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## Sartre and the Nothingness of Consciousness

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Matthew Dale Massey entitled "Sartre and the Nothingness of Consciousness." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Philosophy.

Richard E. Aquila, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

John Nolt, James Bennett, Les Essif

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Anne Mayhew  
Vice Chancellor and  
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SARTRE AND THE NOTHINGNESS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Matthew Dale Massey  
December 2004

## ABSTRACT

Sartre's claim in Being and Nothingness that consciousness is nothingness is typically understood as meaning either that consciousness is not itself, that it is not its objects, that it is not its past, or that it is some sort of state of affairs. Although these interpretations of Sartre are often presented independently of each other, I argue that one can combine several of them in order to arrive at the best understanding of Sartre's treatment of consciousness. Such an understanding treats consciousness as the state of affairs that is its facticity transcending itself toward its objects. One could also combine the four typical interpretations of Sartre so that consciousness for him is a different state of affairs, specifically the state of affairs that is the appearance of objects along with their various indications. This second way of understanding Sartre's treatment of consciousness seems inferior to the first way, though, since the former can account for what seemingly motivates the latter. In order to do so, one must utilize certain aspects of Husserl's description of consciousness, a description that Sartre actually rejects.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Phenomenological Ontology and Metaphysics	9
Chapter Two: Consciousness as Not Itself	53
Chapter Three: Consciousness as Not Its Object	79
Chapter Four: Consciousness as Not Its Past	109
Chapter Five: Consciousness as a State of Affairs	143
Conclusion	175
References	180
Vita	184

## INTRODUCTION

In Being and Nothingness, Sartre claims that consciousness is nothingness. Some examples of this claim are the following:

Nothingness is the putting into question of being by being- that is, precisely consciousness or for-itself. It is an absolute event which comes to being by means of being and which, without having being, is perpetually sustained by being.<sup>1</sup>

The for-itself in its being is failure because it is the foundation only of itself as nothingness.<sup>2</sup>

The For-itself can never be its Future except problematically, for it is separated from it by a Nothingness which it is.<sup>3</sup>

The For-itself is nothing more than this translucent Nothingness which is the negation of the thing perceived....Thus in the perception of the object the For-itself acknowledges itself to itself as not being the object, while in the unveiling of the Past, the For-itself acknowledges itself as *being* the Past and is separated from it only by its nature as For-itself, which can be nothing.<sup>4</sup>

But if the For-itself is to be the nothingness whereby 'there is' being, then being can exist originally only as totality.<sup>5</sup>

...in order for its determination as the nothingness of being to be full, the for-itself must realize itself as a certain unique manner of not being *this* being.<sup>6</sup>

There are many possible interpretations of what he means by the nothingness of consciousness and of what leads him to say that, but four interpretations seem most supported by the text and most frequently emphasized by commentators.

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, Washington Square Press, New York, 1956, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 200.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 251.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid,p. 260.

One of those interpretations centers on Sartre's claim that consciousness is not itself, a second one on his claim that it is not its object, a third one on his treatment of it as not its past, and a fourth one on Sartre's description of consciousness in a manner that can be put using such general ontological terms as 'relation,' 'state of affairs,' and 'event.' It should be noted that the first three interpretations explain the nothingness of consciousness by means of it not being something while the fourth one explains it in terms of what it is. The type of thing that the fourth interpretation treats consciousness as being, then, must be such that it somehow is nothing.

It should also be noted that the first of these propositions- that consciousness is not itself- is of course very different from the other three. For one thing, presumably just about everyone agrees that consciousness-or, for that matter, anything at all-is not (except in special cases) its own object and not its own past, and most would at least be open to the suggestion that consciousness is an event or a relation, whereas hardly anybody is inclined to agree that consciousness-or, for that matter, anything at all-is not itself. Secondly, while Sartre himself emphasizes the connection, it is hardly clear why anyone should agree that, just because consciousness is not its past, or not its object, or is a state of affairs, it is therefore nothingness. The question then naturally arises whether either Sartre's insistence that consciousness is 'not itself' or his insistence that it is 'nothingness,' or both, are not just melodramatic ways of saying something to which one might more readily agree. For instance, one might take the claim that consciousness is not its past simply to mean that



consciousness is free and not determined by anything in the past. Such a reading of Sartre is found in the following;

A pederast is not a pederast, since, in his most intimate consciousness, he knows that there is no compulsion for him to be what he is. *He is not what he is*, for human nature escapes all definition and refuses to see in its act *any destiny* whatsoever.<sup>7</sup>

Although an assertion of such freedom is hardly non-controversial, equating such freedom with consciousness not being itself or with it being nothingness would surely be melodramatic. But, alternatively, perhaps one should rather suppose that Sartre draws the connections that he does precisely because he means to assert two additional claims which are neither melodramatic nor ones with which many would be inclined to agree, namely, that consciousness *is* in some sense its object, and *is* its past, in addition to not being them.

As already noted, each of the four previously-mentioned interpretations of Sartre's treatment of consciousness as nothingness has support from commentators. One can find acceptance of the first interpretation, that the nothingness of consciousness signifies that consciousness is not itself, in the following passage by Klaus Hartmann:

Consciousness is appearance-to-self, presence-to-self...Sartre's meaning is expressed once more in a pictorial account, in which presence-to-self is interpreted as a being with a 'fissure'...What is meant...is a fissure within consciousness..., a fissure within a unity. What separates is an 'ideal distance,' a 'nothing'... Nothingness regarded as a fissure is, first, separation—a relationship of otherness between things. The separated entities, however, must make up a unity if consciousness can be presupposed as a unity of immanence. The separated entities are not each the "other" of the other, their relationship is not one of otherness, because the other

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<sup>7</sup> Wilfrid Desan, The Tragic Finale, Harper and Row, New York, 1960, p. 26.

maintains an identity with the one. Thus, this unity is, by its very form, a whole negating something which is no Other for it.<sup>8</sup>

It seems clear that the nothingness of consciousness is being taken here as its not being the very thing it is identical with-itself.

Some commentators have taken a more minimalist approach to the claim that consciousness is not itself, treating that claim as simply making the epistemological point that consciousness is necessarily aware of not being whatever it is conscious of. This epistemological take on Sartre would entail that consciousness 'is not' itself, since, as we shall see in Chapter Two, consciousness is always necessarily consciousness of itself. An example of such an epistemological reading of Sartre is the following:

Knowledge entails that the object known is held at a distance from the person who knows it: he distinguishes the object from himself, and he thereby forms the judgment, 'I am *not* the object.' This distance at which the object is held is the gap or nothingness at the heart of the For-itself.<sup>9</sup>

This epistemological reading of Sartre could also fit with the second interpretation of the nothingness of consciousness, the interpretation that simply emphasizes it not being its object. Another example of that interpretation is presented by Hazel Barnes in the following:

There is Being-in-itself, which is all of non-conscious reality. Then there is Being-for-itself, which is consciousness, but this, says Sartre, is really only the revelation of the In-itself. In other words, there occurred somehow a "hole in being," and the For-itself as this hole or lack of Nothingness is thus able to stand back, as it were, and so reveal the In-itself. Man recognizes himself as being what is

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<sup>8</sup>Klaus Hartmann, Sartre's Ontology, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1966, pp. 62-65.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Warnock, The Philosophy of Sartre, Barnes and Noble, New York, 1965, p. 61.

not the world. Using this same negating power he can recognize objects.<sup>10</sup>

This 'same negating power' that enables humans to recognize objects is the ability of humans to separate or 'stand back' from objects as they do from the world in the revelation of the world. And just as such separation from the world is the for-itself's not being the world, similarly the just-mentioned separation from objects is the for-itself's not being its objects. This negation of objects of consciousness that is involved in the revelation of such objects is the nothingness of consciousness, at least on Barnes's reading.

It is important to note, however, that there is some unclarity in what Barnes says. First, it is one thing to take Sartre's claims about the nothingness of consciousness to be a way of emphasizing consciousness as not being its object. It is another and presumably stronger thing to say that consciousness is not its objects, and also is nothing but, or "really only," the *revelation* of its objects. After all, the fact that consciousness seemingly acts would make it more than mere revelation. Second, it is not clear what the latter might in any case mean. For example, in saying that consciousness is only the *revelation* of its objects, does Barnes mean that in some sense it actually *is* its objects (despite also not being them)? And if so, just how are we to take such a claim? Or is Barnes saying something else? The very unclarity may make one wonder whether Barnes is after all not *just* emphasizing consciousness as not being its object, and not really saying anything else. Regardless of how Barnes is reading Sartre, though, I will argue in Chapter Three that consciousness both is not *and also is* its object for Sartre, in a sense that goes beyond anything clarified by Barnes.

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<sup>10</sup>Hazel Barnes, "Jean-Paul Sartre and the Haunted Self," The Western Humanities Review, 10, 1956, p. 120.

Regarding consciousness in some sense both being and not being a certain *past*, one can see such a treatment in the following passage:

The perpetual break in being is nothing other than the temporality of the self. To exist temporally is to be wrenched from identity, from a repose in oneself...The for-itself refracts into past, present, and future. Sartre ontologizes these distinctions as disruptions by negation, breakages of identity....The past is surpassed by the present. While my past is *my* past, I am it in the mode of "was," secreting a distinction, and thus negation, between it and the present.<sup>11</sup>

It seems plausible here to treat the 'break in being' as nothingness, and since this nothingness is attributed to the for-itself, it seems plausible to assume that this passage concerns the nothingness of consciousness. That nothingness is thus apparently due to consciousness's wrenching away, not simply from its past, but from its own identity *with* that very past.

The final interpretation of the nothingness of consciousness, the interpretation that focuses on Sartre's description of consciousness using such general ontological terms as 'relation,' 'state of affairs,' and 'event,' is represented in the following:

...the for-itself, or noetic activity, is an irreducible sort of *happening*, or 'absolute event'..., incorporating a certain sort of material as its ingredients. In a sense, we can then say that an instance of noesis is in a way *nothing* over and above whatever material is in question. This would simply recognize that an event (or, in more static terms, any 'state of affairs'), while it is surely *something* over and above its ingredients, is in another respect *nothing but* them...Namely, it is just those ingredients *as incorporated* into just that sort of event...(However,) we would need to add that, as an 'absolute,' the event in question is not construable as a mere function of

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas W. Busch, The Power of Consciousness and the Force of Circumstances in Sartre's Philosophy, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1990, p. 22.

*relations among* portions of the 'matter' in question. This is presumably what Husserl meant to suggest by invoking the Aristotelian notion of 'form.'<sup>12</sup>

Here we see consciousness being described in terms that do not rely on Sartre's claims about consciousness's objects or its past, but rather in a general way that may or may not involve those matters.

Although I have presented these four interpretations of Sartre as independent of each other, I will argue that they need not be mutually exclusive but rather that they can actually work together to provide a possible understanding of what Sartre has in mind in treating consciousness as nothingness. Although I will argue that this possible understanding of Sartre is problematic, each of the first three of those interpretations can be used as an indispensable step in arriving at conclusions constituting a particular form of the fourth interpretation. One might say that *because* consciousness is not itself that consciousness is nothingness, but an adequate account of what is meant by it not being itself requires it to be neither its object nor its past, the very things which consciousness also is. And an adequate account of what is meant by consciousness being the very objects and the very past it is not requires an understanding of it as a special sort of event or state of affairs.

All of this would seem to follow, one might note, if Sartre is claiming that consciousness is nothing other than the fact of or state of affairs that is the appearance of phenomena. Or more particularly, as one might argue, it is just the fact of the appearance of phenomena which are thereby at the same time 'surpassed' (and also indicative of still other phenomena either as themselves in turn *already* surpassed or as potentially to be surpassed). I will argue that such a

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Aquila, "Sartre's Other and The Field of Consciousness: A Husserlian Reading," European Journal of Philosophy, 6, 1998, pp. 265, 274.

reading of Sartre provides a possible explanation of why consciousness of self must also be consciousness of a transcendent object, and that it involves Sartre's reliance upon a notion of the self to reach conclusions that might be incompatible with such a notion. Such a purely phenomenological understanding of Sartre has much to recommend it, and it may even be the most plausible and defensible take on *much* of what Sartre actually claims.

In any case, I will argue that Sartre need not take the above position. Although Sartre makes many claims that seemingly justify such an understanding of him, many other claims by him seem incompatible with it. More significantly, he actually provides at least the basis for a more defensible alternative to that position. This defensible alternative also describes consciousness as an event or state of affairs, but it is the state of affairs that is the transcendence of consciousness's body and past to its objects. I will argue that, to a significant extent, this defensible alternative resembles Husserl's description of consciousness. In particular, for example, it treats the appearance of phenomena as a *correlate* of consciousness rather than as consciousness *itself*. While this may seem to be just what Sartre denies, I will argue that it actually makes more sense out of *all* that Sartre claims about consciousness.

## CHAPTER ONE: PHENOMENOLOGICAL ONTOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

As mentioned in the Introduction, the purely phenomenological interpretation of Sartre's position on consciousness treats consciousness as nothing but the appearance of phenomena along with their various indications, whereas the correlational interpretation treats consciousness as in some way something more, as something related to and beyond such appearance, and of which such appearance is a mere 'correlate.' The purely phenomenological interpretation of Sartre thus seems to differ from the correlational interpretation in that the former, but not the latter, describes consciousness solely in terms of what appears. Both interpretations find support in Being and Nothingness. This chapter will detail Sartre's vacillation between a purely phenomenological approach to consciousness and a desire to describe it on a deeper ontological level.

Sartre's phenomenological approach to consciousness in Being and Nothingness is evidenced by the book's subtitle, "An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology." The book is ontological because its work is to elucidate structures of being in an attempt to answer questions about conscious and non-conscious being,<sup>13</sup> and it is phenomenological because "its method is to *describe* structures

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<sup>13</sup> Sartre, p. 30.

of being that appear to consciousness, so that his readers can verify the truth of Sartre's descriptions in our own conscious experience."<sup>14</sup> This emphasis on what appears is found in the opening line of Being and Nothingness, where Sartre claims that "(m)odern thought has realized considerable progress by reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest it."<sup>15</sup> He further claims that instead of positing a being that exists behind and in support of appearances, he embraces a notion of appearance that is "full positivity; its essence is an 'appearing' which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it."<sup>16</sup>

Sartre opposes this emphasis on appearance to Kant's assertion of beings that exist beyond the ken of possible experience. Sartre rejects Kant's notion of some sort of reference by a phenomenon to a noumenon, a referencing Sartre describes as a phenomenon pointing "over its shoulder to a true being which would be, for it, absolute."<sup>17</sup> Any Kantian 'thing-in-itself,' or seemingly anything else one might assert to exist beyond possible appearance, is apparently rejected by Sartre. As one commentator notes regarding Sartre, "minds as well as physical objects are defined in terms of their overt appearances and all references to a hidden event behind the appearances is ruled out."<sup>18</sup> A table, for instance, is nothing but a series of appearances, with each appearance referring

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<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Wilson, "Metaphysical Questions in Sartre's Phenomenological Ontology," Sartre Studies Internations, 6, 2000, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Sartre, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



to the total series to which it belongs rather than to some being beyond appearance that affects the subject in such a way as to cause such a series of appearances. For Sartre, “there is nothing behind the appearance.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite such claims, though, Sartre might seem to go beyond what appears when he notes how the notion of the phenomenon, with its essence of appearing, “supposes in essence somebody to whom to appear.”<sup>20</sup> This might sound similar to Berkeley’s position that, despite the fact that *esse est percipi*, non-perceived minds exist that have perceptions.<sup>21</sup> Although Sartre rejects Berkeley’s equation of the existence of appearances with their being perceived as well as Berkeley’s view of ‘minds,’<sup>22</sup> it might seem that Sartre has committed the same error one could attribute to Berkeley: criticizing the notion of something that does not appear but then asserting the necessity of something non-appearing in order for there to be what appears.

However accurate such a criticism may be for Berkeley, this does not seem problematic for Sartre. Although Sartre does assert the necessity of someone to whom appearances appear, the ‘being’ to whom things appear also ‘appears’ itself. For Sartre, since “the law of being in the knowing subject is to-be-conscious,”<sup>23</sup> consciousness of something, such as a table, is also always

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<sup>18</sup> John W. Yolton, “The Metaphysics of En-Soi and Pour-Soi,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 48, 1951, p. 549.

<sup>19</sup> Sartre, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> George Berkeley, *Principles of Knowledge and Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, pp. 173-174.

<sup>22</sup> Sartre, pp. 9-10.

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

consciousness of itself<sup>24</sup> (I will say more about self-consciousness in Chapter Two). Sartre says that it is “the first necessity for...consciousness to be seen by itself.”<sup>25</sup> So, the ‘knowing subject’ seems after all to ‘appear’ along with whatever it is conscious of. Although the way the conscious self appears is evidently different from how anything else appears, so that it is self-conscious rather than conscious *of* itself,<sup>26</sup> it may be that Sartre has not in fact committed here to something beyond appearances, or at least to anything beyond appearances and the *fact* of their appearing.

One might of course object that Sartre’s consciousness *of consciousness* of something need not be consciousness of the *being* to whom appearances necessarily appear. Sartre’s consciousness of consciousness could simply be awareness of a conscious *act* rather than awareness of a conscious self or subject. Sartre’s own argument seemingly confirms this. He argues that counting is obviously an instance of the appearance of objects with a certain property or quantity, but that counting also involves “a non-thetic consciousness of my adding activity.”<sup>27</sup> Sartre then shows that this non-thetic consciousness is consciousness’s awareness of itself, or consciousness of consciousness.<sup>28</sup> Thus, one might argue, the conscious *being* to whom appearances must appear does

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

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

not necessarily appear itself, so that Sartre is asserting the existence of something beyond appearances.

The problem for this suggestion is that Sartre does indeed seem to assert the appearance of the *being* to whom appearances appear. He claims that “(c)onsciousness...is the dimension of transphenomenal being in the subject.”<sup>29</sup> This seems to make consciousness at least part of the very *being* of ‘the subject.’ That in turn would seem to mean that consciousness of consciousness is after all consciousness of the subject itself, and not just of a conscious act on its part. It would thus seem that the necessity of a being to whom appearances appear need not take Sartre beyond the phenomenological level of attention to appearances, since “(c)onsciousness has nothing substantial, it is pure ‘appearance’ in the sense that it exists only to the degree to which it appears.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite this seemingly exclusive regard for appearances, though, there are numerous instances throughout Being and Nothingness where Sartre seems to go beyond what appears in an attempt to *explain* what appears. The following quotations are evidence of this:

From the moment the world appears qua world it gives itself as *being only that*. The necessary counterpart of this apprehension then is indeed the emergence of ‘human reality’ in nothingness.<sup>31</sup>

...we have just discovered a swarm of ultra-mundane beings which possess as much reality and efficacy as other beings, but which enclose within themselves non-being. They require an explanation which remains within the limits of the real....Nothingness can be nihilated only on the foundation of being; if nothingness can be

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

given, it is neither before nor after being, nor in a general way outside of being. Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being-like a worm.<sup>32</sup>

*The being by which Nothingness comes to the world must be its own Nothingness.*<sup>33</sup>

...every question supposes that we realize a nihilating withdrawal in relation to the given....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.<sup>34</sup>

What we have been trying to define is the being of man in so far as he conditions the appearance of nothingness, and this being has appeared to us as freedom.<sup>35</sup>

...rejected possibilities in turn have no other being than their 'sustained being;' it is I who sustain them in being....<sup>36</sup>  
...the whole idea of foundation comes into the world through the for-itself.<sup>37</sup>

Human reality by which lack appears in the world must be itself a lack. For lack can come into being only through lack....<sup>38</sup>

But if it is true that the possible is-so to speak-an option on being, and if it is true that the possible can come into the world only through a being which is its own possibility, this implies for human reality the necessity of being its being in the form of an option on its being.<sup>39</sup>

It is through the for-itself that the past arrives in the world because its 'I am' is in the form of an *I am me*.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 168.

It is through human reality that multiplicity comes into the world; it is the quasi-multiplicity at the heart of being-for-itself which causes number to be revealed in the world.<sup>41</sup>

Totality can come to beings only by a being which has to be its own totality in their presence. This is precisely the case with the for-itself, a detotalized totality which temporalizes itself in a perpetual incompleteness. It is the for-itself in its presence to being which causes there to be an *all of being*.<sup>42</sup>

Space...depends on temporality and appears in temporality since it can come into the world only through a being whose mode of being is temporalization....<sup>43</sup>

...quantity...is the inapprehensible indifference of being-which can appear only *if there is* being and which, although belonging to being, can come to it only from a for-itself....<sup>44</sup>

Human-reality is the being which causes a *place* to come to objects.<sup>45</sup>

All of these passages seem to express the notion that consciousness, or at least conscious human beings, is a condition of possibility for various aspects of appearances. Such a position would seem to be beyond confirmation by a mere inspection of what appears, since even if consciousness always appears, consciousness's *necessary role* in appearances does not appear. As Kant notes, "(e)xperience tells us, indeed, what is, but not that it must necessarily be so, and not otherwise."<sup>46</sup>

This willingness by Sartre to deviate from a purely phenomenological

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 196.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 250.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 255.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 264.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 370.

<sup>46</sup> Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1965, p. 42/A2.

ontology would of course be expected by one who adheres to the previously-mentioned interpretation of him that treats consciousness as something other than just an appearance or the fact of their being appearance, namely a correlate of appearances by *virtue* of which they appear. And in fact one finds further support for the correlational treatment of consciousness in Sartre's claims about *how* consciousness conditions appearances. In those claims, like the passages just quoted, Sartre treats consciousness as somehow related to appearances precisely as what enables there to be appearances, and indeed particular *sorts* of appearances. As already noted, consciousness of anything is necessarily consciousness of itself. This leads Sartre, as we shall see more clearly later, to treat self-consciousness as presence to and thus as a certain sort of separation from self.<sup>47</sup> But Sartre offers an *explanation*, in turn, of this special sort of self-separation. According to Sartre, this self-separation of consciousness, or being-for-itself, originates from a failed attempt by non-conscious being, or being-in-itself, to found or cause itself. This attempt is, of course, doomed to failure, since something cannot *both* separate from itself in order to be the cause of itself *and* remain the being that is caused. One might speculate that Sartre offers this *particular* explanation of the self-separation of self-consciousness because an attempt at self-causation suggests both a splitting from self in order to be the separate cause of self as well as identity with the self that is split from in order to also be the effect of this cause. Perhaps

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<sup>47</sup> Sartre, pp. 11, 121.

some notion of a chronological order of a cause and its effect might suggest a self-caused being having to *return* to being its effect after being its own separate cause. A failure to be self-caused might then be treated as a failure to in some sense make it all the way back to the self that initially split, so that there is the immediate juxtaposition or presence of the self that is caused to that self that is its cause. Facticity is the term Sartre uses for the non-conscious being that attempts to cause itself. As we shall also see later, Sartre describes facticity as in some sense the 'body' of the for-itself; I will say more about the body in Chapter Four. In any case, the following quote illustrates Sartre's account of the origin of consciousness:

For us, on the other hand, the appearance of the for-itself or absolute event refers indeed to the effort of an in-itself to found itself; it corresponds to an attempt on the part of being to remove contingency from its being. But this attempt results in the nihilation of the in-itself, because the in-itself can not found *itself* without introducing the *self* or a reflective, nihilating reference into the absolute identity of its being and consequently degenerating into *for-itself*. The for-itself corresponds then to an expanding de-structuring of the in-itself, and the in-itself is nihilated and absorbed in its attempt to found itself. Facticity...resides in the for-itself as a memory of being.... Being-in-itself can found its nothingness but not its being....the contingency which the for-itself has derived from the in-itself remains out of reach. It is what remains of the in-itself in the for-itself as facticity....<sup>48</sup>

All of this seems supportive of a correlational rather than a purely phenomenological treatment of consciousness. To put it in Sartre's own terms, this is because these claims are not ontological, but "metaphysical". According to Sartre, metaphysics and ontology are not the same thing. Ontology (or at

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp. 132-133.

least Sartre's phenomenological ontology) is the phenomenological description of the structures of a being, while metaphysics is "the study of individual processes which have given birth to *this* world as a concrete and particular totality."<sup>49</sup> It would seem that for Sartre, "facticity" has two distinct sorts of significance. Namely, it has some sort of significance on the purely phenomenological level of ontology, and another on the metaphysical level.

On the phenomenological level of appearances, facticity is what the objects of consciousness refer back to, as part of their very meaning, as what consciousness in some sense 'is,'<sup>50</sup> despite its "nothingness." On the metaphysical level, though, facticity is the in-itself being that perennially fails to cause itself, this failure in turn resulting in it being separated from and present to itself as a *for-itself* being to which objects of consciousness appear in the first place. Facticity as the non-conscious being that failed in this way is presumably metaphysical, in Sartre's sense, because it is part of the process whereby consciousness occurs so that there could be any sort of appearances in the first place. And it is not phenomenological because there is no appearance of the very fact of a non-conscious in-itself being changing itself into self-present consciousness as a result of an attempt at self-causation. Unfortunately (for Sartre), the reason for the lack of such an appearance would seem to reveal the very impossibility of the presumed metaphysical fact in question, namely, that even "(i)n order to be a project of founding itself, the in-itself would of necessity

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 788.

<sup>50</sup> Sartre, pp. 430-431.



have to be originally a presence to itself- i.e., it would have to be already consciousness.”<sup>51</sup> In any case, this passage shows how facticity in its metaphysical sense is relevant to the correlational view of consciousness. For here, consciousness is equated with facticity as the non-appearing in-itself being that attempts to cause itself, and such a being turns out to be that which appearances must appear to. Thus, as claimed by the correlational view of consciousness, it seems that consciousness for Sartre is related to appearances rather than being a mere appearance itself, or the mere fact of there being appearances.

One might object here that whatever one might say in regard to their apparent impossibility from the start, Sartre’s metaphysical claims about the origin of consciousness and of appearances are not actual assertions about anything beyond phenomenology but are rather, by his own admission, nothing more than hypotheses that “will remain hypotheses since we can not expect either further validation or invalidation.”<sup>52</sup> After all, even if those claims *could* be true, consciousness could not have been conscious before its origin in order to have experienced it.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Sartre claims that “metaphysics is to ontology as history is to sociology,”<sup>54</sup> suggesting that ontology provides the phenomenological data for metaphysics’ speculative hypotheses. A possible

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<sup>51</sup> Sartre, p. 789.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 790.

<sup>53</sup> Wilson, p. 46.

<sup>54</sup> Sartre, p. 790.

example of ontology's provision of fodder for metaphysical speculation is the following. According to Sartre, ontology teaches us at least two things about non-conscious being-in-itself and consciousness.

(1) *If* the in-itself were to found itself, it could attempt to do so only by making itself consciousness; that is, the concept of *causa sui* includes within it that of presence to self- *i.e.*, the nihilating decompression of being; (2) Consciousness is *in fact* a project of founding itself; that is, of attaining to the dignity of the in-itself-for-itself or in-itself-as-self-cause.<sup>55</sup>

According to this passage, first, my consciousness of a table, for example, is somehow an attempt to found itself, which is equivalent to an attempt at 'attaining to the dignity of the...in-itself-as-self-cause.' And second, the only way that a non-conscious thing can cause itself is by being present to itself like my consciousness of a table. In any case, for Sartre, ontology's claims about a self-caused being as present to itself and of consciousness as a movement toward self-causation produces a *task* for metaphysics, namely "of *deciding* (emphasis added) whether the movement is or is not a first 'attempt' on the part of the in-itself to found itself."<sup>56</sup> Although one might of course wonder if Sartre is basing these supposedly ontological claims on his metaphysical explanation, rather than vice versa, phenomenological ontology, supposedly remaining on the phenomenologically descriptive level, can only say that everything happens *as if* the in-itself modified itself as consciousness as some sort of result of a failed

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 789.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 790.

attempt to cause or found itself.<sup>57</sup> Thus Sartre's metaphysical claims may not be evidence of his willingness to go beyond the level of appearances in his treatment of consciousness.

Although Sartre certainly makes claims at times about the hypothetical nature of his metaphysical account of consciousness, there is on the other hand no denying that he also at times treats that account as an assertion about what actually is the case. The previously-cited passage about facticity's attempt to recover itself seems like such an assertion, with no qualification of that attempt as a mere possibility. Further evidence of Sartre's treatment of metaphysics as more than a merely hypothetical endeavor is his insistence on providing certain answers to two metaphysical questions. The first question is "Why does the for-itself arise in terms of being?,"<sup>58</sup> which amounts to asking why consciousness is in some sense an in-itself being, and the second is "If the in-itself and the for-itself are two modalities of *being*, is there not a hiatus at the very core of the idea of being?,"<sup>59</sup> which amounts to asking what if anything is in common between conscious and non-conscious being. If metaphysics were truly nothing but speculation and hypotheses, then one would not expect Sartre to answer these two questions and thus go beyond appearances in his treatment of consciousness.

