

Article

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SARTRE'S ABSOLUTE FREEDOM

Gerard T. CAMPBELL

Freedom is not *a* being; it is *the* being of man—i.e. his nothingness of being. If we start by conceiving of man as a plenum, it is absurd to try and find in him afterwards moments or psychic regions in which he would be free. As well look for emptiness in a container which one has filled beforehand up to the brim! Man can not be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all.

Jean-Paul SARTRE.¹

Freedom is a problem for each of us in the measure that we are concerned with our human condition. As such, it is not surprising to discern that history shows so many great minds grappling with the problem; but history also bears evidence to William James' admonition that the juice has not yet been squeezed out of the problem.² James' comment, in fact, makes it worthwhile to ask if the juice can ever be squeezed out? One might be tempted to answer with an optimistic 'yes' were the problem an objective one. But the problem is perennial precisely because we are subjects and each of us, as a person, must come to grips with himself and his purpose in life. So while it is good to study and learn from those who have already examined the problem, their solutions can have value for us only in so far as we interiorize and make our own what they have of worth to give. The problem will never be resolved once for all: it is raised anew as each person strives to situate himself and the human condition.

In this context it is especially worthwhile to examine Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. In a contemporary way, Sartre speaks to contemporary man—as an individual to individuals. There is a certain proportion between a world in which shared values are less common, a world of disoriented individuals, unsatisfied and dissatisfied, and Sartre's thesis that freedom consists in absolute indeterminism. This very *malaise* which should compel us to search for a perspective on ourselves and the human condition is carefully dealt with by Sartre; but in Sartre this

1. *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (New York, 1966), p. 539.

2. "The Dilemma of Determinism", *Essays in Pragmatism* (New York, 1948), p. 37.

malaise is not his point of departure, but his conclusion. Consequently, those who seek purpose and meaning to their lives should find it worth the effort to examine carefully those foundations upon which Sartre's conclusions are built.

Sartre himself takes great pains to carefully expose and justify these foundations in *Being and Nothingness*. It may even be because of his attentive analysis that the work will endure. However, what is important for those concerned with the problem is to follow Sartre's own procedure, to trace his footsteps through *Being and Nothingness*, in order to understand the causes of the perspective on man which he portrays. To unravel the knot one must see how it is tied.

But there are difficulties. A considerable degree of benevolence and patience is required of the reader in approaching *Being and Nothingness*. The difficulty of maintaining interest in the work has much to do with Sartre's starting point.

'Everyone is alone, each of us is "de trop", we are all bastards'—such is the order of conclusions which appear in Sartre's novels and plays.³ We are all bastards in the sense that we do not belong, that we are cut off from, and other than the world, that we do not have a proper place in the world. Such radical conclusions are dependent on a correspondingly radical starting point.

Berdyayev's distinction between the *cosmocentric* and the *anthropocentric* perspective is a helpful one in grasping Sartre's point of departure.⁴ Traditionally, philosophy was cosmocentric; its focus was on the world of nature and causality. Within this context, man was seen in terms of *his* nature and where he belonged or 'fit in' with the rest of the world. The focal point of modern philosophy, however, is anthropocentric; its concern is with man the subject, in his subjectivity—an autonomous self discovered in confrontation with and in contradistinction to the object-world. This anthropocentric context and an emphasis on man as *anti-physis* provides a perspective on Sartre's assertion that existentialism is a humanist philosophy:

by existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity.⁵

It is with isolated subjectivity that Sartre begins—and subjectivity means that "first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards, defines himself."⁶ Sartre involves his reader in a dilemma from the very outset: what have we to learn from an existing individual who is stripped of any notion of human nature and is portrayed as only a factual entity, a particular and isolated consciousness, in a situation, engaged in the task of making himself exist as self? It is for this reason that the reader must be benevolent and patient—in spite of Sartre. But for those willing to make the effort, the rewards can be great.

3. Cf. Francis Jeanson, *Sartre par lui-même* (Paris, 1955), p. 83.

4. Cf. Nicolas Berdyayev, *Dream and Reality*, tr. Katherine Lampert (London, 1950), pp. 104 et seq. Also *Solitude and Society*, tr. George Reavey (London, 1947), pp. 10 et seq.

5. *Existentialism*, tr. Bernard Frechtman (New York, 1947), p. 12.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

I

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre sees the phenomenological method as an indispensable instrument for his philosophical presentation of the nature of freedom. To grasp Sartre's philosophy of subjectivity we must first understand this phenomenological method—beginning, as does Sartre, with an analysis of the procedure which he utilizes in developing his position.

Sartre proclaims at the outset of *Being and Nothingness* that the great progress of modern thought lies in having reduced the existent to phenomenon.⁷ In the popular conception of kantian philosophy, the existent is a combination of phenomenon (the appearance of the thing, the way in which it is grasped in sense experience) and noumenon (the inner reality, the essence, the whatness of substance underlying the appearances). Sartre, following Husserl, discards the noumenon as a useless hypothesis: there is no noumenal reality underlying phenomena, "for the being of an existent is exactly what it appears."⁸ Its essence is the aggregate of appearances.

To speak of the appearances of things, however, supposes a someone to whom they appear; a subject or, more precisely, a consciousness. Phenomenon and consciousness, therefore, must be seen as co-relative. As a result, the phenomenological perspective demands two notions: a) the description of what appears *as* it appears and b) that of a consciousness which describes whatever appears in *its* sphere.

Husserl's phenomenology was one of meanings resulting from analysis of the descriptions of appearances. Sartre insists that we delve much deeper. It is necessary, he tells us, to go beyond the *meanings* of the appearances to the *existence* of this world which "appears" to us: "knowledge cannot by itself give an account of being; that is, the being of the phenomenon cannot be reduced to the phenomenon of being."⁹ If there is to be any ground, any foundation for knowledge (phenomenological) then we must abandon a position which asserts the primacy of knowledge. If the existence of what appears to consciousness is reducible to the appearance of what exists, then phenomenology loses its foothold in reality and becomes merely another form of idealism. The existence of the world must be taken out of brackets.

Sartre's escape from idealism to a foundation in real being for 'that which appears' results from an intricate analysis of consciousness. Sartre has already emphasized that phenomenon and consciousness are co-relative. From this base he carefully shows that 'the known' refers to knowledge "and knowledge to the being who knows (in his capacity as *being*, not as being known)."¹⁰ This conclusion aligns Sartre with Husserl in rejecting as fictive the priority of the Cartesian cogito. There is no such thing as a mere consciousness. "All consciousness is

7. *Op. cit.*, p. liii.

8. *Ibid.*, p. liv.

9. *Ibid.*, p. lix.

10. *Ibid.*, p. lx.

consciousness *of* something,"¹¹ that is, there is always a certain content to consciousness, always a positing of a transcendent object. "All knowing consciousness can be knowledge only of its object."¹²

For a knowing consciousness to be knowledge *of* its object, however, it is a necessary condition that it be consciousness of itself as being that knowledge; that is, it must also be self-consciousness.¹³ But even in this self-consciousness, consciousness reflects on its consciousness *of* something. This consciousness *of* something (the foundation of self-consciousness) Sartre calls the *pre-reflective cogito*:

Reflection has no kind of primacy over the consciousness reflected-on. It is not reflection which reveals the consciousness reflected-on to itself. Quite the contrary, it is the non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection possible; there is a pre-reflective cogito which is the condition of the Cartesian cogito.¹⁴

We must not think of the Cartesian cogito, therefore, as some new consciousness which assumes as its object a consciousness until then unconscious of itself. Nor is reflective consciousness, through which the being of the knower is revealed, a quality of the pre-reflective cogito. It is "*the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of something.*"¹⁵ The Cogito is the revelation of consciousness to itself (the being of self to self) in terms of its *being*.

In this perspective there is no way to conceive of the Cogito as a substance impregnated with a content which comes to it. Consciousness is not possible before being—it cannot be prior to its own existence—rather, the cogito determines itself in the act of consciousness. "Its being is the source and condition of all possibility" and, therefore, "its existence implies its essence."¹⁶ The determination of consciousness by itself results from the 'of something' through which consciousness reveals its being to itself. "It can be limited only by itself."¹⁷ In itself, consciousness is a *plenum* of existence—its determination of itself by itself in any given moment *is* its essence.

In abandoning the "I think, therefore, I am" of Descartes, and the primacy of knowledge, we discover the *being* of the knower and encounter the absolute.¹⁸ "The existence of consciousness comes from consciousness itself."¹⁹ Because this absolute is one of existence and not of knowledge, it is not a logical construction (and so we escape idealism), but the subject of experience. Furthermore, as

11. *Ibid.*, p. 1xi.

12. *Ibid.*

13. "... There must be an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself." p. 1xii. Also, "... every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself."

