

***Sartre's Account of Human Freedom in Being and Nothingness:
An Ontological Reading***

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I, Vittorio Sandri, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

ABSTRACT

In the present work, I attempt to provide what may be labelled an 'ontological' reading of Sartre's theory of freedom as it was developed by him in *Being and Nothingness*. Contrary to what is often suggested in the literature, I seek to show that Sartre is highly engaged in supplying an argued ontological foundation for his theory of freedom, of which I provide a sympathetic reconstruction. In chapter one, I attempt to show that material to undermine the intelligibility of psychological determinism (which constitutes a crucial part of Sartre's account of freedom), can be found (1) in Sartre's account of the nature of consciousness, (2) in his account of the relation between Nothingness and Negation and finally (3) in his account of temporality. I argue that Sartre's conclusions about human freedom are not grounded exclusively on our acceptance of his phenomenological descriptions of everyday experiences, and I suggest how the relation between Sartre's descriptions and his ontological-phenomenological claims should be conceived. In chapter two I examine the two connected notions of 'original project' and 'original choice', and I argue that a number of criticisms that have been raised against Sartre can be dispelled once the meaning of these notions has correctly been understood. Finally, in chapter three I endeavour to show that Sartre's *Cahiers pour une morale* can be seen as carrying out the attempt to demonstrate that an ethics is possible on the basis of the ontology of freedom put forward in *Being and Nothingness*, and I suggest what may be Sartre's grounds for proposing freedom as the supreme value of the For-itself, for a universalisation of this proposal as well as for the claim that we should value and actively pursue not only our freedom, but that of others as well.

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Introduction

The esteem in which Jean-Paul Sartre and his oeuvre were held in the Anglo-Saxon world until recently could be exemplified by the portrait that Clive James drew of him in his article 'Jean-Paul Sartre: The Nothingness at the Heart of His Philosophy'. The worldview conveyed by Sartre's philosophy as well as his writing style, James (2007) claims, are the result of the man's irresistible 'urge to be extraordinary'. This urge of his, which may have been due to his need to compensate for his squint and physical ugliness, 'prevented Sartre from telling the truth, because telling the truth was something that ordinary men did'. To conceal the truth, therefore, Sartre ended up developing an argumentative style in which, as James soberly puts it, 'German metaphysics met French sophistry in a kind of European Coal and Steel Community producing nothing but rhetorical gas' (*ibid.*).

Although the situation has significantly changed in recent times, reading Sartre is still for most, as Thomas Baldwin (1996, 81) put it, 'the equivalent of spending a dirty weekend in Paris, before returning to the logical analysis of common sense amidst the homely comforts of suburban England'. On the other hand, even among those who take Sartre seriously, so to speak, and are genuinely interested in his works, one can notice a tendency to display a certain reluctance in acknowledging that the reasoning that supports Sartre's conclusions warrant the status of an 'argument'. Particularly, the way in which the relation between Sartre's ontology and his phenomenological descriptions of everyday experience is understood results often, I think, in a diminishment of the philosophical scope of Sartre's discussions.

In commenting on Sartre's argumentative strategy in *Being and Nothingness*, for instance, Mary Warnock suggests that Sartre employs essentially two types of argumentative patterns. The first consists in an argument 'from certain unproved and extremely general ontological propositions to particular concrete facts' (Warnock 1970, 6). Among these unproved and extremely general ontological propositions Warnock lists Sartre's account of the nature of consciousness. 'The nature of consciousness', she says, 'is also stated as a premiss in this first kind of argument' (*ibid.*). In the second pattern of arguments, on the other hand, 'the concrete facts are first described, and the deduction is that the ontology must be of this general kind if the facts are indeed as they have been presented' (*ibid.*). The method of this second pattern of argument, she continues, 'is basically the anecdote', which should not be understood as 'a device for presenting examples of something which is to be argued for independently' (*ibid.*).

The result of this reading is to make the merits of Sartre's philosophical accounts entirely dependent on the degree to which we find his 'anecdotic' descriptions correct and persuasive. If we exercise the *imagination* in the same way in which Sartre does, Warnock argues, and we see certain objects and situations as 'analogues' for more general fundamental human attitudes, then (and only then) are Sartre's ontological assumptions vindicated. For it is only by drawing the reader to see imaginatively certain concrete features of the world that, she (1970, 12) claims, Sartre can 'get them to accept the general thesis about man's relation to the world'. But what if, on the contrary, one exercises one's imagination differently? What if, for instance, one does not see in the roots of a tree a kind of 'obscene sprawling spreading treacly overflowing', as Roquentin does? According to this reading, in that case Sartre has no independent arguments to persuade him or her of his phenomenological-ontological claims about the nature man's relation to the world.

Along similar lines, Katherine Morris (2016, 197) suggests that Sartre's phenomenological-ontological claims 'are elicited' from his descriptions of experience. According to Morris, for example, Sartre's idea that man is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world is not grounded on any *argument*, but on a certain concrete experience, which in this specific case is supposed to be portrayed by Sartre's famous example of Pierre and the Café. It is true, she (2016, 2014) affirms, that Sartre 'fancies himself a scholar and feels the need to review what Hegel and Heidegger have said about nothingness before making his own phenomenological-ontological claim', but these pages 'are nothing but window dressing' (*ibid.*).

