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Temporality and Ethics in Early Sartre

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Abstract.

This thesis concerns the early work of Jean-Paul Sartre. It reconstructs the groundwork for the abandoned first ethics of 'authenticity', taking an unusual focus on his account of knowledge and the nature of temporality – especially the present. In other words, it focuses on the peculiar nature of time, knowledge and action as they allow us to make sense of an early Sartrean ethics. It suggests that existing accounts of bad faith as running off belief and lax standards of evidence become far more intelligible and less problematic when we see knowledge as intuitive, a matter of the (temporally) complicated presence of the object to the world. This unusual focus gives it its novelty; the aim is to show how these issues can take centre stage in our understanding of Sartre and lead to an original exegesis and reconstruction of his system. It also holds that this yields a reading which we can definitively say supports ethical considerations. Along the way, it also engages with contemporary discussions about the status of character in Sartre, reaffirming the importance of views on that topic which are currently moving out of fashion. It defends the idea that, in order to have a strong notion of a Sartrean ethics, we must defend the idea that character is retrospective and lacks any (semi) causal power over our actions.

Declaration.

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Introduction.

This thesis describes the possibility of early Sartrean ethics, the ethics of “authenticity” promised at the end of *Being and Nothingness*¹, with a view to showing that it can supply the grounds for a concrete, practical account of ethical action.

Sartrean ethics has received much attention in the modern Anglophone scholarship; one reason is that whichever period we consider, it was never truly, formally finished. Neither the early ethics, which finds its culmination in the *Notebooks for an Ethics*², nor the later ethics which was promised by the *Search for a Method*³ and worked toward in earnest in the *Critique(s) of Dialectical Reason*⁴, was ever finished. Unfinished, too, was the final theory, which according to Anderson exists only in lost interview tapes⁵. Each theory, though unsatisfactory, was intended to be more concrete and material than the last, and in this sense represent an advance over its predecessor. In Anderson’s introduction to *Sartre’s Two Ethics*, he makes the point that each ethics was intended to still be grounded on the last,⁶ which entails an interesting point: if all of the later ethics stand in a transitive relation to the first, then establishing that the earliest system works is vital. His early work is systematic to the point where it is often seen as Cartesian, coming out of the fixed, apodictic point of the intentionality thesis towards the ethics promised in *Being and Nothingness*. Yet other commentators have already given this topic considerable attention: writing in 1988, Detmer asked if there was a “need for yet another exposition of Sartre”.⁷ So at the outset, it is helpful to set out the reasons why a(nother) commentary on Sartre, specifically on the possibility of a Sartrean ethics, is valuable now.

¹ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E Barnes. Routledge: London and New York, 2003. Hereafter referenced as *BN*.

² *Notebooks for an Ethics*. Translated by David Pellauer. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1992. p. 474. Hereafter referenced as *Notebooks*.

³ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Search for a Method*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. Vintage: New York, 1968.

⁴ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Vol.1.). Translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith. Verso: London, 2004.

⁵ Anderson, Thomas C., *Sartre’s Two Ethics*. Open Court: Peru, Illinois, 1993, p.1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3

⁷ Detmer, David. *Freedom as a Value: A Critique of the Ethical Theory of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Open Court: La Salle, Illinois, 1988. p.1.

In the first place, there is a longstanding importance in being able to ground our concrete, practical ethics. Insofar as we intuit that there is such a thing as ethics, being able to back up that idea and knowing how to follow through on it is critical. We don't need to come up with an abstract philosophy to show us we have to make meaningful decisions; our everyday lives, all lives, present us with those opportunities all on their own. Sartre was deeply committed to engaging with the ethical, with the difficult decisions that we all face; he had no intention of just producing an abstract theory which would never leave the classroom. Yet without a sturdy system framing it, we can open ourselves to endless charges of subjectivism or relativity; one key benefit of Sartre's system is its pseudo-Cartesian starting point in intentionality, and the way that unpacks and flows towards the ethical. It offers us a vital, solid foundation as we move to answer those questions which we are all presented with: how should we act, how should we organise our society, right through to the mundane like whether we should take his hand or not. His novels show all too well the difficulties life can present us with, the challenges to our ethical sense that both our everyday lives and larger threats like the wars and instability of the 20th century present. Although we are not faced with instability in the same way as he was, we remain consistently implicated in moral crises of a global scale, which make demands on us to accept or reject our complicity or not. Our responsibility for the world, a key Sartrean theme, is perennial. Being able to understand, rather than assert, this responsibility is vital.

Secondly, if Sartre is noteworthy for one non-intellectual aspect of his work, it's the obscurity of his texts, the lack of favours that he does to the reader and his own system. Identifying a common thread in his arguments and his system is a key strategy to bring his views into focus; Detmer set out the importance of freedom as a value in his book of the same title. More recently, Webber⁸ gave us a unified reading of (early) Sartre focused around the importance of character in *Being and Nothingness*. By unifying their accounts around a particular, key theme or point, they both aimed to resolve the unclarity of the text and the system as a whole. This thesis, for similar reasons, focuses on the peculiar nature of time, knowledge and action as they allow us to make sense of an early Sartrean ethics. In particular, it contends that accounts of bad faith as running off belief and lax standards of evidence become far more intelligible and less problematic when we see knowledge as intuitive, a matter of the (temporally) complicated presence of the object to the world. Whilst all of these issues have been dealt with separately before, the aim is to show how they can take centre stage in our understanding of Sartre and lead to a novel reading of his system, a reading which can

⁸ Webber, Jonathan, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Routledge: New York, 2009.

properly support an ethics.

Thirdly, a modern obsession with self-identity and character was a large part of what inspired this work; over the last 20 years many stories have appeared in the popular press about narcissism, sociopathy, and other toxic relations to one's own identity at the cost of others. Accusations along these lines are common: President Trump is a narcissist, that private citizens contribute to the decline of society via their narcissism, even that (Hillary) Clinton is part of a narcissistic 'caring class' prophesied by Lasch in 1994.⁹ Popular intellectual books along these lines, such as *What About Me?*¹⁰ and studies like *Why We Love Sociopaths*¹¹ were popular from 2006-14. The running thread here is an obsession with self-identity and its (im)moral connotations. Sartre, who gave us literary and stage accounts of self-deception and self-obsession's effects such as *Erostratus*,¹² presents us with an ideal starting point for understanding how to properly ground, or how to immanently unseat, these kinds of accounts. We are, as in Sartre's time, faced with a period of crisis, although mercifully a much less bloody one. If we would seek to understand it through the lens of individual and collective self-deception, we must be prepared to defend a conception of ethics which makes self-deception central. Sartre's system, insofar as it does that, is a natural one to turn to.

Since this thesis concerns itself with "early Sartre", it will be helpful to the reader to explain that description. Broadly speaking, I mean pre-1960, although the most extensively used texts in what follows all came from 1948 or before. However, like any shorthand, this is slightly misleading; a common focus on temporality, presence, and knowledge also lends these works a thematic unity that guided their selection.

This thematic unity is twofold: firstly, the strongest visible influences in the texts used here are Husserlian and/or Schelerian, which is another way of saying their focus is on value theory, the lifeworld, and their impacts on ontology and ethics. Those texts will be *The Transcendence of the Ego, Being and Nothingness, Truth and Existence*, and *Notebooks for an Ethics*. Secondly, these works deal with presence in a meaningful way, with how the world is present to us as subjects. After the short piece *Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology*, Sartre's published work up to 1948 turns on a specific general thesis about the way the world is present to us: the

⁹ See Lasch, Christopher, *The Revolt of the Elites*. V.W Norton & Co.: New York, 1995. His description (Chapter Five) of how a misread ideal of tolerance damages society is one of the best formulations of that line of social criticism.

¹⁰ Verhaeghe, Paul, *What About Me?* Scribe: London, 2014.

¹¹ Kotsko, Adam, *Why We Love Sociopaths*. Zero Books: Winchester, 2012.

¹² Sartre, Jean-Paul, "Erostratus" in *Intimacy* [translator unspecified]. Panther: London, 1968.

t titular intentionality thesis. Later pieces, such as the *Search for a Method*, lean far more heavily on Marx and on (the understanding of) history, eschewing concerns about post-Husserlian value theory. Both its primary inspiration and its concerns suggest a clean break with Sartre's work up to 1948.

Without pre-empting the argument too much, we can trace a natural progression from *IHP* as an "Eureka!" moment about presence to *Transcendence of the Ego* and *Being and Nothingness* as an evolved and substantial consideration of intentionality and presence. The former deals with self-presence and the nature of the self; the latter, far more wide ranging, covers the consequences of the intentionality thesis further. *Being and Nothingness* also gives us the first consideration of presence being connected to both knowledge and temporality, and promises a later ethical work which builds on its foundation. That ethical work, it strongly hints, is connected to self-deception and ignorance insofar as 'bad faith' is introduced far before it is necessary and explored using examples that suggest social criticism rather than dry, minimalist situations. Finished (yet not published) in 1947, *Truth and Existence* focuses almost exclusively on the links between knowledge, truths, and presence, and connects this explicitly to an ethical dimension. Colourful examples like the wilful ignorance of a "distinguished carnivore" who represses the bloody history of his chateaubriand¹³ to downplay his role in animal suffering reprise the theme of deliberate ignorance or evasion of knowledge. More dryly, Sartre's suggestion that our projects demand we unveil the world, i.e., that they make that unveiling necessarily valuable to us, does the same work in a more theoretical and explicit way. *The Notebooks for an Ethics*, also finished in 1948 but unpublished, similarly contain reference to the unveiling of the world (through presence) as an imperative and to the ethical import of (not) avoiding uncertainty. Although fragmentary, they offer much that is a development of this thought process, such as material on the ethical significance of tolerating ambiguity.

The keen-eyed reader will notice that *Existentialism and Humanism* and *Anti-Semite and Jew* are missing from this list, which might be surprising. Both texts are explicitly ethical and were written before 1960. More detailed reasoning will be supplied as the texts become relevant, but for the reader's benefit I will sketch here why the two were largely passed over. Firstly, *Anti-Semite and Jew* is primarily a work of mass psychoanalysis concerning anti-Semites. It assumes, rather than expounds, an ethics, and attempts to provide concrete action for French citizens to take against anti-Semitism. As such, an exploration of how the ethics is meant to be generated or defended gains little from the text, save one part: its characterisation of authenticity. The formulation it gives for

¹³ *T&E*, p. 34.

authenticity is hugely important since these are sparse in the Sartrean canon. As a statement of intent and framework for reconstructing the ethical, it is invaluable, even if the rest of the book is somewhat irrelevant to purpose and of a fairly low quality as a sociological-psychoanalytic text.

When it comes to *Existentialism and Humanism*, there are two reasons why I will not treat it as overly significant. The first, and weakest, is that it was never intended as part of the canon, but was a popular lecture whose publication Sartre later regarded as a mistake. More strongly, its argument does not sit snugly in the arc of progression in Sartre's thought I have sketched; it is not concerned with presence and knowledge as the source of the ethical per se. While it supplies a reason to value (the freedom of) the Other absolutely, which is useful for reconstructing authenticity, the same premise can be generated purely using the material on intersubjective relations in *Being and Nothingness*. Why would we want to bypass it in this way? Because, as we will see, *Existentialism and Humanism* directly contradicts the need, in the *Notebooks*, for all freedom to be respected insofar as it is a concrete, *specific* freedom in situation. Since the *Notebooks* better fit the arc of Sartre's theoretical progression far better, their claims will override *Existentialism and Humanism* in this thesis.

This arc or consistent theme is also why the title mentions "temporality" as well as ethics; the account of knowledge we find in *Truth and Existence* and *Being and Nothingness* would be impossible without Sartre's corresponding accounts of temporality and presence. "Presence and Ethics in Early Sartre" or "Knowledge and Ethics in Early Sartre" were serious contenders for the present work's title,¹⁴ so why did "temporality" win out?

Temporality is vital to explaining Sartrean self-deception on my reading; I maintain that the ambiguous self-deception plays on is basically about time. Temporality, which helps us to the notion of the ambiguous future, is by corollary vital to the idea of understanding authenticity and the ethical. As the text progresses, several classic issues in Sartre scholarship, like the potential gratuitousness of radical project change, the (true) origin of anguish, and the nature of character will all be addressed with solutions which emphasise the role of time. The need to constantly verify our projects is behind the ability (and obligation) to refine our knowledge of the world, to consistently employ better concepts in an authentic life, which is vital to the account that follows. None of this would be possible without seeing the thread of temporal ambiguity going through Sartre's account.

¹⁴ The latter might have been a little confusing: Sartre both rails against the primacy of knowledge and makes knowledge, in a different sense, central to ethics in *Truth and Existence*.

In sum, without keeping temporality and time in mind, it is very difficult indeed to justify how knowledge, in Sartre's specialised sense, is crucial to understanding the possibility of ethics.

Outline.

Practically speaking, this thesis appears in six parts, with a brief introduction at the start of each part describing the overall question of each chapter and the questions that will be asked and answered there. Although these introductions are not absolutely comprehensive, they are intended to help the reader follow what is happening at any given point. Methodologically, this text is reconstructive and teleologically moves towards the ethics given in Chapter Five and shored up in Chapter Six. What this means is that the text will progressively supply the reader with understandings of various Sartrean themes needed to make sense of a reconstructed Sartrean ethics.

The first chapter introduces some foundational Sartrean themes, starting from the intentionality thesis and moving onto the in-itself/for-itself distinction, as well as covering the derivation of the pre-reflective consciousness and translucency of consciousness. This chapter, based largely on his essay on Husserl's intentionality thesis, is mostly exegetical.

The second chapter gives an account of freedom in Sartre as a ground for the later understanding of bad faith, inauthenticity, good faith, and authenticity. Exegetically, it introduces the key ideas of nothingness, value and lack which flow out of Sartre's account of the for-itself and in-itself distinction, which are essential for going forward. It also covers the standard account of the motif/mobile/end structure of action and shows that all three can be collapsed into one another or are different ways of looking at the same thing. This includes the first engagement with Sartrean temporality to fill out his account of action and motivation, and shore up the plausibility of radical freedom. One element of apparent chance or randomness in action is left behind: the strangeness of the present, of the apparent moment when we take action. This chapter also gives the first introduction of the fundamental project and anguish, the primary motor of motivated self-deception. The uncertainty of the moment of action later gives us the idea that anguish can be before the present, and by extension that it is a kind of fear of the effort required in long-term action, the need to pursue an "undertaking" in the words of the *Notebooks*.

Next, the third chapter considers Sartre's conception of the self and of knowledge, suggesting the connection between knowledge and the account of temporality given in the previous chapter. It casts the self as built up over time, as a trace of our actual behaviour which is built up of evidence. Our character, on this picture, is not identical with consciousness, but accumulates as consciousness takes action and can be the subject of error and recasting. The accompanying account of knowledge

shows how Sartre has a presence based or intuitive picture in which we directly 'see' the world and gain knowledge of it in that way. The point of actual content with the world, however, is vanishing, and so we constantly 'verify' the world and our projects, laying down a picture of the world that maps onto our ideas of the (non-apodictic) truth. In the sense that all knowledge and truth is being constantly tested, we see an unusually strong case for the Sartrean dictum that all knowledge is in fact what we would normally call belief. Another important consequence of this account is the proof that all error in consciousness has to be reflective, which is hugely important to self-deception later.

Chapter Four describes the self-deception or 'bad faith', taking a line inspired by Catalano and Santoni, that it is basically about evidence, about poor standards of evidence for our self-image in character. However, the needed premise that all knowledge is belief is much stronger than normal for the earlier chapter's insights taken from *Truth and Existence*. In order to preserve our character as an eternal entity, we appeal to the future or the past as continuing on forever, and the appeal we make at any given time is basically irrelevant to the overall structure. So too are crises resulting from the translucency of consciousness, which are there by design where bad faith becomes a way of life in inauthenticity. Moreover, we see how bad faith is a necessarily social phenomenon insofar as the other can directly modify our projects and insofar as many if not all characters are socially mediated.

In Chapter Five, we will see how we can reconstruct authenticity without falling prey to charges of subjectivism. This will be done by reinforcing the classical statement in *Anti-Semite and Jew* about authenticity, adding more detail until charges like the "authentic torturer" example drop out. This account will draw from the previous chapters, understanding authenticity is a kind of solidarity with oneself despite the evolving nature of knowledge and evidence, and the uncertainties involved with long-term undertakings and our freedom to abandon them. In this reconstruction, the point originally made by Detmer, that freedom is the ultimate value, will be central but I will read it through the specific claims of the previous chapters. In the final modifications, we will show how practical and ontological freedom are linked in a way that forces us to respect the concrete goals of the other as much as the value of their apparently abstract freedom, showing that this system of ethics can both regulate our relations with others and enforce a respect for the objective and/or material conditions of their lives.

Lastly, Chapter Six ties up some loose ends in the system, adding several pieces of reinforcement to the story so far. Firstly, an account of how it is possible to be forced into bad faith which does not

depend on anguish per se, in order to dispel the doubt that “mere” anguish is a strong enough incentive towards an inauthentic lifestyle. This will trace the possibility that the Other can disrupt our projects entirely, (coming close to) destroying the normal operation of consciousness and under that threat enforcing bad faith on us. It also reinforces the way we can link bad faith and inauthenticity to the material, by looking at the Sartrean account of possession and tracing how that can lead to an inauthenticity based on the concrete, objective and/or material circumstances of our lives. It then moves on to how we can positively assist one another with our projects, and how that assistance can be blocked by an ignorance imposed from outside.

So why this structure? Broadly speaking, introducing Sartre’s most basic methodological and theoretical concerns is a necessary first step. When writing this text, the idea that ethics would concern self-knowledge and knowledge more generally was never in doubt, which demands the reader first understand the nature of the self, knowledge, and self-knowledge. Understanding one’s self, it turns out, requires an understanding of character, which itself requires an understanding of the structure of action. Only with all of this in place can we start to understand the basic format of self-deception and its relation to the ethical. All of us lets us see the structure as produced by chains of “in order to understand Y we have to understand X”.

The only exception is in considering inter and intrasubjective bad faith and authenticity separately, but this is more of a pedagogical point than anything else. In these cases I ruled that it would be easier to introduce the basic concept by explaining it as if it were purely intrasubjective, and then immediately moving on to the intersubjective (full) version. In any case, in examples like explaining intrasubjective self-deception through character, which turns out to be intersubjective, the contradictions immediately become apparent and demand the full picture. I do not wish to suggest that there is some kind of Hegelian structure of immanent unfolding going on in Sartre more generally (in the sense that that is irrelevant to the discussion, not that we should deny such a claim). Nor is the suggestion that there is anything as complex as the structure of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or the *Logic* at play in the current text. The idea is as simple as it is sometimes easiest to sell a more abstract, intrasubjective idea about, e.g., deception or character and then move on once it is clear that picture falls apart.

List of Abbreviations.

Throughout this text, the titles of some works by Sartre will sometimes be abbreviated for the sake of brevity (especially when referencing). Those abbreviations are as follows:

ASJ: *Anti-Semite and Jew*

BN: *Being and Nothingness*

EH: *Existentialism and Humanism*

IHP: *Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology*

Notebooks: *Notebooks for an Ethics*

Sketch: *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*

T&E: *Truth and Existence*

TE: *Transcendence of the Ego*

It is also worth noting here that throughout, double quotation marks (""") will indicate quotations or engagement with a hypothetical interlocutor, and single quotation marks (") as used as scare marks for technical or unusual (uses of) vocabulary.

Chapter One – The Intentionality Thesis and (Self) Awareness.

This chapter will lay out some introductory concerns within *Being and Nothingness*, looking to make sure Sartre's basic observations and principles are in place ready for a later reading of his more involved positions. Most of this will amount to an unpacking of the dense material in his introduction, which is confusingly written in many places and full of appeals to special terminology, as well as some context from other early works. The goal of this chapter is to show how Sartre derives the famous in-itself and for-itself distinction that underpins the rest of the work through his extension of Husserl's intentionality thesis and a rejection of non-phenomenological starting points for ontology. In particular, Sartre objects to those positions he calls "digestive philosophy" and/or identifies as being an unsustainable representationalism. This will take the form of four main sections, the first looking at Sartre's characterisation of the intentionality thesis, the second looking at self-awareness, the third arriving at the in-itself/for-itself distinction focusing on the for-itself, and finally a few brief remarks on Sartre's overall project leading into a discussion of the nature of the in-itself.

Section One: The Intentionality Thesis.

Sartre owes a huge debt to Husserl for the concept of 'intentionality', which is the key to understanding his system. Indeed, there is good reason to believe (as the progress of this argument should help confirm) that starting with intentionality is what lets him reach the ethical.¹⁵ In *Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology*¹⁶, Sartre defines intentionality in the following way: "[the] necessity for consciousness to exist as consciousness of something other than itself".¹⁷ Against what he terms digestive philosophy, Sartre says that there are no such things as mental objects or contents of consciousness such as a mental picture or components of (inner) experience. When he (somewhat flippantly) compares a digestive consciousness to a "spidery mind" that traps objects in its web and digests them like a real spider might a cocooned fly, the key assertion is that such a mind is "reducing them to its own substance".¹⁸ By this I take him to mean that the experience we have of the world is transformed from appearance into the mental and either preserved whole or reconstructed on demand from the pieces that make it up. In a more modern spin, in visual perception this is like the process of photogrammetry being used to create special effects for TV, cinema, or video games, where special photographic techniques allow a 1:1 replication of an actor or object within a computer graphics engine; the object, formerly [only] outside, is now reproduced within the equipment as a piece of code. The points of view that make this claim intelligible are, on the idealist end of things, that external objects are possible to take out of the world into media of storage and remain those objects, or alternatively that in encountering features of the objective world, replicas are created within storage media and subjects deal exclusively with them. The additional premise that makes digestive philosophy possible is that consciousness is one such medium. Sartre's primary argument against this model of conscious experience is that can't explain a properly described first-person account of our encounters with the world. His general method here is to describe the structure of awareness through minimal presuppositions about what that awareness is and how it is constituted; a proper description will reveal an account of the structure of appearances and their appearing. Even though appearances are

¹⁵ For an argument to this effect, see Poellner, Peter, "Early Heidegger and Sartre on Authenticity" in Mcmanus, Denis (ed.) *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self*. Routledge: London and New York, 2015. pp.243-263.

¹⁶ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology*, pp.257-60 in "Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers: Edmund Husserl" (Vol. I), ed. Bernet, R., Welton, D., and Zavota, G. Routledge: New York, 2005.

¹⁷ *IHP*, p. 259.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

separate from the way they appear, i.e. the structure of appearances is not immediately given when they appear to us, Sartre holds that the correct investigative attitude will reveal that structure to us. Morris refers to this kind of approach as a “re-amazement”, a reacquaintance with the aspects of our experience that are usually passed by and seen as unremarkable, but can be revelatory of the structures underpinning our encounters with the world¹⁹. Describing an everyday, normal encounter with the world, Sartre says:

*You see this tree, to be sure. But you see it just where it is: at the side of the road, in the midst of the dust, alone and writhing in the heat, eight miles from the Mediterranean coast*²⁰

There are two closely related senses of “you see it just where it is...” here; first, you see the object that is the tree as in its actual place independently and outside of consciousness. Second, it is surrounded in its objective location by a halo of other properties like the miasma and the heat haze. On a naïve reading of the first equivocation, the point is that we do not experience objects of the world as coextensive with us; there isn’t a ‘mine-ness’ to the tree trunk that there would be to my hand,²¹ for instance. This difference between my self-awareness and the awareness of the tree is meant to show that appearing things are given to us as separate from ourselves, thus giving us a reason to posit that consciousness must be separate from its object.²² Whatever the grounds (which are not particularly important here), I experience myself with a distinctive sense that it is *my* self, which is missing in the case of the tree – it is “just where it is”. If we pay attention to our experience, we see that this tree is experienced as outer – “[y]ou certainly knew that the tree was not you”²³. We might object here that we can and do experience objects as parts of ourselves – think of the old swashbuckling tales about fencing masters whose swords became extensions of their bodies. However, even if we grant that this is true (i.e. that the weapon has become a part of the maestro) it does not need to be a problem. There is still a meaningful difference in the way he experiences a foil in his hand and the sabre on the wall. This is the same kind of difference as between my experience of the tree and of my arm, and if I could experience the tree like that, the story runs that it *would* be a part of me.

¹⁹ Morris, Katherine, *Sartre*. Blackwell: Oxford, 2008. pp 27-8.

²⁰ *IHP*, p.258, emphasis mine.

²¹ More exactly, my self-identification with the hand is with my hand-as-lived-body, although my hand considered as an object, what Sartre later will call the ‘body-for-others’ is in a different category, that of the “in-itself”, which we will come to and define soon.

²² Or to be much more quick and dirty about it, we can also refer to the impossibility of having a thought with no theme or ‘subject’, going closer to contemporary analytic approaches to intentionality as the “aboutness” of thought.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

Secondly, the tree is given to us in relation to other natural phenomena²⁴ right from the start – it is that specific tree, which is surrounded by Mediterranean dust and bathed in heat, it is inherently given as related to all of them²⁵ and these relations trace out different ways we could explicitly/thematically apprehend the tree, for instance the tree that dances in the heat haze or the tree that is obscured by dust. These different aspects trace out what Husserl would call a *horizon*, and when we consider that there are always aspects of the object that are hidden, there are always infinite perspectives afforded by it. If I were to approach the tree from the North, its southern face would be hidden from me; were I to approach from the South, its northern face would not be visible. In principle, we could make infinitely many infinitely small changes in location to give us an infinite number of perspectives – even before figuring in the different relational aspects of the object. This is to say that the object is in some sense made up of infinitely many parts and is infinitely complex – or at least that, in Sartre’s initially confusing vocabulary, an infinitely long process would be necessary to give the object immediately, in its entirety. This gives us a way to connect the story in *IHP* about experiencing the tree to Sartre’s (brief) argument against mental objects in *Being and Nothingness*, making one extended argument: there he claims “it would require an infinite process to inventory the total contents of a thing”.²⁶ The idea would be that mental objects are collected within consciousness and made available on demand for its use, in analogy with the way I can keep parts in a cupboard and move them to my workbench when they are needed. In Sartre’s more bizarre analogy, it’s the same way that a spider’s meal is first trapped on the web, where it is later unwrapped from its silk to be eaten on the spider’s whim. The relevant question is how we cash out the analogue of being in the box or trapped in the web for a mental object; it’s tempting to talk about consciousness functioning like physical space, but Sartre clearly wants to deny the analogy.

If we imagine an actual case of interacting with a physical object in storage to achieve an end, such as my getting out a knife to prepare a meal, we can cash *that* out in a way that shows Sartre’s intended disanalogy with consciousness. The almost painfully basic case is that I have a drawer

²⁴ Which shouldn’t be confused with phenomena in the technical sense.

²⁵ This also amounts to the observation that the world is given to us all at once, not as individual pieces. In his paper “Pre-reflective Self-consciousness and the Autobiographical Ego” Kenneth Williford holds that this description is vital to establishing the world as ‘always already’ unified synchronically (i.e. instantaneously as opposed to across time) which observation is an important part of the argument against a real ego in *Transcendence of the Ego*. The paper can be found as “Pre- Reflective Self- Consciousness and the Autobiographical Ego”, in Webber, J. (ed.) *Reading Sartre (ed.)*. Routledge: Abingdon, 2011, pp. 195-211.

²⁶ *BN*, p.7.

acting as a container for lots of different knives; I pick one out and it goes from being in storage to being available for use, and I get to work chopping onions. However, described more fully, I have a whole host of knives in the drawer, cook's knives, carving knives, paring knives, each of which might be subclassed as sharp or dull, Germanic or Japanese pattern. What marks each individual knife out as being *that particular knife* is the unity of its features, the length of the blade and the tang, the material the handle is made from, whether it is intended to chop in virtue of heft or sharpness, and so on. This kind of description is purely cold and analytical; all of them will also hold some kind of 'affective'²⁷ charge. They might be the one I am wary of for dulling easily, or one that brings a nostalgia for when I bought and learned to use it. They also have relational features that we can encounter independently of understanding them mechanically – “good for chopping onions” is relevantly independent of “about 4 ½” long and cuts with sharpness not weight”. Being affectively neutral *is* an affective charge; the mundane £12 Ikea knife that merely does its job stands out because it *doesn't stand out* as being particularly good or bad. This unity of aspects of encountering a given knife is instantaneous or 'synchronic', only characterising the knife as it is at one moment. Then there is the diachronic unity, unity over time, that accounts for the knife being re-identifiable instead of leaving us in a slideshow with no recurring characters. Between the incredibly large (Sartre posits countably infinitely large)²⁸ number of aspects united in the synchronic and the infinitely large number of times we could encounter it across, the number of appearances that can be identified as the object is itself infinite. Nonetheless, when I take one knife out of the drawer it is encountered as one possible appearance of the knife, it is that exact knife in context of the time, the lighting, my intentions in using it, and so on – it appears as a finite appearance that, although it refers to the infinite other appearances that could be re-identified as the knife, is specific and limited.

Hence, in order for an object to be literally contained within consciousness, even in the capacity of representation, that consciousness would have to contain an infinite number of representations of the object under its infinite possible aspects, and would have to either have the capacity to unite those representations having encountered or inferred them, or on an idealist representationalist story it would absorb the object all at once as a transcendent object made up of those infinite parts. Given the brevity of his remarks, I think Sartre sees these alternatives as absurd – the question being

²⁷ Roughly, we can say this means emotional for now although that is an oversimplification.

²⁸ The infinite appearances are countably so because they are related to an infinite division of (apparent) space and time, although there is neither indication that he deals with different infinities nor does the argument require engagement with them.

what it would mean for consciousness to have this infinitely large storage capacity and how any semblance of the order we take to be in appearances could obtain. The second point concerns questions like how the knife as it is in my kitchen when I am 25 and making dinner with it is kept separate from the knife as it was when I was younger and learning to use it. The knife, as it is encountered and related to the other knives and its container, is qua appearance always finite, but I take Sartre to be arguing that the idea that it could fit into consciousness presupposes that the whole (transcendent) knife is similarly finite, which is a category error. Once we try and make explicit the consequences of having mental objects, the account rapidly unpacks into one that holds that objects are made up of a simultaneously present series of infinite aspects, which is not compatible with our experience of having one finite experience at a time.²⁹ Sartre's remarks about the being of appearances show us that his enquiry is not concerned with any metaphysical question such as how an infinite knife fits into physical space; his explicit project is unpacking appearances and how they relate to (a consciousness) they appear to. Encountering appearances in this way is what he would call a contingency, something that *just is* and which we have to accept – because of the scope of phenomenology, exploring something like duration or presence of infinite objects in finite space is either going to be some kind of later regional ontology which has its own, different scope, or out of bounds. Hence we can find a logical conceivability argument against the idea of objects in consciousness/mental objects quite apart from those arguments that live and die by our raw experience of the world. We can still take a singular perspective on the tree, however, such as when I might go to photograph the way the hot air swirls around it, but this will always be the-tree-as-surrounded-by-hot-air and not *the tree*.

All of this brings us full circle back to the first definition of intentionality – consciousness of the world is not given to us as being of something within ourselves, so we can say that consciousness of inner objects is in the first place missing. Secondly, the infinity of profiles under which objects of the world can be apprehended means that having mental objects is impossible. Thirdly, consciousness having 'inner objects' is not necessary for there to be consciousness³⁰ – instead it is possible for the being of consciousness "to fly out into the world",³¹ for consciousness to just be the process of its own reaching out to the world beyond itself. Since *Being and Nothingness* spells out what the being of

²⁹ Although "at a time" here implies objective time; as we will later see, for Sartre pace Husserl subjective time is not made up of a series of presents to be occupied but is always a unity of parts engaged with the past, present, and future.

³⁰ This structural triad of lack of necessity, impossibility, and de facto absence, although something of a reconstruction here, mirrors the one explicitly found in Sartre's arguments in *Transcendence of the Ego*.

³¹ *IHP*, p.259.

consciousness is with this as its start, the coherence of the rest of the account is itself (intended to be) an argument for this intentionality thesis. Here, the question becomes how specifically consciousness is aware of itself and the world, given this general structure of being necessarily “consciousness *of something*”. After all, despite a little unpacking, the intentionality thesis has still given us an extremely minimal picture of consciousness.³²

³² Ibid., p.259.

Section Two: Self-Awareness, Reflection Theory, and Pre-reflective Self-Awareness.

One intuitive approach here would have self-awareness or self-knowledge grounded in a theory of reflection modelled on (visual) perception.³³ On this kind of account, self-awareness is only possible when we ‘look inside’ to find ourselves; consciousness has to always reflect on itself in order to be self-aware. Borrowing from Manfred Frank, Zahavi calls this the “reflection theory” of self-awareness, and I think it is exactly this kind of account Sartre has in mind when he criticises the alleged primacy of self-knowledge over self-awareness.³⁴ A premise of the account is that in order for reflection to be possible, there has to be a pair of distinct terms in the act of reflection: the reflected-on and the reflecting, or the object and subject of reflection. If we are naively thinking of reflection as something like inner sight or inner perception then we can draw a parallel with vision; in any case where I see my dog there is a necessary distinction between myself as the seeing and the dog as the seen; vision is always mediated. A case where I reflect on myself or ‘see’ myself is not much different; in order to reflect on myself I have to create a difference between the reflected and the reflected-on, by making myself a[n] (separate) object for myself. There is always a difference between the seen and the seeing, and between the reflected and the reflecting, but if the goal is to achieve self-awareness through reflection then reflection somehow also works to collapse this difference. If we are to achieve reflective self-awareness, reflection somehow has to be the same, but at the same time separate and different from, pre-reflective consciousness. As Zahavi³⁵ rightly points out, the sense of identical here cannot be numerical identity. If reflective and pre-reflective consciousness were numerically identical, there would be no difference between the two of them, so there would be no reflection going on at all. Instead, the reflecting and reflected-on are posited as being in the same stream of consciousness. They are the same consciousness insofar as it would be impossible to actually separate them without destroying the whole conscious system – and even phrasing it like that understates the closeness of their relationship. However, this implies that the reflecting consciousness carries with it some kind of capacity or propensity to discriminate between what is the same as itself and what is different – which in turn implies a kind of prior self-awareness. In order to tell apart components of its stream and other streams [of consciousness], the reflecting consciousness must already be relevantly self-aware. Here is where the real problem starts: if all

³³ The following account of reflection theories in general draws on Zahavi, “Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness” in Welton, Don. (ed.), *The New Husserl*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN., 2003, pp. 157-80. p.159.

³⁴ *BN*, p.8.

³⁵ Zahavi, “Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness”, p.159.

self-awareness comes from reflection, this implies that a further second-order reflecting consciousness is responsible for the self-awareness of the first-order reflecting consciousness. And this second-order consciousness needs self-awareness as well, which means that must rely on a third-order consciousness, which relies on a fourth, and so on into infinity. Or we can put the problem this way: for any given self-reflecting consciousness, it must be self-aware to be self-reflecting, which presupposes that the goal of the self-reflection has been met in the first place – it implies that to reach the self-awareness we are aiming at, there has to be a foundational self-awareness. This leaves us with two options/responses:

a) Reject the account on the basis of infinite regress.

b) Reject the account because it implies and requires a fundamental self-awareness that violates its own premises, i.e. because it is self-undermining.

If we pick option b) above, then we end up rejecting the starting premise that all self-awareness is reflective, and by extension we lose the premise that self-awareness requires a distinction between the self *that is aware* and the self *of which it is aware*, and this is more or less where Sartre ends up.

With regard to knowledge, the intentionality thesis tells us that the knowing consciousness must stand apart from and posit the known object; the object that is known must be outside of consciousness. However, Sartre points out that whilst this is necessary for us to have knowledge,³⁶ it is not sufficient – there is also a need for an awareness of being that which has the knowledge in order for us to have knowledge at all. If I have knowledge, but I am unaware of having that knowledge, I cannot engage with it, yet the very idea of knowledge involves or contains our being able to engage with the topics we have knowledge of. If I am not aware of my knowing consciousness, this amounts to the same thing as not having that consciousness in the first place; to me, that knowledge would not be present. Hence there is a further condition for knowledge, that something secures and grounds my *consciousness* of knowledge. Nonetheless, Sartre sees that we can easily be misled here by the intuitions that add up to the ‘primacy of knowledge’³⁷ – it is

³⁶ “Knowledge” here has a wider sense than what we would now appeal to through justified true belief or something similar – it includes judgment.

³⁷ A tendency to equate all understanding with knowledge and to model all our access to the world as an acquisition of various types of knowledge, which leads us into reflection theories of self-awareness.

tempting to think of this consciousness of consciousness as some kind of knowledge of knowledge, and on the face of it claiming that we have to know what we know is based on a reasonable assumption. This assumption is that knowledge is the primary structure of awareness, which gives us the formula attributed to Alain: “[t]o know is to know that one knows”.³⁸ However, this account immediately falls foul of the general problems with a reflection theory of self-awareness; as Sartre retells it, it at least implicitly suggests an inner look or looking inside ourselves structure to self-awareness. On a strong reading, it is explicitly such an account. In looking to knowledge to explain the self-awareness that *itself* is supposed to ground knowledge, we are “introducing into consciousness the subject-object dualism”,³⁹ which is to say we are positing the known and the knowing as separate terms. However, in order for the knowledge and knowledge-of-knowledge to contain that they belong to the same subject, we have to posit that they are identical as a part of the same stream of consciousness. We are blocked off from using numerical identity because they were introduced as separate moments in the structure of consciousness. Hence, a further act of knowing reflection is needed to posit the two as identical (as being within the same flow of consciousness), and a fourth term will need to be added to posit the first three as identical, and a fifth for the same reasons, and on and on until an infinite number of terms of knowing reflection is needed so that the first could be guaranteed to begin with. The only alternative is, as we saw earlier, to conclude that this kind of account is self-undermining, and that the idea of knowledge grounding knowledge is incoherent. Instead, there must be a final term that is not couched in knowledge to explain any knowing consciousness, which amounts to a rejection of the primacy of knowledge to our own awareness (of the world) which is immanent to the logic of the primacy of knowledge itself.⁴⁰ This final term is what Sartre will call a non-positional or pre-reflective consciousness; it cannot posit an object because the thesis of intentionality shows us this would be to separate itself from that object, which would bring us back to endorsing a reflection theory of self-awareness.⁴¹

What kind of consciousness is this? What is it like? In order to guarantee reflection, it has to be numerically identical to that reflection, always given as present alongside any and all reflective acts of consciousness. All that this consciousness is *is* the bare minimum of being turned toward the world (outside) and it does not contain a reflective stance⁴² on the world, “[i]t does not *know* my perception”. Nonetheless, it has to be the foundation of my conscious/knowing awareness of the

³⁸ *BN*, p.8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Later, we will relate this result back to the project and method of phenomenology itself.

⁴¹ Or reveal to us that we identified the term we called the final, non-positional awareness incorrectly, and that a different consciousness is the guarantor in the chain of reflection.

⁴² Although we will see later that it can very well contain a *valuational* stance toward the world.

world or else we are right back in the reflection theory. In his most famous example, Sartre describes counting cigarettes, and coming to know that there are twelve without ever having reflective/positional awareness of having counted them. He never thinks to himself that he is counting cigarettes, yet if someone were to ask what he was doing, he would be instantly capable of answering that he was counting cigarettes - with no difficulty at all. The general point here is that we have an action that is not being done reflectively/I am not thinking⁴³ about the action, but I am still acting, and when I do reflect on it I find I had an awareness that grounds my (reflectively) conscious ability to know I was counting cigarettes – my consciousness of counting them is explanatory of my (positional) consciousness that I am counting them.

We might ask what it's like to experience the world like this; the idea of non-conceptual content,⁴⁴ defined very broadly, can help. At a gloss, we can see it as a way of experiencing the world as just unfolding in front of us, where we are aware of what is happening but not spelling it out to ourselves in theoretical terms. Imagine some drama where a spy has a secret that he is looking to trade, a piece of strategic intelligence that will be swapped for material aid he needs. He lives in a world where there is a permanent risk of backstabbing and betrayal; at a meeting he finds himself lying about what he knows, feeling a creeping sense of unease that he can't quite pinpoint. Colloquially we might ascribe this to all kinds of things: somewhere in the back of his mind a connection is forming that means he doesn't need the information; some expression on his contact's face wasn't *quite* right; the danger is suddenly too much. In the debriefing later he might tell his handler exactly these reasons in the same way I can say I am counting cigarettes in retrospect, but in the moment they are only there as a feeling to the world, something that is lived through and experienced, engaged with practically but not looked at and examined. Indeed, this kind of absorption and focus characterises most of our engagements with the world; we live through our lives for the most part rather than taking a reflective stance on them as they are happening.

⁴³ In the commonsense/conversational meaning of the word.

⁴⁴ The idea that non-thetic/non-positional consciousness is linked to non-conceptual content can be seen in detail in Poellner, Peter, "Non-Conceptual Content, Experience, and the Self", *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 9 no. 2 (2003), pp 32-57. A briefer account which helped popularise the idea was first published by Jonathan Webber as "Motivated Aversion: Non-Thetic Awareness in Bad Faith" in *Sartre Studies International* vol. 8, no. 1 (2002), pp.80-114.

However, this analogy can be accused of inaccuracy. The claim would be that in this case and others like it, the problem can be framed as an ambiguity in our perception of objects (which is in principle open to being cleared up) whereas the pre-reflective self-awareness we have is necessarily ambiguous. In the case of the spy, what is manifested to him as a feeling or sense about the world is the objective⁴⁵ danger present in revealing too much to someone who is unreliable, but having intelligence from other agents could tell him either way if it is safe, or some kind of training in decoding people's body language might make him feel certain enough to put him at ease. This is, on the face of it, true: in the case of an ambiguity about something out in an objective world, that ambiguity is intuitively reducible to a lack of appropriate evidence and/or the ability to use whatever evidence we do have. Nonetheless, the case of a single event (the meeting) is not equivalent to the permanent status of consciousness, and that is where the disanalogy comes in. If we change the example and say that there was adequate evidence for our spy to know he was not in danger, there is still an affective/emotional charge to his world, a feeling about how the world is, even if that is just some kind of flat boredom – and this too is lived through rather than judged/known. If this boredom is brought to reflective awareness, there is still going to be some kind of sense of how the world is to him that isn't explicit; surrounding every single explicit sense we have of the world is an implicit one; we can always pull another feeling about the world from behind our explicit awareness of our situation, like a magician pulling out handkerchief after handkerchief, forever. These implicit feelings trace out a horizon around our explicit awarenesses, and we can draw an analogy here with vision; there is always a sector of the visual field in focus and out of focus. If I am looking at my dog, I will see his rug in the background; if I look at the rug, the dog will be the background instead. No matter how many times I switch focus, in principle there will always be something hazy and indistinct as well as the clearly visible. Whilst in these visual examples we are focusing on our object and getting it in greater clarity, self-awareness is a different thing entirely: in *Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre claims that the self qua Ego is "never seen except out of the corner of one's eye";⁴⁶ our self-awareness is only given to us undistorted when we do not focus on it/grasp it reflectively. Even this is not quite accurate, though: in the visual case, there is always something that is the centre of the field which is seen differently from the rest, but our awareness of the world can be entirely lived through pre-reflectively. When I get up in the morning, for instance, it is very rare indeed that I conceptualise what I am doing – I more or less automatically put the kettle on, line up cans of dog food for the day, and so on, and it is only in cases of Heideggerian equipmental breakdown that

⁴⁵ At least objective in the sense that anyone with his constellation of goals will always face the potential consequences of the action as endangering.

⁴⁶ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Translated by Sarah Richmond. Routledge: Abingdon 2004. p. 40. Hereafter referenced as *TE*.

anything conceptual comes into it such as explicitly thinking about which shops will be open to buy more pet food at 0830 or being fully aware of my guilt that the dog will go hungry until lunch. If that routine remains undisturbed, then there is nothing thematised in the stream of consciousness.

A consequence of this that will be very important later is the thesis of the 'translucency' of consciousness. If all reflective consciousness is dependent on/grounded by a pre-reflective self-awareness, then there is no room for an unconscious in the sense of some part of the unified stream of consciousness that is there but which is not present to the conscious subject. Reflective consciousness is only possible against the backdrop of pre-reflective consciousness; the very condition of a reflective/positional awareness of an object⁴⁷ is a pre-reflective awareness of oneself as aware of that object. As discussed above, this awareness is not explicit but rather implicit or "lived through", but is always in principle available to become the subject of a reflective awareness. The theoretical differences between the unconscious and a pre-reflective consciousness will become significant later, but for now we can say that the main difference is in the mode of presentation and possibility of access; for Sartre there is nothing in principle that completely prevents access to something in consciousness⁴⁸ because the whole stream is *always* being accessed, and this is a structural necessity of consciousness. The pattern of access we have accounts for the description being "translucent" and not transparent; the presence of a necessarily indistinct ground of awareness rules out a parallel in vision with something clear like pure glass.

So far we have imagined that Sartre is asking after the nature of consciousness and what it is to be conscious, getting the answer that it is founded on a non-positional self-awareness that is always there, that to be conscious is to be non-positionally conscious of being conscious of an object. However, this story does not yet say anything about what it is we are conscious *of*, about what it is to have something like a tree or the dust outside of consciousness; we have to ask how we relate to that external object to see how Sartre derives the categories of the in-itself and the for-itself.

⁴⁷ "Object" in the wider sense of that which thought is directed towards, as opposed to "physical thing" in the sense that a tray is an object but a set of Enlightenment values is not.

⁴⁸ I.e. a part of the stream, not literally a "content".

Section Three: Appearances, the For-Itself, and the In-Itself.

A key step towards the derivation of the for-itself and in-itself as categories is the collapse of any kind of appearance/reality or phenomenon/noumenon style distinction: “the dualism of being and appearance is no longer entitled to any legal status within philosophy”.⁴⁹ Rejecting this distinction immediately leads to the idea that phenomena can be revelatory, rather than always looking past them toward some hidden truth. When we talk about appearances and reality colloquially we assume that for something to appear implies doubt or uncertainty – for instance, if I am looking far out to sea and someone asks me what I can see, I might reply “there *appears* to be a ship on the horizon” by way of expressing the potential confusion with a cloud or a fog-bank. If the ship is only forty feet away, I could say “there is a ship in the bay”, giving up talk of appearances because of my certainty. In the first case, I am trying to track something about reality – the presence of the ship – but because there is reasonable doubt about that perception I speak of an appearance; if there is instead a cloud against the horizon, I will not be tracking the object that underlies what I see. In the second case, forty feet of clear air offers me no such doubts about perceiving an object as large as a tanker, hence when I say of my experience “I see a ship” I am confident I am tracking the thing underpinning that experience, i.e., the vessel. If this kind of distinction does not really work,⁵⁰ we have to ask where we end up if we reject it. This is what Sartre is asking here: “If the essence of the appearance is an “appearing” which is no longer opposed to any being, there arises a legitimate problem concerning *the being of this appearing*.”⁵¹ After this, his moves become very quick, to the point of being unclear.

Rather than a distinction between appearance and reality, he proposes a distinction between the infinite and the finite aspect of appearances that are given to us, those that are given immediately and completely to us (finite) and those that always have further aspects hidden behind the one(s) given to us, like the potentially infinite aspects of the tree mentioned above. Any one given appearance of the tree is finite and singular, it is just *that* appearing of a tree in profile at half three on a lazy afternoon walk, and yet it depends on the infinite series of ways the tree could appear to us – the tree itself as that which can appear is the unity of an infinite series of possible experiences

⁴⁹ *BN*, p.1.