14. *Ibid.*, p. 1xiii.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 1xiv.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 1v.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 1xvii.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 1xvi.

an absolute, it is not *relative* to the experience which reveals it because it *is* this experience. And again, since this absolute asserts the primacy of existence over essence, it can never be conceived as substance. Such is the first order of conclusions, the first realm of being, the being-of-the-subject revealed by the phenomenological method.

But from the being-of-the-subject, from the being of the pre-reflective cogito, Sartre leads us by means of 'an ontological proof' to another domain of being, the being-of-the-world.

To arrive at this second domain of being Sartre returns to the affirmation that "all consciousness is consciousness *of* something." Now this proposition can be understood in two senses: either consciousness constitutes the being of the object or consciousness is a relation to a transcendent being. The first interpretation is self-destructive: if consciousness constitutes its object the result would be a consciousness attempting to distinguish itself from something which is nothing. And since being cannot arise out of non-being, this interpretation must be dismissed. This leaves us the second interpretation. If consciousness is consciousness *of* something, then this 'something' is not consciousness itself but something other than itself—an external object:

This means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is, that consciousness is born *supported* by being which is not itself. This is what we call the ontological proof.²⁰

If Descartes had a difficult task in this attempt to reach the external world (via God and His truthfulness), a difficulty due to his insistence on the primacy of knowledge, Sartre, using the *pre-reflective cogito*, hopes to avoid the dilemma. He claims to establish from his analysis of consciousness an immediate foothold in reality and an immediate affirmation of its existence.²¹ Since all consciousness is consciousness *of* something, consciousness must produce itself as a revealed-revelation of something which is other than consciousness and which is presented as already existing when consciousness reveals it.²²

Having established to his satisfaction the priority of being to being-known, Sartre now turns to his major concern in *Being and Nothingness*, namely, the pursuit of the meaning of being. A search for an authentic self now assumes a real value. But in the pursuit of the discovery of this authentic self we must be aware of Sartre's frame of reference and the relations between "two absolutely separated regions of being: the being of the *pre-reflective cogito* and the being of the phenomenon."²³ This duality of being can be reduced to human consciousness and everything which is outside of human consciousness: *being-for-itself* (human reality, consciousness, nothingness, freedom—the terms are all synonymous) and *being-in-itself*.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 1xxiii.

21. Cf. Wilfrid Desan, *The Tragic Finale: "An Essay on the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre,"* (New York, 1960), p. 10, footnote 18.

22. Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 1xxiv.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 1xxvi.

Sartre defines the for-itself as "being what it is not and not being what it is,"²⁴ and states that the for-itself is in contradiction to the in-itself. The for-itself, as Sartre's definition suggests, discovers itself by mode of negation. This makes it necessary to first examine the in-itself. Sartre accomplishes this by emphasizing three propositions concerning the in-itself: (a) being is what it is; (b) being is in itself; (c) being is.

(a) *Being is what it is.*

In this first proposition Sartre rejects the common prejudice of "creationism." There is no creation 'ex nihilo' for if being is conceived in a subjectivity, it would remain only a mode of subjectivity. Such a position would throw us back into idealism. And even if one posits a fulguration in the Leibnizian sense (a springing forth of the Divine Ideas into reality with God's permission)²⁵ being would stand opposed to the creator. "If being exists over against God, it is its own support; it does not preserve the least trace of divine creation."²⁶ Being is inexplicable in terms of creation.

(b) *Being is in itself.*

By this Sartre means that since being is what it is, it is full of itself. It does not refer to itself as the for-itself or consciousness does—it is beyond self and opaque to itself because it is itself. "It is solid (massif)."²⁷ It has no 'within' opposed to a 'without'. Therefore, "it does not enter into any connection with what is not itself."²⁸ It exhausts itself in being. It is full positivity. As a result, it has no potency since it cannot become what it is not.

(c) *Being is*

Since there is no potency in the in-itself, all we can say of it is that the in-itself is. "It can neither be derived from the possible nor reduced to the necessary."²⁹ It cannot be reduced to the necessary because necessity concerns only the relations of deductions between ideal propositions. Necessity does not concern existents. (Since being in-itself escapes necessity, Sartre calls this the 'contingency' of being-in-itself). Neither can the in-itself be derived from 'the possible' because 'the possible' is a structure of human consciousness (of the for-itself) and so the possible is entirely outside of the domain of the in-itself.

Uncreated, without reason for being, without any connection with another being, being-in-itself is *de trop* for eternity.³⁰

24. *Ibid.*, p. 1xxviii.

25. Cf. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Monadology", *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*, tr. Robert Latta (London, 1968), n. 47, pp. 243-4.

26. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 1xxvii. Elsewhere (cf. *Existentialism*, pp. 16-18), Sartre proposes that the foundation for clinging to the 'creation' prejudice lies in transposing on God the technical view of the world and man's activity in the fabrication of tools.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 1xxviii.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, p. 1xxix.

30. *Ibid.* Being-in-itself is superfluous (*de trop*), is an anthropomorphic expression of consciousness. That being-in-itself be like this for eternity is because, as we shall see later, temporality belongs to consciousness.

Faced with these two distinct domains of being, the crucial problem of *Being and Nothingness* is to establish the connection between them, to discover "man within the world in that specific union of man with the world"³¹ which constitutes the authentic self. Sartre asserts that two interdependent questions come immediately to the foreground: a) "What is the synthetic relation which we call being-in-the world?" and b) "What must man and the world be in order for a relation between them to be possible?"³² It is in order to provide that answer that Sartre now undertakes his massive analysis of human conduct.

II

Sartre begins this analysis with a concrete human activity, selecting as his starting point the activity of asking the above questions. Man asks questions. Now every question presupposes a being who questions as well as a being which is questioned (about something). We stand before a being, whether it be a carburetor or a person, which we are questioning. Further, in asking a question, there is an element of expectation. We expect a reply: either 'yes' or 'no'. And in spite of whichever answer is given, there always remains, in principle, the possibility of a negative answer. The questioner does not know whether the answer will be affirmative or negative. From these observations Sartre concludes that the question is a bridge between two *non-beings*: the non-being of knowing in him who questions, and the possibility of non-being of being in the transcendent being questioned. And any affirmative answer provides a third non-being, namely, the non-being of limitation; for if we can reply of being 'it is thus and not otherwise', then

whatever being is, it will allow of this formulation: "Being is *that* and outside of that *nothing*."³³

At the very outset of the inquiry, therefore, non-being as a new component of the real makes its appearance. And the state of this non-being is of utmost importance. Is its appearance due to psychic operations of judgment, or does this non-being appear because it is real? This problem is somewhat akin to the earlier one of the phenomenon of being and the being of the phenomenon. To resolve the problem Sartre must consider the being of negation which results from 'the question' as human activity or attitude. He formulates the problem as follows:

is negation as the structure of the judicative proposition at the origin of nothingness? Or on the contrary is nothingness as the structure of the real, the origin and foundation of negation?³⁴

Sartre observes that non-being has made its appearance within the limits of a human expectation involved in 'the question'. But because it makes its appearance through consciousness, this does not mean that non-being is merely a quality of judgment. While it is true that a question is asked by one who judges, to question is not the same as to judge—it is a pre-judicative attitude. If, in our question, prior to any judgment, we have an expectation of a disclosure of a being,

31. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

we are also prepared for the eventuality of a disclosure of a non-being. Consequently, non-being cannot simply be a result of judgment: there already exists a pre-judicative comprehension of non-being.

'The question' is not the only pre-judicative conduct which Sartre sees as revealing non-being to us. 'Destruction' is another example. In order for destruction, as such, to exist there must be a relation of man to being. In the disorganization of destruction man must grasp a being as destructive, as fragile. And if this being is fragile it carries in its being a possibility of non-being. Therefore, the condition of destruction, as destruction, is a human condition and it is man who destroys (either directly or through some natural agency—such as a cyclone). 'Destruction', then, as well as 'the question', supposes a pre-judicative comprehension of nothingness. And although destruction, as such, comes into being through man, it is an objective fact—that is, there is a transphenomenality of non-being. The analysis of 'destruction', therefore, provides us with the same result as that of 'the question'.

Sartre's third analysis, that of negative judgment, confirms the conclusions of his two previous ones. Non-being does not come to things through negative judgment. On the contrary, the judgment (of what Sartre calls *négalités*)³⁵ is conditioned and supported by non-being. Negative judgment, in a sense, is a positive recognition or acknowledgement of non-being. Judgment "limits itself to determining a prior revelation."³⁶ It does not cause non-being to appear. Hence, negation does not result from a function of negativity:

the necessary condition for our saying *not* is that non-being be a perpetual presence in us and outside of us, that nothingness haunt being.³⁷

Where, then, does nothingness come from?

Since non-being is grasped in a pre-judicative comprehension, in the three modes outlined above, nothingness must be at the heart of being. Nothingness could not derive its nihilating force from itself because nothingness is nihilated (being which is denied). "Nothingness *is not*."³⁸ Therefore, Sartre concludes, it is only being which can nihilate itself. Yet, the being by which nothingness comes to the world cannot be being-in-itself since being-in-itself has already been revealed as full positivity—and this excludes nothingness.