This reading of Sartre that she advocates, Morris contrasts to that of those who, like Gardner (2010) and Sacks (2005), suggest that Sartre is best read as employing a kind of transcendental reasoning. Morris (2016, 197) characterises the transcendental reading of Sartre as the idea that 'the phenomenological claims are conditions for the possibility of the everyday experiences Sartre describes'. This requires, she (*ivi*, 208) claims, that Sartre's descriptions of everyday experiences be 'indisputable'. However this, she points out, cannot be true for Sartre's descriptions imply a number of philosophical presuppositions that various philosophers would not make or would positively argue against. Therefore, she (2016, 210) concludes, 'Sartre's descriptions *cannot* be understood as playing the role of indisputable 'premises''.

What then is the strategy that Sartre follows in *B&N* ? How are his phenomenological-ontological claims 'elicited' from his disputed and disputable descriptions of everyday experiences? According to Morris (*ivi*, 215) in two ways: (1) through a '(non-inferential) 'ampliative' move from descriptions of experience to 'meaning', and (2) through a '(non-

inferential) revelation of the 'principle of the series', i.e. the essence of the phenomenon described and thus part of a phenomenological ontology'. Again it should be noticed how, according to this reading, our acceptance of Sartre's philosophical standpoints should be based exclusively upon the persuasiveness of his elucidation of the deep meaning of the everyday experiences he describes, and from our capability to see these experiences 'ampliatively' as representative of man's ontological status.

But what if, once again, we do not accept Sartre's descriptions? According to this view, it would seem, we are validated in rejecting his ontology, because Sartre has no independent arguments to prove its worth. This, however, should not be seen as problematic according to Morris, because Sartre's intent is not that of building a philosophical system, but rather that of therapeutically ridding us of the 'bad-faith' that prevents us from seeing the truth of his descriptions of everyday experiences. As an aid in this therapeutic task, Morris (2016, 214) contends, 'an 'argument' as we would ordinarily understand it is useless - by definition'.

In the present work, which is a study on Sartre's theory of freedom as it is presented in *Being and Nothingness*, one of my central aims will be to show that, on the contrary, Sartre *does* employ independent arguments to ground his claims about the nature of reality, and that their relation to his descriptions of everyday experience should be understood in a different way to that indicated by Warnock and by Morris. Sartre's theory of human freedom is, as he (1975) himself indicated, the most complex and profound of his philosophy, and can really be regarded as the vanishing point of his thought. As is the case for the most deep and interesting theories, it was the source of much criticism. Sartre was accused at the same time, by some, of attributing to the human subject a freedom that was too radical to be plausible, by others of having fatalistic implications, and by others still of being just 'deeply unintelligible' (Marcel, 1948, 61 [1946]).

I myself do not think that Sartre's theory of human freedom is unexceptionable, but I still think it is one of the theoretically richest and philosophically most interesting accounts to have been formulated, and I am convinced that several of the criticisms to which Sartre's views on freedom have been subjected are due to mistaken or simplistic interpretations. The aim of the present work is therefore to provide a sympathetic reconstructive account of Sartre's theory of freedom as put forward in *L'Être et le Néant*, and to do so by emphasising the arguments that can be found in support of its phenomenological-ontological claims.

Compared to the approach to the topic exemplified by current debates on human freedom, Sartre's own approach will appear very different. At the present time, the topic of

human freedom is discussed by philosophers in the context of practical philosophy, or else in the domain of metaphysics where, in line with a long tradition in the history of Western thought that dates back to the late Stoicism of Epictetus¹, it is broached in terms of a debate on the existence of a human *free will*. To be sure, Sartre recognises the existence and legitimacy of ‘practical’ notions of freedom, such as political freedom², and he also ascribes to the will a role in his theory. The kind of human freedom he is concerned with in *Being and Nothingness*, however, is neither political freedom nor (primarily) the freedom of the will, but rather one that is ‘ontological’—i.e. that is inseparable from what Sartre thinks a human being ‘is’—and that constitutes the *precondition* of both political freedom and the freedom of the will. Sartre’s discussion of freedom, therefore, is not set up as a debate on the freedom of the will, a consideration which can make Sartre’s theory potentially attractive to those in the analytic field who, while interested in the topic, are discouraged by the results of contemporary debates or else who (following Gilbert Ryle)³ regard the very notion of a ‘will’ with skepticism.

As it is well known, Sartre reworked his conception of freedom throughout his life and well after the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, so my study does not purport to provide a portrait of Sartre’s theory of freedom as a whole, and even within *Being and Nothingness* a considerable selection has been made to pursue what may be called an ‘ontological’ reading. At the same time, although *Being and Nothingness* will constitute the focus of my study, it will not constitute its sole primary source. In particular, because I am interested in the ethical consequences of Sartre’s theory of freedom, in the last chapter of the thesis my discussion will largely draw on Sartre’s posthumously published *Cahiers pour une Morale*, a series of notes that Sartre wrote between 1947 and 1948, and that can be considered an explorative attempt to develop an ethics on the basis of *B&N*’s ontology.