⁵⁰ Although the initial argument is so short as to make it feel like a premise we just have to accept.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

of the tree. Because the tree appears to a subject which is itself undergoing constant change⁵², then the tree as something that can reappear to us must be constituted by an (infinite) series of appearances. A similar point is made evocatively in the short story “Funes, the Memorious” by Borges⁵³ where the title character suffers from a perfect memory that leads him to see the world through instantaneous glimpses: “it bothered him that the dog at three fourteen (seen from the front) should have the same name as the dog seen at three fifteen (from the side)”. Clearly those of us with a normal relation to the world would see through both of these one dog which we are seeing through different aspects as time passes, yet Funes sees, or is starting to see, each finite appearance as being a full object, which can appear only once and never again. Through the course of the story we see how he progresses towards a kind of madness through this tendency, considering the invention of a language in which every single finite experience has its own name or referent and sinking into melancholia when he realises that autobiography is impossible because each successful act of categorisation adds another item that needs to be categorised. The appearance of the same dog at three fourteen and at three fifteen makes no sense to him because he is losing his ability to grasp appearances as going beyond the immediately given; to someone with normal faculties, there are always innumerable other profiles or aspects to *the same* dog that are not currently visible, and for the dog at three fifteen one of these is the dog at three fourteen and vice versa. This is why Sartre calls such experiences transcendent – there are infinitely many ways to go beyond/’dépasser’/’transcend’ a given appearance towards the total set of which it is a member, towards the (transcendent) object of Funes’s dog or the genius of Proust or whatever else.

It is in this context that he introduces the secondary/derivative distinction between “the being of the phenomenon” and “the phenomenon of being”,⁵⁴ and as a first rough pass we can understand the distinction as being between the singular access to something that appears, the “phenomenon of being” and the ground on which this appearance is possible, “the being of the phenomenon”. The account of the “phenomenon of being” is what leads us to our account of what consciousness is; consciousness is that to which the phenomenon, the appearing, appears. Insofar as we take the thesis of intentionality to heart, we posit that “all consciousness is consciousness *of* something”, which we can turn on its head and say that all consciousness/awareness of something is consciousness/awareness. Put more simply: because there is an appearance, there has to be something it appears to. This is where the discussion of the conditions of self-awareness comes in. If we are to avoid the reflection theory and the problems it has, we have to account for a self-

⁵² What kind of change this is and why constant change necessarily implies infinitude is not argued for in *IHP*, but this remark is shored up by Sartre’s theory of presence from *BN* on.

⁵³ In Borges, Jorge, *Labyrinths*. Ed. D.A. Yates and J.E. Irby. Penguin: New York, 1970.

⁵⁴ *BN*, p. 4.

awareness grounding any consciousness; if we want to posit awareness, it turns out we need to posit self-awareness, and moreover we need to posit a non-positional or pre-reflective self-awareness. One way of reframing this is that every appearance is necessarily self-aware as being that appearance, that there is a meaningful sense in which appearances must always appear to themselves: "self-consciousness ... is the only mode of consciousness which is possible for a consciousness of something".⁵⁵ Because its grounds is its appearing to itself, the claim is that consciousness only ever exists insofar as it appears; consciousness just is its appearance to itself. Thus the "phenomenon of being" is constituted by appearing to itself, and nothing more, although it has to be dependent on something outside of itself to satisfy the condition that *something* appears through an appearance; there must be a grounding condition for these appearances. This is what I take Sartre to mean by the "being of the phenomenon", although before getting into more specifics it is necessary to look into the scope of Sartre's project. This should go some way to showing why, independent of his arguments above, he has methodological concerns that militate against describing consciousness as some kind of machine that would be capable of incorporating properly mental objects.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.10.

Section Four: The In-Itself and the Initial Scope of Phenomenology.

In contemporary common discourse, what Sartre calls representationalist thinking takes the form of comparing consciousness and conscious subjects to computational devices, taking their cues from certain strands of physicalism and functionalism in philosophy of mind. We can look at the work of, e.g. Dennett⁵⁶ in popularising this kind of idea. His work, such as his 1995 refutation of p-zombies, is emblematic of approaches that invite us to see consciousness as being capable of being produced by machines, and by extension to see a human as essentially a machine that contains and/or generates a consciousness.

I take Sartre's primary objection to this kind of story, which holds good for much more nuanced versions of it, to be that it starts at the wrong point, that it makes certain assumptions about how we are to investigate the world.⁵⁷ On the one hand, it already assumes that what is needed for an understanding of the world is some kind of knowledge of the type we appeal to as justified true belief, a knowledge of what it is to be a machine, complete with a knowledge of how machines function and are constructed – the question is reducible to something like this: "given that the human is a machine, what kind of machine is it and what is the history of humanity qua machine?" On the other hand, it also appeals to knowledge in Sartre's broader sense that takes in all kinds of judgment; it prioritises (reflective) consciousness of the form "I must catch that tram" over (pre-reflective) "consciousness of the *tram-needing-to-be-caught*".⁵⁸ The latter type is our awareness of the world when we are absorbed in it, when we directly access the world by living through it. Insofar as there is always a pre-reflective backdrop to our reflective consciousness because of the very conditions of possibility of reflection, this *lived through* 'lifeworld' is inescapable and either entirely constitutes or relevantly grounds all our conscious acts. To talk about the distinctively human in terms of a judging consciousness always leaves something missing; this is another way of expressing Sartre's opposition to the primacy of knowledge.

⁵⁶ E.g., in Dennett, Dan. "The Unimagined Preposterousness of Zombies" in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1995, pp. 322-326. This paper hinges on the idea that consciousness is based on the physical to refute the idea that a "fake" consciousness which lacks affective experience is possible.

⁵⁷ Where here the word "world" is used precritically, in the commonsense extension.

⁵⁸ *TE*, p.13.

The commitment to a 'mechanical' consciousness, driven by an emphasis on judgment's usually privileged position, dominates our commonsense discussions about consciousness in general. Whilst the search for knowledge in this kind of way is very productive in explaining things such as the function of specific machines and natural phenomena, the accusation is that its lack of questions about *the questions it poses* is its undoing. This kind of story dances very close to the Heideggerian notions of the ontological and the ontic, between the description of being and the explanation of beings. Presuppositions are fine if we limit the scope of the discussion to one in which we accept them as useful, such as when we talk about a piece of iron appearing to be too cool to work to the apprentice but in reality being at the right temperature, or when we ignore facts about embodied cognition and treat our bodies as merely machines to be repaired in order to save a life. These kinds of questions ask or have behind them questions asking why a real, concrete thing is how it is – why is this artery filled with high pressure blood? Because of fatty deposits causing congestion. When is a piece of iron malleable? When it has been heated so that it is neither molten nor completely solid, or within X degrees of Y at standard pressures. Nonetheless, this does not tell us about what ultimately underpins a piece of iron or an artery, no matter how fine grained our story about the interactions of iron or arteries or other concrete things with the rest of the world is. In these kinds of discussions, there will always be some form of question open to explanation until we hit some kind of axiom or presupposition. We can ask why the iron is hot and be told it is because of the forge. Why is the forge hot? Because of the coke burning in it. Why is the coke burning? Because of a match. Why is a match a good source of ignition? Because of the chemical properties of some types of phosphorous compound. In effect, these questions are either moving us from one domain of questioning to another (e.g. the macro-level physical to the chemical), or working through one possible area of questioning towards us running out of questions we can ask within it. The claim is that the only domain where this line of questions will stop dead is the one of appearances and their appearing; Sartre holds that if we suppose we are asking about appearances and their appearing whilst using a method appropriate for some other domain, our enquiry will go on forever to no real conclusion. Because it has smuggled in the idea of the mind as a container from an understanding of physical containers and representations as objects from the idea that representations in art – statuary, painting, printed pages of poetry etc⁵⁹ – are instantiated in physical items, Sartre is diametrically opposed to these ideas.

This is part of why it does not matter to the account if we suggest that consciousness has some separate faculty that generates representations or even fully fledged objects unbeknownst to us and

⁵⁹ Different sources for presuppositions would be equally unpalatable to Sartre's project.

presents them to an awareness, because this suggestion turns on an equivocation of consciousness that turns the question into one that implicitly uses 'metaphysical' reasoning; the scope of the discussion is one that was identified many years before by Husserl. In LI V 1.1 Husserl identifies three concepts of consciousness that are relevant to phenomenological investigation:

1. *Consciousness as the entire, real (reelle) phenomenological being of the empirical ego, as the interweaving of psychic experiences in the unified stream of consciousness.*
2. *Consciousness as the inner awareness of one's own psychic experiences.*
3. *Consciousness as a comprehensive designation for 'mental acts' or 'intentional experiences', of all sorts.*⁶⁰

(Husserl also recognises "modes of speech current in non-scientific parlance such as 'entering consciousness', 'coming to consciousness' ... and so forth.")

Broadly speaking, the first category includes the full interconnection of both pre-reflective and reflective awareness in consciousness; the second takes in Sartre's pre-reflective self-awareness; the third takes in reflective awareness. These three terms encompass what we are minimally given in our awareness of self and world, and would also take in everything relevant about our encounter with a world made up of entirely fabricated objects. The structure of our encounter with a putatively outer object that we are suggesting is inner would not change, because with respect to the appearance the object *would be* outer – even if some further structure were generating both and stood in a whole-part relation to both. In principle, we would not have access to that system via phenomenology in any case. It is conceivable that other disciplines that have a different method could look into such things, although Sartre is unhelpfully unclear and poetic about this: "it is up to metaphysics to form the *hypotheses* which will allow us to conceive of this process ... [w]hat will make their validity is only the possibility they will give us in unifying the givens of ontology."⁶¹ What I take this to mean is that these metaphysical stories will explain how particular human beings and human beings in general came to be instances of consciousness, and how that consciousness is supported on the level of statements such as "ex nihilo, nihil fit". In other words, both what we could

⁶⁰ Husserl, E. *Logical Investigations* (Volume II), Translated by Findlay, J.N.; Routledge, New York: 1970. pp. 535-6.

⁶¹ *BN*, p.641.

call a metaphysics in the sense that Heidegger called Spinoza and Leibniz metaphysicians⁶² and the modern notion of empirical, explanatory science fall under this concept; this account puts us in agreement with Francis Jeanson on Sartre's understanding of metaphysics: "[it] is continuous with science, it seeks to *explain*."⁶³ Explanation, in this sense, is a web of correct judgments that support some other correct judgments until we get back to a bedrock of some kind of axiom or presupposition.

Instead of this kind of explanation, Sartre is involved in a project of *revelation*, of seeing what the structure is underpinning the connections between appearances, their appearing [to us, the for-itself] and the ground of those appearances. Given that the appearances Sartre is systematising here are necessarily grounded, we need to clarify what sense of "grounded" is relevant here. There are at least two ways we can look at grounding in this context; the first, minimal sense is that there simply is a principle of grounding for the appearances/phenomena of being, because the ground has to pre-exist the appearance to act as a ground for it at all. A second potential sense is that there is something like a causal-explanatory objective world underpinning the world of appearances, and whilst Sartre sometimes lapses into talking as though this is what he has in mind, the initial minimal sense is more defensible and more in keeping with his stated aims of avoiding replicating some kind of Kantian phenomenon/noumenon distinction. Since this grounding principle prefigures awareness of it, on either reading we can see that it has to be self-standing or self-supporting, and it is this aspect of it that causes Sartre to term it the "in-itself" – it has being automatically, it just is, its being is inherent to itself. As for what this actually means, we can look at Sartre's remarks on negation for guidance, starting with his comparison of negation and destruction – he says that "[a] geological pliation, a storm do not destroy – or at least they do not destroy directly, they merely modify the distribution of masses of beings".⁶⁴ It is only for a[n] (aware) subject that there is destruction, he claims, although the mechanism about how destruction is effected comes into our discussion later. What is important here is that there is a relevant distinction between *the distribution of masses of things* and the world-for-consciousness, the lifeworld. This seems to strongly suggest the first reading of the in-itself, although there is more to the account: "[t]here is no less after the storm than before. There is *something else*. Even this expression is improper, for to posit otherness there must

⁶² E.g. in his remarks in *What is Metaphysics?*, a relevant section of which can be found in Kaufmann, Walter, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Plume (Penguin), London: 1975, pp. 277-9.

⁶³ Jeanson, Francis. *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, Translated by Stone, R.V., Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1980.

⁶⁴ *BN*, p.32.

be a witness [who meets certain criteria] ...".⁶⁵ By this I understand that, although something grounding our awareness of the city or the ruin changes between us being aware of the city and the ruin, it is not within the scope of Sartre's phenomenology to discuss the difference between one set of masses of things and another which is independent of that set of masses *appearing* to an awareness. In other words, it cannot tell us about the world as it is in itself, separately from the appearance of the world, although the world as it is in itself can be encountered *via* the world that we live through. The world of cities being destroyed, dogs needing to be fed, or trams needing to be caught comes to us first rather than the underlying ground we point at by talking about objective facts such as the physical durability of stone walls and the energy transferred by high winds. Insofar as we must always access the world through appearances, then we are not entitled to talk explicitly about the in-itself with the familiarity and translucency we could get if we had a pre-reflective awareness of *being the world*. If we were the world itself, it would not provide any grounds for our reflection and/or awareness.⁶⁶ The closest we can get is to return to our first, minimal sense of the in-itself as a principle of grounding that is merely there to ground appearances. This characterisation does not yet fully capture the sense in which it is right to say that an inkwell is an inkwell in-itself without fear of contradiction; to get there we will need an account of negation and (human) freedom, which we will turn to in the next chapter.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See *BN*, pp. 20-21.

Chapter Two – Action, Value, and Temporality.

The previous chapter gives us an abstract conception of awareness and consciousness, but the picture of consciousness it leaves us with is still quite basic. In the following section, we will see how Sartre starts to move past an abstract description of awareness and self-awareness towards an ethical level (although his project was not teleological in the same way as the present reconstructive work is).

To begin with, we will consider what makes the account abstract or about abstract things, and then start moving towards showing how a concrete account is possible by bringing in more key concepts around abstract consciousness. Broadly, the opening question is twofold: what is the relation between consciousness and the world, and what is the condition of possibility of that relation? This will lead us to the idea that consciousness constantly interrogates or “asks questions of” the world, the analysis of which shows that the absent is in fact always present to us, and that we put values into the world. This in turn leads to the famous but initially puzzling claim that ‘nothingness’ is the being of consciousness, and allows us to move onto the structure of action and agency - which it turns out is driven by lack.

We will see how, for Sartre, all projects are goal-oriented insofar as they aim at a state of affairs which is currently lacking. The drive to preserve intuitive or commonsense ideas within the strict framework he has set up brings in his three components of action, the ‘motif’ or objective enabling circumstances, the ‘mobile’ or urge/drive/will, and the ‘fin’, the end in the objective world which is lacking. Next, we see that asking how we can finally justify any project of this type brings in the idea of the original or final project and its incoherence. The last major section addresses accusations of gratuity about our actions, given that we create the world as well as act within it; the answer to these accusations will bring in our first brush with time-consciousness.

Sartre imports his notion of abstraction from Laporte and Husserl when he says that “an abstraction is made when something not capable of existing in isolation is thought of as in an isolated state”,⁶⁷ which I read as being the separation of something from whatever grounds and conditions it. Both that-which-appears/the phenomenon and that-which-is-appeared-to are abstractions in this sense, because on the one hand something can only appear to a perceiver, and a (perceiving) consciousness needs an object in order to be consciousness (from the intentionality principle). Neither term of the pair is viable on its own, because they are mutually grounded in each other; it is impossible to properly analyse one independently. Sartre goes on: “[t]he concrete can only be the synthetic totality of which consciousness, like the phenomenon, constitutes only moments”. What is meant by a “synthetic totality” here? I take this to be a term indicating the inseparability of the parts/moments making up a whole. Catalano⁶⁸ likens this to the relation between the clay making up a statue and its shape; the shape is possible because of the clay, and the clay and its (current) shape can be considered/discussed independently of one another, yet the shape of the clay cannot exist without the clay, and the clay cannot exist with no shape - “[t]he total unity is rather a gestalt, or whole”. His second example makes the point better, where he compares a detailed spectroscopic analysis of the *Mona Lisa*, the colours and distributions of the paint on the canvas, to the *Mona Lisa* itself; although the paint is inseparable from the painting, it is not that painting. This is a different type of synthetic totality to phenomenon/consciousness - the *Mona Lisa* and the pigments making it up stand in a relation of the physical and something supervening on it. We can call a synthetic totality a unity of parts/moments that can't be separated out into independent, free-standing components, and by extension it is a relation in which the whole amounts to more than the addition of one part to its pre-existing partner. For Sartre, these kinds of structures are foundational to human reality; the earlier discussion of the reflective and pre-reflective modes of awareness cashes out such that our awareness of the world is formed of a synthetic totality of the pre-reflective and the reflective awareness of the world; the perception we have of an object depends on the perception of its ground, and vice versa.⁶⁹

As we saw in Chapter One, for Sartre the most fundamental synthetic totality related to the human is the phenomenon and (our) awareness of it which becomes the for-itself/in-itself totality, and is translated by Sartre here into the Heideggerian notion of being-in-the-world; neither the objective

⁶⁷ *BN*, p.27.

⁶⁸ Catalano, Joseph. *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's 'Being and Nothingness'*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980., p.53.

⁶⁹ This Sartrean debt to the Gestalt psychologists is rightly emphasised by Morris in *Sartre*, pp. 63-4.

world nor consciousness is concrete in the sense discussed above. Conscious (human) reality is always enmeshed in the world, and at this level of abstraction Sartre, I think correctly, poses two fundamental questions:

1) What is the relation between man and the world?

2) What are the conditions of possibility for (such) a relationship between man and the world?

The answer to the first question is contained within the very possibility of asking questions at all. In asking how man and the world are related, we are asking a question of being; human consciousness is interrogating the being of the world in the expectation of an answer. Questioning in this broad sense relates to the interrogation of the world, and is not restricted to literally asking someone (else) if something is the case – as Jeanson puts it, “if you interrogate a person he will first have to interrogate being in order to respond to you”.⁷⁰ This interrogation of being is unavoidable because “[e]very question presupposes a being who is questioning and a being who is questioned”,⁷¹ which is another result of the intentionality thesis – every question, as a thought-act, has to have an object, which in turn must be connected to the objective world.⁷² The question’s object delivers an answer of some kind to the question it is involved in – when I ask “is it raining outside?” facts about specific aspects of being give me my answer – the presence of raindrops in the courtyard giving me a “yes”, the absence of raindrops a “no”. Questioning the world always allows the possibility of a negative answer; it is always possible that when I ask if there is rain outside, there will be nothing but sunshine. Nonetheless, there is always a being to the world; the absence of rain is the presence of snow, sleet, sunshine, etc. In order for there to be consciousness, there must be something which appears to that consciousness, and so there is always (a) being addressed by any question(ing) even if it furnishes us with a negative answer to our enquiries - even if it is the non-being of what we expected to find. The possibility of questioning the world and getting negative answers illustrates “[t]he permanent possibility of non-being, outside us and within”⁷³ and introduces non-being as a

⁷⁰ *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, p.119.

⁷¹ *BN*, p.28.

⁷² Or to questions about ontology.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.29.

component of the real and lack as something that has an equal –or more important- footing with presence. Whilst this may still seem hopelessly abstract, we must understand the ontology to see how ethics can unfold, since in Sartre’s own words “ontology cannot be separated from ethics”⁷⁴

The relation between being and nonbeing is vital to the progression of Sartre’s argument and system, so we have to be clear about what this is. Firstly, the position he absolutely wants to deny is that nonbeing is predicated on an act of judgment, which amounts to another denial of what in Chapter One we identified as the “primacy of knowledge”. This is the case in which “negation would be simply a quality of judgment and the expectation of the questioner would be an expectation of the judgment – response”.⁷⁵ What I understand by this kind of account is that it proposes a faculty of reasoning or judgment which compares the expected to the actual, and sees negation to be a description of any discrepancy between them. By Sartre’s lights, on this story the negation of 200 francs is the discovery of the (positive) being of 1300 francs when the (positive) being of 1500 francs was expected. Non-being would become the unifying theme of these kinds of operations, nothingness would be “a propositional function of the type that X is not [what was expected]”. It would be the common thread that runs through judging that there is 1300F not 1500F, judging that the breeder has malamutes not huskies, and so on. Straight away, if we accepted Sartre’s earlier arguments against the primacy of knowledge then we should not be surprised if they hold during the investigation of non-being as well as being. There is nothing on the face of it that separates the appearance of something positive from something negative and causes one to be free of the structures revealed in and through the extension of the intentionality thesis, because both are appearances. We all have plenty of everyday first-person experience of finding something lacking in the things of the world without making a (reflective) judgment, as something lived through. A unifying theme of these experiences is some kind of expectation we had prior to the experience of lack, and this is at least a kernel of truth in the judgment theory – I experience the lack of my keys because I expect them to be there on the hook, I feel cheated because the dealer does not have the goods he promised me, I experience the absence of the expected. Although Sartre simply asserts that “[i]t is evident that non-being always appears within the limits of a human expectation”,⁷⁶ I think we can accept that the experience of encountering non-being is universally in the context of some expectation.

⁷⁴ Personal letter from Sartre to Francis Jeanson, reprinted in *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, xxxix.

⁷⁵ *BN*, p.30.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.31.

It is this universal experience that sets the scene for the classic example of Pierre's absence from the café, which is intended to "show that non-being does not come to things by a negative judgment".⁷⁷ In the example, Sartre is waiting for his friend who has yet to show up at a café. Whilst it is tempting to look at the scene in the café as being made up only of objects that are present, Sartre points out that "in perception there is always the construction of a figure on a ground",⁷⁸ which is to say that whatever is salient or important to us always must appear against the backdrop of the unimportant, and nothing has some kind of inherent right to be in the foreground except insofar as it is currently important to us. Insofar as the arrival of Pierre is what determines the salient, the café acts as the ground for his absence, which is very much present and real. It is present as the way in which similar looking people stand out from the rest of the café as not actually being Pierre, in the way in which pillars stand out as places where he might be hidden from sight, in the way that what is present steps aside to be the ground to the figure that is the absent - "Pierre absent haunts this café and is the condition of its self-nihilating organisation as ground".⁷⁹ The objective, in-itself stuff of the café and the expectations Sartre has form a synthetic totality in which the absent can be present *as being absent*. Different expectations can make different aspects of the world salient to us, and thereby conjure up different non-beings in the world in this way – this is brought out when Sartre discusses the difference between the merely missing and the present-as-absent; any number of other people are not present at the same café, and yet because there is no expectation that they should be there they are not felt to be missing, they do not appear as absent on the ground of the café. In the case where we imagine them to be there for amusement without really expecting them to be present, we do not conjure them up as real absences on the ground of the present, and yet if I held the genuine expectation of meeting Wellington, the rest of the world would reorganise itself into the ground of his real absence. This interchangeability is what Sartre is getting at when he says that negation "can nihilate a being, cause it to arise, and then name it to be thrown back into non-being".⁸⁰ So, we see here that negation is produced by consciousness –and non-being is created- in line with some expectation, but we can still ask what grounds that power of negation.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.35.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.33.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.34.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.35.

In the first place, this ground cannot be found in the category of the in-itself, which as we saw before is pure presence, pure being, and within which the only possible negation is of the kind “Y is not X”, essentially reducing negation to a faculty of judgment. When Sartre claims “it is essential [therefore] that the questioner have the permanent possibility of dissociating himself from the causal series which constitutes being and which can produce only being”,⁸¹ he is reaffirming that nothingness cannot be within being. An act of questioning that would produce negation is impossible in a determined, orderly objective world, because that orderly world lacks the distance on itself required to interrogate it. To ask a question of something, that thing must be in question – it is unclear to me, shut in my office, if it is raining outside because the blinds and the volume of my music separate me from the courtyard and leave it unclear if there is rain or not. If I were to somehow be integrated with the courtyard, the clouds, and so on, my mode of being would give me immediate access to whether it is raining and prevent the question from being possible. Catalano’s analogy,⁸² whilst not perfect, explains this quite well: in a deterministic system such as a billiard ball on a table, being hit by the cue produces a completely predictable effect. This definite predictability ends the possibility of asking questions about the ball, because the answer to any question is always in hand at the very start, as a function of the forces, accelerations, masses etc that enable there to be a travelling ball to ask questions about in the first place. If my awareness of the table were informed by a perfect understanding of the relevant laws and starting conditions, no question I ask about it or interrogation I make of it could possibly be an attempt to gain knowledge.

The ground of the power of nihilation therefore must involve a separation from the world, it must create a distance between the questioner and its object that creates the ambiguity needed for questioning to be possible. This tallies with the gap between awareness and its object that we saw was demanded of consciousness by the intentionality thesis. However, when we return to Sartre’s two guiding questions, we see that they are questions about the being of consciousness itself. Given the necessary distance between the questioned and the questioner, this shows us there must be a distance between the questioning consciousness and its being. We can thereby see that consciousness itself, its being, must be the ground of nihilation, it must *be* nothingness itself, never coinciding with itself to reach a solid self-identity, ultimately giving us characterisations such as “[the human subject] must be what it is not and not be what it is”.⁸³ In order to pose a question of the

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁸² Catalano, *Commentary*, p.66.

⁸³ *BN*, p.90.

world or of being, “the questioner must be able to effect in relation to the questioned a kind of nihilating withdrawal”,⁸⁴ and as we saw before, positive being cannot by itself effect true negation, so the power of nihilation must always be within the being of that questioning being itself. “Man presents himself at least in this instance as a being who causes Nothingness to arise in the world, inasmuch as he himself is affected with non-being to this end”.⁸⁵ We need to emphasise here that nothingness is not a capacity that consciousness has over and above being, but rather *is* its being, and that this flows directly from the original logic of appearance and the appeared-to that Sartre posed in his introduction to *Being and Nothingness*. What this in turn entails is that consciousness, on a weak reading that is subordinate to some independent system of metaphysics, appears to itself to be outside the order of the objective world, and on a strong reading, is independent of that objective world insofar as it negates it. This does not mean that consciousness can directly⁸⁶ alter the state of the objective world, but rather that “‘Human reality’ can only modify its *relation* with being”,⁸⁷ we can change how we interrogate the world through changing what is salient to produce different non-beings in the world, but we cannot change positive being in this way. This feature of consciousness produces Sartre’s first characterisation of freedom, the ability to step outside of the causal order by attaining the distance from (part of) the world to determine its significance through interrogating it. That ‘distance’ is a disengagement that protects consciousness from being affected by that part of the world – “[f]or man to put a particular existent out of circuit is to put himself out of circuit in relation to that existent”.⁸⁸

From here, we can move onto Sartre’s theory of freedom and action proper, although I would like to offer one quick caveat here, which is to note that the theory of freedom being offered explicitly does not concern itself with metaphysical concerns or metaphysical freedom, and is limited to what happens after the isolation of the self from the order of the objective world. This is attributed to “Descartes following the stoics”; for context, in Epictetus’ *Enchiridion* the reader is advised they may always change their attitude towards that which they have no power to (objectively) change.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.47.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.47-8.

⁸⁶ i.e. without acting through the body such as taking a mattock in hand to break ground (although the significance of the ground as “broken” is effected by a negation).

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.48.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Seddon, K., “Epictetus’ Handbook and the Tablet of Cebes: Guides to Stoic Living”, Routledge: Abingdon, 2005.

Section One: Freedom and Action.

This account of negation is crucial to understanding how action gets off the ground; without a negation that puts values into the world ('nihilation'), it is impossible to talk about the ends or goals of action. Sartre describes action as having three components: the cause/*motif*, the motive/*mobile*, and the end/*fin*. He describes the commonsense idea of the *mobile* as a (pseudo) psychological reason for acting, a wish or a desire, whether it is something as slight as my idle wish for some ice cream or as serious as the instantaneous urge of the assassin to kill his target when he sights them. "The motive [mobile] ... is generally considered as a subjective fact. It is the ensemble of the desires, emotions, and passions which urge me to accomplish a certain act. ... the explanation must then be sought in the psychic state – even in the "mental" state of the historical agent. It follows naturally that passions and other desires would have acted differently."⁹⁰ In the picture of free will that Sartre wishes to deny, the *mobile* is the largest contributor or even the only contributor to human choice, and it by itself enough to make subjects act differently in the same situation with the same physical circumstances.

The *motif*, in commonsense usage, is a collection of physical facts that make an event happen, a set of "rational considerations which justify it",⁹¹ a set of reasons which make the action make sense. Sartre's own example is the conversion of Clovis to the Christian faith, which was caused by the strength of the involved powers in Gaul at the time - "[i]f Clovis is converted to Catholicism, then inasmuch as so many barbarian kings are Arians, it is because Clovis sees an opportunity of getting into the good graces of the episcopate which is all powerful in Gaul. ... One will note here that the cause is characterized as an objective appreciation of the situation." This *motif* is only understandable because of the end that the agent has in mind, the goal that they are currently pursuing – it does not make sense to talk about action that is not directed, because that would amount to no more than just a random happening – something no more human or practical than a radioactive particle decaying or not. The simple objective fact of the power relations in Gaul at the time means nothing unless there is something Clovis wants to do that depends on them, in this case to use them to gain power and support in order to expand his kingdom. All action, on this first and commonsense picture Sartre gives us, depends on the agent having a goal or end, the *fin*.

⁹⁰ *BN*, p.468.

⁹¹ *Ibid*.

(With these first definitions in mind, we can dispense with translating *motif* and *mobile*; “motive” and “cause” are not especially helpful as translations due to the baggage they carry. A “motive” is more fitting for a courtroom discussion; a “cause” implies the world imposes itself on us more powerfully than Sartre would be comfortable with. Neither motif nor mobile, insofar as they have been defined and will become an ordinary part of the discussion, will be italicised from here on out. However, the term *fin* will be rendered as “end” since it is easier on the reader and does not carry any inappropriate nuances.)

According to Sartre, the basic arguments in favour of free will and determinism presuppose that either the mobile or the motif is in some way sufficient for action. Determinists hold that the motif, the objective (usually physical) state of affairs that agent finds themselves in, is the explanatory factor, and the proponents of free will holding that the mobile is what is important above all. The first problem emerges when we try to use both a mobile and a motif to explain something, as in the example of joining the socialist party because of both motifs and mobiles, because of both sympathy towards your fellow worker and the way the party will achieve your political ends if you join it. Both the mobile and the motif seem to be present here, so unless we synthesise them we end up without any idea whether to settle on either side of the free will/determinism debate. “What can be meant by the statement what I have joined the Socialist party for these causes and these motives [mobiles]? Evidently we are dealing with two radically distinct layers of meaning. How are we to compare them? ... Actually under a different name it amounts to positing the existence of a conflict between the will and the passions.”⁹² Seeing either of these accounts on its own as unsatisfactory, Sartre suggests that all action should instead be seen to include a motif, a mobile, and an end – that all three must be present in intentional action for it to count as one in the first place. This, along with a basic commitment to excluding unintended consequences of an action as part of an intentional action,⁹³ is the minimal outline of the Sartrean picture of action.

Sartre takes seriously the idea that all action has an end or a goal, describing almost all actions as aiming to make another action possible, which will in turn make some further action possible and so on. For instance, when I go to make tea, I have to open the cupboard door to be able to pick up my mug, to be able to carry it across the room to the kettle – the actions I take lead up to other actions I will take. More than one project can come together in the end of a third project – I might have carried out another set of related actions with an end in mind, such as turning the faucet to fill the

⁹² Ibid., p.469.

⁹³ “We should observe first that an action is on principle intentional. The careless smoker who has through negligence caused the explosion of a powder magazine has not *acted*.” – Ibid., p.455.

kettle in order to be able to produce boiling water, which comes together with the chain of actions that put a mug on the table when I add a teabag and water to the mug, which results in the success of my overall project to make a cup of tea. Each project's success is made up of the success of other projects that add together to some unified goal, and the meaning and value of the sub-projects or instrumental projects is entirely derivative from the larger project they work towards. It only makes sense that I am opening my cupboard to retrieve a mug because I am looking to make tea – each instrumental project is intelligible only in the light of the greater projects that are in consideration. Another way of looking at it is that the lesser projects create the motif for the greater projects – by making a change in the objective state of affairs in my kitchen, I create the physical possibility of making tea later on. With the exception of the original project (which we will come to later) all projects are parts of the project towards another end, or they are made up of smaller projects that open up the possibility of later projects being held and succeeding.

Following on from this, projects cannot be about achieving things that are already the case.⁹⁴ In an everyday situation, it would make no sense to talk about opening a cupboard door to get out a mug which I am already holding, firstly because the mug won't be in the cupboard to get out and secondly because having the mug in my hand with the intent to make tea is rationally justifying of my going to the kettle but not of my going into the cupboard. To put it another way, we can't make changes to the world around us if the world is already configured in the way we want it to be, because any changes would have to be away from what we desired in the first place. Instead, all our projects refer to things that are not yet in the world, to future possibilities that are possible given what exists in the present - "action necessarily implies as its condition the recognition of a "desideratum", that is, of an objective lack...".⁹⁵ The current state of affairs in the world cannot by itself ever supply a good reason for acting, at least in the sense of constituting a motif,⁹⁶ because a motif is a set of objective circumstances that allow another state of affairs to be brought about by an action. Instead, all projects must go beyond or transcend the current state of things as they are, they have to be focused on a way that things could be but aren't yet. Sartre's way of putting this is: "[n]o factual state whatever it may be (the political and economic structure of society, the psychological "state", etc) is capable by itself of motivating any act whatsoever. For an act is a projection of the

⁹⁴ Although, as Webber picks up on in *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, (pp.48-9) there can be projects to maintain states of affairs. My understanding of how this notion cashes out will differ from his.

⁹⁵ *BN*, p. 455.

⁹⁶ Although on the account of the mobile given by Sartre's historian explaining the history of Byzantium, the mobile could merely 'come from nowhere' or 'pop into my head' on top of any given state of affairs.

for-itself toward what it is not, and what is can in no way determine by itself what is not.”⁹⁷ In the example of the factory worker given inhumane levels of work for very little pay, an observer might think he should unionise, strike for better conditions, or outright quit to work elsewhere. From an outside standpoint with access to other workers’ experiences, work safety, remuneration and so on this can seem obvious, but if we imagine the worker does not know what other people earn and how much risk they have to go through to get paid, then he has nothing to compare his earnings and the danger of his life to. For him, his work is just how work is, or as Sartre might put it, it's just a brute datum or factual state. It is only in light of discovering that other workers are paid more for less demanding work that he can choose to rebel against the system (or rationalise his situation, or decide he doesn't care, and so on) because this allows him to go beyond⁹⁸ the current state of affairs that he experiences to another possible way things could be. No matter how objectively terrible his situation is, without the ability to see it as lacking something he cannot possibly act to change it. In the case where he has no other conception of what work is like there can be no rationally justifying considerations in favour of any action to improve his circumstances – it would no longer be action, but a random chance event that does not deserve that name, no more conscious, significant, or willed than a die landing on a six instead of a four. One thing worth noting here is that to transcend the present in the sense that the worker transcends his current situation is not determined by a positive *psychic* object either. One might object that the worker has to form a mental image of the possible alternative in order to come to the conclusion that his situation is intolerable, and that this mental image is itself something positive – in that *it* exists and is not a negation of the circumstances but a real, full being. This awareness of the situation is what, on this objection, would cause the worker to revolt, and thereby show that a positive circumstance has caused a change in the projects of the worker. This objection is not problematic for Sartre because such a mental image would be a fixed object, effectively an in-itself, and thereby would not be capable of being in consciousness. In order for the putative mental state to have some kind of positive being, it cannot be a (transcendent) negation of a current (objective) state of affairs, which is to say it cannot be the product of the action of the for-itself, because for Sartre, the for-itself is that which by its own being nihilates the world. This proposed mental object cannot be a for-itself because it is not capable of nihilating the world in its own right, and if it were it would not fit the role the objection has in mind – it would be more like an alter ego or voices in your head. These would be covered by the same kind of analysis as being told by another person (for-itself) about how things are. As such, the mental image proposed would have to be an in-itself, which is not eligible to affect consciousness:

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 457-8.

⁹⁸ In the sense of giving the wage and risk the affective value to-be-overthrown and not in the sense of his being able to calculate [reflectively] that he ought to be paid more or suffer less risk of harm.

Indeed, it is impossible for a determined process to act on a spontaneity, exactly as it is impossible for objects to act upon consciousness ... [a]nd this is why the fact which strikes us first is that if the will is to be autonomous, then it is impossible for us to consider it as a given psychic fact, that is, as in-itself.⁹⁹

What this shows us is that, as well as not being a problem for Sartre, this kind of objection misses the point of the analysis of consciousness as for-itself. Ends, and the projects that aim at them, must depend on negation. Projects that are of preservation of some state of affairs are a special case of this, although I do not take them to be fundamentally different to those that directly aim at a state of affairs that is not yet actual. Let's look at a concrete example of the two different cases: on the one hand, cleaning and grooming a dog ahead of a show aims at a state of affairs that is not yet actual (the clean dog), whereas aiming to keep the dog clean before the judging aims at preserving it. Webber claims projects like the latter show us that not all projects must aim at the not yet actual, going so far as to say "it is mistaken to assume [Sartre] thinks of projects as necessarily related to things that are not yet the case".¹⁰⁰ However, I think we can invoke the idea of the objective world having an inertia to show that these are special cases of aiming at a state of affairs that is not yet actual. My intended parallel is with Newton's first law describing the motion of bodies:

Every object in a state of uniform motion tends to remain in that state of motion unless an external force is applied to it.

With respect to the objective world and our actions towards it, we can say something similar:

The objective world will remain heading towards a certain future unless the agent acts to cause something else to come to pass.

If we accept this, then a project to preserve a state of affairs in the world *can* be about bringing about a definite goal that is not currently the case. Given the typical behaviour of the dog on his walk and the availability of mud and brackish water in the woods, the objective world tends toward a future in which he will become dirty; the inertia of the objective world is tending in the direction of

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.464.

¹⁰⁰ Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.49.

a future where the grooming is going to be undone. The availability of places where the dog can be kept in comfort where dirt and mud are not around supplies a motif that supports the preservation of his pristine state, which combined with an end and a mobile that is the urge to keep him somewhere clean delivers a complete project structure aimed towards shifting the inertia of the objective world. The project effectively aims at shifting the likely future away from the loss of the desired state of the world towards the preservation of it; what is lacking is the continuation of the dog being clean, even though the project that forms around that lack means his potential mucky future never comes to pass. The possibility the dog will get dirty before the show is enough to cause me to act to keep him clean, and he does not have to get messy for me to orient my actions around his being in good condition.

From these considerations, we can infer that in all action there is always an overarching goal or project at hand. If all action is as part of a project, and all projects are conducted as a result of there being something lacking in the world or about the human subject, such as the lack of an objective (usually, physical) state of affairs when I have a project towards building something (the plot of land is currently lacking a house) or the lack of a psychological state in myself, such as when I find myself lacking in stimulation and go to watch a film as a result, then there must be some kind of ultimate goal or end that these projects form a part of. It is inconsistent for every project to lead to the possibility and/or success of some other project, because if we accept this we enter an infinite regress, always looking for just one more project that will explain our actions (but which can by definition never come). We will always be able to ask what the project leads to, stopping us from properly justifying the actions taken under any project. This would be like borrowing justification for action from the future forever without ever gaining it. Hence there must be an intrinsic and not instrumental end at play at any given time, which is not different from the sum of all the other projects leading up to it; the meaningfulness of and justification for all of the other projects has to borrow from the intrinsic value or justifying power of this project, otherwise the justifications for our actions form one big Ponzi scheme. This means that we should not think of the value of chopping onions as distinct from the value of realising the ambition to be seen as a good cook and gracious host (for instance), because the value of this instrumental action is only really a fragment of the value of the overall goal and owes its intelligibility to that overall goal. It follows that this overall goal has to be manifested in all of our actions, even if we do not think it is (thematise it as such).

The next general feature that needs to be covered here is the affective dimension of the world and

how it relates to action. For Sartre, affects are not just limited to our everyday conception of them as releases of nervous or emotional energy like rage, joy, or fear, but instead they include our sense of how things are with the world at the moment – affects can be, and are often, just sitting there in the way we see the world, like the sense of frustration we might feel stuck in traffic on the way to an important engagement, or the nervous excitement felt when we are about to win a game and (we hope) our opponents can no longer stop us. It is not necessary for this to well up and be expressed in some overt act like gloating over the win or shouting with exasperation for there to be an affect in play; the affect just is the way the world seems to us, it is an act of perception that makes the world a certain way in response to certain conditions related to our projects. It is only because my project of being on time is under threat that I am irritated, which causes me to perceive the objects of the world as irritating – the simple presence of the other cars on the road is nothing more than that, nothing more than the presence of a few objective items in the world and cannot by itself cause us to act, no more than the low wages of the worker in ignorance could cause him to act. It is only because I have projected myself towards a possibility of my being on time for my meeting that the traffic can rationally justify an action, here the perceptive act of constituting the world as one filled with annoyances and hold-ups. In light of our projects we see the world as making demands on us, we feel that the shortcut past this traffic jam demands to be taken or that the phone demands to be used to call our clients and tell them we will be late. In response to our projects, the world lights up as meaningful and showing us the parts of it that are relevant to our projects as useful; our affective acts show us the right instrumental complexes to use to achieve our goals through making them appear to be valuable to us. When I am sowing seeds, for example, on an unreflective level it just feels right that I should dig a small hole for each one – the earth suddenly stands out from the other objects of the world as something that can be dug into, the seeds are there for me entirely as to-be-covered-with-soil – the world suddenly seems to just fit together in certain ways because of the goals I am working towards. Ultimately, perception is active and constructs a world for us that has a meaning given to it by our projects – the soil is only there for me as easy to dig in because I need to dig to fulfil my aims, and the parts of the world that are not relevant to my current goals are there as peripheral, meaningless objects: “It is even possible that in the consideration of the Church [Clovis] can even find no cause for acting in any way at all; he will then discover nothing in relation to this subject; he will leave the situation of the episcopate in the state of the ‘unrevealed’, in a total obscurity.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ *BN*, p. 468.

Section Two: Instrumentality and Our Awareness of our Projects.

The above picture, while useful for showing the broad outlines of Sartre's theory, does not consider the relation between the motif and the mobile past the need to synthesise them together in the Sartrean account of action. In this section we will look at the exact relationship between the motif and the mobile, and the light that relationship sheds on instrumentality in Sartre's picture of action.

Although we can investigate this synthesis from either side, it makes sense to begin by considering the motif, the objective set of circumstances (or presumed circumstances) that justify the action, because on the face of it that is the better candidate for explaining a non capricious, properly justified action – it is immune to the kinds of random changes that Sartre ascribes to Ferdinand Lot's account of the mobile, at least in the actions of Constantine. Sartre elaborates on the motif in one very informationally dense section which implicitly brings in everything we have gone over above:

(1) the cause [motif] is objective; it is the state of contemporary things as it is revealed to a consciousness ... (2) Nevertheless this state of affairs can be revealed only to a for-itself since in general the for-itself is the being by which "there is" a world. (3) Better yet, it can be revealed only to a for-itself which chooses itself in this or that particular way – that is, to a for-itself which has made its own individuality. The for-itself must of necessity have projected itself in this or that way in order to discover the instrumental implications of instrumental-things.¹⁰²

Let's break this down:

1) The motif is objective in the sense it is not up for debate whether it is present or not in the world; it just is the case that there are ships in harbour or onions on the chopping board – things are this way, and it is up to us to reinterpret them or debate what they ask of us in their existence, but there is nothing we can do about their presently being where they are; the brute existents¹⁰³ just are arranged in a particular way at the present moment. The state of affairs that we call the motif has an independent existence from us and is *revealed to us*, not generated in some kind of idealism.

2) The world, and any motif manifested in it, is nonetheless dependent on a human subject because

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 469.

¹⁰³ Items or things considered as in-itself.

it must be revealed to exist, and revelation through nihilation is precisely the domain or purview of the for-itself.

3) To exist is literally to stand out,¹⁰⁴ and for something to stand out as differentiated from the undifferentiated mass of the in-itself there must be the nihilating action of a for-itself, the generation of meaning via absence or lack related to our projects that we saw above. Even though Sartre is committed to the independence of the in-itself from consciousness or human projects, the world which that in-itself amounts to for us is entirely generated by and dependent on consciousness and conscious projects. This is a natural conclusion to draw from the earlier remarks Sartre makes about the nature of negation and nihilation, such as that “man is the only being by whom a destruction can be accomplished ... [natural disasters] merely modify the masses of things”.¹⁰⁵ Our world as a whole is generated in this fashion, not just what we might think as being the currently relevant parts of it to our projects, the specific tools that right now are useful to us in achieving our ends. If we are to take seriously the idea that all perception is a perceptive *act*, then to be an act it must be rationally justified in line with some project, which is to say that the entire world is generated in line with our projects, even if it is made to have the value of not-worth-paying-attention-to or mere background with respect to our current project. We can see this most clearly in the case of “the gunner who has been assigned an objective”,¹⁰⁶ i.e. ordered to shoot a particular target. Aiming at a particular spot is as much a case of not shooting at the other possible targets as at is a case of shooting at the designated target – in order to point out the bullseye, we have to exclude the outer rings, so the gunner “carefully points his gun in a certain direction excluding all others”. Hence even what we would want to usually refer to as inessential or peripheral parts of the world are enmeshed in our projects precisely as being left out of them; they are included in the world in order to be excluded from our projects. Instrumental complexes make no sense in the absence of projects, and the whole of the world is the instrumental complex at play in the for-itself's projects, not just the parts of the world that seem to be directly relevant.

The first question that comes to mind here is how to integrate this with the notion of the translucency of consciousness – how are we aware of our constructing the world in this fashion, if it is indeed an action and a project in itself to create the world that supports our other projects? However, there is textual evidence that Sartre, at least, sees this characterisation to be backward and that in fact the mobile is our awareness of the motif. On a superficial level, if we take the

¹⁰⁴ I.e. the original Latin phrase “ex sistere” which became our word “exist” literally means to stand out.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.32

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.32

valuational demands made by our projects to be demands objects in the world seem to make on us in light of the project, it is at least plausible that the lines between this and the mobile (on our earlier baseline construal) would be blurred from time to time. After all, the mobile does not necessarily have to be thematised as a reason for acting – it can be some kind of gut feeling or emotional charge in the world, and we can see this quite clearly in the example of the soldier fleeing the battlefield under heavy enemy fire. As bullets land all around him, he is seized by a sudden terror and flees, never having conceptualised the need to run away as such - only subsequently being able to conceptualise the whole event later. It is through the emotion of terror that he apprehends the battlefield as dangerous because, for instance, it threatens his various projects that depend on him coming home from the war alive such as raising his children or pursuing some civilian career. His fear is almost wholly the pre-reflective apprehension of these goals that depend on his survival, which causes the world to manifest value properties to him, and is exactly in the same affective class of experience as the mobile was for Lot studying Constantinople. We might tentatively suggest that the mobile is nothing more than this level of apprehension of the current end the subject is working towards, that the affective urge to act that we formerly called the mobile is made up, at least in some cases, just of the value structure that is an awareness of our projects. If this is the case, then what we called the mobile, in the unreflective case, is just (the apprehension of) the value structure of the for-itself. We will return to the reflectively conscious or volitional version of the mobile later, the variant where I say to myself explicitly that I will perform a certain action.