Since that being which is full positivity cannot create nothingness outside of itself, "the Being by which Nothingness arrives in the world must nihilate Nothingness in its Being . . . *in connection with its own being*."³⁹ This Being is the For-itself which *is* its own Nothingness.

Sartre asks us to notice that if we return to the attitude of 'the question', we can readily see that the questioner must have the possibility of dissociating him-

35. There is no English equivalent to this word coined by Sartre. What he means by the term seems to be whatever is experienced whose inner structure necessitates negation.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

39. *Ibid.*

self from the causal order of being which produces only being. In withdrawing himself from being the questioner escapes the causal order (determinism) of the world. He effects a double nihilation: he nihilates the thing questioned in relation to himself and he nihilates himself in relation to the thing questioned in order to bring out of himself the possibility of non-being. This disengagement is a human process. Man is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world. If man is able to make inquiry, to assume the attitude of 'the question', his being must be such that he can put himself *outside of* being, such that he is not subject to it.

This being of man, this placing of himself 'outside of' being and the causal order of the world (determinism), is *freedom*. But such freedom is not a property of the essence of man:

human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom. What we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the *being* of 'human reality'.⁴⁰

Hence, nothingness, in separating man from the causal order, also separates his present from his future and from his past.⁴¹ Human reality experiences itself as nihilation of its past being and it must be conscious of this separation as a structure of consciousness.

Freedom (Nothingness) is the being of consciousness. Therefore, consciousness ought to exist as consciousness of freedom. In freedom, man *is* his past and *is* his future *in the form of nihilation*. This is what is involved when Sartre says that the consciousness of freedom is revealed to man in *anguish*:

anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself.⁴²

Anguish is the revelation of ourselves to ourselves as nothingness and as possibility. Since we are 'outside of' the world we are *undetermined*. In anguish we discover that nothingness separates us from our essence, from ourselves—it separates us from our past and it separates us from our future because the past and the future *are not*. Why consciousness of our freedom is revealed to us in anguish is because anguish is the revelation to us of our conduct, our being, as *possibility* and as *our* possibility, undetermined, bound or constrained by nothing.⁴³ Since our existence precedes essence

40. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

41. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

43. If freedom is the structure of human consciousness, such that man is freedom, and this freedom is revealed to me in anguish, then why am I not perpetually in a state of anguish? Sartre's answer to this problem significantly renders his conclusions more acceptable in terms of common experience. Anguish is exceptional and the reason why this is so is because in ordinary everyday life we are engaged in the world. "Our being is immediately 'in situation'". (*Ibid.*, p. 47). Our normal expectations of the real derive their meaning from an original possibility of myself projected as my choice of myself in the world. Anguish appears only when I disengage myself from the world in which I engaged myself. In this sense, anguish occurs when I call back into question my project of myself in the world through which the world had assumed meaning and value. This is why in anguish, besides having my total freedom appear to me, I am faced with the fact of "not being able to derive the meaning of the world except as coming from myself." (*Ibid.*, p. 48).

there is no explaining things away by reference to a fixed and given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom. On the other hand, if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to to justify our conduct. So in the bright realm of values, we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses.⁴⁴

Although "we are alone, with no excuses" this does not mean that we do not look for excuses. Face to face with our nothingness in anguish, our reflective defence against it is one of flight. "Everything takes place, in fact, as if our essential and immediate behavior with respect to anguish is flight."⁴⁵ It is this attitude of excuse which underlies the theoretical conception of psychological determinism. In our flight to excuse we try to make our essence a mode of being of the in-itself by attempting to apprehend ourselves from without as "an Other or as a thing."⁴⁶

This flight from our freedom, this attempt to apprehend ourselves as "an Other" or as "a thing" in order to have an excuse for our conduct is what Sartre calls "*bad faith*".⁴⁷ Instead of turning its negation outward, consciousness directs its negation toward itself and takes a negative attitude toward itself, thus denying what it is. Human reality, as we saw earlier, must be what it is not and not be what it is. This is the structure of the pre-reflective cogito. True authenticity of self requires the capacity to place these elements of being and non-being in synthesis.⁴⁸ But 'bad faith' is self-deception. In 'bad faith' man attempts to view his being and his non-being as duality, and this introduces duplicity.

The basic concept. . . utilizes the double property of the human being, who is at once a *facticity* and a *transcendence*. These two aspects of human reality are and ought to be capable of a valid coordination. But bad faith does not wish either to coordinate them nor to surmount them in a synthesis. Bad faith seeks to affirm their identity while preserving their differences.⁴⁹

Bad faith is accomplished by means of a vacillation between facticity (what we *are*) and transcendence (what we *are not*) such that we seek to reduce our transcendence to facticity, to reduce the for-itself to the in-itself, and thereby

44. *Existentialism*, p. 27.

45. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 48.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 52. "The chosen possible we do not wish to see sustained in being by a pure nihilating freedom, so we attempt to apprehend it as engendered by an object already constituted, which is no other than our self, envisaged and described as if it were another person." *Ibid.*, p. 52.

47. It is a type of lie but it is the same person who is both deceiver and deceived. To deceive presupposes a knowledge of the truth which I hide and to be deceived I must accept as true that of which I am ignorant. In a project of bad faith I must know as deceiver what is hidden from me as the deceived. And this must take place not in two different moments in time but in the unitary structure of the same project. Cf., Francis Jeanson, *Le Problème Moral et La Pensée de Sartre* (Paris, 1965), p. 171.

48. Both authenticity and 'bad faith' attempt to unite the duality of being and non-being in the subject. The difference between them seems to be that in authenticity the duality is preserved in a synthesis whereas in 'bad faith' the aim is the exploitation of the opposites in order to establish that 'I am not what I am'. We could not have a project of freedom if we could not have a project of bad faith.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

deny our complete responsibility for our facticity and hide our absolute freedom from ourselves. There are two basic ways in which this can be done: we can conceive of our transcendence *as if it were* our facticity or, on the other hand, we can conceive of our facticity *as if it were* our transcendence.

When we try to flee from our facticity (what we are) to our transcendence (what we are not) and make this is-notness our being (facticity), we adopt one attitude of 'I am not what I am'. We try to deny responsibility for our choices which make us to be what we are. We flee from what we are to what we are not and pretend that this what we are not is the real us; that is, we treat our transcendence as if *it were* our facticity. But our acts which constitute us (our facticity which we are trying to flee) depend upon our project—our transcendence. Hence, in this project of bad faith, in this false gesture which we make, we are simply trying to hide what we are from ourselves, trying to deny our freedom and our responsibility for our facticity. But Sartre would say that we are still caught up in responsibility for our facticity even in denying it; the project of bad faith by which we deny our responsibility is still a project. We are entirely free and wholly responsible for the attempt to hide ourselves from ourselves.

The second mode of bad faith is the flight from our transcendence to our facticity through the denial of our transcendence and of the responsibility and the freedom which gave rise to our facticity. In this mode of flight we attempt to deny that in our transcendence we are always more than that we are in any given moment. But our facticity at any given moment depends upon our transcendence. It is because we do not want to be more or other than what we are in the factual situation that we deny our transcendence. But this approach is also self-defeating because our denial can only be done in the light of a transcendence (which is what we are attempting to deny.) Hence, a critical examination of this second mode of bad faith still reveals to us our freedom and complete responsibility. We cannot escape from it.

In both cases of bad faith we use our pure possibility or transcendence as an excuse, a flight from anguish, because we attempt to reduce it to a facticity which would then allow us to plead determinism. But any critical analysis of bad faith reveals a project and so gives evidence of our pure freedom and absolute responsibility. The denial of our transcendence reveals to us our transcendence. It is only pure freedom which can deny freedom.

III

Turning from the examination of the problem of nothingness and the insights furnished by it, Sartre can now proceed to a description of the structures of the for-itself.

(a) *The For-itself as Presence to Self*

If consciousness is the requisite condition for the possibility of bad faith, then the for-itself must be a completely different kind of being than the in-itself. The in-itself is; the for-itself can attempt to escape from itself. What it means for

consciousness to be what it is not and not to be what it is, is that it escapes from the unity of *identity* of the in-itself. The for-itself is a duality which *is* unity. "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."⁵⁰ For a 'self' to exist, its unity of being must include its own nothingness as the negation of identity. As a result, "it is the obligation of the for-itself . . . to exist as a being which perpetually effects in itself a break in being."⁵¹ Its 'hole' or break in being is its nothingness or the continual putting into question of being by being.