Why does Sartre feel the need to answer these metaphysical questions,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp. 789-790.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 788.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 790.

given that any answer to them is beyond confirmation by experience? Jeffrey Wilson, in his article “Metaphysical Questions in Sartre’s Phenomenological Ontology,” suggests that Sartre treats these two questions as he does because only a particular answer to them can do justice to what Sartre claims ontologically.<sup>60</sup> I will argue in Chapter Five that Sartre’s metaphysical claims can help account for what he notes on the level of phenomenological ontology about the seeming independence of what appears to consciousness, but Wilson says that both the freedom of consciousness and its ability to act, two other central themes in Sartre’s ontological description of consciousness, require a particular answer to each of the above metaphysical questions.

Regarding the first question, “Why does consciousness arise in terms of being?,” one could seemingly eliminate the answer that being-in-itself *causes* there to be consciousness by making itself present to itself. According to Wilson, the reason one could eliminate it is that consciousness would thus be determined by the in-itself and no longer free.<sup>61</sup> This would be unacceptable to Sartre, since, as one commentator notes, “*Being and Nothingness* may itself be considered a long paean to Cartesian freedom.”<sup>62</sup> An answer offered by Wilson that *would* be seemingly compatible with the freedom of consciousness is an appeal to teleology: being-in-itself does not *cause* consciousness but rather freely realizes the purpose or goal of attaining consciousness by means of its modification of

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<sup>60</sup> Wilson, p. 60.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> Marjorie Grene, Sartre, New Viewpoints, New York, 1973, p. 45.

itself as present to itself.<sup>63</sup> The difference between Wilson's answer to this first metaphysical question and the answer rejected by him allegedly explains Sartre's acceptance of this question's legitimacy, since the former answer but not the latter one allows for the freedom of consciousness.

Regardless of the problems with the answer that Wilson rejects, however, his metaphysical claim is itself problematic. The fact that freedom is the setting of ends or purposes would make his answer compatible with the *existence* of freedom, but not with Sartre's *ascription* of freedom. Such an answer would seem to ascribe such freedom to the in-itself that consciousness "originated" from in addition to consciousness itself. Indeed, such an ascription would actually mean that the originating in-itself was *not* really in-itself in the first place, but for-itself instead, since a goal or end is something that does not exist,<sup>64</sup> and "what is can in no way determine by itself what is not...(f)or an act is a projection of the for-itself toward what is not."<sup>65</sup> Such an equation of the originating in-itself with the for-itself would mean that consciousness does not *arise* at all, since the notion of something arising or emerging seemingly requires the non-existence of that something until its emergence. "Why does the for-itself arise in terms of being?" thus assumes what Wilson's teleology precludes, namely the emergence of consciousness *from* non-conscious being, so that Wilson's teleological suggestion ultimately *eliminates* the question it was intended to *answer*.

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<sup>63</sup> Wilson, p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> Sartre, p. 564.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 562.

Another problem with Wilson's teleology is its seeming incompatibility with Sartre's description of consciousness as the negation of the in-itself<sup>66</sup> (I will say more about that in the remaining chapters). As such a negation, consciousness would seem to come *after* non-conscious being-in-itself, since negation always presupposes and is subsequent to what it denies. As Sartre claims, "...negation is a refusal of existence. By means of it a being...is posited, then thrown back to nothingness."<sup>67</sup> The fact that negation comes after whatever it negates seems to be further demonstrated when Sartre notes that nothingness, like negation, is the denial of what was first posited, so that being, as that which nothingness denies, is such that "we must be careful never to posit nothingness as an original abyss from which being arose."<sup>68</sup> The point seems to be that, as a negation of being-in-itself, consciousness can not come *before* the in-itself that it negates, but rather must come *after* it. But how can it come *after* it if the in-itself in question already had a purpose? As such, must the in-itself not already be for-itself as well? Wilson's suggested answer to Sartre's first metaphysical question thus seems problematic, even if he is right about Sartre's reason for answering that question.

In any case, there is a further problem. Sartre seems to treat temporality as inseparable from consciousness,<sup>69</sup> so that there can not be *anything* existing before consciousness. The reason Sartre treats temporality this way is that

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pp. 785-786.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 279.

anything temporal is somehow separated from itself, and being-in-itself exists as self-identical with no room for such distinction from itself.<sup>70</sup> An example might help support this point about the self-separation of temporality. I am now writing this work on Sartre, but several hours ago I was not doing so but was reading instead. The fact that I am now typing but I was reading apparently means that some constant existent has endured throughout both activities, namely myself (I will say more about Sartre's treatment of an enduring self or subject later in this chapter). In some way, then, I am the same being that was reading before but is not doing so any longer. But this also seems to imply that, on the other hand, I am not the reading being in question, but I *was* that being. Such temporal distinction from oneself was described in an earlier quote as a "breakage of identity" and "disruption by negation,"<sup>71</sup> and being-in-itself does not include such breakages or any negation. It simply is. Non-conscious being in-itself thus could not exist *before* it modified itself as consciousness, as Wilson apparently suggests, since it could not exist afterward as *not* being what it was. Consciousness, on the other hand, exists as not being that which it is (for reasons that will be explained in the next chapter), so that it exists as the very separation from self that temporality involves.

Due to the importance of this point for Sartre's position on the origin of consciousness, certain objections to this understanding of temporality should be addressed. One might object that Sartre need not resort to any notion of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, pp. 28-29.

<sup>71</sup> Pp. 6-7.

separation from self in order to account for temporality, since one could simply appeal to a permanent self that endures while other factors do not. So, in the example offered above, one need not say that my present typing self is somehow distinct from my past reading self, but rather the self in both cases is one and the same. What is different in the two cases is the activities engaged in by me, but I am (or at least could be) identical throughout those activities. As such, I do not have to *not* be something, specifically myself in the past, in order to exist both before and after certain events (such as my typing and my reading, respectively). So, it would also not seem that non-conscious being-in-itself would have to *not* be what it was in the past in order to exist before something, namely consciousness. The fact that it simply *is* without any of the negation allegedly involved with anything that *was* does not seem to preclude it existing prior to something else, so that Wilson could treat being-in-itself as existing prior to its project of attaining consciousness.

Sartre's response to this objection is that permanence presupposes time, and as such it entails the negation required for temporality's difference from self.<sup>72</sup> The reason he says this is that permanence is obviously not simply the existence of something in the instantaneous now, but rather existence in the past as well. In the above example, a permanent self would exist both in the past as I was reading and in the present as I type. Without such temporal endurance, permanence has no meaning. But what is past is different from what is present,

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<sup>72</sup> Sartre, p. 164.



even if it has endured throughout. To recognize a table, for example (an example that will lead into another objection against Sartre's treatment of temporality), as having already been there, even if having been there without undergoing any change, is to distinguish what it was from what it is.

One might say that such distinction is not a difference and thus a lack of identity between the present and the past unchanging table, but rather a difference between the *properties* of the past and of the present table. So, even if the past and the present table were identical with no distinction between them (indeed, there would then be no "them" that could be distinct), the table could still exist before and after things due to its differing properties. So, for instance, an enduring table could exist both before and after one's breakfast and yet be numerically identical afterward with what it was before. The properties of the table in the past may differ from the properties of the table in the present (for instance, the color of parts of the table could be different from what it was before because of spilt juice), but the table itself could be identical throughout.

Sartre's previously-mentioned points about temporality, however, seem to show that even unchanging things are not identical through time. In the example from above, even if one were to focus on the table itself and not concern oneself with its properties, there is still a difference and thus a lack of identity between the table in the past and the table in the present, no matter how unchanging the table may be. That difference is evident in the fact that the table *was* in the past but it *is* in the present. The fact that it has always occupied space, for instance, means that it is extended in the present, but it cannot be the case that it *is*

extended before. Rather, it *was* extended before. This shows that, in at least one respect, everything with a past must not be what it was: namely, that it must not be (now) anything at all *then* which it *was* then, but it must *have been* it. Thus Sartre's claim that being-in-itself, by virtue of the fact that it simply is without not being anything, does not exist temporally. Consequently, it could not exist *before* consciousness as Wilson seemingly suggests.

An obvious problem with all of this is that non-conscious things *do* seem to exist temporally, as is evident from the above example of the table. While my use of that example may have shown the unavoidable distinction between something in the past and that same thing in the present, it seems to show that such distinction is possible for non-conscious being-in-itself. Since it is true that tables and any number of non-conscious things are such that they *were* even though they now *are*, why is it not possible that non-conscious being-in-itself existed before consciousness, thus allowing Wilson, for instance, to say that being-in-itself *was* non-conscious before it modified itself as consciousness?

Sartre's answer is that non-conscious beings exist in time due to consciousness. Any object of consciousness, such as a table, appears as having a past and a future because "it is revealed to a revelation of which the very being is temporalization."<sup>73</sup> So, it is because I as a conscious being exist temporally in the sense that I *was* before but *am* now that a table can appear to me as having already been in the past and as being now. Somehow the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 280.

temporality of consciousness is transferred to non-conscious being-in-itself, with the result that being-in-itself “reflects time.”<sup>74</sup> According to Sartre, without consciousness there would be no before nor after for non-conscious beings. The self-separation of consciousness is necessarily involved with the self-separation of temporality.

Perhaps, though, one could save Wilson’s teleological answer to Sartre’s metaphysical question by going *backward* from consciousness to non-conscious being-in-itself instead of *forward* from the latter to the former. Consciousness is capable of not being what it was, so one might say that consciousness is not the non-conscious being-in-itself that it was. A possible problem with this is that one can not say, for instance, that consciousness was non-conscious being-in-itself but now is consciousness *in the same way* that I have in mind in saying that, e.g., I was reading but am now typing. The reason for this is that I was conscious both when I was reading and as I am typing, so that both myself as reading and myself as typing could be each other while still not being each other. For Sartre, this is how one can no longer be what one was.<sup>75</sup> As mentioned above, this is the way of being and not being something that is involved with temporality. But it does not seem possible that consciousness was non-conscious being-in-itself, since the latter is incapable of not being or of being different from consciousness the way I as reading in the past am able to be different from or not be I as typing in the present. The inability of non-conscious being-in-itself to not be something

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, pp. 168-170.

would seem to make it just as impossible for consciousness to exist *after* non-conscious being as it is for being-in-itself to have existed *before* consciousness.

This possible response on behalf of Sartre seems to miss the point. While it may be true that *if* non-conscious being-in-itself could not be different from something due to the fact that it could not *not* be something, *then* non-conscious being-in-itself could not have existed before consciousness (or anything else) as something that it *was*, the example of the table (or of any number of non-conscious objects) seems to show that non-conscious beings *are* capable of not being something. Even though Sartre describes being-in-itself as “not a connection with itself....because it is glued to itself,”<sup>76</sup> it could be that Sartre simply mistakenly equates *all* lack of self-identity with the difference from self that is the self-presence of consciousness, instead of allowing for a distinction between such lack for temporality and such lack for self-presence. In that case, he has not ruled out that non-conscious being could exist before consciousness or any alleged attempt by the in-itself to achieve consciousness, thus allowing Wilson to maintain the emergence of consciousness after its non-existence. Sartre has not ruled out that it might have at least *that* much lack of self-identity.

One might reconcile the seemingly temporal nature of non-conscious things with Sartre’s claims about temporality by simply treating those claims as purely phenomenological pronouncements. By that it is meant that Sartre could

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

be simply considering reality only as it is for consciousness, and that reality appears to consciousness as temporally structured. Indeed, Sartre's previously-cited quote that "(m)odern thought has realized considerable progress by reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest it"<sup>77</sup> seems to suggest that Sartre simply finds useful an approach to things as they appear to consciousness, leaving open the question of how things are outside of that perspective. As one commentator notes, one can possibly limit Sartre to "the more minimal claim that *experienced* temporal features derive primarily from the inherent temporality of the For-itself...; that is, temporal experience is...built-in to the being of consciousness itself."<sup>78</sup> Consequently, a phenomenological understanding of Sartre's claims about temporality would eliminate any conflict between those claims and the earlier suggestion about the in-itself's attempt at consciousness coming after the in-itself's existence without such an attempt. One could simply argue that the possibility of temporal existence for non-conscious things is beyond the scope of Sartre's purely phenomenological description of temporality. It should be noted, though, that his earlier claim about objects of experience *owing* their temporal nature to consciousness goes beyond a purely phenomenological perspective. As previously stated, one can not experience the *necessity* of certain conditions for appearances.

Wilson's consideration of Sartre's treatment of birth actually suggests a purely phenomenological approach by Sartre. In that treatment, Sartre seems to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Peter McInerney, "Sartre's Nihilations," The Southern Journal of Philosophy, 20, 1982, p. 101.

assert the existence of consciousness *after* its existence as non-conscious being. According to Sartre, consciousness always has a past.<sup>79</sup> One understanding of that claim is that consciousness always has the structure of having surpassed something that already existed and that it in some sense is, like my consciousness of a table, for instance, involving some sort of reference to my body that was already there and that it in some sense is (I will say more about the body in Chapter Four). The problem with this claim is how the original instance of consciousness, perhaps occurring at one's birth, can refer back to something it is when there is nothing preceding it that is consciousness. In order for the first act of consciousness to refer back to what it in some sense is, it would seem that consciousness would have to precede itself, which sounds like the same impossibility found with the already-mentioned project of being self-caused. Sartre tries to avoid this problem by saying that the original act of consciousness does not refer to a previous instance of consciousness, which would obviously make the referring act non-original, but rather the original act refers to an *in-itself* being that it was.

This might seem to forget Sartre's point about the existence of temporality due to consciousness, as evident in Sartre's claim that "(t)he In-itself is what the For-itself was *before*."<sup>80</sup> Wilson, in any case, defends Sartre as not guilty of making a problematic claim here. Wilson suggests that consciousness simply confers this prior existence upon the in-itself "by its own immediate self-given

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<sup>79</sup> Sartre, p. 199.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 198.

structure of pastness.”<sup>81</sup> But this is not clearly relevant to Sartre’s first metaphysical question, since Sartre need not then be saying that the in-itself *really* existed before consciousness, but rather that consciousness simply *appears* to itself as having already been an in-itself being. Thus one’s awareness at one’s birth, if one could remember it (and if it plausibly had any clear structure), would refer to a past as some in-itself being that one was (presumably, I will argue later, one’s body) before one’s consciousness existed, but no commitment need be made about the actual pre-existence of that in-itself being to one’s consciousness. Wilson’s point in all of this would then seem really to be that Sartre’s treatment of birth need not be seen as a venture into metaphysics after all, but rather that treatment could be understood as an instance of phenomenological description of the structures of consciousness.

One might also approach Wilson in a different way. Even if one could reconcile Sartre’s claims about temporality with the possibility of consciousness existing after there was no consciousness, Wilson’s teleological answer to Sartre’s first metaphysical question may not depend upon that possibility at all. One might take Wilson as simply saying, instead, that consciousness just *is* the in-itself attempting to found or cause itself, and being-in-itself has *always* been attempting to cause itself and has thus always been “turning itself into” consciousness. This calls to mind the notion of God as always creating matter

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<sup>81</sup> Wilson, p. 54.

rather than creating it after existing without matter, and it eliminates any debate about the existence of something before consciousness.

Even if non-conscious being has not existed in a time before any and all conscious beings, though, Wilson's teleology still seems problematic. It would still require that each *particular* conscious being exist after it was a *particular* non-conscious being that had the *project* of becoming that conscious being, but his teleology does not allow for non-conscious beings' existence prior to their consciousness. As the *project* or *goal* of a non-conscious being, consciousness can not yet exist, but having a project means that an in-itself being is already conscious. My body, for instance, can not have the project of being my consciousness without thereby being conscious already, but conscious existence by my body means that such existence is not the upshot of its project. Nor would it seem that Wilson could defend his teleology by saying that consciousness has the project of its *future* conscious existence, which obviously has not yet occurred, since his teleology is not an explanation of the for-itself arising from the for-itself, but rather of Sartre's claim about the for-itself arising from the in-itself<sup>82</sup> (or at least of the in-itself as the consciousness it makes itself be arising from the in-itself as making itself consciousness). Besides, any projection of consciousness toward its future is certainly not beyond experience and is thus seemingly subject to description by Sartre's phenomenological ontology, whereas Sartre's first metaphysical question about the for-itself arising in terms

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<sup>82</sup> Wilson, p. 52.



of being is such that “ontology can not reply, for the problem here is to explain an event, not to describe the structures of a being.”<sup>83</sup> The problems for Wilson’s teleological answer to Sartre’s first metaphysical question thus go beyond any questionable assertions by Sartre about the connection between consciousness and time.

It should be noted that Sartre might seem to share some of these problems in his previously-mentioned treatment of facticity’s role in the origin of consciousness, but he actually does not have such difficulties. As already noted, Sartre treats consciousness as the failed attempt by in-itself facticity to found or cause itself.<sup>84</sup> Here we see Sartre seemingly embracing the very option which he rules out when saying that “(i)n order to be a project of founding itself, the in-itself would of necessity have to be originally a presence to itself- *i.e.* it would have to be already consciousness.”<sup>85</sup> It would seem, though, that Sartre does not have the same problems as Wilson does. As already noted, one might accept the equation of some in-itself being with consciousness by simply saying that consciousness just *is* the in-itself attempting to cause itself. The problem for Wilson is that the originating in-itself being can not be consciousness since it has the *goal or project of achieving* consciousness. Sartre, though, does not treat the in-itself as having *consciousness* as its goal, but rather the in-itself has the goal of self-causation.<sup>86</sup> As already noted, this goal is unrealizable, but unlike Wilson,

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<sup>83</sup> Sartre, p. 788.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 789.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

Sartre does not equate the in-itself's goal with what the projecting in-itself already is by virtue of its projecting.

Of course, the reason that Wilson thinks consciousness must be the in-itself's *goal* is the need to avoid consciousness having the in-itself as its *cause*, but Sartre might not need to avoid that in order to preserve the freedom of consciousness. As just suggested, in fact, instead of conceiving of the cause of consciousness as a separate being from consciousness, Sartre could instead treat such a cause as not distinct from consciousness. As such, the in-itself might perhaps be more like the *material* cause of consciousness rather than its *efficient* cause. In fact, this may be what Sartre has in mind in saying that the in-itself facticity "remains at the heart of the for-itself"<sup>87</sup> and that consciousness just *is* such an in-itself being attempting to found itself. This would mean that the in-itself is the *stuff* that makes up consciousness in the same way that the material cause of a statue, for instance, is the stuff that makes it up (although consciousness is not a thing but rather, as I will argue in Chapter Five, an event). As noted in the Introduction, treating consciousness as an event would mean that it is something beyond its ingredients although it is *just* those ingredients as incorporated into an event. Such an understanding of consciousness and the in-itself facticity that in some sense constitutes it could perhaps make facticity a "cause" that does not pose any necessary threat to the freedom of consciousness. Although Wilson may be right that Sartre meant to preserve the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

freedom of consciousness by answering the question “Why does the for-itself arise in terms of being?,” it does not seem that such an answer must altogether eliminate a cause of consciousness.

As mentioned earlier, Sartre also treats another metaphysical question as legitimate and worth answering, namely “If the in-itself and the for-itself are two modalities of *being*, is there not a hiatus at the very core of the idea of being?”<sup>88</sup> As previously noted, this question is asking what if anything there is in common between consciousness and non-conscious being. Wilson claims that, just as with the first question, Sartre treats this question as worthy of legitimate consideration because only a particular answer to it is compatible with a central feature of Sartre’s ontology of consciousness. As already noted, the first question merits a certain answer, according to Wilson, in order to maintain the freedom of consciousness. In a similar vein, Wilson claims that the second question must be answered in such a way as to preserve the ability of consciousness to act. Unsurprisingly, Wilson treats consciousness’s ability to act as inextricably connected to consciousness’s freedom, since “freedom is power...a power over things in the world that would assure that free choices are efficacious in the sense that they make some real modification in being.”<sup>89</sup> So, according to Wilson, the freedom of consciousness is again at stake with the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 790.

<sup>89</sup> Wilson, p. 58.

explanation of whether or not the being of consciousness and of non-conscious things is dual or unitary, and thus Sartre is warranted in going beyond the level of appearances here.

Unlike the first question concerning the “origin” of consciousness, this second metaphysical question seems to anticipate the possible answers to it. Instead of simply asking why, the second question asks which of two possibilities is actually the case. Those possibilities are (1) the being of consciousness and the being of non-conscious things are distinct and dual with nothing shared between the two, and (2) there is something in common between these two modes of being. Wilson seems to think that Sartre embraces (2),<sup>90</sup> and it certainly appears that (2) is the answer compatible with consciousness’s ability to act on the world, while (1) is not. Sartre seems to recognize this when noting that action is such that “it involves a project which has an immanent origin and which determines a modification in the being of the transcendent.”<sup>91</sup> So, for instance, when I act so as to prepare dinner, I have a conception of a non-existent meal which functions as part of an act that determines a modification of the world and leads to the existence of that meal. The fact that action seemingly encompasses both consciousness (the immanent) and non-conscious being-in-itself (the transcendent) apparently invites an understanding of the two realms of being as united in some fashion. As one commentator notes, even though one’s ability to freely act is in some sense a matter involving oneself, “it must not be

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>91</sup> Sartre, p. 795.

forgotten that, in the concrete, freedom, for Sartre, is the very intentionality that makes us a being in the world.”<sup>92</sup> If consciousness and being-in-itself existed as a radical duality, the chasm that would separate the two might indeed seem incompatible with Sartre’s ascription of free action, or, for that matter, any action at all, to consciousness.

An example from modern philosophy might help to make this point. According to Descartes, the mind and the body are radically distinct beings. The mind’s essence is thinking, whereas the body’s essence is extension.<sup>93</sup> According to Descartes, whenever one performs an action, one first decides mentally what one will do and then that mental decision somehow causes one’s body to move in a certain way. The problem with this is how the mind, being in essence thought and not being extended, can cause the extended body to do something. One usually thinks of extended bodies as affected by other things through surface contact, such as a billiard ball moving after being hit by another ball. Energy’s effects on bodies, such as a magnetic field moving an object, occur by such a field pervading a body and thus being located where that body is. Such surface contacts and locating, though, must occur at some place, some point in space, since the contacted surface and pervaded body exist in space. Thought, however, is not extended like the body, so thought does not occupy any point in space. How, then, can a mental, non-extended thought contact an

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<sup>92</sup> Joseph S. Catalano, “On the Possibility of Good Faith,” *Man and World*, 13, 1980, p. 225.

<sup>93</sup> Rene Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Boston, 1983, pp. 5, 40.

extended body's surface or be located where a body is? Without such contact or location, no effect upon the extended body seems possible. This problem also exists for the body's ability to affect the mind, since extended bodies seem to produce effects by the same means by which they are affected, namely surface contact. If, as Descartes claims, certain activities or motions in one's eyes, for instance, cause one to have a visual sensation, then one's physically extended sense organs have caused the mind to have the mental sensation. This seemingly requires the sense organs or their components to contact the mind, but no such contact is possible without an extended surface of the mind to contact. This problem with causal interaction between the mind and the body, the interaction that occurs in Descartes' treatment of action, seems to make action an impossibility. The source of this problem seems to be Descartes' treatment of the mind and the body as radically distinct types of being.

One might simply dismiss this as a problem specific to the distinction made by Descartes and not see any necessary difficulty caused by any and all radical dualisms between consciousness and non-conscious things. It should be noted, though, that Sartre seemed concerned with avoiding Descartes' problem of connecting the mind with the world, a problem Sartre traces to the fact that "it is not profitable first to separate the two terms of a relation in order to try to join them together again later."<sup>94</sup> Thus one commentator notes that "just as (with)

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<sup>94</sup> Sartre, p. 33.

the incoherence of the Cartesian dualism...so in the present instance would it seem that the dichotomy of for-itself and in-itself must give way to a unity of in-itself-for-itself if the requirement of coherence is to be satisfied.”<sup>95</sup> This is a condemnation of a dualism of consciousness and non-conscious reality, and it is an endorsement of a unified sense of being shared by the for-itself and the in-itself. Given the noted context of that condemnation and endorsement, it would seem that Wilson is right about what motivates Sartre’s apparent answer to the metaphysical question about the unity of conscious and non-conscious beings. Action for Sartre requires a connection between the conscious and the non-conscious, and an affirmation of a basic unity of the two might seem necessary for that connection. Since Sartre ascribes free action to consciousness, he must also ascribe unity to the for-itself and the in-itself.

Why, though, is this a metaphysical matter? It might not seem promising to delve into the processes that have led to the differences between the for-itself and the in-itself, as metaphysics does, rather than to describe the different structures of the two types of being, as phenomenological ontology does, since even a shared origin for the two types of being would not guarantee any connection between them. After all, Descartes treats the mental and the physical as both created by God, but that shared source does not suppress the previously-mentioned difficulties with uniting the two types of being. Perhaps, though, metaphysics can show how the two are united by showing, once again,

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<sup>95</sup> Robert C. Whittemore, “Metaphysical Foundations of Sartre’s Ontology,” Tulane Studies in Philosophy, 8, 1959, p. 120.

that the for-itself's origin makes it really *nothing more* than the in-itself. As already noted, the for-itself originates from in-itself facticity attempting to found or cause itself (or at least one might so *describe* it, *as if* this is the case), and facticity remains at the heart of the for-itself as what the for-itself in some sense is. The in-itself, one might say, is certainly changed by its failed attempt and subsequent separation from itself, but the in-itself is still the basic 'matter' that makes up consciousness, or at least "out of" which consciousness is composed. As Sartre notes, "(b)eing-for-itself must be wholly body and it must be wholly consciousness...."<sup>96</sup>

By showing that consciousness is really just the in-itself (at least as regardable in a certain way) doing something, Sartre's metaphysical claims demonstrate the unity of the being of the in-itself and of the for-itself. As already noted by Wilson, such unity then allows Sartre to affirm the ability of consciousness to act. As also already noted, Sartre's metaphysical claims might additionally support another feature of Sartre's phenomenological ontology, namely the independent nature of appearing phenomena. As I will argue in Chapter Five, the fact that the for-itself's facticity is just the in-itself doing something enables facticity to be of such a nature as to contribute to that appearance of independence.

As previously stated, in any case, Sartre's willingness to answer these two metaphysical questions suggests his willingness to go beyond appearances in

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<sup>96</sup> Sartre, p. 404.



his treatment of consciousness, and his possible answers to them certainly seem to make consciousness something more than what appears. Those answers treat consciousness as an in-itself facticity (at least regardable as something) that attempts to found itself, and such facticity would not seem capable of appearance, since an in-itself being can not make such an attempt. Despite the impossibility of Sartre's answers to his two metaphysical questions, all of this suggests the previously-mentioned correlational treatment of consciousness rather than the purely phenomenological one, since consciousness would not merely be an appearance or appearances of some sort, nor the mere fact of there being appearances, as the latter treatment claims, but would rather be, as the former treatment claims, something beyond appearances that makes appearances possible in the first place.

Still, though, Sartre's forays beyond phenomenology and into metaphysics might actually support the purely phenomenological treatment of consciousness. Sartre claims that the attempted self-recovery of the in-itself would not only show the unity of the in-itself and the for-itself (as already noted), but it would also lead to the rejection of the very distinction between consciousness and the rest of being.<sup>97</sup> In its place would be "a being which we shall call the *phenomen(on)* and which will be provided with two dimensions of being, the dimension in-itself and the dimension for-itself."<sup>98</sup> This indeed calls to mind the proposal that consciousness for Sartre just is the fact that phenomena appear and indicate

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.794.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

other phenomena in various ways, rather than consciousness being something more that correlates with such appearance. Sartre might then be seen as treating the “unity” of the in-itself and the for-itself as incompatible with anything like the sort of duality that a correlational approach to consciousness would seem to endorse, and such a reduction of reality to phenomena would obviously preclude any treatment of consciousness as something beyond the phenomenological level.