Returning to the example of the soldier, the world does not disappear in the episode of wholly emotional engagement with the battlefield. The soldier is still situated in an objective world, parts of which are only a configuration of matter – the breaching explosions that are growing closer, the yells of the enemy in the next street, the walls that might give cover or give way at any minute to a hostile worming squad – and all of these are apprehended as a part of the experience. Indeed, this configuration of matter has to have been nihilated¹⁰⁷ to produce the world that is so threatening; even if the world has melted down to just being “too much” in an episode of horrified dissociation, it is still there. In order to be overloaded by the experience, the world has to be present to the soldier as blanked-out-because-overwhelming. To this extent, the motif is always one awareness of the mobile, and vice versa. It is this insight that Sartre tracks in this pair of statements:

It is obvious that the apprehension of the motive [mobile] refers at once to the cause [motif], its correlate, since the motive [mobile], even when made-past and fixed in-itself, at least maintains as

¹⁰⁷ i.e. we have to have hung demands on it.

*its meaning the fact that it has been a consciousness of a cause [motif], i.e., the discovery of an objective structure of the world.*¹⁰⁸

*[P]ositional consciousness of the cause [motif] is on principle a non-thetic consciousness of itself as a project toward an end. In this sense it is a motive [mobile] ... Thus cause [motif] and motive [mobile] are correlative, exactly as the non-thetic self-consciousness is the ontological correlate of the thetic consciousness of the object.*¹⁰⁹

In light of this correlation, Sartre shows us that in fact the mobile and the motif are aspects of one and the same structure. Given that both of these components of action are in awareness of our (the same) ends, then the mobile, motif, and end are not really distinct. We should think of them instead as different parts or moments of the same thing, our current project, which we apprehend differently at different times and under different contexts. Our positional consciousness of a motif, because of Sartre's commitment to the pre-reflective cogito, must contain a non-thetic self-awareness of itself, and this non-thetic self-awareness is manifested as what we wanted to call the mobile before, as certain feelings about the situation we find ourselves in. Hence the mobile, the motif, and the end all must be co-originary, and so they must all be generated at the very start of the project – in fact, for a project to start is exactly for the mobile, motif, and end to all come into being (or 'upsurge') at once. By extension, the entire system of instrumentality that we experience, the world itself, is in some relevant sense just an awareness of our projects – the choice of ourselves as having a given project is not at all separate from choosing the world itself. In fact, this is nothing more than the development of comments Sartre has made earlier in *Being and Nothingness* - "what I expect from the carburettor, what the watchmaker expects from the works of the watch ... is a disclosure of being"¹¹⁰ - the whole of the instrumental complex is entirely dependent on our projects, the objectively present state of affairs in the world is nonetheless dependent on being interrogated with some aim in mind so that there can be a world in the first place. What we have to remember in this continuity between these early comments and the discussion of the project structure over five hundred pages later is that the simultaneous upsurge of our ends and the world was in mind from the very beginning, present right at the first discussions of negation. Sartre's account is holistic in the sense that the parts of the structure motif/mobile/end are interdependent as aspects of a synthetic totality that is action. They are not independent terms that are unified by being involved in action. The aspects of action they capture are also taken in by the alternative

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.472.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.471.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

accounts Sartre considered - the motif and the mobile are all introduced as important terms for other writers/thinkers – the different varieties of historian, the proponents of free will or determinism, but never Sartre himself. The account of the unitary upsurge is already implicitly present in the classic example of Pierre in the café, at least implicitly – the cafe would not have risen up as presenting us with Pierre as an absence if meeting him there were not our operative goal and justifying consideration for being in the café.¹¹¹ We have already seen that Sartre's overall picture is founded on an original project that gives meaning to a totality of meaningful projects that nonetheless do not make up the original project, but are rather indistinguishable from it, completely parasitical on it in spite of the possibility of reconstructing the original project on the basis of the sub projects that it produces. At the level of this original project, the project in question has to be purely intrinsic, in other words, the question "... but why have that project?" has to make no sense because our analysis is at a level beyond this kind of questioning.

One clarification is still needed here as to what is meant by "intrinsic" goals, because we experience ourselves as doing something for its own sake very regularly. For instance, I used to enjoy having a cider on the way home. If someone asked me why I had chosen cider out of the whole bar, I would reply "because I felt like it" and really mean that; the value of having that drink seemed to come from itself and have nothing leading up to it or justifying it - it was experienced as being intrinsic. So, one objection to the above picture of intrinsic ends is that it does not do justice to these kinds of experiences; even if it seems to hold logically, it is breaking Sartre's commitment to respecting the power and validity of first person experiences as they are lived through. Since we experience ourselves as having intrinsic ends that are not the original project, then there must be other intrinsic ends in play which in principle could serve as guaranteeing the instrumental actions leading up to them. This account could give us a motivational structure made up of multiple interwoven but nonetheless unrelated projects, some of them quite banal like *walking my dog every day* and *having cider after a walk* and some of them more serious like *being a good citizen*. One immediate problem with this kind of account is trying to see how the competing demands of these projects would be balanced if they are not related by an overarching goal. We might end up with some kind of drive theory by following this route, perhaps talking about a polyp-armed self as with Nietzsche in *Daybreak* 119, but Sartre rejects this kind of story: "[e]very desire if presented as an irreducible is an absurd contingency and involves in absurdity human reality ... I can not in fact consider this fondness for rowing as the fundamental project of Pierre; *it contains something secondary and derived*".¹¹²

¹¹¹ "In fact Pierre is absent from the whole café ... I myself expected to see Pierre, and my expectation has caused the absence of Pierre to happen as a real event concerning this café" Ibid., p.34.

¹¹² Ibid., pp.582/3, emphasis mine.

This seems to me to be a clear endorsement of the above picture, where any project or desire has to either feature as an instrumental component of achieving another end, or refer directly to the original project. All the same, given that experiences of enjoying something for its own sake are universal, whether that's a cider or an apricot cocktail, we can't throw out the idea that we experience projects as being intrinsic. However, we can deny that this is the *foundational* form of the intrinsic. What I wish to draw here is a distinction between a 'hard' sense of the intrinsic beyond which we can find no support(ing project) and a 'soft' sense of the intrinsic which can be analysed in terms of some support(ing project). We can draw this idea out in terms of completeness and finality of the projects in question – a hard intrinsic project, once complete, would in principle admit of no further projects to take place which are connected to itself. A soft intrinsic project, by contrast, enables or at least permits other projects to take place after it has completed but does not present itself as such. On this system of categorisation, a hard intrinsic project is and can only be the original project argued for above.

What could this project be? It is helpful here to recapitulate some of our earlier conclusions. Firstly, we should remember there is always a relevant sense in which the in-itself is the foundation of the for-itself, insofar as they are both parts/moments of a synthetic totality. Human reality stands in a similar relation to the *Mona Lisa* and its components in Catalano's example, which is both the *Mona Lisa* and a collection of paint deposits on a canvas – there is no difference at all between the painting and the paint, nothing whatsoever separates the two, but there is nonetheless the paint and the painting which are different in spite of being part of an inseparable synthetic totality. Likewise, the for-itself just is the in-itself, and is separated by absolutely nothing from the in-itself, but the for-itself and the in-itself are nonetheless separate. Human reality, considered abstractly as the for-itself, is, and remains, divided from itself (as the in-itself) by absolutely nothing. Secondly, the only project that adequately explains human reality must be a total project, or else we are subject to an infinite regress, an infinite number of underlying drives that generate our drives, an infinite series of desires that explain our desires. This gets us nowhere. Human reality is not just characterised by the for-itself, because that for-itself is founded on the in-itself that is the necessary condition of its being. As the for-itself is coincidence with itself locked in a synthetic totality with non-coincidence with itself, it would fail if it made an effort to simply return to being the pure or basic in-itself that it is separated from by nothingness. This means that insofar as the for-itself desires any return to the in-itself, "the for-itself, being the negation of the in-itself, could not desire the pure and simple

return to the in-itself.¹¹³ As a result it must attempt self-coincidence in a different mode, which can only be to self-coincide as being the for-itself, as being self-coincidence with being non-coincident. It is an abject paradox for non-coincidence to coincide with itself, because if it succeeds in coinciding with itself it is no longer non-coincidence with itself - this would be to achieve both having itself as its own, sole foundation whilst retaining the aspect of transcendence which characterises being non-self founded being, "*being as for-itself*, a being which is what it is".¹¹⁴ In more plain language, its goal is to be conscious of enjoying not being conscious at all, which is impossible through contradiction. It is this that leads to the claim that "man fundamentally is the desire to be God",¹¹⁵ a completed being that can enjoy that completion by retaining some measure of incompleteness through His radical fullness, but which also causes problems because "the for-itself chooses because it is lack; freedom is really synonymous with lack".¹¹⁶ If lack was ever eliminated from the for-itself, it would be left incapable of action and lose its freedom, which are two ways of saying the same thing: "the for-itself chooses because it is lack; freedom is really synonymous with lack".¹¹⁷ The impossibility of realising this original project give us one approach to, or characterisation of, the state of anguish, the evasion of which we will see in the next chapter as our jumping-off point into the realm of the ethical. Nonetheless, this will have to wait – there is still the question of where specific, concrete projects come from and how they are determined – how does the nebulous project of self-coincidence turn into lesser projects? This question will lead us into Sartre's final determination of freedom as being radical.

We might be concerned here that Sartre's account of freedom cannot sustain an inherent tension between two claims, the first being that consciousness when it is free acts from entirely within itself (i.e. that it really does separate itself from the causal world): "[h]uman reality can not receive its ends, as we have seen, either from outside or from a so-called inner "nature".¹¹⁸ The second is that the choice thus made is not gratuitous even though nothing comes in from outside to justify the free choice at the time of choosing – Sartre himself is aware of this and asks rhetorically, "does this mean that one must view freedom as a series of gratuitous jerks?"¹¹⁹ answering himself immediately: my acts are free "but this does not mean that my act can be anything whatsoever or even that it is

¹¹³ Ibid., p.581.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.587.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.587.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.586.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.586.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.465.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 474.

unforeseeable".¹²⁰ The problem is reconciling these two remarks when they appear to be in direct conflict. There are more and less simplistic variants of this objection, and we will briefly sketch out an answer to a weaker variant before addressing the stronger. The weaker variant accuses Sartre's account of nihilation of requiring consciousness to be completely cut off from the objective world, leaving it adrift and 'unmotivated'¹²¹, making all action gratuitous or even undermining the claim of action to be action at all. As is often observed, the alternative is a Humean kind of happenstance.¹²²

There are two aspects to the structure of freedom that allow us to escape the weaker objection: the significance of value to the for-itself, and the structure of human motivation as being necessarily a totality. Firstly, Sartre clearly refers to value as that which properly speaking makes an in-itself state of affairs in the world conducive to action – "[i]t is only because I escape the in-itself by nihilating myself towards my possibilities that this in-itself can take on value as cause [motif] or motive [mobile]".¹²³ In other words, the very significance of some state of affairs as a mobile is only possible because of value, because of the following feature of value: "[v]alues in actuality are demands",¹²⁴ they are demands that something out in the world is realised or maintained in being, and these demands are intelligible in a way which makes objects in the world reveal themselves in accordance with the values our ends place upon them – hence the mud on the dog is presented as enraging, because as a result of our failure to be ready for the show we are enraged. We apprehend through our mobiles our current end, and make a choice on the basis of our grasp of that end. Hence we have the earlier example of the soldier who freely chooses to flee from battle, making a conscious and reasons-guided decision in pursuit of an end he has given himself – the preservation of his life. In the presence of heavy fire from the enemy, the fear that wells up in him reveals that fire as frightening because it threatens the project of survival; being in the line of fire manifests itself as disvaluable to him, and so he acts in accordance with a project of survival which is dependent in part on a motif that is constituted by the presence of the rock that can provide shelter due to its objective being, and the objective being of the shrapnel that makes a granite slab impassable to it.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.475

¹²¹ "Motivated" is in scare quotes here because it refers to a wider sense of motivation or causation.

¹²² Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford University Press: Clarendon, 2007. Book 2, part 3, section 1.

¹²³ *BN*, p.459.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.62.

Thus, one possible sense in which nothing outside consciousness can determine its choices is that even though an outside state of affairs is necessary for a choice to be made, it is not necessary and sufficient because there must also be the 'noematic'/mental correlate of that state of affairs, the project, which relates back to the necessity of there being something that we are aware of as well as the awareness. On the other hand, the presence of value through a project is both necessary and sufficient to make a choice, and although it depends on an outer object, that outer object would not exist without there being a project and hence values held by a for-itself. It is only because we have projects that there is a world at all, in the sense that the world of human existence depends on negation and that negation is effected on the world in response to a lack apprehended through a project, – “what I expect from the carburettor, what the watchmaker expects from the works of the watch ... is a disclosure of being”.¹²⁵ Hence we end up back with claims like “it is man who renders cities destructible, precisely because he posits them as precious”¹²⁶ compared with the power of storms, earthquakes and the like to “merely modify the distribution of masses of things”.¹²⁷ Moreover, for Sartre Spinoza's statement that all determinate things have been negated is “profoundly true”¹²⁸ and this lets him summarise the point: “there is a factual state -satisfying or not- only by means of the nihilating power of the for-itself”,¹²⁹ by the ability of consciousness, grounded in its separation from the causal order of things, to introduce lack and nonbeing into the world.

The more sophisticated, stronger criticism is aimed at freedom as radical freedom, which is concerned with the origins of motifs and mobiles. This notion of freedom is radical because of the connection both in English and French to the Latin “radix” (“root”); Sartre holds that freedom is, in its ordinary sense, a freedom to choose which values come into the world by choosing projects. The broad form of the criticism is that our choice of projects itself is problematically gratuitous, even if it gives us adequately reasons-justified choices on derivative levels, such as whether or not Constantine should found a second capital, whether that capital should be on the Sea of Marmara or the Adriatic coast, and so on. This is the gist of Charles Taylor’s objection: “a radical choice between strong evaluations is conceivable, but not a radical choice *of* such evaluations”.¹³⁰ There are two

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.31.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.35.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.458.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Taylor, Charles. “Responsibility for Self” in Watson, Gary. (ed.), *Free Will*. Oxford University Press: New York, 1982.

obvious and related questions we might ask here. If a genuinely held mobile¹³¹ such as wanting to be rid of all the problems caused by the plebs in Rome can be followed by something other than an effective action to solve the lack it aims at, i.e. a change in project, has Sartre proposed a model that captures our structures of action as being rational and dependable? Secondly, by which criteria are these shifts in project made?

In order to start answering these questions, we will now look more closely at Sartre's presentation of these ideas. Having laid out the account of the motif/mobile/end structure, Sartre is keen to defend his account of action and freedom on two fronts. On the one hand, he wants to be proof against the charge of gratuitousness, but he also wants to respect an insight found in "common opinion": a choice is free "if it is such that it could have been other than what it is"¹³². His defence centres around a concrete example: we are to imagine him on a hiking trip where, after several hours of walking, he has just collapsed by the roadside. An argument starts - one of his companions accuses him of giving in too soon, amounting to the claim that he was free to have resisted his fatigue. On the other hand, he deflects this charge by "saying that I was *too tired*".¹³³ It would be easy to read this dispute around whether there is a possibility of the agent (Sartre) doing otherwise than he actually did, but accepting the premise that "acting otherwise" is/[was] possible for all action redirects the question - we are asking what makes it permanently possible to act/[have acted] otherwise, and by extension what the conditions (whether features of the objective world, logical conditions, or whatever else) are under which the agent would have acted differently. Given the nested structure of projects that we saw above, this amounts to the question of how one's projects can change and what the scope of this change amounts to: "could I have done otherwise without perceptibly modifying the organic totality of the projects which I am[?]"¹³⁴ and again: "I could have done otherwise. Agreed. But at what price?"¹³⁵ Here I understand the "price" to be either a local or a global modification of one's project[s] - is it a question of altering instrumental projects/ lesser projects, or does the whole have to shift?

Sartre's answer is predictable given his commitment to our projects as being unified as a totality: the whole has to shift in order for our actions to differ. Although there are features of the objective

¹³¹ I.e. a mobile that is A) actually held as opposed to claimed such as the child who claims he wants to clean his room but wants to watch TV, and which B) fits into a project that truly aims at the ostensible goal rather than instrumentally aiming at its failure, e.g. the inferiority project described across *BN* pp. 494-7.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.475.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.476.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

world that do seem to bear on the decision to give up on the hike, such as the heat, the strain put on the muscles, and so on, what is ultimately effective in constituting an action is the value manifested in (by) the world which allows the hiker's body to "signif[y] [his] engagement with the world, in the form of fatigue".¹³⁶ This fatigue is only manifest because of the project¹³⁷ of *getting fatigued* and as such can only be explained in terms of some project that *getting fatigued* enables instrumentally, or as holding the status of a hard/complete intrinsic end. With respect to the objective/in-itself preconditions of, for instance, fatigue, what the project amounts to is the generation of *fatiguing* pathways, sun, and lack of water out of the mere objective being of paths, sun, and dried river beds which are missing water as a simple not as opposed to via nothingness. What this in turn cashes out into is the project of creating a world in the first place; in order to reach my ultimate end through being fatigued, I have to first produce a world that is fatiguing, and one viable route to generating a fatiguing world is through the nihilation of the "objective correlate"¹³⁸ of a country road in the summer. Hence, talking about one of his companions who can endure similar journeys, Sartre says:

*[H]e is going on this expedition because the mountain which he is going to climb and the forests which he is going to cross exist; his mission is to be the one by whom their meaning will be made manifest. Therefore he attempts to be the one who finds them in their very being.*¹³⁹

In other words, the brute existence of the mountain and the forests enables the adventurer to negate them and give them a meaning (make them manifest values) and so projects entail the creation of parts of a/the world. However, if we recall Sartre's acceptance of Gestalt principles, these parts cannot be created on their own – if they are to be figures, there must be a ground for them to rise from. Hence we must create an entire world all at once through our projects, even if some or most of it has to be backdrop which is currently only included as the *excluded*.¹⁴⁰ This isn't a reflective choice like an artist choosing to work on canvas rather than a wall or the floor; it's a precondition of there being a world, and by extension a precondition of action. In fact, this entails that any choice at all is also a choice of oneself as (a) being within a/the world, and we can see this

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ An instrumental part of some other major project, e.g., to be seen as inferior or weak.

¹³⁸ This term is here to avoid confusion between the "country road" in-itself and a country road which is differentiated and imbued with value; strictly speaking the in-itself is undifferentiated and hence it is misleading to call a region of that in-itself a country road at all.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp.478-9.

¹⁴⁰ This is the same conclusion we reached earlier through the co-originary of motif, mobile, and end.

by summarising this result with some principles we saw earlier. To conjure a nonbeing in the world such as Pierre in the café, we must also conjure a being that it stands out against,¹⁴¹ and as such we must constitute a world all in one piece. This world must, too, be generated as one that I am inescapably engaged with because it is generated through my relation to it, through an act of perception which places nonbeing (and hence value)¹⁴² in it as real constituents of that world. This can be seen in the following comments about the original project¹⁴³ and relation to the world: “[t]his original relation is nothing other than the for-itself’s being-in-the-world insasmuch as this being-in-the-world is a choice”¹⁴⁴ and again: “[w]e choose the world not in its contexture as in-itself but in its meaning, by choosing ourselves”.¹⁴⁵ However, the possibility of shifting our global project makes it possible to “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”,¹⁴⁶ which amounts to the apprehension of gratuitousness that sparked the objections in the first place.

With this account in mind, we can turn back to our two questions:

- A) Has Sartre proposed a model that captures our structures of action as being rational and dependable?
- B) Secondly, by which criteria are shifts in (original) project made?

As far as A) goes, we are really asking what distinguishes when a shift in overall project occurs from when a given mobile leads to the result it aims at through an action. Webber supplies a helpful literature synopsis here; he captures the problems this can pose well, having set up the initial schema of project change as follows: “[m]otives [mobiles] can fail to result in the relevant actions, not by being followed by an entirely unmotivated action, but by being replaced with new motives

¹⁴¹ Once again it is worth noting that “existence” derives from the Latin “ex sistere”, standing out from.

¹⁴² The nonbeing “added” to the world is a lack or something missing, such as a condition I want to be in but am not; the value in the world is manifested through the apprehension of conditions of possibility of meeting this goal, such as the desirability of catching a bus to attend a job interview in order to be employed.

¹⁴³ I.e., the search after the hard/complete intrinsic end.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.479.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.485.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.486.

[mobiles] that issue in another action".¹⁴⁷ Webber goes on to list three (effectively two) arguments against a freedom that involves such a conversion of the entire world at once,¹⁴⁸ which I will address with broad strokes individually and then more precisely after resolving them into essentially the same problem:

1) "[T]he sustained pursuit of a project is incompatible with this element of chance in the constitution of motives [mobiles]" (attributed to Peter McInerney).¹⁴⁹

2) "[W]ere he right to say the adoption of projects is entirely unmotivated it would be wrong to call it a choice" (attributed to Dagfinn Føllesdal¹⁵⁰ and in modified form to Gregory McCulloch).¹⁵¹

As a result of these objections (among others), Webber rejects the indeterminism entailed by the Sartrean picture of action; I wish to show that these problems are not problematic enough to cause us to throw out the concept of radical freedom. With regard to the first objection, I do not think that Sartre saw radical freedom as causing problematically random or even frequent shifts in project. The biggest problem with reconciling our everyday experiences with the account is that we see ourselves and others as being reasonably consistent in our actions, at least stable enough that the idea of a personality or character determining our actions is both common and seen as basically reasonable or rational worldwide. In principle, Sartre held that a process of psychoanalysis was possible which could discern the fundamental choice made by the analysand, devoting an entire subsection on *BN* pp. 578-96 to the prospect,¹⁵² as well as other mentions which are notable in connection to it on pp. 479-82. This kind of undertaking would be basically pointless if one's original choice of the world could be completely reversed at any time without warning; the fundamental choice of the analysand could change between or even during sessions of the attempted analysis if it were completely without stability and/or some kind of inertia. Nor do we see the characters in his novels or plays constantly stricken by complete, inexplicable reversals of project, even if they might reflectively

¹⁴⁷ Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.62.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.66.

¹⁴⁹ McInerney, Peter K., "Self-Determination and the Project" in *The Journal of Philosophy* vol. 76 no.11 (1979), pp.663-677. pp. 675-6.

¹⁵⁰ Føllesdal, Dagfinn. "Sartre on Freedom" in Schlipp, Paul Arthur (ed.): *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Open Court: La Salle, Illinois, 1981. pp.392-408.

¹⁵¹ McCulloch, Gregory. *Using Sartre: An Analytical Introduction to Early Sartrean Themes*. Routledge: London, 1994. pp. 62-4.

¹⁵² For a book-length account of this possibility, see Stern, Alfred, *Sartre: His Philosophy and Existential Psychoanalysis*. Vision Press: London, 1967.

attempt to effect these reversals (e.g. Mathieu adopting the mantle of the warrior-hero in the church belltower¹⁵³, Daniel's attempt to drown his cats).¹⁵⁴ For this reason, even if we grant that radical conversions are events of mere chance,¹⁵⁵ I do not think that Sartre would hold, or ever held, that a radical conversion which effects a shift towards an unrecognisable new persona was likely. The sense that comes out of the pain that, e.g., Roquentin felt is more that the experienced possibility of such a conversion hangs over the human subject like the Sword of Damocles,¹⁵⁶ which after all only falls once, and does not need to fall at all to horrify the victim. Nonetheless I have to concede that he does refer to the "frequent upsurge of conversions which cause me to metamorphose my original project",¹⁵⁷ but the rest of this discussion will minimise that as a problem.

With respect to the second question, I do not think Sartre sees the lack of motivation for a change in project to be a problem, at least within the confines of a limited scope of "motivation". It is true that there might not be motifs or mobiles leading up to a change in overall project, but this is not problematic because the project is manifest in terms of motifs and mobiles. If there were motifs and mobiles and a fin leading towards the change of the ultimate project, then we would be back with the problem that the original project is not intrinsic in the hard/complete sense required to give meaning to our actions. As we have seen in the previous sections, a key part of Sartre's story is that the original project generates all motifs, mobiles, and ends, and as such further motifs, mobiles, and ends beyond those the original project supplies are a contradiction. In other words, if a putative fundamental project were shown to be influenced by a further set of motifs, mobiles, and ends, this would be good grounds to show we had misidentified a project as being fundamental rather than a normal process of its operation. This type of reading is why Catalano in his *Commentary* does not address the lack of motivation of the original choice as problem, passing over it by saying: "[s]ince this fundamental freedom is the origin of all secondary motives [mobiles] and reasons,¹⁵⁸ it is unmotivated but not capricious. It is the very being of the for-itself as it makes a world-to-be-there and reveals the in-itself as reasons for action".¹⁵⁹ I hold the claim here to be that radical freedom

¹⁵³ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Iron in the Soul*. Translated by Gerard Hopkins. Penguin: London, 1974. pp. 222-5.

¹⁵⁴ Even in these examples, there is still interpretative room to say that their reflective attempts to change the world qua the values they put in the objective world are basically a self-deceptive sham.

¹⁵⁵ Which is a position I do not want to naively endorse.

¹⁵⁶ More on this next chapter in the discussion of Sartre's concept of "anguish".

¹⁵⁷ *BN*, p.497, emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁸ i.e., mobiles and motifs.

¹⁵⁹ Catalano, *Commentary*, p.199.

precedes all¹⁶⁰ motifs and mobiles, so it cannot be held to account on that level of motivation. This view can be read into Phyllis Morris' when she says "Sartre's point is not that reasons are generally irrelevant to decision making, or that reason should be rejected in favour of, say, impulse, but rather that what counts as a reason must be decided upon before one can begin the process of decision making on the level of particular acts".¹⁶¹ Immediately we might want to demand that the choice is still rational in some wider sense, that there is some kind of reason to which the original choice is responsive.

With regard to what guides the creation of new reasons, the Sartrean reply seems to be that we cannot answer the question of what 'meta-reasons' there might be behind the production of reasons.¹⁶² Whilst this claim means that we will always *apprehend* the process of project change/conversion as gratuitous, it also entails nothing either way about whether they are in themselves gratuitous in the sense of random or chance-driven, just that the way is barred to investigation. Sartre says: "no interpretation of [the original project] can be attempted, for it would implicitly suppose the being-in-the-world of the for-itself just as all the demonstrations attempted by Elucid's Postulate implicitly suppose the adoption of this postulate".¹⁶³ What I take this to mean is that we cannot engage with whatever lies beyond motifs and mobiles because we are permanently locked into using a structure of motifs and mobiles to investigate them. Or to put it another way, what we are just is the engagement with the world through a structure of value, through motifs and mobiles, and so we cannot opt out of asking after motifs and mobiles. Our basic structures of investigating the world are locked into using motifs and mobiles, and all the while it seems that our efforts to reason about rationality are blocked if we work within the motif/mobile structure.¹⁶⁴ Alternatively, we can frame the problem as being an infinite regress in our requests for rational explanation: we are asking for a rationality that underlies rationality. Even if we get an answer, some set of principles that rationally describes the choice of the rational, we can still ask what rational principles describe *those*, and so on into a very vicious regress. What this means for the timing or conditions for an abrupt change in project is that these will be basically mysterious, hence there will be chance and caprice in the selection of fundamental projects or rules for generation (if there are

¹⁶⁰ In the sense that it has power over what counts as a motif or mobile in such a way that it cannot be swayed by motifs and mobiles *alone*; more on what *alone* means here shortly.

¹⁶¹ Morris, Phyllis, *Sartre's Concept of a Person*. University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1976. p.108.

¹⁶² At least with respect to answering *these* questions.

¹⁶³ *BN*, p.479.

¹⁶⁴ i.e., a rationality based on motifs, mobiles, and ends leads us and cannot but lead us to impossibilities and contradictions which we cannot reject, such as the effort to achieve the status of God.

such rules at all) of motifs and mobiles: “[t]he absolute change which threatens us from our birth until our death remains perpetually unpredictable and incomprehensible”.¹⁶⁵ We will now consider two alternatives to what this might mean, in which either we hold onto an inaccessible (realm) of meta-reason or we reject it entirely.

Beginning with the idea that we can preserve meta-reasons for conversion, the first objection identified by Webber seems to go against conversion being gratuitous: we do experience ourselves as holding projects reasonably consistently and predictably, and yet we ought to see disruptions in our own projects and personalities if this permanent risk of change were present. Firstly, the fact such change is possible says nothing about its frequency; levelling this objection presupposes an awareness, or even knowledge, about the way in which these conversions occur – it posits that these conversions occur frequently in order to make their apparent rarity evidence against them. Secondly, it is possible that such conversions occur without being (reflectively) conceptualised – the new motifs and mobiles will manifest as different saliences to the world, but if these result in superficially the same action these will be easy to (reflectively) miss or ignore. If I go from exercising to stay healthy for purely selfish goals to staying fit to be able to play with my children, there might well be a very similar kind of pull exerted by the grass as “to-be-run-on” as there was before. This shift could plausibly be so subtle that it would take a degree of analysis to reflectively apprehend which I might never carry out or have carried out on me. Hence many conversions might go unnoticed. Thirdly, the drift in actions and observed personality in ourselves and others can be small because of the way in which we are connected to the past – recall that, in making a choice, we change our relation to the objective world but not the objective world itself. Sartre affirms many times that “essence is what has been”,¹⁶⁶ which means that the past is objective in the sense that it is fixed – everything from who I first fell in love with to what I had for lunch today is now unalterable. Nonetheless we can change our relation to this objective past and build upon it – “the fundamental project which I am decides absolutely the meaning which the past I have to be can have”¹⁶⁷ and indeed as a part of the objective world, the past is something that must be engaged with as a part of action. What this leads to is a kind of anchoring of our current projects in past history – “a converted atheist is not simply a believer; he is a believer who has for himself rejected atheism, who has made past within him the project of being an atheist”,¹⁶⁸ which will always keep us related to the old (and familiar) even if that relation is outright rejection or scorn. Moreover, any

¹⁶⁵ *BN*, p.487.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.59, pp. 460-4 and p.518.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.519.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.488.

shift in overall project can leave minor projects more or less intact, for example something that substantively addresses the rationality of eating meat does not need to hold sway over my subprojects to do with car maintenance, allowing personally distinctive patterns of action to hold after conversion. Lastly, we can miss changes in project by looking at the wrong thing – I might be reflectively comparing just a local project over time or a fairly large project, not seeing that my projects are appreciably shifting at a different scale. I could be on guard against turning Atheist from Unitarian, but inattentive towards my growing cynicism about life as a whole. Therefore, qua the change in personality or character the objection aims at, frequent changes and conversion are not necessarily likely but can be accounted for even if they are.

All the same, we can still point at the intelligibility of fundamental projects to identify some kind of rationality to them, their development, and how they change. The possibility of an existential psychoanalysis depends on there being a coherence to these fundamental projects and some kind of broader rationality underlying them; Sartre clearly holds that such an analysis is possible and later even wrote two extremely lengthy psychoanalyses¹⁶⁹. As I noted above, I do not wish to hold that fundamental projects are actually down to random chance – there is certainly something lending them this intelligibility, but all the same there is a subtlety that Sartre is attempting to draw between an unjustifiable choice of fundamental project and an *unintelligible* choice of this kind. I think the key clue here is that the intelligibility of these fundamental projects is retrospective – Sartre can diagnose Flaubert’s project because Flaubert has *already* lived through the events that make the diagnosis possible. As such, this analysis ascribes an *essence* – recall that “essence is what has been” and is distinct from the lived through experience of consciousness in live progress. We can see this distinction by looking again at the regress of reason or rationality we saw above:

*Freedom makes itself an act, and we ordinarily attain it across the act which it organizes with the causes [motifs], motives [mobiles], and ends which the act implies. But precisely because this act has an essence, it appears to us as constituted; if we wish to reach the constitutive power, we must abandon any hope of finding it an essence. That would in fact demand a new constitutive power and so on to infinity.*¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ E.g., *Saint Genet, Actor and Martyr*, translated by Bernard Frechtman. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ *BN*, p.460.

If we identify the general, lived-through structure that constitutes the motifs and mobiles¹⁷¹ with further motifs and mobiles then we are looking for a fixed, determined essence, yet as far as living through my freedom is concerned “I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the motifs and mobiles of my act”.¹⁷² What is our experience of living through having this freedom? It is having a set of motifs and mobiles and a world which they illuminate, but it is only by objectifying them and thus cutting them off from life that we can render them intelligible in the sense of *knowable*. If our fundamental aims change then we are aware of this through the new way the world lights up with value before any reflective awareness of those aims or how and why the change happened, but a reflective analysis is needed to supply a *why*. For instance, a reformed thief could live through a world where unguarded valuables no longer appear as to-be-stolen without reflectively considering how a recently adopted project to be a good father effects that change. Undergoing an existential analysis might give him an understanding of his objectified freedom, but the relevant change in his world and his measurable behaviour as seen by others has already taken hold. Skipping ahead slightly, we can also live through an awareness of another person’s freedom and act in accordance or attunement with it – I can exercise empathy without attempting to reflectively grasp their fundamental project. Thus there are two senses of intelligibility of freedom here, and the conceptualised, fixed knowledge or understanding is grounded on the lived through experience of having a particular, concrete freedom revealed by the motifs and mobiles it produces.

All the same, we are left without access to the ground of the rationality of project changes – *prima facie* we must take it on faith that there is a rationality there. As we saw above, a major strand of argument against the theory depends on the apparent rationality of human consciousness, but this argument can equally be flipped on its head – since we have access to a general structure of freedom as it is lived through, and we observe the rationality of the actions exercised through that freedom, a certain rationality must be constituted in and through that freedom – even if it is only accessible *qua* rationality when that freedom is objectified. This is the kind of reading supplied by Gardner when he says that “[u]ltimately, Sartre gives no independent account of rationality as a distinct capacity because he regards it as emerging necessarily with freedom; freedom is undetermined responsibility for determination, and as such *constitutes the space of reasons*”.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ i.e., determines what a motif and a mobile can be.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 461- 2.

¹⁷³ Gardner, Sebastian. *Sartre’s Being and Nothingness*, Continuum: London, 2009. p. 172.

Here I would like to (re)address two obvious objections: firstly, why ought we give Sartre the charity of assuming rationality must be present in radical freedom, rather than dismissing his account because rationality is not given to us as a constitutive part of freedom? Secondly, what form could this automatic presence of rationality possibly take? In the first instance, asking in terms of a dependency of consciousness on structures of knowledge about this sheer givenness of rationality amounts to provoking the vicious regress we saw earlier, and questions about the lived experience of this rationality can be answered with respect to the motifs and mobiles. With respect to the other question, nothingness and freedom are tightly linked to each other and to more Sartrean concepts such as his picture of temporalisation in what Gardner calls “horizontal” relations¹⁷⁴ such that the coherence of one is a guarantee of the coherence of the other(s). This is extremely useful provided that these concepts genuinely do translate forwards and backwards – which, going by how Sartre can unfurl the account of *percipi* and *percipiens* into the accounts of nothingness and freedom, seems to be the case.

Nonetheless, I do not think this second answer is entirely how Sartre would want to respond to the problem – even though it does address the issue at hand using his concepts and methodology. Rather, he would probably deny that the question is correctly posed for the same type of reasons he denied that we should ask how we know that we know we are conscious. We saw above the two senses of intelligibility, intelligibility as something we currently live through and are aware of in terms of the pure demands of the world (i.e., the exercise of freedom itself being an awareness of freedom) and intelligibility in terms of the possibility of being able to posit a fixed essence to freedom. This maps on to the difference between awareness and knowledge/judgment in given by the introduction.¹⁷⁵ When Sartre makes claims like “existence precedes and conditions essence”¹⁷⁶ in this context he is reaffirming that the latter kind of (judgment based) understanding of freedom is dependent on a primary awareness of it. We do not need to be able to judge that we are rational in order to exercise rationality, because if this were true we would have to ask how that very judgment was made rationally. If we demand, implicitly or explicitly, that all choice is rational, then in our own accounts Sartre holds we must either invoke an infinite series of rational decisions or we end up accepting an extra-rational term, which is exactly what Sartre is being accused of. Hence there must be a basic, immediate rationality that emerges simultaneously with freedom, and this immediacy

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁷⁵ This also maps onto the distinction between different varieties of reflection; we will come to the significance of “pure” and “impure” reflection later.

¹⁷⁶ *BN*, p.461.

must not be problematic.

Section Three: Action, The Present, and Changing Projects.

All of this can be restated as a commonsense point: doing is separate from knowing or theory is separate from practice. Whatever my theoretical commitments and knowledge about a subject, there is something fundamentally different about doing something and idly talking or (reflectively) thinking about it, and this gap can't be bridged except *during* the process of acting. The idea that we cannot access the present except as it is lived through, as it turns out, is explicitly there in its prototype form in the *War Diaries*, in comments like "what is termed the present ... never has any substantiality; it is on the point of vanishing, its being coincides with its evanescence".¹⁷⁷ Moreover, this nebulous, infinitesimal present depends on the past as (it is) a *development* of or out of that past: "every present defines itself as separated by *nothing* from a has been – the 'has been' being as close to the present as you like".¹⁷⁸ As I act, there is just the doing, the new unfolding of the world in front of me, and in spite of any number of reflective attempts to control my action (imagine the soldier *telling* himself not to panic just before losing his nerve) the possibility is always open that I will act otherwise than I originally planned, that a different set of motifs will light up as relevant as I act. This doesn't have to necessarily lead to bad consequences – it would equally be a conversion if a different soldier in the unit, panic stricken during insertion, suddenly took initiative and led his fellows to victory.

In light of this reading, we can look back at one of the earlier citations and see a new meaning to it:

*The absolute change which threatens us from our birth until our death remains perpetually unpredictable and incomprehensible*¹⁷⁹

Change in our projects does not always and forever escape our appreciation: it can be understood after the fact in terms like "Clovis decided to conquer Gaul because he developed a thirst for power", however whether change will happen *right now* is always up in the air. As the saying almost

¹⁷⁷ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *War Diaries: Notebooks From a Phoney War*. Translated by Q. Hoare. Verso: London, 1999. pp.212-3.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* pp.213.

¹⁷⁹ *BN*, p.487.

goes, the proof of the pudding is and will always be in the eating. We might be able to make better or worse predictions about future action and the mutation of the fundamental project, but there will never be a certainty to them – and talk of chance or certainty is right because we are making these predictions from an external standpoint, even about ourselves, because of the distance from (one’s) consciousness which is needed for self-questioning. It might well be the case that we can make better or worse predictions based on evidence about how and when projects have changed for others and ourselves in the past, but that moment of going through the looking-glass is still unavoidable; the exact meta-reasons for changing what we grasp as reasons can never be grasped exactly as they *are*.

For these reasons, I think that we can uphold the notion of radical freedom through the objections given above. Moreover, in order to consider ourselves fully engaged with Sartre’s ethical project, we will soon see the need to uphold it in order to have access to the vital notion of anguish, in which “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”.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.486.

Chapter Three – The Self, Knowledge, and Self-Knowledge.

The discussion so far leads us to see that we have a basic responsibility for the world insofar as we make it exist; the world we are faced with is made by our projects, by our ends that create a world in line with their conditions of completion and satisfaction. The inherent lack in human reality means that “[m]y ultimate and initial project ... is, as we shall see, always the outline of a solution to the problem of being. But this solution is not first conceived and realised; we *are* this solution.”¹⁸¹ Any given concrete approach to the problem of lack demands a world in which to enact it, and so we are responsible for the world that we live through. The awareness of this responsibility, anguish, is apparently extremely painful to the point where we can find ourselves entirely devoted to avoiding it.¹⁸² We are told that “anguish is reflective apprehension of the self”;¹⁸³ insofar as the self is an ultimately impossible project, anguish is the collision of our reflective awareness of ourselves as having achievable, well-formed goals with the awareness that they ultimately point towards something impossible. It is a special kind of horror at the way that our actions are all dependent on the impossible, on an original choice that sits outside of the space of reasons yet is still definitively ours. Moreover, the flexibility inherent in our choice of the world poses a double-edged threat to our goals as we usually see them; either that our most cherished and meaning-giving values might collapse and see us becoming what we most hate, or that a change we see as positive and constantly strive for might remain eternally thwarted by processes for which we are responsible. I might remain locked into smoking despite despising it and myself for carrying on, for instance. We will see that a reconciliation with our freedom is the foundation of ethics for the early Sartre; the unethical begins with the set of responsibility dodging tactics he puts under the umbrella of “bad faith”.

To fully describe the structure of this self-deception, we need to have the answer to three sub-questions about self-awareness qua awareness of the *Ego* or *I*:

A) What is the nature of the self?

¹⁸¹ *BN*, p.485.

¹⁸² More on this later, in the chapter on “bad faith”.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.45.

B) What is it for us to be aware of or know something as being true?

and

C) Are there any special considerations relating to our awareness and/or knowledge of truths about ourselves?

Hopefully this is uncontroversial; if the overall question is one about self-knowledge and self-deception, then we need to know what the self is and how we come to have knowledge (about it). This chapter will look at the picture of the Ego and character coming out of *Transcendence of the Ego*, asking if our character can casually determine our action(s) or not and if our consciousness is coextensive with our character.¹⁸⁴

In the less conventional second half, the chapter looks at what knowledge is in *Truth and Existence*, setting out his unusual picture of knowledge as a kind of intuition or 'direct seeing'. After addressing some apparent flaws to do with subjectivism, we will see that the nature of error in this account is directly applicable to and pre-empts the account of self-deception in *Being and Nothingness*. Along the way, it will note the interesting connection between the intuition/presence based account of truth and knowledge and his account of the present, given in the chapter above.

Although *Being and Nothingness* contains material on knowledge (some of which will be drawn on), *Truth and Existence* will be the main focus of this account. This is because, in *Being and Nothingness*, knowledge is covered as a *facet* of presence and temporality, as a stepping stone to later points in the text and its overall arc. Moreover, in *Being and Nothingness*, no completed ethical position is present and the goal of the text is not to elucidate an ethics – not even as a stated secondary goal. In *Truth and Existence*, by contrast, we have a complete text devoted to knowledge and truth which also explores its ethical dimension. Although it was never published in Sartre's lifetime, the text is complete and compatible with the ontology of *Being and Nothingness*. The opening pages of *Truth and Existence* read almost as a summary of that prior text, with little or no drift in the broad strokes of Sartre's position. I hope that the reader can, by readily reconciling the ideas from *Truth and Existence* with those that came before, see that this is the case and accept that text as a

¹⁸⁴For an alternative account of the arguments in *Transcendence of the Ego*, one that focuses far more on the divergence from Husserl it represents, see Priest, Stephen. *The Subject in Question: Sartre's Critique of Husserl in The Transcendence of the Ego*. Routledge: London, 2000.

continuation and expansion on Sartre's earlier ideas on the project, presence, and knowledge.

Section One: The Nature of the Self in Early Sartre.

The question “what is the self?” can itself be broken down into at least three sub-questions and/or senses in which the question can be asked:

A) What is it for there to be (for me to have?) a unified stream of consciousness and/or conscious experiences? (e.g., the questions we saw Sartre to be asking in his initial accounts of awareness and the pre-reflective cogito).

B) What is it for that self to have a personal identity, in the sense of identification of the self across different places and at different times? (e.g., the kinds of post-Lockean identity debates in which Derek Parfit made his name, and which Phyllis Morris engaged with in the Sartrean context.)

C) What allows us to be able to identify ourselves with identities such as being a tailor, a soldier, or a spy, or to evaluate ourselves or others as having distinct characters, personalities, and/or roles in a group or society?

For the purposes of looking at self-deception I will be focusing here on A) and C), primarily on personal identity in the second sense – about how one is identified or self-identified as (instantiating) a certain type of person.

In *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre is concerned with how consciousness is unified – how all the experiences that I identify as mine are bound together – the main question being whether there is some real entity (that we could call the Ego) that binds together our experiences into one consistent series or stream. Husserl’s arguments in his *Ideas II*¹⁸⁵ in favour of such an ego are Sartre’s main target. Sartre deploys a well-known trio of arguments against this conception of the Ego: that it is not needed, that the self can go missing, and that the (really existing) Ego is impossible anyway. Since we have already covered arguments in *Being and Nothingness* that by themselves lead to the latter two conclusions, we will look at them first.

The argument against the possibility of the Ego being in consciousness is effectively interchangeable

¹⁸⁵ Husserl, E. *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy (Second Book)*, trans. Rojcewicz, R. and Schuwer, A. Kulwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht, 2002.

with the arguments against representationalism we saw in the first chapter. If the self or Ego is a real object that is contained within consciousness, then there is the question of what it means for that object to be located in consciousness. A self that is present as a mental object could not be given to us all at once because of the infinite number of aspects or *abschattungen* that make it up, which would demand an infinite object (the Ego qua mental object) to be located in a finite space or container (our stream of experiences). Since there will always be hidden aspects to the self as a real mental object, it will be a “centre of opacity”¹⁸⁶ that would break the Sartrean thesis of the translucency of consciousness, and as such it cannot be a mental object found within consciousness itself. Presenting the argument this way misses out a vital premise, that the Ego is the kind of object that appears through profiles/*abschattungen*. This premise can be supplied by observation¹⁸⁷ of the states of our selves – a self taken up with hatred, for instance, is given through instants and never in its entirety. “[A]n instantaneous consciousness of revulsion cannot be my hatred”¹⁸⁸ because the hatred persists through different contexts and times, it might be a unifying theme for multiple instances of revulsion, *schadenfreude*, envy, and so on which individually are not and cannot be my hatred – “is this experience of revulsion hatred? Obviously not. It is in any case not given as such.”¹⁸⁹ Since the Ego/self is given through profiles, then it must have a type of being that is not the self-translucent being of consciousness, and so could only be an object *for* consciousness since it sits outside of it.

Secondly, it is possible to have an experience that does not relate to a self or Ego at all – it is possible to have an awareness of the world that is entirely pre-reflective, such as the example of having only “consciousness of the tram-needing-to-be-caught”¹⁹⁰ and as such, there can be cases of a fully unified stream of consciousness in which the Ego does not appear. If the Ego does not appear at all times, then we at least have good reason to doubt whether it is necessary for the unification of the stream. The argument of *TE* pre-empts the conception of freedom in *BN* here: [in the example where the Ego is missing] “I am then plunged into the world of objects, it is they which constitute the unity of my consciousnesses, which present themselves with values, attractive and repulsive values”.¹⁹¹ Sartre is describing a world that we are engaging with purely on the level of motifs and mobiles apprehended through values in the world; the world is unified in and through a project which

¹⁸⁶ *TE*, p.8.

¹⁸⁷ (i.e. via reflection).

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

generates those values. Since consciousness must make the in-itself exist to fulfil its projects, and it must produce a whole world at once for the valuable to stand out against. Nonetheless the continued presence of the stream of consciousness implies that there is always subjectivity, i.e., the presence of a consciousness that is pre-reflectively aware of itself, even when the *I* goes missing.