(b) *The Facticity of the For-itself*

Yet the for-itself *is*. It *is* in so far as it is thrown into the world and abandoned in a 'situation'. The for-itself *is* something of which it is not the foundation—namely, its *presence to the world*.⁵² This presence to the world is anterior to any nihilating activity by which the for-itself becomes presence to self. Hence, "we appear to ourselves as having the character of an unjustifiable fact."⁵³ In this condition of contingent fact, the for-itself is reattached with being-in-itself. Thus the for-itself

is sustained by a perpetual contingency for which it assumes the responsibility and which it assimilates without ever being able to suppress it.⁵⁴

The gratuitous unjustifiable contingency at the foundation of the for-itself by which consciousness experiences itself as *de trop*, produces the feeling of *nausea*, just as the consciousness of nothingness produces anguish.⁵⁵

(c) *The for-itself as Lack and the Being of Value*

In its facticity, in so far as it is, the for-itself as *presence to the world* is not the foundation of its being. As *presence to self* the for-itself, escaping the unity of identity, is the foundation of its nothingness. But the for-itself cannot produce nihilation without determining itself as a *lack of being*. It can determine its being only against the in-itself as not being that *of which* it is conscious. In this respect, the for-itself is the foundation of itself as lack of being, and lack appears in the world only with the upsurge of human reality.⁵⁶

'Desire' confirms Sartre's argument. Any being which is what it is would be incapable of desire. Desire must be an escape from itself towards the object desired. "Desire is a lack of being . . ." and since "human reality is lack, then it is through human reality that the trinity of the existing, the lacking, and the lacked comes into being."⁵⁷

50. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

52. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

55. Cf. Jeanson, *Le Problème Moral et La Pensée de Sartre*, p. 187.

56. Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 106.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

That which is desired, what human reality seeks, is itself as a totality, as a unity. In its being the for-itself is a failure because it is the foundation only of itself as nothingness; but this has meaning "only if the for-itself apprehends itself as failure *in the presence of* the being which it has failed to be . . . which would be its foundation with itself."⁵⁸ Here, then, is the origin of transcendence—human reality surpassing itself toward what it lacks. This totality, both lacked and desired, is the impossible synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself:

it would be its own foundation not as nothingness but as being and would preserve within it the necessary translucency of consciousness along with the coincidence with itself of being-in-itself. But this return to self would be without distance; it would not be presence to itself but identity with itself. In short, this being would be exactly the *self*.⁵⁹

This totality, as Sartre points out, is impossible to achieve. Human reality could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself. But although it can never be realized, consciousness can exist only as *engaged* in its pursuit. "It is absolute transcendence in absolute immanence."⁶⁰ It is one with consciousness.

This totality which is the being of the self is *value*. The being of value is to be value; that is, not to be being. The self, totality, and value are one since "the being of value *qua* value is the being of what does not have being."⁶¹ But value still depends upon consciousness. "Human reality is that by which value arrives in the world."⁶² Value is that which is lacked; it is the missing totality towards which the being makes itself be. This is the sense in which "value haunts freedom"⁶³ Value is not *posited* by the for-itself, it is one with the for-itself, one with consciousness, one with nothingness. Value is lived as the meaning of lack and desire which constitutes my present being. Therefore, the cogito, reflective consciousness, is also moral consciousness since it cannot arise without disclosing values.⁶⁴

(d) *The For-Itself and the Being of Possibilities*

We have seen that what the for-itself lacks and desires is coincidence with itself. The transcendent relation of the for-itself toward its totality, toward the self, is a project of identification or unification of the for-itself which is not what it is with an absent for-itself which it is and which it both lacks and desires. What is lacking to the for-itself is the possibility of the for-itself. "Thus the for-itself cannot appear without being haunted by value and projected toward its own possibles."⁶⁵

Now what is involved in 'the possible' is a sort of paradox: on the one hand, 'the possible' is prior to the being of which it is the possibility; on the other hand,

58. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

64. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

'the possible', as possible, must be in some way such that being is prior to possibility. But Sartre finds the paradox of 'the possible' proportioned to the paradox of human reality. The possible is a property of a particular being for which it is a power as a structure of being surpassing itself in a transcendence.⁶⁶ There is no way that the possible can be seen as Aristotelian potency, as belonging to the domain of the in-itself. The in-itself is what it is in the plenitude of its identity:

. . . the possible comes into the world through human reality . . . Just as there can be lack in the world only if it comes to the world through a being which is its own lack, so there can be possibility in the world only if it comes through a being which is for itself its own possibility.⁶⁷

'The possible' is the absent for-itself which the for-itself lacks and desires as value in order to attempt to constitute the self. In this way the concrete possible haunts the lacking for-itself such that if the desire for the lacked for-itself could be realized or satisfied it would confer on the lacking for-itself being-in-itself. For human reality, the possible is precisely *the something* which the for-itself lacks in order to be itself.

(e) *The For-itself and Temporality*

In its negating conduct the for-itself, precisely because it is *for-itself*, is a transcendence toward its possibles. This can only happen within a temporal surpassing. If the meaning of its transcendence is its temporarily we can only understand the transcendence of the for-itself in seeing its relation to time.

i—the past

The past has meaning only with respect to the present. The past appears from our present actuality as *our* past—that is, as present which we *have been*. It is a transcendence behind our present. This is how the past is linked to the present and the only way in which it can have meaning. "The past indeed can haunt the present but it cannot *be* the present; it is the present which *is* the past".⁶⁸ Only the for-itself can have a past ("be" its own past) and *has to be* its past because it puts its past being into question. It is our present which sustains our past in being and this is why we are responsible for our past—we keep it in being. The past is, in this sense, the ever-growing in-itself that we are. At the moment of death we become a pure in-itself because we slip completely into the past. In so far as we have to be our past we are without the possibility of not being it. The past is our essence. It is our in-itself. It is our facticity.

We are our past: but until the moment of death we are not this in-itself in the mode of identity. Because of nihilation we are not our past because we are related to our being in the mode of not-being. "Thus it is in so far as I am my past that I can not-be it."⁶⁹ The past is the in-itself which we are *as surpassed*. And although

66. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

the past lives on and haunts the for-itself as our contingency, our nihilating activity keeps a gulf between our past and present.

ii—the present

The past is in-itself. The present is for-itself. The fundamental meaning of present is *presence to*. "The Present, therefore, can be only the presence of the For-itself to being-in-itself. . . . The For-itself is defined as presence to being."⁷⁰ In this sense the for-itself is the being by which the present enters the world. First, it is a witness to being. But it can only be a witness if it *is not* that to which it is witness, to which it is presence. The present, therefore, is the for-itself's non-being making itself presence to being. The first relation of the for-itself to being-in-itself is negation—it reveals itself as not being being-in-itself, but at a distance. It is present to being in the form of flight. Therefore, the Present *is not* because the for-itself negates and flees the in-itself to which it is present. "The Present is not; it makes itself present in the form of flight."⁷¹

iii—the future

The flight of the for-itself to the for-itself lacked (which is the self) is the future. The for-itself (present) is not what it is (past) and is what it is not (future). The for-itself is its own future. "There is a Future because the For-itself *has to be* its being instead of simply being it."⁷² Because through negation the for-itself has to be a being beyond being, the determining being of the for-itself is the Future or, in other words, its own possibility. "Determinism appears on the ground of the futurizing project of myself."⁷³ It is the future which constitutes the meaning of the present for-itself without pre-determining that being. The future is the possibility of our being beyond being but it is never realized because of the constant perspective of the possibility of not-being it:

the For-itself can never be its future except problematically, for it is separated from it by a Nothingness which it is. In short the For-itself is free, and its Freedom is to itself its own limit. To be free is to be condemned to be free. Thus the Future *qua* Future does not have to be.⁷⁴

Hence *anguish* springs from our not being sufficiently that transcendence which gives meaning to our present. The future is the continual possibilization of our possibles.

(f) *The For-itself and Transcendence*

Transcendence is "that inner and realizing negation which reveals the in-itself while determining the being of the for-itself."⁷⁵ What truly characterizes the for-itself as for-itself is its transcendence. But its transcendence is its is-notness, its project, its desire, its possibility.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

In order to be, the in-itself needs only itself. The for-itself, on the other hand, can exist only in the unity of its *ekstases* (literally, what stands out from it.) In this way, in its transcendence, it stands in continual need of the foundation of the in-itself whereupon, through negation, it can produce itself. One example of this relation between the for-itself and the in-itself whereby the for-itself produces itself is knowledge. All knowledge is intuitive knowledge.⁷⁶ "Intuition is the presence of consciousness to the thing."⁷⁷ But presence, as we have seen, supposes distance and negation. What is present to us is not us. Every theory of knowledge presupposes this "non-being." All presence to something excites or triggers this not-being in us of that which is present. As a result of these considerations Sartre defines the for-itself as follows:

the for-itself is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being is essentially a certain way of *not being* a being which it posits simultaneously as other than itself.⁷⁸

As the being which we are not melts into and represents the absolute plenitude of the in-itself so are we, as for-itself, in our nothingness, the not-being which determines itself from the foundation of this fullness. The fullness of our freedom is grounded in the fullness of the in-itself through which we determine ourselves by negation.