This apparent rejection of such duality may seem especially evident in Sartre’s seeming rejection of a ‘subject’ that experiences the world. Although the focus of this work is Being and Nothingness, Sartre gives an extended treatment of the notion of an experiencing ego in The Transcendence of the Ego<sup>99</sup> (hereafter referred to as TOE). Although one can question whether or not the ego is the same as the subject, Sartre’s claims about the ego would certainly seem relevant to the general issue regarding an experiencing being such as the subject is supposed to be, and, I will show, his claims about an experiencing being in TOE seem to be generally accepted in Being and Nothingness.<sup>100</sup> The following, then, is a brief presentation of his claims about the ego in TOE.

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<sup>99</sup> Sartre, The Transcendence of the Ego, The Noonday Press, New York, 1957.

<sup>100</sup> It should be noted that Being and Nothingness does differ from The Transcendence of the Ego in the former’s treatment of conscious experience as being of a personal nature, even though Being and Nothingness seemingly echoes the rejection of an enduring and everpresent ego in experience. For a discussion of this, see James O. Bennett, “Selves and Personal Existence in the Existentialist Tradition,” Journal of the History of Philosophy, 37, 1999.

In TOE, Sartre claims that the ego is not an inhabitant of consciousness, but is rather “outside, *in the world*.”<sup>101</sup> Sartre does not think that every instance of consciousness is such that there is always an ‘I’ that appears, but rather an ‘I’ appears only upon reflection.<sup>102</sup> So, for instance, my awareness of a table is not such that I am aware of *me* as being aware of that table, but rather I am simply aware of the table without any awareness of some object that is myself. Only by reflecting upon my awareness of the table does there appear an ‘I’ that was aware of it. Sartre supports this by appealing to experience,<sup>103</sup> and he also notes that the notion of an ego that inhabits consciousness is contradictory. The reason for this is that such an ego would be *both* an object *and* a free creator of consciousness’s states and actions, but an object cannot be truly free. As Sartre notes, “Genuine spontaneity must be perfectly clear: it *is* what it produces and nothing else,”<sup>104</sup> so that an ‘I’ that is something and is thus not something else would somehow be limited by what it *is* in what it can *do*. Such limitation would not be compatible with the spontaneity of a free consciousness. So, instead of consciousness always being aware of some object that it is, it is rather awareness of something other than itself and of itself as such awareness, without it being an object.<sup>105</sup> There thus seems to be no opposition of an experiencing being, or ‘subject,’ and the world it experiences, an opposition seemingly present

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<sup>101</sup> Sartre, The Transcendence of the Ego, p. 31.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, pp. 45-46.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, pp. 46-47.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

in a correlational treatment of consciousness and absent from the purely phenomenological understanding of Sartre.

It should be noted that Sartre sees this position on the ego as radically opposed to Husserl's treatment of consciousness.<sup>106</sup> Sartre claims that for Husserl, a "transcendental I...would be, so to speak, behind each consciousness, a necessary structure of consciousness whose rays...would light upon each phenomenon presenting itself in the field of attention."<sup>107</sup> And this is in fact Husserl's position in Ideas.<sup>108</sup> Husserl arrives at this position by performing what he calls the phenomenological reduction, a process whereby one no longer treats what appears to one as something existing independently of one. As Husserl states, the phenomenological reduction "*completely bars me from using any judgment that concerns spatio-temporal existence....*"<sup>109</sup> By eliminating such judgment, one can focus on what exactly appears to consciousness so that one can find what is certain in experience. Such focus, according to Husserl, reveals two alleged facts to which Sartre objects. First, it reveals that there is a self-identical ego belonging to each and every experience, and that "no reduction can get any grip on it."<sup>110</sup> Second, it also reveals that the ego always intends or is of something by means of some sort of 'taking up' of (in the case of sensory awareness) sensible elements, so that "out of the *sensile-element...the concrete*

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>108</sup> Edmund Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, Collier Macmillan Publishers, New York, 1931.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p.100.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 214.

intentional experience takes form and shape.”<sup>111</sup> (One might take this in turn to mean that the ego combines and forms sensory material *into* its very object, or else that the ego somehow surpasses such material, in its “forming” of it, *toward* its object, possibly like consciousness for Sartre surpasses its facticity.) Husserl gives the term ‘hyle’ to these basic components of experience, and he gives the term ‘noesis’ to the bestowal of meaning upon experience, by way of “formative” acts.<sup>112</sup> Whatever appears *to* consciousness is then called the ‘noema,’<sup>113</sup> and Husserl claims that the appearing noema need not be treated as a real element of experience while both the ego’s apprehension of what appears, and the hyletic materials therein, are treated as real. The reason for this is that the phenomenological reduction shows that an appearance still remains even after one stops judging it as an independent existent. If one performs the reduction while looking at a tree, for instance, one finds that it “has not forfeited the least shade of content from all the phases, qualities, characters *with which it appeared in this perception.*”<sup>114</sup> What appeared, then, may not be an aspect of independent reality. The ego, though, is always there, so that there is always

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 228.

<sup>113</sup> There is some debate over exactly what the noema is. Some have argued that it is similar to what Frege termed ‘Sense,’ with the spatio-temporal object it is an appearance of being the ‘reference.’ For a discussion of this, see Aquila, “On Intensionalizing Husserl’s Intentions,” *Nous*, 16, 1982, pp. 209-226. Others have argued that it is the object of experience, while still others have argued that it is the content of experience. For a discussion of this, see Ronald McIntyre and David Woodruff Smith, “Theory of Intentionality,” in *Husserl’s Phenomenology: A Textbook*, ed. by J.N. Mohanty and William R. McKenna, University Press of America, Washington, D.C., 1989, pp. 147-179.

<sup>114</sup> Husserl, p. 240.

“the directing of the glance of the pure Ego upon the object ‘intended’ by it....”<sup>115</sup>  
Unlike TOE, then, Husserl treats the ego as ever-present and fundamental in all experience. There is no appearance of something without an ego that plays a role in such appearance, and this opposition of an *experiencing* being to an *experienced* being seems similar to the correlational interpretation of Sartre with its treatment of consciousness as a being beyond appearances.

All of this is relevant to Sartre’s treatment of the subject in Being and Nothingness because Sartre echoes there his rejection of Husserl found in TOE, albeit for different reasons. In Being and Nothingness, Sartre finds fault with Husserl’s treatment of the appearing noema as unreal in contrast to the real noesis. The reason for this is that “Husserl defines consciousness as a transcendence...But from the moment that he makes of the *noema* an *unreal*, a correlate of the *noesis*, a noema whose *esse* is *percipi*, he is totally unfaithful to his principle.”<sup>116</sup> Sartre sees the transcending of consciousness to what it is of as implying the independent existence of what it is of, but Husserl does not seemingly recognize such independence in his treatment of the noema.

One might defend Husserl by noting that all of his conclusions about the noesis and noema followed from his performance of the previously-mentioned phenomenological reduction, so that it is only when one performs this operation that the noema appears as unreal. After all, Husserl recognizes that without this reduction, in what he calls the ‘natural attitude,’ one does treat the things that

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 237.

<sup>116</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 23.

appear as having independent existence.<sup>117</sup> As one commentator notes, “Husserl...speaks of the reduction, and of the *epoche* specifically, as an *epistemological* reduction....He makes no ontological claims whatever in this sketch of phenomenology and phenomenological methodology.”<sup>118</sup> Still, though, it is not as if Husserl is simply treating his conclusions as mere consequences of a decision to not view the objects of one’s experience as independently real, a decision one can obviously refuse. Rather, Husserl performs the reduction in order to find what is certain in experience, to discover the truth about consciousness.<sup>119</sup> So, his treatment of the noesis and of the ego as real in contrast to what one is conscious of is arguably a rejection of the transcendence of consciousness to an independently existing being. Sartre sees that rejection as incompatible with Husserl’s recognition of the intentional nature of consciousness, and he claims that Husserl “has shut himself up inside the *cogito...*,”<sup>120</sup> and that “(c)onsciousness, as Husserl conceived it, can not in reality transcend itself... toward the world....”<sup>121</sup>

Sartre thus sees Husserl’s correlational treatment of consciousness as leading to a rejection of the world. This is in stark contrast to Sartre’s claim in Being and Nothingness that “...knowledge is the *world*...and outside of that-

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<sup>117</sup> Husserl, p. 96.

<sup>118</sup> M. M. Van de Pitte, “On Bracketing the *Epoche*,” Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review, 11, 1972, p. 543.

<sup>119</sup> Husserl, pp. 101-102.

<sup>120</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 119.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, p. 162.

*nothing*.”<sup>122</sup> This certainly sounds like TOE’s similar rejection of an experiencing being. We thus seem left, after all, with Sartre’s previously-mentioned notion of the phenomenon, with its combination of the for-itself and the in-itself, rather than with an opposition of consciousness and the world. Although Sartre based that combination earlier on his metaphysical claim about the attempted self-causation of the in-itself, we can see that his criticism of an ego-inhabited consciousness and of a Husserlian primacy of the ego gives other reasons for rejecting any sort of divide between what is experienced and what experiences. It should be noted, however, that one need not in fact correlate what is experienced with an *ego*, as Husserl does, but could rather correlate appearances with an *event* such as a sort of ‘taking up’ activity like Husserl’s noesis. Still, any such correlation would presumably have to cohere with Sartre’s apparent rejection of anything beyond the world that appears.

Despite that rejection, though, there is still reason to believe that a subject exists for Sartre. Indeed, his unifying notion of the phenomenon, rather than eliminating the subject, might seem unintelligible without a subject. Since the phenomenon is that which appears, it would seem to require a witness in order for it to be an appearance. As previously noted, Sartre recognizes this in his Introduction when he claims that “(r)elative the phenomenon remains, for ‘to appear’ supposes in essence somebody to whom to appear.”<sup>123</sup> Hence his claim in the Conclusion that “(t)he *phenomenon* of in-itself is an abstraction without

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 251.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 4.



consciousness....”<sup>124</sup> As one commentator says about Sartre, “(t)he subject may be deferred, dissolved, and deconstructed, but it is not relinquished,”<sup>125</sup> and another notes how “Sartre...refrains from...effacing the subject completely.”<sup>126</sup> These comments seem verified by Sartre’s earlier claim that “the law of being in the knowing subject is to-be-conscious.”<sup>127</sup> Indeed, this assertion of a subject would seemingly mean that there is more than just a noetic *act* correlated with what appears, and it might suggest a treatment of consciousness as more than just the appearance of phenomena or the fact of such appearance.

Even if Sartre does retain something that experiences over against what is experienced, though, it should be noted that he certainly rejects Husserl’s treatment of the appearing as possibly unreal in contrast to the real status of the being things appear to. Although there are no appearances without consciousness, the *being* of what appears, being-in-itself, is not dependent upon consciousness, whereas consciousness is dependent upon being-in-itself.<sup>128</sup>

The reason for the independence of the in-itself is the earlier-mentioned transcendence of consciousness to what it is of, a transcendence that requires something other than consciousness for it to transcend toward, while the dependence of consciousness is due to its nature as *presence* to what it is of (I

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 791.

<sup>125</sup> Christina Howells, “Conclusion: Sartre and the Deconstruction of the Subject,” in The Cambridge Companion to Sartre, edited by Christina Howells, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992, p. 342.

<sup>126</sup> Nik Farrell Fox, The New Sartre: Explorations in Postmodernism, Continuum, New York, 2003, p. 52.

<sup>127</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 10.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 791.

will say more about that in Chapter Three). So, regardless of Sartre's position on the subject, he does not accept Husserl's *primacy* of the experiencing being over what is experienced. I will argue in Chapter Five, though, that a correlational treatment of consciousness can accommodate Sartre's claims about the independent nature of what is experienced by consciousness, even if Husserl can not.

Still, Sartre not only claims the *dependence* of the experiencing being upon the experienced, he seemingly rejects the very *existence* of such a being in his earlier claim that "...knowledge is the *world*...and outside of that-*nothing*."<sup>129</sup> How this claim can cohere with his position that there must be *somebody* for phenomena to appear to is problematic, but it seems that Sartre's unclear stance on the existence of the subject is matched by his unclear stance on the nature of consciousness. Just as he vacillates between there not being and being an experiencing subject, he also shifts from consciousness being *nothing but* the appearance of phenomena to consciousness being other than and related to such appearance. This chapter has shown how both readings of Sartre have some support, but I will argue in the following chapters that Sartre should ultimately embrace the position that consciousness is more than just the fact that phenomena appear and indicate other phenomena in various ways. Still, though, any understanding of that position must recognize his seeming resistance to consciousness being anything more than that fact.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 251.

## CHAPTER TWO: CONSCIOUSNESS AS NOT ITSELF

Keeping in mind Sartre's vacillation between a purely phenomenological and a correlational understanding of consciousness, let us return to the claim that consciousness is nothingness. As noted in the Introduction, I believe the best place to start in order to understand what this means is Sartre's claim that consciousness is not itself. One of the arguments Sartre gives for that claim is based on the self-consciousness of consciousness. He gives that argument without reference to what exactly consciousness is, but rather focusses on its *relationship* to whatever it is. I will say more about what consciousness is for Sartre in the following chapters, but for now I will address this argument for its non-identity with itself.

In the Introduction to Being and Nothingness, Sartre seems to present the notion of consciousness not being itself on the basis of the claim that consciousness must be conscious of itself, and this without any specific mention of the previously-noted things that consciousness is not (namely, its object and its past) while perhaps also in some sense being them. Here is Sartre's argument for the claim that consciousness is necessarily conscious of itself:

...the necessary and sufficient condition for a knowing consciousness to be knowledge *of* its object, is that it be consciousness of itself as being that knowledge. This is a necessary condition, for if my consciousness were not consciousness of being consciousness of that table, it would then be consciousness of that table without consciousness of being so. In other words, it would be a consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious-which is absurd. This is a sufficient condition, for my

being conscious of being conscious of that table suffices in fact for me to be conscious of it.<sup>130</sup>

As significant as I take the self-consciousness of consciousness to be in Sartre's overall position, it should be noted that the argument he presents here is problematic. According to Sartre, a consciousness without self-consciousness, which in the above passage he seems to equate with a conscious *act* without self-consciousness, would be absurd since it would then be a seemingly contradictory unconscious consciousness. As one commentator notes, though, a flaw in Sartre's reasoning is "the move from 'consciousness ignorant of itself' to 'unconscious,' when the strongest conclusion the premises warrant would be 'unselfconscious.'"<sup>131</sup> Another commentator claims that since Sartre is really referring to two different things, namely "... (1) the first-order world-directed consciousness... and (2) the self-consciousness (of) the first-order consciousness..." then it follows that "Sartre needs to show that (1) cannot occur without (2) and his main argument does not really do so, since an unconscious (2) does not contradict having a conscious (1)."<sup>132</sup> Another way of seeing this problem is to recognize that there are surely all kinds of things that any given consciousness is unconscious of, without that fact seeming to lead to any absurdities. For instance, surely Sartre would grant that there are some objects of one consciousness that are not and will not be objects for a second consciousness. Specific experiences from my childhood, for instance, may be objects of my awareness but may never be the objects of another's awareness. Does this lack of consciousness of such things render the other consciousness unconscious? If so, then every consciousness would be absurdly unconscious,

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>131</sup> Peter Caws, Sartre, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979, p. 63.

<sup>132</sup> Rocco J. Gennaro, "Jean-Paul Sartre and the HOT Theory of Consciousness," Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 32, 2002, p. 324.

since there are obviously objects for every consciousness that are not so for either any or all other consciousnesses. Sartre clearly does not think that this obvious fact leads to such absurdity, so why would a lack of consciousness of *itself* make a consciousness unconscious? All consciousnesses lack consciousness of *something*, so it may seem unreasonable to hold that they can not be unconscious of themselves.

One might claim that the reason for the need for the special sort of self-consciousness that is supposed to be in question is the avoidance of an infinite regress. Sartre says as much in the following passage:

The reduction of consciousness to knowledge in fact involves our introducing into consciousness the subject-object dualism which is typical of knowledge. But if we accept the law of the knower-known dyad, then a third term will be necessary in order for the knower to become known in turn, and we will be faced with this dilemma: Either we stop at any one term of the series—the known, the knower known, the knower known by the knower, etc. In this case the totality of the phenomena falls into the unknown: that is, we always bump up against a non-self-conscious reflection and a final term. Or else we affirm the necessity of an infinite regress (*idea ideae ideae, etc.*), which is absurd...Consciousness of self is not dual. If we wish to avoid an infinite regress, there must be an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself.<sup>133</sup>

This absurd infinite regress is, according to one commentator, that “one knows only in consequence of an antecedent activity of knowing.”<sup>134</sup> One knows that a table is in front of one, for instance, because one already knows that one knows this, and one knows that one knows this because one already knows that one knows that one knows this, and so on. If this were the case, then one would

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<sup>133</sup>Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 12.

<sup>134</sup> Fred Kersten, “Can Sartre Count?”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 34, 1974, p. 345.

never seem capable of arriving at knowledge of anything, since there must first be an infinite sequence of knowing certain things.

The problem for Sartre, though, is that it is only *if* the 'totality of the phenomena,' namely, the knower and the known which are distinct according to the 'law of the knower-known dyad,' must be known that an infinite regress follows from a lack of self-consciousness. But that is precisely what is being questioned, namely, *why* consciousness must be conscious of itself (or, to be true to Sartre's position, conscious (of) itself). As already stated, consciousness is surely not consciousness of *everything* (specifically, not every object of every other consciousness), so why must it be conscious of itself? With no satisfying answer to this, there seems no reason for the 'immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself' that is self-consciousness, and there seems no danger of an infinite regress without such self-awareness.

One might object that this criticism of Sartre fails to account for his contrast between consciousness and its opaque objects. In his discussion of the self-transcending activity of consciousness, Sartre distinguishes consciousness from its objects in the following manner:

All consciousness, as Husserl has shown, is consciousness *of* something. This means that there is no consciousness which is not a *positing* of a transcendent object, or if you prefer, that consciousness has no 'content.' We must renounce those neutral 'givens' which, according to the system of reference chosen, find their place either 'in the world' or 'in the psyche.' A table is not *in* consciousness-not even in the capacity of a representation. A table is *in* space, beside the window, *etc.* The existence of the table in fact is a center of opacity for consciousness; it would require an infinite process to inventory the total contents of a thing. To introduce this opacity into consciousness would be to refer to

infinity the inventory it can make of itself, to make consciousness a thing, and to deny the cogito.<sup>135</sup>

One might try to use this point to argue that to deny the necessary self-awareness of consciousness is to reduce it to something unknown *in the same manner in which the totality of an object is unknown*. Just as consciousness can never be aware of every content of its infinitely dense objects, similarly consciousness would be unaware of itself, making it also an infinitely dense being. Such infinite density would preclude consciousness 'exhausting' itself in its transcendence to its object,<sup>136</sup> which would constitute a denial of Husserl's central insight into consciousness.

This attempt to appeal to the difference between consciousness and its objects in defense of Sartre's claim about the necessary self-consciousness of consciousness still misses the mark. A lack of self-consciousness by consciousness need not be due to it possessing an infinite number of contents which could not be canvassed. It could simply be due to consciousness not being aware of itself *at all*, the way it is not aware of certain objects of another consciousness. The lack of awareness of the infinite contents of an object is not a complete lack of awareness of that object, but rather an awareness of only part of what that object is. But the objection to Sartre is not that he has failed to rule out such a 'partial' awareness of consciousness by itself, but rather that he has failed to rule out a *complete* lack of self-awareness. *Even if* consciousness is such that it does *not* have a density that can never be fully known, it still seems that one need not be aware of consciousness. Self-awareness may be an all or nothing proposition. Sartre has not shown that it is not completely absent from at least some acts of consciousness.

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<sup>135</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 11.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

Another way of seeing this point is by realizing that just as there seems no reason for Sartre to claim that every 'opaque' object of other consciousnesses are available to consciousness, similarly there seems no reason for him to claim that consciousness is aware of all other consciousnesses. Whatever one makes of Sartre's account of the encounter with the Other as subject, or as consciousness (an encounter that occurs with 'the Look'), it does not seem that Sartre is asserting that one encounters or has some sort of awareness of *all* other consciousnesses. This is especially so if one takes his account to be of the *generalized Other*, or no particular other consciousness at all. The point is that Sartre himself seems to accept a lack of awareness of certain translucencies, specifically of at least some other consciousnesses, so a lack of self-awareness seems capable of being just another example of such a lack of awareness, with no need for accepting the opacity of consciousness as a consequence of its possible absence of self-awareness.

Perhaps the most adequate defense of Sartre's claim about the necessity for consciousness to be self-conscious is provided by Stephen A. Dinan. In his article "Intentionality in the Introduction to Being and Nothingness," Dinan connects Sartre's acceptance of Husserl's claim that consciousness must be consciousness *of* something with Sartre's insistence on the necessity of self-consciousness for consciousness. As was shown in the last quote from Sartre, he treats consciousness as always consciousness *of* something, a fact about consciousness that means "there is no consciousness which is not a *positing* of a transcendent object...."<sup>137</sup> Dinan claims that any such positing by consciousness can only occur *if* consciousness is aware of itself. The reason for this is that

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid.



if it [consciousness] were not [self-conscious], consciousness would be conscious of its object without being conscious that it was so. This would seem to mean that consciousness, no longer conscious of itself, could not distinguish its object as object, that is, as *other* than itself, or *transcendent*, in the manner in which it is experienced (*italics mine*).”<sup>138</sup>

A key point here is that an object of consciousness does not simply *happen* to have the property of transcendence to consciousness, a property which consciousness need not be aware of (the way it is not aware of many ‘non-inventoried’ contents of its infinitely dense objects). Rather, consciousness treats an object as transcendent by the very act of positing it. That is the very manner in which it is aware of objects. To take away the transcendence of an object of consciousness is to take the object itself away, and without an object there is no consciousness (since it is always *of* something). And the only way an object appears as transcendent of consciousness is by appearing as other than it, and this otherness requires an awareness of what the object is being contrasted with, namely, consciousness. Hence the necessity of the self-consciousness of consciousness. This analysis by Dinan is impressive since it explains why a lack of self-consciousness is not a mere *limitation* of consciousness by placing something outside of its ken (namely, itself), but is rather the *elimination* of consciousness by removing a necessary condition for consciousness to be what Sartre has already established it to be (namely awareness *of* something). As already stated, there seems to be no problem with consciousness simply lacking awareness of something (which it obviously does since it lacks omniscience), but clearly there is a problem for consciousness if a lack of self-awareness means a lack of awareness of any and all transcendent objects. Perhaps one could

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<sup>138</sup>Stephen A. Dinan, “Intentionality in the Introduction to Being and Nothingness,” Research in Phenomenology, 1, 1971, p.95.

challenge either Dinan's assertion that "ofness" for an object means it is present as transcendent or his notion that such presentation requires the presentation of consciousness, but he at least shows a way for Sartre to connect consciousness with self-consciousness.

We may now consider the possible reasoning toward a further conclusion on Sartre's part. Since consciousness is necessarily self-conscious, it stands in "an immediate, non-cognitive relation...to itself."<sup>139</sup> Because of this self-consciousness, consciousness is present to itself. The reason this follows is Sartre's claim that consciousness of something is the confrontation of consciousness by 'a concrete and full presence,'<sup>140</sup> so that self-consciousness is the presence of consciousness to itself. This leads to consciousness not being itself. This consequence of presence to self is demonstrated in the following:

*...presence to always implies duality, at least a virtual separation. The presence of being to itself implies a detachment on the part of being in relation to itself...Presence to self...supposes that an impalpable fissure has slipped into being. If being is present to itself, it is because it is not wholly itself. Presence is an immediate deterioration of coincidence, for it supposes separation. But if we ask ourselves at this point *what it is* which separates the subject from himself, we are forced to admit that it is *nothing...nothing* can separate the consciousness (of) belief from belief, since belief is *nothing other* than the consciousness (of) belief...The being of consciousness qua consciousness is to exist *at a distance from itself* as a presence to itself, and this empty distance which being carries in its being is Nothingness.*<sup>141</sup>

Since consciousness is separated from itself, it is other than itself, and, consequently, not itself. This means that the principle of identity, which states that everything is such that it is itself, "limits its scope to a region of definite

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<sup>139</sup>Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 12.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid, pp. 124-125.

being,”<sup>142</sup> the region of being-in-itself. One could then argue that not being itself makes consciousness nothingness. After all, whatever *something* it could possibly be would not be it, because it is not itself. There is thus ample evidence for the position that consciousness is nothingness for Sartre because self-consciousness requires it to not be itself.

One might object at this point that Sartre has merely *asserted* that the presence of consciousness to itself means it is separated from itself and that he has not shown *why* this is so. Indeed, why could it not be that an instance of consciousness is simply directed to a transcendent object as well as to itself? Why would such self-direction by consciousness necessitate any sort of separation of consciousness from itself? And why must consciousness’s presence to itself be anything more than such a ‘self-contained’ act of self-direction?

In order to see why self-presence means separation from self for Sartre, one must look to Sartre’s account of presence in general. One can see this account in the following:

Presence to --- indicates existence outside oneself near to ---....I can be present to this chair only if I am united to it in an ontological relation of synthesis, only if I am there in the being of the chair as *not being* the chair.<sup>143</sup>

It follows from this that since consciousness is present to itself it exists in the manner of not being itself, just as presence to anything means existing in the manner of not being whatever one is present to. But, again, one can still ask *why* Sartre treats presence in this manner. It seems clear that Sartre treats presence as a type of relationship, and he does not think any type of relationship with

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid, p. 176.

oneself can be had by a being which simply is what it is in self-identity. As noted in Chapter One, being-in-itself is such a type of self-identical being, and Sartre sees such being as “at rest ‘in-itself;’...it simply *is*.”<sup>144</sup> Its identity with itself is not seen as any type of relationship with itself, but rather identity is taken to be the absence of relationship with whatever something is identical with.<sup>145</sup> Identity and relationship with the same thing are incompatible since identity is the complete cohesion of being with itself, its absolute fullness of itself, a total plenitude. Such density is the complete absence of diversity,<sup>146</sup> with no place for distinguishability, so what place could there be for any type of relationship with oneself? Although being related to oneself allows that one *is* oneself, it does mean that one is *not* oneself *as well*. In fact, one could say that a necessary feature of all relationships is some distinction between what is being related. So, how could that which is identical with itself be related to itself since the distinguishability required for such a relationship is missing? This is not simply a matter of self-identity being different from self-presence, with no reason precluding that which is the former from also being the latter. Presence to self is a relationship of the self to itself, and whatever is identical with itself is not distinguishable from itself as something related to itself must be. Thus, the self-identity of what is present to itself, namely, consciousness, seems precluded. Self-identity and self-presence are thus not descriptions which are different yet compatible (like ‘round’ and ‘green,’ for instance), but rather they are descriptions which are incompatible as well as different (like ‘round’ and ‘square’).

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

Consciousness is not identical with itself, then, and thus other than and separated from itself.

But perhaps things are not so easy. In the above passage concerning the necessity that presence involve the existence of something as what it is not, the example given by Sartre to make this point was of presence to an *object* (specifically, a chair). But has not Sartre made it clear that self-awareness and object-awareness are two very different things? As already noted, awareness of an object is arguably always of something transcendent to consciousness, making such objects other than consciousness. Such otherness seems to clearly make object-awareness an example of the 'knower-known' dyad found with cases of knowledge. Sartre, though, clearly distinguishes the sort of relation between the knower and known and the non-cognitive relation of the self to itself. Indeed, one might claim that what makes self-awareness non-cognitive is exactly the lack of separation between the self that is aware and the self that it is aware of (or, again, aware (of)). Presence to self is that non-cognitive relation of the self to itself, so perhaps the example of object-awareness with its obvious distinction between the object and consciousness is inapplicable to the case of presence to self. Sartre's previously mentioned point about the non-being required for presence might just be a point about presence to objects and not a point about presence to self.