The discussion will be divided into three chapters. In chapter one I discuss Sartre’s standpoint on freedom by contrasting it with that of psychological determinism, and I suggest how the relation between Sartre’s descriptions and his ontology should be conceived. Chapter two critically examines the related notions of ‘original choice’ and ‘original project’ and the role that they play within Sartre’s theory of freedom. Lastly, drawing on Sartre’s *Cahiers pour une Morale*, chapter three enquires into the ethical consequences of the results obtained by Sartre’s theory of freedom in *B&N*, and considers the value that, for

¹ Cf. Frede, *A Free Will. Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*, ch.3

² Cf. *B&N*, 505.

³ Cf. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, ch. 3.

Sartre, man can put in place of the unattainable 'In-itself-for-itself', how we can turn to it, whether it offers a viable alternative and whether there is any ground for a universalisation of Sartre's ethical suggestions that is at the same time consistent with his theory of freedom.

Chapter I - Ontological Freedom

An important part of Sartre's account of freedom consists in exhibiting the unintelligibility of psychological determinism. The starting point of psychological determinism consists usually in the enunciation of the principle of sufficient reason, which very generally expresses the idea that everything that happens must have a cause or a reason that explains why it happens rather than not. The idea of an event happening without a cause is deemed unintelligible, and if the determinist is asked for further proof of the principle he will reply that the questioner, by asking for a reason that justifies its universal application, is thereby complying with the principle itself.

Everything that happens, the determinist points out, must have a cause. But a 'cause', he contends, is not really a cause if it is not sufficient to bring about its effect; on the other hand, if it is impossible that a sufficient cause should not produce the effect, then a sufficient cause is a necessary cause.⁴ Accordingly, every action, insofar as it is an happening, must be determined by a (necessary-sufficient) cause. If the action is thought of as proceeding from an 'act of will', this act of will itself, being an happening or event, must have a determining cause for its happening. Accordingly, the libertarian notion of a *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* — the idea that one can indifferently choose between two or more courses of action without any prior cause determining one's willing — is deemed unintelligible by the determinist.⁵ Every action must, on the contrary, be determined by a prior motive that, by being present 'in' consciousness, brings about the action just as a physical cause produces its effect on a material body. The motive is therefore conceived of by the determinist as a 'psychic fact' that, present 'in' consciousness at a certain time t_1 , produces another psychic fact at t_2 or else a decision within an unbroken chain of full psychic states.

In commenting on Sartre's theory of freedom, McCulloch (1994, 38) writes that Sartre 'does not argue that we are metaphysically free', but 'assumes it' (*ibid.*) In what follows, I want to show that, on the contrary, Sartre's discussion of the nature of consciousness, of action and of temporality provides us with three independent set of considerations aimed, among other things, at arguing that we are free by undermining the intelligibility of psychological determinism. I shall now proceed to examine these three in turn and later I

⁴ Cf. for example Hobbes, 'Of Liberty and Necessity' (1999 [1645]).

⁵ 'Cf. for instance Schopenhauer (1999, 40 [1839]) 'If we attempt to represent to our mind such a *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* we soon become aware that here the understanding is really brought to a halt; it has no form of thinking such a thing'.

will suggest, in the light of the discussion, how I think the relation between Sartre's phenomenological-ontological claims and his phenomenological descriptions of everyday experiences should be understood in defining Sartre's argumentative pattern.

Let us start then with Sartre's conception of consciousness. The crucial aspect of this for the present purposes is the claim that consciousness is 'translucent', i.e. that there is nothing 'in' consciousness that is not consciousness (of)⁶ itself, contrary to what is suggested by what Sartre calls 'the effeminate philosophy of immanence'.⁷ If this can be proven, then the determinist's notion of motive is undermined, because it follows that there can be no such thing as a 'motive' if this is understood as a psychic fact that, present 'in' consciousness, provokes one's actions. For the purpose of understanding the relation between Sartre's ontology and his phenomenological descriptions, it is important to see how this conception of consciousness as translucent is attained, and to do so we need to examine Sartre's discussion from where he begins, i.e. from the introduction to *Being and Nothingness*.

The introduction to *B&N* is one of the most difficult and truly one of the most important sections of the entire work, and examining it will also enable me to lay out some theoretical material that will become relevant for my discussion of Sartre's ethics of freedom in chapter III. The introduction begins with Sartre pointing out how the philosophy of his time has made important progress in attempting to reduce 'the existent' to 'the series of appearances which manifest it' (*B&N*, 1) . This attempt, which he attributes to Husserl and Heidegger, goes in the right direction because it dispenses with the problematic dualism of 'being' and 'appearance' (as well as of potency/actuality), whereby being is conceived of as hidden behind or as the inaccessible 'interior' (*B&N*, 1) of appearance, thereby making our claims to *know* what is the case problematic.

On the contrary, phenomenology is defined by the idea of a *phenomenon* that 'is as it appears'. For instance, what the phenomenon 'force' *is*, is defined by the totality of the effects that it manifests or that appear (accelerations, deviations etc.).⁸ Of course one might think that what it means for something to be a real existent and what is involved in the subject having an appearance are two separate questions. Admittedly, Sartre does not argue for the preferability of considering the two matters together, because he takes this to have been sufficiently established by phenomenology. This does not mean, however, that

⁶ Where the parenthesis indicates, as we shall further elucidate in what follows, that the consciousness in question is conscious (of) itself in a 'pre-reflective' manner.

⁷ Cf. Sartre (1970, 5 [1939]).