The main argument he makes is the most relevant to our selves qua our self-identification, which is that the real Ego is unnecessary for unifying the stream of consciousness because the stream comes as already unified. The claim is that time comes to us as a flow rather than a set of moments – I am immediately aware, to use the Husserlian example, of a melody as a whole extended temporal event, not as a series of notes or instants that I unify later. In the *Phenomenology of Inner Time-Consciousness*¹⁹², Husserl attempts to explain this flow by effectively extending the basic unit of time consciousness from the present back into the past and forward into the future; the quantum unit of our awareness of a temporal world sustains the past in ‘retention’ and projects toward the future in ‘protention’. In simpler terms, the basic unit of time is not an isolated present, but also takes in the past and the future. As (our consciousness of) time advances, the future intended in protention enters the ‘now-phase’ which maps on to the present, and the present passes into retention, so at any given point in the flow two dimensions of the current phase map onto the previous one (protention and now-phase always become now-phase and retention, respectively). The link between the different units is thus established and sustained by what Sartre misnames the “‘transversal’ consciousnesses that are real, concrete retentions of past consciousnesses”.¹⁹³ These connections never create a link between isolated presents – it is not a case of connecting the present at t1 with the present at t2 and the present of t3. If time (or at least the consciousness of time) were given as a series of disconnected moments or instants, then the argument runs that it would not be experienced as a flow but as a series of disconnected moments that would have to be unified later, as some kind of slideshow to which more work would have to be applied to produce the world as we experience it. Instead, the perception of time is done through *blocks* that already refer to the dimensions or ‘extases’ of time that correlate with the past and future as well as the present. Any experience we have that has a duration is to be explained by means of this multiple structure of time-consciousness.

¹⁹² Husserl, Edmund. *Phenomenology of Inner Time-Consciousness*. Translated by John Barnett Brough. Dordrecht: Kulwer Academic Publishers, 1980. The following account mainly draws on pp.153-58.

¹⁹³ *TE*, p.7.

As an example of how this looks, consider the classical Husserlian example of a melody: if I am to recognise a phrase of a song as that song, i.e. as an extended sequence that is made up of varying notes that occur through time and which are unified into a whole, I cannot just be aware of a note in the present. I have to be aware that this C is connected to the B that came before it, and to anticipate (protend) the next C that follows in order to hear the phrase C – B – C whilst only ever being able to hear one of the notes at once. In our actual experiences this is supported both by the tendency of musical notes to linger with us as the music goes on, as well as the confusion or annoyance we can feel if the tune stops abruptly or is played incorrectly. Zahavi¹⁹⁴ makes a similar point about how we hear and understand spoken sentences, which we can expand on: in order to hear sentences as sentences, they have to obey certain regularities of grammar and meaning that can only ever be given by the structure of a sentence of a whole. If I were to say to you at dinner, “pass me the...” you would only be able to make sense of “pass” in light of the recipient “me”, and can only connect “me” to the “pass” by retaining the instruction while you hear the intended recipient. Moreover the structure “pass me the ___” is only properly intelligible if it has an object, i.e. if a noun is coming afterwards, and hence you must anticipate/protend an object is coming such as “the vinegar” so that “pass me the ___” doesn’t sound like gibberish. Without the first words being retained and the last words being anticipated, the word “me” doesn’t relate to the vinegar or either of the other words at all. If I say “pass me the” at the table, the most likely result is that someone asks for clarification; their anticipations have become empty intentions. For now all that matters is that the stream of consciousness has to come pre-unified, that as Gurwitsch once put it we should see “time as the source of all egological genesis”¹⁹⁵.

Given Sartre’s denial of a transcendental Ego, he is left with the question of what we are talking about when we describe an I or Ego or self; since we talk about these things on a regular basis (e.g., “I am tired”, “I went fishing”, etc) this expression must be tracking something rather than nothing. His first attempted definition of the Ego is “the unity of states and actions”,¹⁹⁶ which is to say states like anger and our actions forming a descriptive or explanatory whole – if I say I am angry and I hit my desk, these two factors tally and combine into what I am, what my I or Ego is. As (Phyllis) Morris¹⁹⁷ points out, there are already ambiguities about how we ought to read this very minimal claim, giving us at least two possible readings. Reading that the Ego is a unity of states and actions

¹⁹⁴ Zahavi, Dan, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*. MIT press: Cambridge, MA and London, 2005. p. 57.

¹⁹⁵ Gurwitsch, Aaron. “A Non-Egological Conception of Consciousness” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 1, No. 3 (March 1941), pp. 325-338. p. 334.

¹⁹⁶ *TE*, p.21.

¹⁹⁷ Morris, *Sartre’s concept of a Person*, p.84.

already invites us to see it as being synonymous with what we would call “character”, and indeed she claims that “Sartre does not make a further distinction between character and, say, personality; he uses the terms ‘psyche,’ ‘ego,’ ‘self,’ as well as the term ‘character,’ to refer to the system of conscious relations”.¹⁹⁸ However, this very temptation comes from the way that character seems to describe something genuinely predictive of our future actions – the idea behind this intuition is that states we are in cause and then subsequently explain our actions. It would not be unusual to say things like “I’m angry right now, I shouldn’t talk to the customers” because being angry might make us give bad customer service. This is the view that “character stands in some sort of semi-causal relation to actions”,¹⁹⁹ which Morris ultimately argues is not Sartre’s. There is also the alternative that the Ego or character is descriptive, a kind of narrative construction out of our past actions which can be used to make more or less effective predictions about our future behaviour yet which does not exert causal influence over our acts. Morris’ thesis is one of the earliest thorough statements of the second view, and in what follows I will take her to exemplify this line²⁰⁰ of thought. In recent years Webber²⁰¹ has made a significant effort to realign the semi-causal relation line with Sartre’s position, more or less explicitly in opposition to Morris. To summarise: either the Ego/character is either retrospective, narratively/poetically created and inefficacious in guiding action, or that it plays a part but, in line with the thesis of radical freedom, does not entirely determine future action.

Resolving this issue hinges on what exactly a state is – Sartre claims that they are real, given concretely to reflection – I can grasp, e.g., my hatred as a real thing, I can talk about it or introspect about it and it has more reality than some kind of theoretical or purely imaginary object.²⁰² However, the way in which we can grasp these states shows that they are not in consciousness – they are grasped as having duration in time rather than being instantaneous. We grasp hatred, for instance, as being there both in disappointment that someone is at the same café as in the morning and in a revulsion at their actions in the afternoon; through different separate instances of disgust or unease or disappointment we apprehend the overall whole of our hatred. Thus, “my hatred appears to me at the same time as my experience of revulsion. But it appears *through* this experience”²⁰³ and this set of appearances is really a series of profiles through which hatred is grasped as a transcendent object. Rather poetically, Sartre says that “[h]atred is a letter of credit for

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.84.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.86.

²⁰⁰ This kind of view is found in many other places, most influentially in Catalano and McCulloch.

²⁰¹ Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, especially ch.2 (pp. 16-37).

²⁰² *TE*, p.21.

²⁰³ Ibid., p.22.

an infinity of angry or revulsed consciousnesses”,²⁰⁴ which is to say that a state suggests its own permanence and immutability – even if it is given in annoyance at one point and disgust at another, it endures through these appearances and will do so forever. In this sense the Ego we normally talk about does *present itself* as causally determining – since we hold hatred in our hearts, we will feel annoyed if we have to work with our enemies, nauseated by their successes,²⁰⁵ and so on. Nonetheless this infinite extension of a hatred shows that there can never be certainty about a state, since we would have to grasp all the *abschattungen* or profiles of it at once; as we have already seen, this is impossible for a finite consciousness. So the state, even if we are or were accurate in thinking it determines our future actions, could never completely determine them – states are never permanent and certain, even if they present themselves as such.

This leaves us with the possibility of error about states in much the same way as we can have perceptual error, despite the accuracy of the individual moments of revulsion, disgust etc that make up the hatred – the indubitable lived experience or *erlebnis*. For example, we might conceptualise repeatedly being uneasy around someone as a dislike of them, and later realise we were actively trying to suppress a powerful attraction. Although the indubitable consciousnesses did not change, some kind of reorganisation and reconceptualization of our experiences is always in principle possible.²⁰⁶ The continued survival of the state has to hinge on further instances of the [type of] consciousness that make it up – a hatred that does not produce more instances of revulsion is like a bounced cheque which we can safely rip up. If we are presented with enough contradictory consciousnesses, it seems to be both irrational and against near-universal experience to say the state we are in does not change – it makes no sense to say that I feel only happiness around someone yet hate them, for instance. This is a key common-sense observation supporting the Morris-style view, which strongly counts in favour of character as (a conceptualisation of) a series of past actions as matching a certain description. If we read Sartre’s description of qualities as being second-order states, this conception of character seems definitive. In *TE*, Sartre claims that “[t]his psychical disposition (I am full of rancour, I am capable of violent hatred, I am inclined to anger) is naturally something more than and different from a simple average. It represents the substratum of states just as states represent the substratum of the *Erlebnisse*.”²⁰⁷ In other words, in the same way that a state like anger seems to cause the individual consciousnesses of hate, revulsion etc., the

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.23.

²⁰⁵ Sartre’s example of hatred here seems to be about a rather petty person.

²⁰⁶ Confusion over this relationship leads to a pair of “tempting error[s]”; firstly, doubting the indubitability of the lived consciousness because we can be wrong about states, and secondly positing the indubitability of states because of the indubitability of lived consciousnesses.

²⁰⁷ *TE*, p.27.

quality of being an angry individual seems to cause the states of anger we enter. In reality, moments of lived experience are unified into the states and states are unified into qualities. These qualities sometimes play an important role in sustaining an ego or character – if a state like hatred really does project itself to infinity but we find ourselves forgiving others, changing our opinions of them, or just going a long time without seeing anything that would be enraging, something needs to sustain that state in being. If someone is characterised by giving out heavy-handed punishments but all their (current) underlings are above reproach, we might still want to call them a harsh taskmaster in spite of not having punished anyone lately. This is why qualities are “a potentiality, a virtuality which, under the influence of various factors, may pass over into actuality. Its actuality is precisely the state (or the action)”.²⁰⁸ A quality is a state that might be expressed in the right circumstances, it is a promise of future action if those circumstances are right. The quality of being a harsh taskmaster is the promise of more punishments and the state of rancour if the employees’ work quality slips. Qualities are not necessarily contained in the Ego in the same way that states and actions are, however: “they are never indispensable, since states and actions can find directly in the Ego the unity which they require”.²⁰⁹ I take this to mean it is entirely possible to constitute an Ego entirely on the basis of recent evidence, without retaining states which have lapsed. Whilst this means that qualities are not a structural part of the flow of consciousness and can be missing from the Ego, it does not mean that they lack reality. They are, after all, valid intentional objects for us; we talk about them all the time.

This account of the Ego as states, actions, and qualities matches up well with Morris’ general formula for character ascription:²¹⁰

- A) Actions have been performed matching the character trait/description, e.g. fleeing a battlefield for cowardice.

- B) There are a sufficient number of actions of this type to rule out unusual or uncharacteristic behaviour.

- C) There is an absence of contradictory action in the time span under consideration, e.g. thievery alongside charity.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.27-8.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

²¹⁰ Morris, *Sartre’s Concept of a Person*, p.88.

Whilst conflating the literary and philosophical works should be done with care, Sartre explicitly supports this view in *No Exit* when Inez says: “it’s what one does, and nothing else, that shows the stuff one’s made of”.²¹¹ She says this to directly contradict Garcin, who claims heroism or at least a lack of cowardice, despite an actual track record of flight from battle. It is not insignificant that this is a case of somebody judging another’s character – on the face of it, there is something different about us knowing ourselves and other knowing us, and this counts double in light of Sartre’s thesis of the translucency of consciousness. Yet if we have already accepted that we can be in error about our states and that states are not *in* consciousness, then there is nothing fundamentally different about one’s own access to these states and others’, since they are relevantly external and public. We might have access to more evidence about those states because we are always there at the events that make them up, but the whole is equally accessible and real to others – “My I, indeed, is no more certain for consciousness than the I of other men”.²¹² If we frame the discussion in terms of how we can discern character in others, then a deceptively simple argument Morris makes takes on great force: how can we have character information in the absence of actual, concrete actions? Without access to some kind of mental criterion we are left with the question of what character can be – if all we have access to is the actions of others (and ourselves) to (re)construct our characters, what is left over and above those actions which can take on the description “character”?²¹³ It seems that the sum total of available character evidence is a set of past actions and states, which claim is all-but explicit later in *TE*: “[t]he Ego is nothing other than the concrete totality of the states and actions which it supports”.²¹⁴

The obvious rejoinder, which I am hesitant to link to Webber’s position but which could be the basis of its own semi-causal view, is that future actions do constitute evidence for our characters. Because I *will* donate to charity, it is true that I am benevolent, for instance. To be slightly unfair, this sounds like something a liar might claim rather than a substantive position – “I’m reliable, don’t worry, I’ll pay the bill tomorrow”. More to the point, the possibility that I will do otherwise takes away from the usefulness of it as character evidence – we would usually look at past performance to decide whether we believe the statement itself. A successful business manager, with a long train of prompt payments behind him, would be far more likely to be believed than a serial defaulter. We might look back when a chancer has paid up and see that he was actually reliable, confirming our prediction and

²¹¹ Cited at Morris, p.86.

²¹² *TE*, p.50.

²¹³ Morris, *Sartre’s Concept of a Person* p.86 & pp. 93-4.

²¹⁴ *TE*, p.30.

through it confirming our outline of character ascription. Yet if we do this, we seem to be merging or unifying a set of past actions/states into a character *in order to prove that* character is not a unification of past actions/states. To replace the idea that we can predict actions in this way, Morris suggests we see actions as in or out of character²¹⁵ – actions can conform or not to the characters ascribed to us and this allows us to use character *as if* it were a predictive or casually effective force, even though it is not. This makes it possible to use predictive language as a part of our discourse of character ascription, even though it tracks something other than we usually take it to. Since we usually experience our Ego/character to be something stable and coherent, i.e. we experience the majority of actions we or others carry out as being in character, we might ask why this is, and the answer will have a lot to do with the structure of action and of projects. To see how this is not a case of smuggling back in a semi-causal view, it is time to look at another picture, namely, Webber's.

Webber's position is explicitly intended to be a semi-causal view; having defined²¹⁶ a character trait as a "relatively stable" disposition to act a certain way given a certain situation, he states that "[the] idea that character traits explain our behaviour but are nonetheless parts of ourselves that we can change is central to Sartre's philosophy".²¹⁷ He makes a further specification that some traits might be generic but others might be useful identifying tools (especially when they are part of a set of traits). A love of Ottorino Respighi's music might be a much better tool for identifying or marking out a particular character than an aversion to fire, for instance.²¹⁸ Webber gives two possible options for cashing out this notion of a character trait: either a sum of actual action in line with Morris' view, or "purely in terms of mental events", which would make character identical to something within the flow of consciousness. He ends up rejecting the Morris-style view on the basis that it provides us with confused grounds for ascribing character, given that our future predictions about someone's action require a huge amount of very subtle information taken in concert. An attempt to talk about someone's vicious character in response to an action, such as reaching the deadly voltage point in the Milgram Experiment, might end up being rejected if they did not do the same without authority compelling them to cruelty. Instead, argues Webber, we would end up favouring more fine grained descriptions like cruelty-under-authority and benevolence-when-alone. If all of our decisions made in character lead to trait and state descriptions of this fine grained kind, soon we are left dizzy and

²¹⁵ See Morris, *Sartre's Concept of a Person*, pp.94-9.

²¹⁶ Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.16.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.16.

²¹⁸ So far, we can assume a direct translation between this concept of a trait and the thing our previous account of states was trying to track, but already reaching a direct translation between the two would be premature and dangerous.

lost by the difficulty of unifying them into an overall character:

*[we] would have to think of ourselves as having displayed a wide variety of traits on a wide variety of highly specified occasions and would be unable to prescribe any remedy for the future. The moral purposes of thinking in terms of character would therefore be hamstrung.*²¹⁹

We can make two early observations here: it does not seem to follow that an account of character must be wrong because our constitution of a given Ego/character is prone to error, as we seem to make mistakes about our own Ego and those of others all the time. Indeed, we seem to make very serious mistakes of this kind. In fact, I would go so far as to say the error would be to claim we have mostly accurate ideas about others, given the rate at which we are simply wrong about how people will act or think in a given circumstance, even people we know well. There is also an issue here about the difference between reflective consideration and reasoning about Egos and the original appearance of a reflectively considered Ego to us – it might well be very difficult to reflectively reason about Egos without error, but if the Ego is an(other) object in the world it will be necessarily, i.e., spontaneously, unified when consciousness creates that world. If we take this seriously, the question is about the difficulty of reasoning about Egos/characters, not about the difficulty of constituting them to begin with. Moreover, it is not clear that character or Egos are the site of ethical involvement at this level of removal from ethical reasoning, and so neither is appealing to the ethical applications of the theories a convincing argument away from the Morris-style view. If we *already* had in place a conception of ethics which did require certainty about Egos and which we had good reason to take as a dependable fixed premise in Sartre's system, the argument would be persuasive. As it stands, this is a *prima facie* objection that hinges on unsupported intuitions, which highlights that Webber already has an implicit stake in what character turns out to be – a particular structure that fits into a later conclusion at worst and which merely reflects an intuition at best. Before getting deeper into his account, this point needs clarifying.

When it comes to the extension of "character", there is something different and instructive going on between Morris' Sartre and Webber's. When Morris talks about character and/or the Ego, she is attempting to track, based on the Sartre of *TE*, what we are actually addressing when we use these words. She is asking what the referent of "character" actually is, in spite of what we take it to be – trying to identify a real structure underpinning our use of the term. If we observe that we have access to something we call an Ego which is or contains within it a character, then it is natural to ask

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.18.

what that is. Subsequently learning that the Ego is purely retrospective does not remove our ability to talk about it and make predictions on its basis; all of us have experienced the unreliability of inductive arguments at one point or another, yet we can continue to use them. The fact that we can use them to make predictions does not change if they are a retrospective unity instead of a semi-causal force, any more than learning that ladybug larvae are not their own species of insect stops them protecting my garden from aphids. Given that we know it to be an object from its givenness via profiles, and we know that objects cannot compel consciousness, then we must see the Ego and the character-giving states within it as something purely retrospective. Webber's move seems to be to ask what *actually* grounds the regularity and predictability of action and to call *that* character, which is subtly different. In effect, instead of asking what our use of these character terms tracks, he is asking what they *should* track and redefining them to fit. His account ultimately terminates in the idea that our character is made up of our projects:

*Sartre understands behaviour to manifest qualities, or character traits ... [t]hese qualities consist in the overall set of projects that each person freely chooses to pursue and has the power to change.*²²⁰

This makes a lot of sense in terms of explaining certain regularities in conduct and behaviour; our actions will be consistent as long as they are unified within a certain set of projects and hence fit within a consistent space of reasons. It also satisfies the lack of *total* determination of the future because of the possibility of radical conversions and because of local indifference.²²¹ It also preserves the idea that consciousness is purely internally motivated. However, insofar as Sartre explicitly subsumes qualities, states, and actions under the Ego,²²² and our usual way of talking about character indeed involves states and qualities such as being in anger or being an angry type, this is not what Sartre has in mind with respect to Egos and character. The term character as Webber uses it is referring to a different concept altogether, to (the consistency of) the original project. This discussion started with mention of an overlap between him and Morris, and that overlap is with the importance of projects to determining our future actions. Insofar as our projects have not undergone radical conversion, the acts they constitute will be located within (motivated by) the same space of reasons as the ones coming before, allowing us to unify²²³ them into a consistent

²²⁰ Ibid., p.29.

²²¹ I.e. the interchangeability of ways of completing a vague enough project. Coffee and tea both slake thirst and warm you up, so we might be locally indifferent to which one we drink after an afternoon in the cold.

²²² A whole subsection of *TE* is, indeed, called "The constitution of the Ego as a pole of actions, states, and qualities". (*TE*, p.28).

²²³ These egos, being part of the world, come to us spontaneously unified so this is not a reflectively conscious puzzle-solving exercise a bit like building an egological jigsaw.

whole, i.e. to incorporate them into the Ego or character we are ascribing to ourselves or others. This is why, where Webber sees character, Morris sees the *characteristic*.²²⁴ It is hence somewhat unfair for Webber to claim that character, as “the projects the individual has chosen to pursue and could choose not to pursue ... [which] warrant the ascription of character traits”,²²⁵ has been ignored by Morris and others, who deny the reality of character, when they have differing understandings of how to proceed and use the word character. If we look for Webber’s intended extension of the term “character” in earlier commentaries, we can find engagements with it via the project structure and original project. For instance, when Webber claims that Gregory McCulloch excludes character from his understanding of facticity and transcendence, he quotes the following part of McCulloch’s description: “our past decisions and choices that have brought us to where we are now”.²²⁶ Under the Morris-style reading, these decisions and choices spell out into the states etc that *make up* character, and so McCulloch neither downplays nor ignores the original project as being abstractable into other projects.

Prediction²²⁷ of our actions based on character is, for Sartre, itself an action since it has an intentional object – the future state of being that will be realised and we are aiming to correctly anticipate. In order to make a reasonably definite prediction about action, there must be motifs making it possible, i.e. objective circumstances which enable it – and these can only be located in the past. In fact, even if we are making a reflective probabilistic prediction (“there are better than even odds he will be bored at the theatre”), this is on the basis of a series of reflective predictions that themselves depend on the assumption of fixed motifs.²²⁸ The temporal flow of consciousness means that any candidate semi-causal character traits (Webber sense) could never be located in the present, in short because “the present is ... nothing more than being, it is a slipping-past alongside being, pure nothingness”.²²⁹ If we attempted to keep them present to us forever, this would be impossible because that act of grasping and determination is also an act of negation which makes them fixed and past. The trait that we attempted to grasp would be constantly rushed downstream in the flow, so to speak, and will always appear in the past having necessarily slipped through our

²²⁴ See Morris, *Sartre’s Concept of a Person*, pp.94 -7.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19.

²²⁶ McCulloch, *Using Sartre*, p.75.

²²⁷ Which, being a strictly epistemological affair, has to be sharply distinguished from *Protention*.

²²⁸ This *is* a reflectively conscious puzzle-solving exercise akin to building the easily predictable future Egos and seeing how many of them show the result we are aiming to predict.

²²⁹ *BN*, p. 231.

fingers in the present.²³⁰ The trait will always be a past aspect of the flow and indeed of the Ego, resolving the position back into a Morris-style view.

Where seeing projects as the site of “character” is profoundly right is in what is tracked by states, qualities, etc. Sartre claims that states and qualities are “inert”²³¹ and posits something like occasionalism about the effectiveness of the Ego: although the Ego has no determining influence, it *seems to* because the flow of consciousness magically projects that power onto it at the same time as *it* determines action. Our direct awareness of the actual determinants of action - the motifs, mobiles, and end[s] – is entirely contained in the values that manifest as appearing in the world. Those *values* are what genuinely precipitate the actions which are later unified into a reflectively grasped Ego, yet we approach the world through “magical objects which retain, as it were, a memory of the spontaneity of consciousness, while still being objects of the world”.²³² The Ego is a construct which does not reflect the actual action of consciousness and which is nonetheless our only reflective access to consciousness, which seems to contain qualities and states which produce consciousnesses: “[c]onsciousnesses are given as emanating from states, and states²³³ as produced by the Ego”.²³⁴ It is right to say we reflectively apprehend our projects through the Ego, but this does not mean our talk about Egos and characters is actually about projects – it is still about Ego or character, which nonetheless turns out to be derivative from projects. Our character might well suggest we have certain projects or inhabit a certain space of reason, but is never coextensive with those projects or that space of reason.

²³⁰ See also Joseph Fell’s assertion that the “present produces the past”, in Fell, Joseph. *Emotion in the Thought of Sartre*. California University Press: New York, 1965. His discussion of emotional states on pp.87-90 ends with a helpful diagram about the constitution of character, which illustrates this point.

²³¹ *TE*, pp. 33-36.

²³² *Ibid.*, p.35.

²³³ There is no mention of qualities here because, as mentioned above, they are not always necessary components of the Ego.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.35.

Section Two: The Ego, Knowledge, and Truth.

With this picture of the Ego in mind, the next question is: how are we to account for the inaccuracy or accuracy of our self-knowledge?²³⁵ Self-knowledge in the sense of knowledge of character is knowledge of an object, because the Ego of states, qualities, actions etc is a transcendent object. This means it is safe to begin by assuming that there are no special considerations about knowledge of the Ego, and instead look at knowledge more generally.

Sartre has an unusual account of knowledge which he describes as follows:

*There is only intuitive knowledge. Deduction and discursive argument, incorrectly called examples of knowing, are only instruments which lead to intuition. When intuition is reached, methods used to attain it are effaced before it; in cases where it is not attained, reason and argument remain as indicating signs which point to an intuition beyond reach.*²³⁶

As Detmer puts it, it seems that “intuition” means “the direct apprehension, or if you prefer, the immediate seeing or grasping of some point or principle.”²³⁷ ²³⁸ Given our everyday conceptions about knowledge, the idea of a knowledge solely based on intuition might seem unlikely or even fantastical, but a good reason to allow this importance to intuitive knowledge comes to us through Lewis Carroll. In order to prove an argument through deductive logic, he claims, we must accept the truth of a certain set of premises and propositions that show they lead to a conclusion. If knowledge is something gained by this sort of reasoning, it flows from a series of propositions that necessarily entail a conclusion. In Carroll’s original paper, “What the Tortoise said to Achilles”,²³⁹ we have Achilles advancing the following argument (overleaf):

²³⁵ i.e., the (reflective) judgments we make about ourselves.

²³⁶ *BN*, p.195.

²³⁷ Detmer, *Freedom as a Value*, p.187.

²³⁸ In order for this to meet our ordinary expectations about knowledge, there has to be some kind of immediate givenness to the ‘accuracy’ of knowledge that would lead to these disputes being potentially settled.

²³⁹ Carroll, Lewis, “What the Tortoise said to Achilles”, in *Mind*, vol. 2 no.14, 1895, pp.278-80.

A

B

Therefore, Z.

The tortoise, not believing Achilles, is prepared to grant A and B, but not to accept that they entail Z. Achilles asks that the tortoise grants a further premise, C: “if A and B are true, Z follows”. Yet the tortoise can refuse Z even on the basis of A, B, and C, because he can demand a further premise, D, which says that A, B, C is a good argument for Z. This can go on forever: if we posit A, B, C, D the tortoise can make trouble by demanding a premise E, that “A, B, C, D proves Z “is a valid argument. If “A, B, therefore Z” is sound and valid but not convincing, no amount of extra premises will be sufficient, or necessary and sufficient, to make it persuasive. The conclusion we are meant to draw from this is that “deductive logic without intuition proves nothing. Logic is of no use if it does not help me to see that something is so”.²⁴⁰ This seems to give us reason to accept that intuition is necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. Sartre radicalises this: intuition is sufficient, not merely necessary, for the acquisition of knowledge: “[t]here is only intuitive knowledge”.²⁴¹ If all knowledge is ultimately grounded on some kind of immediate seeing, then there is no place at the site of knowledge gain for a deductive argument. Logical reasoning can allow us to see something, to have an insight, but it is not sufficient for knowledge. Later on, in *Truth and Existence*, Sartre explicitly rejects the idea that logical discourse creates knowledge; the “contemplative” outlook that insists that it does is “a kind of thought making truth the product of reasoning and of discourse that refuse [sic] intuition’s fundamental revealing value”.²⁴² We can still need a specific procedure to get to knowledge, such as deductive reasoning, but the way this gives us knowledge lies in intuition, not some special non-intuitive feature of the argument itself.²⁴³

Before getting into more detail about this “seeing”, there is one objection it is useful to get out of the way. We might want to suggest that two people could “see” the same thing and fail to get the same knowledge. If all knowledge is a matter of seeing but what you learn is un(der)determined by what you see, then we don’t have a good explanation of how a particular contact with the world

²⁴⁰ Detmer, *Freedom as a Value*, p. 189.

²⁴¹ *BN*, p.195.

²⁴² Sartre, J-P., *Truth and Existence*. Translated by Adrian van den Hoven. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992. p.58. Hereafter referenced as *T&E*.

²⁴³ If the reader still sees the idea of intuitive knowledge as strange, it might be helpful to see how Husserl proposed something similar in Cartesian Meditation III. See *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Cairns, D., Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1960.

gives you knowledge. Imagine you are playing poker with two other people, Alice and Bob. Alice has just placed a very large bet, and your response could turn the whole game. You and Bob have the same, unobstructed view of her playing with her watch; Bob is aware, but you are not, that she plays with her watch when she lies. On one reading of the situation, you both see exactly the same thing, therefore if knowledge is a matter of seeing you should have the same knowledge. If we know everything we see, and Bob knows Alice is bluffing, you should too.

This objection falls down because of the passive model of perception it presupposes – by Sartre’s lights, perception is active. This passivity is what suggests the claim that you and Bob are both “seeing the same thing”, since it suggests that in “seeing”, something independent of you filters in, unmodified, via the senses. The active sense of “seeing the same thing” here is something like experiencing the same sensations, which is quite different from sharing an *active* perception of the world. We say we are “seeing the same thing” because there is, give or take a few degrees of visual angle, the same pattern of light reaching us, and hence the same image created on our retinas, transmitted to the sight centres of the brain, etc. Sartre explicitly rejects the notion of sensations this hangs on, saying “it is pure fiction”.²⁴⁴ When we equate sensation with perception and describe it as some kind of sense-data based on light wavelengths travelling into the eye, we leave out both the immediate givenness of the world and the affective dimension of perception. The world manifests values to us as well as a brute picture or image, and so whilst the players may all see the same visual picture (in terms of primary and secondary qualities), only Bob experiences the world as demanding that he bets. When we look at a full account of what is actively perceived, we are not perceiving the same thing as Bob because we are not directly perceiving that Alice is lying. By taking in the affective dimension of perception, we can see that the players were not “seeing” the same thing at all, so the objection does not hold.

So far we have a starting point: knowledge is a matter of contact with the world through perception. Knowledge either is or is intimately related to the presence of the world to us – there is something about seeing that *specific* tree writhe in the Mediterranean heat that gives us knowledge. In light of the world being created or illuminated by consciousness, this contact or presence must be part of a project – the project of making a world that can meet our desires out of the in-itself. If knowledge is only present during direct contact with the world, then there is a tension here with our necessary separation from the objects of our perception. This can both be seen and accounted for in the following statements:

²⁴⁴ *BN*, p.338.

The for-itself is outside itself in the in-itself since it causes itself to be defined by what it is not; the first bond between the in-itself and the for-itself is therefore a bond of being.

Consciousness, having projects that depend on making a world to enact them (like the hiker making a steep, harsh mountainous path in order to be fatigued), is defined by those projects that relate to a missing end such as a fatigue the hiker does not have. The world is generated as one that presents values in line with those ends; the in-itself and consciousness are linked by their needing each other to exist.²⁴⁵

But this bond is neither a lack or absence ... [t]he knower is not; he is not apprehensible. He is nothing other than that which brings it about that there is a being-there on the part of the known, a presence – for by itself the known is neither present nor absent, it simply is.

Here is the problem: how can we fit in the characterisation of projects as oriented at lack with the claim that lack and absence do not characterise the bond between the object and consciousness? One way to solve it is to suggest that at the point of access to the object, it is neither given as in the present, nor in the future or past. It could be given as being a pure movement through the temporal extases of past and future, a contact that involves the past, present, and future all at once and is not located or stuck in one of those moments. Sartre gives a statement supporting this: “But this presence of the known is presence to nothing, since the knower is the pure reflection of a non-being²⁴⁶”, i.e. since the knowing consciousness is oriented towards the non-being of the future, it is “not” in the sense of not yet, it borrows its being from the future. This is supported by a later remark: “if we can not posit any intermediary,²⁴⁷ we must at the same time reject both continuity and discontinuity as a type of presence of the knower to the known”.²⁴⁸ This matches up to our picture of temporality because the past is definitely continuous with consciousness and the future is always potentially discontinuous with consciousness, yet both extases cannot be removed from the overall flow. Sartre’s conclusion later in the same paragraph is more definitive on this point: “[t]he presence of the for-itself to the in-itself can be expressed neither in terms of continuity nor in terms of discontinuity: it is pure *denied identity*”. I take “pure denied identity” here to mean the primary

²⁴⁵ Of course, there is the in-itself regardless of consciousness, but it does not have the meaningful status of the world, it cannot stand out in the sense of *ex sistere* on its own.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p.200.

²⁴⁷ Between the knowing consciousness and its object.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p.201.

instance of non-identity between consciousness and its object. This non-identity helps make sense of the idea that the present is mysterious or vanishing; presence, the time where an object is present to us, is bizarre. Knowledge is (closely related to) the constitution of the world in the present moment, it is the site of the creation of what there (now) is in order for projects to engage. Our knowledge of the world is an immediate insight into the world given to us in and through our creating that world.

This opens up another problem: since we ordinarily talk about knowledge as being something we get to keep, talking about instantaneous contact with the world doesn't seem to capture it. Rather than being (semi) permanent, knowledge is challenged constantly because consciousness is always temporalizing – time is always flowing, and the contact with the object we have in knowledge is always slipping away from us: “I can grasp what is present to me only by temporalizing myself in behaviours that aim at the future”^{249 250} which makes us “a being which is not yet what it is”.²⁵¹ Because of this, the project of verification or checking of knowledge and truth is perpetual; this lines up with earlier remarks in *BN* about the constant need for renewal of projects, like the early example of the gambler's constantly (un)renewed project to give up gambling.²⁵² Moreover, each object as it is present to us suggests a([n] element of the) future, such as the cup of hot tea which suggests both that it will be warm in a few seconds but cold in a few minutes. “[Being] depends, in its manifest being, on a verification which is to come and that is considered as having occurred or, rather, there is a whole important dimension of its present being which is not given in intuition and yet which is present in its very character as absence”.²⁵³ Objects in the present refer forwards into the future because they manifest a lack of some future state of affairs, like the mushrooms that demand to be kept in the pan because they aren't cooked. These claims exerted on the future can serve as motivation for a future project: the mushrooms might also contextually demand that salt and pepper are added when they have been fried. As I engage with the world, I constantly test my anticipations and establish new ones, so all free projects will lead to the creation of (new) knowledge. In turn, all knowledge involves the process of objectifying the world by the negation and nihilation involved in the passage of time,²⁵⁴ it is constantly being made determinate. The passage of knowledge into the past turns it from a live, actual contact with the world into a fixed, determinate

²⁴⁹ This bears striking parallels with Hegel's arguments about Sense-Certainty and the “now”: Hegel, G.W.F., *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford University Press: New York, 1977. pp.63-5.

²⁵⁰ *T&E*, p.19.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.18.

²⁵² *BN*, p.56-7.

²⁵³ *T&E*, p.24.

²⁵⁴ i.e., the flow of the future and present into the past makes them negated, objectified, definite.

object that is part of my past – the specific contact I had with the world is now a part of my history. Since our knowledge is perpetually becoming fixed, it changes from an irreducible part of our own conscious flow to a publicly available object. Instead of being a set of demands that are sustained by their flow into other projects, the knowledge (and through it, its object) has become fixed and an in-itself. In fact, this process is another way of looking at the flow of the present into the past. Sartre's belief that "essence is what has been" is crucial to explaining this – the past is, as we saw in the previous chapter, determinate, negated, and fixed. So what does this constant negation actually do to knowledge?

Since this negated knowledge is fixed and determinate, it will be communicable in a way my immediate lived experiences are not. I have revealed the world to myself through and to knowledge when I have the initial knowledge-constituting insight; the process of temporalisation, of creating a unity of consciousness across time, ensures that our knowledge immediately passes over into a negated, intersubjectively available form. This form is what Sartre calls truth: "truth cannot be for just a single absolute-subject. If I communicate a revealed manifestation, I communicate it with my revealing behaviour, with the outline and selection that I performed on it, with contours".²⁵⁵ A truth's "contours" are the selections of project and/or attitude that led up to it being made, which make it a revelation of a concrete, specific world. When that truth is shared, "the in-itself appears to the newcomer as for-itself", i.e. the world appears as something coming to me through the intermediary of another consciousness. "[A]t the same time the for-itself becomes in-itself" in the sense that my subjective revelation of the world takes on the form of an object seeking to compel the other to see the world in a certain way, which appears as ownerless and objective.²⁵⁶ Thanks to temporalisation, at any point where we grasp knowledge apart from the initial moment of insight, it will therefore be through a truth – the same fixed, determinate, or propositional object that we communicate to others. When I try to (re)capture my previous insight into the way the world is, it comes from the in-itself, the factual, rather than being lived through as a present and ongoing revelation. Knowledge as it is presented in *BN* is never truly present to us but has always already

²⁵⁵ *T&E*, pp.5-6.

²⁵⁶ These remarks borrow a lot of their force from the *BN* chapter on intersubjectivity which has not been addressed yet, but the description should seem reasonable. If a friend tells me a certain part of town is beautiful, that judgment reflects on him and his character at the same time as it reveals or gives me insight into an "ownerless" idea that the town is worth seeing. An objective force that compels consciousness in a certain direction seemingly to contradict Sartre's account of freedom, but the influence of other consciousnesses will turn out to be a special case.

slipped into the past,²⁵⁷ so in Sartre's specialised terminology what we call knowledge is really truth apart from when it is lived through. Since truth is a ready-formed and ready shaped vision of the world, it can trigger in us a new or renewed appreciation of the knowledge we previously had – it can cause us to see the world in the same way we did previously. It suggests to us certain anticipations about the way the world is, like that our salt cellar is filled with salt, and can be tested by having those anticipations tested. As long as the anticipations are fulfilled, we regain the knowledge we had, and the truth remains stable and unchallenged. This is only a sketch, and we will return shortly to a fuller account of how Sartre sees error and how it relates to truth.

We might worry that this leaves us with a story about knowledge and truth which doesn't leave room for accuracy or inaccuracy. We could be suggesting a total subjectivism where there are no wrong or right answers, just potential spaces of reason that might or might not be inhabited, different ways of seeing the world we might or might not think of as appropriate. The argument runs something like this: if I have free rein in setting my goals, I have free rein in the anticipations that they give me, so I have almost limitless freedom with regard to what is true for me. In short, it says we are at risk of losing everything we normally want to capture when we talk about truth and knowledge. Detmer summarises this danger well: "You have your claim, based upon your intuition, and I have my counter claim, based upon my quite different intuition. All we can do, so the objection runs, is to ask each other to look again, and, should we each persist in our original claims, to call each other "blind"". ²⁵⁸ There is a naïve way of reading this where we have lost our power to identify correct knowledge/truth by denying the power of instruments like empirical study to help us. I think Detmer is absolutely correct to say that this is misguided because "[i]ntuition is not being proposed as a replacement for these instruments. Rather, it is merely that a new understanding of the relation between these instruments is being proposed". ²⁵⁹ Instead of insisting on a different set of methods and procedures for acquiring knowledge (and through it, truth), Sartre's account suggests that the methods we normally think of as giving us knowledge work *because of* the intuitions they give us access to.

A stronger version of the objection might say that even if we grant that (e.g.,) empirical study does not ultimately ground knowledge claims, neither can intuition; something else entirely could yet be

²⁵⁷ Having something as live knowledge for an extended period of time is a case of having the same object slipping through our fingers repeatedly. By analogy, even if we can't grasp a single drop, we can have water running through our hands.

²⁵⁸ Detmer, *Freedom as a Value*, p.194.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

shown to underpin and/or regulate knowledge. We have good reason, the objection runs, to look for this X-factor because of the arbitrariness allowed to knowledge by the intuitive model. We are effectively back with the earlier argument that we might see the same thing and get different/underdetermined knowledge out of it. So, let's turn to a second, more precise answer to the problem. Remember that the world in-itself is not negotiable – it always presents us with the coefficient of adversity discussed here in Chapter Two. Even though I can change my attitude to the factual/objective world, I cannot alter it by an act of will alone, so the mountain which can be a call to adventure, a place of natural beauty, or a pain to bypass cannot be genuinely made into a place to find gold if there is none there. Any specific project will reveal the in-itself in specific ways that are unique to that exact project or constellation of projects. When we have an argument about the world, we are really arguing about the precise way we should engage with the in-itself given to us, not what there is in-itself. We are, strictly speaking, arguing about the questions we ask the world, not about which answers that come back, because these answers are given to us in the immediate translucency of pre-reflective consciousness as soon as the question is asked. As such, they are open to us, and any identical interrogation of the world will yield the same result. We are not looking at the world and arguing over if both of us are getting the same knowledge from seeing the same thing; we are asking if we are both looking in the same place.

All the same, we might want to object that there are cases of perceptual error that make this overall account false or trivial. Imagine we are looking into a shop window; I see a store clerk cleaning the windows but you see a mannequin with your worse eyesight. When we argue over whether there is a mannequin or employee in the window, the objection runs this is because of our different faculties of vision, not different questions we are asking the world. We are both looking to see what is in the shop window (asking the world what is there in the same way), and yet the world is returning different answers to us. On a hardline anti-metaphysical reading of Sartre (such as Jeanson's²⁶⁰), visual error and its consequences/effects are within the remit of metaphysics and the sciences grounded on it – specifically, medicine or ophthalmology, where the eyes can be legitimately seen as a mechanical part of a mechanical system. As such, any differences in our detection of primary and secondary properties are prior to and outside of phenomenology's scope, and can be safely ignored. This is probably going to be unsatisfactory to anyone seriously making an error-based objection. More sympathetically, we might respond that there are certain questions we can only ask if we have the right tools in hand – e.g., we can only get meaningful answers about the alcohol content of a

²⁶⁰ See Chapter One, above for a discussion of Jeanson's position.

liquid by using something like a hydrometer or refractometer. Whilst I can ask aloud how strong a brew is empty handed, I can only interrogate the world with access to the right tools²⁶¹ – I can only get the world to open up conclusive answers when I am properly equipped. In the man/mannequin case, we might not be able to ask the world the right questions because our eyes, seen as a piece of equipment, are the wrong tools for that job. The body seen in this sense is an in-itself, and presents a fixed starting point for our projects; in order to share motifs two people would have to have (within a certain tolerance either way) the same basic bodily capacities. As a fully grown adult, I can't share a child's project of squeezing through playground railings, but I can share going through a normal doorway with someone 5 cm broader across the shoulders. Since we always have a facticity to deal with, there will always be certain questions we cannot ask. What the argument about the man/mannequin boils down to is whether we are asking the same questions, after all. Overall, what this highlights is the potentially misleading equivocation between "sight" as a mechanical-optical process and "sight" meaning the presence of objects to us.

With this interlude out of the way, we can get back to our original question in earnest. When our knowledge does change in response to good reasons, what is happening? We can get an answer when we consider that the fundamental logic or rationality of our projects translates into a fundamental logic and rationality to the knowledge we can hold. Knowledge is challenged when our anticipations are made and tested; Sartre describes the failure of an anticipation as follows: "it annihilates itself if it does not allow a correct construction".²⁶² What does this "annihilation" really mean? When we usually talk about ourselves as irrational, we are talking about our stated goals not matching up to our actual motivational structures and actions. If I claim I want to be a good parent but all of my motivational structure is geared toward alcoholism, I act irrationally²⁶³. This irrationality comes down to the mismatch between the motif of the whisky in my desk drawer, the mobile of my feeling like a drink, and my stated end of being a good parent – because my actual end, the end locked into my motivational structure, has everything to do with alcoholism. It really comes down to a properly structured actual project of alcoholism clashing with a claimed/false project of good parenthood. At the pre-reflective level, the end of good parenthood doesn't connect to decisive²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ See also *Notebooks*, p. 313: "[t]he instrument is not just a tool, it is a way of seeing."

²⁶² *T&E*, p.23.

²⁶³ This is the sense of irrationality Moran uses in an analytic context: "if the persistence of the attitude is impervious in this way to considerations of its justification, the attitude itself cannot be a fully rational one and must instead be seen as a kind of fixation." Moran, Richard, *Authority and Estrangement*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, and Oxford, 2001. p.108.

²⁶⁴ Even in a genuine project of good parenthood, the whisky might still appear as weakly motivating, and we might still be tempted to drink; there isn't an *overwhelming* motivation or temptation. Strictly speaking, there

motifs and mobiles about whisky so a proper motif/mobile/end structure can't be made. In the absence of any self-deceptive protection of the project, there is no way to fit a paralytic, drunken stupor into looking after a child properly, so the two can never share in a proper motivational structure. Since drinking can never refer to a future where I have been a good parent, "autodestruction" or "self-destruction" is strictly speaking the wrong term, since the incoherent project can never be created in the first place.

This gives us a preliminary answer about how (self) knowledge is generated: our projects lead to anticipations that are tested by the world. When an anticipation fails, the projects which depend on it aren't renewed,²⁶⁵ causing a different project to take their place. This means we end up with a different contact with the world. For instance, I might look forward to seeing the neighbour's cat in the garden when I drink my morning coffee. If she doesn't arrive, the anticipations to do with her are made empty, so all the projects I have to do with her, like giving her scraps of bacon from breakfast, are cancelled. Rather than dealing with my normal routine, enjoying the company, worrying about how much my landlord hates cats, etc, a completely different set of contacts with the world takes hold.²⁶⁶ I can equally fail to have a certain anticipation without finding my intentions empty in the meantime: I might be preoccupied and have a project entirely to do with getting somewhere quickly, in which case I do not verify the world in the same way (thematise the cat's absence as anything significant). All the same, I *do* generate positive knowledge about the world, but train times and likely traffic are present to me rather than the (objective) elements of my normal routine.

These arguments also lead to an answer about how (self) knowledge can be inaccurate. On the one hand, our knowledge might not have been tested yet, and so it can persist even though when it is challenged it will turn out to be wrong. This, as Sartre readily acknowledges,²⁶⁷ is largely the impact of chance: I can incorrectly know there are eggs in the cupboard even though it is empty, because I haven't checked since someone took them. This would be the kind of inaccuracy when someone asks me "did the cat visit?" as I was halfway down the road when it should have come to the door. Alternatively, I might not contingently have read or heard that the world can be unified in a certain

is a motivation to experience the temptation as part of a much subtler and wider project like "heroically resisting my bad urges" which interacts with the project of parenthood but still allows it to succeed.

²⁶⁵On a stronger reading, the anticipation and the project are coextensive.

²⁶⁶The old projects, even though they can be and are often a major theme of the new ones, do not survive the failure of the intentions they generate; if the intentions they lead to are not fulfilled, they just cannot survive as live projects.

²⁶⁷ *T&E*, pp.23-5.

way; I might just not know that taking the largest slice of the pie is greedy here if it was a cook's privilege back home. Both of these can be the case even if I am properly critical about the world, for no other reason than that I can't spend my entire life staring at the kitchen cabinet or double checking local customs and how my actions will develop my character.²⁶⁸ On the other hand, we can also explain error via self-deception: since all revelation of the world is motivated and chosen, it should be possible to choose not to reveal (part of) the world: "since the truth is an illumination through an act and the act is choice, I must decide the truth and want it; therefore I am able to *not* want it."²⁶⁹ I can, for instance, deliberately avoid checking my bank balance so I never learn how badly I am budgeting. We can be much subtler about the ways we ignore the world, such as being aware of a threat but downplaying it in order to not properly recognise it as a conclusively motivating and problematic thing – and this will become very important in the next section. If this seems trivial as a reason for error, it's meant to be – if our picture didn't return back to something relateable then it would not do a good job of capturing our lived experiences.