Kathleen Wider makes a similar criticism of the supposed self-separation of self-presence in her article "Through the Looking Glass: Sartre on Knowledge and the Pre-Reflective Cogito."<sup>147</sup> According to that article, Sartre inconsistently attempts to apply the subject-object duality found with knowledge to the case of

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<sup>147</sup>Kathleen Wider, "Through the Looking Glass: Sartre on Knowledge and the Pre-Reflective Cogito," *Man and World*, 22, 1989, pp. 329-343.

self-awareness (the pre-reflective cogito) in order to maintain his central distinction between the type of being of consciousness and the type of being of its objects. That distinction, as mentioned above, rests on the fact that being-in-itself (the type of being of non-conscious things) involves identity with itself, while being-for-itself (the type of being of consciousness) entails non-identity with itself. To avoid the self-identity of consciousness, Sartre separates it from itself by making it present to itself in the same manner, Wider suggests, that it is present to objects. But this is inconsistent on his part, since such a separation of consciousness from itself is an introduction of the subject-object dyad he explicitly distinguishes from self-awareness. Wider then makes the following point:

Unless Sartre maintains that belief *is* consciousness (of) belief, for example, the possibility arises that there could be something in consciousness of which consciousness is unaware; that is, an unconscious act of consciousness. To avoid this possibility, Sartre holds to his earlier claim that there is no distinction between an act of consciousness and consciousness of that act. To maintain this unity and duality presence to oneself entails, Sartre argues that what separates consciousness from itself at the pre-reflective level is nothing. But he can't have it both ways. If we take his claim seriously that nothing separates an act of consciousness from consciousness of that act, then the distance and separation involved with the notion of presence developed in the section on knowledge does not apply. The unity remains undivided.<sup>148</sup>

I do not think that Sartre is guilty of such inconsistency. While it is true that his example of the non-being required for "presence to ---" was an example of presence to an object, his point was still about the nature of presence *in general*, not simply presence to objects. The fact that his example was of one type of presence and not of another should not obscure that point. More

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid, p. 338.

significantly, Wider's point that the separation of consciousness from itself by nothing is equivalent to it not being separated from itself at all is incorrect. In Sartre's description of the 'fullness' and 'density' of the in-itself, he notes that "there is not the slightest emptiness in being, not the tiniest crack through which nothingness might slip in."<sup>149</sup> It is the fact that nothingness is not found in the in-itself that makes it identical with itself. Wider's point seems to be that simply dividing something by nothing is not to divide it at all, to not distinguish the things that are divided by nothing. But this lack of distinction of the for-itself from itself would not be equivalent to identity with itself. The in-itself's identity with itself is not a case of nothingness dividing it from itself. As just noted, nothingness is not found in the in-itself at all, so it could not divide it from itself. So, the fact that consciousness is divided from itself by nothing (whatever that eventually turns out to mean) does not make it identical with itself. And that is enough for Sartre to distinguish consciousness from being-in-itself, enough for Sartre to claim that consciousness is not itself. The fact that consciousness (of) belief is not identical with consciousness (of) belief means that it is not itself, so Wider's point that Sartre's description of self-awareness does not introduce any sort of duality or distinguishability into consciousness does not seem correct. While it is certainly true that Sartre argues for the *unity* of consciousness with the self it is aware of at the pre-reflective level, that difference from object-awareness does not amount to consciousness being *identical* with itself. Only nothingness separates consciousness from itself in the self-awareness of the pre-reflective cogito, but that still keeps consciousness separate from itself. Presence to self may then, for all Wider shows, produce separation from self, even if it is not awareness of

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<sup>149</sup>Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 121.

an 'othered,' transcendent object, and, again, separation from self leads to not being oneself so that consciousness is nothingness.

This contrast between object-awareness and self-awareness brings up a further significant point. Although the separation of consciousness from itself is different from its separation from its object, one might argue that consciousness just *is* its object. Indeed, as noted in Chapter One, the purely phenomenological interpretation of Sartre states that consciousness for Sartre is nothing more than the fact that phenomena appear (and, as we shall see more clearly later, are surpassed as well as indicate other phenomena that have been surpassed or are potentially surpassed). These appearing phenomena are the presentation in profile of objects, in the world, for consciousness, so it might seem that this interpretation of Sartre would not differentiate awareness of such objects from self-awareness since it claims that there is nothing more to consciousness than the appearance of such objects. If consciousness is nothing more than the appearance of objects, then awareness of its objects would seem to be awareness of consciousness.

Although the current discussion of self-awareness is meant to be understood in abstraction from any specific position about what the self in consciousness's self-awareness is, I will simply note here that although *part* of what the purely phenomenological position on Sartre takes consciousness to be is the fact that objects appear, that is not *all* of what it takes consciousness to be. As just stated, it is *also* the fact that these appearing objects are surpassed and indicate other phenomena that have been surpassed or possibly will be surpassed. So it is not the case that this position would take consciousness's awareness of objects to just be its awareness of itself, but it would rather take the former awareness as part of what the latter awareness is. Thus the distinction



between object-awareness and self-awareness, a distinction crucial to establishing both consciousness' unity with and separation from itself, does not collapse with the purely phenomenological interpretation of Sartre's treatment of consciousness as some kind of nothingness.

It might be objected at this point that my description of object-awareness is problematic. I have discussed Sartre's treatment of the presence of objects, not to mention of self-presence, as a confrontation of consciousness by whatever it is that consciousness is "present to." Perhaps a better suggestion would be to treat object-awareness, for instance, as simply the presence of objects rather than the presence of consciousness to certain objects. The latter position treats consciousness as something that stands in a relationship with objects, whereas the former suggests that all that there are are objects without any existent thing called consciousness standing in some sort of relationship with them. This suggestion, which I will call the 'presence of' position, has the virtue of giving a clear sense to how consciousness is nothingness, and it reminds one of Sartre's quote from the previous chapter that "...knowledge is the *world*...and outside of that- *nothing*."<sup>150</sup> The 'presence of' position avoids any need that phenomena may have of appearing *to* something, because what is present for this position are objects rather than appearances. One could say that this position is much like the result of Occam's Razor, with no need to multiply any entities beyond the bare objects. This position would be problematic for my treatment of the separation of consciousness from itself, since this position would mean that presence does not require the relationship and thus the distinguishability found

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid, p. 251.

with self-presence. Instead of presence involving both that which is present and that which it is present to, presence need only involve the former.

Of course, if the view to be attributed to Sartre is that consciousness is its objects in the sense of being nothing other than the fact of the appearance of its objects, then there would seem to be an easy response to the charge that Sartre fails to distinguish consciousness of itself from consciousness of objects.

Consciousness of itself would be consciousness of a certain *fact regarding* the objects in question. Here, however, we encounter an issue relating to what I called the fourth aspect of Sartre's view of the nothingness of consciousness. On that view, consciousness is indeed a certain sort of fact (or event or state of affairs), but that fact is at the same time said to be *nothing more* than whatever it is a fact *regarding*, or whatever are the "ingredients" of that fact. I will have more to say about this later.

In any case, I do not think that the 'presence of' position accurately reflects Sartre's claims. The reason for this is that the in-itself, the type of being of objects, is "at rest 'in-itself,'"<sup>151</sup> and can not be present to anything, not even to other objects that are also in-itself. As Sartre notes, presence to anything is not "a matter of a simple external relation of contiguity,"<sup>152</sup> but is rather a synthesis with what something is present to. The fact that one object is co-present with any other is due to a synthesis with both objects, a unification with both objects not being either object, so that presence is inexplicable if only in-itself objects existed. But that is exactly the problem with the previously mentioned 'presence of' position: it attempts to explain presence by appeal to nothing but in-itself objects. The presence of an object requires that it be in some sort of relationship

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid, p.176.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid.

with something else, since being present means to be located in some fashion. But any such locating of anything in relationship with anything else requires that it *not be* what it is related to, and the in-itself simply *is*.<sup>153</sup> Thus one can not explain presence as simply being the presence *of* something without it being presence *to* something it is not, and non-conscious being-in-itself is not such that it is *not* something. In turn, then, presence to self must mean some sort of separation of the consciousness that is present from the consciousness that it is present to.

Of course, the same objection from Chapter One regarding Sartre's treatment of temporality could be made against his treatment of presence. Just as one could say that non-conscious objects seem to be capable of existing temporally by not being what they were, so one could say that such objects seem capable of being present to other things by not being other things. As noted in Chapter One, Sartre's claim that consciousness is necessary for not being something may just seem like an assertion without convincing support. For that reason, one might instead want to read Sartre as simply considering the world as it exists for consciousness, rather than making claims about reality in and of itself. Even so, the 'presence of' position may still seem problematic as an account of the *awareness* of objects, as opposed to just the *existence* of objects, since awareness seemingly requires something more than just the objects that there is awareness of. If not, there would seem to be no distinction between an instance of awareness of certain objects and an instance when such objects existed without there being any awareness of them. Consequently, the 'presence of' position does not seem a satisfying account of object-awareness,

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<sup>153</sup>Ibid.

and thus does not threaten the notion that presence to something requires distinguishability from that something.

Returning to the issue of self-presence, there still seems to be a general problem with the whole notion of consciousness not being itself. If there is something that consciousness is (namely, itself), what sense does it make to then say that it is also not that very thing it is? Wider applies this general point to the claim that consciousness is not itself, or, more specifically, to Sartre's claim that consciousness (of) belief is not consciousness (of) belief, in the following:

...pre-reflective consciousness must somehow exist as a witness to itself as well and 'thus by the sole fact that my belief is apprehended as belief, it is *no longer only belief*, that is, it is already no longer belief, it is troubled belief' (Being and Nothingness, p.121). For Sartre, consciousness (of) belief irreparably alters belief. But that is impossible on Sartre's view. Consciousness even at the pre-reflective level must be self-conscious. Belief is not belief; it is consciousness (of) belief. Although he acknowledges that since it is part of the very being of belief that it be self-conscious, that it 'can exist *only* as troubled,' he still concludes that it 'exists from the start as escaping itself' (Being and Nothingness, p. 122). But if from the start what it is is self-conscious, then how does it escape what it is by the results of its self-consciousness?<sup>154</sup>

One could argue that Sartre is simply meaning to contrast the type of being of consciousness with the type of being of non-conscious reality. Just prior to the passages from Sartre quoted by Wider, Sartre discusses the fullness and self-identity of being-in-itself. He there notes that being-in-itself simply is. He then states that the being of consciousness (being-for-itself) can not be described as one would describe being-in-itself, so that one can not say of belief that it is belief as one can say of a table that it is a table.<sup>155</sup> It might seem

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<sup>154</sup>Wider, p. 335.

<sup>155</sup>Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 121.

plausible then to read Sartre as saying that belief's escape from itself is its not being itself the way that an object such as a table is itself, rather than reading Sartre as saying that belief's escape from itself is its not being itself the way *belief* is itself. The latter reading of Sartre would seem to make him guilty of inconsistency, since he would be first granting self-identity to belief and then denying it by saying belief escapes such identity. But it need not be the case that, as Wider claims, Sartre *first* describes belief as escaping from itself and *then* says that it escapes from, or is not, such an escape. It seems equally plausible, and certainly more charitable, to say that Sartre is first considering the position that belief is self-identical and then showing how belief escapes from and is not such a manner of being. Indeed, other passages in which Sartre describes the for-itself as the failed attempt of being-in-itself to be itself while also being other than itself as its own cause<sup>156</sup> supports this more charitable interpretation, since it shows consciousness as an escape from self-identity. However problematic the notion of such an attempt by the in-itself may be (as noted in the previous chapter), it does not thus seem that Sartre is guilty of inconsistently saying belief, or any instance of consciousness, *escapes from* and *alters* what it is by being present to itself. Whatever it is supposed to amount to, belief, like any other instance of consciousness, *is* presence to itself.

Wider raises yet another problem with Sartre's treatment of presence to self, however, specifically with his treatment of such presence in the case of pre-reflective consciousness. In her article "The Failure of Self-Consciousness in Sartre's Being and Nothingness,"<sup>157</sup> Wider argues that Sartre fails to distinguish

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid, p. 128.

<sup>157</sup>Katherine Wider, "The Failure of Self-Consciousness in Sartre's Being and Nothingness," *Dialogue*, 32, 1993, pp. 737-756.

pre-reflective consciousness from pure reflection. Pre-reflective consciousness for Sartre is a kind of self-consciousness. It is the 'immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself' previously mentioned in Sartre's denial that presence to self is an example of knowledge, with its dyad of knower-known.<sup>158</sup> Pure reflection is also a kind of self-consciousness. Specifically, it is the presence of consciousness to itself not as an object but as consciousness, "the appearance of the for-itself for the for-itself."<sup>159</sup> Because pure reflection does not objectify what it is present to (namely, itself), it does not involve the duality of the knower-known dyad. It thus remains one with what it reflects upon, which, again, is itself. As Sartre claims, "To know is to *make oneself other*. Now the reflective can not make itself wholly other than the reflected-on since it *is-in-order-to-be* the reflected-on."<sup>160</sup> For Wider, this description of pure reflection is indistinguishable from Sartre's description of pre-reflective consciousness. Both, after all, are cases of remaining one with and of not objectifying what they are present to. And since what consciousness is present to in both cases is consciousness itself, why does Sartre put such emphasis on distinguishing between two seemingly identical cases?

The reason Sartre treats pre-reflective consciousness as distinct from pure reflection is not a difference in the relationship between consciousness and what it is present to, but rather *what* it is that consciousness is present to in each case. Before broaching the topic of reflection in general and pure reflection in particular, Sartre characterizes consciousness as a failed attempt by being in-itself to cause itself, to be distinct from and then identical with itself, a failure that

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<sup>158</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 12.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p. 217.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 218.

results in it being present to itself. As mentioned in Chapter One, the in-itself would not seem *capable* of making such an attempt, but Sartre asserts such an attempt in the following:

But while being-in-itself is contingent, it recovers itself by falling into for-itself. It *is*, in order to lose itself in a for-itself. In a word, being *is* and can only be. But the peculiar possibility of being-that which is revealed in the nihilating act-is of being the foundation of itself as consciousness through the sacrificial act which nihilates being. The for-itself is the in-itself losing itself as in-itself in order to found itself as consciousness.<sup>161</sup>

One sees here the self-identity of being without the attempt at self-foundation, and one also sees that this self-identity is lost once the attempt at self-foundation results in consciousness. This loss of self-identity is the self-presence of consciousness, something shown by Sartre in the following:

The self therefore represents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of *not being his own coincidence*, of escaping identity while positing it as unity-in-short, of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of multiplicity. This is what we shall call presence to self. The law of being of the *for-itself*, as the ontological foundation of consciousness, is to be itself in the form of presence to itself.<sup>162</sup>

The consciousness that results from the attempted self-foundation is a failure since the being that is present to itself has not succeeded in causing itself. As noted in Chapter One, the reason for this failure by being-in-itself to cause itself is the impossibility of being *both* distinct from something as its cause *and* identical with that same thing as well. As previously stated, presence to self puts

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, pp. 123-124.

one at a distance from oneself, makes one separate from oneself, so that self-present consciousness is not identical with itself as an impossibly self-caused being would be. As Sartre notes, “the turning back of being on itself can only cause the appearance of a *distance* between what turns back and that on which it turns.”<sup>163</sup>

This discussion by Sartre of this failed attempt by the in-itself is filled throughout with mention of *pre-reflective* consciousness,<sup>164</sup> but, as already noted, this discussion precedes his analysis of reflection, and thus of pure reflection. When Sartre does turn to the topic of reflection, however, he describes reflective consciousness *not* as the attempt by the *in-itself* to found and recover itself, but rather as the attempt by the *for-itself* to do so. According to Sartre, “reflection or the attempt to recover the for-itself by a turning back on itself results in the appearance of the for-itself for the for-itself.”<sup>165</sup> The for-itself is, of course, consciousness, and Sartre had already described it as the in-itself’s failed attempt to found and recover itself. This thus means that reflection in general and pure reflection in particular is presence to a transcending of the in-itself (the failed attempt by the in-itself to found itself), a transcending that *is* the for-itself, while pre-reflective consciousness is awareness of an in-itself that has been transcended. Both are united with what they are present to, since both are an attempt by different “things” to found themselves. Both thus are (though also in some way are not) what they are present to, which amounts to saying they are

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p. 217.

<sup>164</sup> E.g., Ibid, pp. 125,130.



both instances of presence to self. But pre-reflective consciousness and pure reflection are not present to the same thing. Sartre's distinction between the two thus does not seem susceptible to Wider's attempt to collapse it, so that Sartre's discussion of self-consciousness and of its role in making consciousness nothingness does not seem mired in inconsistency.

This way of responding to Wider has a potential problem. As already noted, in his Introduction, Sartre claims that consciousness' awareness of something is always also an awareness of itself being aware of something. Sartre then argues that this fact about consciousness requires the existence of pre-reflective consciousness.<sup>166</sup> The problem this poses for my above response to Wider is that this seems to show pre-reflective consciousness, and not just pure reflective consciousness, involving an awareness of and thus presence to the for-itself. After all, pre-reflective consciousness is aware of itself as consciousness, and since the for-itself is consciousness, then pre-reflective consciousness is present to the for-itself. How can this be reconciled with my above attempt to distinguish these two types of consciousness by means of what each was present to?

Such a reconciliation can occur by recognizing Sartre's distinction between metaphysics and ontology and by realizing that, at least as presented so far, the above distinction between these two types of consciousness depends

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p. 217.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

upon certain metaphysical claims. As noted in Chapter One, metaphysics for Sartre is “the study of individual processes which have given birth to *this* world as a concrete and particular totality,”<sup>167</sup> while ontology is the (phenomenological) description of the structures of being.<sup>168</sup> Sartre’s talk of consciousness as the in-itself’s attempt at self-foundation is an example of metaphysics, since it is an attempted explanation of how the structures of consciousness came to be, not a phenomenological description of those structures. Since one can not directly observe the in-itself’s project of founding itself (such observation, as noted in Chapter One, would require consciousness to impossibly be both a self-identical in-itself being and a self-present for-itself being), one can only offer it as an explanation of what one can observe. All of this is relevant to my response to Wider because my distinction between pre-reflective and pure reflective consciousness is based on this metaphysical explanation. Specifically, its above claims about the difference between pre-reflective and pure consciousness have been put wholly in terms of the different processes that Sartre claims *give rise* to these two distinct types of consciousness, namely, processes involving two different things attempting to found themselves. Although both processes can be called an attempt by consciousness to found itself, pre-reflective consciousness is an attempt at self-foundation by consciousness as an in-itself being that is transcending itself while pure reflection is such an attempt by consciousness as the transcendence of an in-itself being. As noted in Chapter

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 788.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

One, metaphysics shows Sartre that consciousness just is the in-itself doing something (attempting self-causation), so pre-reflective consciousness is present to what is doing this while pure reflection is present to what is being done. On the other hand, since there are no further entities involved in pure reflection than in pre-reflective consciousness, one might also describe them as presence to the same thing after all, namely consciousness. So, again, there seems no inconsistency in Sartre's account of how the self-presence of consciousness makes it nothingness.

Of course, not everything that exists as being-in-itself has attempted to found itself. An inanimate object, for instance, exists in the manner of the in-itself, because it has not attempted to found itself only to end up present to itself. But human beings are examples of things that existed in the manner of the in-itself and attempted self-foundation only to achieve self-presence. (It is unclear if *only* humans have attempted self-foundation and not, for instance, animals, and it is also unclear *when* humans first attempt this, such as at birth or some time before or after that.) Both inanimate objects and humans co-exist as examples of things with being, but the former are in-itself beings and thus self-identical while the latter are in-itself beings that have eliminated self-identity through an attempt at self-foundation. One can certainly wonder why *all* of being-in-itself did not attempt to found itself, but Sartre's explanation of pre-reflective consciousness does not seem dependent upon explaining this.

Having dealt with these numerous objections against Sartre, let us review his argument from self-consciousness for consciousness not being itself.

According to him, in order to avoid the absurdity of an unconscious consciousness, consciousness must be conscious of itself. One possible defense of this point is the suggestion that consciousness of a transcendent object that is not consciousness requires an awareness of consciousness in order to distinguish such an object from consciousness. However compelling that defense may or may not be, Sartre reasons that since consciousness of something is presence to that thing, self-consciousness is presence to the self. This means that consciousness is present to itself, and the relationship of presence requires one not be whatever one is present to. Thus consciousness, being self-conscious and consequently self-present, is not itself. One may take consciousness not being the very thing that it is as Sartre's meaning when describing consciousness as nothingness.

Having now explained why Sartre says that consciousness is not itself, the next step in understanding what he meant in treating consciousness as nothingness is understanding what it *is* that consciousness *is not*. One possible way to do that is to turn to Sartre's claim that consciousness is not its object.

### CHAPTER THREE: CONSCIOUSNESS AS NOT ITS OBJECT

As mentioned earlier, the claim that consciousness is not its object seems like something most would accept, but the interest of the claim stems from Sartre also claiming that consciousness is the very object it is not. If that were so, it would explain why consciousness is nothingness, since it would not be the very thing that would make it something, namely whatever it is. It would also provide a necessary supplement to the position that consciousness is not itself, since it would say more about what it is that consciousness is not, in not being itself.

Evidence of Sartre's acceptance of consciousness both being and not being its object is found in the following:

Knowing belongs to the for-itself alone, for the reason that only the for-itself can appear to itself as not being what it knows. And as here appearance and being are one—since the for-itself has to be its appearance—we must conclude that the for-itself includes within its being the being of the object which it is not inasmuch as the for-itself puts its own being into question as not being the being of the object....(I)n the case of an internal negation...it is within and upon the being which it is not that the for-itself appears as not being what it is not...In the internal negation the for-itself collapses on what it denies...the term of origin of the internal negation is the in-itself, the thing which is *there*, and outside of it there is nothing except an emptiness, a nothingness which is distinguished from the very thing only by a pure negation for which *this* thing furnishes the very content.<sup>169</sup>

This passage centers upon what Sartre terms an internal negation. An internal negation is “such a relation between two beings that the one which is denied to the other qualifies the other at the heart of its essence—by absence.”<sup>170</sup> An example from Sartre of such a negation is the denial involved in a statement like “I am not rich.”<sup>171</sup> If one is affected in one's very *being* by this fact (perhaps by

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, pp. 244-245.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p.243.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

feeling depressed or inferior), one is characterized by the lack of what is denied (in this case, wealth). The other type of negation is an external negation, and Sartre treats this as a denial of something that does not affect the very being of what lacks that denied thing.<sup>172</sup> An example of this would be one non-conscious object not being another such object, such as a table not being a chair. Sartre claims that the for-itself is not only 'in' a relation of internal negation with its object ('the thing which is there'), but the for-itself is so dependent upon that object that nothing other than the object exists 'in' that relation. Thus the for-itself is not something *other* than its object, since all that there is in the case of the for-itself's knowing of anything is the known in-itself and "an emptiness." But the for-itself is still *not* its object as well, since it is the negation of its object. One sees again the ambiguity of Sartre's position on the subject, as he seemingly vacillates between something other than what is experienced and nothing but the experienced. Be that as it may, it seems that consciousness is, at least partly (I will say more about that later), the very object it is not.

The reason that the for-itself 'collapses' on the object it knows has to do with the nature of presence. Sartre's claim, quoted above, about the for-itself's collapse on its object is part of a discussion of knowledge, but that discussion is relevant to the nature of presence. Sartre claims that all knowledge is intuitive knowledge, and such knowledge amounts to the presence of consciousness to what is known.<sup>173</sup> Knowledge for Sartre is thus like everything else for the for-itself, since he claims that "(t)he For-itself is defined as presence to being."<sup>174</sup> Now Sartre had previously said, as we saw, that consciousness always being

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, pp. 176-177.

consciousness *of* something means that consciousness is always “confronted with a concrete and full presence which is *not* consciousness.”<sup>175</sup> Presence to something requires one to be distinct from that something. Thus our earlier discussion of self-presence showed how consciousness must be related to and separated from itself in order to be present to itself. In his further discussion of consciousness’ presence to its objects, however, Sartre notes another aspect of presence: some sort of ‘unity’ with whatever one is present to. Despite the apparent lack of identity with its objects implied by its presence to them, Sartre claims that the presence of consciousness to something means it somehow *is* that something. Sartre explains why in the following passage:

Presence to-- is an internal relation between the being which is present and the beings to which it is present. In any case it can not be a matter of a simple external relation of contiguity. Presence to- indicates existence outside oneself near to--. Anything which can be present to-- must be such in its being that there is in it a relation of being with other beings. I can be present to this chair only if I am united to it in an ontological relation of synthesis, only if I am there in the being of the chair as *not being* the chair.<sup>176</sup>

Sartre seems to be suggesting something *between* presence as *unity* with something and presence as *being* something (‘...I am there in the being of the chair...’). Although the above quote seems to endorse the treatment of presence to something as unity with it by saying that one can be present to something only if one is united to it, the fact that the quote rejects the notion of presence as simple contiguity with something also seems to oppose the view of presence as unity, since unity seems to involve the distinctness of what is united. In any case, the very fact that Sartre is ambiguous as to these different treatments of

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

presence seems significant. After all, consciousness both not being and being its object correlates well with presence being unity with and also actually being what one is present to.

Of course, just as one could wonder why Sartre would treat presence as requiring the separation of what is present from what it is present to (a point addressed in the previous chapter), one could also wonder why Sartre treats presence as requiring what is present to *be* (or to be 'in the being of') what it is present to. Sartre's reason seems to be that nothing that is completely distinct from something else can ever be connected to that something else, and, as shown in the previous quote, Sartre considers presence as a type of relationship, a form of connection between what is present and what it is present to. Sartre speaks to this in the following passages:

A being which is present to -- can not be at rest 'in-itself'; the in-itself can not be present...<sup>177</sup>

I can not determine myself not to be an object which is originally severed from all connection with me. I can not deny that I am a particular being if I am *at a distance* from that being. If I conceive of a being entirely closed in on itself, this being in-itself will be solely that which it is, and due to this fact there will be no room in it for either negation or knowledge.<sup>178</sup>

We have seen that (presence) can not be the pure co-existence of two existents, conceived as a simple relation of exteriority....<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p. 176.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 245.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p. 177.



A possible explanation of Sartre's reasoning here could be that any two completely distinct beings would require a third being to connect them, and if the third being were distinct from the other two, then a fourth and fifth being would be necessary to connect the third being with the first and the second being, etc. One might object that it is only if one treats a connection between things as being itself a thing of some sort that any possible need for additional connecting beings emerges. It would not seem, though, that any third being not distinct from two other things, so that it was in some sense connected to both of them, could be a connection between those two things, since the two distinct beings would then be connected to the third being instead of to each other. Consequently, the for-itself can not be completely separated from the objects it is present to in order to be connected to them by the relation of presence. It is, in some sense, 'united' with them. But there is nothing other than the for-itself and its object that unites them. Indeed, according to Sartre's previous quote about the for-itself as the internal negation of the in-itself, there is seemingly nothing other than the object of consciousness *at all*. So the for-itself must be 'united' with its object in its very *being*. But then we have Sartre's conclusion: the very being of the for-itself is to be found in its object. Although I do not think that the best way of understanding Sartre, namely the correlational account of consciousness, treats consciousness as being (as well as not being) its object, Sartre does equate consciousness with its object here. Any defense of the correlational account will thus have to explain such equation, and I will attempt to do so in Chapter Five.

Despite the ultimate untenability of Sartre's treatment of consciousness as both being and not being its object, the position that all there is with consciousness of an object is that object offers a possible explanation of why self-consciousness is always consciousness of a transcendent object. Such an explanation would remedy a problem with Sartre's previously mentioned metaphysical explanation of consciousness (Sartre's claim that consciousness is the failed attempt by the in-itself to found itself), that problem being a failure to account for the necessity of consciousness's presence to such an object. Sartre needs to account for this given his agreement with Husserl's insight that consciousness is always consciousness of something, an insight he takes as meaning that "there is no consciousness which is not a *positing* of a transcendent object."<sup>180</sup> In Sartre's metaphysical explanation, though, all that is involved is the being that becomes present to itself in its failed attempt to found itself, and that being is not other than self-present consciousness. There is thus no apparent need for an object that is not consciousness. The following quotation seems to demonstrate this lack of such an object in consciousness's originating act of failed self-foundation:

But while being in-itself is contingent, it recovers itself by falling into for-itself. It *is*, in order to lose itself in a for-itself. In a word being *is* and can only be. But the peculiar possibility of being-that which is revealed in the nihilating act-is of being the foundation of itself as consciousness through the sacrificial act which nihilates being. The for-itself is the in-itself losing itself as in-itself in order to found

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

itself as consciousness.<sup>181</sup>

A reconciliation of this explanation with the necessary presence of consciousness to a transcendent object might be achieved, though, if one says that consciousness just is (although it also is not) its object. Consciousness must have an object, because consciousness just *is* its object (in addition to not being it). Being present to self makes consciousness present to an object since consciousness *is* its object.

This reconciliation of Sartre's metaphysical explanation with his ontological description of consciousness as always being consciousness of a transcendent object may, however, seem incoherent. Sartre must treat consciousness' object as not being consciousness in order to maintain his understanding of Husserl's phenomenological point, but he then must turn right around and treat such an object as not being *other* than consciousness in his metaphysical account of consciousness as a failure at "self-foundation." One seems faced with the following dilemma: either Sartre maintains the otherness of the object but leaves unexplained the necessity of consciousness transcending to such an object and always being of something, or Sartre explains that necessity, in his metaphysical account, by making such objects the very thing that their transcendence would keep them from being—namely, consciousness itself. In order to maintain the second alternative, then, one must explain how consciousness can both be and not be its object. One might attempt to make sense of this by saying that Sartre

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

treats consciousness as *the fact that* there are certain objects as opposed to treating consciousness as the objects themselves, but I will explore that possibility in Chapter Five. For now, though, one can see the work that might be done for Sartre by consciousness both being and not being its object.