⁸ Cf. *B&N*, 1.

his methodological stance is 'dogmatic'; it is rather aimed at avoiding the traditional philosophical problem of filling the gap, so to speak, between appearance and reality.

If the existent is reduced to the series of appearances which manifest it, these appearances must, as such, appear *to* a subject. This sole fact, Sartre points out, implies the possibility of multiplying ad infinitum the points of view on those appearances (*B&N*, 3). Each appearance, in other words, refers to an infinite number of other appearances. The principle or law which presides over the non-arbitrary succession of a series of appearances is defined as the 'essence' of the phenomenon under consideration, and the subject is said to be able to have an intuition of this essence — the essence itself can appear to the subject (*B&N*, 2-3). If a single appearance is sufficient to have an intuition of the *essence* of the phenomenon therein manifested, no single appearance can ever be sufficient to manifest the phenomenon in its completeness, because the appearances that manifest the phenomenon are infinite, and the phenomenon *is* the totality of these appearances.⁹ However, although in no single appearance the phenomenon is revealed 'completely', in each appearance the phenomenon is revealed 'absolutely', that is *as it is* — each appearance 'has its own *being*' (*B&N*, 4).

Now, Sartre agrees on the fact that, although relative to a subject, the phenomenon reveals itself 'absolutely' to the subject, and this will turn out to be important for our discussion of Sartre's ethics in the third chapter. To say that each appearance 'has its own being', however, leaves unexplained what it means for an appearance to have being, i.e. how the concepts of being and appearance should be coordinated. The first question that Sartre raises in connection with this is whether there is a 'phenomenon of being' (*B&N*, 4). It seems that being must appear in some way if we are to explain the fact that we can talk about it along with the existence of certain *moods* (such as boredom and the kind of nausea that he describes in the homonymous novel) that involve, on our behalf, an attitude towards everything that exists *in general*.

However, Sartre now asks, is this 'phenomenon of being' the same as the 'being of the phenomenon'? (*B&N*, 4). In other words, can we coordinate the concepts of being and appearance by understanding being as *itself* an appearance (the phenomenon of being) that appearances can disclose as the possibility of their manifestations? This is the posi-

⁹ As a result, Sartre points out, it seems that phenomenology has reintroduced a duality (albeit at the level of appearance) between the finite and the infinite. In order to grasp appearance as 'appearance-of-that-which-appears', Sartre points out, I must transcend it towards infinity. Moreover, because the series is infinite we have to think of the phenomenon in terms of potentiality, whereas the appearance is actual, thus it seems that phenomenology has also reintroduced a dualism of potency and actuality that it thought it had disposed of (*B&N*, 3).

tion that Sartre attributes to Heidegger. And yet, Sartre reasons, it is difficult to see what it is in the appearance that could 'do' this disclosing. For the phenomenon, whose aspects appearances manifest, only 'designates itself as an organised totality of qualities' (B&N, 5), but being is not one of these 'qualities'; nor is being the 'meaning' (or essence) of the phenomenon. Appearances do not refer to being as to their signification, but rather, Sartre affirms, as 'the condition of all revelation' (*ibid.*) Being must be conceived as the *ground* of appearance, as 'being-for-revealing' (*être-pour-dévoiler*).

The fact that the being of the phenomenon is conceived of as its 'ground', can be seen as allowing Sartre to affirm that he has not thereby reintroduced the duality phenomenon/noumenon (as Sartre understands it). For as Gardner (2010, 11) points out, 'while it is true that O [an object] considered *qua* the object-world is considered *in relation* to the subject, and that O considered *qua* being-in-itself is *not* considered in relation to the subject, the latter does not count as consideration of O 'as it really' is, because being-in-itself is categorically property-less — rather, it is the *ground* of things having properties [...].

But if being is conceived as the ground of appearance, then it would be futile to ask appearance (as, according to Sartre, Heidegger does) to reveal its being (i.e. the condition of the possibility of its appearing), because obviously 'being', insofar as it is this condition, must be *trans-phenomenal* — it cannot be 'revealed being' (*être dévoilé*). The phenomenon of being therefore, while according to Sartre it exists, *qua* phenomenon must *itself* be grounded on its being — the phenomenon of being cannot coincide with the being of the phenomenon (B&N, 5-6).

Nonetheless, one might ask, why do we need to conceive of being as the *ground* of appearance? Why does appearance need a trans-phenomenal ground in being? Can we not coordinate the notions of being and of appearance by saying that the being of appearance *is its appearing*? This, Sartre points out, is just another way of phrasing Berkley's *esse est percipi*, the idea that to be is to be perceived or to be known (B&N, 6). At this point, Sartre launches into an examination as to why this conception is unsatisfactory, and this will be crucial in exhibiting the ground of Sartre's conception of the nature of consciousness and to explain why a motive cannot be 'in' consciousness as the determinist believes.

