* (Ottawa: Canadian Library of Philosophy, 1980).

<sup>18</sup>GP, 350.

What in Jaspers comes under the heading of “apparent revelation” in Sartre comes under the heading “bad faith,” or more properly, “sincerity” (which for Sartre is always in bad faith). Attempts to reveal the self through observation or self-reflection serve only to conceal the “actual” self, and in Jaspers as in Sartre, these attempts represent an *intentional* act of concealment. Where these attempts fall short is in the attempt to *know* the self. “Revelation comes in *being* oneself.”<sup>19</sup> Not in the sense of “being what one is,” which is for Sartre the definition of sincerity. Sincerity always ends in bad faith because sincerity always amounts to the attempt to coincide with the self *as object* which one has defined oneself to be. For Jaspers,

being oneself is never the same as being an object. What I myself actually am is never anything that can be unambiguously recognized and defined as an object. The basic relationship in being an object is the causal relationship. The basic relationship in being oneself is the relationship of the self to the self, the process of absorption, inner activity and self-determination.<sup>20</sup>

The question with which we began this chapter was the manner of cognition which pure reflection represented. We find in Jaspers’ revelation a suitable and plausible model. Pure reflection appears in Sartre as the experience of anguish, a “crisis of self-understanding” in which the self appears *not to coincide* with the self as it is (statically) understood.<sup>21</sup> The experience of anguish lends itself to an understanding which is nevertheless not knowledge, an apprehension of the self not as object but

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Which is, of course, the standpoint of the pre-reflective *cogito*. Cf. Merleau-Ponty’s “tacit cogito”: “The tacit *cogito*, the presence of oneself to oneself, being no less than existence, is anterior to any philosophy, and knows itself only on those extreme situations in which it is under threat: for example, in the dread of death or another’s gaze upon me... .” (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method [New York: Humanities Press, 1962], 404.)

“from within.” To this degree, pure reflection is a genetic understanding of the self. At the same time, this genetic understanding is *active*, a “process of absorption” not unlike the exercise of empathy through which we come to genetically understand an other. If, in Sartre’s terms, pure reflection is a “lightning intuition,” it is a lightning intuition with which we *identify*. At the level of pure reflection we *coincide* with ourselves, precisely insofar as we *fail* to coincide with the “self-as-object” given in accessory reflection. It is not surprising, then, that Sartre refers to pure reflection as a “revelation,” the object of which is to bring this revelation to its own attention:

... In the reflective revelation there is a positing of a being whose being was already a revelation. Reflection is limited to making this revelation exist for itself; the revealed being is not revealed as given but with the character of the “already revealed.” Reflection is a recognition rather than knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

To slightly rephrase, pure reflection amounts to the *acceptance* of the experience of anguish as a revelation of the self in its truest light. What is revealed is not at all an object, but rather a “situation”—a relationship between the self, its states, and its objects the origin of which is for Jaspers and for Sartre ultimately beyond understanding.

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<sup>22</sup>BN, 219. EN, 202.



## THE UNUNDERSTANDABLE

In the act of understanding psychic connections, we come up against the limits set by the ununderstandable. *In one sense* we may see this as the extra-conscious, the limit of the understandable. As the body that carries us we have to accept it in all its causal connections, as matter we have to shape it and as material possibility we have to grasp it and where it fails this simply has to be endured. *In another sense* what cannot be understood is also the source of the understandable and it thus goes beyond the understandable; it is a self-illuminating process, something becoming understandable, if only we can lay hold of it out of the unconditioned absolute of Existence itself.<sup>23</sup>

At the heart of every act of understanding, there is that which cannot be understood, which from one point of view simply represents the limit of our faculties of understanding. There is another point of view, however, from which the ununderstandable appears as the *source* of the understandable, that is, the fountain of *possibilities*. "... In relation to the ununderstandable, where this is a limiting factor that can be causally explored, psychological understanding becomes *empirical psychology*."<sup>24</sup> And from the standpoint of empirical psychology, the ununderstandable presents itself as "brute" psychological facts which serve as fundamental psychological causes but cannot be further explained. "The ununderstandable discloses itself to *causal enquiry* as instinctual drives, biological somatic facts and supposed specific extra-conscious mechanisms."<sup>25</sup> In other words, the *unconscious*. But from the *existential* point of view, the ununderstandable illuminates being itself, and this illumination constitutes *existential understanding*.

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<sup>23</sup>*GP*, 308.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

... In relation to the ununderstandable as a phenomenon of possible existence, it [psychological understanding] becomes the philosophical illumination of Existence itself. Empirical psychology affirms how something is and how it happens; the illumination of Existence through what may be possible makes its appeal to Man himself.<sup>26</sup>

Here we find the turning away from empirical psychology which had such an important impact on Sartre, the suggestion of a method of psychological understanding which is a-causal and anti-empirical, a psychology which appeals to *being* in place of mechanism. It is clear from what has been said that the unconscious is, in Jaspers' view, in the province of empirical psychology. It is not surprising, then, that Sartre's attempt to make use of Jaspers' method led him to reject the unconscious in favor of his theory of bad faith, which attempts to explain the phenomena of consciousness not in terms of the *contents* of consciousness but in terms of the relation of consciousness to itself. This thread taken from Jaspers does not exhaust itself in the notion of bad faith, however. The ununderstandable reappears in Sartre at the heart of his ontology as *being*, which, in Sartre's formulation, is *de trop*.<sup>27</sup> Being simply *is*, and cannot be further explained.

How and in what manner the ununderstandable presents itself in Sartre also closely follows Jaspers' account:

The ununderstandable *from the existential aspect* presents itself as a freedom, which discloses itself in free decisions, in a grasp of absolute meanings, and in that basic experience where the marginal situation rises from the empirical situation—that marginal point where we are roused from ordinary existence into an autonomous self-hood.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>I.e., superfluous. See *BN*, 29/*EN*, 34.

<sup>28</sup>*GP*, 308.

Thus for Jaspers as for Sartre, the ununderstandable (for Sartre, being-for-itself) is a freedom—a source of possibilities and nothing more. And again, in Jaspers and Sartre alike, it reveals itself in our free decisions. To return to Sartre’s example of the “prostitute-bride,” the young woman is anguished at her freedom to act in a manner so “unlike herself,” and it is this apprehension of her freedom which constitutes her anguish. But it is anguish that “exposes” the pre-reflective *cogito*—the experience of anguish is the experience of pure reflection. The experience of anguish is the “marginal situation” which rouses us into “autonomous self-hood.” In anguish we “understand” ourselves as free, and this understanding of freedom holds out the possibility of authenticity.

Sartre’s attraction to Jaspers is not unlike his attraction to Husserl: where Sartre took up Husserl in reaction against neo-Kantian idealism, he took up Jaspers in reaction against empirical, “scientific” psychology.<sup>29</sup> “Existential understanding” was for Jaspers an entirely different direction in psychology, the end result of which was the possibility of liberation, a theme which we see clearly and repeatedly played out in Sartre:

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<sup>29</sup>To this extent Sartre departs from Jaspers. Jaspers was careful to delineate the varieties of psychological understanding, but unlike Sartre did not reject “scientific” psychology. On the contrary, for Jaspers understanding was often the starting-point for causal investigation and real psychological understanding lay somewhere between empirical fact and Existence itself (see *GP*, 311ff.) To this extent, Sartre draws from Jaspers only selectively.

The field of empirical research has no freedom nor does it contain anything of that liberating challenge offered by the philosophical illumination of Existence proper: the challenge of validity, awareness of the absolute, of marginal situations, ultimate decisions, responsibility, and of oneself as an original source. Through the psychology of meaningful phenomena, existential illumination comes into contact with this something that goes beyond understanding, with the reality proper that lies in the possibilities of autonomous self-hood through the processes of memory, attention and revelation.<sup>30</sup>

Sartre follows Jaspers not only in the initial departure from empirical psychology, but also in the direction which that departure takes. “Existential” psychology in Jaspers takes us in the first instance to the fundamental structure of our being, but beyond and through that to the freedom, which is, existentially speaking, our original condition. Existential psychology in this sense leads to a “conversion,” what Jaspers calls “autonomous self-hood” and Sartre calls authenticity. The parallels extend at least this far: in both cases, the “authentic” is not the usual human condition, but rather lies concealed within it and is “recovered” through an unusual and exceptional act of self-recognition, which occurs in a crisis of self-understanding.

#### EMPATHY AND AUTHENTICITY

Here again, as was the case with Bergson, the facts of Sartre’s biography suggest that these parallels are not coincidental, but rather that Sartre quite consciously drew on Jaspers’ concept of understanding in formulating his own psychological theory. The direction in which Sartre took Jaspers’ notion is clear in the comparison of the texts, and is remarkably in keeping with the direction in which Jaspers took it himself. This connection explains a great deal in Sartre, some of which I have mentioned above, but in particular provides us with a more fully-developed framework within which to

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<sup>30</sup>*GP*, 308–309.

understand pure reflection. The question with which this chapter began was the question of the nature of the cognition which pure reflection delivers. If we take it that pure reflection is an analogue of Jaspers' "revelation," it is possible to provide at least a partial answer to that question. Pure reflection, like revelation, is a *recognition*, a genetic understanding of the self. What is revealed is the self as an ultimately ineffable, ultimately free source of spontaneity.

What is important here in extending Sartre's account is that for Jaspers and Sartre alike, this revelation is *not knowledge*. No new object is uncovered, and importantly, *no new beliefs are formed*. Jaspers' claim that in "apparent revelation" the "fixed nature of the assertion already carries falsity"<sup>31</sup> is in perfect keeping with Sartre's claim in *Being and Nothingness* that in bad faith "... belief, by becoming *belief for itself*, passes to the state of non-belief."<sup>32</sup> That is to say, beliefs concerning the self are by definition based on "non-persuasive evidence."<sup>33</sup> Our beliefs concerning the self insofar as they pretend to certainty are necessarily false. Pure reflection, and in the same way understanding, is distinguished from this type of reflection in that what is formed as a result is *not* a belief, i.e., a claim to knowledge, but rather an *identification*. To be more precise, to "accept" the evidence of accessory reflection or self-

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<sup>31</sup>*GP*, 350.

<sup>32</sup>*BN*, 114. *EN*, 110.