Still, there's one last thing missing: what exactly is error about the self or consciousness? As we saw above, on the pre-reflective level there isn't really such thing as error, since a project that doesn't reflect reality is always immediately destroyed in the face of evidence against it:²⁷⁰ "there is no error; anticipation is a non-being which gets its being from the anticipated in-itself".²⁷¹ Mistakes must be at the reflective level if they aren't pre-reflective. Even though we can show that we chose the situation at the level of radical freedom, error and complicity or innocence only come in at the reflective level. This bears out the much earlier claim that consciousness is 'translucent'; pre-reflective consciousness is available to itself and incapable of hiding any ulterior motives from itself. A mistake, as the product of reflection, mirrors one of the ideas about negation we earlier saw rejected²⁷² – it is a kind of comparison between a desired set of ends and what actually happened. A mistake is something like when we find 1300 francs in our pockets not 1500, or the cafe is closed not open. When we track the innocence of mistakes, we are tracking rationality in Moran's sense, we are tracking how our reflectively held/avowed goals match up to our prereflectively held projects. In the case of an innocent mistake, error happens despite our avowed goals matching our pre-reflectively held projects. An example would be hanging laundry outside to dry having read a weather report saying it will be sunny; if it then rains and the clothes stay wet, we can say it was due to chance and

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.25.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p.27.

²⁷⁰ In the absence of any self-deceptive project protecting it.

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 23.

²⁷² I.e. on *BN* pp.30-1.

not self-sabotage. If I were both aware that it might actually rain *and* prereflectively aiming to fail (such as in order to avoid having to go out by having no suitable dry clothes), then I would have made a deliberate error when it ultimately rained.

This sketch of innocence and complicity in error still leaves lots to be answered – if the reflective self depends on the pre-reflective self, then there are plenty of holes in the argument. We will see that the problems that ought to arise due to the translucency of consciousness can be addressed by the impact of ‘unknown unknowns’ on truth and knowledge. Donald Rumsfeld famously invoked these to escape American responsibility for the War on Terror: “There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know”.²⁷³ Despite being mocked at the time (and deep into bad faith himself), we will see that he was being surprisingly insightful into the fundamental means we use to escape responsibility.

²⁷³ Donald Rumsfeld speech to NATO on 6 June 2002, archived at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s020606g.htm> accessed 08/12/2015.

Chapter Four – Knowledge, Temporal Ambiguity, and Self-Deception.

With the point in mind that error is only possible at the reflective level, we can move onto the mechanics of self-deception or 'bad faith'. Although Sartre devotes considerable time to distinguishing his picture from Freud's, I will skip over the issue of the unconscious because it is a negative, not a positive, consideration. Instead, I will start with additional background on the motivation for bad faith, the anguish caused by the strangeness of the present, the permanent possibility of conversion, and by the incoherence of our ultimate ends. Examining the classic examples of bad faith, I will show how it is basically dependent on an appeal to either the past or future and that the crises which should engulf it can be a normal part of its operation. That is to say, the pre-reflective self-awareness that we are deceiving ourselves can be, and is even often, a tool in sustaining bad faith. Moreover, bad faith's appeals to an eternal essence coming out of the past or going on forever are driven by poor standards of character evidence which are made reasonable by the ambiguity of the future. The immediate givenness of this ambiguity, we will see, also means these poor standards of evidence can apply without introducing an epistemological level into the pre-reflective.

This chapter will then go on to consider whether self-deception is purely intrasubjective, considering whether the character of the individual is possible without the intercession of the other to begin with. Given that our characters seem to be often -or always- constructed by and for the benefit of others, we have to ask whether our self-deception depends on them. In this connection, we will see that the intuition/idea that the other can define our characters socially has to be challenged: we have to defend it against the idea that only consciousness can determine consciousness.

Section One: Intrasubjective Self-Deception.

Bad faith is explicitly named as the flight from anguish: “in bad faith, we are anguish-in-order-to-flee-anguish”.²⁷⁴ To recap, anguish is an awareness of our freedom as inherently threatening to our projects. This can be the awareness that our future projects might change from within, causing us to act differently to how we would (now) want to: “[t]he artillery preparation which precedes the attack can provoke fear in the soldier who undergoes the bombardment, but anguish is born in him when he tries to foresee the conduct with which [he will face it]”.²⁷⁵ As far as our freedom goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, yet we abhor uncertainty in our current projects and/or the instability of our characters. The anguishing thing about a potential artillery strike is that I might *become* a coward when it hits, despite depending heavily on my heroism for my self-image.²⁷⁶ The real horror here is that the objective world does not compel me either to bravery or cowardice; whatever I do, I do for purely internal reasons. Since those reasons are subject to spontaneous change in the present, the future can be an almost unbearable threat to us: “the decisive conduct will emanate from a self which I am not yet”.²⁷⁷ Conversely, in cases like the famous gambler example, the past can be the focus of anguish – a past resolution or project might be something I can abandon and have to take responsibility for abandoning, regardless of how strongly I felt motivated at the time – “what [the gambler] apprehends then in anguish is precisely the total inefficacy of the past resolution”.²⁷⁸ In either case, anguish is the awareness that freedom can lead to us holding completely different values over time, which runs counter to the world of solid plans and self-consistency of our reflectively held hopes and dreams. Anguish might also take hold when we realise some aspects of ourselves are made up of a *collection* of events that we can’t live in or through – we will never get to really be the individual our avowed goals aim to create. Hatzymosis²⁷⁹ has a reading of *Nausea*²⁸⁰ where Roquentin is anguished by the impossibility of adventure or the adventurous life; although he can look *back* at his adventures in Indochina or his romance with Anny, he never lived *through* them as adventures. This can apply to any adventure: getting out of a country without a ticket, for instance, might really be a stressful episode of realising you’ve run out of money, hours of despair in a hotel room, the frustrating sacrifice of giving up your luggage, and then a dull hitchhike broken up only by the stress of passing through official checkpoints. None of

²⁷⁴ *BN*, p.69.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.52.

²⁷⁶ We will come to the relevance of “self-image” to freedom and self-deception shortly.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.56.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.57.

²⁷⁹ Hatzymosis, Anthony, *The Philosophy of Sartre*. Accumen: Durham. pp. 6-8.

²⁸⁰ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Nausea*. Translated by Robert Baldick. Penguin: Harmondsworth, 2000.

these things are inherently an adventure, and they're all quite unpleasant, but collectively we might look back on them fondly or tell people at parties about them for years to come. Even adventures mostly or completely made up of enjoyable moments (a fairytale romance) can only be enjoyed as single episodes at a time. You might be able to have an enchanted evening with your lover, but you could never enjoy the whole romance at once. This kind of anguish is realising that we might have a certain character or Ego whilst never getting to experience *being* that Ego. Although this is an extrapolation which is not explicit in the substantive philosophical work of Sartre, it gives us the notion of anguish before the *present*.

As commentators like Webber²⁸¹ have recognised, full-blown anguish is always reflective; Sartre explicitly states that "anguish is reflective apprehension of the self".²⁸² We can also see the claim that it is a special, reflective form of emotion in the work of Joseph Fell.²⁸³ This should flow from our previous discussion of error and mistakes: if anguish is an apprehension of a (potentially) mistaken belief about oneself and one's projects, then it is essentially based on judgment. To make a mistake is to (reflectively) compare the expected or desired result (I get to be brave forever) with the reality of what our freedom produces (our projects change). Anguish is the reflective awareness that, whatever work we do on/in the world, (more) work will always be needed to sustain the results. Sartre's later comments (In *Truth and Existence*) on (deliberate) ignorance as a way of fleeing from being speak to this: "the world first appears to [us] as that in which nothing is given to man, within which man has no place unless he carves it out for himself".²⁸⁴ The same text describes a love-hate relationship with freedom and the objective world that underpins it: "an ambivalent mixture of attraction and repulsion vis-à-vis the revealing for-itself". We are, through the fundamental project to become God, attracted to an in-itself which offers the means to complete our existence, but also repulsed by its refusal to let us actually get there. Our freedom, through the impossibility of pure, eternal presence to the objects we intend, faces us with the impossibility of self-recovery whenever we reflect on it. Since all projects aim towards a final, closed end that is impossible, we are faced with a horrifying contingency to our actions: we are in an absurd, unjustifiable situation that we have to take responsibility for all the same. The impossibility of finally grounding our projects is the greatest possible disvalue we can encounter. It is the detachment of all our rationally held goals from any grounding rational order, which our motivational structures nonetheless survive. We

²⁸¹Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 74.

²⁸² *BN*, p.54.

²⁸³ Fell, *Emotion in the Thought of Sartre*, pp. 60-64.

²⁸⁴ *T&E*, pp.43/4.

remain capable of acting despite the basic irrationality and contingency of the structure as a whole, yet a reflective and full apprehension of this would provoke an unbearable crisis.²⁸⁵ The question, which returns us to the sphere of reflective and prereflective error, is how this is possible.

As noted above, we can dispense with Sartre's dismissal of Freud to skip to the real meat of things. Sartre opens his discussion proper by outlining three classic conducts of bad faith: the "flirt", the waiter, and the homosexual with the "champion of sincerity".²⁸⁶ A common tactic when approaching the literature is to look at the latter two as being more important, and the flirt as some kind of outlier case or exception.²⁸⁷ By contrast, I maintain that the flirt is the most important example he gives, far more so than either the waiter or the homosexual. As an opening thesis, we can say that bad faith is a way of suppressing the reflective awareness of anguish, which makes use of "psychological determinism",²⁸⁸ an attitude which in general attempts to deny our freedom. The picture it paints is "deterministic" because it suggests our choices are made for us in advance/causally determined in order to avoid encountering the basic contingency of human existence. In turn, this attitude is enabled by manipulating the difference between facticity and transcendence – "it must affirm facticity as being transcendence and transcendence as *being* facticity".²⁸⁹ Exactly what this means is controversial, especially if the meanings of "transcendence" and "facticity" are still up for grabs. So before getting into the concrete cases of bad faith, I want to give a working definition of facticity and transcendence. For these purposes, facticity includes everything that could be a motif/mobile, including our past, our body, and the objective circumstances we find ourselves in.²⁹⁰ It is everything which is fixed and which we have to take responsibility for. Transcendence and the transcendent, by contrast, is everything that could be an end, they are our possibilities which are rushing towards us, they are what we will or could be. Transcendence is not coextensive with freedom, but it is a necessary part of freedom. However, so is facticity. On the picture I have been drawing across the previous chapters, we can identify facticity

²⁸⁵ However, a reflective apprehension of our freedom's full effects is not alone sufficient for full-strength anguish: "we should not however conclude that being brought onto the reflective plane and envisaging one's distant or immediate possibilities suffice to apprehend oneself in pure anguish" (BN, p.64).

²⁸⁶ This last example is, of course, born out of a different political climate to our own and the idea that a homosexual chooses his identity will be unpalatable to many modern readers.

²⁸⁷ The most prominent modern work taking this approach is Webber's; see how discussion of the waiter appears on p.79, followed by the homosexual on p. 80, but the flirt appears on p.85 in *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*.

²⁸⁸ See BN, pp.64-5.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p.79.

²⁹⁰ Our current projects are not part of facticity because being current precludes being in the past, which precludes the kind of objectivity needed to supply a motif. Things like our anticipations about a project are related to objective circumstances like past performance and can form motifs.

with the past and present elements of consciousness, and transcendence with the future. A temporalizing freedom is that which converts transcendence into facticity and/or shows that a given transcendent anticipation was empty. I submit that, as well as being consonant with the system as set out above, this reading is partially proven by the power it has in making sense of bad faith.

How does this play out in Sartre's concrete examples of bad faith? Consider the case of the "flirt" on her date. She is out to dinner with a man who wants to sleep with her, and "knows very well the intentions which the man who is speaking to her cherishes".²⁹¹ Whatever she enjoys about the game, either leaving with him or turning him down will ruin it. Nonetheless, there are "possibilities of temporal development", which is a ten-dollar way of saying the present in the restaurant implies a future, although not a specific one where they are together or not. As he carries on obviously trying to seduce her, things ought to come to a simple decision: have sex with him, or don't. Once he says to her, "I find you so attractive!", things are make-or-break. Instead of choosing to see the urgency in the situation and the need for a decision, Sartre claims she chooses to make him a thing. What does this mean? It is "the projection of the strict present of the qualities into the temporal flux", which is to say the denial of transcendence. It is the denial that there is anything to the situation apart from facticity, apart from the past or the present, the denial that there will ever be a future. Magically, she changes the world so it only contains abstract "objective qualities" or possible motifs, which makes him "sincere and respectful as the table is round or square", whilst disavowing that those motifs require (and so suggest) an end. She lets his comment wash over her while disarming the future it points to, and practically speaking this allows the evening to keep on going.

Where this gets more complicated is Sartre's claim that she hedges her bets between wanting to live in the factual or objective world (enjoying a feeling which "address[es] itself to her body as object") and wanting to live in a world where she does have transcendence, where she gets "a recognition of her freedom". She "does not quite know what she wants", which isn't a simple case of indecision or a reflective analysis of the information she has to choose on, it's a deliberate way of avoiding responsibility by *choosing* to not choose either way. While she is safe within the factual from the transcendent, it is still possible for factual things to threaten her project. Her defence, which is magical and does not actually change objective reality, cannot stop her date from taking her hand. Her body, part of the facticity that she tried to escape into, now suggests the decision she wanted to escape. Anything done to alter facticity (which in the specific case relevantly means moving her hand

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 78.

or not) will imply a decision or demand one: “[t]o leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt ... [to] withdraw it is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm”.²⁹² The answer is to dive headfirst into transcendence, to become “all intellect”. Potentially misleading Cartesian implications aside, she is identifying with an abstract transcendence²⁹³ which is a pure freedom, a pure consciousness with nothing to do with the body-as-object. In temporal terms, she is projecting a future where she has been divorced from her hand (in the sense that where her hand was didn’t matter) and imposing that imagined possible future onto her facticity. Although we will come back to this in the concrete case of the waiter, she is denying that she has a body, or past, by making her past and body pure reminders that she is *only* the future she is projecting.

The overall point is that she uses *both* the association of facticity with transcendence and the association of transcendence with facticity in response to different existential threats. In the one case she denies the future by expanding the past/present into eternity, and in the other she denies the past/present by expanding the future back over the past/present. Yet, if something should break us out of the one strategy, bad faith seems to be able to adapt and switch to the other, and this is what is captured here: “[bad faith] must affirm facticity as *being* transcendence and transcendence as *being* facticity, in such a way that at the instance when a person apprehends the one, he can find himself abruptly faced with the other”. In this process, we are always positing a fixed nature to ourselves, which is the whole point of the exercise. Whether we deny transcendence or facticity (more precisely, whichever side we give the status of the other) makes no difference to the end result: the denial of freedom. This is how Sartre can find bad faith in “Love is Much More than Love”, where “unity is established between present love in its facticity ... and love as transcendence” to leave us “beyond the present and factual condition of man” as well as in “I am too Great for Myself” which “throws us first into full transcendence in order to suddenly imprison us within the limits of our factual existence”.²⁹⁴ As we will see later, this equivalence of the two conducts gives the overall structure a great deal of stability: as we see in the case of the flirt, we can always switch to the other type of bad faith if the one we are using falls apart.

So in order to produce bad faith, we see Sartre appeal to a denial of transcendence or facticity or both. However, it is *prima facie* unclear what this “denial” entails, and this ambiguity plays out in the

²⁹² Ibid., p.79.

²⁹³ Which is magical because an actually existing abstract transcendence is impossible.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.79/80.

historical debate between Stevenson, Gordon, and Hymers on bad faith. At a gloss, Stevenson²⁹⁵ gave the first Anglophone reading of bad faith as the reflective denial of that which we are prereflectively aware of, starting a debate about how this denial is possible if consciousness is translucent. The initial challenge to this model came from Gordon, who pointed out that denying something we are aware of should make us *fully* aware of whatever we are denying. His argument is almost naïve but devastating: directly affirming that I am not counting cigarettes when I actually am is impossible.²⁹⁶ If I reflect on my prereflective activities, the translucency of consciousness entails I am also aware of any contradiction between what I affirm across the two levels of consciousness. In turn, Hymers suggested that bad faith avoids this problem by dealing in half-truths and half-lies. When we might get in trouble, he notes, we can use ambiguous statements to avoid confrontation or admitting guilt. “No, I haven’t done the reading” becomes “I haven’t finished the reading yet”, which is strictly true because not even starting isn’t finishing, but in another sense a blatant lie because it implies some progress. The half-lie works because of an “underlying ambiguity between their public and private significances”,²⁹⁷ because of a difference between what I am saying and what is understood by the listener. In a parallel way, the ambiguity of the conducts of bad faith allow us to deny the situations we are in without forcing us to avow directly contradictory claims about ourselves. However, it is not clear that the parallel works, since we can’t fall back on the public/private distinction to create an intrasubjective ambiguity. Nonetheless, I think we can make changes that let this kind of denial go through.

Firstly, we should note that Hymers’ account is really addressed at transcendence, or the future. When it comes to past actions or character proper, self-deception doesn’t face the same problems because of the ambiguity of assembling evidence. An individual’s past, even the past of someone who has done relatively little, is so full of events that there could be any number of ways to assemble them into a whole. Unless the picture of ourselves we paint is completely extreme, there will always be some kind of evidence for it – however tenuous. If I want to say I am basically bad because I once stole money as a child, seeing my whole law-abiding adult life as the close-call result of heroic self-denial, I can. By contrast, when someone asks “have you done the reading?” and we half-lie “I haven’t finished yet” it is not an appeal to, or reinterpretation of, facticity. There is nothing in the past to base the (implied) claim I have started the reading on whatsoever. When we look at our own self-image, the same thing holds. If I avow to myself I am studious and have not failed in my

²⁹⁵ Stevenson, Leslie, “Sartre on Bad Faith” in *Philosophy* vol.58 (1983), pp.253-258.

²⁹⁶ Gordon, Jeffrey, “Bad Faith: A Dilemma” in *Philosophy* vol.60 (1985), pp.258-262. pp.260-1.

²⁹⁷ Hymers, Michael, “Bad Faith” in *Philosophy* vol.64 (1989), pp.397-402. p.461.

studiousness by not reading, this might be supported by no factual evidence either. If we can't appeal to public/private or implicit/explicit meanings for ambiguity, where can we look? The answer is, to the future. Since the future is always in question, we can appeal to a future where we *will* have done the reading in spite of our current projects being incompatible with studying. When we reflect on it, this kind of anticipation is of the form "my actions *will* form part of the evidence for my desired character" or "my action *will be* irrelevant to judgment of my character". Imagine someone challenges my eating habits when I am eating chocolate cake, but I don't want to give up the belief I am on a diet. By anticipating a future of lots of exercise or a number of healthy meals that outweighs it, I can appeal to that possible future and avow "I'm on a cheat day". The notion of "cheat days" depends on a sustained period of dieting before and after, and since nothing can *yet* prove with certainty that I will fail, I can appeal to a future of good behaviour without contradiction. This kind of appeal to the future is a half-truth insofar as it acknowledges objective facts about the present yet surrounds them with virtual future events to disarm them of anything troubling.

The next two examples of bad faith, the waiter and the homosexual, are important because they spell out the poles of bad faith in more detail and give us a better purchase on bad faith on the level of character, Ego, and identity. Nonetheless, they do not show us anything structural that is not there in the example of the flirt and the remarks around it. When we look at the behaviour of the waiter, we see that he is play-acting on some level since his movements are exaggerated, too stereotypical: "all his behaviour seems to be a game".²⁹⁸ Although he can never become a waiter permanently because his projects are always subject to change, he nonetheless attempts to symbolically or magically affirm that he is completely and entirely a waiter by adopting the role as fully as he possibly can. As Catalano has pointed out, possibly later influencing McCulloch's focus on the discussion of logical and real possibilities,²⁹⁹ there are limits to what we can transcend ourselves towards: "'transcendencies' does not mean remote or farfetched ways of acting, but believable ways of behaviour".³⁰⁰ The logical or abstract possibility of taking on the *permanent essence* of waiterhood is played out in his actions, it's a possible future that he makes equivalent to his facticity by shaping his actual facticity around it, trying to glue down his actions (and presumably his past) into the unquestionable actions of a waiter. Of course, it is impossible that he achieves this permanent essence: "the original structure of 'not being what one is' renders impossible in advance all

²⁹⁸ *BN*, p.82.

²⁹⁹ McCulloch, *Using Sartre*, p. 36 & p.68.

³⁰⁰ Catalano, *Commentary*, p.83.

movement toward being it itself or 'being what one is'³⁰¹ This is, in principle, no different than the flirt trying to shape her factual situation into one that does not spoil her evening,³⁰² yet we will soon see the significance of the example as being bound up with an identity.

The second single-pole example Sartre gives us is the "unhappy homosexual" who is, insofar as we can have impermanent identities, definitely gay; reading his past actions through a Morris-inspired picture of character makes him unequivocally homosexual.³⁰³ He ought to agree that "[t]o the extent that a pattern of conduct is defined as the conduct of [homosexuality] and to the extent that I have adopted this conduct, I am [homosexual]".³⁰⁴ His colleague, who pushes him to confess his homosexuality, wants him simply to admit what he is, rather than trying to spin facts about his life as out of character, the result of chance, and so on.³⁰⁵ So to begin with, he is in the same situation as the waiter: he plays with a possible way of transcending his past actions and attempts to disarm his present and past by making it continuous with a desired character or description. His past actions become a phase of experimentation: "the results of a restless search, rather than the manifestations of a deeply rooted tendency". He overcomes the facts about his situation by using his freedom: he sees the acts that make up his homosexuality as "*a destiny*", as equivalent to influences beyond his control. What happens if he "admits" his nature and is sincere? As far as the evasion of freedom goes, not much. Giving in to the demand, at least the demand put on the homosexual, is "to confess what I am in order that I might finally coincide with my being",³⁰⁶ it is becoming all facticity. Once he identifies with his character, he affirms that it is essence and not merely the unity of his past actions. Or at least, this is the "ideal" of sincerity, the condition that the person aiming to be sincere is trying to reach – even though it is impossible, as impossible as the waiter being a waiter or the flirt's date lasting forever. However, the case is not this clean-cut: we need to make a distinction between living the life of someone attempting sincerity, and this ideal or end game of sincerity to see what is going on more broadly. Considering the wider life of someone attempting sincerity, we have already seen how the homosexual originally favoured transcendence over facticity. Once this failed (the failure

³⁰¹ *BN*, p.85.

³⁰² All the same, this overview misses out a vital element of the situation: the socially constituted aspects of waiterhood, the way that Sartre sees tradesmen as obliged to perform their identities "as a ceremony" (*BN* p.82).

³⁰³ Strictly speaking, Sartre conflates homosexuality with paederasty, but the example is not changed if we correct for his unfortunate and by modern standards extreme prejudice here.

³⁰⁴ *BN*, p.87.

³⁰⁵ Both of them are, in some way, trying to ignore the troubling fact of our freedom, but for now I will gloss over the bad faith of "the champion of sincerity" since the proper analysis takes us out of the basic, intrasubjective picture into the intersubjective.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.89.

triggered by his colleague's demands), then he switched to the ideal of sincerity, the favouring of facticity over transcendence. Yet since we do not really have fixed essences, this has to fail too, eventually leading him back to some equivalent of the first position (which doesn't have to be a denial of homosexuality, but can be any conduct that denies one's facticity). This creates "a continual game of mirror and reflection, a perpetual passage from the being which is what it is, to the being which it is not what it is and inversely from the being which is not what it is to the being which is what it is".

Strictly speaking, the lifestyle or broader conduct of someone aiming at sincerity does not produce a different result from the broader lifestyle of someone in the waiter's position. Taxonomically it can be useful to talk about the difference between the ideals that organise their lives lived in bad faith – usually Bad Faith³⁰⁷ for trying to privilege transcendence and sincerity for trying to privilege facticity, along with the umbrella term "bad faith" for all conduct denying freedom. The flirt is a case that takes in both indifferently, a very local case happening over an evening or even a few minutes. Yet even when we look at each individual pole, it is clear that "the goal of sincerity and the goal of Bad Faith are not so different".³⁰⁸ While we can abstract from concrete examples of bad faith to the abstract structures of Bad Faith and sincerity, all actual instances of bad faith must be concrete. They must be the bad cook persuading himself his food is delicious, the homeowner putting off paying their bills, the child who says he "is just bad" at mathematics. Whilst bad faith is abstractly the game of playing with facticity and transcendence, like anything else consciousness does it must be a project. Since our projects lead to actions, and our actions form a vital part of our history, bad faith will always interact with character and identity. Bad faith will shape the new elements of our character being laid down, and it has to reckon with our character insofar as our past acts are motifs for future ones. Thus, the ontological game always leads us into who we are, our ethos, and from there into the realm of the ethical. Therefore, although the structure of bad faith says nothing by itself about character, every actual instance of bad faith will take the form of games about identity which *make use* of character.

This fact is what allows us to describe bad faith on a psychoanalytic level: the preoccupation with identity can give us the obsessions of a person with a character, over and above the stream of consciousness's need for unity which can be basically any theme whatsoever. A bad faith which is

³⁰⁷ Which I capitalise here and after to avoid confusion.

³⁰⁸ *BN*, p.89.

concerned with identity and stability of the self is on the level of Laing's "ontological security".³⁰⁹ The ontologically secure person "will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity",³¹⁰ in other words, they will not experience freedom as anguishing.³¹¹ An "ontologically insecure" individual will be keenly aware of anguish and driven in their everyday actions by avoiding it. The conducts of ontological insecurity Laing covers in *The Divided Self* contain striking parallels to Sartre's conducts of bad faith. Under the threat of "implosion", there is the "experience of the world as liable at any moment to crash in and obliterate all identity as gas will rush in and obliterate a vacuum".³¹² This is almost as clear a statement of the threat anguish poses as there could be. He goes on: "[R]eality, as experienced from this position, is necessarily implosive ... and *in itself* a threat to what identity the individual is able to suppose himself to have."³¹³ In the more precise Sartrean terms, this is the threat posed by the in-itself to our projects, the hate in the love-hate relationship with being Sartre describes in *Truth and Existence*. To repeat, even though attaining an identity is not the goal of bad faith, the stability that *is* its goal can only be accessed through a security of identity, through ontological security. Although Laing is not concerned with the ontological level, the parallels between his descriptions of psychological defences and Sartre's of bad faith underscore how tightly connected the two are: "[b]eing like everyone else, being someone other than oneself, playing a part, being incognito, being anonymous, being nobody (psychotically, pretending to have no body) are defences that are carried through with great thoroughness in certain schizoid and schizophrenic conditions".³¹⁴

For all of this, we have yet to see how this ties into our picture of error and the (willed) failure to reveal (parts of) the world. These conducts, while they show how bad faith connects to the life of the psyche and show locally how bad faith is possible, don't fill in the blanks between the basic structure of Sartrean knowledge and these conducts of bad faith. The key lies in the section called "the faith of bad faith" which connects the denial of facticity or transcendence to the structures of knowledge covered in the previous section. The key part of Sartre's setup is this:

³⁰⁹ Laing, Ronald D., *The Divided Self*. Penguin: London, 2010. p.39.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ This security does not mean bad faith; on the psychoanalytic level bad faith is a schizoid, not healthy, attitude.

³¹² Ibid., p.45.

³¹³ Ibid., p.46.

³¹⁴ Ibid., p.111.

The true problem of bad faith stems evidently from the fact that bad faith is faith. It can not either be a cynical lie or certainty – if certainty is the intuitive possession of the object. But if we take belief as meaning the adherence of being to its object when the object is not given or is given indistinctly is belief; and the essential problem of bad faith is a problem of belief. ³¹⁵

Going by the picture of knowledge in the previous section, there is no such thing as the intuitive *possession* of the object. We are always necessarily separated from our objects by nothingness, by the temporalisation inherent to the structure of consciousness. In this sense, no object is given distinctly at all, since the project of grasping it always makes them slip away from us. Apart from the fleeting moment of presence of the object, we can also apprehend the world through truth, but truths in the sense given above are provisional, every time they are used is a time that they are checked or verified. As a result, the sense in which knowledge is belief is incredibly wide, covering (almost) everything we would normally think of as being knowledge.³¹⁶ Rather than being in a separate realm to knowledge,³¹⁷ on this reading belief is not sharply divided from it. This is what is exploited by bad faith; since all knowledge is akin to belief, it is possible to collapse the distinction and thereby lower our standards of evidence until it is possible to see as true all kinds of things that wouldn't stand up to real scrutiny. This is why we are told that "I have not persuaded myself [of a given self-deceptive avowal]; to the extent that I could be so persuaded, I have always been so"³¹⁸ since the normal standards of what persuades have been suspended, and that same extent of evidence is now sufficient – the goalposts move, not the state of the objective world. All of this is summarised in the claim that bad faith works because it "does not hold the norms and criteria of truth as they are held by the critical thought of good faith",³¹⁹ which I will follow Catalano as taking to be a properly critical set of standards of evidence.

If bad faith is a case of manipulating evidence and exploiting the nature of belief, we must be very careful. If we sneak in (or Sartre sneaks in) a cognitive, judging element to the way pre-reflective consciousness constructs its projects/approaches evidence, then we will have broken the very first

³¹⁵ *BN*, p.91.

³¹⁶ With the exception of apodictically certain truths, which are mostly mathematical or logical, or facts about our experiences as we experience them.

³¹⁷ A reading which appears in the work of, e.g., Cox: see Cox, Gary. *Sartre and Fiction*. Continuum: London, 2009. p. 128.

³¹⁸ *BN*, p.91.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*.

tenet of Sartre's system, that pre-reflective consciousness is not based on judgment.³²⁰ This is why he is at pains to confirm that "there is no question of a reflective, voluntary *decision*, but of a spontaneous determination of our being". Whether or not this is true remains to be seen. Belief, in the picture of *Being and Nothingness*, is uniquely self-destructive. Sartre, with a perhaps unnecessary appeal to Hegel, describes how immediate belief ("I decide to believe in it, and to maintain myself in this decision; I conduct myself, finally, as if I were certain of it")³²¹ has to give way to non-belief, since being aware of a unified set of things in the world (like his friend's actions) also entails awareness that I am effecting that unification (through the translucency of consciousness). At the same time as I am certain of my belief, it "appears to me as a pure subjective determination without external correlative", i.e. as something I am making that is not exclusively grounded in objective reality. So whilst I have certainty in a belief (Pierre is my friend) as an immediately given part of the world, that very immediate certainty about the world has to come with the awareness my own consciousness generates the world that belief is about. In summary, (all) belief is inherently contradictory because it is grounded in something that is simultaneously out there, completely independent of me, and something wholly dependent on me for its being. This tension is another manifestation of the impossibility of simply grasping one's object that is there right from the beginning, from the separation of consciousness from the tree "out there" in the Mediterranean. While the impossibility of ever grasping the object perfectly as if it were purely an in-itself prevents belief and knowledge from being permanent, there are different ways that this can factor into how we try to grasp the world. If we choose good faith, we are trying to grasp our objects in spite of this problem: "the ideal of good faith (to believe what one believes) is, like that of sincerity (to be what one is), an ideal of being-in-itself".^{322 323} Bad faith is, at heart, an attitude that uses this fact to accept low standards of evidence, by divorcing itself from evidence one way or the other: "If every belief in good faith is an impossible belief, then there is a place for every impossible belief".³²⁴ The equivalent reflective choice would be to accept any old evidence for a position, since perfect evidence is not available, and when we put it this way the fallacy should be obvious. As Catalano puts it: "the uncritical evidence of bad faith is thus seen by the person in bad faith to be as good as

³²⁰ This is, in effect, what Wider accuses Sartre of doing in her *The Bodily Nature of Consciousness*. We will see this in more detail soon. (Wider, Kathleen: *The Bodily Nature of Consciousness*. Cornell University Press: London, 1997).

³²¹ *BN*, p. 92.

³²² *Ibid.*, p.93.

³²³ This comparison to sincerity might cause us to see good faith as a subspecies of bad faith, however the very effort to apprehend the world is different from a reflective attempt to apprehend the world as certain.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

the critical evidence of good faith”.³²⁵

So far, this could very well be introducing judgment into the pre-reflective level: an attitude of bad faith seems to *judge* that all evidence is as good as any other, or that belief is not to believe. Wider notes that “In explicating what this duality [that belief is not to believe] amounts to, Sartre reintroduces epistemological considerations”.³²⁶ She illustrates the point with this quote: “To believe is to know that one believes, and to *know* that one believes is no longer to believe”.³²⁷ If bad faith turns on introducing judgment into the pre-reflective, then pre-reflective consciousness can no longer ground reflection, destroying Sartre’s entire system. However, we can substitute in a non-problematic awareness that “to believe is not to believe” if we consider the Sartrean schema of truth and belief with respect to his picture of temporality and presence. Earlier, we saw that the wider sense of “belief” needed to drive bad faith in fact includes almost all knowledge and truth in their technical Sartrean senses, because there can never be the final, definitive presence of the objective world to consciousness. Every attempt to grasp an object is a kind of reaching into the future, an anticipation, and yet our anticipations can fail. If our anticipations automatically carry with them an awareness of their uncertainty, then we can be aware that belief is “not to believe” without problematically making prereflective judgments. I want to suggest that the awareness of our failure to grasp our objects is not something that we judge or reason towards; it is coextensive with the awareness that time has a flow. This spares Sartre from Wider’s criticism, insofar as the normal operation of consciousness could imbue us with an awareness of its structure instead of prereflective consciousness passing judgment on itself in bad faith. As far as the fallibility of belief goes, there is a world of difference between being aware that there is a future which is a priori subject to change and judging that a given, *specific* vision of the future is liable not to happen. Williford captures this point well when he says that “[t]he anticipation of a specific future, that may or may not unfold in the way expected, is already a level or layer above the flow, although it presupposes the flow”.³²⁸ There is, he points out, a certain sense in which the future is infallible: our projects involve an anticipated or protended future which they refer to and cannot exist separately from. As far as there being a future goes, “protention is infallible just because it is an internal relation consciousness bears to itself as already reaching into its future”.³²⁹ Nonetheless any

³²⁵ Catalano, Joseph, *Good Faith and Other Essays*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers: London, 1996. p.138.

³²⁶ Wider, *The Bodily Nature of Consciousness*, p. 88.

³²⁷ *BN*, p.92, emphasis Wider’s.

³²⁸ Williford, Kenneth, “Degrees of Self-Presence” in Miguens, Sofia, Preyer, Gerhard, and Bravo Morando, Clara (eds.) *Pre-Reflective Consciousness: Sartre and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*. Routledge: Abingdon, 2016. p.73.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

anticipation of an *actual* future can be inaccurate; an anticipation is by its nature not certain (see the description of presence in Section Two, above). We can straightforwardly be aware of a given anticipated future as relying on the temporal flow of consciousness without judging that it is so, and that awareness of temporality brings along with it an awareness of the future's uncertainty. Let's be precise about this: the awareness of uncertainty that is immediately given is purely logical and related to my own freedom. It has nothing to do with the objective circumstances surrounding the anticipation, nor is it an awareness of destiny (the impact of chance). It is the (direct) apprehension of the uncertainty the present introduces, of the impact of our ambiguous separation from our intentional objects. Wider's claim was that belief has to *know* itself as belief to generate the ambiguity that drives bad faith, but if all knowledge is immediately given as uncertain, the troubling cognitive element drops out.

This attitude of "uncritical evidence" plays out as we make the kinds of claims that only we seem convinced by; Catalano gives an excellent example of the bad rower who sees all he signs he is unathletic as normal parts of athleticism. Athletes sweat, of course, so the way he sweats as he flounders is normal, and proves that he is an athlete. Since rowing is strenuous and rowers get sore muscles, the resistance he feels is again normal and a sign that he really is a rower like the rest of them. A normal, critical standard of evidence about athletic ability says that someone whose muscles ache in the first five minutes is at best very rusty, yet what should be evidence *against* calling him an athlete is used to let him avow he is doing well. There is a problem for this kind of self-deception: since consciousness is translucent, he should be prereflectively aware that he is not actually a good athlete.³³⁰ Yet, as Calatano points out,³³¹ the awareness we have of our failure can be reconceptualised. A muted or dim awareness of ourselves as self-deceptive might be a background feeling of uneasiness or dread, which we can avow is related to something else. The rower might say that he is tired, or that the uneasiness is about the tax return he hasn't filed, explaining away the lingering, abstract disvalue he is aware of. Guilt about an unfiled tax return might be unpleasant, but it isn't an existential threat unless being prompt and efficient is a critical part of the identity we are trying to latch on to. In fact, the discomfort that should challenge our deceptive practices might be used to reinforce our (current) identity. What should, on the face of it, destroy our bad faith can reinforce it.

³³⁰ I.e. that he lacks the character evidence for being one.

³³¹ Catalano, Joseph, "Successfully Lying to Oneself: A Sartrean Perspective." in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol.50, no. 4 (June 1990): pp. 673-693.

Consider how our identities can turn on disliking or liking certain things: someone eco-conscious might get angry at the government's management of high ground in England and how it leads to flooding. Their anger should flow from the huge disvalue to them of arbitrarily grazing land that should be covered in shrub, and it would be surprising if they did not feel that way. It might even be good evidence they don't care about the environment if these cases didn't provoke a response in them. This kind of account flows naturally from a Sartrean picture where emotions, which are actively generated, can reflect our projects³³² and the progress of those projects. By conflating our sense of unease that we aren't really, e.g., eco-conscious with despair or anger about the state of the environment, we can reinforce that identity, using our discomfort as evidence for our avowed projects.³³³ The anger, the unease, is beyond the possibility of doubt, but we can still hide the *target* of that anger from ourselves. This leads to one way that bad faith can remain stable and enduring: the mechanisms that ought to tear it apart can be hijacked by the effort to keep it together.

Despite accepting all of this, we might object that we ought to be aware of this second-order self-deception, the self-deception about our self-deception. If it fails, our basic self-deception should be vulnerable and ultimately fail, causing bad faith to inevitably degrade and fall apart. However, talking about second and first-order projects in this way presupposes the deceptions are layers of physical protection, like a moat and then a wall. If we were trying to get past a series of physical obstacles like a castle, clearing the moat would be enough to never be faced with it again. In the case of self-deceptive projects, both the deceptive project and second-order protections can be so diffuse that physical break-in analogies fail completely. A whole series of self-deceptions, both sincerity and Bad Faith, can be leveraged to support the master project, and replaced or re-used at any time. In fact, the objection presupposes that a failed self-deceptive project has to be replaced with a project in good faith, which as we saw with the flirt isn't the case; the failure of concrete projects is an integral part of a life lived in bad faith. Having described the collapse of bad faith under the translucency of consciousness, Sartre notes that "these phenomena [i.e., collapses of bad faith] are frequent and we shall see that there is an "evanescence" of bad faith which, it is evident, vacillates frequently between good faith and cynicism",³³⁴ i.e., he is willing to grant that conducts or second-order projects of bad faith collapse very often. If we read this into the case of the flirt, the attraction of good faith would be the awareness that she has to make a decision, an assessment of

³³² See Chapter Two.

³³³ This possibility was highlighted by Bob Solomon in his "Sartre on Emotions" in Schlipp, Paul Arthur (ed.): *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Open Court: La Salle, Illinois, 1981. pp. 211-229. The closing pages of Solomon's article are most relevant here.

³³⁴ *BN* p.73.

the situation based on a certain realistic and appropriate standard of knowledge. Yet, since a different conduct of bad faith is available to her (whether that's the dodge into all-facticity or all-transcendence is irrelevant) it is possible to re-enter the "cynicism" of bad faith, the poor standards of evidence and avoidance of one's freedom. He goes on: "[e]ven though the existence of bad faith is precarious, and although it belongs to the kind of psychic structures which we might call 'metastable', it presents nonetheless an autonomous and durable form". What I take this to mean is, even though Bad Faith and sincerity are vulnerable and collapse often, we can still remain slaved to their overall goal of bad faith.

This structure allows us to avow addressing our bad faith without really challenging it at all. If, in bad faith, I try to investigate why I feel uneasy or out of place, destroying one of the poles allows me to end my self-examination. It lets the investigation be finished without ever addressing the real problem, without addressing the avoidance of freedom. Although individual conducts are constantly exposed and outed, bad faith can take the form of "a constant and particular style of life". It is easy to imagine what this would look like: a life filled with uneasiness, constant self-examination, and desire for improvement but which nonetheless remains stagnant. An individual living like this will constantly have revelations about themselves and be acutely self-aware about what their projects have aimed at, revelations like: "I became a waiter because I was scared to go to law school" or "I was weird with him on the date because I am afraid of commitment". There is nothing about bad faith that makes these things false, and in a certain way they are massively insightful. These types of observations might be extremely good at assessing *character*, but they say nothing directly about our projects.³³⁵ This insightfulness is part of their danger: since they are accurate at the local level, they are enough to stop our self-examination or railroad it somewhere else. This is where the "unknown unknowns" of the previous section come in: an accurate reflective assessment of our character is impossible if we don't even set the right parameters for investigation. Our master project of bad faith, such as an inferiority project, is in principle always perceptible in our character and analysable. Yet if we are constantly looking at concrete reasons why we have failed in our endeavours, the transcendent unity of the project can remain hidden – even if we are reflectively aware of everything that should show it to us under some description. In bad faith, there can be things that we are ignoring by making ourselves not even look for them: ask why we failed the exam, when we should wonder why we *decided* to fail it. In this way, the "evanescent" switching between different forms of bad faith can stop the master project from ever being unveiled, which leaves the

³³⁵ See the following remark: "'to know oneself well' is inevitably to look at oneself from the point of view of someone else, in other words from a point of view that is necessarily false" (*TE*, p.38).

prereflective motivations for our actions hidden to reflection. They appear to us as unknown factors that we didn't even know to look for, as "destiny"³³⁶ in the lexicon of *Truth and Existence*. Once we have accepted destiny, we are in the realms of chance events determining us. While we pursue projects hidden to reflection, we can end up in a world of causal determinism that just happens to always be stacked against us, again and again.

³³⁶ See *T&E* p.39: "if I run toward the ditch hidden by branches to avoid the beater who is running after me ... it does not exist for me and my projects do not take it into account ... since each step brings me closer to it and for-me these steps can neither bring me closer nor move me away from it ... it awaits me, comes nearer and manoeuvres my legs. This relationship of interiority in exteriority without reciprocity ... is called Destiny".

Section Two: The Social Nature of Self-Deception.

The above account misses out something that should be obvious: in practice, self-deception often plays out for an audience. Our acts of self-deception are more likely to play off the reactions of others than not. It is almost a cliché to point out that the flirt, the waiter, and the unhappy homosexual are all embedded in social contexts, and those contexts are necessary to getting all of those examples off the ground.³³⁷ In particular, there seems to be something special about the character(s) we aim toward and their social origins – all kinds of archetypes we might be trying to embody only exist in a social context. Being a priest, for example, is only intelligible in the context of an organised religion created and sustained by a community. One key question is how these characters can be substantial enough to offer an escape from the problems of incompleteness and desire that we, as conscious entities, necessarily face. The obvious path here is to examine the famous “look” which Sartre claims is capable of gluing us down and fixing us; in the look, the other can make us into a voyeur, a gardener, a waiter, etc. We might ask two further questions: in what sense are we forced into a certain character by others, and does the seeming need to embody a (social) character in bad faith mean that all bad faith is necessarily social?

So what is the look and how does it serve a role in fixing us, in whatever sense, into having a particular character/ego? In the standard example, Sartre imagines himself motivated by jealousy to spy on someone else (a couple) through a keyhole, “alone and on the level of a non-thetic self-consciousness”.³³⁸ While he is alone and unnoticed, he is purely living his actions, not thematising them or their consequences and significance. His consciousness is, as he puts it, “a pure mode of losing myself in the world”, at that moment all that he *is* is exhausted by the act of spying. More simply, he is focused on what he is doing and is not reflecting on its impact on his character or what it will add to the narrative of his history; he is there, purely caught up in the moment. His response to his jealous ends and all the motifs and mobiles present is to spy, to put his ear up to the door, but there is no Ego or self that is spying. This is what is meant by the claim, “[t]here is nothing there but a pure nothingness encircling a certain objective ensemble and throwing it into relief outlined upon the world”.³³⁹ So what comes next? At the sound of footsteps down the hall the other is made

³³⁷ Not to mention the example of the grocer which society “demands he limit himself to his function as a grocer” (*BN* p.82).

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.283.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.284.

present to him, and he is made present to himself: “I now exist as *myself* for my unreflective consciousness”.³⁴⁰ Suddenly, he is aware of what he is doing, of the consequences, of *who* his actions make him – he is, to himself, a pervert, a failure, etc. This awareness is immediate, powerful, and all-consuming; something in the outside world seems to compel him to adopt it. To say that the other has forced him to adopt an identity seems to be a perfectly accurate assessment of the situation. Whether it is shame, pride, embarrassment, or whatever else, the takeaway message is that there are cases of emotion and/or self-awareness that seem to be imposed from outside.³⁴¹ If we want to accept that analysis of the situation, then we have to cash out the description and deal with some apparent contradictions with the system as it has been presented so far.

Since all awareness of the Ego/character so far has been reflective, falling under knowledge and judgment, if we are given pre-reflective *knowledge* of a socially mediated character through the look, the pre-reflective cogito has been violated. If that’s right, we either have to throw out the analysis or break the system as a whole. So how can we be aware purely prereflectively of a character or Ego being imposed on us? One answer is that the intersubjective Ego or character is traced out in a kind of negative space, a process which can functionally introduce an Ego into my pre-reflective consciousness even though there is, strictly speaking, no such object there. When we use negative space in art, we exploit the way that if I draw everything around a figure like a chair, then there will be a perfectly chair-shaped gap in the scene I have drawn. It is possible, and in many cases easier, to draw the ground rather than the figure – and at no point would an artist using negative space focus on or attempt to reproduce the chair itself. Instead, they would look at the edge of the dog sitting by it, the boundary of the table in front of it, etc. This idea helps us make sense of the claim that the Ego “comes to haunt the prereflective consciousness”³⁴² through the action of the look, rather than being present as an object within consciousness. What I take this to mean is that (since) the other can directly alter the values present in my world, and make my world into the world of a pervert (hero, coward, etc), he can make my world into one that traces out a character for me because of the gaps and blanks it is shaped around. Under the look, Sartre claims that “I am in a world which the Other has made alien to me, for the Other’s look embraces my being and correlatively the walls, the door, the keyhole. All these instrumental-things in the midst of which

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ This gives us a naïve objection-and-reply. Someone might object that they don’t experience emotions in this way, stopping the account dead; the only reply would be that the experience is universal and to claim otherwise is simply mistaken.

³⁴² Ibid.

I am, now turn toward the Other a face which on principle escapes me.”³⁴³ Although I remain free to respond to this imposition, I am faced with a world which is no longer (uniquely) mine, with a set of limitations on my freedom.

How are we to make sense of the other modifying our values, and through them our world? One option is to say it is just given in or discovered through the experience of the look. On this reading, something about the experience of intrasubjective emotions both reveals the other to us and shows that they are capable of an action-at-a-distance to affect our world.³⁴⁴ Since the description of the look is given as a fiat, then more needs to be said for us to run with the account. Recall³⁴⁵ how, For Sartre, the world can be described as a kind of web or map of significance – as marking out ‘hodological’ space. In line with our projects, some parts of it appear in the foreground, others in the background, some demanding to be realised, others demanding to be stopped. All of it appears at once, its parts intimately interconnected with each other in figure-ground relations and depending on our nihilating, value-granting being to exist. We can meaningfully talk about this hodological space, taking some Merleau-Ponty inspired terminology, as a field of value. Just like an electromagnetic field repels or attracts certain objects, the hodological value field attracts or repels certain possible futures or ways for the world or the subject to be. When a project clicks into place and I act on it, we can talk about my value field having successfully attracted its end. As metaphors go, this might seem fairly strange, but its strength is how easily it can be extended to cover how the Other might directly give me values or modify my value structure.