If it is true that every metaphysics presupposes a theory of knowledge, it is also true, Sartre points out, that every theory of knowledge presupposes a metaphysics (B&N, 6). In other words, while the Berkeleyan wants to reduce being to being known, he must also consider the problem of the being of this very knowledge. As for this knowledge, i.e.

as for the totality 'perceived-perception' we can legitimately ask if this totality 'is'. If it is not, then 'it falls away in nothingness' (B&N, 6). If it 'is', then for the sake of consistency we shall have to say that what it is for it 'to be' is for it 'to be known'. But then there must be a subject that knows this knowledge, so the attention shifts from the *percipi* to the *percipiens*. If we now ask again what it is for the *percipiens* to 'be', for the sake of consistency we shall have to reply that it is for it to be known, and this leads us into a regress because we then need to introduce another *percipiens* that knows this first one to give it being and so on *ad infinitum*. Thus it seems that in the attempt to rescue the being of knowledge we are referred to the being of the subject, but now in order to stop the regress we need to declare the subject trans-phenomenal, i.e. 'not-subject' to the *percipi*.

However, what does it mean to 'be' for this trans-phenomenal knowing subject? It means, Sartre contends, for it to be 'conscious'. Consciousness, as Sartre puts it, 'is the trans-phenomenal dimension of being in the subject' (B&N, 7). Moreover, Sartre contends that it is a necessary and sufficient condition, in order for a knowing consciousness to be the knowledge of its object, that it be 'consciousness of itself as being that knowledge'.

It may be argued, as Rosenberg (1981) does in commenting on Sartre, that consciousness does not need to be conscious of itself in order to be knowledge (or more generally consciousness) of its object. When it comes to establishing this point, Rosenberg points out, Sartre does not really have an argument, and merely asserts circularly that consciousness must be conscious of itself because otherwise 'it would be a consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious' (B&N, 8). However, Rosenberg affirms, it does not follow from the fact that consciousness is not conscious of itself at the pre-reflective level that it must be an unconscious. We can conceive of a consciousness that, while non-conscious of itself, can nevertheless successfully 'intend' its object (Rosenberg 1981, 258). What might Sartre reply to this? Inviting the skeptic to pay attention to the fact that he is pre-reflectively conscious is problematic because, if he attempted to do so, he would inevitably fall on reflexivity (however 'complicit' he may attempt to remain with his previous consciousness).

There are, however, some considerations that can be seen as supporting Sartre's claim. First, it may be pointed out, it is a transcendental condition of being conscious of an object that consciousness takes itself as non-identical with that object. The cat that is non-self-consciously immersed in its chase after the quail, in Rosenberg's example, must at the very least distinguish itself from the quail in order to chase after it. But what can it mean for it to distinguish itself from the quail if not to be conscious of *itself* as not being the quail?

Second, if pre-reflective consciousness of an object is not conscious of itself, how do we conceive of its relation to reflective consciousness? Rosenberg (1981, 259) claims that 'there are occasions in which we ourselves come to a consciousness of having been aware of something, but come to this consciousness precisely as a consciousness of having been aware of that thing *without* at the same time having been aware of being aware of it'. But the question is '*how* do we characterise this transition?'. Take for instance Sartre's example of 'counting' cigarettes.¹⁰ Rosenberg would agree with Sartre that it is possible that I count twelve cigarettes without being 'reflectively' conscious of what I am doing, and that when somebody asks me 'What are you doing there?' I suddenly become reflectively conscious of what I am doing and I answer: 'I am counting'. However, Rosenberg would contend, 'before' I was asked, I was not conscious of *myself* counting (not even non-positionally, as Sartre on the contrary thinks), I only had what Sartre would call a 'positional' consciousness of each cigarette counted.

Now, as I have pointed out, this positional consciousness already requires that I distinguish myself from the cigarettes that I count, and it is difficult to see how one could understand this without making reference to my being conscious of not being the cigarettes. Quite apart from this, however, Rosenberg's view implies that we have to conceive of reflective consciousness as a 'new' consciousness that knows the first (on the present assumption) non self-conscious consciousness. But the trouble with this conception is that it presents us with two consciousnesses that form two isolated independent wholes, and we are faced with the naive realism problem of understanding how these two can enter into relation with each other, and above all of how they can be reunited into an *internal* relation as it is the case of reflective knowledge.

Moreover, this view leaves room to skeptical doubt, depriving the reflection and the *cogito* of their certainty. For one can always ask 'how do you know that it is the same consciousness the one reflected-on the one that knows it?' The alternative, which is Sartre's and which we shall deal with later, is to attempt to conceive of the consciousness reflected-on and the consciousness that directs itself to it as part of the same internal reflexive relation, but this is only possible if the first consciousness is already conscious (of) itself. In addition to this, on Rosenberg's conception, the manifestation *ex nihilo* of a reflective consciousness that apprehends the first non self-conscious consciousness seems gratuitous, whereas we shall see that Sartre's conception of the pre-reflective as already conscious allows him to give an explanation of the occurrence of reflection in teleological terms.

¹⁰ Cf. *B&N*, 9.

Finally, to have twelve distinct positional consciousnesses of twelve distinct cigarettes is not sufficient to 'count' them and build up a sum, because counting is a synthetic operation — it requires that each unit be added synthetically to the previous ones. It is necessary that the previous units be 'retained' so that the following ones may be added to them. They are not just retained by themselves, they require an operative intention. But how can this operative intention be explained if all that consciousness 'is' at the pre-reflective level is an intending of objects that is not aware of itself?