<sup>33</sup>This is true for Sartre of any belief, in that belief is *only* belief (and therefore conscious that it is not knowledge.) See *BN*, 113/*EN*, 109.

observation is to *believe* it. To accept the evidence of pure reflection or understanding is, as Jaspers puts it, to *appropriate* it.<sup>34</sup>

This admittedly vague notion is clarified greatly by analogy with *empathy*, the mechanism by which we obtain genetic understanding of others. We can, for example, *recognize* another's predicament, taking account of his situation and the causes which led to his reactions. If Pierre has fallen on the ice and is clearly in pain, we can conceptually understand, i.e., *know*, what has happened to Pierre. Reconstructing the events which led to his present state, we can give an account in terms of our belief of why Pierre is acting as he is. "Pierre has fallen and hurt himself." This is not, however, to *empathize* with Pierre, which is another kind of cognition altogether, but *a cognition nonetheless*. To empathize is not to form beliefs about the facts, but rather to place myself *within* Pierre's situation, to see the predicament from Pierre's point of view and take it, as much as is possible, as *my own*. In empathy for Pierre, I form no objective beliefs. I make no claims to knowledge or fact. Nevertheless, I *understand* Pierre in his current state.

The example is trivial but the point is not. Taking pure reflection as an extension of understanding provides a model for understanding the manner of cognition involved. While it is difficult to understand the notion of empathy with oneself (since one's situation is by definition *already* one's own), it is not difficult to see that our consciousness of pure reflection is something akin to the consciousness of empathy.

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<sup>34</sup>In Sartre's usage, to have (and hence to appropriate) is always an attempt to *be*, which is the mark of *impure* reflection. Jaspers' usage is much looser, meaning only to "take up" or "make one's own." It is Jaspers' sense that is intended here.

Empathy is not knowledge in the strict sense, but nevertheless something is “known” (i.e., one “knows” how another feels). The analogy of empathy gives substance to the otherwise insubstantial notion of “recovery,” which appears in Jaspers as “self-election” or “self-appropriation.” I have argued in chapter two that pure reflection is a species of conception (see p. ff.). This is entirely consistent with the interpretation of pure reflection as analogous to empathic understanding. Conception, recall, gives its object in its entirety, without profile, and teaches nothing. Conception *is not knowledge*. Clearly, however, pure reflection does not deliver a concept of an external object, but rather a *self*-concept. Which is to say, pure reflection delivers a concept which we “stand within,” much as we attempt to “stand within” another in empathy.

Here, finally, it is possible to make sense of the “intellectual effort” which appeared in Bergson and which I argued was likewise required with respect to pure reflection. The “intuition” of pure reflection is one thing; the “identification” with pure reflection is another. Pure reflection, that is, delivers a “flash of insight” which constitutes a moment of crisis or anguish. But this insight may or may not be taken seriously. What is important to bear in mind is that the “taking seriously” of the pure reflective intuition is not a matter of forming a judgment. Rather, it is a matter of identification or appropriation which is what is analogous to empathic understanding. It is what Sartre calls *recovery*:

If then I hike across the country, what is revealed to me is the surrounding world; this is the object of my consciousness... I have a non-positional consciousness (of) this body which signifies my engagement in the world, in the form of fatigue... But I do not yet *think* of my fatigue; I apprehend it as the quasi-object of my reflection. Nevertheless there comes a moment when I do seek to consider my fatigue and to recover it... It is not at all a contemplative apprehension of my fatigue; rather, as we saw with respect to pain, I *suffer* my fatigue. That is, a reflective consciousness is directed upon my fatigue in order to live it and to confer on it a value and a practical relation to myself. It is only on this plane that the fatigue will appear to me as bearable or intolerable. It will never be anything in itself, but it is the reflective For-itself which rising up suffers the fatigue as intolerable.<sup>35</sup>

This “recovery” of the reflection is distinct from the reflection itself. We can draw the distinction sharply: Pure reflection brings the unreflected self to consciousness. Recovery confers *value* on the object of pure reflection. To recover is to *valorize*. This valorization is for Sartre not a judgment but rather a *choice*.<sup>36</sup>

... There is, for example, a certain type of flight before facticity, a flight which consists precisely in abandoning oneself to this facticity; that is, in short, in trustingly reassuming it and loving it in order to try to recover it. This original project of recovery is therefore a certain choice which the For-itself makes of itself in the presence of the problem of being. Its project remains a nihilation, but this nihilation turns back upon the in-itself which it nihilates and expresses itself by a particular valorization of facticity. This is expressed especially by the thousands of behavior patterns called *abandon*.<sup>37</sup>

In abandon we “give ourselves over” to our experience. Not every act of recovery is an act of abandon. Nevertheless, abandon illustrates the process by which a reflective consciousness is *lived*. For Sartre, this choice is always reflective. It can be made from the perspective of accessory reflection, in which case it is not a recovery but rather bad faith. Or it can be made from the perspective of pure reflection, in which case the choice is authentic.

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<sup>35</sup>BN, 585–586. EN, 531.

<sup>36</sup>It will become clear in the following chapter that this “choice” is not a *deliberative* one.

<sup>37</sup>BN, 587. EN, 533.



It is at this juncture that Sartre's account of pure reflection gives itself over to ethics. Pure reflection is prerequisite to genuine, meaningful moral choice:

In reality, there are two things: morality, which seems to me the level of pure reflection, and the rest, on which one would have to make a number of reservations, on which one could establish a complete casuistry and differences of value, but this would not belong to morality itself.<sup>38</sup>

It is only on the pure reflective level that choices of value appear *as* choices. From the standpoint of impure reflection, values appear as features of the self or the world which are merely perceived and acted upon. Sartre's ontology maintains that the unreflected self is nothing more than a spontaneous consciousness of objects which is at the same time present to itself. It is this conception of the self which is revealed in pure reflection and from which any genuine morality must proceed:

If we wish to move to the terrain of morality, it's obviously necessary that reflection should take account of what it is, which is to say that it has added further to the division, and that the syntheses which it makes fall short of their aim, since they are objects, when what we required was a subjective synthesis.

At that moment, reflection must truly become a manner of living with the rent (*déchirure*) in consciousness. We place ourselves on the level of morality, that is, by starting from the moment when we reject being, since being has rejected us, the moment when we no longer want values, in the sense in which want is taken as a simple coincidence with self.<sup>39</sup>

Understanding pure reflection, in light of Jaspers' "revelation," as the reflective presentation of the self in such a way that the self becomes subject to a *choice*, the relation between pure reflection and authenticity becomes more clear, which in turn renders it possible to give a more complete account of authenticity. In particular, the understanding of pure reflection which has been developed up to this point sheds light on Sartre's notion of the "original project" and gives substance to the example of

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<sup>38</sup>CS, 142. *CDS*, 90.

<sup>39</sup>CS, 134. *CDS*, 79.

“play” in its relation to authenticity. These considerations make clear the *ethical* importance of pure reflection, which has hitherto been discussed primarily as a problem of epistemology.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONVERSION, AUTHENTICITY, AND SARTREAN MORALITY

The for-itself is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in the form of a project of being. To the for-itself *being* means to make known to oneself what one is by means of a possibility appearing as a value. Possibility and value belong to the being of the for-itself. The for-itself is defined ontologically as *lack of being*, and possibility belongs to the for-itself as that which it lacks, in the same way that value haunts the for-itself as the totality of being which is lacking. What we have expressed ... in terms of lack can just as well be expressed in terms of *freedom*. The for-itself chooses because it is lack; freedom is really synonymous with lack.<sup>1</sup>

The “being-in-question” of the for-itself is Sartre’s ontological extension of the principle of intentionality: consciousness is consciousness of objects, which appear on the horizon as objects through a negation which consciousness exercises on the world, the in-itself. But this is to say that consciousness appears to itself as an object only through a negation which it exercises on itself. Consciousness thus “stands at a distance” from itself. It is never self-identical. The being of consciousness—what consciousness *is*—is never fixed, but rather a question to be decided by consciousness itself. The question of what consciousness is, moreover, cannot be decided permanently, but rather must be continually answered anew on each occasion that consciousness attempts to grasp itself. Consciousness is, in this sense, “a continuous act of creation.”<sup>2</sup> This non-identity of consciousness with itself is for Sartre what constitutes freedom.

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<sup>1</sup>*BN*, 722. *EN*, 652.

<sup>2</sup>See *TE*, 101/*TDE*, 82.

Human reality is free because it *is not enough*. It is free because it is perpetually wrenched away from itself and because it has been separated by a nothingness from what it is and from what it will be. It is free, finally, because its present being is itself a nothingness in the form of the “reflection-reflecting.” Man is free because he is not himself but presence to himself. The being which is what it is cannot be free. Freedom is precisely the nothingness which *is made-to-be* at the heart of man and which forces human reality to *make itself* instead of *to be*.<sup>3</sup>

Man is free, that is, because there is no antecedent cause one can point to which determines what he is. “What man is” is a question of the manner in which he is conscious of himself. And this, in turn, is a question of *choice*:

... For human reality, to be free is to *choose oneself*; nothing comes to it either from the outside or from within which it can *receive or accept*. Without any help whatsoever, it is entirely abandoned to the intolerable necessity of making itself be—down to the slightest detail. Thus freedom is not *a being*; it is *the being* of man—*i.e.* his nothingness of being.<sup>4</sup>

This is the notion captured in Sartre’s slogan “existence precedes essence.”<sup>5</sup> The being of consciousness is prior to the determination of its being. What is *lacked* by the for-itself is this determination. The for-itself *is*, but it is not a *thing*, *i.e.*, it is not *in-itself*. The for-itself projects itself into the world, as it were, as an object. That is, it produces what it “lacks” by determining itself “to be” this or that sort of thing. The spectrum of determinations which the for-itself can make for itself are its *possibilities*. Those which it chooses are its *values*.

The project of consciousness, then, is to found its own being: to be an object which is at the same time a consciousness and therefore not an object at all. Consciousness, that is, determines itself in the world in order to be *in-itself-for-itself*: “... the ideal of a consciousness which would be the foundation of its own being-in-

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<sup>3</sup>*BN*, 568. *EN*, 516.

<sup>4</sup>*BN*, 568–69. *EN*, 516.

<sup>5</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Frechtmann (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 13. Idem, *L’Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Editions Nagel, 1946), 17.

itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself.”<sup>6</sup> This ideal is what Sartre alternately calls *value* (in the singular)<sup>7</sup> and the project of being God. “... 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,”<sup>8</sup> namely, a being who “founds” himself and is at the same time free. While the desire to be God *defines* human existence, it does not amount to an essence or nature.

... While the *meaning* of the desire is ultimately the project of being God, the desire is never *constituted* by this meaning; on the contrary, it always represents a particular discovery of its ends. These ends in fact are pursued in terms of a particular empirical situation, and it is this very pursuit which constitutes the surroundings *as a situation*. The desire of being is always realized as the desire of a mode of being, and this desire of a mode of being expresses itself in turn as the meaning of the myriads of concrete desires which constitute the web of our conscious life.<sup>9</sup>

This “mode of being” is for Sartre the “original choice,” the choice of self which expresses a particular attempt to found oneself. This original choice is, for Sartre, the key to understanding the person. It is moreover the key to understanding the moral role of pure reflection.