Imagine for a moment how two electromagnetic fields interact. To begin with, out of range of one another, they are completely distinct, with independent charge and strength across the whole field. As they come closer, some of the field lines will be strengthened by constructive interference, and others weakened by destructive interference. If the two are pushed together such that they merge completely, the gross charges in the original patterns will be replaced by the net charges of the new, single field. No object, in the sense of a physical, tangible *thing* is modified, yet the potential behaviour of objects in the field changes. In the case of two individuals either looking, being looked at, or mutually looking at one another, no object is created by means of the encounter, but a

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 285.

³⁴⁴ I say here intrasubjective emotions because the case of the look falls under the second account of emotion in the *Sketch* and the compatibility of the first and second accounts can be contested, e.g. by Richmond in her “Magic in Sartre’s Early Philosophy”, in in Webber, Jonathan (ed.) *Reading Sartre* Routledge: Abingdon, 2011, pp. 145-161. pp.154-5.

³⁴⁵ See also Chapter Two, above.

modification of the value structure of the world is effected, a modification which depends on my existing projects and the values I already project into the world. It is not a creation from nothing of a new world, but the net product of the action of the other's field/hodological space on mine. Why should this description be any more persuasive? The answer is at least threefold: first, it allows us to take an unusual stance on the refutation of solipsism that reinforces Sartre's point in that section. Second, it makes sense of Sartre's description of the self as a limit to the power of the other to dominate our world or assimilate it entirely into our own.³⁴⁶ Lastly, this picture allows interesting comparisons with the 'second account' of the emotions in the *Sketch*, especially if we read the references to magic there as still being operative in *BN*.

The analogy comes into its own when Sartre claims that "consciousness can be limited only by consciousness".³⁴⁷ Whenever we look at fields interacting, the condition of possibility of that interaction is that they are bound by the same laws, and of the same kind. Just as we can see the presence of a new electromagnetic field in telltale distortions of a pre-existing one, the idea is that living through a distortion in our own field of value proves to us, immediately, the presence of another consciousness. This is suggested when Sartre talks about the look as being "my transcendence transcended".³⁴⁸ When Sartre says that "I perceive that these possibilities which I am and which are the condition of my transcendence are given to another, given as about to be transcended in turn by his own possibilities", we can easily read this as an awareness of the modification of projects (via the modification of "possibilities", i.e. the goals those projects depend on) by the presence of the other. Yet, if the other can transcend my own possibilities, then how is it that they do not completely overwrite or overstamp the whole? One answer lies in the following claim: "[the self is] the limit between two consciousnesses as it is produced by the limiting consciousness and assumed by the limited consciousness".³⁴⁹ Effectively, the objection is backwards since the self-for others is what limits our absorption into the consciousness of the other. The other does not fail to absorb us for want of trying; the self-for-others arises as the barrier or limit to the total integration of the two consciousnesses. Or, to put it another way, the self-for-others turns out to be the manifestation of the resistance each field of value offers to the other, giving way in places, resisting in others, with a possibility of mutual strengthening in still others.

This picture is not localised to *BN*. The direct modification of the other's field of values is also a

³⁴⁶ *BN* p.312: "[the] Self-as-object (is) the limit between two consciousnesses"

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.287.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

theme in the *Sketch*, although in that context it is presented as one aspect of “magic”, insofar as “man is always a sorcerer for man”.³⁵⁰ In the main body of that text, emotions fill a similar role for Sartre as dreams do for Freud:³⁵¹ they act as a symbolic or magical fulfilment of the individual’s wishes, a compensation for thwarted desires. These emotions’ direction of fit is mind-to world; consciousness begets a reality where our problems have been transcended. In the second picture, the direction of fit is reversed, and “the world reveals itself as unrealisable and reveals itself as a magical environment”,³⁵² chiefly in the encounter with the other. What is it for something to be magical? “[T]he magical ... is an inert activity, a consciousness rendered passive”³⁵³ where to become passive is to be “altered, degraded”, which tallies with the above account of the other making an alteration or modification of consciousness. That degradation comes through an other, e.g., through a face at the window. Immediately, terror takes hold, an “act of consciousness which destroys all the structures of the world that might dispel the magic ... the window as ‘object that must first be broken’ and the ten yards as ‘distance that must first be covered’ should be annihilated”.³⁵⁴ The ordinary requirements of (objective/physical) threat are swept away, and we are no longer in a logical world. If we were dealing with the situation as a mundane one, it would hold far less threat. The room functions as an instrumental complex that makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for the potential threat to reach us, because of the way any attacker’s body is held in check by the door, the bolt, bars at the window, etc. Yet in the magical experience of terror, the instrumental complex does not feature because we are “in a world which is such that all the things existing in it are magical in nature, and the only defences against them are magical”.³⁵⁵ Now, although he is talking about consciousness as it manifests through (embodied) behaviour, Sartre also asserts that in the same circumstance “[t]he behaviour which gives its meaning to the emotion is no longer our behaviour; it is the expression of the face and the movements of the body of the other being, which make up a synthetic whole together with the upheaval in our own organism”.^{356 357} The two descriptions are

³⁵⁰ Sartre, Jean- Paul. *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*. Translated by Philip Mairet. Routledge: London and New York, 2002. p.56. Hereafter referenced as the *Sketch*.

³⁵¹ See Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. Brill, A.A., Ware: Wordsworth: London, 1997. Esp. ch.1 &2.

³⁵² *Sketch*, p.57.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁵⁵ “Magic” here is doubly relevant since an Other in this sense is like a spirit which is from, and operates on different rules to, the mundane world. For an excellent account of how spiritual worlds differ from and interact with ours, see Carmen Blacker’s account of Shinto *Kami* worship: Blacker, Carmen, *The Catalpa Bow*. Routledge: London, 1999.

³⁵⁶ Although this is a claim about behaviour, that behaviour derives directly from consciousness insofar consciousness “drags the body with it in as much as the body is belief and the consciousness believes in it”. (*Sketch*, pp. 57-8).

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.58

interdependent. The only defence is magical because it would have to be a direct counter-modification of the other, rather than a manipulation of the objective world, the world of tools and objects. I am not vulnerable because of a projected chain of events like the door getting kicked down and an attacker bullrushing me. I am vulnerable because I am infected with a project of making-myself-vulnerable, and the only way to stop that vulnerability is to parry-riposte this projection by directly *making* the other nonthreatening. The possibility, even necessity, of this kind of counterstrike makes a circular game of bad faith possible, the (in)famous “circle of desire” in sadism and masochism, although to prove minimally that the ethical *can be* intersubjective we do not need to spell out how that specific conduct plays out.³⁵⁸

For all of this, there is still the issue of how deeply identity and character depends on the other. Simply put, does identity qua character depend on the self-for-others? The strong claim that all identity depends on others is instinctually appealing because of, as Laing put it, the “complementarity” of identities: “[a] man needs a wife for him to be a husband. A lover without a beloved is only a would-be lover... All ‘identities’ require an other: some other in and through a relationship with whom self-identity is actualized ... By complementarity I denote that function of personal relations whereby the other fulfils or completes self”.³⁵⁹ Of course, a picture like this extends to unwanted or undesirable identities too – a thief or a conman depend on having victims. If we find this kind of idea appealing, and we grant that bad faith depends on a social identity and character, then we end up at a position like Eshleman’s: “[b]ad faith always involves engagement in a social world, where social forces pressure one into assuming a social identity”.³⁶⁰ Eshleman argues that Sartre’s conception of character and identity shifts irreversibly after *Being and Nothingness* introduces the Other; beforehand, “Sartre lacks the technical resources necessary to explain the ascription or denial of determinate characters to one’s self”.³⁶¹ In our actual, concrete world the notion of complementarity seems to support the idea that all identity is relevantly social, which would make the claim go through. It is extremely difficult to think of an identity that is not dependent on others in this way – even a wandering ascetic or a doomsday-prepped survivalist stands in relation to society as something they reject.

³⁵⁸ Of course, this example is still hugely significant to the reception of Sartre on intersubjectivity; an early and excellent account of the “circle of desire” is found in Butler, Judith, *Subjects of Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Especially relevant is pp.138-56.

³⁵⁹ Laing, Ronald D., *Self and Others*. Pelican: London, 1971. p.82.

³⁶⁰ Eshleman, Matt. “The Misplaced Chapter on Bad Faith” in *Sartre Studies International*, Vol 14. No. 2 (2008), pp. 1-22. p.2.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

When it comes to specifics, the argument gets more sophisticated but also less clear-cut, because of contradiction between apparently ontological claims about the other and the self and the ontological necessity of the other given the self. When Eshleman cites passages of *BN* such as “the presence of the for-itself as for-others is the *necessary condition* for the constitution of the for-itself as such”,³⁶² the claim seems to be that consciousness ontologically implies the existence of the other. This is compounded by the further argument that, since the look shows us the “irruption of a self ... at the level of pre-reflective consciousness”, then “consciousness can be understood as non-egological³⁶³ only when considered *solus ipse*, that is, in abstraction”.³⁶⁴ Given the context, this appears to contradict the foundational work on character and identity laid down in *Transcendence of the Ego*, and the implication is made that a genuine shift has occurred. However, if we take the negative space argument from earlier seriously, we can describe the intersubjective, pre-reflective ego as nothing especially new. If the self-for-others is given to us unproblematically (i.e., without reintroducing reflection to the pre-reflective) then its discovery only asks us to unpack Sartre’s foundational claims, not revoke them. Eshleman’s key contextualising remark is, “Sartre admits that during Parts I and II he was not talking about flesh and blood humans, because intersubjectivity is a necessary condition for being a man”.³⁶⁵ If we are talking about the way that concrete, actually existing humans act and relate to one another, we are well past discussing the basic makeup of consciousness.

This recontextualisation allows us to avoid arguing over whether bad faith is necessarily social or not – because we have to ask which bad faith we are haggling over, the most basic and abstract form or bad faith as we actually encounter it in our daily, flesh-and-blood lives? When Santoni, in “Is Bad Faith Necessarily Social?”,³⁶⁶ argues against the other as ontologically implied and required by bad faith, he is somewhat arguing past the point. He is completely correct that the self does not ontologically imply the Other, and when he quotes Sartre that “the existence of Others is not a consequence which can derive from the ontological structure of the for-itself”³⁶⁷ Eshleman is not

³⁶² Ibid, p.10, citation given by Eshleman as *BN* p.95, emphasis Eshleman’s.

³⁶³ i.e. in the sense of not containing an Ego or character, as opposed to the other senses that Zahavi has so eloquently pointed out (see Chapter Two, above).

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Santoni, Ronald E., “Is Bad Faith Necessarily Social?” in *Sartre Studies International*, Vol. 14 No. 2 (2008), pp. 23-9.

³⁶⁷ *BN*, p.297, quoted in “Is Bad Faith Necessarily Social?” p.26.

contradicting the social identity and complementarity based account of bad faith. He is completely correct to say that “an understanding of the original phenomenon of bad faith requires an acknowledgement of its ontological beginnings, as well as the ontology of human reality’s “coming into the world”³⁶⁸ and bad faith *is* ultimately grounded on the lack at the heart of consciousness. However, if we separate the ontological and properly ethical domains,³⁶⁹ we only need to show that an intersubjective ethical domain can be founded in and analysed through Sartre’s ontology, and that we really are in contact with others. While the ethical will have to wait, the possibility of an intersubjective bad faith shows that there is space to talk about intersubjective ethics in general. Any experience of the same type as shame or pride is by its very nature intersubjective – we are not ashamed of ourselves, but of ourselves as the other has constituted us – of what Sartre calls out being-for-others. I appear as an object in the experience of shame, and this appearance demands that there is an Other – as Zahavi summarises it, “foreign subjectivity is revealed to me through my awareness of myself in the capacity of being-an-object for an other”.³⁷⁰ These experiences are still contingent. Because it happens that we, as members of our concrete civilisation, universally experience them, then it is implied that *for us* the Other is both certain and our characters draw something from the Other. All actual instances of human bad faith are social, mediated by the ability of others to alter our worlds or transcend our transcendences. Although there might be other, non-human *consciousnesses* in bad faith, in order to do a concrete ethics of human life there is no pressing need to examine them; since we find ourselves in a human, social world then to discuss how an ethics can rule over us we need only describe how ethics play out *in that world*.

³⁶⁸ Santoni, “Is Bad Faith Necessarily Social?”, p.29.

³⁶⁹ See the previous section and Catalano’s remarks on bad faith and inauthenticity being distinct.

³⁷⁰ Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, p.171.

Chapter Five – Authenticity as an Undertaking.

With an account of Sartre's basic system in place, and an account of the how and why of self-deception, we are now in a place to consider the alternative: "authenticity", a way of acknowledging our responsibility for our actions and our characters. This chapter will explain how authenticity works by defending a naïve statement about what it is or should be. By turns it will look at how taking responsibility plays out given the nature of our situation, given what value is in Sartre's system, given our relation to others, and given the link between practical freedom and freedom to choose projects.

Section One: Responsibility and the Subjectivism Charge.

One of the most, if not *the* most common historical criticism(s) of Sartre and Sartrean ethics is the charge of vicious subjectivism. Broadly, the charge is that it allows the agent him/herself to define what is ethical arbitrarily, robbing Sartrean ethics of any normative power and rendering it useless. We find an early version of this charge in Plantiga;³⁷¹ Detmer³⁷² makes it; and it is the substance of MacIntyre's infamously cavalier dismissal of the early Sartre.³⁷³ Anderson, in *Sartre's Two Ethics*, found subjectivism in *ASJ* but not in the *Notebooks*,³⁷⁴ and the problem is clearly not going away. Since the criticism is so long-lived, and answering it draws in so many aspects of Sartre's picture, it will be our inroad to exploring what authenticity is and is not.

A major source of the criticism is the following, one of the most explicit and often quoted statements Sartre made about the nature of authenticity:

*Authenticity, it is almost needless to say, consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate.*³⁷⁵

A common interpretation of this passage leads to what Detmer calls the "Authentic Torturer Problem".³⁷⁶ If, in the above, we read "situation" to mean simply what is currently going on, we can carry out any action and be authentic if we recognise and avow our responsibility for it. The problem seems to be that a torturer, currently inflicting unimaginable pain on someone else for no apparent reason, is acting authentically so long as they recognise and acknowledge they are doing it: "Sartre must be read as saying that as long as we confront our choices honestly and acknowledge our responsibility for what we choose, and for the consequences of our action, without resorting to

³⁷¹Plantiga, Alvin, "An Existentialist's ethics" in *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 12 no. 2 (1958) pp.235-56. See p.250 for the criticism itself, which is outdated but illustrates the aggressiveness with which this attack was first made in the Anglophone world.

³⁷² Detmer, *Freedom as a Value*, Chapters Two and Three, esp. pp. 163-7.

³⁷³ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*. Duckworth: London, 2007, pp.5-6.

³⁷⁴ See Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics*, pp.54 -5.

³⁷⁵ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Translated by George J. Becker. Shocken: New York, 1974. pp.64-5. Hereafter referenced as *ASJ*.

³⁷⁶ Detmer, *Freedom as a Value*, p.165.

deterministic excuses, we are entirely above any possible reproach on the ethical plane”.³⁷⁷ If we accept as a premise that there are certain actions, like torture, that we directly know to be immoral, then there is a major problem here. This picture of authenticity has it, at best, allowing unethical actions to go on without passing judgment, and at worst, actively condones them in some circumstances. Nonetheless, similar objections, which turn on a principle like “[a]ny acceptable ethical idea must accommodate the fact that other people deserve a minimum of consideration, toleration, respect or recognition”,³⁷⁸ amount to an invalid external critique unless they are grounded in the system in question. Even though they might be intuitively desirable and/or later turn out to be valid, we end up begging the question if we say an ethical system has failed because it fails to produce anything that would commonly be called the ethical. With this in mind, the way this picture allows authentic torturers is not *by itself* a fatal flaw.

The deeper subjectivism problem comes in when we ask what makes authenticity a coherent ethical model – if there were an internally coherent argument supporting it based on sound premises, we would have to accept the system, permission of torture included. Yet if choosing a “lucid consciousness” of the situation is just another choice, then a truly vicious subjectivism charge becomes possible:

*if it is truly Sartre's view that values are created by the free choices and free actions of individual human beings, and have no status apart from their being so created, then whatever is freely chosen or brought into being by a free action is valuable, and there are no possible grounds for determining what individuals should choose in any given situation. But this entails the absurd conclusion that there is no reason why anyone should not choose hate over love, war over peace*³⁷⁹

If this particular awareness of a situation is chosen like any other project, then having a lucid awareness of the situation is only as valuable as any other freely chosen project. If the authentic attitude cannot confer objective value on the projects undertaken in it, then it cannot be the basis of any ethical system whatsoever. Hence, any Sartrean ethics of authenticity will fail.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Heter, T. Storm, “Authenticity and Others: Sartre’s Ethics of Recognition” in *Sartre Studies International*, vol. 12 no. 2 (2006), pp. 17- 43. p. 19.

³⁷⁹ Detmer, *Freedom as a Value*, p.167.

Whilst historically common, these criticisms rely problematically on at least three things: how we read what it is to value something and what being a value entails, the nature of our encounters and dealings with others, and what “the situation” means in the ethical context. Clarifying these three aspects with respect to the Sartrean picture we have built up over the last four chapters before returning to the *ASJ* master statement will lead to a much clearer picture, and one in which the subjectivism claim does not hold up – even in *ASJ* itself.³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ Anderson, in *Sartre's Two Ethics*, held that the subjectivism criticism is valid in *ASJ* but not in the other ethical works: “... if a mass murderer like Jeffrey Dahmer ... had a true and lucid consciousness of the situation [in which he] lured to his apartment, killed, and dismembered over a score of gay males ... He would fit Anti-Semite and Jew's definition of authenticity!” (*Sartre's Two Ethics*, p.55).

Section Two: Value, Situation, and Freedom.

So what, in the full description, is the relevant sense of “situation”? Firstly, and before getting into anything else, being in situation means and reveals that we are a [value creating] consciousness. What this injects into the master statement is that reasons-responsive, goal oriented consciousness generates all values³⁸¹ under consideration as we apply the description of authenticity to any actual case. This comes straight out of the definition of free consciousness we saw in Chapter Two, above, and indirectly out of consciousness’s neverending attempts to extinguish lack in itself. Accordingly, we can show it follows that the authentic attitude must value freedom itself in some sense.

This point was made well by Barnes in her *An Existentialist Ethics*: all consciousness must value freedom, if only implicitly. She invites us to learn from Dostoyevsky’s “Underground Man”, who is permanently engaged in acting against his own (utilitarian) best interest, against all rational calculation: “No matter how stupid the caprice, even if it is certain to harm the man who acts by it, the Underground Man argues that it may still be more advantageous than all other advantages”.³⁸² Yet in the broader perspective, he is not just opposing the naïve, utilitarian liberalism of his century. According to Barnes his project cashes out into a wider opposition to any ethical system whatsoever: “he deliberately rejects the opportunity to justify his life; *he deliberately chooses the nonethical as the higher value*”.³⁸³ The question raised by this case is whether an individual (consciousness) can coherently value the unethical, whatever it turns out to be. On the face of it, The Underground Man opposes his conception of the ethical³⁸⁴ because it will lead to a non/inhuman series of regulations on human freedom, a set of diktats that leave no space for genuine human life. The basic problem with this attitude is that he *values* something: a world where he and others are free to act in capricious ways. He sees that either there is no space for the (vision of) freedom he desires, and wants to make it possible, or desires to protect it before it is crushed by Enlightenment ideals. This means he experiences it, or its future continuation, as lacking, and making demands on him. As soon as he avows anything as valuable, sees any choice as coming with an “ought” or a demand to be realised, then he has shown himself to be valuing freedom (and with it, existential lack).³⁸⁵ His awareness of a demand to destroy the ethical is itself an awareness of value; it regulates human life

³⁸¹ i.e. a consciousness which generates its world in response to its goals.

³⁸² Barnes, Hazel E., *An Existentialist Ethics*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1978. p.4.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 10, emphasis mine

³⁸⁴ Broadly, a bourgeois classical liberalism.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.23/4

because it has normative force. Claiming, or avowing, that he does not follow any normative guide is a classic case of bad faith here, an outright mismatch between the avowed and implicit/actual project.^{386 387}

So given that we cannot consistently fail to value freedom— if we always value freedom in some sense- what distinguishes the ethical and the unethical modes of valuing it? Does the fact that we are dependent on existential lack entail, after all, that we can will it and take responsibility for it in a relevantly ethical mode? In the last chapter we saw how Santoni, attempting to show that bad faith is possible *intrasubjectively*, referred to our dependence on existential lack as being an original, inescapable form of bad faith. In brief, his argument ran that because existential lack can never be fulfilled, we are always in bad faith because our avowed goals are founded on a deeper and permanent project of attaining to object-like being, which is incoherent and impossible. We end up with two related questions here. Firstly, what does it look like when we value our freedom as part of authentically valuing a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, whilst assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves? Secondly, does entering this state somehow mean that we have to abandon the project to become God altogether, possibly even finding a new motor or core dependency for human freedom?

³⁸⁶ Which is also, as we saw, a classically irrational act on Moran's definition of irrationality.

³⁸⁷ As an aside, when Dostoyevsky cuts his story short, he concludes that "[The Underground Man] could not help going on. But to us too it seems that this will be a good place to stop". Again, this reinforces that his attitude is one of bad faith – we can predict that the adverse conditions of his life can and will repeat because they are effected by his bad faith attitude, which exists as a durable way of life.

Section Three: Responsibility and Solidarity with the Future.

With respect to the first question, we can find the clearest (early) picture of authentic living in the *Notebooks*, in the form of “willing to will” our freedom, which is the result of a “thematic grasping of our freedom, of gratuity, of unjustifiability”.³⁸⁸ In what follows, we will take a closer look at the section of the *Notebooks for an Ethics* surrounding this concept.³⁸⁹

Sartre begins by effectively restating some earlier points about bad faith and identity: It is thanks to freedom and existential lack that “it is false that I am courageous and false that I am not so”, and so any non-contradictory attitude towards freedom must honour that fact, must accept that any state or property such as courage can always be transcended and never adheres to us as a fixed, permanent being.³⁹⁰ In fact, attributing any quality or state to ourselves, or attempting to be courageous, cowardly, etc has been shown repeatedly³⁹¹ to be inherently doomed to failure. Any kind of argument over *which* state I am in, or *which* qualities I possess, implies that we can have that state for our being. It implies an appeal in bad faith either to a possible future or a definite past which is extended and taken to describe us forever. It doesn’t matter whether we are trying to be courageous or a coward; what matters is that in bad faith we attempt to be something, we attempt to adopt an identity. The choice of cowardice and courage here is unlikely to be a coincidence, and probably calls back to Garcin in *No Exit*. Whether he is trying to avoid being a coward, constantly defeated by Inez, or using her to fix himself down as one,³⁹² is ultimately irrelevant: avowing having an essence or specific, permanent being is the trap. Hence, “[a]uthenticity therefore leads to renouncing every project of being courageous (cowardly), noble (vile), etc. Because they are not realisable and because they all lead in any case to alienation”.³⁹³ So what is the alternative?

Absent being able to ever achieve a genuine, permanent nobility, vileness, etc., we end up losing the

³⁸⁸ *Notebooks*, p. 474.

³⁸⁹ It should be noted that the popular *Existentialism and Humanism* (Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism and Humanism*. Translated by Philip Mairet. Methuen: London, 1973.) is also concerned with ethics, although for reasons I will enumerate later it makes a much worse primary source than the *Notebooks* or *Truth and Existence*.

³⁹⁰ This much was implied by bad faith appealing to fixed (human) essences.

³⁹¹ See the discussion of states and qualities in *TE*, pp. 20-28.

³⁹² I.e. if we take the unorthodox and insightful reading offered by Webber in Webber, Jonathan, “There’s something about Inez” in *Think* Vol. 10 no. 27 (2011) pp.45-56.

³⁹³ *Notebooks*, p.475.

right to (claim we have) continued states and identities, and each of these properties and the goals that instantiate them “becomes an undertaking”.³⁹⁴ For a goal to be an “undertaking” minimally indicates that it will take time, is vulnerable to interruption from outside or abandonment from within, and that it is only after the process is complete (or I am dead!) that we can judge its success. It should be apparent that this attitude takes permanent essence away from us, but still allows for character if we take the Morris reading – nothing about it removes the ability for character to accrue through our acts, but an understanding of character as permanent and unassailable is out. Instead, we must accept that a project such as having/maintaining a friendship has to unfold over time, “where an intuitive certitude will correspond to each particular time of this undertaking”.³⁹⁵ I take this to mean that, once we have committed to a long-lasting project,³⁹⁶ the demands it makes of us should be apparent to us as they emerge, as necessary conditions for the project continuing – we commit in the undertaking to respond to any circumstances that could threaten it in the future.

This does not mean having a definitive schedule/roadmap for all of our projects, since that would mean having literally decided in advance what all our actions will be. Apart from being impossible, this would amount to denying a) that complications could affect the execution of my projects, and b) that I might abandon the project thanks to a conversion. Conversely, if we understand from this that we have to decide whether or not to carry on repeatedly, we also fail to commit to the project – this is potentially a picture of unconnected moments of reverting back and forth on our projects. This, argues Sartre, is the same thing as not endorsing the project at all, since it is supposing that the first commitment we make is non-binding, or not binding enough to stand on its own.

Instead, we should see a project as unfolding over time and becoming increasingly concrete as it does so – when we initially start a project, at the stage of its being an intention to X, it is necessarily vague or abstract for one of two reasons.³⁹⁷ It might not be fleshed out with the specific, concrete means to its end - I might decide to work for a company, not really knowing what my job role amounts to. Or the abstractness can come purely because the project is not realised yet – because any plan can and will encounter obstacles, the final project might be unrecognisable compared to the original intent. I could adopt a wholly different style of conduct or attitude toward the project

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p.476.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ And, in practice, most of the high-level projects we have are of this type.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, pp.477-8.

without sacrificing the fact I am embarked on it. There is a meta-aspect to this uncertainty: it is uncertain both what material obstacles will emerge and how I will reply to them. As a result, an intention or project of this type is only ever seen in its fullness when it is complete: “the total intention coincides with the total work and it is the total work that reveals the total intention”³⁹⁸. In short, it is concrete engagements with the world and their results that really matter when it comes to adopting projects: an authentic attitude to a project is only concerned with producing the result, not with being cowardly, brave, etc: it is only concerned with the immediate demand to jump on a grenade or run for one’s life.

All of this amounts to an advance commitment to see through the results of one’s projects, it is a kind of solidarity with one’s future and past self to see that the goal, whether lofty like building a hospital or mundane like good pet ownership, is achieved. Insofar as it is open to the fragility of our projects, it is an acceptance of responsibility, and a lucid understanding of the situation, whatever the situation is, as one that demands effort from us and the maintenance and protection of a set of affairs in the world. Rather than supposing, implicitly or explicitly, that the work is destined to happen, and that *my* destiny is to make it come to pass, it acknowledges that concrete tasks, and so our projects, have a life of their own. This is why “[p]ure, authentic reflection³⁹⁹ 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 ... insofar as it turns its subjective face toward me)”.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Readers of Sartre will know that, in the full picture, the notion of pure reflection is vital to authenticity, although we are only addressing its *effects* or *upshot* here, pure reflection itself will be covered later.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 479.

Section Four: Play as a Model for Authenticity.

The second question raised above was, does an authentic attitude require us to abandon the original quest for completeness? If we see the original project as *both* synonymous with existential lack *and* a basic, unavoidable project of bad faith (I am always attempting to become God) then we end up undermining an authenticity based on *BN*. Either we end up claiming that we are always, on some level, in bad faith (as Santoni has argued),⁴⁰¹ or we undermine the ontology of *Being and Nothingness*. Neither of these options (at least, without a positive picture of what an alternative ontology looks like) is desirable, so it is worth working past them.

When it comes to authenticity demanding a *fundamentally* different configuration of consciousness, we can sidestep the issue. Since the existing Sartrean picture purports to describe how consciousness must be structured to be consciousness at all, an argument that consciousness can be structured differently needs to tear down the argument to get off the ground. At the very least, it would need to show how it is possible for something which has one set of conditions of possibility to transition toward having another set of conditions of possibility, which on the face of it is extremely implausible. Nonetheless, Anderson appeals to textual evidence that there has to be a separate ontology of authenticity and inauthenticity: "In fact, Sartre stated explicitly in *Being and Nothingness* that he was dealing there only with descriptions on the level of impure, or accessory, reflection".⁴⁰² Commentators such as Zheng have shown in detail how his specific textual evidence does not hold up⁴⁰³ when taken into wider context,⁴⁰⁴ but I do not think we need to go that far. If the ontology of *BN* were incorrect, or worse, incorrect because it is generated by a project of bad faith, then the text would be self-defeating and ultimately pointless. Without an accompanying text that shows a different ontology and gives us a good reason *why* we should study a purposefully inaccurate text, writing *BN* would have been an exercise in futility. This is not to mention how the literary projects in *Nausea*, and *The Roads to Freedom* foreshadow or depend on the descriptions given in *BN*. Why would Sartre go to the trouble of creating an oeuvre that is basically worthless except as a warning, without pointing out that fact – if only for pedagogical reasons? And why, moved by his experiences and his conversion to the Marxist cause, would he maintain an ontology he knew to be flawed in

⁴⁰¹ See Santoni, Ronald E., *Good Faith, Bad Faith, and Authenticity*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1995. Chapter Three deals with this issue.

⁴⁰² *Sartre's Two Ethics*, p.54.

⁴⁰³ E.g. the comments on *Notebooks* p.6 where *BN* is described as an "ontology before conversion".

⁴⁰⁴ See Yiwei, Zheng, "Sartre on Authenticity" in *Sartre Studies International*, vol. 8 no. 2 (2002), pp. 127-40. pp. 129-31.

order to write the *Critique(s) of Dialectical Reason*? All of this means there is a burden on anyone pushing an alternative ontology to create it, rather than being able to support it in abstraction from its actual content. As a result, the issue can be safely avoided unless there seems to be good reason to cast out the system as a whole, which is not obviously the case.

So turning to the other challenge: how is it possible for us to value something other than identity and completeness if all our action depends on existential lack? The idea is, since all projects point to the goal of completion, by transitivity completion is the ultimate value endorsed by all of them. Since valuing completion leads to bad faith, we are able to talk about an original project of bad faith which is never overcome, even if we have projects that are authentic in the sense outlined above. The most promising way out of this comes out of insisting on separating the ethical and ontological spheres; even though ethics might be *grounded in* ontology for Sartre, that does not have to mean that there is an ethical value inherent to ontology. An analogy would be that, although winning a game is grounded in its rules, you cannot win or lose at the *rules* of a game. Moreover, if we were locked into bad faith by our most basic structure, Sartre would not be able to talk about an ethics at all – if bad faith leads necessarily to the unethical, then we should be able to formulate an ethics purely within ontology, something Sartre denies: “[o]ntology itself cannot formulate ethical precepts”.⁴⁰⁵ He would also be unable to make the following comment: “one begins with flight and inauthenticity. But the question is whether this nature is universal or historical.”⁴⁰⁶ If Sartre saw the ontological constitution of consciousness as either necessarily instantiating bad faith or having bad faith for its being, there would be no room to ask in the first place – and in what follows, he is emphatic about the importance of history: “Ethics must be historical”.⁴⁰⁷ Were the god-project relevantly identical with existential lack, it would be analytically, uninterestingly true that we are in bad faith.

If we can talk separately about a project to become God and existential lack providing a motor for all action, what does that look like in practice? The most promising picture comes to us through Zheng’s interpretation of Sartre on play. Take running a race as an analogy: the whole notion of a race only makes sense because the runners are attempting to win. The conditions of possibility of calling an event a race include the fact that someone will win and everyone involved is trying to win; if it

⁴⁰⁵ *BN*, p.645.

⁴⁰⁶ *Notebooks*, p.6.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

doesn't matter which order the racers finish in (or if nobody wholeheartedly tries to win), it simply isn't a race.⁴⁰⁸ However, it would be a mistake to say that the only *possible* good motivation to race is to win – and it isn't even intuitive for most people that you'd only compete out of wanting to win. Whilst winning *can* be the whole point, with everything you do subordinated under the desire to win, it is also possible to subordinate winning under some other, higher goal like honour or sportsmanship. If I am competing to participate in some kind of honourable tradition of sport, winning stops being the primary end – it doesn't matter if I lose, because losing is not a failure condition. (Conversely, if I aim to win every race without fail, a loss is going to be a hammer blow.) Nonetheless, even if I am trying to participate in this sportsmanlike tradition, I have not given up on winning. A goal of sportsmanship is absolutely compatible with trying to win, and crucially does not have to diminish the effort I make to win. Although it is only possible for me to will sportsmanship because of races having to be won, winning the race is not my overall goal – in practice, it is a subordinate or instrumental part of the overall whole.

By analogy, in authenticity we can adopt a (coherent) project other than becoming god as our core project – even though getting rid of ontological lack is still the *core dependency* of our projects. The ontological necessity of existential lack is never removed, but on the plane of our willed projects we adopt a stance of responsibility for our situation. We understand our projects as *undertakings* which are fragile, and do not try to get a fixed identity (i.e., symbolic existential completion) from them. This attitude is not unprecedented in Sartre's own writings; as Zheng points out,⁴⁰⁹ the description of play in *BN* is intimately connected to the ethical, since it is suggestive of “a particular type of project, which has freedom for its foundation and its goal” which “...belongs [rather] to an ethics”.⁴¹⁰ In fact, the lines between the two are blurred from the start, since “[a]s soon as a man apprehends himself as free and wishes to use his freedom ... then his activity is play”.⁴¹¹ The key connection between play and authenticity as “willing to will” is that the player “himself sets the value and rules for his acts and consents to play only according to the rules which he has established”,⁴¹² i.e., the player establishes the parameters for his free project, in order “to attain himself as a certain being, precisely the being which is in question in his being”. The rules of a game are invented, sustained, and willed by us, and can reveal our freedom to us insofar as they are context-dependent and can highlight the context-dependency of projects we have. If, in play, we have the ability to set an

⁴⁰⁸ See Zheng, *Sartre on Authenticity*, p.133.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.135.

⁴¹⁰ *BN*, p.602.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.601.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

undertaking as our goal without primarily willing completion or the permanent loss of existential lack, then we have a working prototype of authenticity running under the ontology of *BN*.⁴¹³

Zheng's own opposition to play as a prototype of authenticity is telling. He claims that a life lived on the model of play would be too unstable to sustain a viable, ethical life: "if one adopts a playful attitude (whether unreflectively or reflectively) across the board, it is quite likely that she will lose all her securities and that she cannot satisfy her basic needs. If I play at my job, the result of my work is at best unstable, which is likely to cause me to lose my job".⁴¹⁴ Simplistically, the problem is that if we play at life, we will not take it seriously enough to sustain basic physical needs and social connections; our institutions will crumble if everyone acts in this way. This isn't a deep objection by itself, since it assumes that an ethical life has to resemble a vision of our current, average or "normal" lifestyles, but it does point toward a deeper problem. The reason why a playful attitude would cause these problems is that individuals adopting it are free to stop "playing" at whatever attitude or project they are adopting at any time, making social relations unstable at best. This kind of play, where we drop out of commitments at any time and for whatever purely internal reasons, is childlike and untenable within a *social* context. Whilst the above has cashed out a lot of the intrasubjective content of authenticity, it is only by including the social context that the picture can be completed.

So far, despite the added detail, the original problem is not deflected: an authentic torturer could see his vile deeds as a part of an undertaking that needs effort, that effort being mandated by the lack at the heart of his being, and will to will the concrete projects that keep his wider project alive. It is no coincidence that bad faith cashes out concretely into the search for identity and, as we saw in the previous chapter, these identities depend on the intercession of the Other.⁴¹⁵ Minimally, this suggests that a change in our relationship to the other is entailed in the authentic attitude, but it will prove impossible not to value the freedom of others as we value our own. Factoring this in will defeat the subjectivism charge once and for all.

⁴¹³ Although claiming a direct identity between the two is impossible for reasons to do with the nature of reflection; authenticity has to operate on a (the) reflective plane whereas play is pre-reflective.

⁴¹⁴ Zheng, *Sartre on Authenticity*, p.138.

⁴¹⁵ This is made explicit in the *Notebooks*: "the quality of being courageous can be conferred upon one only by others in light of certain forms of behaviour ... Others will hang an *objective* label on you that will then internalise in the form of an in-itself-for-itself. *Notebooks*, p. 474.

Section Five: Intersubjectivity and Authenticity.

This necessity of the other in authenticity, although a reconstruction in the context of *Being and Nothingness*, runs through the early works. From Roquentin's doomed relationship with Anny, through almost *all* of Mathieu's relationships with others, to Sartre's discussions of the war and its impact on those fighting in it, the Other is everywhere in his early accounts of inauthenticity. In the *War Diaries*⁴¹⁶ this influences his early thoughts on what it is to be authentic at all - he imagines someone who, before the war, "used to live highly inauthentically in all the various social situations into which he was thrown - family, job, etc"⁴¹⁷ and who is shaken out of his complacency by being called up. As a soldier, he acts completely authentically - he is authentic, at least with respect to his situation on the front. Something about the shock of being called up has changed his attitude, yet when his wife comes to visit, there is the risk that his authenticity will be shattered - "presumably, a being who expects the inauthentic of us will freeze us to the marrow with inauthenticity ... an imposed inauthenticity, against which it is easy but painful to defend oneself".

For one thing, this strongly implies that authenticity has to be achieved by an entire community to be stable, which tallies with a later remark in the *Notebooks*: "ethics is not possible unless everyone is ethical".⁴¹⁸ As we have seen, above, inauthenticity is a way of life; by corollary, authenticity has to also build up behind it a consistent character, give or take a few errors or stumbles. So, one (admittedly weak) way we can defend a necessarily social authenticity is practically - if we are affected by others, directly forced or transformed into inauthenticity by being with them, it would be impossible to sustain authenticity in an inauthentic world. Even if we take the most optimistically naïve reading of resistance being "easy but painful", the sheer amount of contact we have with others seems to prohibit authenticity. On this simplistic reading, easy means just that - minimal effort is required to resist each attempt on our authenticity, and this resistance is always easily available to us. Yet given the sheer number of social interactions most of us enter into, and assuming a largely inauthentic general population for the sake of argument, the slide into inauthenticity would seem to be a matter of statistics. If we are 99% effective at resisting having inauthenticity foisted on us, the 1% of interactions that get through to us in some way are still

⁴¹⁶ *War Diaries*, pp. 219 - 23.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁴¹⁸ *Notebooks*, p.9.

damning. Our attitude might only be changed with respect to some part of our lives, but if we slide into a regional inauthenticity, we are still inauthentic: “authenticity is achieved en bloc: one either is or is not authentic”.⁴¹⁹ On this reading, one reason authenticity must take stock of others is organisational: it is impossible to sustain a personal authenticity without at least an implicit pact or agreement with those around you to help each other sustain it. This paints the grim picture of an ethical cold war, where destruction is mutually assured – If I condemn others to inauthenticity, I condemn myself.

Although it passes a first, casual inspection, we can still force a subjectivity charge in. If we grant that there are, or might be, individuals who are contingently more capable of resisting the influence of the other than most, they would have no stake in agreeing to mutually defend the project of authenticity. Equipped with an iron resolve not to be turned from his undertakings, the Andersonian torturer can carry on unabated. The root of the problem is, this kind of picture is still basically intrasubjective: it treats the presence of the other as accidental to authenticity, as something that might intrude or interfere. Yet, if we are attempting to construct an ethics that reflects our social lives, we have to investigate it on the level of the human, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The key idea that can turn this around is that freedom and consciousness are relevantly *generic*. By this I mean that the consciousness, qua consciousness, of any one individual (associated with any one self or ego, and embodied in any one body) has no priority over any others, and can demand no rights over and above any other consciousness. If we accept our prior analysis of the “look”, there are experiences in which others are immediately given to us as a free consciousness, exactly like our own in that regard. Above, we saw how all consciousness must value its own freedom.⁴²⁰ This is not an instrumental necessity, but a structural part of any act that generates value, so Anderson’s objection (“Surely I can will a goal, e.g., a healthy body, and yet not will the means to it, e.g., daily exercise or a low cholesterol diet. People do this all the time. It may be illogical or stupid to will ends without willing the means to them, but we can in fact do so”)⁴²¹ does not apply. Even at the limit where we value nothing at all, we have to *implicitly* value the consciousness that allows us to instantiate the disvalue of the world, or the positive value that holds our ambivalence in being. If we accept that, absent distortion, the consciousness of the Other is given to us as a source of value

⁴¹⁹ *War Diaries*, p.219.

⁴²⁰ To recap, since all value is generated by free consciousness, and we cannot consistently *fail* to value something, by transitivity we must value free consciousness as long as we exist.

⁴²¹ Zheng, *Sartre on Authenticity*, pp. 62-3.

exactly like our own, we see that that consciousness is given as innately valuable just like our own. If we must value free consciousness as an absolute, primary value, we must value *all* free consciousness as such.⁴²²

The classic objection to this picture is that it is impossible to cash out the notion of valuing freedom as one's ultimate end in a way that is either philosophically coherent, interesting, or of practical use to those attempting to live an ethical life. What does it mean to value freedom if we are always free? Merleau-Ponty was among the first to make this criticism when he said: "if indeed it is the case that our freedom is the same in all our actions, and even in our passions, if it is not to be measured in terms of our conduct, and if the slave displays freedom as much by living in fear as by breaking his chains, then it cannot be held that there is such a thing as free action, freedom being anterior to all actions."⁴²³ If the torture victim is potentially able to transcend his current situation and change his attitude to being tortured, he is still free, and the torturer could claim his freedom is being valued, as the victim's radical freedom is not impinged. This should not be seen as an unusual view of Sartre on freedom and impingement – Warnock held it a long time ago in *The Philosophy of Sartre*: "Even if our choices are entirely restricted ... we may choose how to conceive the possibility of escape or release, and above all we may choose how to evaluate it. This is what Sartre refers to as the For-itself, or consciousness, 'choosing itself'".⁴²⁴

Against this picture, we can invoke both Detmer's distinction between ontological and practical freedom in early Sartre, and later comments made in his *Notebooks*. On Detmer's scheme,⁴²⁵ "ontological" freedom refers to our ability to revise our projects within the constraint of the objective conditions around us. When we change our attitude towards the world, we exercise our ontological freedom; we are always ontologically free. No use of our ontological freedom has to (be able to) change the objective world to count as such. Conversely, practical freedom is measured by the concrete possibility of success and failure. It is freedom "in the sense of freedom of obtaining", the concrete freedom to effect changes in the objective world. Since the argument about the absolute value of consciousness refers to the structure of ontological freedom, on the face of it the

⁴²² For an alternative derivation of this point focusing on the *experience* of value, see Poellner, Peter. "Early Sartre on Freedom and Ethics", *European Journal of Philosophy* vol. 23 no. 2 (2015), pp. 221-247.

⁴²³ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Translated by Donald A. Landes. Routledge: Abingdon, 2014. pp. 436-7.

⁴²⁴ Warnock, Mary, *The Philosophy of Sartre*. Hutchinson & Co.: London, 1972. p.125.

⁴²⁵ *Freedom as a Value*, p. 62.

demand that we value the freedom of the Other only applies to their freedom of choice. Given the two senses of freedom are ostensibly logically separate, we can reformulate the problem: since the Other's ontological freedom is not harmed if we harm their practical freedom, then agents can still decide their actions are moral by fiat, and we are still stuck in a subjectivism.

How are we to overcome this? A solution opens up if we examine what happens when we influence the practical freedom of another. Recall how, in Chapter Two, we saw that the motif, the mobile, and the end are ultimately ways of approaching the same thing. This is a theme that is picked up in the *Notebooks*, in the discussions surrounding the "elasticity" of ends and projects. He says:

*I learn my ends in the world, that is, I learn my ends by their means. This bunch of grapes is given me in passing as something to be picked. Is it end or means? One cannot tell. End: It has awakened my thirst, it posits itself as desirable. But is it not a means of satisfying my thirst? Would I think of my thirst again if I didn't want to satisfy it by just this means?*⁴²⁶

All projects, it turns out, ultimately hinge on specific ends. There is no such thing as a realisable project that is completely abstract: "to eat is not just unconditionally to posit an end that any food can satisfy, it is to like this meat, that dish".⁴²⁷ As Sartre reiterates on *Notebooks* pp.477-8, a purely abstract project or purely abstract intention to carry out some action has almost nothing in common with the actually realised project, which allows us to make sense of what he calls the limit case, "where my end is posited with no means in sight"⁴²⁸ – which is most of them if I am strapped to a torture rack. In this case, "my desire appears in terms of the collapse of my situations". As long as there is an alternative to fill the gap, projects can have a certain elasticity or changeability; if I want to eat my packed lunch and it spoils, the general project of eating can be salvaged by buying more food. Yet there is always a limit to how much can be changed without destroying the project; by making the ends distant enough, we make them sufficiently abstract that they are destroyed.⁴²⁹ In destroying the means, in other words, we destroy the ends, and in so doing we (can) destroy the project. By limiting the *practical* freedom of another, we can force the use of their *ontological*

⁴²⁶ *Notebooks*, p. 241.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.241.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.423.

freedom. Whilst we have changed their concrete project, we have not changed their ability to *generate* projects.

However, if every project⁴³⁰ depends for its existence either on having a success criterion or referring to a project with a success criterion, we can make headway. Those projects which prevent the Other from getting their way must have objective success criteria – whether or not the smear article is published, whether the prison is effective, and so on. Exercising our ontological freedom to work past obstacles is all very well, but there is no compelling reason why we should *have* to do so. In order to be motivated to sabotage the Other,⁴³¹ I must disvalue the expression of their freedom and value the expression of my own, with the net result of valuing the exercise of my freedom on the objective world above theirs. However, in the most abstract case, there is nothing that can possibly justify this difference, so there is nothing that can possibly justify such courses of action.

There is also a related, Kierkegaardian⁴³² objection about the concrete application of this picture: If there are multiple different social and/or ethical systems which meet these criteria, we might be lost without any motivation to stick with one configuration. Since any potential social structure that meets these demands is as good as any other, then there is nothing to keep any *one* of them stable. However, we can beat this objection quite easily if we demand a reason why the alternative system should be *positively* favoured, and why the current system, apparently good, is to be taken as disvaluable. In the *Notebooks*, Sartre's position is even stronger when he says "what is necessary *has to be done*. Hence one has to choose, from two equally efficacious ways, the easiest one ... if one does choose the more difficult path it is because, in a roundabout way, he wants to be",⁴³³ i.e., the only motivation to choose between two authentic paths is found in and through a project of bad faith. Having to spontaneously decide between two equally good projects, as unlikely as that is, would not be troubling: one simply and pragmatically does what has to be done.

In closing, one final set of questions: what is the relation between prereflective good and bad faith and an authenticity that lies on a moral level? How are we to preserve the appreciation that projects

⁴³⁰ Apart from, of course, the fundamental project to become God.