To be sure, Sartre does himself offer another and different explanation of why self-conscious consciousness must be consciousness of a transcendent object. It does not, however, seem to reconcile his phenomenological ontology with his metaphysics. Sartre claims that the for-itself exists “in the form of the phantom dyad-the reflection-reflecting....(with) the two terms outlined in the dyad point(ing) to each other.”<sup>182</sup> This condition of reciprocal reference seems to follow from consciousness being present to itself. The reason it follows is that self-presence is a state of existing as seen by and as witness of oneself.<sup>183</sup> The one seen is thus the same as the one seeing, and the one witnessed is the same as the one witnessing, meaning that what is seen or witnessed is itself seeing or witnessing what makes it seen or witnessed. But, Sartre argues, consciousness can not *just* be a reference of itself to itself, because then one would have “the two terms of the quasi-dyad support their two nothingnesses on each other, conjointly annihilating themselves.”<sup>184</sup> Since “the reflecting exists only in order to reflect the reflection, and the reflection is a reflection only in so far as it refers to the reflecting,”<sup>185</sup> one is thus referred from the one to the other, and vice versa,

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p. 241.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

*ad infinitum*, without ever arriving at something that is more than a reference back to that from which one was referred. Even two mirrors facing each other and thus reflecting each other are more than *just* reflections of each other, namely glass objects, and Sartre seems to think that the dependence of both reflecting and reflected beings requires a being that exists independently of reflection. Perhaps this is similar to Aquinas's claim that contingent beings can only exist if there is a necessary being. Regardless, in order for consciousness to *be*, then, there must be reference to something that is not *only* a reflexive reference back. This makes consciousness necessarily conscious of something other than itself. Hence, consciousness must be consciousness of a transcendent object.<sup>186</sup>

As mentioned above, this explanation fails to reconcile Sartre's metaphysics with his phenomenological ontology. Before one can see the reason for this failure, though, one must see how the "reflection-reflecting" explanation differs from the earlier explanation I derived from consciousness both being and not being its object. The former, unlike the latter, treats consciousness's object as merely *related* to consciousness, and *not* as *being* consciousness. It claims that "the for-itself is...in the form of the phantom dyad-the reflection reflecting...(and) the reflection...makes itself qualified by something other than itself or, if you prefer,...it is reflected as a relation to an outside which it is not."<sup>187</sup> Although the earlier alternative explanation also accepts

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid, pp. 240-241.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

consciousness being related to what it is not (namely, its object), the reflection-reflecting explanation does not treat, or at least need not be *taken* as treating, what consciousness is of, as of an object, as also *being* consciousness. In order to see this, one must understand two points. *First*, in at least some of his claims, Sartre treats the being that consciousness in some sense is as its *facticity*, the in-itself being that “becomes” consciousness in its failed attempt to found itself. The following passages show this:

But the peculiar possibility of being-that which is revealed in the nihilating act-is of being the foundation of itself as consciousness through the sacrificial act which nihilates being. The for-itself is the in-itself losing itself as in-itself in order to found itself as consciousness.<sup>188</sup>

It follows that this in-itself, engulfed and nihilated in the absolute event which is the appearance of the foundation or upsurge of the for-itself, remains at the heart of the for-itself as its original contingency.<sup>189</sup>

This perpetually evanescent contingency of the in-itself which, without ever allowing itself to be apprehended, haunts the for-itself and reattaches it to being-in-itself-this contingency is what we shall call the *facticity* of the for-itself. It is this facticity which permits us to say that the for-itself *is*, that it *exists*....<sup>190</sup>

Thus the attempt by the in-itself to found itself, an attempt that is the for-itself, is an attempt by what thereby becomes the facticity of consciousness. And this facticity, *qua* transcended, is what consciousness is then said to “be.” Now given the reference to “haunting” in the passage just quoted, it seems reasonable to suppose that Sartre’s description of the “dyad” in question in the reflection-

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

reflecting argument as a “phantom” dyad is meant to refer to this particular context of discussion. And so when Sartre argues that the phantom dyad that is consciousness needs to be “related” to something transcendent in order to avoid falling into nothingness, he presumably just means that consciousness, as some sort of “phantom dyad” that is (and also is not) its facticity, needs to be so related in order to avoid falling into nothingness. Consequently, *second*, this facticity does not seem to be consciousness’s *object* in any clearly phenomenological sense, possibly because it seems to be rather just *the being that is surpassed* toward objects. Or at least, minimally put, what Sartre says doesn’t seem to say any more than that. In any case, the following passages about the body seem to support this:

The body is what I nihilate. It is the in-itself which is surpassed by the nihilating for-itself and which reapprehends the for-itself in this very surpassing.<sup>191</sup>

The body as a sensible center of reference is that *beyond which* I am in so far as I am immediately present to the glass or to the table or to the distant tree which I perceive.<sup>192</sup>

The body seems to be equated with facticity in the first passage (I will say more on the body in the next chapter), and the body, and, consequently, facticity, is then described as surpassed toward consciousness’s objects. So, in claiming that consciousness must be *of* an object in order to avoid falling into nothingness, Sartre is not necessarily claiming thereby that consciousness *is* its object (as opposed to being, in some sense, what is surpassed *toward* its

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p. 409.

object). Thus his attempt to reconcile his phenomenological ontology with his metaphysics differs from the alternative attempt which centers on consciousness both being and not being its object. (It should be noted that, even though this attempt also centers on consciousness both being and not being its facticity—since, as noted in Chapter Two, consciousness is not whatever it is—what remains in *question* is how both consciousness’s object and its facticity are—and are not—consciousness, given that they are not the same thing.)

This demonstration of the difference between Sartre’s explanation in terms of reflection requiring something more than just a reference to something else and my alternative explanation shows the problem with the former’s attempt to reconcile his phenomenological ontology with his metaphysics. The problem is that in the metaphysical account, since consciousness *is* “already” something independent of its “reference” to an object, namely an in-itself being that has been transcended (which, as just noted, is the facticity of consciousness), then consciousness does not seem to be necessarily dependent upon the transcendent being of its object to prevent it from falling into nothingness. If, on the other hand, consciousness just *is* its object, then its presence to self is already a presence to a transcendent object. To be sure, our understanding of how consciousness can be transcendent of and thus other than itself while also still *being* itself needs elaboration, but treating consciousness as both being and not being its object seems, for better or worse, the best way to reconcile Sartre’s phenomenological ontology with his metaphysics.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid, p. 429.



One might defend Sartre's appeal to the notion of reflection-reflecting in his attempted reconciliation of his phenomenological ontology with his metaphysics by claiming that the self-transcendence of facticity means that one could never *grasp* what consciousness is without "reference" to some transcendent object, since one would be otherwise continually referred *from* that facticity specifically as "reflecting" *to* that facticity as "reflected," and vice versa. But even if such attempted grasping would be like a dog futilely chasing its tail, it does not follow that consciousness, as transcended facticity, would fall into nothingness without reference to some transcendent object. Even if one could not ever actually grasp some self-present facticity, that facticity still *is*, and it is not clear why its being should depend upon a reference to consciousness's object in order to be. Facticity, even transcended facticity, does not need to refer to an object in order to be. Thus my disagreement with this part of Sartre's reasoning.

By way of anticipation, we might in any case note a possible way of connecting Sartre's talk about consciousness "being" its facticity and his talk about it "being" its object, or at least being nothing more than its object. As I have already suggested, we may regard Sartrean facticity as in some way necessarily indicated, or *reflected*, by consciousness's object. As already mentioned, the purely phenomenological reading of Sartre in fact sees consciousness as nothing more than the fact that phenomena both appear and in various ways indicate other phenomena (or the possible appearance of other phenomena) in various ways. This position might perhaps then be further

elaborated to say that Sartre treats the facticity of consciousness just as *being* what is in a certain way indicated or reflected by appearing phenomena. To this extent, such a reading of Sartre could at least have him say that facticity is an *aspect* of consciousness's object. I will explore this suggestion in the next chapter. It should also be noted again that Sartre's claims about consciousness in some sense being its object may seem problematic for the correlational treatment of consciousness since that treatment does indeed seem to make consciousness something more than either appearing objects or the fact of their appearing. As previously stated, I will address this problem in Chapter Five. For now, though, we could at least also add that, *in* this very "indicating" of certain sorts of things, in certain sorts of *phenomenologically* characterizable ways, it might be held that the object of consciousness *is* thereby in some way also indicating, or "reflecting," what is *metaphysically* characterizable (if not directly graspable) as the facticity of consciousness, transcended toward objects in its "effort" to found itself.

One could object, however, that my emphasis upon consciousness being its facticity is overly simplistic due to its applicability to pre-reflective consciousness only and not to reflective consciousness. As noted in Chapter Two, from the point of view of Sartre's metaphysics, pre-reflective consciousness is the presence of the in-itself to itself arising from its failure to found and recover itself, whereas (pure) reflective consciousness, arising from a similar failure on the part of the for-itself, has as its phenomenological upshot the presence of the for-itself to itself as such. So, even if pre-reflective consciousness is present to

itself as in-itself facticity, one might object that reflective consciousness is not present to any sort of facticity at all, and that it in no way “is” any such thing.

Although Sartre notes how (pure) reflection is the presence of a for-itself being to that very same for-itself being, reflective consciousness nonetheless still retains the in-itself facticity of consciousness. Sartre says (pure) reflection “is not the appearance of a new consciousness directed on the for-itself but an intra-structural modification which the for-itself realizes in itself...”<sup>193</sup> With pure reflection, the consciousness that was there before reflection, namely a pre-reflective consciousness that in some sense is its facticity, “makes itself exist in the mode reflective-reflected-on...;” thereby reflection allows pre-reflective consciousness “to subsist as a primary inner structure”<sup>194</sup> of the consciousness in question. This means that the facticity that pre-reflective consciousness in some sense is remains in reflective consciousness. Granted, pre-reflective consciousness is the self-presence (and thus the transcendence) of facticity, while reflective consciousness is the self-presence (and thus transcendence) of that *transcended* facticity. So what pre-reflective consciousness both is and is present to is in *some* sense not the same thing that reflective consciousness is and is present to. In any case, the same facticity is found in both, even if differently “reflected” phenomenologically. The relevance of all of this is that, at least in terms of Sartre’s own attempted reconciliation of his phenomenology with his metaphysics, it remains unclear why *either* reflective consciousness or pre-

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, p. 215.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

reflective consciousness has need of reference to the actual being of a transcendent object of consciousness in order to avoid falling into nothingness. Why is not the facticity in question sufficient in both cases?

It should be noted that a further problem exists for Sartre's claims about consciousness being nothing more than its object. That problem is how such treatment could account for the unity of consciousness over time. If one were to say "I see a table" and then say "I see a chair," there would seem to be something constant ("I") referred to in these two statements. But what could be constant between consciousness of one object and that of another if there is nothing more to consciousness than its object? One might say that a *person* is constant in one's awareness of different objects, but how can Sartre accommodate that claim without something more to consciousness of an object than its object? Although Sartre often seems unclear as to whether or not there is a subject that makes something more of consciousness than just its object, perhaps any constancy throughout different conscious acts requires that a subject exist. Otherwise, once an object of consciousness has changed, what remains the same?

It should be noted that Sartre in fact sounds at times as if there is *not* anything that persists from consciousness of one object to that of another. He claims that "(i)t is not in the future that I rediscover *my* presence since the future releases the world to me as correlative with a consciousness to-come."<sup>195</sup> This

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid, p. 277.

certainly sounds as if a fundamental change is brought with every future change in consciousness's object. One way, however, that Sartre attempts to preserve the unity of consciousness, in spite of this apparent multiplicity, is found in his discussion of possibility. In that discussion, Sartre claims that the consciousness of a particular object is in some way the consciousness of that object's potential changes.<sup>196</sup> Sartre's reasoning starts from the idea that *what* an object for consciousness is depends upon that object's lack of some potential development. For instance, Sartre notes how a crescent moon is what it is by contrast to a full moon which it is not.<sup>197</sup> Lacking what would make it a full moon is just part of what a crescent moon *is*. Sartre treats this denial *by* an object *of* another object as a kind of "return" by the denied object to the denying object, so that it is in light of what an object is not that an object is what it is. What is denied in these instances are potentialities of an object, and these potentialities are at least partly constitutive of an object.

All of this is relevant to the issue of an enduring consciousness because Sartre treats the lacked potentialities constitutive of an object as correlative to lacked possibilities of consciousness of an object. Just as an object is

constituted by what it lacks, so consciousness of an object is constituted by the possibilities it lacks. Sartre shows this in the following passage:

I am beyond the crescent moon as the possibility of a radical negation of the moon as a full disc; and correlative with the return

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, p. 269

of my future negation toward my presence, the *full* moon comes back toward the crescent in order to determine it in *this* as a negation; the full moon is what the crescent lacks; it is the lack of the full moon which makes the crescent a crescent....I attribute the dimension of the future to the crescent as crescent...and I constitute it as the crescent moon by the determining return toward it of what it lacks.<sup>198</sup>

Since consciousness is (although it also is not) its object, one would expect this sort of correspondence between what is the case for consciousness and what is the case for its object.

Why, though, does Sartre think that the possible consciousness of an object's potentialities is the same as the consciousness of that object? The reason seems to be that Sartre treats the potential actualization of the consciousness of an object's potentialities as that which the self-present consciousness of that same object needs in order to be identical with itself, or "complete." As already noted in Chapter Two, Sartre treats consciousness as being separated from itself by virtue of its self-presence. Because of this absence of itself from itself, Sartre treats consciousness as a lack of what would make it complete.<sup>199</sup> In his discussion of possibility, Sartre specifies what would complete consciousness: "(t)his missing For-itself is the Possible."<sup>200</sup> The Possible here is the consciousness of the potentialities of consciousness's object. This is shown by Sartre's claim that "...as a correlate of this possible non-thetic consciousness, the glass-drunk-from haunts the full glass as its

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, p. 153.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

possible and constitutes it as a glass to be drunk from.”<sup>201</sup> So, the consciousness of an object endures through a change in that object because the consciousness of any potential developments of that object is what the former consciousness is in the first place, despite its also *not* being it due to the separation from itself found with its presence-to-self. The original consciousness of an object thus endures because it is replaced by itself, not by another consciousness, when there is awareness of changes in an object of consciousness.

At least two problems exist for this attempt to explain the endurance of consciousness despite a change in what it is consciousness of. The first problem has to do with the supposed “identity” of a present consciousness with a possible consciousness. According to Sartre, the self-present consciousness of an object is the self-present consciousness of that object’s potentialities, since the latter is what the former lacks in order to be reunited with itself. But how would that make the present consciousness of a crescent moon, for instance, the same as the eventual consciousness of a full moon? After all, even if the crescent moon is what it is for Sartre due to its *not* being the full moon, just as much as consciousness is what it is due to its not being itself, that does not imply that a crescent moon is a full moon. Or at least, without the supposition of some sort of an *underlying* identity (substance?), it does not. So does Sartre not also need to appeal, in the case of consciousness, precisely to some sort of *underlying* identity? (That identity would seem to have to lie in his notion of

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 157.

*facticity*, as giving some sort of “substance” to consciousness beyond what its *object* is able to give. I will get to this point shortly.)

This problem of how consciousness can also “be” its possible consciousness becomes even worse when one emphasizes that, whatever one might choose to say about consciousness both being and being separated from *consciousness*, self-present consciousness, at least on the pre-reflective level, both *is* and *is separated from* an in-itself being, namely an in-itself facticity that attempted to found itself. Again, pre-reflective consciousness is the in-itself *qua* separated from *itself*. As previously noted, the in-itself attempted to found itself, to be *both* its own foundation *and* identical with itself. It only succeeded in being present to itself, however. So what results is an in-itself being that is separated from itself. This in-itself being that lacks itself *is* consciousness for (at least the metaphysical) Sartre. So what consciousness is missing in missing itself is a certain sort of in-itself being. From this perspective, the being of consciousness does not consist in a lack of a for-itself being such that, in pursuing it, consciousness would be pursuing *itself*. It rather consists in a lack of *being-in-itself* such that, in pursuing it, consciousness as an in-itself being is in some way pursuing both itself and an impossible being, namely a self-caused being, as its own foundation.

Perhaps another way to understand the problem with Sartre’s reasoning is to examine it in the form of the following argument:

- 1) Consciousness is present to itself.
- 2) Whatever is present to itself is separated from or lacks itself.



3) Therefore, consciousness lacks itself.

Although this argument may seem to be valid, there is an equivocation of the term 'consciousness' such that only one of two possible understandings of that term could mean that consciousness of an object lacks the possible consciousness of that object's potentialities. As noted earlier in this chapter, 'consciousness is present to itself' can be understood as meaning *either* (a) an in-itself being is present to itself *or* (b) a for-itself being, which is *already* an in-itself being present to itself, is present to itself. Given (2), (a) would mean that consciousness lacks an in-itself being, the in-itself being that consciousness is; (b) would mean that consciousness lacks a for-itself being, a self-present being, since what is lacked is an in-itself being *qua already* present to itself. Sartre's discussion of consciousness in some sense being its possible consciousness seems to turn on (b), since the possible consciousness is what consciousness is said to lack in that discussion. But (b) seems more like a description of *reflective* consciousness than of *pre-reflective* consciousness, and Sartre's treatment of the possibility of consciousness is supposed to be part of a discussion of pre-reflective consciousness.<sup>202</sup> In any case, even if that treatment was part of a discussion of reflective consciousness, there would still be no reason to think that pre-reflective consciousness of an object lacked consciousness of such an object's potentialities, and thus there would be no explanation here of the unity of pre-reflective consciousness.

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, p. 154.

The question of the distinction between reflective and pre-reflective consciousness may, however, relate to a possible objection to my distinction between (a) and (b). That objection is that (a) and (b) are not really different at all, but are rather different ways of saying the same thing. Although (b) claims that a self-present for-itself being is what consciousness lacks, the in-itself being that (a) treats as lacked by consciousness is likewise a self-present for-itself being. The reason for this is that the being that the lacking in-itself is present to is itself, not some other in-itself being. Consequently, the lacked being in (a) is separated from itself and thus seems to be a for-itself being just like the lacked being in (b). How, then, is the being present to and lacked by consciousness in (a) different from the being present to and lacked by consciousness in (b)? Perhaps one can even see (a) and (b) as instances of the two different ways for Sartre of looking at consciousness:

Thus we are obliged to admit that the consciousness (of) belief is belief. At its origin we have apprehended this double game of reference: consciousness (of) belief is belief and belief is consciousness (of) belief....Each of the terms refers to the other and passes into the other, and yet each term is different from the other....Thus consciousness (of) belief and belief are one and the same being, the characteristic of which is absolute immanence. But as soon as we wish to grasp this being, it slips between our fingers, and we find ourselves faced with a pattern of duality, with a game of reflections....In fact if we seek to lay hold on the total phenomena (*i.e.*, the unity of this duality or consciousness (of) belief), we are referred immediately to one of the terms, and this term in turn refers us to the unitary organization of immanence.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, pp. 122-123.

It might seem that (a) is simply focusing on the duality of consciousness, with its description of the lacked as in-itself just being a matter of emphasis upon the lacked *not* being self-present consciousness. And (b) would be focusing upon the unity of consciousness, with its description of the lacked as a for-itself that is ecstatically *being* the lacking consciousness<sup>204</sup> just being a matter of emphasis on that which is lacked *being* self-present consciousness. Hence (a) and (b) might not be incompatible options, with one having to choose *either* one *or* the other. Perhaps one could embrace *both* (a) *and* (b).

The problem with treating (a) and (b) as equivalent is that such treatment makes pre-reflective and reflective consciousness equivalent. I have already noted a problem with such equivalence in response to the earlier objection that pre-reflective consciousness is present to itself as for-itself consciousness rather than as in-itself facticity. This problematic equivalence of pre-reflective and reflective consciousness seems to follow from the equivalence of (a) and (b), since (a) seems to be grounded in Sartre's view of the very nature of pre-reflective consciousness, while (b) seems to speak more to the case of reflection. Sartre, though, certainly does not think these two forms of consciousness are the same thing, despite the similarities between the failed recovery of the in-itself in the case of pre-reflective consciousness and the failed recovery of the for-itself in the case of reflective consciousness. Reflection for Sartre is a "second effort"<sup>205</sup> at a certain sort of self-founding, namely, an effort

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, pp. 180-184.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, p. 216.

by consciousness (as opposed to the in-itself) to found itself: an “intra-structural modification which the for-itself realizes in itself.”<sup>206</sup> Without a distinction between reflective and pre-reflective consciousness, nothing would distinguish the first effort (on the part of the in-itself) at self-recovery from this second effort (on the part of consciousness). Although it is true that Sartre does not think anything new is added by reflection to pre-reflective consciousness<sup>207</sup>, the fact that reflection “modifies” pre-reflective consciousness precludes any equation of the two forms of consciousness.

Sartre claims that reflective consciousness is such that “the ‘reflection-reflecting’ which is reflected-on exists for a ‘reflection-reflecting’ which is reflective.”<sup>208</sup> This seems to involve the presence of the lacking being to itself *in addition to* its presence to the lacking being which it is, and it also seems to involve the presence of the lacking being to itself *in addition to* its presence to the lacking being which it is. Sartre distinguishes the case of pre-reflective consciousness from this by claiming that it is simply the “reflection-reflecting,” with no additional “reflection-reflecting” reflecting *on* it.<sup>209</sup> As in (a), then, pre-reflective consciousness would involve the presence to consciousness of the

being which consciousness is, with no *other* self-presence on the part of that being. And this is arguably just the presence to consciousness of the *in-itself being* which consciousness is. Consequently, just as real differences exist

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid, p. 215.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, p. 214.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness, so also the distinction between (a) and (b) seems more than simply two ways of describing the same thing.

Regarding the distinction between (a) and (b) in this way, one may then see how a substitute of (a) for (1) in the original argument does not after all permit the conclusion that, at least on the pre-reflective level, consciousness is lacking with regard to a possible *consciousness* which it (impossibly) would be. The argument again:

- 1) Consciousness is present to itself.
- 2) Whatever is present to itself is separated from or lacks itself.
- 3) Therefore, consciousness lacks itself.

If substituting (a) for (1) yields “An in-itself being is present to itself,” we can see the problem this generates. We could thus not read the conclusion (3) as saying that consciousness lacks a *for-itself* being which it (impossibly) would be, for the being that consciousness is said to be and to be present to in (1) is an in-itself being. To read (1) as (a) and then accept consciousness in (3) as lacking with respect to a for-itself being would be, again, to neglect the difference between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness.

Only by reading (1) as (b), then, and not as (a), can one justify Sartre’s conclusion about consciousness’s lack of its possible consciousness. This would of course render the whole issue irrelevant to the case of the being of pre-reflective consciousness. But we need to remember that our original interest in Sartre’s view regarding a “lack” of being with respect to consciousness was that-

in the face of Sartre's view of consciousness as nothing more than its (ever changing) *objects*-it promised some sort of hope for making sense of the idea of consciousness as nevertheless maintaining an identity over time. If the notion of lack in question were applicable only to the case of reflective consciousness, it could only explain the endurance of reflective, but not of pre-reflective, consciousness. And this would in any case be in addition to the problem already noted earlier, namely that, even if reflective consciousness is what it is *due to* its lack of a possible consciousness that would make it the foundation of itself (just as the crescent moon is what it is due to its lack of what would make it a full moon), that does not seem reason to treat it as *being* that possible consciousness.

A second problem with Sartre's account of an object's possibilities as an explanation of the endurance and unity of consciousness is that it does not account for all changes in what one is aware of. Even if the consciousness of an object is in some way the same as the consciousness of that object's potentialities, that does not explain what could be constant throughout consciousness of an object and the consciousness of something other than that object's potentialities. For instance, let us grant that the consciousness of dark clouds may be in some sense the same as the consciousness that correlates with the potential rain resulting from those clouds. The question remains: how can the former consciousness be the same as the consciousness of an unexpected happening, say, an unexpected surprise party later that day? Surely one can be observing the clouds at one point and also be aware of the party at

some later point, but Sartre's treatment of possibility does not seem to offer an explanation of how this can be so. A surprise party does not seem like a potentiality of dark clouds, so one can not say that, *due to the potentiality of the clouds that is the party*, the consciousness of the party is the lacked possibility of the consciousness of the clouds. What, then, enables there to be something enduring throughout changes in objects of awareness?

In her article "Sartre on the Transcendence of the Ego,"<sup>210</sup> Phyllis Sutton Morris offers a way for Sartre to have an enduring being throughout consciousness of different objects. In that article, Morris suggests that it is the enduring body that accounts for the unity of consciousness for Sartre.<sup>211</sup> Although there can be consciousness of a wide array of objects, the fact that the same body can be related to these differing objects explains what can be the same in the awareness of all such things. One who is conscious of a chair, for instance, can be the same as one who is conscious of a table if both consciousnesses in some way involve the same body. The following passage from Sartre suggests the reading offered by Morris:

In one sense the body is what I immediately am. In another sense I am separated from it by the infinite density of the world; it is given to me by a reflux of the world toward my facticity, and the condition of this reflux of the world toward my facticity is a perpetual surpassing....the body is perpetually the *surpassed*. The body as a sensible center of reference is that *beyond which* I am in so far as I am immediately present to the glass or to the table or to the distant trees which I perceive....that in relation to which the perceived object indicates its distance as an absolute property of its being is

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<sup>210</sup> Phyllis Sutton Morris, "Sartre on the Transcendence of the Ego," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 46, 1985, pp. 179-198.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187.

the body....This means that it is at once *a point of view and a point of departure*- a point of view, a point of departure which I *am* and which at the same time I surpass toward what I have to be.<sup>212</sup>

One can see here the omnipresence of the body for any awareness of something, in such a way that one can say that a common feature unifying different acts of consciousness is just a particular body “indicated” (or “reflected”) by all *objects* of consciousness. What an awareness of a particular object has in common with awareness of any other particular object need thus not be due to any potentiality of the one object to become the other object. Rather, it is due to the body “indicated” by both such objects.

Several questions arise concerning this reading of Sartre. For one, how can the ever-changing physical body be a constant being throughout different objects of consciousness? As Locke noted, a problem with treating the body as the basis of identity throughout different acts of consciousness is its composition of “constantly fleeting Particles of Matter...”<sup>213</sup> The body replaces its cells continuously, so that no part of the body is the same throughout one’s lifetime. Of course, such constant change does not seem to preclude one from treating a body as in some sense the same thing over time, whether that body is one’s own or someone else’s, just as one can treat other changing objects as in some sense the same thing over time (a table, for instance, can surely be the same thing even if one paints it a different color). Perhaps such treatment is due to some overarching whole that is the body, independent of its replaced parts,

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<sup>212</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, pp. 429-430.



something like Locke's "one Common Life"<sup>214</sup> Could such a whole be what Sartre might take as constant throughout consciousness of different objects? Or could it be that it is simply the body *indicated as the same* by different objects of consciousness that might yield for Sartre an enduring being throughout different objects of consciousness? By this I mean that, even if the physical body that is indicated by objects of consciousness is not the same due to its state of constant change, all that matters is that *it appears as if* it is the same body indicated by all the different objects of a consciousness. One might object to this explanation of the unity of consciousness since it would *merely* appear that something is constant throughout the awareness of various objects, and nothing would *really* be constant throughout. Perhaps that might make the unity of consciousness illusory. A possible response by Sartre might be his claim that with consciousness "appearance and being are one-since the for-itself has to be its appearance...."<sup>215</sup> So the fact that it *appears* as if the same body is indicated by the various objects of consciousness means that the same body *is* being so indicated. This equation of appearance and reality might be explained by recognizing a distinction between the body *as lived* and the *body-for-others*, with Sartre saying that the former is the source of the unity of consciousness. This distinction between these two senses of what the body is, as well as whether the lived body *is* in some sense the body-for-others, will be dealt with next.

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<sup>213</sup> John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Oxford University Press, New York, 1975, p.332.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. 331.

<sup>215</sup>Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 244.