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<sup>6</sup>*BN*, 723–24. *EN*, 653.

<sup>7</sup>Sartre uses the term “value” ambiguously, and this is a serious source of confusion in his writing. On the one hand, “values” are particular desires and individual possibilities which become actualized. On the other hand, Sartre uses “value” quite narrowly to signify the ideal of God which “haunts” the for-itself. It is usually clear from the context which sense is intended, but it is important to make the distinction and many of Sartre’s commentators do not.

<sup>8</sup>*BN*, 724. *EN*, 653.

<sup>9</sup>*BN*, 724. *EN*, 654.

## ORIGINAL CHOICE

The original project which is expressed in each of our empirically observable tendencies is then the *project of being*; or, if you prefer, each empirical tendency exists with the original project of being, in a relation of expression and symbolic satisfaction just as conscious drives, with Freud, exist in relation to the complex and to the original libido. Moreover the desire to be by no means exists *first* in order to cause itself to be expressed subsequently by desires *a posteriori*. There is nothing outside of the symbolic expression which it finds in concrete desires. There is not first a single desire of being, then a thousand particular feelings but the desire to be exists and manifests itself only in and through jealousy, greed, love of art, cowardice, courage, and a thousand contingent, empirical expressions which always cause human reality to appear to us only as *manifested by a particular man*, by a specific person.<sup>10</sup>

The original choice is the *unifying principle* of the person, and expresses itself through the complex of desires which together constitute the person. Empirical desires are *symbolic* of an original choice of self. Which is to say that values are only valuable in light of some particular project that gives them meaning. Any value or desire, then, reflects and refers back to some particular projection of self toward the ideal of being God. It is not Sartre's claim that there is in fact some moment of choice in each human life from which the innumerable expressions of the person then derive. Rather, it is that the complex of desires which manifest a person taken together represent a meaningful totality which can be understood under the heading of a single, original, choice.

This choice is the subject of existential psychoanalysis, in which it plays a role similar to that which the "complex" plays in Freud: a fundamental attitude to which all of the events of psychic life refer. Existential psychoanalysis is the method whereby the original choice can be uncovered. By a method analogous to Freudian analysis, existential psychoanalysis *reconstructs* the original choice from its symbolic expres-

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<sup>10</sup>BN, 722–23. EN, 652.

sions, which are the individual's concrete desires. Through the process of existential psychoanalysis, it becomes possible to uncover the mode of being in which the person projects himself into the world and which allows us to meaningfully account for the person's behavior, attitudes, reactions, and perception of his own situation.<sup>11</sup> Existential analysis, however, is a *third-person* perspective. "Of course the subject *can* undertake a psychoanalytic investigation of himself. But in this case he must renounce at the outset all benefit stemming from his peculiar position and must question himself exactly as if he were someone else."<sup>12</sup> Existential analysis grasps the individual only from without and is the means by which the original choice is brought to *knowledge*.

Existential psychoanalysis, that is, is fundamentally different from reflection.

... If the fundamental project is fully experienced by the subject and hence wholly conscious, that certainly does not mean that it must by the same token be *known* by him; quite the contrary. The reader will perhaps recall the care we took in the Introduction to distinguish between consciousness and knowledge.<sup>13</sup> To be sure, reflection can be considered as a quasi-knowledge. But what it grasps at each moment is not the pure project of the for-itself as it is symbolically expressed—often in several ways at once—by the concrete behaviour which it apprehends. It grasps the concrete behaviour itself; that is, the specific dated desire in all its characteristic network. It grasps at once symbol and symbolization.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>It is very difficult to present in a limited space non-trivial examples of how this method proceeds. Monica Hornyansky in chapters six and seven of her excellent dissertation "The Scope and Coherence of Sartre's Early Theory of Value," (University of Waterloo [Canada], 1983) argues convincingly that Sartre's biographical works are attempts at existential psychoanalysis. In her view, for example, Sartre's biography of Jean Genet (*Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frechtmann [London: Heinemann, 1963]) is an attempt to make sense of his life in terms of his "original project" of being a thief. This original project is what binds together the facts of his life and allows us to understand the shift he underwent from thief to writer. This view does much to explain not only existential psychoanalysis but also Sartre's biographies. In general, this dissertation is one of the most lucid and insightful works on Sartre's theory of value that I have seen. See also her article "The Nature of Sartre's Ethics: A Reconciliation of Its Ideal and Positive Elements," *Man and World* 22 (June 1989): 151–61, which is a brief summary of some of her conclusions.

<sup>12</sup>*BN*, 728. *EN*, 658.

<sup>13</sup>See *BN*, 10–11/*EN*, 17.

<sup>14</sup>*BN*, 728–29. *EN*, 658.

Reflection (which here means *pure* reflection) fully grasps the manifestations of the project, but does not grasp the project *as* a project. The conscious events which are the object of reflection do not appear in reflection as symbolic of any fundamental project. This is not, however, to say that there is not *consciousness* of the original project in reflection, only that our reflective consciousness of the original project does not amount to *knowledge*:

This apprehension [of our concrete behavior], to be sure, is entirely constituted by a pre-ontological comprehension of the fundamental project; better yet, in so far as reflection is almost a non-thetic consciousness of itself as reflection, it *is* this same project, as well as the non-reflective consciousness. But it does not follow that it commands the instruments and techniques necessary to isolate the choice symbolized, to fix it by concepts, to bring it forth into the full light of day. It is penetrated by a great light without being able to express what this light is illuminating... . This “mystery in broad daylight” is due to the fact that this possession is deprived of the means which would ordinarily permit *analysis* and *conceptualization*. It grasps everything all at once, without shading, without relief, without connections of grandeur—not that these shades, these values, these reliefs exist somewhere and are hidden from it, but rather because they must be established by another human attitude and because they can exist only *by means of* and *for* knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

There are two points to be made here. The first is that existential analysis provides the answer to the question of how it is that the content of pure reflection can be *known*. But existential analysis is *subsequent* to any pure reflection, and the consciousness of pure reflection is not knowledge but *understanding*. “Reflection, unable to serve as the basis for existential psychoanalysis, will then simply furnish us with the brute materials toward which the psychoanalyst must take an objective attitude. Thus only will he be able to *know* what he *already understands*.”<sup>16</sup> The second point is that since the original choice is made *prior* to any analysis, and it is only through analysis that the

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<sup>15</sup>BN, 729. EN, 658–59.

<sup>16</sup>BN, 729. EN, 659.



choice becomes an object of knowledge, the original choice, while fully conscious, *is not a judgment*.

“Existential psychoanalysis,” according to Sartre “is *moral description*, for it releases to us the ethical meaning of various human projects.”<sup>17</sup> The original choice is a *moral* choice, for it is only in light of the fundamental project that particular choices of value have meaning. Values are “valuable” only in the context of a particular project and choice of self which reveals our situation in a particular way and informs our choices with regard to it. Questions of morality thus refer us back to the original project within which the moral questions arise. It is ultimately and exclusively at this level that ethical meaning is discovered. But while the original choice can be *described* at the level of existential psychoanalysis, this is not the level at which the original choice is *taken*. The original choice is not made in knowledge in the manner of a decision or judgment, but rather *prior* to knowledge in the manner of Jaspers’ “acceptance” (see p. ).

... We must insist on the fact that the question here is not a deliberate choice. This is not because it is *less* conscious or *less* explicit than a deliberation but rather because it is the foundation of all deliberation and because as we have seen, a deliberation requires an interpretation in terms of an original choice. Therefore it is necessary to defend oneself against the illusion which would make of original freedom a *positing* of causes and motives as objects, then a decision from the standpoint of these causes and these motives. Quite the contrary, as soon as there are cause and motive (that is, an appreciation of things and the structure of the world) there is already a positing of ends and consequently a choice. But this does not mean that the profound choice is thereby unconscious. It is simply one with the consciousness which we have of ourselves.<sup>18</sup>

The original choice cannot be thought of as an ideal which we first conceive and then realize.

Each human being is, for Sartre, a particular solution to the “problem of

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<sup>17</sup>BN, 796. EN, 720.

<sup>18</sup>BN, 594–95. EN, 539.

being,” and the original choice is the solution that we *are*. “We make it exist by means of our very engagement, and therefore we shall be able to apprehend it only by living it.”<sup>19</sup> We find the image of ourselves and our original choice in the world as we live it. “In fact it is by surpassing the world toward ourselves that we make it appear such as it is. We choose the world, not in its contexture as in-itself, but in its meaning, by choosing ourselves.”<sup>20</sup> In this sense, we are *positionally* conscious of our choice. “The value of things, their instrumental role, their proximity and real distance (which have no relation to their spatial proximity and distance) do nothing more than to outline my image—that is, my choice.”<sup>21</sup> But this positional consciousness is only consciousness of *what the choice is*, and is the same knowledge obtained by existential psychoanalysis. This is not the same as *consciousness of choosing*.

This consciousness, as we know, can only be non-positional; it is we-as-consciousness since it is not distinct from our being. And as our being is precisely our original choice, the consciousness (of) the choice is identical to the self-consciousness which we have. One must be consciousness in order to choose, and one must choose in order to be conscious. Choice and consciousness are one and the same thing.<sup>22</sup>

To be conscious is to be conscious of an object. But objects appear as objects only by virtue of our consciousness of them, through a particular negation which consciousness inserts between itself and the in-itself. An object appears as this or that because we are conscious of it in this or that way. Consciousness of objects *presumes* a prior choice which determines the direction which our consciousness of objects will take. Objects

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<sup>19</sup>*BN*, 596. *EN*, 540.

<sup>20</sup>*BN*, 596. *EN*, 541.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>*BN*, 595. *EN*, 539.

“emerge from the background” of the world in accordance with projects that we have and ends which we pursue. These projects and ends are nothing more than our original choice. Therefore to be conscious is already to have “chosen,” and moreover, insofar as we are conscious of consciousness (non-thetically), we are also conscious of that choice.