⁴³¹ As against negligent damage or accidents.

⁴³² See Kierkegaard, Soren. *Either/Or*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. Penguin: London, 1992. Especially p.189.

⁴³³ *Notebooks*, p. 474.

are “undertakings”, and what does it mean to do so? To answer these questions, we need to make explicit something that might seem obvious: authenticity is a sustained way of life. In several places in the *War Diaries*, including one quoted above, Sartre talks about himself and others being more or less authentic *over time* and at different times: “I was authentic before my leave ... in Paris, I was not authentic”.⁴³⁴ If we take this seriously, we can understand authenticity as a special type of character, a paradoxical one born out of not being concerned with character at all. In other words, it is, and has to be a way of life.⁴³⁵

This becomes apparent when we look at the relationship between good faith, bad faith, and authenticity. In his landmark examination of the topic, Santoni argues⁴³⁶ that “whereas good faith, at the ontological level, is to be viewed as one's unreflective “choice” of, or attitude toward, one's freedom” is separate from “authenticity, as a lucid recognition, acceptance, and living of one's ontological freedom”, which “requires, as prerequisite, a reflective radical choice to convert from the bad faith to which one is ‘naturally’ inclined and in which one is living.” This claim came only shortly after Catalano said that “if a genuine antithesis to bad faith exists, it is to be found in the concept of authenticity rather than in the concept of good faith”.⁴³⁷ Here I wish to defend a line that is closer to Santoni's, making a sharp division between the pre-reflective and reflective rather than the “ontological” and a “way of life” per se. To be explicit about it, we need to distinguish three levels: the pre-reflective attitudes of good and bad faith; the level of impure and pure reflection; and the ethical/unethical life. We have already distinguished good and bad faith, so I will move right along to a definition of pure and impure reflection.

In one *Notebooks* section quoted above,⁴³⁸ Sartre described authenticity as reflectively seeing projects as undertakings, with the caveat that this is only possible through an undistorted, or “purified”, reflection. “Pure” reflection, as an idea, is present right at the start of Sartre's work, as early as *The Transcendence of the Ego*.⁴³⁹ The description he gives there, that “pure reflection ... stays with the given without making claims about the future” might be puzzling given that the

⁴³⁴ *War Diaries*, p.219.

⁴³⁵ Note that this directly contradicts Catalano in *Good Faith and other Essays*, p. 151.

⁴³⁶ Santoni, *Good Faith, Bad Faith, and Authenticity*. p. 123.

⁴³⁷ Catalano, *Good Faith and Other Essays*, p.77.

⁴³⁸ i.e., pp. 474-84.

⁴³⁹ E.g. *TE*, p. 23.

authentic individual sees their projects as undertakings which stretch out into the future. However, we can easily make this early definition compatible with that account: this pure reflection does not make *specific* claims about the future, and the fact that there is a future at all has to be immediately given to a temporalising consciousness.⁴⁴⁰ Rather, this ties into the claim we saw in Chapter Four, above, that consciousness in bad faith appeals to *specific* futures,⁴⁴¹ which appeal takes significant liberties with available (objective) facts about the world. Of course, we mean to distinguish pure and impure reflection, not bad and good faith, but this overlap reminds us of something important – that pure and impure reflection each have to be grounded on a pre-reflective self-awareness. If this were not the case, we would break Sartre’s pre-reflective cogito and leave his system entirely. When it comes to a reflection, in this case an impure one, making an avowal (about states, etc⁴⁴²), that avowal has to be motivated. It has to draw on what, in both *Being and Nothingness* and *Truth and Existence*,⁴⁴³ we saw as the presence of the objective world to us, mediated through our projects. If the resources available to reflection are distorted, it stands to reason that that reflection will be erroneous.⁴⁴⁴ This also ties into Sartre’s remark that “when I deliberate, the chips are down”,⁴⁴⁵ i.e., before we reflectively make a decision, the set of decisions that can be made has already been determined.⁴⁴⁶ The resources handed to reflection here overwhelmingly favour a distorted vision of the world.

The inverse of this holds true: In order to produce a clear, undistorted reflective picture of the world, an undistorted or minimally distorted version of the world must be present to us to begin with. In the terms we pulled from *Truth and Existence*, above, if our intuitive knowledge is gathered in good faith, we are far more likely to produce a robust set of truths via reflection. At base, there is some description of our experience that is always indisputable: right now, I am typing, voting, feeding the cat, etc. The arguable part comes after: I am showing my appreciation in the thank you note, I am trying to defeat a political bloc, I love my cat. This is how Williford’s insightful description of pure reflection gets off the ground: “On the one hand, if one merely reports what is currently unfolding in

⁴⁴⁰ See Chapter Two, above.

⁴⁴¹ On my reading, bad faith and sincerity both involve appeals to virtual futures. Either the projected future will establish retroactive continuity with a desired state, or assert that a desirable present character is viable indefinitely.

⁴⁴² See *TE*, pp.23/4.

⁴⁴³ See Chapter Three, above.

⁴⁴⁴ Even if bad faith leads to (or more strongly, implies), impure reflection, this does not mean the two levels can be conflated, because they have a different status in Sartre’s ontology.

⁴⁴⁵ *BN*, p.473.

⁴⁴⁶ Or on a strong reading that is not worth defending, the decision has entirely been made. The problem with endorsing this is that it makes reflection and the reflective “will” completely inert.

a rather minimally conceptual and neutral vocabulary, one is not necessarily involved in impure reflection. You seem to yourself to be reading right now and probably have so seemed for a while (only you know). Interpreted neutrally, this is not an impure reflective judgment. It is even apodictic".⁴⁴⁷ This minimal description, or *some* minimal description, is going to remain constant in what bad and good faith pass up the line, but is far, far more prominent in the content that good faith offers up to reflection. Whether we are seeing ourselves as a petty criminal or a heroic rebel makes no difference to our appreciation that we are in prison; even the most obstinate bad faith depends on objective facts about the world to get going. If we see truths, in the special sense outlined previously, as capable of shaping how we conceptualise our immediate experience, then they can have a regulatory function on how distorted our reflection is.

When Williford goes on to describe the process of gaining precision in our (neutral) descriptions, he is describing the collision of our (currently held) truths with new (intuitive) evidence:

*[w]e absorbed the language used for naming and describing these gross contours of types of conscious experiences from infancy, and in manifold special contexts. (Can you tell me where it hurts? How intense is the pain? Is it a stabbing or a burning pain?) We long ago learned about the plexus of causal and behavioral relations associated with each type of experience and the set of analogies used to describe them, and the dynamic profile associated with them.*⁴⁴⁸

If I hold, on whatever level, that this pain is all hell and defies description, being asked if it burns or stings or stabs put that description to rest when one of those options fits. As a description and/or the project it relies on is tested, eventually it tends toward a solid, durable form, and becomes available to us as a dependable truth. At this point, it has been refined to the point where there is no possibility of error "as long as the experience judged continues to unfold".^{449 450} Although Williford himself draws a distinction between neutral concepts available to reflection like "I am reading" and those available to an advanced, "cathartic", reflection, I do not think his distinction is strictly necessary; his interpretative point stands either way. When he claims that

⁴⁴⁷ Williford, "Degrees of Self-Presence", p.86.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p.87.

⁴⁵⁰ This qualification is necessary because, as we saw above, verification (of a truth) is necessarily an ongoing process. The only way a truth can be tested in an ongoing fashion is by a sustained contact with the intuitive experience that it supposedly rules over.

*one must develop appropriate concepts and, by a process of consulting and re-consulting lived experience over years, become familiar with the contours and saliences, the patterns and flows, statics and dynamics, layers and ranges of types of experience*⁴⁵¹

he is describing a natural process of maturation of our truths. What this maturation does is make more of our truths and/or concepts almost unassailable, and that unassailability comes exactly from their ability to survive challenges that others would not. Put simply, it's a process of getting better at living morally (authentically) through gaining life experience.

Of course, given Sartre's commitments about consciousness, he intends these nearly unassailable truths to lead to the understanding of authenticity given above: seeing projects as undertakings, responsibility for ourselves and our situation, and so on. These reflectively held attitudes, in other words, are what make us act authentically, and they only exist in and through those authentic acts.⁴⁵² However, if we are motivated to act authentically, we have (also had) reveal(ed) to ourselves the basic structure of consciousness and value; the genie is out of the bottle, and any truly authentic action should demand that the actions which come after it are similarly authentic. This is why Sartre's imaginary war-convert is "led to think about [his home life], to make resolutions for the future, and to establish guidelines for *keeping* authenticity as he moves on to other events" and hence we see that "[t]he desire to acquire authenticity is only a desire to see things more clearly and not lose it".⁴⁵³ The truths which are conducive to pure reflection stay with us by being tested and reaffirmed, and the opposite is also true: those that make us reflect impurely are destroyed if they are challenged honestly. So one must "adapt one's life to one's authenticity",⁴⁵⁴ in a process of ensuring that our lives reinforce the truths that regulate the purity of our reflection.

Pure reflection, then, becomes a skill that is practiced over time. It is, in fact, a meta-skill that rides on top of all of our other projects, which might mean the ability to hyperfocus the world into the most relevant aspects for our current goal. By most relevant, I mean the effective parts of our action, like finding the best way to defuse an argument. If we are committed only to ending an argument, we will describe and approach that argument very differently to if we have my own scores to settle. Let's say I promised my partner I would pick up cat food on the way home, but forgot. Bringing up old scores ("you forgot to feed the dog!") would be pointless because it would

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p.88.

⁴⁵² See above, this chapter.

⁴⁵³ *War Diaries*, pp.220 – 21.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

only inflame tension: the halo of resentments or past slights that sits around the current disagreement is useless to ending it. Going beyond the bare minimum need to apologise or to rush out and buy the food anyway is asking for trouble, and in the long run will only make things worse. How do we learn to avoid arguments and how to make things right? Unless someone teaches us (and a lot of the time, even if they try) it is by getting into disagreements, making mistakes, and trying to recover the situation. Being able to limit ourselves to the salient parts of any problem helps us immeasurably in solving it; letting go of (affective traces of) other projects and being able to understand where we stand and where to go is a key part of completing any project. The sooner I understand any problems clearly, and the need to approach them efficiently, the sooner I will be able to understand them in the most objective and focused way possible, and the more skilful I will be in engaging with them.

To readers of *Transcendence of the Ego*, this account may seem unusual, if not downright troubling. This picture, of pure reflection as a skill or an undertaking, directly contradicts Sartre's comments in the conclusion of that work. Speaking of Husserl's view in the *Cartesian Meditations*, Sartre claims that the epoche, as a conceptual forerunner to pure reflection, is gratuitous in the sense that he does not understand why Husserl would ever be adequately motivated to engage in it:

*Husserl himself ... makes a very vague allusion to certain psychological motives which might lead one to effect the reduction. But these motives do not seem adequate and above all the reduction does not seem able to operate except after a long period of study; it thus appears as a skilled operation, which confers a sort of gratuitousness to it.*⁴⁵⁵

instead, Sartre claims there that the epoche/ pure reflection are entered into as "an anguish that imposes itself on us and which we cannot avoid, it is at one and the same time a pure event of transcendental origin and an accident that is always possible in our daily lives". Pure reflection is the aftermath, in other words, of a pseudo-Heideggerian anxiety and equipmental breakdown, rather than a skilled technique which we practice over time. Moati has supplied an excellent description of the status of this reduction: "[o]n Sartre's account, we are, sometimes and by accident, exposed and condemned to the reduction ... it is no more a *philosophical* act, but an *existential ordeal*".⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ *TE*, p.49.

⁴⁵⁶ Moati, Raoul, "Radical Epokhe: On Sartre's Concept of 'Pure Reflection'." In in Miguens, Sofia, Preyer, Gerhard, and Bravo Morando, Clara (eds.) *Pre-Reflective Consciousness: Sartre and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*. Routledge: Abingdon, 2016. p.472.

So why, given that Sartre directly contradicts the skilled procedure view, would we want to return to it? The main reason is, this is in line with the understanding of knowledge and truth we find in *Being and Nothingness* and which is continued on and expanded by *Truth and Existence*. The concept of constant verification of projects alongside every single action we take demotes refinement of our concepts for exploring the world from something taking a long period of study to something we are always already engaged in. I take the implicit parts of the Husserl criticism in *TE*'s conclusion to go something like this:

- 1) Pure reflection/epoche seems to require lots of study to reach.
- 2) Most individuals do not put in much work, if any, towards achieving pure reflection/epoche.
- 3) But, the experiences associated with pure reflection are near universal.
- 4) Hence, pure reflection cannot be a technique or a skill that we practice.

If every action carries with it the demand to re-evaluate our projects and implies a refinement of our knowledge towards (but not necessarily converging on) apodictic truth, we always have the opportunity to purify our reflection, in the sense of make it as close to given experience as possible. While revision of our projects might be the most obvious and (metaphorically) eye catching in response to anxiety, the process is going on all the time and, unless we are in extreme bad faith, always making our reflective concepts work better on the next occasion.

With his presence based account of knowledge, Sartre gives us the resources to see pure reflection as giving us higher quality (more reliable) knowledge over time, as something which we always have the opportunity to practice. Rather than it being exceptional or basically miraculous for us to revisit our construction of the world, every action provides an opportunity to do so. In that connection, the threshold for the world motivating me to change my mode of reflection becomes very low indeed. Although we will return to this when taking about the "pain" of project shifts, the idea that some and only specially major kinds of events gain the power to provoke anguish by themselves is also deeply suspect, whether it comes from Sartre or Heidegger.

In fact, the bar to entering pure reflection it is even lower on this model than implied above. Deploying a Husserlian epoche or adopting Sartre's phenomenological attitude is distinct from employing pure reflection (although pure reflection is a prerequisite for the phenomenological attitude). When defining pure reflection at the start of *TE*, Sartre notes that "[p]ure reflection (which is, however, not necessarily phenomenological reflection) stays with the given without making any

claims about the future".⁴⁵⁷ Using pure reflection as a skill does not even imply theoretical understanding of phenomenology, however obscure or dim, it does not imply a major theoretical awakening as a barrier to entry. There is, in other words, nothing that makes a halting first or impaired attempt to use pure reflection *less* of a case of pure reflection, or outright a failure. As Williford puts it: "one can attend to the details of experience, whether or not one has concepts for all the data one singles out. Indeed, initially one will not have very good concepts, if any, as any experienced teacher of phenomenology and philosophy of mind will know".⁴⁵⁸

Seeing pure reflection in this way thus breaks with *Transcendence of the Ego* in a way suggested by Sartre himself, i.e., in a way supported by both the main thread of *Truth and Existence* and the account of presence and knowledge in *Being and Nothingness*. The skill and catharsis approach also preserves the notion that impure reflection (and through it inauthenticity) hinges on going beyond what is given to us in presence, e.g., when we go past an instantaneous revulsion to hatred.

The overall point of this chapter can be said very simply. Authenticity should be seen as an ethical way of life which inherently respects others, shored up by a constant and lively engagement with ourselves, others, and the world. In this chapter, we have finally seen that authenticity has the following salient features: it can normatively regulate our actions and our relations with others, as well as referring to the material and objective. Insofar as this was shown in context of the first four chapters, this was developed systematically. Therefore, the objective of this thesis, as stated in the introduction, has been met. In order to drive the point home, the next chapter will consider the abstract shape of some ways that this can translate into actual life.

⁴⁵⁷ *TE*, p. 23.

⁴⁵⁸ Williford, "Degrees of Self-Presence", p. 85.

Chapter Six – Loose Ends: The Pain of Inauthenticity, and Concrete Motivations to Self-Deception.

In this chapter, we will tie up some loose ends around authenticity being something that addresses the social and the practical. We will look at why, based on *Anti-Semite and Jew*, appealing to mass psychoanalysis as a way to make substantive ethical points can backfire. More positively, the chapter will then reinforce the ideas that a) Others can *force* (rather than invite) us to be in bad faith, and b) that bad faith can genuinely rule over the material as well as abstract elements of the objective world. This is based on two naïve criticisms: that anguish isn't enough by itself to provoke us into bad faith, and that the account of authenticity ruling over the material, above, simply doesn't ring true. It will also consider how the ways we can assist others in good faith are vulnerable to (epistemic) interference from others, reaffirming the importance of knowledge in the present account.

Combining an expansion of the remark that (authentic) conversion is “easy but painful”⁴⁵⁹ with the epistemological content of *Truth and Existence* will demonstrate how an unusually toxic form of bad faith can be socially generated. Building on that, and the earlier claim that respecting the freedom of others requires respecting the concrete, material aspects of their lives, we will also see how the Sartrean account of possession allows us to talk about (in)authenticity as addressing material possessions. Although the prior chapters have already shown how we can be motivated to bad faith, and that the ethical necessarily involves the other, reinforcing these points should make the overall picture more plausible. Combined with a picture of how our attempts to relate to others in good faith are possible and can be thwarted (at an ontological- “psychological” level) by external

⁴⁵⁹ See the discussion of *War Diaries* in Chapter Five, above.

influence, we will also see how the overall account can guarantee the possibility of genuine regulatory principles but is very weak at providing them by itself.

Section One: Uncertain Diagnoses of Inauthenticity.

Anti-Semite and Jew was Sartre's first sustained social commentary after *Being and Nothingness*, published in the immediate postwar years; since it is his most famous early work of social criticism, it is an ideal place to look at how the (early) ethics works out less abstractly. Sartre's method in it is simple: he identifies, based on the conduct of anti-Semites, that their avowed reasons for being anti-Semitic are incoherent, and belie a deeper bad faith which is structured like any other. The anti-Semite's antisemitism, it turns out, has more to do with their own self-perception than anything else. Sartre effectively works by cases, drawing from a series of anecdotes about anti-Semitic behaviour to show us the generic form of anti-Semitism. He draws a common thread between several examples such as a woman cheated out of her furs who latches onto the Jewishness of the furrier,⁴⁶⁰ and the student who feels cheated out of his grades by the Jews,⁴⁶¹ since these anti-Semites claim a harm has been done to them, a harm that does not stand up to scrutiny. If Bretons and not Jews took the student's place on the lists, we have to ask why the student still blames the Jews. Sartre holds that the anti-Semite does not fear the actual, specific truth about Jewish history and conduct, but instead fears truth *in general*: "they wish to exist all at once and right away. They do not want any acquired opinions, they want them all to be innate ... they wish to have ... the kind of life where one becomes only what he already was",⁴⁶² This is completely consistent with our discussion of bad faith earlier, insofar as it is the identification of the future with a perfect, monolithic identity in the past which proceeds by disregarding evidence. By identifying Jews as absolute evil, anti-Semites are able to cast themselves as the "Knight-errant of the Good" insofar as "Good consists above all in the destruction of Evil".⁴⁶³ Hatred for the Jews, to the point of wishing violence upon them, proves to the Anti-Semite that they are good, in a viciously circular syllogism: *If I find I hate Jews, then Jews must be evil, and if Jews are evil, then I must be good. Therefore, I am good.*

One huge flaw in this argument is revealed by Sartre's own comments – he says of the anti-Semite that "The Jew only serves him as a pretext; elsewhere his counterpart will make use of the Negro or the man of yellow skin".⁴⁶⁴ This an admission that he is still describing bad faith in very abstract terms, that are so vague as to barely pick out and explain antisemitism at all. Whilst the account he

⁴⁶⁰ *ASJ*, p.7.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.38.

gives is a well-supported *possible* framework for antisemitism, Sartre's reliance on anecdotal evidence makes the case extremely weak. An exasperated George Orwell had this to say when reviewing *ASJ*:

*At the beginning, M. Sartre informs us that antisemitism has no rational basis: at the end, that it will not exist in a classless society, and that in the meantime it can perhaps be combated to some extent by education and propaganda. These conclusions would hardly be worth stating for their own sake, and in between them there is, in spite of much cerebration, little real discussion of the subject, and no factual evidence worth mentioning.*⁴⁶⁵

As Michael Walzer notes in his preface to the 1995 edition, when it came to actually existing antisemitism Sartre "did no research".⁴⁶⁶ We should be clear here that there are two relevant types of missing evidence: to begin with, actual historical facts like how the Warsaw ghetto operated,⁴⁶⁷ or how the Dreyfus Affair played out and rippled into later events, are missing. We are also lacking any evidence that the anti-Semites he described ever existed, and that they are in any way representative of anti-Semitism as it existed around Sartre. We might create an intellectually sparkling account of *a* form of antisemitism, its structure and its genesis whilst completely missing the point about what is happening on the ground. This is the essence of the "cerebration" Orwell describes; it is the risk of creating a verbose, obsessively thought-over account of a situation and people that never really existed, which opens up no real possibility of change.

This isn't to say that there is no value at all to the *ASJ* account, or to discredit the system as a whole. Rather, we have to acknowledge the limits of what was done by *Being and Nothingness* and the surrounding early works; they are, and are only intended to be, schematic. It isn't until much later, until 1957 and the *Search for a Method*, that we see a major, published, and systematic justification of the engagement of anthropology and/or sociology with existentialism. Rather, it is the first completed, published work that properly *justifies* how existentialism can come to deal with specific, concrete moral issues.

⁴⁶⁵ Review in *The Observer*, November 1948, reproduced in Orwell, George. *It is what I think*. Secker: London, 2002. pp 464-9.

⁴⁶⁶ *ASJ*, vi.

⁴⁶⁷ See *ASJ*, pp.9-11.

Although, as Orwell's review points out, it is too vague to effect an actual critique, perhaps the problem in context *here* is that it is not vague enough. An account of the conditions under which socially mediated bad faith is possible is valuable, so long as we were above board that it is still abstract and theoretical. Rather than trying to fix the account or offer an involved social-anthropological study of current culture,⁴⁶⁸ here it might be useful to take a step back. Over time I have come across two criticisms of the account from laypeople again and again; to address them, I will show in greater detail than before why we would give in to (socially mediated bad faith) in the first place, and suggest a more relatable way in which (in)authenticity can preside over the objective/material. In addition, it is useful to see how Sartre is entitled to talk about the positive assistance we (should) give others. So far, the examples we have considered focus disproportionately on the inauthentic, on how not to act.

⁴⁶⁸ This would require an account of its possibility on par in complexity and length with the *Search For a Method*.

Section Two: The Pain (and Difficulty) of Project Shifts.

Here I would like to start addressing an external critique: why would we enter into shared delusions, often harming others and ourselves, in defiance of a pre-reflective awareness that this is the case? Is anguish really so bad that we would be prepared to constantly endure a low-level awareness of a problem, rather than fixing it? This, to many laypeople I have spoken to about authenticity, is the weakest point of the abstract story. So why, if we doubt that everyone feels anguish to be a significant threat, would we give into bad faith and the inauthentic life?

One answer is that it can be the only way to keep a coherent self in existence at all, under threat of a total disintegration which goes beyond anguish. In the usual case of bad faith, although other selves are available to us, it is merely painful for us to switch to or adopt them and avoid anguish. In Catalano's example of the struggling rower with his date,⁴⁶⁹ for instance, he stays with a grandiose self-image since it is less painful to endure the suppressed sting of anguish than to abruptly realise he is out of shape, that he is not suave, and that his date is laughing at him. In this case it is reasonably safe to describe the problem as one of self-honesty. The evidence is there and clear-cut; does the rower listen? This is straightforwardly a matter of personal responsibility, of the kind captured by the naïve reading of the *ASJ* authenticity definition. Moreover, there is a readily available path out of bad faith; the only thing stopping us from taking it is ourselves.

To see how we could face a stronger motivation to bad faith, we have to make sense of the idea that it can be "painful but not difficult" to effect a change in our projects. Earlier we glossed the difference between the two as being a difference between describing our experience of the transition as valuable or disvaluable and describing the underpinning structure of our projects as such, but this needs unpacking to be useful. Recall to begin with that projects cause there to be values in the world at all, and those values are of the form of a demand. This demand is, either that some unrealised state of affairs should come to be, or that something which already is should either continue to exist or stop existing. As we saw, our overall set of projects is, or can be, immensely complex, and together these disparate parts form "the organic totality of the projects which I am";⁴⁷⁰ every project we have is linked back to this totality since "the possible under consideration refers to other possibles, these to still others, and so on to the ultimate possibility which I am".⁴⁷¹ If

⁴⁶⁹ See Chapter Four, above, for my discussion of this example.

⁴⁷⁰ *BN*, p.476.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.482.

the objective circumstances a project needs are threatened, we will experience a normative pull on us to remove the threat or replace/repair them. For instance, my project to stay dry will be threatened if the roof leaks, so I experience the leak as disvaluable. As we also saw above,⁴⁷² when projects are destroyed or defeated this can happen without us experiencing a value associated with that change. If I go to the builder's merchant expecting to buy slate roof tiles and find they only have terracotta, the project "get slate tiles" loses its validity⁴⁷³ and is replaced immediately by "get terracotta tiles". If (since) they both service the project "repair the roof as soon as possible" equally well, there is no problem. However, there are cases where a project shift does evoke the experience of value, and it is there we can find the source of the "pain" in a project shift.

In the simple case above, the two projects are functionally indistinguishable in the support they provide for an overarching goal; it does not matter whether the tiles are slate or terracotta if we only care about whether there is a watertight roof or not, so the shift carries no positive or negative value. Yet if we imagine a more complex case where there is a tension between two alternatives, we can see how the pain of making a choice comes about. Imagine a committed carnivore whose choice to eat meat has become integral to their life. They have learned to cook all kinds of meats with skill, spending huge amounts of time studying butchery and acquiring expensive equipment like smokers, outdoor barbecues, high quality knives etc for this purpose. Imagine they then read a philosophy paper which shows, beyond their ability to deny it, that eating meat is irredeemably immoral. Yet their meat-eating does not stop; they find themselves wracked with guilt and doubt about their behaviour but continue. Let's further assume that they are authentic but they still feel this pain.⁴⁷⁴ One way to explain this situation is in terms of a normal protection mechanism for valid projects and the sheer number of projects that vegetarianism touches on. If our projects manifest threats to their realisation as disvalues, then abandoning the project has to be a danger itself. My deciding to give up is just as much a threat to a project as missing the objective prerequisites (e.g. tools, materials). A vague disillusionment and lapsing, i.e. a faltering of my mobiles, is a threat to my vegetarianism as much as an objective consideration like having to eat meat or starve. Yet, if our projects are simply annihilated when they are no longer valid,⁴⁷⁵ how can we hold and sustain a wrongheaded project outside of inauthenticity (bad faith)?

⁴⁷² In the sections on truth and knowledge in Chapter Four.

⁴⁷³ i.e. since fetching slate tiles is no longer an option, the motif relating to slate is not available so a full project structure of motif-mobile-end is denied to us.

⁴⁷⁴ I.e., they don't have a bad faith project like an inferiority project that demands they try and fail at something and which latches onto meat eating as moral failure to sustain it.

⁴⁷⁵ For context, see the discussion of knowledge and presence in Chapter Four.

One answer comes from looking at the (subjective) validity of our projects as dependent on an equilibrium between those projects, and asking what causes that equilibrium to be disturbed. If they do not rule each other out absolutely, or all mutually reinforce each other, the equilibrium is maintained; if a project or set of projects conflicts with the others, there is an imbalance that must be corrected; we can recreate a stable configuration again at the cost of giving up some projects or committing to new ones.⁴⁷⁶ This is what is meant by the “fundamental modification of my original choice of myself”⁴⁷⁷ that we discussed earlier with reference to freedom more generally. However, there is and has to be a certain tolerance for sustaining projects where it is unclear if they fit together. This tolerance is a function of the ambiguity of our projects, and of the ambiguities of possible engagements with the world. The inauthentic character (and ignorance as a form of bad faith) exploits this ambiguity, which is unavoidable. In *Truth and Existence*, we see the tubercular T. ignoring the symptoms of her disease,⁴⁷⁸ the cough, blood in the phlegm, etc. She avoids treatment by ignoring the possibility that they are unrelated; in her case it is clear to anyone, especially to her, that they ought to mean she has a serious problem. We could imagine more borderline cases than hers – an intermittent cough, exhaustion which starts at the same time as the in-laws arrive in town, etc. What makes it alright to ignore coughing three times a day (or more precisely, not to assimilate it into a “tubercular reality”) is that the other symptoms are missing, and the severity of the cough is exceptionally mild. The question has to be, what makes the isolated cough fine to ignore, but a persistent one a genuine problem?

An answer comes from a basic Sartrean point, which was implicitly there in his essay on intentionality: our projects are not given to us all at once and immediately; they evolve over time. Whilst we are infallibly aware of the current⁴⁷⁹ and past phases of a project insofar as we *are* that project, we are not aware of all the twists and turns of chance that will influence it, nor are we always perfectly aware of all the other (sub) projects that we will be required to adopt along the way. I might form a project to buy cat food, but until I encounter the blocked road on the way to the shop that project does not explicitly contain a sub-project to follow a diversion. Avoiding obstacles on the way to the shop, an ambiguous and loose (sub) project, is the most specific commitment I

⁴⁷⁶ See the discussion of the project of fatigue and the “price” of resisting fatigue at *BN* 476 – 86.

⁴⁷⁷ *BN*, p.486.

⁴⁷⁸ *T&E*, p. 33 onwards.

⁴⁷⁹ We have to be aware of the current dimension of a project because that awareness is the same as being aware of any value whatsoever.

had when I set off. So long as any current threat to our projects is necessary but not sufficient to collapse a project, we can keep our old commitments. Coughing a few times might be necessary but not sufficient to incorporate a tubercular element to my character, for instance. It ambiguously points to irritants in the air, to eating too quickly, to the flu, and to tuberculosis – to a horizon of things so wide it barely counts as evidence for any of them. This horizon of possibilities is a horizon of possible/virtual futures where I ambiguously might be fine after some water, better when the pollen count goes down, or where my life is in grave danger. All of these things are given as possible by the project, but none of them are definitive.

It is only as a part of a constellation of related symptoms that a cough makes tuberculosis a live possibility or a certainty. As the evidence accumulates, the number of healthy futures the present can refer to goes down, until the possibility of good health collapses around us. The same general point is true for any project we might want to have, even in spite of certain projects where it seems like one piece of weak evidence settles an issue.⁴⁸⁰ Apparently glimpsing enemy soldiers in the brush, even just seeing something glint a mile away, might definitively warrant hiding more deeply, readying weapons, signalling reinforcements, etc. These cases are unusual and don't hurt the overall point. Staying alive in war might involve a subproject like "avoid false negatives at all costs"; there's a special, non-bad faith, consideration there about the nature of evidence since even one enemy patrol will kill you. Nonetheless, it's still ambiguous if the enemy *is* about; I am just committed to acting in spite of that ambiguity because of potential practical consequences of inaction.

In sum, there has to be a well-formed motivational structure under these more ambiguous cases; there isn't either total random chaos or Buradin's ass. Unless a certain state of affairs is completely pushed out of the horizon of possibility, our related projects will exert normative force on us, they will always "demand" to keep going and for that state of affairs to be realised or preserved. In the bad faith case, someone like Sartre's tubercular woman can organise their life around never being (reflectively and thematically) aware of their condition, but in that instance there is no *genuine* ambiguity about the situation – they are well (pre-reflectively) aware that all their healthy futures have collapsed. However, we can experience ambiguity in good faith simply because it isn't clear what will happen in the future, what demands will be placed on us, or whether our projects are really coherent. Preserving an uncertain engagement with the world is legitimate insofar as we might still verify it later. We can hold two or more contradictory projects at once without a problem

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p.29: "All intuition is not instantaneous; all intuition temporalizes itself".

so long as they are all *provisional*, so long as they are all waiting to be proven to fit the objective world or dissolved. This makes the nature of the “pain” in project shifts so common-sense as to beggar belief: if projects conflict, whichever way I act will be resisted by the other projects, for as long as all are held in being. This resistance manifests as feelings like being conflicted, torn by indecision, or troubled by a choice we are sure we must make but which we still despise.

Of course, we all know that some project shifts are more painful than others; deciding whether to buy shares in Boeing or Activision is nothing like deciding whether to end a formerly close relationship. One way of looking at why is by imagining us as having a soup of hypothetical minimal projects which all exert one quantum of normative force. Two projects which co-depend effectively exert twice their valuative weight, since challenging one is effectively the same as challenging both. One threatened project which is intimately bound up with a hundred other projects will punch at a hundred times above its weight, and so on. The only hard constraint here is that, in line with our conclusions about authenticity, the value of freedom itself remains absolute. Whilst Sartre himself would doubtless be appalled by this quasi-utilitarian schema, it lets us explain why some projects are harder to defeat than others since we have to push through a greater mass of disvalue to open up the space for their collapse. When we claim we have become vegetarian yet still feel conflicted, it would be more accurate to say we are actively clearing the ground for full-fledged vegetarianism to take place but are currently in limbo, waiting for our projects to grow into forms that can come into conflict with the established equilibrium. How do the projects solidify? By exposing ourselves and the new, nascent project to the world, testing the truths it supplies us with, verifying that it works by actively trying to engage with the world through it.⁴⁸¹ Contact with the world shrinks the horizon of possible futures until our projects become certain; it makes our available motifs more certain and workable. Once we have verified our projects (knowledge), the pain or disvalue coming from alternative projects (knowledge) will dissipate.

Why does Sartre claim that this process is not difficult even though it can be immensely painful? I understand this to mean something simple: we can always freely choose to start down any path that is within the horizon of our possibilities, and the only thing stopping us from following through on a valid project is the pain, the resistance our prior projects throw up to the tipping of the balance. In this wide sense, it is easy to change projects, and does not require any fundamental, structural

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p.14: “[t]ruth reveals itself to action. All action is knowledge”.

change to consciousness. One added benefit of this reading is that it contributes to and explains the experienced stability of our projects without removing the threats that provoke anguish; it allows some of our projects to become entrenched but leaves the strangeness of action untouched.

Section Three: Inauthenticity and the Threat of Destruction.

The important consequence of this analysis is that it shows how the bad faith of others (and/or a kind of structural bad faith in a community) can have horrifying, toxic effects on us. Other thinkers gave this a much deeper analysis than the early Sartre; in the latter chapters of *Self and Others*, Laing described a distinction between “false” and “untenable” situations which is illuminating.

Adopting, or being put in, a false situation is extremely similar being in bad faith: Laing contrasts a false or “counterfeit” situation from a genuine one by saying “[w]hen a man’s words, gestures, acts disclose his real intentions, one says they are genuine and not counterfeit as coin is genuine and not counterfeit”.⁴⁸² In context, we can read this as meaning a false situation is one where our avowed intentions/projects/actions do not correspond to our actual intentions/projects/actions. By the same token, this makes the false situation an irrational one, which helps explain why being in it is dangerous. Much as in bad faith, nothing done within a false situation can resolve the conflicts posed by/in it: “[t]rue conflict is clarifying. False conflict is muddling. When the issue is false and confused, the real or true conflict cannot come into focus, true choices are not available”.⁴⁸³ However, the false position is generally local and limited, it is whether the date on the lake is going well, whether it matters that my hand has been taken, and so on. A false situation might be an episode of bad faith or a localised piece of inauthenticity.

By contrast, an untenable position describes a wide, even global situation; someone within it can expect that “no matter how he feels or how he acts, or what meaning the situation has, his feelings are denuded of validity, his acts are stripped of their motives, intentions, and consequences, the situation is robbed of its meaning.” Left unaddressed, this kind of situation leads to a radical breakdown of our agency, since neither the resources we have to draw on, nor the ends that might be up for grabs, can be relied on. Without room for an adequate motif or end, the world is disrupted; whatever I do will be uncertain and painful, with no possible resolution to or productive issue from that pain. At the extreme, a coherent world becomes impossible and yet consciousness remains, our projects only barely coherent enough to count as such and under permanent threat. On the face of it, this situation looks like it includes the experience of full-strength anguish. It is the radical destruction of all possible futures since all possible meaning has been collapsed in advance.

⁴⁸² Laing, *Self and Others*, p.130.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.143.

How is a completely untenable situation possible? As Laing points out, it can be the result of bad faith, on my part or on the part of others, since “[t]hose who deceive themselves are obliged to deceive others. It is impossible for me to maintain a false picture of myself unless I falsify your picture of yourself and me”. One way of surviving objectification under bad faith is, as we have seen several times, to enter into a collective bad faith which is stable.⁴⁸⁴ However, this is only possible where the motivations of the other are relatively stable and/or predictable – if there is nothing stable to conform to, not even a straightforward bad faith is possible; we are worse off since constant adaptation of our bad faith makes each subproject of bad faith that much flimsier – since it can and will be destroyed constantly. If we live under the conditions of the “double bind”, then that constant destruction of our projects becomes a reality for us. What makes a situation a double bind? To begin with, it has to involve more than one person, and has to be made up of repeated episodes that follow a pattern – it is, as Laing quotes Bateson, “such repeated experience that the double bind situation comes to be an habitual expectation”.⁴⁸⁵ There must then be an overt command which threatens severe, if not existential danger if it is disobeyed. This is counterbalanced by a second command, implicit or explicit, which carries the same level of threat but contradicts the first. Depending on which prong of the dilemma is being directly levelled at us, we can adopt a position that fails against the other; eventually, since we are confronted all the time with the inadequacies of our positions (otherwise, why would we be motivated to swap between them?), we will make the switch perpetually. Eventually, designing our projects to fail efficiently and be replaced/rebuilt quickly becomes a survival mechanism.

This condition is worse than an ordinary encounter with anguish, since the other is effectively *forcing* us to experience an anguish-like breakdown of our projects which is nightmarishly difficult to counter, either in bad faith or through our authenticity. The problem here is that the intermediate, limbo state our projects (can) enter and which is responsible for the pain of project transitions becomes semi-permanent, or even permanent. Laing shows us how this can come about through “the presence of numerous disclaimed, unavowed, contradictory and paradoxical implications”⁴⁸⁶ in a situation which make it a double bind. In a small-group situation, the ostensive statement “it’s cold” can really mean the injunction “put on the fire”; at the obviously malicious end, offers of help like “we’ll arrange a nice change for you” can really be a threat: “If you don’t stop behaving like this,

⁴⁸⁴ Laing himself was familiar with Sartre’s early work and cites *No Exit* to explain that this can happen: “[e]ach cannot sustain his ‘bad faith’ without collusion with another, each remains tormented and haunted by anxiety and despair.” (*Self and Others*, p.112.)

⁴⁸⁵ Laing, *Self and Others*, p.144.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.160.

we'll send you away". Once we spot these patterns, it should be easy to point them out, but if there really is an existential threat⁴⁸⁷ then we add an extra pole to the internal conflict which is so painful. Moreover, if the originators close ranks, or are simply forceful enough in their denials, the process can continue: "Jack will deny that he has implied anything, and moreover imply that Jill is wrong, mad, or bad to think anything is implied. This implication in turn is made and disavowed. The next time a plain statement is made, and Jill reacts to it as a plain statement, she will be accused of being insensitive, or of wilfully refusing to 'know perfectly well' what is meant". If our lives in general are governed by this kind of structure, it is impossible to stabilise the equilibrium of our projects, since that restabilisation requires a (relatively) coherent amount of evidence to come from the (objective) world and from others. At any given time, the essence of being in an impossible double bind like this is that we can neither be sure we are about to act appropriately, nor are we sure whether we have done so in the past. We constantly feel on edge, since a huge number of our projects seem under threat at all times. By comparison, being in garden variety bad faith, suffering a low level awareness that our projects are inconsistent but never having to confront them, is a release. Bad faith, in the worst case, is enforced on us because the alternative is absolutely nuclear.

If the threat forcing us into bad faith really can be this severe, the (strands of) bad faith offered (or spontaneously developed) as an alternative have to be powerful as well. It must be true that, in the words of Erich Fromm, "the culture provides patterns which enable them to *live with a defect without becoming ill*",⁴⁸⁸ i.e. without being exposed to full-strength nausea or anguish, or else other-relations would be in serious danger of breaking down. In his words,

*If a person fails to attain freedom, spontaneity, a genuine expression of self, he may be considered to have a severe defect, provided we assume that freedom and spontaneity are the objective goals to be attained by every human being. If such a goal is not met by the majority of members of any given society, we deal with the phenomenon of the socially patterned defect. The individual shares it with many others, and his security is not threatened.*⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁷ "Existential" in the sense of threatening our existence and/or a complete destruction of everything we hold dear.

⁴⁸⁸ Fromm, Erich. *The Sane Society*. Routledge: London, 1956. p.16.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

Section Four: Material and Objective aids to Bad Faith.

How does this abstract picture, which we might want to call purely psychological if that wasn't so anti-Sartrean, allow us to talk about and critique our actual relations with material things, and not just our abstract projects related to them? An example might help. Above (Chapter Five) we saw how we have to respect the objective conditions of others' projects to respect those projects, but it is useful to spell out at least one possible mechanism of our relation to objects in bad faith.

Otherwise, we can imagine a simple, devastating class of criticism: if we can't describe a connection to the objective/material even in outline, what stops our system being Orwell's "cerebration"?

For Sartre, the objects we possess can be intimately bound up with our character, since they can be both the material condition of our actions and also create or signify a certain style of action that defines us. He says: "[m]y lamp is not only that electric bulb, that shade, that wrought iron stand, it is a certain power of lighting *this* desk, *these* books, *this* table, a certain luminous nuance of my work at night in connection with my habits of reading or working late; it is animated, coloured, defined by the use I make of it; it *is* that use and exists only through it."⁴⁹⁰ This is a simple point: the specific objects in our possession, and the specific way we use them, are a vital part of constructing our habits and our way of going about things. We are never just people who read, we read for pleasure or for academic purposes; we read in a garden in daylight or on a lunch break under a fluorescent bulb; we read secondhand classics or new releases from the bestseller lists - all of these things create and reflect vastly different patterns of life. When I make my possessions exist, i.e. when I hang values onto them, I shape them in the light of the projects I have: "[t]he totality of my possessions reflects the totality of my being. I am what I have. It is myself which I touch in this cup, this trinket."⁴⁹¹ If my projects are visible in my possessions, over time those possessions can become a record of my character, since "everything which is mine ... all this informs me of my choice".⁴⁹²

In the best case, we can take our possessions' meaning and those of others at face value: I have this high-grade bow, well-kept in some ways, worn in others, because I *am* a match-grade archer. There's no affectation here, every single piece of my equipment is chosen and maintained to certain standards because I fully endorse the demands of that lifestyle and those projects. Or we might have

⁴⁹⁰ *BN*, p. 611.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 485.

possessions which promise a certain future which has yet to be realised, but which we are making every good faith and authentic effort to bring about. Say I buy a series of books on a certain political topic because I am convinced everyone should learn about it – it would be inaccurate, all other things being equal, to say that I am lacking the proper interest. Yet that’s only the first step in living up to that project’s demands; it’s still ambiguous whether or not I am going to meet them. My purchase, or rather, my acquisition, of those books owes everything it contributes to my character to a future that is still in question. Asserting that I *am* politically active just because I have them becomes a classic act of bad faith by the definition we saw earlier – it is an appeal to the future which justifies an identity claim in the present. Whilst possession will always be appropriative in the sense that it is involved in the “project to become God”, there is clearly a difference between merely using objects to project identity, and subsuming the possession of those objects under a higher goal. This is why Fromm made the quasi-Marxist observation that “[t]he *human* [i.e., the authentically human] way of acquiring would be to make an effort qualitatively commensurate with what I acquire ... the acquisition of books and paintings [would depend] on my effort to understand them and my ability to use them”.⁴⁹³ Without our making the effort to understand them, they cannot authentically contribute to the quenching of existential lack.

All of this becomes more complicated when we consider mostly or entirely artificial associations between objects and experiences, many of them created by advertisers. When the Coca-Cola company started associating itself with images of smiling young people enjoying themselves, or with the spirit of Christmas, or with friendship when they recently put common names on their bottles, they did not, and could not have, create a real connection with their product and the lifestyles/characters they were promoting. If anything, the slim, smiling, healthy individuals which appeared on their vending machines up to the 2000s would have their figures jeopardised by drinking flavoured sugar solution regularly. This point was already a commonplace before Sartre’s time: Fromm observed that “[w]ith a bottle of Coca-Cola we drink the picture of the pretty boy and girl who drink it in the advertisement, we drink the slogan of ‘the pause that refreshes’”.⁴⁹⁴ The connection is tenuous at best and normally nothing short of magical – simply drinking the same products as someone who lives up to an ideal is supposed to signify that we are the same as them, by affirming the consequent. For the sake of consistency we also have to see this as an appeal to the timelessness of my character: today, I am consuming this product like the courageous types in the adverts, and either this completes a courageous character or shows that I, infallibly, will adopt one.

⁴⁹³ Fromm, *Sane Society*, p. 132.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.133.

Tracing this kind of association past the obvious connections gets incredibly convoluted, very quickly, but the basic structure is there.

Like any form of bad faith, the appeal to my possessions is unstable and needs to be reinforced. Where we own objects that straightforwardly try to confer identity, that identity is incredibly fragile. Let's say I own a complete set of expensive cookware but never put it to use, and in fact have atrocious to middling skill with it on the few occasions I do. The identity claim will stand up to only light scrutiny; whilst I might be able to explain what the gear does, I won't be able to produce evidence I am a good cook because I just won't be able to make good food on it. Nor will I be able to appeal to past episodes of good cooking to establish a pattern; the relevant character evidence is missing. If I try and fail to produce that evidence, I can either double down on my bad faith, experiencing a stronger and hence more painful feeling of awareness it will collapse, or be forced to give up. Yet given an abundance of resources, it is possible and easy to try the same manoeuvre with another identity rather than having to confront why I was pretending to be, e.g., a cook. I can plausibly say something like, whilst I had to give up cooking, it turns out that I am actually a musician, or that I have discovered a new passion for rowing. Unless my wider motivations to keep on pretending at roles get challenged, the unpleasant feeling of my projects leaving equilibrium can be banished immediately every time, by a cure that is always close at hand.

Assuming there is an available abundance of products and services, Sartre's own analysis of money shows how it becomes a key feature of this magical wish-fulfilment through ownership of property. He says that where the relation between labour and producing goods is obscured, both the relationship between property and character and our relationship to the labourers is "hidden but not suppressed"⁴⁹⁵ since "[m]oney represents my strength; it is less a possession in itself than an instrument for possessing". Money, in bad faith, becomes a measure of my power to acquire character, to have money or credit is worth nothing in itself but allows us to continue "acquiring character" through possessions for as long as possible. This also extends to the trend of acquiring "experiences", because learning for one day how to forge a dagger does not make you a blacksmith any more than seeing whales in an afternoon's boat ride makes you a marine biologist or an explorer. Fromm was well aware of this when he said that the alienated consumer "consumes ball games, moving pictures, newspapers and magazines, books, lectures, natural scenery, social gatherings, in the same alienated and abstracted way in which he consumes the commodities he has

⁴⁹⁵ *BN*, p.610.

bought”.⁴⁹⁶ Despite the actual inadequacy of acquiring and consuming these things in satisfying our desires, the ability to buy symbolic things outright “suppresses the *technical* connection of subject and object and renders the desire immediately operative, like the magic wishes of fairy tales”.⁴⁹⁷ This is exactly what makes a painless switch between identities possible through consumption, potentially removing the sting of those identities being hollow and false.