For the time being, though, one can see a possible compatibility between the unity of consciousness and consciousness being nothing more than its object, especially if one recognizes the unifying body as simply that which objects “indicate” rather than as being altogether distinct from consciousness’s objects. In fact, the purely phenomenological reading of Sartre would have to treat the body in such fashion, since that reading treats consciousness as nothing more than the fact of the appearance of objects with their various indications. A problem for this position arises, though, from Sartre’s apparent treatment of consciousness as *both* “nothing more” than its object *and* as also its self-recovering facticity. Chapter Five will offer a possible solution to this problem, a solution that ultimately rejects Sartre’s equation of consciousness with either its objects or the fact of their appearance.

Although this chapter has shown problems with Sartre’s explanations of *both* the necessity of self-consciousness being consciousness of a transcendent object *and* of the endurance of consciousness by means of its possibilities, it has also shown possible alternative explanations that seem compatible with his general position. In any case, this might be regarded as conferring a reading of Sartre’s view of consciousness as not being itself in terms of at least some significant sense in which its very *being* is to be found in its *object*, despite the fact that its object is also something that consciousness plainly is not.

#### CHAPTER FOUR:

#### CONSCIOUSNESS AS NOT ITS PAST

The claim that consciousness is not its past, like the claim that consciousness is not its object, is a claim that most would probably accept. What, after all, *is* its past? The interest of the claim, though, stems from the fact that, just as with consciousness's object, consciousness *is* in some sense the past it is not. So, since consciousness is not the very thing it is, the very thing that would make it something, it is then nothingness. But what does it mean to say consciousness both is and is not its past?

There are at least two ways of understanding how consciousness both is and is not its past. The first way involves an understanding of the past in a fairly straightforward sense, the sense one has when saying, for instance, that the past was but is no longer, while the second involves an understanding of the past that in some way equates the past with the body. Starting with the first understanding of how consciousness both is and is not its past, Chapter One noted Sartre's position that although one is *not* whatever one was in the past, one also in some sense *is* whatever one was in the past as well. An example from Chapter One showed that even if I am the same person that was previously reading but am now typing, I am not identical with myself as reading because although I *am* typing, I *was* reading. This irremovable difference between what I was in the past but am now in the present persists even if what was true of me previously still is true, so that even if I am *still* reading as I was, say, an hour ago, that would not change the fact that I *am* now reading but I *was* reading an hour ago. As also noted in Chapter One, a permanent self that exists throughout one's past and present would not change things either, since such a self would still be such

that, again, it *was* whatever it was in the past but it *is* whatever it is in the present. Still, as previously stated, this difference between oneself and one's past does not eliminate the fact that one is in some sense what one was. After all, one has to be the same one who was before in order for it to be true that one was. As Sartre notes, "...the term 'was' is a mode of being. In this sense I *am* my past, I do not have it; I am it."<sup>216</sup> Using Chapter One's example to support this point, I can surely now be the same one that was previously reading. This identification with the past that one also is not is further demonstrated in the following quote from Sartre:

A remark made by someone concerning an act which I performed yesterday or a mood which I had does not leave me indifferent; I am hurt or flattered, I protest or I let it pass; I am touched to the quick. I do not dissociate myself from my past.<sup>217</sup>

According to this understanding of consciousness both being and not being its past, then, consciousness exists as the separation from self involved with temporality. As noted in Chapter One, Sartre does not think non-conscious beings exist in this manner, but rather their temporal appearance is simply a matter of their reflection of the temporality of consciousness. Being-in-itself simply is without not being anything, so that non-conscious things allegedly owe whatever negation is required for their seeming temporality to consciousness. For Sartre, only consciousness can not be without such external support, so that only consciousness can strictly speaking exist as not being the very past that it is.

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<sup>216</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 168.

This separation from its past is what constitutes the freedom of consciousness. For Sartre, consciousness is free because it has “the permanent possibility of effecting a rupture with its own past, of wrenching itself away from its past....”<sup>218</sup> It is as if the separation of consciousness from its past creates a chasm that prevents the past from affecting consciousness as its cause. By not being its past, consciousness has the power of withdrawing from all that has occurred in order to posit a non-existent end. Such positing could not occur if consciousness were incapable of withdrawing from being, since “what is can in no way determine by itself what is not.”<sup>219</sup> So, it is because I am not my past that I can attempt to achieve things that do not exist, such as a meal for this evening. As noted in Chapter One, Wilson claims that this freedom to act is what Sartre means to preserve by answering certain metaphysical questions. As I will argue in Chapter Five, treating consciousness as a certain state of affairs helps explain how it can not be the past that it is, thus making it free, at least according to Sartre.

The second understanding of how consciousness for Sartre can both be and not be its past involves a connection between consciousness’s past and consciousness’s body. As noted in Chapter One, Sartre claims that consciousness just is its in-itself facticity attempting to cause itself, and Chapter Two noted that consciousness, at least on the pre-reflective level, is present to and thus separate from itself as its in-itself facticity. This is relevant to

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, p. 563.

consciousness's past because consciousness's facticity *is* its past, due to the fact that consciousness's facticity is its body, and consciousness's body is its past. Sartre writes "...the body as facticity is the past...."<sup>220</sup> So, by both being and not being its facticity, consciousness is both being and not being its past.

This explanation of consciousness both being and not being its past obviously requires answers to a couple of questions. For one thing, why does Sartre think that the body is consciousness's facticity, and what exactly does that mean? Also, why does he think that the body is consciousness's past, and what does *that* mean? Hopefully, answering these questions will explain how consciousness's facticity, the very thing that is consciousness, at least on the pre-reflective level, is consciousness's past.

In order to answer the first question, one must recall that, according to Sartre's metaphysical explanation, the facticity of consciousness is the in-itself being that attempted to found itself. This attempt failed and resulted in the presence of facticity to itself. Since this explanation is meant to account for what appears when one examines consciousness, one may wonder what aspect of the appearance of consciousness invites this explanation. Here is where the body enters in. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, objects for Sartre always appear to consciousness with some reference to a body that has been surpassed. Part of the presentation of an object is its location in relationship to one's body. So, a chair, for instance, always appears as being a certain distance

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 431.

and direction from one's body. To say, for instance, that a chair is to the right of a table is to locate the chair in relationship to something else (since the chair may be to the left of the table for one located elsewhere), and that something else is one's body. Indeed, without the location of objects in relation to each other, a location made possible by the body as a reference point, there would be no objects. The following passage illustrates this:

It is not even conceivable that a consciousness could survey the world in such a way that the glass should be *simultaneously* given to it at the right and at the left of the decanter, in front of it and behind it....this fusion of right and left, of before and behind, would result in the total disappearance of "*thises*" at the heart of a primitive indistinction.<sup>221</sup>

So the body is always indicated by an object of consciousness, and Sartre, as noted above, equates that indicated body with transcended facticity.

But why does he make that equation? What is the connection between transcended facticity and indicated body? Perhaps Sartre is noting the fact that the indicated body is always indicated as 'already there,' as something that existed prior to its indication. For instance, when a chair indicates my body in some position relative to it, it always indicates something that was there before there was any awareness of the chair. This might make the body like transcended facticity, because facticity seems at least capable of existing before any transcendence of it toward something else. The problem with this explanation is that it does not distinguish the body from numerous other things

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid, p. 405.

indicated by an object. Objects do not simply indicate the body, but they also indicate, among other things, other possible objects of consciousness. Many of these possible objects of consciousness are, like the body, indicated as already being there, as illustrated in Sartre's example of presence to a cup which indicates presence to the bottom of the cup.<sup>222</sup> Surely this indication of the bottom of the cup is of something that was already there before its indication, not of something that just came into existence at the time of its indication. So the simple indication of the body as 'already there' does not seem uniquely to identify it as transcended facticity.

Perhaps the unique feature of the indicated body is that objects indicate it *as surpassed*. In fact, Sartre says as much in the following:

...the body is perpetually the *surpassed*. The body as a sensible center of reference is that *beyond which* I am in so far as I am immediately present to the glass or to the table or to the distant tree which I perceive.<sup>223</sup>

Unlike the body, then, other objects that are indicated by consciousness are not indicated as something surpassed in order to arrive at the indicating object of consciousness. But what does it mean to say that the body is indicated as surpassed? Since, as noted above, being surpassed could involve being previous to whatever something is surpassed toward, the body's indication as surpassed could be taken as literally meaning that the body is a previous object of awareness before awareness of any and all other objects of awareness the body is surpassed toward. This suggestion, though, seems contrary to

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid, p. 424.



experience, since one seems frequently to go from one object of consciousness to another without the body being an object of awareness prior to those other objects. It is not as if awareness of a chair and then of a table is *first* awareness of the body, *second* awareness of a chair, *third* awareness of the body again, and *fourth* awareness of a table. This succession of events certainly *can* happen, but Sartre's claim that the body is always indicated as surpassed by objects of consciousness surely does not mean that such a succession *always* happens whenever one is conscious of different objects in succession.

Perhaps, though, one can uniquely identify the body as surpassed in awareness of objects by means of the body being indicated as 'already there' by *each and every object of consciousness*. I have already noted that simply being indicated as 'already there' by an object does not distinguish the body from various other objects indicated by objects of consciousness. But such indicated objects are not so indicated by every object of consciousness, while the previous quote from Sartre shows that the body is. So, unlike the bottom of a cup that is indicated as 'already there' by another part of that cup, the body is indicated as 'already there' by the cup, the chair, the table, the glass, the tree, etc. Each and every object of consciousness thus appears as beyond the surpassed body because each and every object of consciousness, in order to be such an object, indicates the body as 'already there.' Indeed, this indication of something that is 'already there' seems almost like a return to or looking back upon what is indicated, given the previous nature of something indicated as 'already there.'

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid, p. 429.

Perhaps this helps motivate Sartre's metaphysical account of a failed attempt to recover the facticity that consciousness is, given the similarity between 'looking back upon' the body and the attempt to recover facticity. One also finds here a reason that the indicated body seems like a good candidate for being, like facticity, what consciousness is. Since each and every object for consciousness shares in common its indication of the body, the body seems like the only enduring feature of the varied objects of consciousness. It thus seems fitting to treat it as what consciousness is throughout awareness of different objects, thus equating the body with the facticity that the consciousness of all objects is. This account of what it means for the body to be indicated as surpassed might thus explain the equation of the body with facticity.

This explanation is not completely clear, though. The reason for this lack of clarity is Sartre's treatment of the body as more than one thing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Sartre distinguishes between the body-for-itself and the body-for-others. The body-for-itself, at least in one sense, is "never a given which I can know. It is there everywhere as the surpassed...."<sup>224</sup> It is thus the phenomenological upshot of metaphysical facticity, that which is indicated as surpassed by the objects of consciousness. In another sense, though, the body-for-itself is not a center of reference for objects of consciousness, but rather it is the arrangement of objects of consciousness that is surpassed toward another, non-existent, future arrangement of objects.<sup>225</sup> The body-for-itself in the former

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 409.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, p. 429.

sense, as center of reference, or a “point of view,”<sup>226</sup> is indicated but does not appear, but in the latter sense, as a “point of departure,”<sup>227</sup> it does appear.

Although my above equation of the body with facticity only made reference to the body-for-itself in the former sense, the two senses of the body-for-itself agree in the body being transcended toward something else. They differ in what the body is in each case and in what each is transcended toward.

The body-for-others, on the other hand, is an object in the world, something that appears and thus involves the transcendence of the body-for-itself in that appearance. It is apprehended as a “wholly constituted object...a *this* among other *thises*.”<sup>228</sup> It would thus be the body as what one sees when one looks in the mirror, for instance, an appearing thing that appears to others as well. The body in this sense, then, does not seem to be what Sartre equates with the facticity of consciousness, since this object, like any other object, indicates the body-for-itself as a being surpassed toward it, and, unlike the body-for-itself, not every object indicates the body-for-others as a being surpassed toward it.

This distinction between the body-for-itself and the body-for-others raises a problem. Despite the fact that Sartre treats these two aspects of the body as “different and incommunicable levels of being,...(that) can not be reduced to one another,”<sup>229</sup> the fact remains that these are two aspects of the *same thing*. How

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, p. 430.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p. 402.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, p. 404.

can the body be both for-itself as well as the in-itself object that is the body-for-others? One might claim that making the body for-itself makes it not in-itself, and vice versa, thus leading one commentator to claim that “the...body...can be identified neither with the ontological status of an absolute for-itself nor with the ontological status of an in-itself.”<sup>230</sup> This is not the problem from Chapter One of how to *relate* for-itself consciousness to in-itself non-conscious beings. As noted then, Sartre connects the two types of being by making metaphysical claims about the origin of consciousness from the in-itself’s failed attempt at self-causation, thus claims to the effect that the for-itself just *is* the in-itself doing something. The problem is rather how the body-for-itself, which consciousness in some sense is, can be an in-itself object once it has *already* separated from itself by its attempted self-founding. As an in-itself object, the body-for-others is not losing its self-identity by the failed act of self-foundation that makes something self-present consciousness. Sartre’s insistence on the radically distinct types of being for consciousness and non-conscious objects might seem to preclude anything being both types, regardless of how intrinsically related they

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<sup>230</sup> Thomas W. Busch, “Being and Nothingness: Ontology Versus Phenomenology of the Body,” Southern Journal of Philosophy, 3, 1965, p. 183.

may be.

Of course, one might wonder whether this problem applies to the claim in the previous chapter that consciousness is in some sense its object. Is that not treating something (namely consciousness's object) as being both consciousness *and* a non-conscious object? If the nature of presence is such that consciousness of a table, for instance, requires that consciousness in some sense *be* that table, what more difficulty is involved in saying that the body-for-itself is consciousness and the body-for-others is that same thing as a non-conscious object? If an ordinary object like a table can be both a non-conscious object and the consciousness that is present to it, why is it problematic to say that the body is both, as well?

It should be noted that consciousness being an object it is present to does not mean it is that same object when it is not present to it, but Sartre seems to say that consciousness is always the body-for-others even when it is not an object of consciousness. When one is present to a table, for instance, it may be necessary to in some sense *be* that table, but it is not necessary to still *be* that table when consciousness is then present to another object such as a chair. By saying that consciousness is the body due to the body being consciousness's facticity, it would seem that consciousness for Sartre is always the body-for-others that is equated with the body-for-itself, even when the former is not an object of consciousness. Still, though, this difference does not show how treating the body as both in-itself and for-itself is any more problematic than the previous

chapter's treatment of consciousness's in-itself objects as in some sense being consciousness.

In fact, it seems one could have a similar understanding of how both an object and the body can be for-itself consciousness and in-itself object. I will argue in the next chapter that the best way to understand consciousness as both being and not being either its object or its body is to treat consciousness as a particular sort of state of affairs (or a fact or event), a state of affairs that is not an additional particular thing other than its constituents but that is still not the same thing as those constituents. So, by treating consciousness as in some sense being its object, Sartre could be taken as meaning that consciousness is just the state of affairs of the appearance of objects along with their various indications. As already noted, this is how the purely phenomenological position understands Sartre. Similarly, by treating consciousness as being its body, Sartre could mean that it is just the state of affairs of consciousness's facticity being transcended toward its correlative objects. This would be the previously-mentioned correlational position on Sartre. As constituents of a state of affairs, consciousness's objects or its body would in some sense be other than yet the same as the state of affairs that includes each. All of this requires and will receive further consideration, but it shows that although the two positions differ on what state of affairs is consciousness, they offer similar accounts of how something can be both in-itself object and for-itself consciousness.

Despite this similarity in how consciousness's objects and its body can be both for-itself and in-itself, Sartre treats the body as different from any other

object of consciousness. The body-for-others is consciousness that is captured by another consciousness's awareness of it, a capture that occurs by the other's awareness of one's body as an object. Sartre notes this in the following account of one's awareness of the other, an awareness like the other's awareness of one's own consciousness:

...the Other's body is his *facticity*...as it is revealed to my facticity....This facticity is precisely what the Other *exists-in* and through his for-itself; it is what the Other perpetually lives in nausea as a non-positional apprehension of a contingency which he is, as a pure apprehension of self as a factual existence....The Other's for-itself wrenches itself away from this contingency and perpetually surpasses it. But in so far as I transcend the Other's transcendence, I fix it....This body of the Other is given to me as the pure in-itself of his being-an in-itself among in-itselfs, and one which I surpass toward my possibilities....The Other is...given to me as a *body in situation*.<sup>231</sup>

Since the body-for-others is one's body in so far as it is an object of awareness for consciousness, it would seem that Sartre's claims here about the Other's body and one's awareness of it would equally apply to the body-for-others. What one sees here is that even though the body-for-others is an object among other objects, it is an object 'in situation.' This seems to show that the body-for-others is a special kind of object. Indeed, Sartre explicitly states that the body-for-others is a *conscious* object. Note the following:

Being-for-itself must be wholly body and it must be wholly consciousness; it can not be *united* with a body. Similarly being-for-others is wholly body; there are no 'psychic phenomena' there to be united with the body. There is nothing *behind* the body. But the body is wholly 'psychic.'<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, pp. 449-451.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, p. 404.

The body-for-others thus seems different from an ordinary object of consciousness like a table, for instance. For whatever Sartre means by saying that the body-for-others is 'psychic,' one would surely not say that about something like a table.

Does this offer another explanation of how the body can be both consciousness and in-itself object? For starters, it should be noted that any significant distinction between the body-for-others and other objects seems challenged by Sartre's insistence that the body-for-others is in some respect just another object. He notes for the body that "(e)ither it is a thing among other things, or else it is that by which things are revealed to me. But it can not be both at the same time."<sup>233</sup> The body as that by which things are revealed to me is the body-for-itself, so the body-for-others seems to be the body as a thing among other things. This does not suggest some special feature of the body-for-others that would make it different from a non-conscious object.

But we have already seen that Sartre does treat the body-for-others as a special kind of object. So what makes the body-for-others so special? As seen above, the body-for-others, unlike other objects, is indicated by other objects as a *facticity*.<sup>234</sup> This means that the body-for-others is indicated as being surpassed toward other objects. The body-for-others is the same type of thing as another consciousness's body in its appearance to me,<sup>235</sup> and the other's

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, p. 402.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, p. 449.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, p. 445.



body is indicated by objects as another center of reference other than the body-for-itself. This awareness of the other's body is thus "a certain arrangement of the instrumental things of *my* world inasmuch as they indicate *in addition* a secondary center of reference which is in the midst of the world and which is not me."<sup>236</sup> So, objects not only indicate my body as that which they are beyond, but they also indicate another object, the other's body, as something they are beyond.

Before examining whether this point explains how the body can be both for-itself and in-itself, it should be noted that this treatment of the body-for-others seems potentially problematic for Sartre's account of the body-for-itself. As I noted above, one way to understand how the body-for-itself is different from other indicated things is that the body-for-itself is indicated by *each and every* object of consciousness as having been 'already there.' Sartre, though, seems to say that the other's body is also indicated by each and every object of consciousness, and surely such a body is also indicated as 'already there.' Thus Sartre's claim that "it is the Other-as-body whom things indicate by their lateral and secondary arrangements. The fact is that I actually do not know instruments which do not refer secondarily to the Other's body."<sup>237</sup>

Sartre here distinguishes the body-for-itself from the other's body by means of the other's body being indicated by each and every instrument (I will examine shortly whether this is a difference from each and every *object*) in a

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, p. 446.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

*secondary* way, whereas the body-for-itself is presumably indicated by each and every object in some primary way. But what is the difference between the other's body being indicated secondarily and the body-for-itself being indicated primarily? One difference offered by Sartre is that the indications of the body-for-itself are indications which are "constitutive of the indicating thing," whereas the indications of the other's body are only "lateral properties of the object."<sup>238</sup> This seems to be a reference to the previously-mentioned point that an object is necessarily located in some position relative to the body-for-itself. Thus the fact that a glass, for instance, must appear *either* to the right *or* to the left of a decanter. But why is the glass being to the right of the decanter in relation to the body-for-itself, for instance, constitutive of the glass, whereas the glass being to the left of the decanter in relation to the other's body is only a 'lateral property' of it? His reason cannot be that only *some* objects, at least instruments, indicate the other's body, in contrast to *all* objects, or at least instruments, indicating the body-for-itself. Recall his earlier claim that all instruments indicate the other's body. Indeed, this indication of the other's body might seem as much a part of an object as does its indication of the body-for-itself. If all instruments indicate the other's body as well as the body-for-itself, then a glass being to the right of the decanter for the body-for-itself might seem no more essential to it than its being to the left of the decanter for the other's body.

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, it does not seem that the other's body is only indicated by all *instruments* as opposed to all *objects*. The reason for this is that all objects of consciousness are also instruments:

...the body....is the immediate presence to the For-itself of "sensible" things in so far as this presence indicates a center of reference and is *already surpassed* either toward the appearance of a new *this* or toward a new combination of instrumental-things.<sup>239</sup>

Thus an object of consciousness not only indicates a surpassed point of view, or 'center of reference,' but it also indicates something else that such an object would be surpassed toward. A glass of water, for instance, not only indicates one's body in front of it, but it also indicates itself in the future as having been drunk from as well. Since an instrument is the means by which one achieves some end or goal, or what Sartre describes as something "'able to be surpassed toward--,'"<sup>240</sup> then all objects being surpassed toward some other object or objects seems to make instruments out of them. So one cannot distinguish the other's body from the body-for-itself by saying that all instruments, but not all objects, indicate the former while all instruments *and* objects indicate the latter. It seems that all instruments *and thus* all objects indicate both the body-for-itself as well as the other's body.

It should be noted that even if some objects did not indicate the other's body, that would still not differentiate the other's body from *both* forms of the body-for-itself. As mentioned above, the body-for-itself is both a point of view *and* a point of departure. As a point of view, the body-for-itself does not appear

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid, p. 429.

but is indicated by each and every object of consciousness. As a point of departure, though, the body-for-itself does appear as an object or arrangement of objects that one surpasses toward another object or arrangement of objects. Since one's point of departure is an appearing "object," this means that it *is* an object rather than what is indicated by that object. After all, it would seem odd to say that an object is indicated by itself. The body as point of departure, then, is not indicated by each and every object, so that the body-for-itself, at least as point of departure, can not be distinguished from the other's body by means of every object being constituted, at least in part, by its indication of the body as point of departure but not of the other's body. Explaining how indication of the body-for-itself as point of view is constitutive of objects would, at least so far, not explain how the body-for-itself as point of departure differs from the other's body.

Still, perhaps one could distinguish the body-for-itself as point of view from the other's body by means of the fact that the indications of the body as point of view occur in some sense *prior to* the indications of the other's body. I have already noted that both of these forms of the body are indicated by all objects of consciousness, but perhaps a prior indication of the body as point of view would make it fundamental to what an object is in a way that indication of the other's body is not. Perhaps an object's indication of the body as point of view somehow establishes what an object is and thus enables it to then indicate other things like the other's body. If so, that would make sense of Sartre's claim that the indications of the body-for-itself are constitutive of an object while the indications

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid, p. 354.

of the other's body are merely "lateral properties" of it. This would be contrary to the previous claim that both indications might seem equally essential to objects.

Indeed, Sartre seems to demonstrate this priority of indications in his description of "the Look." "The Look" is the transformation of consciousness into an in-itself object in the midst of the world, a transformation brought about by another consciousness becoming aware of one.<sup>241</sup> The earlier quoted claim about one 'fixing' another consciousness as an object is an example of one subjecting another consciousness to "the Look." In an example of one *being subjected to* "the Look," Sartre imagines one getting caught while eavesdropping. At first, one is totally engrossed in what one is doing. While looking through a keyhole, one's consciousness is "a pure process of relating the instrument (the keyhole) to the end to be attained (the spectacle to be seen), a pure mode of losing myself in the world...."<sup>242</sup> But suddenly, one hears footsteps from behind and realizes that another person is looking at one. This realization brings on a particular sort of self-awareness, and this self-awareness involves a consciousness of myself as existing on the level of objects in the world. This encounter with what Sartre calls the "other as subject" precedes one's encounter with the other as object, or the other's body, meaning that "the Other exists for me first and I apprehend him in his body *subsequently*. The Other's body is for me a secondary structure."<sup>243</sup> As already noted, the latter encounter with the other's body also entails the indication of the other's body by objects of

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, pp. 348-349.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p. 348.

consciousness. This means that one's awareness of objects prior to one's encounter with the other as subject in "the Look," an encounter that occurs prior to one's encounter with the other's body and the consequent indications of that body, is an awareness of objects prior to those objects' indications of the other's body. Such a prior awareness of objects, however, no matter how pure and involved, must still include the indication of the body-for-itself as point of view by those objects.

As already noted, Sartre claims that objects must be located in some fashion in relation to one's body, that "(i)n each project of the For-itself, in each perception the body is there."<sup>244</sup> In Sartre's eavesdropping example, then, no matter how absorbed one may be in looking through it, the keyhole in some sense appears as in front of one's body, thus indicating it. The absence of such locating of objects "would result in the total disappearance of 'thises' at the heart of a primitive indistinction."<sup>245</sup> These 'thises,' then, that subsequently indicate the other's body, seem to be what they are due to their indications of the body-for-itself as point of view, indications that are prior to and thus without their indications of the other's body. Hence Sartre's claim that objects' indications of the body-for-itself are constitutive of the object while their indications of the other's body are merely "lateral properties" of them. Even though all objects indicate both the body-for-itself as point of view and the other's body, the priority of indication distinguishes the indications of the former from the indications of the

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid, p. 446.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, p. 429.

latter. In fact, such priority might explain Sartre's claim that the other does not appear out of ontological necessity but is rather "impossible to deduce from the ontological structures of the for-itself."<sup>246</sup>

Let us now return to the question that led to this discussion of the difference between these two types of indications. Does Sartre's treatment of the body-for-others as a facticity provide an explanation of how the body can be *both* for-itself consciousness *and* in-itself object? Although consciousness originates as a particular sort of "effort" on the part of an in-itself being in Sartre's metaphysical explanation, that explanation does not lead Sartre to the conclusion that, as a conscious being, one simply *is* (in the mode of being-in-itself) an in-itself being. We may see this reflected in his discussion of consciousness of the other's body. One's awareness of the other's body as being in situation, as being surpassed toward other objects, recognizes that the in-itself being of the other's body has in some sense transcended itself. As Sartre notes, in one's awareness of the other "I apprehend this transcendence in the world."<sup>247</sup> Sartre's treatment of the body-for-others as consciousness thus does not make the obvious mistake of failing to recognize the occurrence of such self-transcendence. It does, however, make a transcending for-itself being into an in-itself being, and it does so *while simultaneously treating it as still being for-itself consciousness*. Sartre notes this when saying that "...the Other...appears

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid, p. 405.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, p. 474.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p. 446.

to me as a transcendence-transcended.”<sup>248</sup> So the problem is not simply how an in-itself being could first become a for-itself being and then become an in-itself being again. Indeed, such a sequence of transformations is how Sartre describes the movement from birth to death.<sup>249</sup> That sequence, however, does not necessitate any treatment of the for-itself as also being an in-itself object over the same span of time. Sartre’s claims about the body-for-others, though, seem like such a treatment.

We cannot solve this problem simply by claiming that the body-for-others is the facticity of one’s consciousness, so that treating the body-for-others as in-itself object is simply treating one’s facticity as an in-itself being. Although (in the metaphysical context) one’s facticity was originally an in-itself being, it is transcended in the failed attempt of consciousness at self-foundation. In one sense then it *is* an in-itself being, namely, in the sense of it being an in-itself being that has become a for-itself being. But that just shows that consciousness is a modification of an in-itself being, not that consciousness is still what it would be, namely self-identical, without that modification. As such a modification, it does not seem that consciousness can also be a being without that modification. In any case, as one should remember, the notion of “facticity” in the specific sense of the body-for-itself is introduced by Sartre solely in phenomenological terms, not in terms of the metaphysical account that allowed him to speak of

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, pp. 169,431.



facticity as the in-itself being remaining “at the heart of” the for-itself as an upshot of the failed attempt in question.

Perhaps, though, Sartre’s treatment of the body-for-others as an object of another consciousness shows that one cannot simply equate objects with in-itself beings. I suggested earlier that Sartre treats the body-for-others as a conscious object, and perhaps any difficulty we have with that treatment is simply due to the assumption that an object just *is* an in-itself being. Typical examples of objects, such as tables, chairs, glasses, decanters, trees, etc., are obviously self-identical in-itself beings, but that does not mean that *all* objects are such. Is there any reason not to treat the body-for-others as both an object *and* a for-itself being?