... If someone objects that in accordance with these observations it would be necessary to be conscious not of our *being-chosen* but of *choosing* ourselves, we shall reply that this consciousness is expressed by the twofold “feeling” of anguish and responsibility. Anguish, abandonment, responsibility, whether muted or full-strength, constitute the *quality* of our consciousness in so far as this is pure and simple freedom.<sup>23</sup>

Consciousness of choosing, that is, is pure reflection. Pure reflection is the consciousness of “standing outside the self,” of having created the self in the form of an ego which nevertheless cannot contain the consciousness which created it. It is consciousness of *freedom*, in Sartre’s sense, of *non-identity* with the reflection of our self. Pure reflection is consciousness not of *being* oneself, but of having *chosen* oneself. This consciousness of having chosen opens the possibility of *re-evaluating* one’s choice. And it is only at this level—the level of the original choice—that *moral* choice can be meaningfully made. This moral choice cannot be a matter of deliberation, since, as Sartre claims, deliberation presumes the assumption of the original project. Nevertheless, it is possible in Sartre’s view to *revise* one’s original project. This revision is what Sartre calls *conversion*.

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<sup>23</sup>BN, 597. EN, 541–42.

## CONVERSION

The role of the original project is illustrated in the example of fatigue:

... If I apply this same method [i.e., regressive analysis] to interpret the way in which I suffer my own fatigue, I shall first apprehend in myself a distrust of my body—for example, a way of wishing not “to have anything to do with it,” wanting not to take it into account, which is simply one of the numerous possible modes in which I can *exist my body*... . Hence my fatigue instead of being suffered “flexibly” will be grasped “sternly” as an importunate phenomenon which I want to get rid of—and this is simply because it incarnates my body and my brute contingency in the midst of the world at a time when my project is to preserve my body and my presence in the world... . I am referred to myself as well as to my original project; that is, to my being-in-the-world in so far as this being is a choice.<sup>24</sup>

Thus I “give in” to my fatigue, perhaps by stopping to rest. To use the terminology introduced earlier, I “abandon” myself to my fatigue, organizing around it my self-perceptions (I am tired), my appreciation of the world (the path is too steep), and my desires (I want to rest). All of this can only be made sense of, in Sartre’s view, in the context of a project in which my fatigue is *relevant*, in Sartre’s example, the project of self-preservation. Were my project a different one, perhaps the opposite one of *overcoming* the limitations of my body, my fatigue would come on to me differently. I would embrace it rather than seek to avoid it, and it might spur me to yet more strenuous activity. Neither of these projects constitutes an “original” project. The preservation or transcendence of the body is itself a value which refers in turn to a previous project. But it is by this method of analysis that we eventually arrive at a project which is “*selbständig*”—which refers to no project other than itself—and is therefore truly “original.”

But if this is true, it is also true that any *modification* of my projects implies a modification of the original project which underlies them.

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<sup>24</sup>BN, 589. EN, 534.

... I have yielded to fatigue, we said, and doubtless I *could have* done otherwise but *at what price?* At present we are in a position to answer this. Our analysis, in fact, has shown that this act was not *gratuitous*. To be sure, it was not explained by a motive or a cause conceived as the content of a prior state of consciousness, but it had to be interpreted in terms of an original project of which it formed an integral part. Hence it becomes evident that we can not suppose that the act could have been modified without at the same time supposing a fundamental modification of my original choice of myself... Thus this *possible*—to stop—takes on its meaning only in and through the hierarchy of the possibles which I am in terms of the ultimate and initial possible.<sup>25</sup>

That I stop is due to the fact that *that is the way I am*, not in the sense that there is an unshakable quality to my person which compels me to stop, but rather that I have *chosen* myself, through the multitude of prior choices and actions leading up to my moment of fatigue which taken together *are* my self (in Sartre's view), such that I will yield to my fatigue. *Not* to stop would be to *become someone else*, to pursue a *different* project in light of which my priorities would be re-ordered. Thus, although the possibility of stopping occurs to me only by virtue of my original choice of myself, "... this does not imply that I *must necessarily* stop, but merely that I can stop only by a radical conversion of my being in the world; that is, by an abrupt metamorphosis of my initial project—*i.e.*, by another choice of myself and my ends. Moreover this modification is always possible."<sup>26</sup>

The possibility of this conversion is what appears to us in anguish, which is to say, pure reflection:

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<sup>25</sup>BN, 597–598. EN, 542.

<sup>26</sup>BN, 598. EN, 542.

In anguish we do not simply apprehend the fact that the possibles which we project are perpetually eaten away by our freedom-to-come; in addition we apprehend our choice—*i.e.*, ourselves—as *unjustifiable*. This means we apprehend our choice as not deriving from any prior reality but rather as being about to serve as foundation for the ensemble of significations which constitute reality.<sup>27</sup>

Pure reflection (i.e., anguish) is then the moment at which the choice becomes evident and at which it is possible to choose otherwise. Not in the sense, again, that one can *deliberate* from the perspective of pure reflection, but in the sense that it is in the moment of pure reflection that another project can be *assumed*.

... Let us thoroughly understand that our actual choice is such that it furnishes us with no *motive* for making it past by means of a further choice. In fact, it is this original choice which originally creates all causes and all motives which can guide us to partial actions; it is this which arranges the world with its meaning, its instrumental-complexes, and its coefficient of adversity. The absolute change which threatens us from our birth until our death remains perpetually unpredictable and incomprehensible.<sup>28</sup>

That is, by seeing our choice *as choice*, we then find ourselves free to abandon that choice and pursue another one. This moment at which one project succeeds another is what Sartre terms the *instant*. The instant represents a break in the temporal unity of the person, in which the present project is “made-past,” that is *nilated*. “... at the time of the new choice, consciousness posits its own past as an object; that is, it *evaluates* its past and takes its bearings in relation to it. This act of objectivizing the immediate past is the same as the new choice of other ends.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, a shift in project is signalled by a *distance* from the previous project. The previous project becomes an *object* for consciousness, on which one can then “take a stand” in light of the new project which one has undertaken. This positing of the past as an object is the essence

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>BN, 598–99. EN, 543.

<sup>29</sup>BN, 601–602. EN, 546.

of conversion. The outcome of conversion is *knowledge*, not of the new and present project, but of the previous project which is now defined as exclusively in the past.

Pure reflection, however, does not necessarily lead to conversion. It is possible that the project revealed in pure reflection will simply be *reassumed*. This reassumption is not, however, instantaneous. The project reassumed does not become an object for consciousness, but is simply *recovered* in the sense already discussed (see pp. f. and f.).

This does not mean that it *gives an initial thrust* or that there is something settled—which I can exploit to my profit so long as I hold myself within the limits of this choice. On the contrary, the nihilation is pursued continuously, and consequently the free and continuous recovery of the choice is obligatory. This recovery, however, is not made from *instant to instant* while I freely reassume my choice. This is because there is no instant. . . . In so far as I *shall reassume* my choice, the making-past of the process will be effected in perfect ontological continuity with the present. The process which is made-past remains organized with the present nihilation in the form of a *practical knowing*; that is, meaning which is lived and interiorized without ever being an *object* for the consciousness which projects itself toward its own ends.<sup>30</sup>

To offer an analogy: if I am entirely absorbed in my reading, oblivious to myself and my own activity, I can imagine an abrupt moment of consciousness in which I “come to my senses” and am suddenly aware of myself “as reading,” I can on the one hand *stop* reading for one reason or another (“goodness, look at the time!”) or *continue* reading as before. In the former case, my reading becomes a part of my past, an *object* on which I can take a point of view (“I cannot believe I read for so long!”). In the latter, my reading is not an object for my consciousness (as I continue to read), but my reflective consciousness of reading does not disappear entirely. It becomes *incorporated* into my experience of reading. Before, I read oblivious to the time. Now, I read *in spite of* the time. I have *chosen* to continue reading, even if my having chosen is no

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<sup>30</sup>BN, 601. EN, 545.

longer the object of my present consciousness. Although the analogy is obviously imperfect (since my choice here is a *deliberate* one), it is possible to see in this example the sense of “practical knowledge” which Sartre has in mind. My reflective apprehension of reading alters the *meaning* of my reading, despite the fact that I continue to read.

The “recovered” act of reading would, for Sartre, be very different from the “oblivious” act of reading. The recovered act is free. The unrecovered act is not.<sup>31</sup> While it is true that I am not *compelled* to read in any case, I am only free *not* to read to the extent that I am aware that I am reading and my reading is a choice. That is, I am free to do otherwise only to the extent that I am *aware* that I can do otherwise. Here the analogy fails us, since for Sartre the locus of freedom is not at the level of concrete action as such, but at the level of the original project. To choose between two present alternatives, two “possibles,” is already to have chosen a project within which those alternatives arise as possibles and within which one of them will appear as preferable. Thus, my deliberate choices are constrained by a prior choice of myself.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Recall here Bergson’s claim that freedom requires an intuitive grasp of the fundamental self (see p. ).

<sup>32</sup>Sartre maintains that it is nevertheless possible to make voluntary decisions which contradict the fundamental project. But the decisions are always taken in bad faith. Since we are necessarily conscious of the fundamental project at the unreflective level, there can be no error concerning the project itself. It is possible, however, to be mistaken about the objective situation, i.e., at the level of accessory reflection, and thus impose on myself projects which are opposed to my fundamental project. Likewise, there are voluntary projects which are *indifferent* to the original project, i.e., projects which while they compose part of the whole that is my original project could be otherwise without altering the original choice. See *BN*, 606ff./*EN*, 549ff.



The result is that a voluntary deliberation is always a deception. How can I evaluate causes and motives on which I myself confer their value before all deliberation and by the very choice which I make of myself? The illusion here stems from the fact that we endeavor to take causes and motives for entirely transcendent things which I balance in my hands like weights and which possess weight as a permanent property.<sup>33</sup>

Voluntary deliberation locates the *cause (motif)* of the act in the object and the *motive (mobil)* for the act in consciousness. “Actually causes and motives have only the weight which my project—*i.e.*, the free production of the end and of the known act to be realized—confers on them. When I deliberate, the chips are down.”<sup>34</sup> *Genuine* choice, and genuine freedom, take place only at the level of the original project, which is to say, of pure reflection.

“The structure of the voluntary act ... requires the appearance of a reflective consciousness which apprehends the motive as a quasi-object or which even intends it as a psychic object across the consciousness reflected-on.”<sup>35</sup> Deliberation is a reflective act, specifically an act of impure reflection. Deliberation seeks to uncover states or qualities residing in me as “features” of myself which impel me toward this or that action. Deliberation seeks to determine *who I am*, when the question is really *what have I chosen*. As such, deliberation is always an exercise in bad faith. It is only from the standpoint of pure reflection that values appear to us as spontaneous and unjustifiable “creations,” rather than features of the world. The point of view from which values appear as qualities belonging to objects is what Sartre calls “the spirit of seri-

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<sup>33</sup>*BN*, 581. *EN*, 527.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

ousness.”<sup>36</sup> It is only through the exercise of pure reflection, more specifically, the *cultivation* of pure reflection, that we can escape bad faith and the spirit of seriousness. This is what Sartre will call authenticity, and the example he gives is play.