We might think that, if all of this is pointed out, we can be liberated from our bad faith. Since our failed appeals to identity through possession and consumption will repeat themselves, over and over again, there must be a limit to the number of times we can go on making them. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily lead to an escape from the problem. Recall how, following Webber’s reading, it doesn’t ultimately matter whether Garcin is attempting to make himself brave *or* cowardly in *No Exit* – whichever move he is making, he is in bad faith. If I am repeatedly failing to achieve identity through my consumptive/possessive conducts, I can make this very failure to achieve identity an identity. I can actively become a loser, unhappily stuck in the lack of character my half-baked, magical conducts give me. Because this result traces out a consistent narrative, it can be picked out and identified, and I can appeal to it as my destiny, either in a past that shapes my future unavoidably or in a future which shows I was never anything else. In other words, I can use the failure of all my previous projects in bad faith as the foundation of a new life in bad faith. This is a classic inferiority project as Sartre conceives of it, “nothing other than the organised totality of my failure behaviour, as a projected plan, as a general device of my being”.⁴⁹⁸ It also follows that to sustain this, the societal structures supporting it have to deny that they support an inferiority project. After all, an inferiority project requires that we avow (and are allowed to avow) attempt(s) at success. Irrespective of the actual, historical details required, it should be apparent now that the early Sartre can be entitled to this kind of analysis and that through it can produce an ethics – even if the loose analyses that prove this are a jumping-off point at best.

By being entitled to or having the resources for an ethics, I mean that Sartre’s ethical system, as I have set it out, can (and has to) provide actionable, concrete demands that regulate our behaviour and our relations with others in meaningful ways. If knowledge is gained through action, action is mediated by the objective world,⁴⁹⁹ *and* we have to respect the objective situation of the other, demands on knowledge are (in part) demands on how we alter the objective world. These demands

⁴⁹⁶ Fromm, *Sane Society*, p. 136.

⁴⁹⁷ *BN*, p. 610.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

⁴⁹⁹ See Chapter Two and Chapter Three, above.

include not disrupting the other's projects as much as they include valuing (our own) freedom, and that lack of interference includes not disrupting the body or the personal effects of the other. Something concrete like a wall is not just an assemblage of stuff; it carries within it the other's desire for safety, forms part of the bed they need to grow food, keeps their flock in check and assures their livelihood. Insofar as nothing gives me the inherent right to interfere with those projects, I similarly cannot justify harming their means to those projects – including their person. Hence Sartre's claims such as:

*There is no abstract ethics. There is only ethics in a situation and therefore it is concrete ... Ethics is the theory of action. But action is abstract if it is not work and struggle. For example: to save an infant who has drowned. Absurd. Concrete problems: Should Luther have abandoned the peasants during the peasant war?*⁵⁰⁰

Ethics depends on its historical context, on the projects that we illuminate, call back to, and interfere with when we act. In the spirit of showing how this Sartrean account really can rule over our interactions with others, it is useful to consider how good or desirable actions are to be understood and promoted – and to understand how the untenable, impossible situation interfaces and interferes directly with our attempts to respect the other's freedom.

⁵⁰⁰ *Notebooks*, p.17.

Section Five: Assisting the Other: The Appeal.

So how are we to develop a positive understanding of the duty to respect the other's freedom and the constant demand to improve our picture of the world? Mainly, by seeing how these two demands intersect in what Sartre calls the "appeal". The "appeal" is a request for assistance, the analysis of which takes us beyond simply *not harming* others as in the Andersonian torturer example.

The (in)authentic torturer, recall, was ultimately impossible because of his (likely pre-reflective) necessary understanding of the other's abstract freedom and the nature of value. If we imagine an abstract inauthentic torturer realising that his actions are unsupportable, we do not get past what Sartre calls "help", a gratuitous, disinterested aid-giving which is not interested in the specifics of the other's life or circumstances. "Help" in this technical sense is a pure urge to assist, which does not recognise the other in their full freedom.⁵⁰¹ Another example of help would be seeing someone at the station struggle to carry a bag and rushing to assist, without asking what is in the bag and why they are carrying it. For all I know, there could be anything inside – from a holiday's worth of clean clothes to a shipment of weapons bound for evildoers. Helpfulness of this kind does not go past Sartre's basic Schelerian points about value – the formal character of the end as an end is all that matters here. Valuing the other's end, even valuing it absolutely, does not imply an understanding or comprehension of the end at all – all it implies is that I see another's (valued) goal is at stake. It includes a "refusal to transcend"⁵⁰² this purely formal position. The properly ethical position, by contrast, implies an "appeal", which Sartre initially defines as "a request made by someone to someone in the name of something"⁵⁰³ In other words, it's a request for assistance with a particular, concrete goal. Once the goal aimed at is concrete and not formal, we reach the level of "recognition of a personal freedom in situation by a personal freedom in situation, transcending the purely formal value of an end".⁵⁰⁴ So what are the salient features of this recognition?

Firstly, an appeal builds the relation between the petitioner and their assistant through the course of the (shared) goal – they do not depend on a "given solidarity"⁵⁰⁵ but instead construct that solidarity in and through the appeal and the giving of assistance. In simpler terms, asking for assistance and getting it creates the relationship between the pair. The appeal also implies that the project is

⁵⁰¹ *Notebooks*, p.275.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, p.276.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

communicated; it is not (only) intuited like when I see someone who needs help with their luggage - it is explicitly given to me by the other. The difference, at least to begin with, is between seeing someone holding an end, and being asked "please help me with *this* end": this luggage, this illness, etc. Why is this significant? Because it points to the importance of freedom being in (a) situation. Since conscious freedom can only exist (can only create its world) in light of the objective world it is in, it makes no sense to talk about a purely abstract freedom or consciousness except as an initial tool for understanding and explaining the system. By the time we are asking about the world of the for-itself as the reality of a human freedom, that ship has well and truly sailed. The torturer tortures someone who opposes a political party, who wants freedom for their people, they torture their (bosses') opponents. A real, concrete appeal to a torturer to renounce torture entirely might be the appeal to stop interfering with freedom, to stop supporting oppressive regimes as well as to stop devaluing the freedom of the specific captive.

Any ethics which deals with a purely abstract freedom cannot be compatible with an ethics which makes the appeal significant. *Existentialism and Humanism* fails this test in spectacular fashion when Sartre deploys a universalizability argument to create an intrasubjective ethics. Summarising his argument, Sartre paraphrases (part of) the basic Schelerian thesis on value: "[t]o choose between this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of that which is chosen; for we are unable ever to choose the worse". So far, so uncontroversial. Yet he goes on: "if, moreover, existence precedes essence and we will to exist at the same time as we fashion our image, that image is valid for all and for the entire epoch in which we find ourselves".⁵⁰⁶ This is patently false if we take the idea that consciousness is always (already) in situation seriously. Unless we are in exactly the same situation as another, or a very close approximation, it is outright impossible for us to push our goals and values on others without treating them as a merely formal consciousness. If I, for instance, desire to have children, I cannot also will that someone carrying the genes for cystic fibrosis and terrified of passing it on should have children unless I completely ignore their circumstances and wishes.

This is why, by the time of the *Notebooks*, Sartre denies the possibility that our holding values contains the idea that *only* those values are valuable, or that only those values *ought* to be valuable. Implicitly, the naïve universalisation formula of *Existentialism and Humanism*, read strongly, is this exact claim. Hence Sartre's denial of that idea: "[t]o say 'in his place I would have done the same

⁵⁰⁶ *EH*, p. 29.

thing' is purely formal, since I am not, nor will I be, in his place".⁵⁰⁷ By extension, any implicit assertion to that effect is also involved in a purely formal understanding of the other, an understanding which does not go past seeing the formal value of their ends as the ends of (free) consciousness. This is not to deny the basic thesis that freedom, and all that it projects, is valuable, but it is to reaffirm that we can only value freedom in the abstract in and through valuing a concrete, embodied freedom in situation. The *inauthentic* torturer, remember, is incapable of valuing his prisoner's abstract freedom whilst concretely denying him free rein to act and mortifying his flesh.⁵⁰⁸ Moreover, the idea that our values (can) formally suggest the other's values should be overridden does not entail that we have to act on that possibility, since the conflict is *not* the only possible mode of intersubjective relations.

The appeal, insofar as it is an appeal to another concrete, embodied freedom, takes into account the other's projects – it recognises that the other has neither an identical freedom nor one they share with us. Per the above discussion, appeals are not based on an imaginary other, identical to us, and placed into the same situation. Instead they acknowledge that the other has different goals to us, and stands in a different relation to the world. This is a completely everyday part of our lives, and Sartre's example of an appeal is likewise everyday: "[i]f I ask for information from a shopkeeper, I take account of her preoccupations, I have to be quick and precise, and my attitude warns her that I know in advance that I have interrupted her in her preoccupations".⁵⁰⁹ Being conciliatory, trying to be quick and efficient, these are ways Sartre is trying to respect her goals which he might interrupt. Knowing that those goals are important to her means that "[f]rom the beginning, I conceive that this very situation may be one that prevents her from answering me". Accepting that the other might *not* drop their projects to assist me means I accept their projects are as valid as mine, even if "this in no way signifies that I accept them for me, otherwise they would be obligatory". Recognising this diversity, however, also means that I have a certain minimal level of understanding of their goals. For Sartre to acknowledge the shopkeeper as busy he has to have a decent comprehension of what she is trying to do – her need to stock-take, the need to serve other customers, etc. Comprehension of the other brings us back into the epistemological dimension of ethics.

Insofar as I gain knowledge by engaging with the world, knowledge of the other originally comes from interacting with them. Even if I have never met a certain shopkeeper before, my assumptions about how to act are driven by prior interactions of a similar type, or by others telling me what to

⁵⁰⁷ *Notebooks*, p.276.

⁵⁰⁸ See Chapter Five, Section One, above.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.274.

expect who *have* had dealings with people in similar roles or circumstances. In order for the other's goals to be revealed to me, I have to interact with them – I have to attempt a project which involves them, and acquire knowledge from the successes and failures of those projects. This is why Sartre says that “[t]he other's end can appear to me as an end only in and through the indication of my adopting that end. This is what gives a meaning to the other's operation, but reciprocally is what gets unveiled in that operation”.⁵¹⁰ Only by engaging with the other's action can I meaningfully comprehend their projects; I must either make an appeal to them or respond to their appeal to do this in good faith.⁵¹¹ The necessity of engaging with the other's project in order to comprehend it, even though that might seem like an obvious point, becomes important later – it suggests and predicts that there are limits to appeals.

Sufficient⁵¹² comprehension of the other's projects, considered in itself, rules out at least three states of affairs between myself and the other. Firstly, it rules out that the other's position is completely incomprehensible to me.⁵¹³ This might be because of prior circumstances and unreflective of bad faith on either of our parts – military service and battle, winning a major sports event, or major traumas like torture or rape are all outlier events that are difficult (if not impossible) to understand without experiencing them directly. Likewise, we must rule out a deliberate failure to understand, a kind of contempt that understands what the other wants in order to reject it. If I know the other is interested in something I disapprove of or find boring, like stamp collecting or watching science fiction, that disapproval is always (or at least very often) predicated on knowing what is involved. If I say I “do not understand why” someone would go to trade fairs for rare and old stamps, that entails an understanding of the practical steps – e.g., the time and money taken, and at least a theoretical understanding of the drive that pushes them to do it. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, the “failure to understand” is actually the wish for them to place the same value on something I *do* approve of. I understand very well the strong, overriding valuational pull to acquiring a 1918 Curtiss Jenny but see it as a waste of affect that could be “spent” on more useful things. This failure to comprehend is doubly in bad faith: neither do I relevantly misunderstand the other, nor am I treating them as a free consciousness. Lastly and relatedly, it rules out what Sartre, in delightful Yiddish, calls kibitzing:⁵¹⁴ backseat driving or quarterbacking. In this context, it means disregarding

⁵¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.277.

⁵¹¹ And, a pattern of such good faith responses is needed for authenticity.

⁵¹² i.e. sufficient for true authentic engagement.

⁵¹³ See *Notebooks*, pp. 284/5.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

the freedom of the other entirely, which is a straightforward relation of and in bad faith. Which makes perfect sense – transcending the other’s wishes to achieve their project⁵¹⁵ for them denies us insight into their actual wishes.

The latter blocks to understanding, kibitzing and a self-important failure-but-not-failure to understand, should seem par for the course by now. They both treat the other as unimportant in straightforward ways, respectively not trusting them to execute their projects and disregarding those projects entirely. The idea that ordinary people can’t understand what it’s like to develop Gulf War syndrome or win a world cup is obvious, but using these major examples to explain a knowledge barrier is somewhat unhelpful or even disingenuous; they do not represent the biggest sources of (absolute) failure to comprehend the other. Instead, we should see the untenable situation as both a leading cause of these failures and comorbid with other reasons why untenable situations come about. The untenable situation can be part of an absolutely banal life.

Remember how, per Laing’s definition,⁵¹⁶ an untenable situation exists where:

- A) An agent lives under at least two expectations, one of which is explicit and the other implicit.
- B) These expectations are in tension/contradiction.

And

- C) Attempting to point out the contradiction or leave those (perceived) expectations (appears) to be impossible, usually due to existential threat.⁵¹⁷

Recall, too, that the easiest responses to these situations is bad faith, the alternative being outright anguish and all the problems that brings. I want to suggest here that the example of the flirt, with a few added details, is an example of someone in bad faith as a response to an untenable situation. Let’s imagine, borrowing the extra detail Eshleman adds,⁵¹⁸ and giving her and her date the same names he does (Claudette and Pierre), that the major source of her apparent coquettishness is a strong Catholic faith (or at least, the need to keep up Catholic appearances). This faith carries with it the requirement to suppress her sexuality; to sleep with her date immediately would be sinful and

⁵¹⁵ Or worse, what we might mistakenly or carelessly understand to be their project.

⁵¹⁶ Laing, *Self and Others* p.125 (on the double bind as a model of untenable situations).

⁵¹⁷ I.e., *wholesale* destruction of her projects which may or may not be due to physical deprivation or suffering.

⁵¹⁸ See Eshleman, “The Mislplaced Chapter on Bad Faith”, p. 14-15.

an affront to others in the Catholic community and God. However, let's also imagine that her society tells her she must enjoy herself and indulge desires of all sorts, or else live a boring (and hence bad) life. So in her case we have the following injunctions:

Explicitly: Claudette must be a good catholic and not have sex on a first date or she is a sinner and will be ostracised.

Implicitly: She must indulge her desires (of all kinds) or else be dull, not worthy of befriending, and so suffer a soft form of ostracism.

(In fact, it's inessential which is implicit and which is explicit, and just like she can reverse the polarity of the bad faith shielding her from the situation, the two demands can swap between being explicit and implicit without destroying the problem as a whole.)

The existential threats she faces come from the dual threats of ostracism: whichever perceived threat she responds to or deals with, she always stands to lose her social standing and any projects which hinge on it.

Coming back to comprehension and things that block it, her problem can only be explained properly as a whole and in context. Lacking that context, someone hearing Claudette complain about her faith's demands might say something like "go ahead, just enjoy yourself", completely failing to understand her. Equally if she talks about how hard it is to maintain her faith in spite of the dating culture she lives in, she might expect to be told she is a sinner, or weak, and so on. The fear of being called out in either way might have a chilling effect on her even trying to describe these problems to another; if she can't expect a coherent response or for her problem to be addressed, why would she even try? Even if the other has the urge to help, the formal understanding that her projects are threatened but valuable, there is no guarantee that they can comprehend Claudette's problem or projects. It's true that if I rule out passing judgment on her behaviour/projects, and/or quarterbacking her to a solution, I can still attempt to understand. I can still listen to her experiences and take them at face value. That response gets very close to Laing's empathetic response to schizophrenics and the schizotypal,⁵¹⁹ it means that I try to draw her experience out by taking her seriously as a freedom and not as an object. Yet this minimally freedom-respecting attitude still does

⁵¹⁹ See Laing, *The Divided Self* pp. 31-8.

not entail I can make use of what I learn, or even that I can internalise what I am being told in the way it is meant or in some other useful form. Even worse, it does not entail that the other understands where the problem originally comes from or that there is an untenable situation in effect. Claudette might simply experience her problems as a sense of unhappiness, even profound misery. What's worse, an *apparently* untenable situation is just as limiting to our actions: even if the other would respond well to our appeals, our past experiences can poison the ability to understand the threat has passed.

Section Six: Ignorance and Blocked Appeals.

Why, apart from the properly random effects of destiny,⁵²⁰ might I lack the relevant knowledge to respond to an appeal? Firstly, even if we do not act in bad faith, there might be relatively innocent reasons for my ignorance. The development of cliques and, on the macro scale, classes and castes causes incommunicability of ideas, for instance. Even if every individual appeal is more or less made in good faith, the logic of the appeal tends to produce tightknit communities who are not well equipped to help/assist others. If I have the option to appeal to those who need time and effort to comprehend my projects, or someone who can comprehend them immediately, the choice is easy. Asking X who would find dealing with the problem a pain is inconsiderate if I can ask Y instead, who finds it a breeze and would be delighted to help. In the longer term, this will only concentrate the difficulty of comprehension; any barrier to comprehension is likely to be built on and not eroded if we favour those who already have experience and are naturally willing to help. This is something Sartre alludes to when he says that “[o]ne appeals to one’s equal and in a society of castes or classes, this appeal tends to reinforce the ties of caste or class”.⁵²¹ Conversely, the creation of stupidity or socially generated and conditioned ignorance is very different to an accidental, and likely transitory, imbalance in roles and knowledge or collective lack of knowledge; it implies an oppression, most likely conditioned by untenable situations: “stupidity refers us to oppression and a society divided into classes, just as the suppression of stupidity refers us to a classless society”.⁵²² Understanding Sartre’s conception of stupidity in the *Notebooks* lets us see how untenable situations can flow from divides in a population.

To understand how appeals between people can be blocked by an epistemic form of oppression, we have to reconsider how knowledge (and the absence of knowledge) works in the intrasubjective context. Recall how, when we lack knowledge inside ourselves, parts of the objective world can be completely missing from the value-laden space our projects work in. The log in front of me, when I am totally unaware of it, does not feature at all in my understanding of the world and project of running until I trip over it. There are also large parts of the world which are vague because I do not need them to be detailed, which are “both determined and undetermined”.⁵²³ Vast swathes of the

⁵²⁰ *T&E*, p. 39.

⁵²¹ *Notebooks*, p.285.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p.310.

world, about which I *could* have knowledge do not harm my projects if I lack certainty about them. Bad information how many ears of corn there are in a wheat field would in no way overturn an acting career, although an actor might still be aware that one *could* count the number of grains out there. So the field becomes determined, insofar as it is something I could count if my projects were switched, but undetermined since I have no idea what the actual count is. Since nothing turns on it (for me) this vagueness is not harmful, and does not put any demands on me to get more or better information. Where my projects *do* engage with areas of the world where I am missing knowledge, those projects demand that the world is unveiled. This is bound up with Sartre's claim in *Truth and Existence* that all projects demand an unveiling of the world, that to act is to reveal and unveil the world. Above, we saw similar remarks about presence automatically involving knowledge, as per *Being and Nothingness's* temporality chapter. So intrasubjectively, missing knowledge falls into three major categories: the completely missing and unfelt, the vague but unthreatening, and that which demands we seek it out, which exerts a pull on us. We hold empty intentions, to be sure, but they are not something negative about us or our character.

Conversely, if the Other knows something we do not, the gap in our knowledge takes on a different cast. When we are alone, or when the Other does not interact with our projects, the world is something that opens up over time as we interact with it and learn. Our projects, which demand we act in certain ways, also promise to expand themselves and with that to expand our understanding of the world. There is no suggestion that something is missing, but instead the sense that things will come with time and with application. Yet if someone else is ahead of us, our knowledge becomes incomplete or deficient, instead of promising a future (of) discovery. As Sartre puts it: "[a] thought can be incomplete only in relation to another, already existing thought".⁵²⁴ Since I lack knowledge *for the other*, they can constitute my entire life as lacking, they can start inferring and/or picking up on character evidence that makes me deficient. Not knowing the content of, say, an untranslated Husserl text, might imply a history where I never learned to read German. Whatever positive reasons there might be for this are immediately made into a negative; if I was taught Mandarin as a third language, any benefits or other consequences are irrelevant with respect to my ignorance of Husserl. It does not matter that I can read *The Heroes of the Water Margin* in the original or that I excel in my work handling international manufacturing; insofar as someone constitutes me ignorant of the Husserl all of these things I *have* done fade behind the things I have not, i.e. the way I never read the untranslated text.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., p.295.

This does not have to be problematic if our ignorance is reciprocal, if we each specialise into different areas of knowledge and willingly assist each other where assistance is needed. If a philosopher knows little of medicine and a medical doctor knows little about philosophy, this does not entail a necessary problem.⁵²⁵ There are plenty of complex systems of co-operation that do not need to imply oppression; the fisherman who knows nothing of growing grain and the farmer-baker who knows nothing about fish can happily co-operate to keep their community in food. The fisherman going to get grain can recognise the freedom and the concrete situation of the farmer by trading fairly, not being an imposition during crucial and laborious tasks like threshing-winnowing, and so on – they can appeal to the farmer as a full freedom and be receive assistance with respect to their own full freedom.

The problem starts when my ignorance is combined with both a lack of appropriate, reciprocal assistance, and (the sense) that it is definitive. My ignorance can be, or feel definitive, for plenty of reasons. We might live under oppressive circumstances, where it is overtly forbidden to discuss certain things or ideas. If it is illegal to discuss past revolutions and the intellectual history of revolution, I might be incapable of learning that radical political change is possible at all, much less how to enact it. Low-quality education, in a wide sense which includes both schooling and public discourse, might keep me from ever asking pertinent questions about my problems or those of society, keeping any and all effective political discourse locked away – and for commentators like Lasch,⁵²⁶ this is exactly what has happened in modern liberal democracies. Even this little is getting ahead of ourselves, but it is enough to remind us that a definitive kind of ignorance is possible and can be conditioned from outside. If our ignorance of some fact or set of facts is (experienced as) definitive, it is experienced as a limit to our freedom; there will be parts of the world which we, by ourselves, will never be able to adapt to and incorporate into our projects. Whilst being definitively ignorant of minor things like the best way to catch pike or spin a skein of wool is possible, in what follows we should imagine the relevant knowledge is significant and could easily pose an existential threat to many projects.

Where my ignorance is definitive, my projects are always under threat. With respect to my projects, I am suddenly “[i]nstalled in truth or error without being able to distinguish between them”.⁵²⁷ I

⁵²⁵ See *Notebooks*, p. 299.

⁵²⁶ This is one of the central theses of *Revolt of the Elites*.

⁵²⁷ *Notebooks*, p. 301.

cannot make progress on those projects at all, since I am cut off from any reasonable feedback about whether my efforts are working or not. This produces something very similar to the untenable situation, except instead of being faced with unpredictable outcomes I am faced with *unreadable* outcomes – I flat out do not know what I have really achieved or am likely to do if I keep going down a certain path. This, like the classic untenable situation, seriously harms my ability to form and execute projects, and threatens a destabilisation of my agency. This is also extremely painful in the sense that it constantly tugs on many of other related projects without the promise of creating a successful project shift. It creates a constant second-guessing in the one who is ignorant; the immediate perception they have of the world is indubitable, but always undermined as soon as it is made by the other. They have knowledge just as much as anyone else, on the *Truth and Existence* definition, but never come to form a dependable, stable truth. Their truths come with a provisional nature that they simply can't shake.⁵²⁸

If you cannot fix the problem by learning more, by acting on the world, then the only way out of this pain and uncertainty is to rely completely on the other to secure your projects. Note that, if your ignorance is definitive, they do not share knowledge with you.⁵²⁹ Rather, they provide reassurance that *there is* some relevant knowledge guiding your projects; since only projects generate knowledge, this means they put you in service of their ends. If I offer certainties about what people ought to be paid, won through the pursuit of capital, and you are definitively ignorant about the movement of capital, you are in serious danger if you rely on me. Any economic truth I have to offer, whether I reflectively acknowledge this or not, is tied to my project of generating capital – it is not tied to your projects about meeting your basic needs or living a flourishing life! If your project is not to produce as much capital as possible for me, then I will be misleading you every step of the way, and via a means that is extremely hard to grasp or act against. It is not hyperbole to say that, if effected on purpose, this manipulation is “the most subtle and most fundamental form of violence”.⁵³⁰ Reliance on the other does not give us knowledge – it gives us a dependence on their projects, makes us an accessory to them and their goals.

Why would we (or Sartre) call this violence if there is no actual bloodshed involved? Firstly because my projects, if I am definitively ignorant, are disrespected and my freedom is not accorded its value. It's a classic intrasubjective bad faith: I am being treated as an instrument of someone else's

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 321.

⁵²⁹ This is analytically true; if you can acquire knowledge, you are not permanently ignorant.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., p.301.

projects, and whether that's because I am a dupe or in chains is irrelevant to the violence done to my projects. Sustaining this kind of ignorance is out of the question for an authentic agent, since "[i]gnorance comes to me by way of the other as negation of my freedom. ... knowledge creates the obligation to teach".⁵³¹ This point is hugely important – since definitive ignorance can limit my freedom just as badly as being thrown in chains, authenticity and the authentic society demands that it is destroyed wherever it is found. Ignorance is destroyed in and through sharing knowledge; if it is not, the ignorant are made complicit in being incomplete, in remaining fools or dupes. The ways they respond to their situation, Sartre argues, help engender and reinforce it, as well as oppressing others. They risk not only acting out against others who are not oppressing them, but through "counter-oppression" becoming complicit in their own ignorance and intellectual subjugation. In other words, they are not only caused to suffer, but also made to make things *worse* in an attempt to regain their ontological stability. This might come about straightforwardly through anger as the awareness that something is wrong which they cannot possibly fix. Just as in the *Sketch* and the fable of the sour grapes,⁵³² our anger conditioned by ignorance might make us lash out at the world, trying to negate the problem by magically destroying it. Since our anger is caused by a lack of knowledge about how to fix a problem, any violence that comes out of it will inevitably target the wrong thing. An ontological insecurity ultimately caused by the contradictions of globalising capital, for instance, might earth itself as anger at immigration.

Less dramatically, another solution to the ontological insecurity of ignorance might be an unhealthy adherence to common knowledge or ritual, a fall into a Heideggerian "they". Here is where untenable situations are bred the easiest. Paradoxically, one way to defeat the awareness that our projects are always transcended is to completely, totally throw ourselves into being transcended. Habits, customs, a shared stock of cultural references, all of these let us make our projects into a matter of "generalities and repetitions",⁵³³ which can by an act of magic destroy our agency, our freedom, and our troubling responsibility for ourselves and others. Remember how, above, a key part of understanding bad faith was the appeal to a timeless character. To recap, either we take our past and project that it will and cannot change in the future, or we take an imagined future and reinterpret the past as evidence for its inevitability. The repetitive and the ritual carries with it the idea that everything will be the same forever; the truths of common wisdom promise to be eternal. If I give in entirely to common wisdom, or something like it, and act in a repetitive way that motions towards things always being the same, symbolically I destroy the possibility for change implied by

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² *Sketch*, p. 41.

⁵³³ *Notebooks*, p. 313.

the advancement of time; with that, my freedom becomes inert and untroubling.

The thing about these commonplaces is they also create incommunicability problems between groups, which are very hard if not apparently impossible to resolve. If I am committed to, e.g., right-wing social Darwinist tropes but also prepared to concede the value of lives here and there when challenged, any serious discussion I am involved in is likely to run around in circles. I can make these concessions only because I am not playing to uncover a stable truth or to win the ostensible argument; my ontological security is all that I stake (and can stake). This is doubly true if my opponent is relying on an opposing set of tropes rather than a coherent system of knowledge; neither of us can seize on a genuinely satisfying argument because at base neither of us is capable of proving anything relevant whatsoever – we lack a piece of the puzzle, whether that means intellectual tools, systems of reason, empirical evidence, or historical proof.

In fact, the relevant knowledge becomes inert, taken out of the whole circuit of my oppressor, myself, and any non-debate. If some demagogue (or collection of them) holds my world together for me, and they outstrip me totally in their (claimed) knowledge, I could hardly understand them even if they did tell me the foundations of their system. “[T]o the extent that he is limited, the dumb fool cannot comprehend me past some point ... those truths that he cannot comprehend he has to make use of if he wants to live and act. Therefore he has to adopt them out of confidence in my freedom”.⁵³⁴ In the end, Sartre observes, from the demagogue’s perspective “I can no longer be believed because of what I *demonstrate*, which in the end would hardly flatter me ... but because I am *me*. In a word, I realize the human dream of being believed for irrational reasons”.⁵³⁵ Under intellectual oppression, we can believe in our sources implicitly, without reference to whether or not they continue to understand what we do not know. Our belief that they have knowledge is sufficient to let them oppress us; they do not need to hold any of the knowledge we believe they do to subjugate us. Simply being convincing when I am in a period of sufficient doubt (i.e. when the pain of project shifts is high enough) will get that job done.

In that event, whether or not the oppressor originally held the keys to any useful knowledge, the discourse surrounding them and the projects of those believing them will be obscenely distorted, and yet remain stable. The first, and ontologically the only significant, thing that the oppressors have us believe is that our characters are stable and we have projects which are not under threat.

⁵³⁴ *Notebooks*, p.319.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

Everything else, even though we ostensibly came to them for their understanding of, e.g., economics, ethics, the causes of our society's ills, and so on, is secondary. Incommunicability of our projects and our knowledge comes about because, at root, we don't have a project we can communicate in the first place, and the mechanism of oppression has turned us into the intellectual living dead. Our ideas, which under any normal circumstances ought to have died on exposure to evidence, remain standing and take on a life of their own. If I appeal to you for help with my problems, but cannot even formulate what those problems are, there is no chance at all you can comprehend them. An unarticulated (and inarticulable!) problem has no answer.

We can add to this problem something more benign but still restrictive: If the other puts me in my place in the world, whether explicitly or implicitly telling me to become a manufacturing worker, an agricultural worker, etc, the rhythms of that life will also breed incommunicability. The routine of an agricultural life is completely different to one of a watchmaker or factory worker, and involves shared annoyances, joys, and opportunities for bonding that are again completely different. The acts of farming, of watchmaking, etc contain repetitive and unique aspects which, as they recur, "harden into generalities and repetitions, and these calluses will affect our ends which have an aspect of generality".⁵³⁶ Our lives become routine even if we are not stripped, per Adam Smith or Marx,⁵³⁷ of any intellectual benefit of our work by its industrialised form. The challenges we face, the metaphors we are likely to use, drop out of universality as we all deal with different parts of the world. Being a watchmaker involves an entirely different type of time management to growing finicky crops; Sartre's own naïve and patronising description of the life of peasantry as (merely) waiting for things to grow⁵³⁸ shows how different worlds can fall out of communication.

The overall point is, on top of the relatively innocent sources that block us from assisting one another, both a profound uncertainty in ignorance and the possibility of anger or violence on the part of the ignorant can restrict us into untenable situations. Of course, an adherence to routine or a railing anger are not the only attitudes we could take to this uncertainty. Sartre himself suggests that we might either adopt an attitude of (quasi) religious zeal to the knowledge we are given, helping squash dissent, or become some kind of prophet/standard bearer for the ideas we are made to espouse.⁵³⁹ We could also add the example of socially mediated bad faith from earlier: we could

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ See *Capital* I Ch. 15 section 4, "The Capitalist Character of Manufacture". Edition consulted: Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume 1*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. Penguin Classics: London, 1990. pp 480-91.

⁵³⁸ *Notebooks*, p.313.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., pp. 323-4.

plunge ourselves into coincidental identities, or into our total failure to adopt an identity as an identity in and of itself. All of these attitudes are a bad faith which we have adopted because of the uncertainty of ignorance, and our desire to avoid the disintegration it threatens, and they are by no means exhaustive.

Section Seven: Ignorance, Untenable Situations, and the Limits of this Early Account.

So how does this help confirm that Sartre has the resources for an ethics? For one thing, it suggests both an outline of how we can positively provide aid to others and ways in which that aid can be blocked. It shows that we can describe some properly intersubjective ethical patterns using the system we have been building up. So why, given references to recognisable features of life like control by ignorance and the way people like Claudette might find themselves in a bind, is all of this still on the level of *resources* for an ethics?

Firstly, looking at the appeal and the impact of ignorance reaffirms the inseparability of respecting the other from a historically located, specific situation. Any knowledge that is missing and preventing us from making or responding to an appeal is not knowledge *as such*. It is a specific knowledge, the knowledge that something is thus-and-so. I might be aware the factory does not pay me enough to experience a flourishing life, but blocked off from being able to explain how things could be otherwise. The missing knowledge (truth) I need (or tools that let me reach that knowledge) would be determinate knowledge about the state of the industry, the cost of living, the logics of capital and production, and so on. Conversely, the ones imposing ignorance on others cannot make them abstractly ignorant: they have to instil an ignorance of something particular, or some constellation of particular ignorances. My ignorance of particular facts also traces back to the history of my life; I might not understand some facet of economics because I have never studied the subject, and I never studied it because wage earning work and family obligations took up too much time, because ... and so on until a complete psychoanalysis of my life is implied. All of these things relate to concrete facts like the cost of education, the cost of rent, social ideas about who does and doesn't deserve my support, and so on. In fact, they relate to my specific job, the specific profit margin of my employer – they relate to the specific manifestation of those concrete facts within my life. I cannot rail against abstract disrespect for my well-being or the rights of others; I must rail against 14 hour work days in the cotton factory.

We can see Sartre understands this clearly at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, where he comes at the point from the other way: “ontology and existential psychoanalysis (or the spontaneous and empirical application which men have always made of these disciplines) must reveal to the moral

agent that he *is the being by whom values exist*".⁵⁴⁰ Why would we submit to existential psychoanalysis in the first place? Surely because we have something we see as a problem, threat or failure in our lives, something like Claudette or Pierre consistently making mistakes in dating, something concrete that we cannot achieve or make peace with. Even if I decide to analyse someone without their consent or knowledge (say through a journal, letters, published work), I have to have a reason to do this, I have to be trying to diagnose an apparent problem or understand how another is free from my own problems. Whatever new projects we take on, most likely having learned to appreciate and embrace ambiguity, are still new concrete goals. If Pierre figures out that he is treating his dates as objects and decides to change, that will come out in objective behaviours such as trying not to pressure them, picking up on discomfort and backing off, and so on. Since our projects are inseparable from action, any decisive awareness of the need to change (the way we approach) our projects *must* be manifest in action, is and has to be coextensive with trying something new (and hopefully better). At the risk of belabouring the point, this means that our abstract awareness of the absolute value of freedom has to come out as and through regulating principles about our actions and interpersonal relations.

In cases like Claudette and Pierre's, or the unhappy consumerist's, figuring out a concrete course of action which fits Sartre's system is superficially easy. Ideas such as respecting the other's freedom by making sure they want to be at the café, by not trying to leverage social expectations to get your own desires met, are simple to come up with almost to the point of vacuity. Partially this is because these examples, even with extra detail, were spun to explain and elucidate the Sartrean system; if Claudette and Pierre were invented to explain bad faith, it makes sense that the instance of bad faith they are in is simplistic. The second we make them anywhere near realistic, however, the option to be blasé about giving them advice expires. Suppose Claudette really exists and is reflectively aware of her situation, as I expanded it above. She is aware of, and reflects on, an extreme difficulty in explaining the restrictions on her actions and the pressures it puts her under. Simply telling her not to pay attention to others judging her, to not go on bad dates, to trust her gut when someone seems like a loser – none of this will be helpful, none of it implies comprehension of her situation or the ability to assist if she appeals for aid in getting out of it.

⁵⁴⁰ BN, p.647.

Assisting her, in the long term, implies a much wider understanding of why her situation is possible, of religious and patriarchal and generally controlling influences in the society she lives in. Her project, perhaps as basic as “make this nonsense stop”, itself might demand and imply all kinds of revisions, some or many of which would require a lifetime worth of study if nobody else has put in the required work – or if she cannot access it. A specific understanding, say, of the exact power relations and historical-political currents that made her society possible, is by no means contained in or derivable from the ontological conditions that set out how her position is possible. Neither is a definite idea about how to change things at a level bigger than herself. We might be able to talk about the preconditions underlying her situation fluently, but the actual social and behavioural trends that enable them are far beyond the scope of the account so far. Her situation is untenable precisely because it is made up of a Gordian knot of objective circumstances and the ways the projects of others interfere with her life. Expecting the mere revelation that the knot was first tied in the name of ontological security to set her free is lunacy.

Sartre is, in the contexts we have been discussing, only ever talking about the ontological *conditions* of a potential authenticity or inauthenticity even if he has to dip into real examples or examples that scream for unpacking to make those points. Discussing the oppression of ignorance, as seen above, Sartre notes that “[i]t is not yet a question of economic and social oppression but of its ontological conditions”⁵⁴¹ even as he moves on to talk about the benefits of “*full employment*” and makes quasi-empirical claims such as “[s]tupidity is most frequently found in the bourgeoisie because the son of the factory owner has the right to run the factory even though he is incapable of doing so”. While we can trace out how something *like* classes comes about through the mechanics and limits of comprehension,⁵⁴² Sartre is not (yet) entitled to talk about class in any substantial (historical) context. The claim that the classless society is authentic⁵⁴³ or likely to lead its members to authenticity is, at best, suggestive. Ideas like the natural tendency for people to form pockets of mutual incomprehensibility, and the possibility of oppression and violence through ignorance, gesture at the possibility of diagnosing the reasons why we are (treated) in bad faith but they do not constitute that diagnosis. Mixing in talk about heredity and inheritance of property and managerial rights is already saying too much about education and competence in specific cases. If Sartre had

⁵⁴¹ *Notebooks*, p.325.

⁵⁴² See section six, this chapter.

⁵⁴³ “the suppression of stupidity [i.e. of one motivation to bad faith] refers us to a classless society” – *Notebooks* p.325.

polished and published that section of the *Notebooks* as a standalone text, Orwell would have been utterly justified in giving it the same savage reviewing as *ASJ*.

Nor does added pseudo-practical, theoretical detail like the simple derivation of economic principles get us any further towards providing practicable concrete advice to others. For instance, showing that the difference between use value and exchange value⁵⁴⁴ can be explained by building up from an ontological level does not tell us anything practical about how to upset the prevailing system, even though Sartre asserts that, as a result of that distinction “[w]hat we can and must do is fight for a society that will give labor a determined value (e.g., for a classless society)”. Remember that the charge of “cerebration” Orwell made was that in *ASJ* Sartre ends up explaining simple or obvious ideas in obtuse language. To anyone in a culture with access to even a whistlestop summary of *Capital I* and the ideas in it, the use value/exchange value distinction is not novel; Sartre, in the *Notebooks*, does not offer anything new and interesting on the matter and certainly not in an easy to understand way. In terms of giving practical advice on how to change things, it has nothing to say at all. It is, in that sense, fairly useless as a regulator of our behaviour, and doubly so since it appears as a fragment rather than as a part of a completed narrative. It is, in other words, “cerebration”. This is not to deny that Sartre the man held such beliefs for good reasons. Nor does it say that in other, later work he was unable to give an adequate account of (the need for) a classless society. Yet, at best, these sorts of accounts remain suggestive.

This is not to say the idea is *wrong* or that there are no problems with class structures in Sartre’s time or ours. The issue is that skipping right ahead to those points, having only just established the possibility of an ethics, would be dangerous. The value of something like the “classless society” is, on my reading, a reflection of the value of avoiding ignorance and the duty to reveal and share knowledge with others, a reflection of the way that knowledge carries with it the duty to either teach others or at least enter reciprocal relations of ignorance with others in good faith. Classes, insofar as they fit into the model of ignorance and violence given above, might be unethical insofar as they are vectors of an imposed ignorance. In Chapter Five, above,⁵⁴⁵ we saw a related fragmentary claim that ethics has to be achieved by all in order to be achieved by anyone: “ethics is not possible unless everyone is ethical”.⁵⁴⁶ Perhaps the claim translates into a demand for

⁵⁴⁴Ibid., p.118-9.

⁵⁴⁵ Specifically, Chapter Five, Section Five.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., p.9.

classlessness like this:

Ignorance should be avoided

Classes and class-like structures foster ignorance

Therefore, classes and other structures which promote ignorance should be eliminated.

Such an argument, apart from being basically unactionable, misses the way pockets of incommunicability form naturally even in good faith, and misses the way reciprocal ignorance and division of labour does not have to lend itself to inauthenticity. Addressing whether a given division of labour is conducive to inauthenticity would have to be a practical, concrete question which needs all sorts of detail we can't get from the structure of consciousness alone.⁵⁴⁷ As far as talk of classless societies and the like goes, we have to treat them as promissory for other investigations; what the account we have here tells us is that those investigations can, in principle, deliver moral instruction. The form of what has to be done, and the question of whether it is *practically* achievable or not, comes down to other disciplines like political economy, rhetoric, logistics, practical understanding of the current state of culture/ideology, and so on. All we know from the nature of value, consciousness and freedom is that we have the need to investigate the world and bring about improvement where possible. In that sense Sartre is almost a classical Enlightenment thinker, but in practical terms, in terms of telling us what we should be doing and whether a particular vision of the ethical can be carried out in a given environment, these early works can only be suggestive.

This suggestiveness is why early readings of Sartre on ethics can seem unsatisfying. Jeanson, writing in 1947, tells us that “[t]he question is whether men should let themselves be shunted about indefinitely on a sea of unforeseeable reactions or whether they should call on all their resources in order to take hold of a determinate current that has some chance of restoring to them the human meaning of their action”.⁵⁴⁸ Without considering *which* “determinate current” this is, i.e. which authentic project the desire to become God is subsumed under, this tells us absolutely nothing about what has to be done or about the actual, concrete process of refining our attitudes to the

⁵⁴⁷ Even in Sartre's later work, we should note that it takes him 671(!) pages of *the Critique of Dialectical Reason* to say “[t]his enables us to reach the concrete at last”.

⁵⁴⁸ Jeanson, *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, p.225.

world. This is why the key *Existentialism is a Humanism* example of the student deciding to care for his mother or go to war⁵⁴⁹ is so significant. The whole point of that example is that only by acting on it can an ethical problem be resolved – and finding we were wrong or experiencing tragic choices is a perfectly natural part of moral experimentation and action. For a provincial young adult with little life experience, being put on the spot to perform a utilitarian calculus or fathom out the deontological demands on the situation is no worse than the demand to trust one's moral instincts and be ready to deal with the consequences. All we are really guaranteed by (this) Sartre is that there are better and worse ways to act, around the guiding star of the absolute value of consciousness, but it is up to us to experiment in our concrete situation and discover the ethical. In that sense we learn from Sartre that the ethical is possible, but also that understanding the source of ethics and locating its practical demands on us are two completely separate things.

⁵⁴⁹ *EH*, p.36.

Concluding Remarks.

The account of Sartrean ethics I have given is mostly abstract and technical, far more oriented at showing an ethics is possible than where it ought to go. We saw how, from the most minimal points about consciousness, we can derive an ethics of responsibility which regulates our actions, and neither ignores the Other, nor lacks purchase on the physical/material or objective. The question has to be where to go from here: since an ethics is possible, and the world demands ethical decisions from us all the time, what can we take away from this account? Historically, of course, Sartre moved towards Marxism, reflected in his writings through the *Search for a Method* and the *Critique(s) of Dialectical Reason*, the second of which was never finished. His interest later shifted to colonialism and imperialism⁵⁵⁰, although he grew frustrated by the incompetence of the leftwing political movements he engaged with.

In terms of an alternate progression from the early ethics, we can see a therapeutic angle reflected in Sartre's influence on R.D. Laing. Laing's *Reason and Violence*⁵⁵¹ contains a foreword by Sartre, attesting that Laing's understanding of mental illness is broadly right. We can also see a lineage of allied thought in the work of Erich Fromm; although written before *Being and Nothingness* his seminal *Fear of Freedom*⁵⁵² dealt, as the title suggests, with individuals' desire for less freedom (not more) helping open the door to fascism. Insofar as *Being and Nothingness* has the resources to explain inferiority projects and the like, this historical development was somewhat predictable. In more modern context, Zheng's emphasis⁵⁵³ on catharsis through pure reflection might also suggest a cross between a self-cultivational and therapeutic ethics derived from authenticity.

We are not without dedicated works spelling out concretely where the ethics will go; Barnes' *An Existentialist Ethics* is notable for having been written before the *Notebooks* were available. It impressively covers how Sartre's existentialism stands compared to, and vis-à-vis engaging with, political movements as diverse as Zen Buddhism, Marxism, Tillich's theology and Randian Objectivism. More recently, T. Storm Heter has proposed a reading of authenticity which stresses

⁵⁵⁰ See Arthur, Paige *Unfinished Projects*. Verso: London, 2010 for an enlightening description of how this mapped onto his substantive work.

⁵⁵¹ Laing, R.D., *Reason and Violence* (with D.G. Cooper). Tavistock: London, 1959. p.7. Note, however, that this comment appears in context of a work on the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

⁵⁵² Fromm, Erich, *Fear of Freedom*. Routledge: London, 1942.

⁵⁵³ See Zheng, Yiwei, *Ontology and Ethics in Sartre's Early Philosophy*. Lexington Books: Lanham, MD., 2005.

the significance of recognition in other-relations and the possibility of existentialist virtues, drawing on a wider canon than Sartre alone.⁵⁵⁴

Having drawn on the Sartrean account of knowledge more than usual, I would like to sketch what an ethics of ignorance, of avoiding ignorance, would tell us about how to explore a concrete, real ethics. In a minimal form, our awareness of the world demands that we explore it world and our lives to find out what the ethical looks like. As we saw, we are always and forever interrogating the world; every time the world is made present to us our knowledge is tested and challenged in some way. Moreover, our projects form and disperse along rational lines, which is (empirically) visible due to the formation of our characters behind us. The creation and disruption of our projects, seeing which projects can lock or cohere and which can't, is genuinely revelatory about the structure of value since that structure is its condition of possibility. We can, and do, learn about value and the ethical by seeing what works in our lives and what doesn't; we are immediately aware, at least on some level, when we are wide of the mark. The best thing we can do, if we want to discover a concretely ethical life, is to allow our knowledge and received truths to be tested as often as possible, and genuinely tested at that. This continual testing applies both on a small and a large level, in our daily routines and the way we go through life as a whole. It does not, and should not, apply only to big-ticket moral questions but to the frameworks of action that contextualise them and make them possible; there is a reciprocal relationship between the small-scale problems which we face and the larger commitments which ground them. Every (accurate) revision improves our truths, it gives us a more adaptive picture of the world which will allow us to prosecute our goals. One route to finding what authenticity concretely means is simple but arduous: to open ourselves to experience (and to the experiences of others) and try to learn from them as much as possible in good faith.

Maintaining a lifestyle of genuine responsibility, moreover, would be a test of faith. A test of our faith in ourselves to deliver that future, and of faith that destiny will not interfere. There is nothing which can compel us to do anything, except actually *doing* what has to be done. Yet those actions occupy a basically mysterious space, a present which has no reality except as something that will come or which has happened. The best and only defence is to accept that our (major) projects are all "undertakings", that they require time to execute and will be challenged over and over again. We can look at the past with a critical eye and see how we or others were successful in the past, whether we really acted coherently or not. Nonetheless there is always scope to be afraid of a future

⁵⁵⁴ Heter, T Storm, *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement: Authenticity and Civic Virtue*. Continuum: London: 2006.

where we make mistakes; there will be, as a matter of empirical certainty, a time when we make them. All we can do against destiny is prepare, and be ready to ask what went wrong afterward, no matter how painful the process is.

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