Indeed, one might say that being an object simply *means* being that which appears to consciousness with a certain level of distinction or separation from consciousness, rather than meaning that which is an instance of the in-itself. Consciousness is only non-positionally aware of itself, whereas it is positionally aware of objects. This seems to correspond with the body-for-itself being indicated without ever appearing while the body-for-others does appear to (another) consciousness. So indication without appearance seems to involve some sort of distinction or separation of consciousness from itself, but less separation from consciousness than does its appearance to itself as an object. So perhaps one can say that this makes the appearing body-for-others an object but not an in-itself being.

Wider seems to support this suggestion in her article “Hell and the Private Language Argument: Sartre and Wittgenstein on Self-Consciousness, the Body,

and Others.”<sup>250</sup> Wider there claims that for Sartre another consciousness is necessary for one to achieve full self-consciousness, since one can never sufficiently detach oneself from oneself in order to fully view oneself. So, she states, “(i)t is necessary for me to be body for the Other to be able to look at me and thus to establish my objectivity. Without this experience of my objectivity, I could never learn to ‘look at myself’ from the outside so to speak, as if I were another.”<sup>251</sup> This seems to treat something’s status as an object as a function of its mode of appearance, since one’s objectivity is a consequence of the Other being able to look at one. Indeed, one might expect Sartre to determine something’s mode of being by its mode of appearance, given his praise of modern thought for “reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest it.”<sup>252</sup> If this line of thought is correct, then, the body-for-others is an object due to its appearance and it is a for-itself being due to its transcendence of its in-itself being.

Before moving on, a brief summary of what has been established so far in this discussion is in order. This second understanding of consciousness both being and not being its past seems to follow from consciousness’s past somehow being part of what its facticity is, given that consciousness both is and is not its facticity (as discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two).

Consciousness’s past can be seen as its facticity if one in some sense equates

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<sup>250</sup> Kathleen Wider, “Hell and the Private Language Argument: Sartre and Wittgenstein on Self-Consciousness, the Body, and Others,” Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, 18, 1987, pp. 120-132.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

the past with the body and then equates the body with facticity. Consciousness's facticity can be seen as the body if one sees that the indication of the surpassed body seems to be necessary for something to be an object for consciousness. The body indicated by objects of consciousness is both what consciousness is as well as an object for another consciousness. Being such an object does not make the body a self-identical in-itself being, it simply means that the body appears as sufficiently distinct from another consciousness, thus enabling an access to the body only available to another consciousness.

With these conclusions about the body and its connection to consciousness's object in hand, let us see if they can help solve a potential problem with the last chapter's claim that consciousness is in some sense nothing more than its object. Such an understanding of consciousness would seem to lend itself to what one may call the 'no content' view of consciousness. This view states that consciousness does not contain anything like private experiences or appearances, since consciousness is not simply always the consciousness *of* something, but it also exhausts itself in its transcendence to its object. Sartre expressly endorses the 'no content' view when he states that "consciousness has no 'content.' We must renounce those neutral 'givens' which...find their place either 'in the world' or 'in the psyche.' A table is not *in* consciousness-not even in the capacity of a representation."<sup>253</sup> This would be

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<sup>252</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 3.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

exactly what one would expect if consciousness is (and is not) its object, with nothing to have or contain some representation or appearance of the object.

A problem with this view, however, is that Sartre seems to accept the notion of private appearances in the following:

The grass is something qualified; it is *this* green grass which exists for the Other; in this sense the very quality of the object, its deep, raw green is in direct relation to this man. This green turns toward the Other a face which escapes me. I apprehend the relation of the green to the Other as an objective relation, but I cannot apprehend the green as it appears to the Other.<sup>254</sup>

This acceptance of private appearances seems to mean that there is something more to consciousness of an object than just that object, since one can experience the object of the other's consciousness (in the above quote, the grass), but not that object's appearance to the other (the grass as it appears to the other). The object and its appearance to the other thus seem distinct. It stands to reason then that the object of one's own consciousness and the appearance of that object are distinct as well. But how then is consciousness of an object nothing more than that object? Moreover, how can Sartre claim that consciousness has no contents?

Adrian Mirvish offers an account of Sartre that explains how there can be private appearances despite Sartre's claim about consciousness having no content. In his article "Sartre and the Gestaltists: Demystifying (Part of) *Being and Nothingness*,"<sup>255</sup> Mirvish argues that Sartre was objecting to the

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid, p. 343.

<sup>255</sup> Adrian Mirvish, "Sartre and the Gestaltists: Demystifying (Part of) *Being and Nothingness*," Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, 11, 1980, pp. 207-224.

Introspectionist school of psychology when he denied that consciousness has any 'givens' in it that would constitute its contents. According to that school, what one experiences are not actual objects in an external world, but rather distinct, atomic sensations in the mind. These sensations are caused by the smallest perceptible stimulations of one's sense organs. Objects are nothing but combinations of these sensations, so that one never actually experiences anything in the external world, but rather only encounters the private contents of one's mind.<sup>256</sup>

The problem for Sartre with this account of our experience of objects is that it relies upon us being able to experience objective, external reality in order to arrive at its notion of private sensations. Introspectionists rely upon experiments with physical sense organs, like the eyes, to see how their composition can explain our experience of the external world. Such experiments suggest that the eye is like a camera, producing images based upon its stimulation by external matters. These images are thus not anything external to one, but are rather simply one's own private experience. But the experimenter must assume that what she is observing in her experiment about the sense organs is more than just her private sensations, but rather are actual sense organs in the external world with their stimulation by external matters. The psychologist thus inconsistently assumes our access to objective, external reality in order to establish our experience of nothing but purely private sensations. Her conclusions undermine the basis for those conclusions. As Sartre states,

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, pp. 210-211.

“(s)ensation supposes that man is already in the world since he is provided with sense organs, and it appears to him as the pure cessation of his relations with the world.”<sup>257</sup> Mirvish claims that Sartre was rejecting the position that consciousness contains such sensations when Sartre described consciousness as having no contents.

This claim is significant since it allows for something else besides sensations as a content of consciousness. This something else for Mirvish are appearances that necessarily involve reference to an external world and external objects in that world. Mirvish notes how the Gestalt school of psychology offers an account of experience that involves such a reference to external reality, and he further notes how that school mirrors Sartre’s objections to the notion of private, atomic sensations. Both Sartre and Gestalt psychology do not think that one’s actual experience of objects can be constructed out of the combination of supposedly more basic sensations, and they both claim that one experiences objects as synthetic totalities with an essential reference to the external world.<sup>258</sup> Mirvish offers the following quotes as evidence of Sartre’s agreement with the Gestalt school on the nature of experience:

...we do not encounter anywhere anything which is given as purely *felt*, as experienced for me without objectivation. Here as always I am conscious *of* the world, and on the ground of the world I am conscious *of* certain transcendent objects.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 415.

<sup>258</sup> Mirvish, pp. 217-218.

<sup>259</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 412.

...in no case do we get out of an existing world....we might show that what is called...the specificity of the senses is referred back to pure determinations of objects as such.<sup>260</sup>

...an object *must always appear to me all at once...*, but...this appearance always takes place in a particular perspective which expresses its relations to the ground of the world....<sup>261</sup>

These passages, along with Sartre's earlier quoted claim about appearances of objects to the other ("This green turns toward the Other a face *which escapes me.*") suggest for Mirvish appearances of objects to consciousness, appearances which are distinct from although necessarily indicative of transcendent objects in an external world. Mirvish thus would not agree with an account of consciousness as nothing but its object.

One problem for Mirvish's account of Sartre is that it posits an intermediary between consciousness and its objects, a positing which Sartre clearly rejects. As already noted in Chapter Three, Sartre treats the presence of consciousness to what it is consciousness of as an internal negation of consciousness's object, a relationship between consciousness and what it is of that involves consciousness in some sense *being* that which it is of. This means that consciousness, although not identical with its object, is not some separate being other than its object. Thus Sartre's claim:

...the term of origin of the internal negation is the in-itself, the thing which *is there*, and outside of it there is nothing except an emptiness, a nothingness which is distinguished from the thing only by a pure negation for which *this* thing furnishes the very content.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p. 413.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, p. 418.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, p. 245.

Since all that exists with consciousness of an object is that object and nothingness, it would not seem that an appearance of an object, being distinct from an object and being a *something* contained by consciousness, is included in Sartre's ontology. Also, aside from any notion of consciousness in some sense being its object, Sartre's claim that consciousness has no content would not seemingly allow for Mirvish's appearances.

But what about Sartre's point about grass appearing to another consciousness in a way that it does not appear to one's own consciousness? Sartre may deny in certain passages that anything other than an object exists in consciousness of that object and renounce any content for consciousness, but Mirvish's point seems to be that this does not cohere with Sartre's treatment of the grass's appearance to the other. Hence Mirvish's attempt to reconcile these seemingly incompatible aspects of Sartre by suggesting that Sartre was merely rejecting *sensations* as contents of consciousness, not *all possible* contents of consciousness. As just noted, though, Sartre seems to clearly reject *anything* as a content of consciousness. How can one reconcile that with his talk of appearances of objects to another consciousness?

The first step in such a reconciliation is realizing that objects of consciousness for Sartre are really the "synthetic unity" of their appearances.<sup>263</sup> By this he means that "(t)he phenomenal being...is nothing but the well-

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 5.



connected series of its manifestations,”<sup>264</sup> and each appearance of an object “refers to the total series of appearances.”<sup>265</sup> These appearances, though, are not contents of the mind, but are rather transcendent of consciousness. As already noted, Sartre claims that all consciousness is consciousness *of* something, and whatever it is conscious of is transcendent of consciousness.<sup>266</sup> So, in claiming that grass, for example, appears differently to another than it does to me, such difference could just be due to one of the appearances that constitutes the object that is grass appearing to the other while another such appearance appears to me. Thus the grass can appear larger, for instance, to one examining it closely than it does to one looking at it from a distance. Such different appearances, though, do not necessitate any private appearances, since all appearances are transcendent of consciousness, nor is anything other than an object required to explain such difference, since the object that is the grass is simply the synthetic totality of its appearances. There is thus nothing needed other than the object of consciousness, nor is there any need for any contents of consciousness.

But this appeal to transcendent objects’ identity with their appearances does not solve the problem of one not having access to what appears to the other. Sartre’s quote about the appearance of the grass to the other states that one cannot apprehend the grass as it appears to another. How can this be if what appears to consciousness are transcendent appearances that constitute

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

objects? If appearances are transcendent of consciousness, it would seem that any consciousness could be aware of what appears to any other consciousness. Perhaps an explanation of this is possible by means of this chapter's appeal to facticity, and thus the body, as constitutive of what an object is. As noted earlier, Sartre treats an object for consciousness as indicating or reflecting the facticity of consciousness, and one can see such reflected facticity as an aspect of consciousness's object. Perhaps, then, an object appears differently to another than it does to me because that object indicates the other's facticity, or body, to the other, and that indication is constitutive of what that object is. An object for my consciousness is constituted by its indication of my facticity instead. By indicating different facticities, or bodies, to different consciousnesses, objects can appear differently to different consciousnesses *without* having to resort to appearances of objects as entities that somehow occupy consciousness. Contrary to Mirvish, then, one can thus maintain that consciousness is not a container of appearances of its object.

This appeal to an object's indication of the body as somehow constitutive of that object might, however, pose a problem. If an object appears differently to different consciousnesses because it indicates different bodies, and if such indications are constitutive of that object, then it seems that two consciousnesses would never encounter the same object. If an object is what it is due to its indication of a particular facticity, then its indication of two different facticities would make it two different things. Perhaps one could avoid this difficulty by

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

claiming an essential element common to the object in all of its indications of different bodies, thus making indications of the body a necessary but not entirely determinative condition of an object. Indeed, Sartre's previously mentioned example of a glass appearing in some position relative to his body (right, left, in front of, behind) seems to assume such an essential core, since he speaks of the *same* glass being in some different position relative to another's body. Thus the necessity of an object's different locations in relation to different bodies does not seem to preclude there being the same object for different consciousnesses. One can thus make sense of consciousness being nothing more than its object even though one can not be aware of certain appearances to the other. Aside from reconciling such inaccessible appearances with Sartre's equation of consciousness with its object, though, (an equation which I will ultimately reject in Chapter Five), the constitution of objects by their indication of the body can reconcile such private appearance with consciousness having no contents.

With this difficulty addressed, let us return to consciousness both being and not being its past. Having already shown how consciousness's facticity is its body, the next step in understanding this interpretation of consciousness both being and not being its past is explaining how the body is the past. As already noted, the body is what consciousness surpasses in its awareness of objects. So, objects not only indicate the body as a means of location, but they also indicated the body as what was in some sense there before their appearance. Since the indication of the body makes an object what it is, the surpassed body is always there as what was before whatever one is aware of. It would thus seem

that the body would always be indicated as what is past, thus possibly explaining Sartre's equation of the body with the past.

So, to return to the distinction drawn at the beginning of this chapter, there are at least two ways of understanding how consciousness can both be and not be its past for Sartre. The first way appeals to the nature of temporality and the self-separation that it requires, while the second way appeals to the body as surpassed toward consciousness's objects. It is interesting to note that the first way does not treat the past as what is transcended toward consciousness's objects, while the second way does. This might make the first way seemingly unsuitable for the correlational treatment of consciousness, since that treatment regards consciousness, and thus the past that it in some sense is, as related to appearances by its self-transcendence toward appearances. I will address this matter in Chapter Five. In any case, consciousness not being its past could once again be treated as making it nothing, since it is not the very thing (its past) that it is, the very thing that would make it something. Although anything would be nothing by not being what it is, Sartre claims that only consciousness, and not in-itself objects, does not require some sort of external support in order to not be the past that it is.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONSCIOUSNESS AS A STATE OF AFFAIRS

The fact that consciousness for Sartre both is and is not its objects as well as its past and its body indicated by its objects may be taken to lead to the conclusion that consciousness is a state of affairs (or an event or occurrence) involving its objects and all that they indicate, but having no other constituents besides. To begin with, at least, as noted in Richard Aquila's article "Two Problems of Being and Nonbeing in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*,"<sup>267</sup> an event or state of affairs in some way both is and is not the things constituting it. An example illustrates this point about states of affairs. The state of affairs consisting of my presence in a room involves certain particulars, namely, myself and my room, as well as, perhaps, the relationship of being-present-in. These particulars and that relationship, though, are not identical with the state of affairs that is my presence in the room, even if one takes the particulars and the relationship all together. The reason for this is that the particulars and the relationship have to be in a certain order, namely of myself being present in the room rather than the room being present in me. This ordering of the particulars and the relationship is what the state of affairs is, so that the state of affairs is not the same thing as the things it involves. It also, though, is not anything else besides those things it involves, since the order of the particulars and the relationship is just those things existing in a particular way. A state of affairs thus

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<sup>267</sup> Richard Aquila, "Two Problems of Being and Nonbeing in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 38, 1977, p. 169.

is and is not its constituents since it is nothing more than yet still is not the same thing as its constituents, and this might then at least be taken as a start toward the previous chapters' claims that consciousness is in some sense the objects and the past that it is not.

One might object that a state of affairs is *dependent* upon its constituents but is still something additional to its constituents. A lightning bolt, for instance, would be nothing without a certain set of conditions existing in the sky, such as the charge of the particles in the air, since the lightning bolt would not occur without such conditions. But that certainly does not show that a lightning bolt is nothing other than those conditions. Indeed, a lightning bolt is a sudden addition to any such conditions. Similarly, one might say that a state of affairs such as my presence in a room would not exist without its constituents, but the state of affairs could still be an additional, albeit dependent, thing with respect to its constituents. Indeed, one could treat the constituents as the *cause* of the state of affairs, much like the charge in the air is the cause of the lightning bolt. Such treatment would certainly challenge any claim that a state of affairs is nothing else besides its constituents, especially if one accepts Hume's claim that "the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct."<sup>268</sup>

Although it is true that a state of affairs being nothing *without* its constituents does not prove that it is nothing *in addition* to them, I do not think that a state of affairs is merely a dependent yet distinct thing with regard to its

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<sup>268</sup> Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. by Ernest C. Mossner, Penguin Books, London, 1984, p. 127.

constituents. Returning to the example of the state of affairs of my presence in a room, that state of affairs is not simply an ordering of its constituents that is brought into existence by those constituents, as an effect is brought about by its cause, but rather that state of affairs *is* those constituents *as ordered in a particular way*. Unlike an effect and its cause, there is no way to describe the state of affairs that is my presence in a room without referring to the constituents of that state of affairs. A state of affairs is just a way that its constituents exist, if one will, and as such there is no additional entity in question beyond those constituents. Consequently, a state of affairs is not something in addition to its constituents, which, again, seems to make it similar to consciousness not being something in addition to its objects and past.

One problem with this understanding of consciousness as a state of affairs is how consciousness differs from other states of affairs that are not instances of consciousness. Surely one can think of any number of states of affairs that would not seem to be such instances, such as the state of affairs of a tree being in a meadow, for example. Of course, an *awareness* or *experience* of such a state of affairs would surely be an instance of consciousness, but such a state of affairs without any awareness of it would not seem to be. Like consciousness, such states of affairs do not seem to be the same thing as their constituents, since they are not simply their constituents taken all together without regard for any particular ordering of those constituents, but they do not seem to be anything more than their constituents, since they are just their constituents ordered in a

particular way. Consciousness must have something else to it, then, in order to distinguish it from any and all other states of affairs.

One possible way of distinguishing consciousness from other states of affairs is the suggestion that consciousness is not just a state of affairs but is also a condition of possibility for all other states of affairs. Such a suggestion would simply extend what Sartre claims about the role of consciousness in what he calls “negatites,” or negative states of affairs, so that consciousness played such a role with all states of affairs. According to Sartre, the reason that consciousness is a condition of possibility for negatites is that such states of affairs, such as someone’s absence from a certain place or the distance between two points,<sup>269</sup> are “little pools of non-being”<sup>270</sup> that require the existence of nothingness at the heart of being. Being-in-itself, though, “does not contain Nothingness as one of its structures,”<sup>271</sup> so that there must be something besides being-in-itself that “supports it (nothingness) in its being (parenthesis mine).”<sup>272</sup> The reason for this is that, as already noted, Sartre claims that the in-itself simply is and thus is not such that it is not something.<sup>273</sup> In order to account for the nothingness in negative states of affairs, then, Sartre has to appeal to something as the support and source of this non-being. That something is consciousness.

The reason that nothingness requires a source according to Sartre is that nothingness can not exist apart from being, but is rather dependent on being.

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<sup>269</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 55.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p.56.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, p. 57.



According to Sartre, “nothingness is logically subsequent to (being) since it opposes being in order to deny it (parenthesis mine).”<sup>274</sup> In order for there to be nothingness, there must be nothing *of something*. As Sartre notes, our everyday sense of nothing always assumes a prior specification of being.<sup>275</sup> For instance, when one says that there is nothing in the refrigerator, one is meaning that there is not anything desirable to eat there. That is, there is not a specific being or beings there. The being that the nothingness “in” negative states of affairs depends on, however, cannot be the beings-in-themselves that are the constituents or ingredients of such states of affairs. For as just noted, what is in-itself simply is and is not such that it is not, so that the in-itself “does not contain Nothingness as one of its structures.”<sup>276</sup> So, whatever being conditions nothingness by not being can not be the in-itself. In order for there to be nothingness, then, “in” such states of affairs, it follows that “...there must exist a Being... *by which nothingness comes to things*.”<sup>277</sup> Nothingness must somehow be a product of a very different sort of being from the in-itself, one which can in its own right, by contrast, not be. In some sense, that being must obviously *be*, since it is the being that this nothingness depends upon,<sup>278</sup> but it must also

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

somehow involve not being in its very being such that “it nihilates Nothingness in its being *in connection with its own being*.”<sup>279</sup> For otherwise, just like the in-itself, it could not be the source of the not being, or nothingness, “in” the negative states of affairs that are encountered in the world. There must thus, Sartre concludes, be a being which can both be and not be. Such a being “must be its own Nothingness,”<sup>280</sup> which seems to mean that it must be what it is not and thus not be itself.

Sartre of course claims that the for-itself is the being which is not, and, thus, not itself. In this respect, he particularly emphasizes the human behavior of questioning. According to Sartre, questioning requires one to dissociate oneself from being, to be outside the “causal series which constitutes being and which can produce only being.”<sup>281</sup> Whenever one questions, one realizes the possibility of a negative reply. This possibility of negative reply, this possibility of the denial of something, shows the existence of nothingness. The reason that the questioner must have nothingness as part of her being, he argues, is that one could not be in suspense, as it were, neither affirming nor denying the existence of something, if one were simply part of the deterministic process of being-in-itself. The indeterminateness of the being questioned, its presentation as neither being nor not being at the time of the question, requires the indeterminateness of the questioner as neither affirming nor denying it. The

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, pp. 57-58.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, p.58.

questioner is thus the combination of being and nothingness that is required for the existence of nothingness in the negative states of affairs that are encountered in the world, since she must *be* in order to perform the act of questioning with regard to the world, but she must also *not be* in order to avoid being caused to either affirm or deny what is questioned. The for-itself is thus that which both is and is not what it is; it is the being that is also a nothingness as well as a *source* of nothingness (namely with respect to those negative states of affairs that it encounters in the world).

Several problems exist with this reasoning by Sartre. For one thing, it seems that simply abstaining from either affirming or denying whatever one is questioning could just as easily be caused by the deterministic process of being-in-itself as could affirmation or negation. Using one of Sartre's examples, if one examines one's carburetor with the question of what is wrong with it, one could eventually discover that the answer is nothing,<sup>282</sup> so one neither affirms nor denies a problem with the part at the time of the question. It seems, though, that the act of withholding judgment could be caused as easily as could the act of judging that something is wrong with it. Even though, as noted in Chapter One and Chapter Four, Sartre certainly affirms the freedom of consciousness and wishes to avoid any deterministic cause for consciousness, there seems no reason to conclude that the for-itself is exempt from the determinism of being-in-itself simply because of the suspension of judgment involved with questioning.

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid, p.38.

Another problem has to do with the for-itself's provision of the nothingness found with negative states of affairs. Sartre concludes from the presence of nothingness in the for-itself (established by, among other things, its ability to question) and absence of nothingness from the in-itself that the nothingness found in negative states of affairs must come from the for-itself. But how does this nothingness get to states of affairs? One might answer this question by reference to a point made in Chapter One's discussion of temporality. According to that discussion, Sartre claims that consciousness supplies the nothingness for the temporality of objects by means of their *reflection* of the temporal nature of consciousness. Could one then not also say that consciousness supplies the nothingness for encountered negative states of affairs by their reflection of the nothingness of consciousness as well? This notion of "reflection" might seem more understandable if one recalls the suggestion from Chapter One that Sartre is making purely phenomenological claims about things as they are experienced by consciousness, rather than claims about things existing independently of consciousness. This might suggest that experienced negatites are in some sense dependent upon consciousness, and thus their ability to reflect the nothingness of consciousness might make more sense.

However well the notion of reflection works as an explanation of how consciousness provides nothingness for them, this appeal to Sartre's phenomenological focus as an explanation of consciousness's provision of nothingness for negative state of affairs seems problematic. In fact, the notion of negative states of affairs as dependent on consciousness seems incompatible

with Sartre's phenomenological description of consciousness as consciousness of something transcendent of it and "not supported by any existent different from itself; it has its own *being*."<sup>283</sup> Even if one can show how this independence of experienced negatites can fit with their being somehow dependent on consciousness, simply noting Sartre's phenomenological orientation does not support such dependence on consciousness. It seems conceivable that one could focus on how things appear to consciousness without having to conclude that consciousness is the reason for how they appear, since consciousness could encounter things that it has no role in constituting. In fact, Sartre seems to embrace this view of consciousness when saying that "for consciousness there is no being outside of that precise obligation to be a revealing intuition of something...."<sup>284</sup> So, Sartre's phenomenological focus seemingly only shows how consciousness *reveals* things rather than how it *constitutes* things. It would not thus seem that such a focus would necessarily explain consciousness's provision of nothingness for negative states of affairs. Of course, one could just take Sartre's focus on how things appear to consciousness as simply *meaning* that consciousness for him is somehow responsible for what it experiences, but such treatment would be an unsupported position. It would also seem incompatible with the fact that Sartre *argues* for consciousness's provision of nothingness for negative states of affairs based on the impossibility of the in-itself

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

to make such a provision and the ability of conscious beings to perform the act of questioning.

Returning to that argument, there is a further problem with it, beyond how there is a 'transferring' of nothingness to negative states of affairs. As previously noted, nothingness for Sartre is always the denial and non-existence of something (as seen in the earlier example of there being nothing in the refrigerator meaning there is not *something*, namely anything desirable to eat, in the refrigerator). Consequently, he claims that nothingness requires support from being. It would thus seem that the being that supports and is a condition of possibility for nothingness is whatever nothingness is the non-existence of. Since the for-itself is the supposed support of nothingness, nothingness would then be the non-existence of the for-itself. But this does not explain the non-existence of *in-itself* objects involved in negative states of affairs. (It should be noted that my earlier example of there being nothing in the refrigerator is a negative state of affair that involves the denial of in-itself objects.) What about the non-existence of a chair, for instance, in the negative state of affairs that is the chair *not* being the table? Must not the chair be the support of nothingness since it is not being something? Although Sartre claims that negative states of affairs originate from human activity and "indicate an aspect of being as it appears to the human being who is engaged in the world,"<sup>285</sup> in-itself objects are often not something else in such states of affairs and thus seemingly support

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

nothingness. This would exclude such objects from being-in-itself, though, since they would no longer simply be but would then also be the nothingness that they support. Sartre, though, certainly does not think that non-conscious objects are nothing; only conscious beings are nothing. But there seems no reason here why non-conscious objects would not be nothing, since nothingness is the non-existence of something, and what is not something, in this case the objects that are not other objects, is the support of nothingness. The fact that nothingness is always the non-existence of something, rather than simply being non-existence, is why Sartre claims that nothingness depends on being. It would thus seem that non-conscious objects, not just consciousness, would be the support of nothingness and thus, according to Sartre's previously-mentioned reasoning, would be nothingness.

One might suggest that Sartre simply meant that consciousness *is* its object, so that non-conscious objects would be the support of nothingness since they *are* nothingness-supporting consciousness. Identifying such "denied" objects with consciousness would possibly make Sartre's argument for the latter's provision of nothingness applicable to the former, as well. As I argued in Chapter Three, Sartre does, after all, maintain that in some sense consciousness is its object. So, if consciousness of a chair, for instance, is the same thing as a chair, then consciousness being the support of nothingness means that the chair, as consciousness, is such a support. As mentioned earlier, consciousness for Sartre is nothingness since it supports nothingness, and nothingness is the denial of something. So, perhaps one could say that this denial of something

that constitutes the nothingness of consciousness just is the non-existence of the chair by other objects not being the chair.

A possible problem with this suggestion is that no matter how closely one wants to tie consciousness to its object(s), one can not *identify* consciousness with its object(s). The reason for this is the already-mentioned separation involved in the presence of consciousness to whatever it is consciousness of. Presence to an object is a relationship with that object, so there must be a distinction between what is present to an object and the object itself. Thus, consciousness of a chair can never *be* a chair, meaning that one can not account for a chair or any other object being the support of nothingness by appealing to its identity with consciousness. One might respond, though, that consciousness's lack of identity with an object does not preclude it being its object, since, as already noted, consciousness is what it is not. Consequently, one might make sense of how something that is *not* consciousness (non-conscious objects which also are in some sense consciousness) could support and thus be nothingness.

It would seem, though, that despite the non-existence of non-conscious objects due to them not being other objects, such objects can not be the support of nothingness. The reason for this is that, unlike consciousness, such objects can not *be* the nothingness that they support. They are not their own nothingness because they are not what they are not. A chair, for instance, is not the table that it is not. By not being their own nothingness, they would have to absurdly produce nothingness without actually being nothingness, an



impossibility for Sartre since “(i)t would be inconceivable that a Being which is full positivity should maintain and create outside itself a Nothingness....”<sup>286</sup>

Consciousness, on the other hand, is its own nothingness since, as noted in Chapter Two, it is not itself by virtue of being present to and thus separate from itself. It would thus seem that however much one ties consciousness to its objects, there still remains a difference between the two. Unlike non-conscious objects, then, consciousness is thus suited to be the condition of possibility for nothingness.

One problem for all of this is that even if non-conscious objects are not suited as the origin of nothingness, it would seem that any state of affairs, not just those that are instances of consciousness, would be so suited. As previously suggested, consciousness not being itself and thus being its own nothingness could be due to it being a state of affairs that both is nothing more than its constituents while still not being the same thing as its constituents. This would seem to be the case for other states of affairs besides consciousness, though, so they could seemingly originate nothingness, as well. If that is so, then consciousness would not seem different from other states of affairs.