## PLAY

The spirit of seriousness has two characteristics: it considers values as transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity, and it transfers the quality of “desirable” from the ontological structure of things to their simple material constitution. For the spirit of seriousness, for example, *bread* is desirable because it is *necessary* to live (a value written in an intelligible heaven) and because bread *is* nourishing... . Thus we are already on the moral plane but concurrently on that of bad faith, for it is an ethics which is ashamed of itself and does not dare speak its name. It has obscured all its goals in order to free itself from anguish. Man pursues being blindly by hiding from himself the free project which is this pursuit. He makes himself such that he is *waited for* by all the tasks along his way. Objects are mute demands, and he is nothing in himself but the passive obedience to these demands.<sup>37</sup>

The spirit of seriousness reverses the true relation of consciousness to its objects much in the same way that accessory reflection reverses the real relation of consciousness to the ego.

Accessory reflection perceives consciousness as a product of the ego, a “self” which is prior to the acts of consciousness which belong to it. In accessory reflection, the spontaneity of consciousness and hence the freedom of the subject is “swallowed up” in a durable and transcendent self. Accessory reflection, then, is a manner of flight, “as if” its goal were to obscure the freedom of consciousness. In the same manner, the spirit of seriousness obscures the consciousness of freedom by “losing” consciousness in the world.

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. Nietzsche’s “Spirit of Seriousness,”: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. with a preface by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), ch 3., § 11.

<sup>37</sup>*BN*, 796. *EN*, 721.

The serious attitude involves starting from the world and attributing more reality to the world than to oneself; at the very least the serious man confers reality on himself to the degree that he belongs to the world. . . . Thus all serious thought is thickened by the world; it coagulates; it is a dismissal of human reality in favor of the world. The serious man is “of the world” and has no resource in himself. He does not even imagine any longer the possibility of *getting out of* the world, for he has given himself the type of existence of the rock, the consistency, the inertia, the opacity of being-in-the-midst-of-the-world. It is obvious that at bottom the serious man is hiding from himself the consciousness of his freedom; he is in *bad faith* and his bad faith aims at presenting himself to his own eyes as a consequence; everything is a consequence for him, and there is never any beginning for him. That is why he is so concerned with the consequences of his acts. . . . Man is serious when he takes himself for an object.<sup>38</sup>

The spirit of seriousness is a *moral* attitude, but a moral attitude taken in bad faith. We could argue that the spirit of seriousness is an *unacceptable* moral attitude on those grounds alone: because it is in bad faith is it *false*, and not merely false, but *viciously* so—it is a lie. If the serious attitude is a flight from freedom, it is a flight which we undertake in *full consciousness* of doing so (although our consciousness of it is not reflective). And if this is the case, it is not only false, it is moreover *self-defeating*, since it is a flight which cannot succeed. We might also argue that seriousness fails as a moral standpoint since the serious standpoint is an evasion of freedom and therefore moral responsibility. If morality (as Kant thought) presumes *freedom*, the serious attitude cannot be a moral one. The crucial failure of the spirit of seriousness for Sartre, however, is that the spirit of seriousness is *futile*, not in the sense that it is an impossible attempt at flight, but that it is an impossible attempt to achieve the goal of a fusion of the in-itself with the for-itself. That is, to be God. And the futility of this attempt undermines meaningful moral decision.

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<sup>38</sup>BN, 741. EN, 669.

Many men, in fact, know that the goal of their pursuit is being; and to the extent that they possess this knowledge, they refrain from appropriating things for their own sake and try to realize the symbolic appropriation of their being-in-itself. But to the extent that this attempt still shares in the spirit of seriousness and that these men can still believe that their mission of effecting the existence of the in-itself-for-itself is written in things, they are condemned to despair. For they discover at the same time that all human activities are equivalent (for they all tend to sacrifice man in order that the self-cause may arise) and that all are on principle doomed to failure. Thus it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations.<sup>39</sup>

From this standpoint, then, it is *impossible* to make meaningful distinctions of value. If all values are justified by reference to the ideal *ens causa sui*, the *ens causa sui* is itself ultimately unjustifiable, and it follows that "... *nothing*, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values."<sup>40</sup>

Values, that is, are unjustifiable insofar as they are understood as *determinations*. "In the serious mood I define myself in terms of the object by pushing aside as *a priori* impossible all enterprises in which I am not engaged at the moment; the meaning which my freedom has given to the world, I apprehend as coming from the world and constituting my obligations."<sup>41</sup> In other words, the *direction* which my being is to take, the *nature* of the ideal which I am to pursue, is seen as *given* to me by the world and the nature of things. The failure of this attempt to ground our ideal in the world reveals itself in anguish, as the pre-reflective awareness that things in the world are not in fact the *causes* of our acts.

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<sup>39</sup>BN, 797. EN, 721–22.

<sup>40</sup>BN, 76. EN, 76.

<sup>41</sup>BN, 78. EN, 77.

If ... I wished to avoid anguish and vertigo, it would be enough if I were to consider the motives ... as *determining* my prior activity in the same way that the presence at a determined point of one given mass determines the courses followed by other masses; it would be necessary, in other words, that I apprehend myself in a strict psychological determinism. But I am in anguish precisely because any conduct on my part is only *possible*, and this means that while constituting a totality of motives ... I at the same moment apprehend these motives as not sufficiently effective.<sup>42</sup>

Values appear as *possibilities* and cannot constitute *reasons* in themselves for one course of action or another. That the precipice is dangerous is *not sufficient* reason not to throw myself into it. It remains possible that I might, a possibility of which I am aware. My choice of suicide or self-preservation is not determined by the horror of the precipice. The horror of the precipice is only the *occasion* for the appearance of these possibilities with their accompanying motives. But these motives "... from the sole fact that they are motives of a possibility, present themselves as ineffective, as non-determinant; they can no more *produce* the suicide than my horror of the fall can *determine me* to avoid it."<sup>43</sup> To the extent, then, that the spirit of seriousness attempts to locate values which are not *possibilities* but *necessities* which would be justified in terms of things in the world it is futile, since the value of things in the world always refers back to an undetermined—i.e., free—choice on the part of the subject.

In contrast to the spirit of seriousness, Sartre gives the example of play:

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<sup>42</sup>BN, 67–68. EN, 68.

<sup>43</sup>BN, 69. EN, 69.

Play, like Kierkegaard's irony, releases subjectivity. What is play indeed if not an activity of which man is the first origin, for which man himself sets the rules, and which has no consequences except according to the rules posited? As soon as man apprehends himself as free and wishes to use his freedom, a freedom, by the way, which could just as well be his anguish, then his activity is play. The first principle of play is man himself; through it he escapes his natural nature; he himself sets the value and rules for his acts and consents to play only according to the rules which he himself has established and defined.<sup>44</sup>

In play, the value of our activity is not found in the world in the sense of "having-to-be-done." Rather, our activity is spontaneous and "has to be done" only to the extent that we *choose* to do it. Our possibilities in play appear to us precisely as they are: *merely* possibilities. There is no ultimate reason to play in this way rather than in another except that we choose to do so. There is no *necessity* in play. We alone determine the course and meaning of our actions, in full consciousness of our freedom to alter that course or meaning. In this sense play avoids the spirit of seriousness by locating the source of value in the subject instead of the world. But play is distinguished from seriousness not only in the nature of the values pursued, but in the nature of the *pursuit*. In play,

the act is not its own goal for itself; neither does its explicit end represent its goal and its profound meaning; but the function of the act is to make manifest and present to *itself* the absolute freedom which is the very being of the person. This particular type of project ... is radically different from all others in that it aims at a radically different type of being.<sup>45</sup>

In play, that is, the goals to be pursued do not present themselves as the *motives* for our play. It is not to win the game that we play, but merely for the sake of playing. Winning takes on meaning and importance only in light of our choice to play the

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<sup>44</sup>BN, 742. EN, 670. In his posthumously published *War Diaries* Sartre attributes this idea of play to Schiller: "... I subscribe whole-heartedly to Schiller's phrase: 'Man is fully a man only when he plays.'" (*The War Diaries of Jean-Paul Sartre: November 1939–March 1940*, trans. Quintin Hoare [New York: Pantheon Books, 1984], 327. Hereafter referred to as *WD*. Idem, *Les Carnets de la drôle de guerre: Novembre 1939–Mars 1940* [Paris: NRF, Gallimard, 1983]. Hereafter referred to as *CDG*.)

<sup>45</sup>BN, 742. EN, 670.

game, and the derivative value of the goal is entirely transparent. However earnest and engrossed we are in the game, we nevertheless play with a constant consciousness that “it is only a game.” In choosing to play, we *choose to freely choose* our ends and goals, i.e., we *choose to be free*. And this choice is the fundamental meaning of play. The project of play represents a “radically different” type of project in that it does not adopt the goal of *being* but rather the goal of *doing*. In play I do not desire to “make something” of myself. It is not the desire to coincide with myself that moves me to play. But by choosing to do (i.e., *merely do*) and not be, I choose a *different type of being*. Namely, I choose to be the type of being *that does not desire to be*, which is equivalent to choosing to be free, to not-coincide, to renounce the project of being-God.

It is on the possibility of just such a project that the possibility of a Sartrean ethics depends: the moral attitude for Sartre is the attitude of play. It is only from this perspective that choices of value are meaningful, namely, from the perspective of a consciousness which fails to coincide and *chooses not to* coincide with itself. It is in this way, too, that it is possible to escape bad faith. The choice is not a matter of voluntary deliberation, but a matter of *recovering* one’s project. To recover the original project is to adopt and *remain in* the pure reflective attitude, which is to say, *not to flee* the experience of anguish.

## AUTHENTICITY

We should not conclude ... that being brought on to the reflective plane and envisaging one's distant or immediate possibilities suffice to apprehend oneself in *pure* anguish. In each instance of reflection anguish is born as a structure of the reflective consciousness in so far as the latter considers consciousness as an object of reflection; but it still remains possible for me to maintain various types of conduct with regard to my own anguish—in particular, patterns of flight.<sup>46</sup>

We flee anguish in bad faith. To avoid bad faith is then *not* to flee anguish. And this is authenticity. Anguish alone is not sufficient for “moral conversion.” Authenticity requires the adoption of a particular *attitude* toward one's anguish. This has already been discussed as the “effort” or “cultivation” of pure reflection (see p. ). But it is possible at this point to offer a more detailed account of what this “practice” of pure reflection entails. The ultimate *meaning* of authenticity is the *rejection* of the value of the in-itself-for-itself—the *abandoning* of the project of being God. We are in anguish precisely because we are conscious of the failure of that project. Not to flee anguish is to *accept* the impossibility of self-coincidence and the freedom which non-coincidence implies. But this acceptance cannot be a *deliberate* decision, since there can be no meaningful deliberation at the level of the original choice. Rather, authenticity depends on a *conversion* in the sense detailed above: the spontaneous assumption of a radically different project.