It seems therefore that Sartre's claim that consciousness needs to be consciousness of itself can be supported in many ways. However, as we have mentioned, if consciousness of itself must be certain of itself as it distinctively is, then this self-consciousness cannot be identified with 'self-knowledge', i.e. with a dual structure in which we have a consciousness 'known' that is the *object* of a knowing consciousness. Otherwise we can ask, how does the knowing consciousness know its identity with the known consciousness? To introduce a third knowing consciousness that knows the relation between the two would amount to generating another regress. On the other hand, to suggest that the identity in question can be 'inferred' would be to violate the obvious fact that we do not come to 'conclude' that I am conscious of myself *as myself*.

The only available alternative, it would seem, is that consciousness must be internally self-related in a way that makes it certain of itself without making itself into an object. This is why Sartre refers to this pre-reflective consciousness as 'consciousness (of) itself', where the parenthesis indicates that 'itself' is not the object of 'consciousness'. In chapter two we shall say more about how this primitive internal self-relatedness should be understood and how this is of consequence for Sartre's ethics. The crucial point for the moment is that if consciousness must originally be conscious (of) itself without being an object for itself, then it means, Sartre contends, that originally self-consciousness *could never be a consciousness of objects*, which implies according to Sartre that consciousness itself can have 'no content', or that there is nothing in consciousness that is not consciousness (of) itself.¹¹

Consciousness therefore exists as consciousness (of) itself as conscious *of* something that is outside it. To say that consciousness is consciousness *of* something does not mean that consciousness 'constitutes' that of which it is consciousness, but that consciousness is a *relation* to the object it is consciousness of. Sartre thinks that to be con-

¹¹ Moreover, as Frank (2004, 156) points out, due to the infinite aspects in which for Sartre an object can be given, if consciousness knew itself objectively it would have to make an infinite inventory of itself and would lose its immediate certainty.

conscious of something 'is to be confronted with a concrete and full presence which *is not* consciousness' (B&N, 16), i.e. that the object of which consciousness is conscious must be *transcendent* - it must not be consciousness. Sartre calls the intending consciousness 'For-itself' (*pour soi*)¹², and the transcendent being that consciousness intends 'in-itself' (*en soi*). The meaning of these two notions is progressively enriched in the course of Sartre's discussions in *Being and Nothingness*, and it can only be properly grasped as a result of them. However, we can already say as a result of the present discussion that while consciousness is *transparent* to itself— i.e it is 'for-itself'— being-in-itself is *opaque*, it is 'filled with itself' (B&N, 21) and the best way to describe its way of existence is to say the being that constitutes the transcendent object of consciousness '*is what it is*'. On the contrary the for-itself as consciousness, as we shall see in the next chapter, *is not what it is* and rather 'has to be what it is'.

The fact that consciousness is transparent to itself and that there is nothing in consciousness that is not consciousness (of) itself enables us to understand how Sartre's theory of consciousness undermines the intelligibility of psychological determinism: action cannot be determined by a motive that is 'in' consciousness and that moreover acts on myself without me being aware of it. For according to the previous discussion (1) no such psychic fact could be present 'in' consciousness and (2) consciousness is from the very beginning conscious (of) itself.

If we now stand back, as it were, and examine Sartre's argumentative pattern in this first instance, we come to the following conclusions. First, Sartre's account of the nature of consciousness, which is of crucial importance for his rejection of psychological determinism, is not 'stated as a premiss' as Warnock (1970, 6) misleadingly suggests, nor is it part of a collection of 'unproved and extremely general ontological propositions' (*ibid.*). On the contrary, it is the result of Sartre's examination of alternative possible ways of making sense of the nature of consciousness and of reality, and of his argued rejection of them as unsuitable. Rather than being merely 'window dressing' or the result of Sartre wanting to 'fancy himself a scholar', these passages are fundamental for an appreciation of the merit of Sartre's views.

The unintelligibility of alternative views, therefore, is not exclusively grounded on our acceptance of Sartre's phenomenological descriptions as indisputable, but on a (often preliminary) independent discussion. This means that when phenomenological descriptions of everyday experiences are introduced, although in absolute terms they are not in-

¹² While here as well as in other passages Sartre uses 'consciousness' and 'for-itself' interchangeably, when it becomes relevant, he is careful to identify the For-itself more properly with 'embodied consciousness'.

disputable *qua* descriptions, the terrain for our acceptance of them and of the conclusions Sartre wants to derive from them has already been prepared (or sometimes will be) and is supported by an independent rejection of alternative possible accounts. The phenomenological description of counting, for example, is not the 'proof' that the pre-reflective cogito is a (or indeed 'the') transcendental condition for the possibility of experience. Rather, the necessity of conceiving of self-consciousness as an original internal, non-positional self-relatedness has already emerged 'negatively' by the rejection of the possibility of conceiving otherwise. The example of counting provides then a situatedness for further *reflection* on how consciousness should positively be conceived of. And the strength of Sartre's pattern of argumentation consists, I think, in showing that the direction indicated by the rejection of alternative models is confirmed by the situated reflection carried out upon his phenomenological descriptions.