But this inner negation is also *realization*. The project toward self on the part of the for-itself to the for-itself lacked is based upon that which is lacked. And what is lacked (and, hence, desired and valued) is precisely that to which we are present and which we are not. Therefore, as soon as something is revealed to us it is revealed as an *instrument-thing*, as a *that toward which* correlative to a possibility. While the in-itself shows us what we are not it is at the same time a determinism of our lack which then appears in projection as our lacked for-itself. As long as the for-itself is for-itself it is condemned to be free:

picture an ass drawing behind him a cart. He attempts to get hold of a carrot which has been fastened to the end of a stick which in turn has been tied to the shaft of the cart. Every effort on the part of the ass to seize the carrot results in advancing the whole apparatus and the cart itself, which always remains at the same distance from the ass. Thus we run after a possible which our very running causes to appear, which is nothing but our running itself, and which thereby is by definition out of reach. We run toward ourselves and we are—due to this very fact—the being which cannot be reunited with itself.⁷⁹

IV

Being-For-Others

We have already seen that it is through us that the world has organization and meaning; this is accomplished by means of our possibilities and our project. The

76. Deduction, argument, reasoning are instruments leading to intuition.

77. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 210.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 247-248.

world is for us, as a presence to it, both obstacle and instrument. In the constant mechanics of negated facticity leading to transcendence and the positing of possibilities, there is a fluidity of movement. The ass drawing the cart and pursuing the carrot is an image of a perpetual motion machine. But it is an incomplete and inadequate image of human reality. Suddenly the cart, the ass and the carrot are lying on the road! The ass perceives that he has been sideswiped. The Other makes his appearance felt. Our solitude has been rudely interrupted and consciousness now reveals a being which is our being without being-for-us.

We need only take 'shame' as an example. "Shame is an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation."⁸⁰ In shame, we are ashamed *of* what we *are*. We *live* it. We are ashamed *of ourselves before someone*. ("Nobody can be vulgar all alone!")⁸¹ We recognize that we are as the Other sees us. We are seen. We have become an object for the Other. The Other is a mediator between ourselves and us. Therefore, if we are to grasp all the structures of our being we must investigate this radically different ontological structure—our being-for-others. To accomplish this we must examine a) the existence of the Other and b) the relation of our *being* to the being of the Other.

(a) *The existence of the Other*

We cannot prove the existence of the Other. To be able to do so would assume the priority of knowledge to being with the result that the Other would be a construct of our thought—as such, the Other would have only ideal existence. We cannot prove his existence. We can only affirm it.

Since we affirm the existence of the Other this affirmation can only come from the cogito because the Other is immediately *present* to us as *not being* us. At this point one of the modalities of the Other's presence to us is *as an object*.

Here, Sartre warns us, we must be very careful. If the other is only present to us as an object, as not being us, this would leave our pure subjectivity entirely intact. The interruption of our solitude would remain unaccounted for; shame, for example, would be impossible. Nevertheless, in our consciousness of our shame before somebody we recognize that we are an object *for a subject*. It is this meaning which must be investigated.

One approach that we could adopt would be to say that since we are conscious of the other as object, the relation is reciprocal and we can also be an object for another subject. But again, this procedure leads us to constitute the Other ideally in existence by extrapolating our own negating activities and assuming that they belong to another. What becomes obvious is that we can never get to the Other's existence *as subject* starting from the modality of the Other's presence to us *as object*. As long as the Other appears to us as an object, any subjectivity which we posit in him in order to see ourselves as object is fictive. We cannot enter into the immanence of another:

80. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

81. *Ibid.*

in order for me to be able to appear to myself as an object for the Other, I would have to apprehend the Other as subject; that is to apprehend him in his interiority. But in so far as the Other appears to me as object my objectivity for him cannot appear to me.⁸²

Setting aside the idealistic approaches to the subjectivity of the Other, Sartre tries to find in consciousness the revelation of the Other as a 'presence in person', that is, in a modality other than the knowledge which we have of him as an object.

To do this it is necessary to return to the for-itself in a *situation*. By *situation*, Sartre means "this ensemble in the world with its double and inverted determination"⁸³ that is, that the world is *thus* because of our possibilities and our possibilities are *thus* because of the world. The Other, in our 'situation' is for us an object. As an object he is *there*, not us, present to us in the structure of our world—a world organized according to our possibilities, a world of which we are the centre. But suddenly we are aware that "instead of a grouping *toward me* of the objects, there is now an orientation *which flees from me*."⁸⁴ This appearance of a disintegration of the objects of *our* universe announces the appearance of the Other in our universe. He steals our world! He organizes it according to his possibilities. But there is more. The Other is not simply the one we see (as object) and who sees the same objects which we see and confers on them an absence for us. *He looks at us*. In his organization of the world we are an object for him. " 'Being-seen-by-the-Other' is the *truth* of 'seeing-the-Other.' "⁸⁵ Fixed by 'the look' of the Other, we are seen. He places us as an object—an object that *we are* without the ability to determine *what* we are *for him*. This is the route by which we arrive at the existence of the Other as present subject:

it is in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being-as-subject.⁸⁶

What does this *being seen* mean for us?

With 'the look' of the Other we are placed. "I am conscious of my self as escaping myself, not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness, but in that I have my foundation outside myself."⁸⁷ The self comes to exist as an object in the world and we are revealed to ourselves as an in-itself for an Other. As a result of being looked at, we must live our facticity. We strip ourselves of our transcendence. By means of 'the look' of the Other our transcendence has been transcended. All of our possibilities are for the Other instruments which will serve him against us. We are naked, vulnerable, in danger. "*I am no longer master of the situation.*"⁸⁸ In sum, our possibilities are now alienated from us and associated with objects of the world serving the Other.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 297.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 314-315.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

There is yet another dimension to 'the look' of Others. "What is certain is that I *am* looked at: what is only probable is that 'the look' is bound to this or that intra-mundane presence."⁸⁹ What is important is that we cannot always identify 'the look' as originating from a particular source who is present to us as object and who subsequently objectifies us. In our world we can never get to the Other *as subject*—but only as an object—through his body. On the other hand, we are led to the existence of the Other as subject from the fact that our being is alienated from us and that we are conscious that our transcendence can be transcended in our situation. Therefore, the Other is not necessarily *this* Other. The multiplicity of Others is not a *collection* but a *totality* "since each Other finds his being in the Other."⁹⁰ In short, the Other is always present to us in so far as we are always for-Others. The proof of this condition

I realize concretely on the occasion of the upsurge of an object into *my* universe if this object indicates to me that I am probably an object at present functioning as a *differentiated this* for a consciousness. . . Each look makes us prove concretely—and in the indubitable certainty of the *cogito*—that we exist for all living men.⁹¹

(b) *the relation of our being to the being of the Other*

With the theft of our world by the Other, with our transcendence transcended by him such that our being is alienated from us and we exist for-the-Other and must live this situation, what happens or must happen to our for-itself? Must we remain vulnerable and naked?

The answer to this problem has been there all along: to put on clothes is to hide one's object-state; it is to claim the right of seeing without being seen; that is, to be pure subject.⁹²

Because of the shame of which we are conscious due to our exposure by the Other, we attempt to re-cover ourselves. We recover ourselves by looking at the Other because, as we have seen, we cannot be an object for an object. We must grasp our alienated being and to accomplish this we must continually make the Other that which we have to *not be*. We make the Other lose himself in the world by negating our being-for-the-Other and thereby reducing the Other to the status of object. The only way of recovering our for-itself is constantly to contain the Other within his objectivity for us. As a result of this attitude, "my relations with the Other-as-object are essentially made up of ruses designed to make him remain an object."⁹³ The only way to keep ourselves from being exploited is to exploit the Other—to reduce the Other to in-itself. But in this task of objectifying the Other we are always doomed to failure. The whole process can explode at any time. In the previous relations of being-for-itself with being-in-itself, in the first *ekstasis*, negating activity was simple and revealed the for-itself to itself. The in-itself could not negate reciprocally. But the Other can always in turn negate

89. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 344.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 364.

his-objectivity-for-us and so reconstitute us as an object. The negation of being for-Others is still an internal negation. The essential point is that now the negating activity is divided into two internal and opposed negations:

each is an internal negation, but they are nevertheless separated from one another by an inapprehensible eternal nothingness. . . . *Simultaneously* with negation of myself, the Other denies concerning himself that he is me. These two negations are equally indispensable to being-for-others, and they cannot be reunited by any synthesis.⁹⁴

As we continually attempt to regain our alienated being, our being-for-itself which is lost by 'the look' of the Other, the Other reciprocates in order to free himself from us. While we seek to regain our freedom by enslaving the Other, the freedom of the Other is always trying to enslave us. "Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others."⁹⁵

If conflict, in general, is the primary meaning of the structure of our relations with others, it is important to see at least one concrete instance of this conflict. To do so will enable us to better understand Sartre's position on absolute freedom. Perhaps the most practical concrete relation to examine is that of love, for surely, if there is a possibility to escape our absolute subjectivity in unity with the Other, this would seem to be by love.