The project of being-God, however, is an *ontological* feature of consciousness. Consciousness, in transcending itself toward objects, transcends itself toward a self which it is not. To abandon this project is to no longer be a consciousness. It cannot be, then, that authenticity rejects the project of being God as such. It is rather the case

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<sup>46</sup>*BN*, 78. *EN*, 77–78.



that authenticity assumes the project of being-God in a different light, i.e., adopts a different attitude toward the fundamental project. I have argued that the failure of the fundamental project stems from the fact that the in-itself-for-itself is taken *seriously* (in Sartre's technical sense): as though it were a permanent feature of the world (and ourselves) which acts upon us as a cause. The project of becoming God cannot be rejected *as a project*, but it can be rejected as a *serious* project. It can be rejected as a project *given* to us and reassumed as a project *at which we play*. It is not possible, that is, not to pursue some project of being or other. It *is* possible to adopt as one's fundamental project not the *completion* of that project, but the *choice* of a project. In other words, to value not the ends pursued for themselves but the freedom which chooses those ends.

This "conversion" can be understood as an analogy to play, and taken in that light it becomes clearer what Sartre has in mind. Pure reflection reveals the fundamental lack of self-coincidence of the for-itself. This revelation is anguish, and what it reveals is freedom. What the pure reflective insight exposes, however, is not that we can *decide* to play or not to play, but that *we are in fact* playing. That the value of the for-itself is a creation for which we ourselves are responsible. At this juncture, one can either *resume* the game with the awareness that it is a game, or continue to play but *pretend* that it is not. The first response is authentic. The second is bad faith. In the first case, although my immediate ends may not change at all, *my project has radically changed*. I have undergone a conversion in that my previous, "serious," project now comes into view as an object of knowledge and my reflective apprehension of playing

persists in consciousness as a “practical knowledge.” As was the case when I became reflectively aware of my reading, I resume my project, but *the project means something different*.

It is one thing to construct a plausible interpretation of Sartre’s view. It is another to show that it is Sartre’s own. In this case, it is possible to do both. One can only speculate as to what Sartre might have meant on the basis of *Being and Nothingness*. One can confirm these speculations by reference on the one hand to his *War Diaries* and on the other his *Notebooks for an Ethics*. From his *War Diaries*:

This state of misery [anguish] *can* be a reason for consciousness to return to an accurate view of itself and stop fleeing itself. It’s not a question of its seeking any value other than substantiality—if it did, it would cease to be *human* consciousness. The value that will assign it its new attitude remains the supreme value: being its own foundation. It will no more stop asserting—and willing—this value than cognitive consciousness, after Husserl’s \_\_\_\_\_,<sup>47</sup> ceases to posit the world. It is from the first impetus towards substantiality that human reality must draw the value-reason that allows it to recover itself.<sup>48</sup>

The conversion to authenticity does not *supplant* the original project, but dictates a new *attitude* toward it, namely, that of *founding* rather than *receiving*:

Which is this conversion? The search for a foundation requires that one *assume* what one finds. If the act of founding is anterior to the existent one finds, as in the case of creation, assumption is contained a priori in the act of founding. But if, as in the case that concerns us, it’s a question of an effort to found that which already exists in fact, assumption must precede foundation, as an intuition which reveals *what* one is founding. To assume does not at all mean to accept, though in certain cases the two go together. When I assume, I assume *in order to* make a given use of what I am assuming. Here, I am assuming *in order to* found. Moreover, to assume means to adopt as one’s own, to claim responsibility. Thus the assumptive consciousness is, therefore, nothing other than an intuition of the will, which consists in adopting reality as one’s own. And, by that adoption, human reality is revealed to itself in an act of non-thematic comprehension. It is revealed, not as it would be known through concepts, but as it is *willed*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> \_ correction for the translator’s \_\_\_\_\_, an obvious misprint.

<sup>48</sup> *WD*, 112.

<sup>49</sup> *WD*, 112–113. “Creation” in this passage is creation *ex nihilo*. While it is true for Sartre that the for-itself “creates” the objective representation of the world and its self, the fundamental project of “having-to-be” is not a creation of consciousness but rather the definition of its structure. This project is what is “assumed” here, in order that it can then be founded as some *particular* project which is our own.

To “will” the original project is not to *agree* to it, but to *consent* to it. Authenticity is not the reflective *recognition* of one’s fundamental project (which is simply pure reflection), but the *adoption* of that project as a project which one wills oneself.

This understanding of authenticity and its relation to pure reflection is restated in *Notebooks for an Ethics*. This volume represents a fraction of the massive body of notes which Sartre compiled between 1947–1948 in preparation for the treatise on ethics promised in the conclusion to *Being and Nothingness*. There were ten notebooks in all. Two of them (probably the first and part of the second) survive, and were published posthumously as *Notebooks for an Ethics*.<sup>50</sup> These notes are a disappointment to those who awaited them as “Sartre’s unpublished ethics.” They amount to far less than that. Uncompiled and frequently fragmentary and obscure, they comprise a record of Sartre’s thoughts on morality with no coherent argument or single binding theme.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear from these notes that the understanding of authenticity and conversion which Sartre brought to his ethical treatise was consistent with that outlined in his *War Diaries* and with the interpretation offered here:

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<sup>50</sup>See Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, vol. 1, *A Bibliographical Life*, trans. Richard McCleary, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 229–230.

<sup>51</sup>Only recently translated into English, there has been only cursory commentary on this work to date. For examples, see: Thomas Anderson, “Authenticity, Conversion, and the City of Ends in Sartre’s *Notebooks for an Ethics*,” in *Writing the Politics of Difference*, ed. Hugh Silverman, Selected Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy 14, 99–110 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Mark Hunyadi, “Ma liberté, c’est la meurtre de l’autre: A propos des *Cahiers pour une morale* de Jean-Paul Sartre,” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 117 (1985): 173–84; Sonia Kruks, “Sartre’s *Cahiers pour une morale*: Failed Attempt or New Trajectory in Ethics?” *Social Text* 13/14 (1986): 184–94; and Peter Whitney, “Jean-Paul Sartre’s Notebooks,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 15 (May 1984): 109–22.

[The] perpetually shifting ensemble of perpetually calling things into question and of perpetually surpassing them can be revealed only to a reflection that *does not will* Being but rather existence, for reflection is not contemplative: it is either accessory or purifying reflection. In either case it is a project. What therefore can the project of a reflection which refuses to look for Being be? It can only be a question of a radical decision for autonomy. The whole system for recovering accessory reflection has appeared, in effect, as a noematic projection of the self as the Other and finally as a form of heteronomy. The decision of pure reflection is both negative and positive at the same time: as negative, it renounces the attempt at a synthetic fusion of the self by the self, which leads necessarily to realizing the unification outside itself and to sacrificing lived consciousness to the noema; as positive, it understands that the unity of existence cannot be of the same type as that synthetic unification that crushes the reflected into the reflecting, but must rather be of a new type which is an *accord with itself*.<sup>52</sup>

Authenticity succeeds where seriousness fails by relocating the locus of attempted unity from the transcendent object (i.e., the ego) to the pre-reflective *cogito*. “A freedom which wills itself freedom is in fact a being-which-is-not-what-it-is and which-is-what-it-is-not, and which chooses as the ideal of being, being-what-it-is-not and not-being-what-it-is.”<sup>53</sup> Consciousness cannot coincide with the reflected-on, but can coincide with itself *as* the being which does not coincide with its objective representation.

If, indeed, the passage to reflection does not realize a unity of being of the For-itself and instead open a new abyss within consciousness, it does realize another kind of unity: for through reflection existence appears to itself in the form of a theme and a question. It does not identify itself with itself, but it maintains itself since immediately the problem arises of knowing whether it will continue or stop...<sup>54</sup>

Authenticity, then, is not a relation one stands in to what one *is*, but rather a relation one stands in to what one *does*. More precisely, authenticity is the standpoint from which what one is is *defined* by what one does.

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<sup>52</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. by David Pellauer, with a foreword by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 478. Hereafter referred to as *NE*. Idem, *Cahiers pour une morale*, edited by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, Bibliothèque de philosophie. (Paris: NRF, Gallimard, 1983), 494–95. Hereafter referred to as *C*.

<sup>53</sup>*BN*, 798. *EN*, 722.

<sup>54</sup>*NE*, 478–79. *C*, 495.

In sum, the existent is a project, and reflection is the project of taking up this project. Naturally, it is in the mode of being and not being that the process unfolds, for reflection is and is not the reflected on. But what really matters is that reflection is not contemplation. It is a form of willing. If the project is not recaptured contemplatively, at least it is recaptured *practically*. Reflection makes this project one's *own*, not through identification or appropriation but by consent and forming a covenant... . Pure, authentic reflection is a willing of what I will. It is the refusal to define myself by what I am (Ego) but instead by what I will (that is, by my very undertaking, not insofar as it appears to others—objective—but insofar as it turns its subjective face toward me).<sup>55</sup>

What one assumes in authenticity is not one's *nature* but one's *activity*, which one pursues not because it is valuable, but because *one values it* and for that reason alone. But this means that authenticity must be *reaffirmed* in the face of each new situation with which we are presented. One sustains authenticity by a continued and constantly renewed effort:

First of all ... authenticity is achieved en bloc, one either is or is not authentic. But that doesn't at all mean that one acquires authenticity once and for good. I've already pointed out that the present has no purchase on the future, nor the past on the present... . And the authenticity of your previous momentum doesn't protect you in any way against falling next instant into the inauthentic. The most one can say is that it is less difficult to preserve authenticity than to acquire it. But, in fact, can one even talk about 'preserving'? The instant that arrives is novel, the situation is novel: a new authenticity has to be invented. It's still the case, people will say, that the memory of the authentic must protect us somewhat from inauthenticity. But the memory of the authentic, in inauthenticity, is itself inauthentic.<sup>56</sup>

Authenticity is not an abstract response to one's own being but rather a *manner* of response to one's *situation*. One can live one's situation authentically or inauthentically. To live one's situation authentically is to *choose* that situation—to *will* it. To choose one's situation *is* to choose oneself: by choosing (authentically) to rest I choose

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<sup>55</sup>NE, 479. C, 495.