If we now examine Sartre's second set of considerations aimed, among other things, at undermining the intelligibility of psychological determinism, we see that it exhibits the same argumentative pattern. These considerations are contained in Sartre's account of action and of the relation between nothingness and negation, which I will now characterise. Action, Sartre asserts in the chapter on freedom (*B&N*, 455) is on principle 'intentional'. The careless smoker who sets a powder magazine on fire through his negligence, he says, 'has not acted' (*ibid.*). In order for something to count as action, the agent must consciously be engaged in a project towards an end.¹³ If this is the case, then action implies as its condition the recognition of a 'desideratum', i.e. of something that we desire and want to actualise (*B&N*, 456). Accordingly, Sartre claims, the process of constitution of an end, which is necessary for action, carries within itself a double 'negation'. On the one hand, the subject posits an ideal, desired state of affairs that as such *is not present*. On the other hand, the subject posits his actual situation 'as a nothingness in relation to this state of affairs' (*B&N*, 457), i.e. as lacking in something, as an objective lack or 'négativité'.

How, Sartre now asks rhetorically, can something that 'is not' (an end) be caused by something that 'is', that is, by a factual state, as proposed by determinism? Moreover, how can a factual state reveal itself as 'lacking' in something (as a *négativité*)? As long as consciousness is regarded as a being that is a plenitude, Sartre argues, 'it is perpetually referred from being to being, and cannot find in being any motive for revealing non-being' (*B&N*, 456). If these 'nihilations' (*néantisations*) cannot be effected by the in-itself,

¹³ For an opposite view, see John Hyman's recent book: *Action, Knowledge, & Will* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), ch. 2.

they must come from the for-itself. This means, Sartre points out, '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' (*ibid.*).

In other words, according to Sartre action is on principle intentional and as such must have an end. This end however, is freely created by the for-itself, and it is only in the light of this freely posited end that something can appear as motivating. Even a strong passion such as the fear of dying from starvation, Sartre says, 'has meaning only outside itself in an end ideally posited, which is the preservation of a life which I apprehend as "in danger"' (*B&N*, 459). This does not mean that we need to reflectively make our motives explicit as in the case of deliberation, but at least it means that we must have conferred a value on them so that they can appear as motivating (*ibid.*).

However, what does it mean to posit one's current state as lacking and to apprehend a negative state of affairs in general? Does it mean primarily to 'judge' that certain state of affairs is not the case? The fact that the absence of something and negative states of affairs in general cannot be perceived in the world as an 'object' might incline us to deny that there is any *objective* reality to nothingness (negative state of affairs are not in the external world, which is rather conceived of as a fullness of being). To the extent that a negative dimension emerges in the world, this is to be found in the subject, and more precisely at the level of the subject's *judgments*. 'Nothingness' is then conceived as a totality constituted by these negative judgments: 'a concept establishing the transcendent unity of all these judgments' (*B&N*, 30).

For instance, to 'see' someone's absence from a place where we expected him or her to be, Bergson (1911, 297) would say, amounts to making a comparative judgment between the result anticipated and the result that obtains (both of which are *existents*, one imagined or thought and the other found or perceived). It may be suggested that, on this view, Sartre's account of motivation would still be compatible with determinism, because what it means to perceive a negative state of affairs is merely to make a comparative judgment between two positive states of affairs - the judgment being a 'full psychic act'.

Nevertheless, Sartre has a number of reasons to suggest that (1) we can have a *pre-judgmental* 'experience' of negative state of affairs; (2) that it is this pre-judicative experience of negative state of affairs that grounds our negative judgments, and not vice versa. First, it is not clear where exactly, in the judgmental theory's picture, we should place the negation. My judgment 'I expected to see X in this cafe' and my judgments 'I see a chair'; 'I see four chairs' 'I see a table' 'I see a waiter' etc. are positive psychic acts which

establish or describe facts. Where does the negation come from? Bergson suggests that negation is a further representation of the exclusion of the imagined object from the reality found: '*the idea of an object conceived as "not existing"*', he claims, '*is necessarily the idea of the object "existing" with, in addition, the representation of an exclusion of this object by the actual reality taken in block*' (Bergson, 1911, 302).¹⁴

On this picture the 'not' is therefore thought of as a category that the mind possesses (or that at any rate is engendered when we formulate certain affirmative judgments) as a form of sorting out and separating. However, Sartre would contend that by conceiving of negation in this way, i.e. as a category that 'comes suddenly to mark with its seal certain thoughts' (B&N, 35) which results from our affirmative judgments, 'we will have carefully stripped negation of all negative function' (*ibid.*). Moreover, as we have said earlier, Sartre's theory of the imagination as put forward in *L'imaginaire* shows, if sound, that we cannot *first* posit an imagined existent and distinguish it *subsequently* from actual perceptions (through the 'not'). Rather, Sartre argued that the image must enclose in its very structure a 'nihilitating thesis'. Imaginative consciousness constitutes the object as existing *elsewhere or not existing*.

Sartre therefore suggests that we must allow for a pre-judicative experience of nothingness that grounds our negative judgments, and in support of this claim he provides a number of phenomenological descriptions of what is involved in certain common practices that characterise our everyday life where the priority of the pre-judicative experience of nothingness is exhibited. Once again, however, it should be stressed once again that the unintelligibility or problematicity of the judgmental theory of negation is not grounded exclusively on these descriptions. The practice of 'questioning', for example, *can* but need not be expressed by an interrogative judgment. I can question, Sartre points out, by a look, a gesture. What is more, Sartre contends, the pervasive practice of questioning involves three nihilations. First, the subject must posit itself as 'not knowing' the answer; second, the subject posits the possibility that the answer be negative (unless it is a rhetorical question); third, the answer will negate or exclude another possible answer: 'it is this, not that'. If your car breaks down and you don't know what caused the malfunction, you may ask yourself: 'Is it the carburettor, or the spark plugs or something else?'. If you find out that it is the carburettor, you will at the same time have found out, in accord with Spinoza's principle, that it is *not* the spark plugs (B&N, 31).