It has already been noted that the Other places us in constant danger by 'the look' and thereby steals our freedom and our project of attaining the *self*. In the world of the Other, we become an instrument for him since he possesses us. He sees us as we can never see ourselves; we do not know *what* we are for him since we can never enter into his subjectivity. We recover ourselves by suppressing the freedom of the Other and constituting him as object (which still leaves his nature intact). In short, "everything which may be said of me in my relation with the Other applies to him as well."⁹⁶

Now in the quest for unification by love, whether we address ourselves to the Other in so far as we are an object or in so far as he is an object, the intention is the same: "I want to assimilate the Other as the Other-looking-at-me."⁹⁷ We place ourselves at the centre of the world in an attempt to seduce the Other and act upon the Other's freedom such that we will have an assurance policy against his theft of our freedom. We want to exist for him in such a way that he will exist for us as his project:

My project of recovering my being can be realized only if I get hold of this Other's freedom and reduce it to being a freedom subject to my freedom.⁹⁸

In our attempt to seduce the Other we want the Other to choose us. "The lover does not desire to possess the beloved as one possesses a thing. . . . He wants

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 366-368.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 445.

96. *Ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 447.

to possess a freedom as freedom."⁹⁹ As lover, therefore, what we really seek is to be freely loved. We want the Other's free choice to be us as the objective limit of his freedom such that we should be "the unique and privileged occasion of it."¹⁰⁰ We want the Other to choose us as an absolute, as a supreme value, such that we are no longer unjustifiable and *de trop*, but rather that we are the world for the Other.

But alas! Love is a deception. Our project of making ourselves loved is doomed to failure. It reprovokes conflict rather than overcoming it. "If the beloved can love us, he is wholly ready to be assimilated by our freedom."¹⁰¹ If we provoke love in the Other the sense of his love is also 'to be loved.' We are no longer his absolute value since he throws us back into our own subjectivity by trying to make us love him.

Each one wants the other to love him but does

not take into account the fact that to love is to want to be loved and that thus by wanting the other to love him, he only wants the other to want to be loved in turn.¹⁰²

We cannot achieve unity with the Other through love. He continually refers us back to our own unjustifiable subjectivity. We cannot escape ourselves. We are condemned to be free.

V

The Structure of Absolute Freedom

Since there is no escape from our freedom or subjectivity either in our relations to others or in our relations to the in-itself, the final task remaining is to show the ramifications of the absolute character of freedom as the first condition of action. In order to understand the dimensions of freedom Sartre now analyzes the structures of action.

The first important aspect of *action* is that it is *intentional*: "to act is to modify the *shape* of the world; it is to arrange means in view of an end."¹⁰³ Action is not mere movement: to act, in short, means to intentionally realize a conscious project. Hence, the necessary condition of acting intentionally is to recognize an objective lack and, in the light of this recognition, to posit a *desideratum*, a yet-unrealized possible:

This means that from the moment of the first conception of the act, consciousness has been able to withdraw itself from the full world of which it is consciousness and to leave the level of being in order frankly to approach that of non-being.¹⁰⁴

99. *Ibid.*, p. 448. Sartre's concept of love corresponds to the role of Johannes, the seducer. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, "Diary of the Seducer", *Either/Or* (New York, 1959), Volume I.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 449.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 454.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 459.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 529.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 530.

For action to take place, therefore, there must be not merely recognition or presence of the for-itself to the in-itself, but also a perception of the for-itself as lack (producing value) and, finally, the for-itself as projecting itself toward self, that is, creating motivation entirely from itself. Since the for-itself creates its own motive or self-movement, "we must recognize that the indispensable and fundamental condition of all action is the freedom of the acting being."¹⁰⁵

Now whereas "it is in fact impossible to find an act without a motive"¹⁰⁶ this in no way implies that the motive *causes* the act in any determined way. Sartre stresses that the motive itself is a free creation, an integral part of the act itself and in no way prior to it. It is the for-itself which confers on the motive its value as cause. An act always escapes a determining cause because the intention of the act arises from our transcendence, from our project (which is an ensemble of non-existents). Since the project and the act coincide, "the motive, the act, and the end are all constituted in a single upsurge. . . . It is the act which desires its ends and its motives, and the act is the expression of freedom."¹⁰⁷

Freedom, then, is the very *stuff* of our being. It is not a quality or a property of the for-itself. It *is* the for-itself. It cannot be defined or referred to a concept (for then it would not be free). Existence and freedom precede essence. Since the for-itself always has to be, "I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the causes and the motives of my act. . . . This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself."¹⁰⁸

We cannot hide this freedom from ourselves. The determinist attempts to do so by trying to apprehend the for-itself as being-in-itself, to pretend that there is a nature or an essence to the for-itself—but even this enterprise of explanation is to be seen as a free project. It is precisely because we are presence to ourselves that we can attempt these escapes, but the very attempt reveals our freedom to us. The attitude of bad faith is always upset by anguish.

Nor can we pretend to be simultaneously free and determined. The common tendency is to give man a determinate nature and then allow him freedom with respect to voluntary acts while restricting determinism to the domain of the passions. Such psychological manichaeism must be rejected, Sartre claims, because it introduces a dichotomy into the human psyche:

indeed it is impossible for a determined process to act upon a spontaneity, exactly as it is impossible for objects to act upon consciousness. Thus any synthesis of two types of existents is impossible; they are not homogeneous; they will remain each one in its incommunicable solitude.¹⁰⁹

Descartes had already tried a dualist approach with a noted lack of success. Sartre insists that we can profit from the errors of Descartes. Only two solutions

105. *Ibid.*, p. 533.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 535.

107. *Ibid.*

108. *Ibid.*, p. 537.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 540.

are possible: "either man is wholly determined. . . or else man is wholly free."¹¹⁰ Since the very proposition that he is wholly determined is self-defeating (and 'anguish' makes us recognize it), Sartre would have us conclude that man is wholly free and then try to understand what absolute freedom involves.

For Sartre, the first consequence of man being wholly free is that the voluntary act can no longer be considered the unique structure of free acts. Since man is free all of his acts are free. Since man is a unity "how can we refuse autonomy to the passions in order to grant it to the will?"¹¹¹ Even for the will to constitute itself as will supposes an original freedom. Consequently, and as a result of his investigation of deliberation, Sartre concludes that the will is merely a *reflective* mode of being in relation to posited ends. But "passion can posit the same ends."¹¹² For example, in the face of danger we can will to resist and to confront the danger or, in an emotional reaction, we can run away in fear. Whichever attitude we adopt, he says, the difference lies in the subjective attitude to the end posited:

the difference here depends on the choice of means and on the degree of reflection and of making explicit, not on the end. Yet the one who flees is said to be "passionate", and we reserve the term "voluntary" for the man who resists.¹¹³

To be free, therefore, means that our ends are not dictated to us by a nature or from some outside force. Our ends must be subjective. We alone choose them. It is precisely this choice which characterizes our being in its upsurge of freedom. Since both volition and the passions are subjective attitudes, both are free:

thus since freedom is identical with my existence, it is the foundation of ends which I shall attempt to attain either by the will or by passionate efforts. Therefore it cannot be limited to voluntary acts.¹¹⁴

Freedom, then, coincides with the very being of the for-itself, with the nothingness which the for-itself has to be. Since the for-itself, as presence, is always at a distance from itself, it cannot be determined by its past, neither can it be determined by anything external to consciousness nor, finally, can it be determined by ends or motives since, as transcendence, the for-itself is a being which is originally a project and creates its own ends and motives in its free upsurge toward self. Nevertheless, even if our acts cannot be defined in terms of the state of the world or in terms of our past, this does not mean that our acts are capricious or gratuitous in the sense that they are unintelligible. Choice means more than the mere capacity to choose oneself according to whim. "A choice is said to be free if it is such that it could have been other than what it is."¹¹⁵ The importance of this is that the understanding of any act does not depend upon the act itself. "An act cannot be limited to itself; it refers immediately to more profound structures."¹¹⁶

110. *Ibid.*, p. 541.

111. *Ibid.*

112. *Ibid.*, p. 542.

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Ibid.*

115. *Ibid.*, p. 554.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 560.