<sup>56</sup>WD, 219. See also SPM, 218/PM, 353.

my fatigue, and by the same stroke I choose the original project within which my fatigue appears as a demand needing to be met.

To be authentic is to realize fully one's being-in-situation, whatever this situation may happen to be: with a profound awareness that, through the authentic realization of the being-in-situation, one brings to plenary existence the situation on the one hand and human reality on the other. This presupposes a patient study of what the situation requires, and then a way of throwing oneself into it and determining oneself to 'be-for' this situation.<sup>57</sup>

This is the only direction that authentic choice can take. To choose myself as indefatigable prior to the occasion of my fatigue is to postulate my *being*. It is a modification affecting the "me"; it invokes the ego, and is therefore in bad faith. I cannot authentically choose myself *as* a self. I can authentically choose myself only by reassuming (or rejecting) the demands which emerge from my situation insofar as those demands are revealed by pure reflection to be occasions for choice. Meaningful decision for Sartre takes place neither on the level of the subject nor on the level of the world, but exclusively concerns the existence of the subject *in* the world. Morality has no transcendent objects, only immediate demands.

#### SARTREAN ETHICS

Authenticity therefore leads to renouncing every project of being courageous (cowardly), noble (vile), etc. Because they are not realizable and because they all lead in any case to alienation. Authenticity reveals that the only meaningful project is that of *doing* and that the project to do something cannot itself be universal without falling into what is abstract (for example, the project to *do good*, always to tell the truth, etc., etc.). The one meaningful project is that of acting on a concrete situation and modifying it in some way. This project implies secondary forms of behavior: it may imply not fleeing, or cutting one's wrists and not talking. Yet if the goal sought is *to be* courageous, the apparent and concrete end becomes a pretext for mystification.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>WD, 54.

<sup>58</sup>NE, 475. C, 491.

In light of the considerations which have been raised, it is difficult to speak of moral judgment in a Sartrean context at all. Moral judgment connotes deliberation, which takes place in accessory and not pure reflection. But pure reflection is moral reflection and authenticity is the plane of meaningful moral action. In pure reflection, we gain access to the unreflected consciousness, and the unreflected consciousness is corrupted in reflection.

... Unreflected consciousness must be considered autonomous. It is a totality which needs no completing at all, and we must acknowledge with no qualifications that the character of unreflected desire is to transcend itself by apprehending in the subject the quality of desirability. Everything happens as if we lived in a world whose objects, in addition to their qualities of warmth, odor, shape, etc., had the qualities of repulsive, attractive, delightful, useful, etc., and as if these qualities were forces having a certain power over us. In the case of [accessory] reflection and only in that case, affectivity is posited for itself, as desire, fear, etc. Only in case of reflection can I think “*I hate Peter,*” “*I pity Paul,*” etc.<sup>59</sup>

From the pure reflective standpoint, Peter is *given* as repugnant, Paul is *given* as pitiful. These qualities present themselves as *in their objects*, and come on to us as *demands*: Peter is to be avoided, Paul is to be helped. If we are to remain in the pure reflective attitude, i.e., the *moral* attitude, these demands must remain *unmediated*.

Reflection “poisons” desire. On the unreflected level I bring Peter help because Peter is “having to be helped.” But if my state is suddenly transformed into a reflected state, there I am watching myself act, in the sense in which one says of someone that he listens to himself talk. It is no longer Peter who attracts me, it is *my* helpful consciousness which appears to me as having to be perpetuated. Even if I only think that I must pursue my action because “that is good,” the good qualifies *my* conduct, *my* pity, etc. The psychology of La Rochefoucauld [viz., self-love] has its place. And yet this psychology is not *true*: it is not my fault if my reflective life poisons “by its very essence” my spontaneous life. Before being “poisoned” my desires were pure. It is the point of view I have taken towards them which has poisoned them.<sup>60</sup>

At the unreflected level, values are given *immediately*. “The immediate is the world with its urgency; and in this world where I engage myself, my acts cause values to

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<sup>59</sup>TE, 58. TDE, 41–42.

<sup>60</sup>TE, 59. TDE, 42.

spring up like partridges... . Values are sown on my path like thousands of little real demands, like the signs which order us to keep off the grass.”<sup>61</sup> My reaction to these values must be spontaneous, not mediated by a consciousness of my self which I wish to bring into being. Thus, I help Peter because Peter needs to be helped, conscious at the same time (pre-reflectively) that it is through my own choice of self that Peter appears as having-to-be-helped and that through helping him I choose a world in which his need is a value and a self for whom helping him is valuable.

The Me being suppressed by pure reflection, the project stops being related to anything other than its goal. Therefore it preserves that immediacy that it has in the unreflected, because it itself mediates itself. In this immediacy I see that poor fellow who is thirsty, I give him water because water appears immediately desirable for him. In accessory reflection, I give him water because my Me is the one that does good. However, in pure reflection the project of giving water is limited to discovering itself as itself in its ipseity, that is, the consciousness of water as desirable thematizes itself.<sup>62</sup>

That is, while the desirability of water is immediately given to me, I am conscious that the desirability of the water qualifies my project in such a way that *assenting* to that value (by giving Peter a drink) constitutes a particular choice of myself.

The For-itself always wills the end for itself, but it is conscious of willing itself as willing this end. There is a double dimension: 1st, the water is desirable (it continues to affirm the reflected by its initial, unaltered intention). 2d, the For-itself is through its project an unveiling of the water as desirable. Subjectivity appears as an unveiling act. Existential vertigo: the project appears to reflection in its absolute gratuity. But since reflection *wills* it, it is recaptured.<sup>63</sup>

My authentic moral choice amounts to a choice about whether Peter needs to be helped. By helping Peter, I assent to his need and all that implies. By declining to help him, I reject it as a value. The only possible ground for this choice is my fundamental choice of myself, which hinges on the choice I make with regard to Peter. But this

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<sup>61</sup>BN, 76–77. EN, 76–77.

<sup>62</sup>NE, 480. C, 496–97.

<sup>63</sup>NE, 481. C, 497.



choice is fundamentally gratuitous. There is no *reason* for me to choose one way or the other. There is no *reason*, indeed, that a choice must be made at all—that is, that there is a For-itself. And the assumption of a project does not mitigate its gratuity. An assumed project is a *willed* gratuity, and it is the willing which justifies the project.

It is this double simultaneous aspect of the human project, gratuitous at its core and consecrated by a reflective reprise, that makes it into *authentic existence*. The active discovery (unveiling/assumption, discovery/founding) of the pure field of existence has indeed initially to grasp its perfect *gratuity*...

But, at the same time, it is gratuitous, it is assumed gratuitousness. But assumed *by itself alone*. This reflective doubling assumes this gratuitousness. Through this reflexivity, I consent to be a man, that is, in order to commit myself to an adventure that has as much chance of finishing badly, I transform my contingency into a *Passion*.

As for my undertaking, I justify it for myself by the single fact that I call it into question. I grasp it in its contingency but also as an unsurpassable, insurmountable absolute, which draws its absolute character from its being willed as it wills itself.

... It is me, which nothing justifies, who justifies myself inwardly... Caught up in pure gratuitousness, my accord with myself confers subjective necessity on me.<sup>64</sup>

If it is difficult, then, to speak of moral judgment in Sartre, it is equally difficult to speak of moral *justification*. The moral question, in the end, is not which action is undertaken or for which reasons, but rather in what *manner* is the action undertaken. The authentic act is justified by its authenticity—its being chosen—and becomes *inauthentic* the moment it seeks any further source of justification.

This does not indicate that the For-itself has to choose itself through the caprice of the instant (for the caprice of the instant is a caprice only in appearance; it gets its capricious form from a background of some constant choice), but only that the For-itself must itself describe itself in terms of perspective, and as a direction, and even more so by what it *does* than by what it wills.<sup>65</sup>

That moral choice is ultimately unjustifiable (i.e., in terms of some transcendent value) does not imply that moral choice is whimsical or that all moral choices are equivalent. Recall that this is precisely Sartre's criticism of the spirit of seriousness. From the

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<sup>64</sup>NE, 481–82. C, 497–98.

<sup>65</sup>NE, 478. C, 494.

standpoint of authenticity, some choices are better than others—some choices are free and others are not. What is not possible is to determine which choices are better in advance, abstracted from all situation, and for all men. Sartre’s ethics are necessarily *situational*. The responsibility for moral decision falls to the individual and it is equally impossible to decide for another as it is to ultimately justify one’s own choices to others. Authentic existence is “... an absolute contingency that has only itself to justify itself by assuming itself and that can assume itself only within itself without the project justified inwardly ever being able on this basis to justify itself to others in its subjectivity.”<sup>66</sup> “In this sense existentialism’s sole moral recommendation would be a simple transposition of its description of the human: ‘live with the rent in consciousness.’”<sup>67</sup>

This aspect of Sartre’s ethical thinking has been severely criticized on the grounds that it leads to an absurd moral subjectivism:

... If it is sheer choice and not its content that counts, then all possibilities are equivalent and we end up in an ethics of mere chance.<sup>68</sup>

If choosing freely for oneself is the highest value, the free choice to wear red socks is as valuable as the free choice to murder one’s father or sacrifice oneself for one’s friend. Such a belief is ridiculous.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>*NE*, 482. *C*, 498.

<sup>67</sup>*SPM*, 219. *PM*, 352. The reference here is to *CS*, 134/*CDS*, 79.

<sup>68</sup>Risieri Frondizi, “Sartre’s Early Ethics: A Critique,” in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., 380.

<sup>69</sup>Mary Warnock, *Existentialist Ethics*, New Studies in Ethics (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967), 54.

... Since the only rule it provides me is the rule to avoid self-deception, and to act authentically, then I have done all that is required of me so long as I follow this rule, and avoid bad faith, and acknowledge that I alone freely choose what I do and am responsible. But then anything that I freely choose to do meets the requirements of authenticity: one freely chosen act is as good as another, and there is no way of discriminating among my freely chosen acts...<sup>70</sup>

But these criticisms depend on the understanding of choice as *deliberation*, and to this extent, Sartre would agree with them. Sartre's claim is that all moral choices in this sense *are* equivalent, whether we take them to be or not. Moreover, in Sartre's view, we are *aware* that they are ultimately unjustified, since moral belief is *only* belief, and "to believe is to know that one believes, and to know that one believes is no longer to believe."<sup>71</sup> This sort of moral choice, in other words, is always in bad faith. What these criticisms imply is that on Sartre's view, one can select moral values as one selects ties: as one pleases with no penalty for changing one's mind. But from what has already been shown it is clear that value choices in Sartre are of an entirely different character. To choose authentically is not to decide arbitrarily with the conviction that one is therefore free. To choose authentically is not to *decide* at all. Authenticity is not a question of adopting moral "positions." Rather, it is a question of *acting* in the awareness of the consequences of one's acts.