In any case, however problematic Sartre’s reasoning is, it should be noted that it is a departure from a purely phenomenological approach to consciousness. As stated in Chapter One, experience can not tell one that consciousness, or anything else, *must* be a certain way in order for there to be

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

something else, such as nothingness. But, according to Sartre, the nothingness involved in negative states of affairs requires the existence of that which is not itself, which is consciousness.

Furthermore, while the reasoning so far has only attempted to show consciousness as a condition of possibility for negative states of affairs, Sartre's reasons for treating consciousness as necessary for negatites might actually entail its necessity for any state of affairs. Aquila notes that Sartre "uses the notion of a 'negative' state of affairs so broadly as to include virtually *all* states of affairs."<sup>287</sup> For instance, Sartre claims that one's apprehension of a line segment from A to B involves an apprehension of nothingness if one distinguishes between points A and B and views them in relation to one another.<sup>288</sup> The nothingness involved here is the fact that *A is not B* and vice versa, and the apprehension of that fact differs from simply apprehending the line segment that runs between those two points. The former apprehension seems to be of the state of affairs that is A and B being distant from each other, while the latter apprehension seems to be of an object, namely the line segment. As Aquila states, the former is "seeing *that* A and B are distant from one another...",<sup>289</sup> and such seeing involves presence to nothingness. Thus even the state of affairs of A and B being distant from each other seems an example of "those little pools of non-being"<sup>290</sup> that are negative states of affairs, and this suggests that just about

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<sup>287</sup> Aquila, "Two Problems of Being and Non-Being in Sartre's Being and Nothingness," p. 171.

<sup>288</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 54.

<sup>289</sup> Aquila, "Two Problems of Being and Non-Being in Sartre's Being and Nothingness," p. 171.

<sup>290</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 53.

any state of affairs could be treated by Sartre as a negative one. After all, just about any state of affairs involves constituents that are related to and thus distinct from each other, and such distinction involves the non-being found in negatites. Consequently, a treatment of consciousness as necessary for *negative* states of affairs seems equivalent to simply treating it as necessary for any state of affairs, at least for Sartre.

Although this attempt to distinguish consciousness from other states of affairs that are not consciousness seemingly goes beyond the purely phenomenological level, the treatment of consciousness as a state of affairs might nevertheless in some ways seem a reduction of consciousness to the phenomenological level of appearances. The reason for this is that Sartre's description of consciousness, noted in Chapter Three, as the internal negation of an in-itself object or objects would seemingly suggest that consciousness is a state of affairs involving such objects and nothing more. According to such a suggestion, my consciousness of a table, for instance, would just be the fact that the table appears and indicates various things like my body, my past, and other phenomena that either already have or will appear. Consciousness would then be only that which appears. One might object that if consciousness is the state of affairs that involves appearing things, then it is something beyond that which appears, but one must remember the earlier response to the objection that a state of affairs might be a dependent yet still additional entity to its constituents. As noted then, a state of affairs just *is* its constituents ordered in a certain way, so that a treatment of consciousness as a state of affairs involving only its

objects is not a treatment of it as anything additional to the appearing things which constitute it.

All of this thus sounds like an embracing of Sartre's previously-mentioned option in Chapter One of just considering the phenomena and their combination of the for-itself and the in-itself, as opposed to accepting "the ancient duality 'consciousness-being.'"<sup>291</sup> As noted in Chapter One, Sartre could possibly base this combination of the two types of being on his metaphysical assertion that the for-itself just is the in-itself attempting to found or cause itself, and possibly based on this he thinks it is more profitable to reject the duality of the experiencing and the experienced. As also noted in Chapter One, though, such an attempt by the in-itself at self-foundation, or at anything else, would seem to be an impossibility. On the other hand, the previous chapters seem to offer other reasons for an exclusive regard for phenomena. While consciousness as self-conscious must be separated from itself, and so in some sense not be whatever it is, presence to something also requires that what is present in some sense be whatever it is present to. So consciousness must in some sense be the indicating objects that it is present to. The fact that consciousness is both self-aware and present to something thus requires that it both not be and be something, specifically its indicating objects. This seemingly leads to consciousness being the state of affairs of objects appearing and indicating various things that either have appeared (the past) or will appear, since such a

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid, p. 794.

state of affairs both is and is not the indicating appearances that constitute it. Such a state of affairs thus is and is not consciousness's objects, which makes it consciousness.

Sartre's seeming focus on the phenomenological and the treatment of consciousness as a state of affairs involving the appearance of indicating phenomena might thus seem like a rejection of any type of experiencing being beyond the level of appearances. After all, if one reduces consciousness to the phenomenological level of simply being the appearance of indicating objects, what place is there for something beyond such appearances that is experiencing those appearances? In fact, in many ways, Sartre's treatment of consciousness as nothing more than its objects might appear to be the equivalent of Hume's denial of any enduring, separate self or mind that perceives all of the contents of such a mind. According to Hume, "...(t)he mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance, pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations."<sup>292</sup> Rather than treating the mind as an additional entity to all of its perceptions, Hume says that only perceptions exist. This certainly sounds similar to Sartre's apparent denial that consciousness is an additional entity to its appearing objects.

One possible difference between Sartre and Hume points out a potential problem for a purely phenomenological reading of Sartre. That difference is Sartre's claims, noted in the last chapter, that appearing phenomena always

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<sup>292</sup> Hume, p. 301.

indicate the body and the past, both of which constitute the facticity that consciousness is. One could perhaps see this claim by Sartre as nothing more than an addition to Hume's basic denial of the mind as something more than what appears, an addition Sartre makes by simply noting a particular aspect of appearances. Wider, though, treats Sartre's difference from Hume as more than that in the following quote from "A Nothing About Which Something Can Be Said: Sartre and Wittgenstein on the Self:"

Although Sartre follows Hume in denying that there is a mental subject of experience, a Cartesian ego, he does argue that the for-itself while nothing still exists. It exists as something that does not appear in the world. It is not therefore a nonworldly substance. But it is something that cannot be apprehended in the world since it is the necessary condition for the world's existence, the center of the world and its limit. This view of consciousness goes beyond a simple Humean denial of a Cartesian self.<sup>293</sup>

I would suggest, based upon what has already been said in the previous chapter, that this something that cannot be apprehended in the world is the body-for-itself (specifically, as non-appearing point of view rather than as appearing point of departure) and the past that consciousness is. This indication by objects of consciousness's facticity poses a problem for any treatment of consciousness as nothing more than its appearing objects, that problem being how consciousness can just be its objects when it is also its body and its past. Despite Sartre's previously-cited claim in Chapter Three that consciousness of an object is an

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<sup>293</sup> Kathleen Wider, "A Nothing About Which Something Can Be Said: Sartre and Wittgenstein on the Self," in Sartre Alive, edited by Ronald Aronson, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1991.

internal negation of an object that involves nothing more than that object, his treatment of the indicated body and past seems in conflict with that.

One might further object that consciousness being its facticity not only shows that consciousness is more than its object, but it also seems incompatible with consciousness being any, or at least most, of its objects *at all*. Even if the appearing object that is the body-for-others is the same thing as the non-appearing body-for-itself as point of view, every other object is certainly not the same thing as the non-appearing body-for-itself. After all, the body-for-others is just one object amongst many objects for consciousness. A table that is an object of consciousness, for instance, hardly seems the same thing as the indicated yet non-appearing body-for-itself. It might thus seem that consciousness could at most be only one appearing object, the body-for-others, and not any other object.

One might attempt to reconcile consciousness being nothing more than its objects with it also being its facticity by treating consciousness as a state of affairs distinct from the appearance of indicating objects, a state of affairs involving its facticity. Perhaps, in particular, one could interpret Sartre as treating consciousness as the state of affairs that is the self-transcendence of consciousness's facticity, so that consciousness would not then be anything additional to its facticity even though it would also not be, as a state of affairs, simply identical to the facticity that constitutes it. One could thus preserve the notion that consciousness is nothingness due to its status as a state of affairs but still maintain the position that consciousness is in some sense its facticity. Such

an understanding of consciousness would seemingly be an example of the previously-discussed correlational treatment of consciousness, since it equates consciousness with something beyond appearances (the body-for-itself and the past that comprise facticity), something that is somehow *related* to appearances, the latter in turn “correlated” with the specific *ways* in which facticity is transcended on any occasion.

There are several potential problems with this interpretation of Sartre. First, the fact that consciousness as a state of affairs that is the transcendence of facticity is arguably nothing more than its facticity does not seem to help us explain how consciousness is *also* nothing more than its object, which of course Sartre also seems to hold. The fact that consciousness for Sartre is an internal negation of its object means that it is nothing more than its object, which seemingly means that consciousness is in some sense its object. But how can consciousness be its object if it is instead the state of affairs that is the transcendence of facticity? As such a state of affairs, consciousness would arguably be (and also not be) the facticity that constitutes (i.e., provides the sole *constituents of*) that state of affairs. But how could it then be its object? Or, for that matter, a state of affairs “constituted” (in the sense in question) by its object?

Another problem with the treatment of consciousness as the state of affairs that is the transcendence of its facticity is Sartre’s previously-cited claim that “it appears as the first necessity for...consciousness to be seen by itself.”<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 121.



This is a problem since, as previously noted, the body-for-itself does not appear but is rather indicated by what does appear. Since the body along with the past are the facticity that consciousness is, it might seem that consciousness, as a state of affairs constituted by its facticity, could not always appear and thus be seen by itself. Although the appearing object that is the body-for-others is for Sartre the same thing as the body-for-itself, the body-for-others is certainly not a constantly appearing object. It is, instead, an occasional object of awareness.

Perhaps, though, one could say that consciousness being seen by itself does not require the constant appearance of consciousness, just the constant indication of consciousness as its facticity. As noted in the previous chapter, Sartre claims such indication when noting how every object for consciousness is somehow constituted by its reference to the body-for-itself. Indeed, one might argue that the notion of a constantly *appearing* consciousness is untenable due to the sort of reasons for Hume's rejection of any idea of an enduring self. Those reasons are found in the following passage:

But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently there is no such idea.<sup>295</sup>

Perhaps, then, Sartre's fundamental claim that one is never merely conscious of something, but rather one is always consciousness *of being consciousness* of something,<sup>296</sup> should be taken as meaning that consciousness of something is

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<sup>295</sup> Hume, p. 300.

<sup>296</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 11.

always consciousness of something that indicates consciousness's facticity (specifically, the body-for-itself as point of view and one's past). This interpretation of Sartre's claim has the additional benefit of offering a possible explanation of the difference between self-awareness and object-awareness, with self-awareness being the mere "indication" of and object-awareness being the actual appearance of what one is aware of. In any case, regardless of that explanation's plausibility, it would seem that one could indeed treat the constant indication of the body-for-itself and of one's past as the necessary self-awareness of consciousness on which Sartre insists. And of course the equation of consciousness with a state of affairs constituted by its facticity would seem compatible with such insistence.

Still, any ability of consciousness as non-appearing (but always indicated) facticity to witness itself does not eliminate the previously-mentioned problem of consciousness being both its facticity as well as the internal negation of, and thus nothing more than, its object. Perhaps, though, one can explain Sartre's claims that consciousness is (and is not) its objects simply by a desire on his part to avoid problems he saw with a correlational treatment of consciousness, problems that possibly motivated him to embrace a purely phenomenological understanding of consciousness. As noted in Chapter One, Sartre rejects Husserl's notion that what one experiences and perceives, the noema, is simply a correlate of conscious activity, or the noesis. According to Sartre, "Husserl defines consciousness as a transcendence...But from the moment he makes of the *noema* an *unreal*, a correlate of the *noesis*, a noema whose *esse* is *percipi*,

he is totally unfaithful to his principle.”<sup>297</sup> As one commentator notes, “...for Sartre...Husserl’s suspending, or bracketing, of existence does indeed rob the world of its richness.”<sup>298</sup> So, Sartre sees Husserl as unfaithful to his principle because Sartre treats consciousness’s transcendence to what it is of as implying the independent existence of what it is of.

Sartre’s treatment of the phenomena that appear to consciousness certainly seems to make them more than Husserl’s allegedly unreal noema. For Sartre, the phenomena have a certain independence from consciousness.

Sartre shows this in the following passage from his Introduction:

...the being of the phenomenon, although coextensive with the phenomenon, can not be subject to the phenomenal condition- which is to exist only in so far as it reveals itself- and... consequently it surpasses the knowledge which we have of it and provides the basis for such knowledge.<sup>299</sup>

The phenomena are thus not dependent upon consciousness the way a mere correlate of consciousness would be. Still, as noted in Chapter One, Sartre continues to maintain that “(r)elative the phenomenon remains, for ‘to appear’ supposes in essence somebody to whom to appear.”<sup>300</sup> Can one simply take this to mean that the relativity of the phenomena is just phenomena’s need for consciousness in order to be appearances, not phenomena’s need for consciousness in order to simply be? Sartre seems to say as much when he notes that “the in-itself has no need of the for-itself in order to be; the ‘passion’ of

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>298</sup> Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary*, p. 9.

<sup>299</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 9.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

the for-itself only causes *there to be* in-itself. The *phenomenon* of in-itself is an abstraction without consciousness but its *being* is not an abstraction.”<sup>301</sup> Since being-in-itself is for Sartre the being of the phenomena,<sup>302</sup> this passage shows that the phenomena do not need consciousness in order to be. This may seem odd since it would seem just as impossible for the phenomena to not appear as it is for a bachelor to be married, so that the phenomena would not seem capable of existing without appearing, thus needing to appear to consciousness in order to be. Regardless of Sartre’s consistency regarding this matter, though, he seemingly differs from Husserl on the dependency of what appears upon what it appears to.

With this emphasis upon the phenomena’s independence in mind, perhaps one can understand why Sartre seemingly embraces the purely phenomenological position mentioned in Chapter One and throughout the subsequent chapters. If the phenomena present themselves as robustly independent, then they are not like Descartes’ experienced ideas, for instance, which are in the mind and are nothing but certain modes of or manners of existing for the mind.<sup>303</sup> With Sartre’s phenomena having no seeming need of anything else, then it might seem natural for him to describe consciousness of objects (which are presented by means of a series of appearing phenomena<sup>304</sup>)

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid, p. 791.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>303</sup> Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1979, p. 25.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

as a state of affairs that is an internal negation of in-itself objects, consisting of such objects and seemingly nothing more than them. As already quoted in Chapter Three, Sartre's description of consciousness as an internal negation of an in-itself object involves a seemingly exclusive focus upon the appearing in-itself beings:

In short the term-of-origin of the internal negation is the in-itself, the thing which is *there*, and outside of it there is nothing except an emptiness, a nothingness which is distinguished from the thing only by a pure negation for which *this* thing furnishes the very content.<sup>305</sup>

Given all of this, one could certainly be tempted to treat consciousness as nothing but the fact that phenomena appear and indicate other phenomena in various ways.

As already noted, though, Sartre also treats consciousness as its facticity. So a purely phenomenological understanding of consciousness in terms of its appearing objects would seem untenable. And have we not also seen that a correlational treatment of consciousness-where the fact of phenomena appearing is a mere "noematic" correlate of particular ways in which facticity is transcended on any occasion-is likewise untenable, given Sartre's claim that consciousness as the internal negation of its objects is such objects and nothing more? But perhaps more can be said in favor of the correlation treatment.

Perhaps it can at least do justice to Sartre's claims about consciousness by showing that facticity contributes precisely to the necessarily independent *appearance* of appearing objects. As noted in Chapter One, Husserl treats

consciousness as somehow transcending hyletic material in order to be conscious of the appearing noema. Sartre rejects Husserl's notion of the hyle because "we can not conceive how consciousness can transcend this subjective toward objectivity."<sup>306</sup> Regardless of how problematic such a move from the subjective to the objective may or may not be for Husserl, Sartre can in fact give a *role* to facticity similar to what Husserl gives to his hyle. All he needs to deny is that it involves any move from the subjective to the objective. The reason for this is that facticity is not subjective for Sartre, but rather it is the in-itself being that attempted to found itself and "is" thus consciousness.<sup>307</sup> As noted in Chapter One, one can treat Husserl's hyle as either surpassed by consciousness to its object or as in some sense even "constitutive" of its object. Similarly, Sartre claims that consciousness transcends facticity (which amounts to it transcending itself) in its awareness of its objects,<sup>308</sup> and, as noted in Chapter Four, he also treats facticity as in some sense constitutive of consciousness's objects. But the important thing to see is that this constitution of objects by in-itself facticity could then in turn help account for the necessarily independent nature of what appears to consciousness, at least precisely as it appears to consciousness. So, for instance, the fact that an object such as a table appears to the left of one's in-itself body and as subsequent to other appearing objects, also located in relation

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p. 245.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, p. 409.

to one's body, would necessarily *make* such an object present itself as in some sense having the very same sort of in-itself status as one's in-itself body. (And the same would of course go for the in-itself status of the past in general.) In fact, Sartre's venture beyond phenomenology when saying both that facticity impossibly attempts to cause itself and that consciousness is (and is not) a past that, unlike the body, is not indicated as surpassed by its objects (as mentioned in Chapter Four), may be regarded as attempts on his part to treat facticity as more than what simply appears in order for it to contribute to objects' appearance of independence. Consequently, Sartre can make the following comments in Nausea about the world one experiences:

It left me breathless. Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of "existence." I was like the others, like the ones walking along the seashore, all dressed in their spring finery. I said, like them, "The ocean *is* green; that white speck up there *is* a seagull"...When I believed I was thinking about it, I must believe that I was thinking nothing, my head was empty, or there was just one word in my head, the word "to be." Or else I was thinking...how can I explain it? I was thinking of belonging, I was telling myself that the sea belonged to the class of green objects, or that the green was a part of the quality of the sea...If anyone had asked me what existence was, I would have answered, in good faith, that it was nothing, simply an empty form which was added to external things without changing anything in their nature. And then all of a sudden, there it was, clear as day; existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost the harmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root was kneaded into existence....<sup>309</sup>

The point of this suggested reading of Sartre, then, is that perhaps his apparently one-sided focus on what appears when describing consciousness as

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<sup>309</sup> Sartre, Nausea, New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York, 1964, p. 127.

the internal negation of its object involves a failure to appreciate that appearances *can* consistently be regarded as dependent upon something else, compatibly both with a rejection of Husserlian “idealism” and also with adoption of a “phenomenological” point of view in ontology. Namely, they can be regarded as so dependent precisely for their *necessary appearance* of being something in-itself, independent of the consciousness of them. But of course, on the other hand, this would make no sense apart from *another* point of view in ontology, or at least in what Sartre chooses to call “metaphysics.” Sartre’s failure to be clear about the exact ways in which he did not depart from Husserl may thus be seen as having its own necessary correlate in the unclarities that we have encountered throughout as to the *relation* between the “metaphysical” and “ontological” sides of his analysis.

Sartre might only need the *presentation* of independence by appearances in order to preserve his understanding of Husserl’s central insight that consciousness is always consciousness of something. In fact, one might think such means of preservation is most faithful to Husserl, as noted by one commentator in the following quote:

...consciousness is always consciousness of something...ought perhaps more properly to be regarded as either a definition or a descriptive psychological fact. If regarded as a definition then “consciousness of something” is only a synonym for “consciousness.” If viewed as a psychological fact, intentionality is an introspectively discoverable characteristic of our conscious lives. To go beyond this and argue that the state of being conscious of something logically implies the necessity of this “something’s” external existence is to be misled verbally by the seeming



implication of substantial being on the basis of the meaning of the word "consciousness."<sup>310</sup>

So, even though, as noted in Chapter Two, Sartre takes Husserl's insight to imply that "there is no consciousness that is not a *positing* of a transcendent object,"<sup>311</sup> perhaps such positing can occur even if the object only seems transcendent. If so, then consciousness would not need to be merely the internal negation of its object, since, as noted in Chapter Three, that need emerges from the alleged impossibility of consciousness, like anything else, being connected to that which it is not. If consciousness's objects only seem independent while really being dependent upon consciousness, then there is no reason to say that consciousness must in some sense be nothing more than the objects to which it is present.

Perhaps the earlier example of awareness of a table can demonstrate both what the correlational reading of Sartre claims and how that reading differs from other understandings of Sartre. According to the recommended correlational position on Sartre, consciousness of a table is a fact about the body and the past that the table necessarily indicates, namely the fact that they have been transcended toward that table. The transcended body and past exist independently of conscious experience, and the fact that their transcendence in some sense constitutes the experienced table makes the table at least appear as independent of experience as well. This position differs from Husserl in that it is

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<sup>310</sup> Robert E. Butts, "Does 'Intentionality' Imply 'Being'? A Paralogism in Sartre's Ontology," *Kant-Studien*, 52, 1960, p. 432.

<sup>311</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 11.

subjective hyletic “stuff” that is transcended toward whatever is experienced, and one can always choose to apprehend the experienced, such as the table, as not having independent existence. The purely phenomenological reading of Sartre, on the other hand, differs from the correlational reading by simply viewing consciousness as the fact that the table appears and indicates a body and a past. The body and past are thus not what consciousness is for that reading, but rather are just what is indicated by appearing phenomena.

It would seem plausible to say in conclusion that while Sartre’s claim that consciousness is nothingness apparently meant several different things to him, it is *best* understood, on the most fundamental level, as meaning that consciousness is the state of affairs of its facticity being transcended toward its object. As already stated, as a state of affairs, it would in a way not be anything more than its constituents (one’s body and past). But it would not be simply the same as them either. Sartre’s claims about consciousness being nothing more than its *objects* would then seem due to an unnecessary treatment of such objects as really independent rather than as simply appearing that way. And the connection between Sartre’s claims about consciousness being its facticity and about it being nothing more than its objects would be, finally, that one could *explain* objects’ appearance of independence by the role of facticity in the consciousness by which such objects are apprehended.

This understanding of consciousness as the self-transcending facticity that objects appear to would seem to be an affirmation by Sartre of a kind of “experiencing subject.” Instead of consciousness simply being the purely

phenomenological fact that objects appear, it instead seems to be a fact about what such objects appear to. Specifically, it is the fact that consciousness's facticity transcends itself toward its objects. Furthermore, this treatment of appearances as a correlate of consciousness certainly does not preclude the latter "appearing" itself, as well, at least in an important phenomenological sense. For as already noted, consciousness is in some sense the body (and past) that is both necessarily "indicated" by what appears and also appears itself as the body-for-others. The fact that it appears, though, does not make consciousness *just* an appearance.

Although it is true that some of Sartre's claims about consciousness are problematic, such as his claims about in-itself facticity somehow attempting to found itself and about consciousness being nothing more than its object, it would thus seem that one can glean a fairly plausible account from him of consciousness and appearances as standing in some sort of relation of correlation. That account treats consciousness as a body and past that are transcended toward appearing objects and that such objects always indicate. Whether or not such objects exist independently of such transcendence, they necessarily appear that way. This account would then make him more similar to Husserl than he professes to be. But it seems to make the most sense of all that he says. Despite his efforts to distance himself from Husserl's alleged failure to recognize the independent nature of what one experiences, it would seem that at least a central element in Husserl's position can actually help explain, within the confines of a "phenomenological ontology," that very independence. Any

understanding of Sartre would seemingly have to recognize this irony in the relationship between the two thinkers. That the explanation in question is itself in turn dependent on some sort of “ontology” of consciousness that is what Sartre calls “metaphysical,” and that involves what seems to be the most striking unclarities in his book, may make one marvel at the extent to which Sartre himself may have gone to distance himself from Husserl.

## CONCLUSION

Sartre's claim that consciousness is nothingness seems best understood as meaning that consciousness is the state of affairs of its facticity being transcended toward objects correlative with it, with facticity at the same time being the only constituents of that state of affairs. I call such an understanding of Sartre the correlational position. This does not imply that Sartre actually meant this by treating consciousness as nothingness, but rather that such an understanding of him makes the most sense out of all that he says. Although Sartre says many things that sound as if consciousness for him is a different state of affairs, namely, of the appearance of objects with their various indications, an understanding of Sartre that I call the purely phenomenological position, such an understanding of Sartre suffers from at least two problems. First, it does not make sense of his claim that consciousness is its facticity, given that none of its appearing objects are its facticity. It is arguable that perhaps the body-for-others is. Even that object, however, is not strictly identifiable with consciousness's facticity, since facticity is consciousness's past as well as its body. Second, the correlational position seems to account for what arguably motivated the purely phenomenological position, namely objects' appearance of independence from consciousness. It is this second problem that shows the superiority of the correlational position, since that position shares the first problem with the purely phenomenological position, given that Sartre also claims that consciousness is something other than its self-transcending facticity, namely its objects.

Despite these problems, the purely phenomenological position seems more able than the correlational position to reconcile certain features of Sartre's phenomenological ontology with his metaphysics. According to Sartre's phenomenological description of consciousness, consciousness is always of a transcendent object, and according to his metaphysical explanation of consciousness, consciousness originates from the in-itself's failed attempt at self-causation. Since this attempt at self-causation does not seemingly involve anything other than the in-itself being that attempts self-causation, it would not seem that consciousness would necessarily involve any transcendent objects that it would be of. The purely phenomenological position can explain why this failure at self-causation and resulting presence to self would require having a transcendent object since it treats consciousness as in some sense being its appearing objects in the first place.

There might seem to be another explanation of why the metaphysical failure at self-causation necessitates consciousness having a transcendent object, an explanation that is compatible with the correlational position. Self-consciousness, the result of the failure of self-causation in question, is, at least on the pre-reflective level, the indication of consciousness by transcendent objects that is a phenomenological datum for Sartre. Without such indication, there is no self-consciousness, so that consciousness needs transcendent objects to indicate it in order for it to be self-conscious, and so be consciousness in the first place. Since this explanation does not treat consciousness as being

its objects, it seems compatible with the correlational position's treatment of consciousness.

This explanation might also seem to account for the very fact of Sartre's designation of consciousness as being its objects, since one can only phenomenologically find consciousness *by way of* its objects. But however plausible an explanation this may be for Sartre's claim that consciousness is just its objects, it simply ignores Sartre's metaphysical explanation of consciousness. For even if pre-reflective consciousness is only aware of itself by means of its reflection by its transcendent objects, that simply does not speak to the question why the act of attempted self-causation in question should be necessarily related to a transcendent object. It would seem that such an attempt could only involve itself, and thus it would seem that its resulting presence to itself might only involve itself. The phenomenological description of consciousness as always of a transcendent object is certainly not incompatible with the claim that consciousness originates from a failure at self-causation, but the latter does not explain nor entail the former, without the additional claim that consciousness in some sense is its objects.

There might not seem to be any need to reconcile Sartre's metaphysics with his phenomenology. For the former's claims seem to involve an impossibility in Sartre's own view. The claim that an in-itself being attempted to do anything, whether what it attempts is possible or not, would seemingly assert an impossibility since Sartre treats an attempt or project as something only found with the for-itself. Given this, one might of course then wonder why Sartre made

such claims at all. In fact, one might find it more charitable to simply ignore those claims, made throughout Being and Nothingness, and only acknowledge his statement, made toward the end of the book, that it simply seems *as if* consciousness originated from such an impossible attempt.

It is, however, important that Sartre treats facticity's attempt at self-causation as an actual occurrence. By treating facticity as actually doing something that does not appear phenomenologically, Sartre will then at least have an explanation of the fact that phenomena necessarily appear as *independent* of consciousness. In particular, one may hypothesize that facticity helps to 'constitute' phenomena for Sartre in a way that is comparable to Husserl's view of "hyle" helping to constitute the "noema," by getting "transcended" in a noesis that incorporates it. As such, facticity's existence beyond its appearance can be *reflected* in the phenomena in a way comparable to Husserl's view of the hyle's incorporation in the noema, but with a very different upshot from Husserl's view. In fact, the very impossibility of facticity's attempt at self-causation insures that such an attempt does not appear, meaning that, precisely in its 'constituting' role, facticity exists beyond the phenomenological level. One can thus not treat it as nothing more than what is indicated by appearing objects, a treatment that would make it simply an aspect or feature of such objects. This poses yet another problem for the purely phenomenological position, since such treatment would seem to be the only one it could give of facticity. Thus, however successful Sartre's enterprise in fact was, it would seem that we can at least understand what he was trying to do, and



applaud it as an ingenious attempt to utilize some of Husserl's insights about the 'constitution' of what one experiences precisely in support of a transcendental *realism* in phenomenology, as opposed to Husserl's transcendental idealism.

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## VITA

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