Instead of looking to the past or to a nature or to external determinism to understand a particular act, we must see "a turning back of the future toward the present."¹¹⁷ Without in any way understanding a causal mechanism, an act is comprehensible only in terms of a project which is a projection of the for-itself toward self, toward a possible. Hence, any particular possible under consideration refers to other possibles and, finally, "to the ultimate possibility which I am."¹¹⁸

This ultimate possibility which provides the structure for the intelligibility of *this* act is not just *one* possible among others. It is "the unitary synthesis of all our actual possibles."¹¹⁹ The particular possible which we can deliberately choose resides in the ultimate possibility until a particular circumstance places it in relief from the background of the synthesis "without, however, thereby suppressing its quality as belonging to the totality."¹²⁰ As a result, Sartre would have us note carefully a very special relationship between the for-itself and the in-itself. The two are strictly co-relative. It is the concrete situation which makes this free possible stand out in relief against the fundamental project and yet, simultaneously, it is our fundamental project which makes the world appear to us as this situation and this complex of instruments. We choose the meaning of the world in choosing ourselves. It is our project which gives the world its meaning at the same time that the world engenders this particular possible for us:

thus the fundamental act of freedom is discovered; and it is this which gives meaning to the particular action which I can be brought to consider. This constantly renewed act is not distinct from my being; it is a choice of myself in the world and by the same token it is a discovery of the world.¹²¹

Incomprehensible, gratuitous conduct in particular actions, therefore, is eliminated from Sartre's position. In one sense particular acts are rooted in the original project. Still they remain absolutely free. The fundamental project, however, is not one of deliberate choice because it is the foundation of deliberation and deliberation remains only "interpretation in terms of an original choice."¹²² At the same time we cannot say that the fundamental and profound choice which is the original project is unconscious—we should say, rather, that it is one with consciousness. While the particular act is intelligible in terms of the fundamental project in which it is always involved and which in fact, permeates this act, the particular act remains contingent and unjustifiable because both the particular action and the project remain wholly free.

It is the foundation of our free acts, the original choice, made without a base of support which appears as absurd. Deliberative choices can be explained by recourse to the project. But the project is *original* in all senses. It is absurd

117. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 562.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 563.

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*, p. 564.

122. *Ibid.*

because we cannot choose not to choose. It is absurd in the sense "that the choice is that by which the very notion of the absurd receives a meaning."¹²³

Given the necessity of choosing, Sartre says, we are thrown back to the facticity of the for-itself. The for-itself is not its own foundation. If it were its own foundation then freedom would decide its own freedom and its own existence. This would suppose a for-itself confronted with the choice of itself as free or as not free and, in turn, merely refer us to an original freedom whereby this choice could be made. The freedom of the for-itself is a *given*: the fact of not being able not to be free is the *facticity* of freedom, and the fact of not being able not to exist is its *contingency*.¹²⁴ Hence the freedom of the for-itself is a given in a world of givens. But at the same time the world of givens, the situation, the coefficient of adversity, does not limit freedom. "The given (in the sense of situation) in no way enters into the constitution of freedom since freedom is interiorized as the internal negation of the given."¹²⁵ Freedom, on the contrary, is a relation to the situation such that situation and motivation are really one:

we shall use the term *situation* for the contingency of freedom in the *plenum* of being of the world inasmuch as this *datum*, which is there only *in order not to constrain* freedom, is revealed to this freedom only as *already illuminated* by the end which freedom chooses.¹²⁶

So while we are not free not to be free, freedom is an escape from and a constitution of the factual given—but there remains the *fact* of this escape from and constitution of the factual given and it is this *fact* which is the facticity of freedom. The paradox of freedom lies in the fact that there is freedom only in a *situation* and that there is a situation only through freedom.

What the fact of our freedom, of our being condemned to be free, implies is that we are fully responsible for our world since responsibility is "consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object."¹²⁷ Since all choices depend on our fundamental project we are the authors of our mode of being and of the situation and, consequently, we are responsible for both. Complaint or excuse is senseless since nothing external can determine us and this means that there are no accidents in life.

I am responsible for everything, in fact, except for my very responsibility, for I am not the foundation of my being. Therefore everything takes place as if I were compelled to be responsible.¹²⁸

It is this recognition of my absolute responsibility which gives rise to the feeling of *abandonment*: we are conscious of our solitude engaged in a world for

123. *Ibid.*, p. 586.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 595. In common language we would say that freedom is necessarily free. We must bear in mind, however, that Sartre defines necessity as a relation between ideal propositions. This is why he must designate our not being able not to be free as factual contingency.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 596

126. *Ibid.*

127. *Ibid.*, p. 677.

128. *Ibid.*, p. 680.

which we are wholly responsible. This is why the for-itself experiences itself as anguish and why "most of the time we flee anguish in bad faith."¹²⁹

Finally, although man is always engaged in an effort to create himself by a free project for which he is wholly responsible, what remains to be examined is the meaning of his fundamental project, of his thrust toward being. What does the project represent in the relation to being-in-itself? How does man make himself to be by this project?

To answer this question we must return to the fact that the for-itself is a being whose being is in question in the form of a project of being. It is what it is not. What properly characterizes the for-itself, therefore, is its *lack of being*; it is because of its lack of being that possibles appear as values. Value continually haunts the for-itself as the totality of being which is lacked. "The for-itself chooses because it is lack; freedom is really synonymous with lack."¹³⁰ Because man is fundamentally a lack of being, "fundamentally man is *the desire to be*."¹³¹ Consequently, all original projects, in spite of the infinity of possible projects, have this in common: each is a desire to be; each is the desire to be *in-itself*. "The being which the for-itself lacks is the in-itself. The for-itself arises as the nihilation of the in-itself and this nihilation is defined as the project toward the in-itself."¹³² In other words, that which man continually seeks in whatever project he freely assumes is the quest of being what he is. "This is why the possible is projected in general as what the for-itself lacks in order to become in-itself."¹³³ The for-itself seeks to be for-itself as its own foundation: it seeks to be an *ens causa sui*:

Thus the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God. . . . God, value and supreme end of transcendence, represents the permanent limit in terms of which man makes known to himself what he is. To be man means to reach toward being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God.¹³⁴

Although freedom is identical with man's lack of being and his desire of being, and the meaning of the project is the desire to be God, this does not mean that at the core of human reality freedom has given way to a human nature or essence. "Freedom is existence, and in it existence precedes essence."¹³⁵ Freedom remains the immediate upsurge toward being and essence remains a particular mode of being, merely one possible, a particular invention of self resulting from the fundamental project, the situation and concrete choices. While we can say that "the *meaning* of the desire (to be in-itself-for-itself) is ultimately the project of being God, the desire is never *constituted* by this meaning; on the contrary it always represents a particular discovery of its ends."¹³⁶

129. *Ibid.*, p. 681.

130. *Ibid.*, p. 692.

131. *Ibid.*

132. *Ibid.*, p. 693.

133. *Ibid.*

134. *Ibid.*, p. 694.

135. *Ibid.*, p. 695.

136. *Ibid.*, p. 694.

Man is not a conscious substance, rather he is consciousness seeking to be a substance. Desire stems from his lack of being and desire is always supported by the being which is lacked. The being of human reality can never be a substance but is condemned to being a lived relation. If we can say that man is the desire to be God it is always with the qualification that this effort is "without there being any given substratum for that effort, without there being *anything* which so endeavors."¹³⁷

Human reality always remains a free project to metamorphose itself, to change itself from a for-itself to an in-itself-for-itself. But by definition its metamorphosis is a failure since the for-itself is what it is not and is not what it is. Never can it be what it is.

Every human reality is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being, and by the same stroke to constitute the In-itself which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the *ens causa sui*, which religions call God. Thus the passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion.¹³⁸

VI

Critique of Sartre's Position

It is not by accident that *Being and Nothingness* should be such a massive, complex and difficult treatise. Sartre's subject matter demands it. Any attempt to explain human freedom must take into account the nature of man, his relation to the world in which he lives, his relation to others and, ultimately, to God. That Sartre recognizes the total scope of the problem he makes evident by the subtitle of *Being and Nothingness*—"An Essay On Phenomenological Ontology." Indeed, the same sort of awareness of the dimensions of the problem led Leibniz to describe the question of freedom as one of the two labyrinths (the other being the problem of the one and the many) where reason often goes astray.¹³⁹

To those who have worked their way through *Being and Nothingness*, Leibniz's metaphor of the labyrinth must seem strikingly appropriate. Many of the paths and by-ways invite further exploration either because of the excellence of Sartre's insights or because of almost shameless equivocations and contradictions. But as interesting as these particular paths may be it is still with the work as-a-whole that we must be concerned. Sartre can lead us into the labyrinth, but he cannot lead us out. "Man is a useless passion" is a cry of despair.

The real difficulty with Sartre's position is that he is lost from the very start. When Theseus went into the labyrinth he carefully unwound the ball of string. Sartre takes no such precautions. Yet common sense would seem to dictate that if we wish to examine human freedom we should begin our analysis with our experi-

137. *Ibid.*, p. 705.

138. *Ibid.*, p. 754.