While it is true that all authentic moral choices are equivalent for Sartre, in that there exists no external standard against which one might be judged superior, this does not imply that these choices lack *weight*. This is the thrust of these objections, and it is in this respect that they miss their mark. These criticisms rest on two fundamental

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<sup>70</sup>James Collins, *The Existentialists* (Chicago: Gateway, 1968), 83.

<sup>71</sup>*BN*, 114. *EN*, 110.

misunderstandings of Sartre's view: First, as I have indicated above, they take moral choice to be *deliberate* choice, as the selection of moral options prior to engagement. But it has already been shown that for Sartre this is not the case. The original choice does not exist first only to be subsequently expressed. Choice and engagement are simultaneous for Sartre. I choose myself as *weak through* and not *prior to* my stopping to rest. It is not then fair to say that for Sartre I may "choose as I please." Indeed, for Sartre my choices are ultimately free, but only at the level at which "as I please" no longer has meaning. It is not my *acts* at all which are freely chosen, nor my values. It is my project, which is to say myself. If I authentically choose to wear red socks, that is not to say that my choice is arbitrary, that I could as readily wear blue ones or murder my father. It is to say that by wearing red socks I consciously (although non-thetically) reassume the project within which the wearing of red socks is valuable (e.g., the project of being stylish). It may very well be (and in fact is far more likely) that my choice of footwear is *irrelevant* to my project. In this case, it *is* merely a decision. In this case, it truly does not matter. The error here is in conflating *all* choice with the (usually) irrelevant, deliberative, choice of socks. This is to badly misinterpret—even worse, to caricature—Sartre's view.

The second misunderstanding on which these objections rest is that because moral choices have no *objective* value they have no value of any kind. And again, this is wrong. Given that authentic choices are choices concerning *projects*, there is no ultimate standard against which one can judge one project more worthy than another—whether it is better to get drunk alone or be a leader of nations. But authentic choices

are not made objectively, and for the one who chooses, the choice which is made matters a great deal. I may choose not to give in to my fatigue, but, as Sartre asks, “at what cost?” To continue rather than to rest is to abandon the entire web of meanings around which I organize myself and my world. It is, in effect, to become someone else. Likewise, if Pierre comes on to me as needing help, it is because I already perceive Pierre’s need as valuable. *Not* to respond to that need is to reorganize my scale of values. In other words, to play a different game. But just as there is no *ultimate* value to scoring points in a game, for the one who plays, the scoring of points is valuable. It is in this way that helping Pierre or stopping to rest has value. The moral choice with which we are presented in Sartre is in fact not whether to play or whether to help Pierre. The choice of authenticity is a choice of *how* to live one’s values—in a way which is meaningful or a way which is not. It is false, however, to say that for Sartre all possibilities are equivalent. It is better to score than to miss, because this is the game that I am playing, and it is better to help Pierre than not since this is the project I pursue. The error here is in presenting choices of this nature as choices *which have no consequence*. But this misconstrues the sense of choice at work in Sartre.

This line of objection against Sartre is posed by Detmer as the “authentic torturer problem”:

The obvious difficulty with this ethic is that it leaves us with no legitimate, objective grounds for condemning the actions of, for example, the torturer who offers no excuse for his actions, and who accepts full responsibility for them. A torturer who candidly says, “I have freely chosen to kidnap and torture you, and I take full responsibility for my choice,” is apparently above criticism.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Detmer, 165.

But this is also false. The torturer can be criticized from another point of view with another scale of values. The essence of the criticism is that the torturer's choice, if it is an authentic one, is as *justified* as our own anti-torture choice and there is no objective criterion for selecting between the two. To present this as an objection, however, is to insist on something which Sartre's theory explicitly denies, namely, a categorical imperative. And to that extent, it is not a criticism at all. On Sartre's view, moral choices are justified because they are *choices*, which is to say, free. Moral choice which is bound by external criteria is not free, not because it is determined, but because it is in bad faith. To argue that the torturer *must* choose otherwise is to appeal to a transcendent value. From the Sartrean standpoint, this is to insist on an ethics of bad faith. Thus, the authentic torturer objection is not a refutation of Sartre's conclusions so much as a blunt refusal to understand what Sartre's ontology entails, namely, an understanding of morality within which a meaningful morality of the sort on which the critics insist is impossible and the question is not whether our moral theory meets that standard but how to construct a meaningful moral theory given that such a standard cannot be met.

Sartre has also been criticized on the grounds that authenticity itself is an *ad hoc* moral value. That is, that if there is no ultimate value, authenticity itself cannot be ultimately valuable.

If all values are ultimately unjustifiable, then there is no reason to suppose that it is any better or more valuable to be lucid than to be involved in self-deception. The individual in bad faith chooses his being—just as the individual who attempts to escape from bad faith. Both choices are “grounded” in one’s nothingness. Both fundamental projects are ultimately gratuitous. There is no reason to value one rather than the other: this is Sartre’s own grand conclusion.<sup>73</sup>

Again, this is to insist on a categorical imperative which Sartre’s theory will clearly not provide. Sartre would have to agree that no sense can be made of the claim that authenticity is more *valuable* than bad faith, since authenticity is an attitude with regard to values. Authenticity recommends itself not on the grounds of value, but on the grounds of the fundamental project which is an ontological feature of consciousness. Self-coincidence is the unavoidable goal of consciousness. Consciousness is conscious precisely because it fails to coincide with itself and transcends itself toward objects. In bad faith, this project of self-coincidence fails. In authenticity, it succeeds.

It is from the first impetus towards substantiality that human reality must draw the value-reason that allows it to recover itself. For buffeted consciousness can quite freely will, by its plenary authenticity, to accomplish its effort to found itself. And this is not because authenticity is original value, superior to inauthenticity, but rather as one corrects a clumsy, ineffective effort by purifying it of all useless, parasitic actions. Thus authenticity is a value but not primary; it gives itself as a means to arrive at substantiality. It suppresses that which, in the search, is *flight*. But of course, this value of authenticity is merely *proposed*. Consciousness alone can self-motivate itself to effect the conversion.<sup>74</sup>

The “value” behind authenticity is value in the strong sense of lack of substantiality which manifests itself in the project of being-God. This value is given, built-into consciousness as it were. Authenticity is a means to that unavoidable end. The imperative behind authenticity is not categorical. It is a hypothetical imperative, the hypothesis of which is necessarily fulfilled given the type of beings which we are. Authenticity is not a *necessary* value. It is a *prudential* one. Sartre’s answer to the question “why

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<sup>73</sup>Richard Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 151.

<sup>74</sup>*WD*, 112.

be authentic?" is "because that is what you want." In answer to the question "but why want that?" Sartre can only point to his ontology.

Sartre's critics have in general failed to take into account the depth of the revision in our understanding of value and moral reflection which Sartre proposes. Sartre is more often than not criticized as if his questions were analytic questions and his terms the terms of common discourse. It is not surprising, then, that Sartre's theory has been painted as entirely implausible. But this is not the understanding which we should adopt. Sartre's thought repays careful reading. In particular, the careful reading of Sartre's comments concerning pure reflection reveals a concept of self and self-understanding which is radically different from that which Sartre's readers generally bring to his work and which supports his moral conclusions to a much greater degree than is generally acknowledged. The direction of Sartre's ethics largely follows that of his ontology: we must abandon the primacy of knowledge and relocate consciousness in the world among objects. What Sartre proposes is not a new answer to the standard questions of ethics but rather a new understanding of the ethical question itself. Our interpretation and subsequent criticism of Sartrean ethics must bear this in mind.

In particular, what must be borne in mind if a clear understanding is our goal is that the tenets of Sartrean ethics are the conclusions and not the premises of Sartre's philosophical work. I have attempted to show that Sartre's ethical claims are motivated by particular phenomenological problems and supported by Sartre's own phenomenological understanding of reality which is not specifically ethical. That is, that Sartre's response to the problem of reflection in general commits him to his approach to ethics.



Understanding the genesis of the problems which Sartre addresses allows us to understand the terms in which his responses proceed. In Sartre's case, his moral theory cannot be well-understood apart from the notion of pure reflection, which in turn cannot be understood apart from Sartre's commitment to phenomenology on the one hand and his rejection of deterministic psychology on the other, as evidenced by his debt to Bergson and Jaspers. The reading of Sartre as a synthesis of these influences enhances Sartre's historical interest, locating him at the intersection of several traditions from which he draws without entirely following any of them. Locating Sartre within his context underlines the originality of his attempt while at the same time clarifying the direction of his thought to the extent that it is in fact a response to the thought of others. Taken in this light, Sartre's view emerges as both deeper and more coherent than is generally understood, and consequently of greater value.

Sartre's moral thought remains perhaps the most intriguing aspect of his work, if for no other reason than because it is so incomplete. Pure reflection is an irrevocably individual notion just as Sartre's early thought was overwhelmingly concerned with the individual consciousness. There are, however, ample indications that this is not the level at which Sartre wished his ethical theory to remain. Ethics necessarily concerns not only the individual but the other. Sartre's claim that "... in wanting freedom we discover that it depends entirely on the freedom of others, and that the freedom of others depends on ours"<sup>75</sup> suggests that authenticity carries implications not only for the individual's attitude toward himself but also his attitude toward others—that there

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<sup>75</sup>Sartre, *Existentialism*, 46. Idem, *Existentialisme*, 83–84.

is, at the end of Sartre's moral account, a social ethics. And if this is the case, pure reflection is only half of the story. This raises the question of the relation between Sartre's early and later works, i.e., the extent to which Sartre's social philosophy can be understood as a continuation of his phenomenology. This question has been inadequately addressed, but is the question on which depends the ultimate meaning and direction of Sartrean ethics. Sartre's *Notebooks* will doubtless prove more useful in this regard than with respect to the questions taken up here. The reader must bear in mind that to resolve the question of pure reflection is not to resolve the problem of Sartrean ethics, although it is clearly a necessary condition. As for the rest, to paraphrase Sartre: we leave these questions to a future work.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>*BN*, 798. *EN*, 722.

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## Curriculum Vitae

Born: June 5, 1966, Cincinnati, Ohio

Education: B.A. with honors and distinction in Humanities, Shimer College (1987)  
M.A. in Philosophy, Indiana University (1989)

Academic Positions: Associate Instructor in Philosophy, Indiana University (1989–1991)

Awards: Frances Perkins Scholar (1984–1987)  
Andrew W. Mellon Dissertation Write-Up Fellowship (1992–1993)