139. Cf. Preface to the *Theodicy*, tr. E.H. Huggard (London, 1951), p. 53.

ence of ourselves as choosing subjects. Instead, Sartre's point of departure is one which does violence to experience and it is this fact which seems to provoke resistance on the part of the reader (for the difficulty of the subject and the length of the work are not obstacles to the serious reader). From the very outset Sartre portrays man as *anti-physis*—and this in an *absolute* way. Human reality is reduced to consciousness arising in an absolute upsurge out of, and in opposition to, an absurd, superfluous, contingent world. Sartre takes us out of the world in which we live, to which we are related, in which we make choices, and he sets us in opposition to it. We are uprooted and cut off from nourishment. Our roots in the natural world are severed. It is a strangely fitting image that absurdity and the meaning of nausea are brought home to Roquentin in Sartre's philosophical novel, *La Nausée*, by means of the roots of the chestnut tree in the park.

By defining man in opposition to nature (such that man has no nature), Sartre can make freedom (lack of nature) absolute since it can no longer be a quality of a natural being. To say that freedom precedes essence or, to use his more popular expression, "existence precedes essence", allows Sartre to ignore for all practical purposes the foundation in being of the being-for-itself. Sartre is content to simply mention the 'facticity' of the for-itself. The embarrassment of the for-itself acting in a determinate way (a point to be considered later), bothers Sartre not in the least. He dismisses this as the absurdity of freedom. But it is only as absurd as his starting point. Sartre would reduce man to existence, but surely questions about the existence of something can only be answered by paying close attention to the sort of thing it is. Sartre has nothing to say about oak trees and butterflies. They are dismissed to that opaque world of being-in-itself. The foundation of the for-itself whereby it is a particular in-itself is dismissed in the same way. Of course, if we ignore the world we will also distort our perspective of ourselves in it.

Sartre chooses instead to build his foundations with the cogito. And although he uses it in a way different from that of Descartes (since for Sartre it is always co-relative to the world), he succeeds in perpetuating the cartesian dichotomy. The labels change but not the realities. Descartes' dualism is consciousness and the world; Sartre's is being-for-itself and being-in-itself—two "completely distinct" realms of being. Consciousness provides the separation. There is an important difference between Sartre's for-itself (which is what it is not and is not what it is) and Aristotle's knower (to know is to be the other as other). For Aristotle, knowledge is a principle of unification and, through knowledge, man "can become all things." For Sartre, on the other hand, knowledge isolates us from the world. It reveals to us only 'otherness'. Consciousness denies of itself that of which it is conscious. This 'nihilating', the power to conceive negatively, is the only real function which Sartre attributes to the cogito and it is the key to Sartre's whole position. Forlornness, abandonment, nausea, absurdity all stem from Sartre's first principle. Man stands in isolation and alienation, an individual, unable to relate to others, stripped of the capacity to love and to share. Everything and everyone becomes nihilated. All relations, whether with others, or God, or the world must necessarily be relations of conflict. When the conclusions are viewed in relation to

Sartre's first principle it becomes apparent that a little distortion goes a long way. To treat human reality as consciousness is to destroy man as man.

The selection of consciousness as a point of departure engenders other problems as well. How are the two distinct realms of being to be reunited in the project of the authentic self? If consciousness (the for-itself) through its activity of nihilation presents us only with an impersonal other, then how are we to escape the sterility of consciousness? It is important to note that the cogito does not engage us in action. Our awareness of the other as other does not involve us in the pursuit of the other as good. The problem, therefore, is to understand how Sartre gets from the cognitive order to the appetitive order, from otherness to the *desideratum*. What is the foundation for *lack* and *value*?

Since Sartre cannot answer this on the basis of the cogito, he resolves the problem by simple fiat: the for-itself, since it is outside of the domain of the in-itself, is *freedom*. And once Sartre has simply identified consciousness and freedom he can then introduce the notion of 'the project'. (The 'fundamental project', however, is a notion that Sartre is consistently incapable of handling.)

It is somewhat ironical that 'the project', perhaps the most practical and valuable aspect of Sartre's philosophy, does not have any real dependence on Sartre's own first principles. As he incorporates it into his philosophy another important resemblance between Sartre and Descartes appears. Descartes can only escape the prison of consciousness by sleight of hand, so to speak or, more properly, by manipulation of language. Descartes slips a content (a personal 'I') into the cogito when the real conclusion, of course, should have been 'cogitatur' (there is thinking going on). Sartre is capable of similar verbal shenanigans in his passage from the cognitive to the appetitive order.¹⁴⁰ It is accomplished by equivocating with the "for" in the "for-itself". The for-itself, as consciousness, is merely a point of reference on the world which is present "for me". By the time that the object of consciousness has become identified with *lack* and *value*, "for" has assumed the meaning of "for the sake of" or purpose.¹⁴¹

Since the power to act does not come from consciousness, neither can consciousness be identified with freedom even if knowledge is a necessary condition of the free act. Instead, the foundation of freedom must lie in the demands of a being-in-itself whereby both consciousness and freedom belong to a particular kind of being with a nature to fulfill. "I am not free not to be free" only becomes absurd when man's nature is ignored rather than explored. As a consequence, the thrust towards the fullness of being which is lacking must be relative to the essential being that we are.

Sartre's failure to begin with what is truly human reality leads him inevitably into contradictory conclusions. At the outset of *Being and Nothingness* we are faced with the task of seeking "the authentic self" only to find out later that this consists of a "synthetic unity" of the in-itself and the for-itself which is an "im-

140. I do not mean to suggest that it is done deliberately.

141. This is even more evident in the French "pour-soi".

possible synthesis.” Authenticity, if we are to be led by Sartre, involves being a “useless passion” since the meaning of the fundamental project is to be *ens causa sui*, the desire to be God (“but the idea of God is contradictory. . . .”) How can the ‘self’ be the in-itself-for-itself when we are told that being-in-itself does not enter into any relation with what is not itself? Finally, of course, if we did become in-itself-for-itself, our fullness of being would be our nothingness of being.

At times, there is even some cause to suspect that in his attempt to make man *absolutely* free, Sartre comes close to stripping man completely of freedom. “Man is condemned to be free.” But is he then free at all? Again the problem arises because of Sartre’s emphasis on the cogito. The for-itself determines itself against that of which it is conscious by means of negation. However, it is on the basis of that negation that ‘lack’ arises and it is because of that which is lacked that desire and value appear. Similarly, when Sartre stipulates that freedom only takes place in a situation, we should bear in mind that by freedom he means the internal negation of the given. The identification of freedom with ‘nothingness’ comes very close to determinism. Perhaps one of the most haunting images of *Being and Nothingness* is that of the ass dragging the cart while pursuing the carrot. Sartre uses it to portray the futility of attempting to escape ‘freedom’, the futility of the human condition. But the image is also one of perfect mechanism.

At other times, particularly in his analysis of the structure of freedom, Sartre speaks in an entirely different manner by stressing freedom with respect to choice rather than to ‘nothingness’. Here, he quite rightly situates freedom within the context of intentionality rather than consciousness. But a careful analysis shows us that even within this context freedom cannot be absolute.

Choice, like consciousness, is not empty; choice is always between possibles and possibles, as Sartre affirms, appear on the ground of intention. This means that it is the intentional end pursued (the project) which is responsible for the appearance of possible means among which a choice is made. It is in this sense that intention is involved in the act of choice since it is the principle which directs the choice. But what is the foundation or the ground of the intention which makes this particular choice possible? Sartre fully realizes the necessity of an ultimate intention (the fundamental project). However, he then calls the fundamental project “an original choice”. But if the fundamental project or ultimate intention is a choice, what grounds it? He has already shown that no choice can be made without an intention which causes the possible means to appear. At this point, Sartre calls freedom “absurd” because it “goes beyond reason”. But a magical use of words does not dispose of the contradiction. Either the fundamental project is not a choice (and freedom is not absolute) or it is not fundamental. Sartre cannot have it both ways. If the project is fundamental, then it cannot be chosen: it is necessary. If it is a choice, then it cannot be the fundamental project. Ultimately, there must be some determinism in order for freedom to exist—but the determinism must be such that freedom is still possible.

A former professor to whom I am deeply indebted, M. Jacques de Monléon, once made the telling observation that a philosophy which begins in epistemology

ends in despair. Sartre's philosophy is not an exception. Yet Sartre's point of departure and his ultimate failure are due to his own myopia. The real unity of the in-itself and the for-itself which is the self is continually present but ignored. "Consciousness is bound to the in-itself by an *internal* relation. . . so as to constitute a totality."¹⁴² Is not the search for a synthetic unity, therefore, a vain quest? Intrinsic unity is already present and the relation between the in-itself and the for-itself is not one of duality but of unity. The whole man has his foundation in being.

Consciousness, then, is not human reality but an integral part of human reality. As a result, man's nothingness of being is not absolute. Neither in his freedom. Rather, these are *relative* to the kind of being that we are. Our existence is a real one in a real world, with a nature which is given and a completeness that is lacking. This should have been the paradox worthy of Sartre's considerable talents.

142. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 760.