¹⁴ Emphasis in the original.

According to the judgmental theory, when the car breaks down I *judge* that I don't know what caused the malfunction and then I *judge* again that it is not the carburettor etc. Sartre would argue that to say that in these cases we 'judge' that we are ignorant of something appears to be a very mechanic and unnatural and phenomenologically inaccurate reconstruction of what happens. Instead, he suggests, we have a pre-judicative comprehension of what we lack. Similarly, we have a pre-judicative comprehension, we see that the carburettor is not working. Moreover, it seems bizarre to say that what we 'expect' to find in checking the carburettor is a judgment-response of the type 'it is not X' (as on the judgmental view). Rather than a judgment, he contends, what I expect is 'a disclosure of being on the basis of which we can make a judgment' (*B&N*, 31).¹⁵

Finally, via his famous example of Pierre and the Café (*B&N*, 33-35) Sartre thinks that he can provide evidence that nothingness assumes 'concrete' forms¹⁶. I have got an appointment with Pierre at four o'clock in a café. I am late and I wonder whether he will have waited for me. I arrive, I look at the room and I say to myself 'He is not here'. What we are asking is: 'Does negation enter/appear only with this judgment, or is there an intuition of Pierre's absence on which my judgment is grounded?'

First, Sartre points out that in perception there is always the construction of a figure on a *ground*. In Sartre's words, when I enter the café looking for Pierre 'there is formed a synthetic organisation of all the objects of the café, on the ground of which Pierre is given as about to appear' (*B&N*, 33). Sartre calls this organisation of the café which I effect 'nihilation' and contends that this nihilation 'is given to me in intuition' (*ivi*, 34) (in accord with the principle that consciousness is always conscious (of) itself). There is then a second nihilation that I effect and witness, which consists in the nihilation of the objects of the café which I look at (especially the faces) and which I for a moment mistake for Pierre and that I then cause to disappear into the ground when I realise that they are not him: 'Could this be Pierre?'. No. And I move to another object or face and so on.

So what is offered to intuition, Sartre argues, is 'a flickering of nothingness; it is the nothingness of the ground, the nihilation of which summons and demands the appearance of the figure, and it is the figure-nothingness which slips as a *nothing* to the surface of the ground' (*B&N*, 34). From this he concludes that 'What serves as a foundation for the judgment — "Pierre is not here" — is in fact the intuitive apprehension of a double nihila-

¹⁵ This reflects Sartre's account of consciousness, according to whichthetic consciousness, i.e. consciousness with the propositional form of the kind envisaged by the judgmental theory of negation, is a secondary mode of consciousness that is *grounded* on the 'pre-reflective' *conscience (de) soi*.

¹⁶ Cf. Gardner (2009, 64).

tion' (*ibid.*) and that 'my expectation has caused the absence of Pierre to *happen* as a real event concerning this café. It is an objective fact at present that I have *discovered* this absence [...]' (*ibid.*) The way in which the absence of Pierre is given to me, is therefore different to the purely judgmental way in which the absence of 'Wellington' is given to me if I decide to amuse myself by formulating this kind of judgment. If negation is conceived of as sort of stamp set indifferently on certain judgments, how can the advocate of the judgmental theory account for the fact that 'it can nihilate a being, cause it suddenly to rise, and then name it to be thrown back to non-being' (*B&N*, 35) as the phenomenological description of this example shows?

Therefore, Sartre contends, it would seem that our apprehension of negative judgments must be grounded on these nihilations, and that originally what it means for me to posit my current state as lacking with respect to an ideal state of affairs is not to judge that this state of affairs is absent, but to have a pre-judgmental experience of its absence and of myself as lacking it. And Sartre's point is that it is unintelligible how any factual state whatsoever could produce this negative moment in which consciousness constitutes itself as a negation. As long as I am immersed in being, in the perception of my room for instance, how can I experience it as the room in which someone *no longer* is or else as the room which I should exit to go for a walk?

This is also a reason why the relation between my present consciousness and my past consciousness cannot be understood as a relation of *determination*. There is a 'cleavage between the immediate psychic past and the present consciousness' (*B&N*, 51). In order to be able to effect these nihilations, 'it is necessary that conscious being constitutes itself in relation to its past as separated from its past by a nothingness' (*B&N*, 52). The self, therefore, insofar as its being is consciousness, must be conscious of this cleavage between its present and its past, but it is not conscious of it as a 'phenomenon which it experiences', (*B&N*, 52) but rather, Sartre contends, as 'a structure of consciousness which it is' (*ibid.*) . Because my past consciousness and my immediate consciousness are separated by a nothingness, I can always 'posit' the former, i.e. see it as an object thereby reconfiguring it as 'past' and decide whether to recover what previously motivated it.

The structure of temporality, therefore, provides Sartre with a third possible way of challenging the psychological determinist's assumption that the relation between my past and my present is a relation of determination — it is on the contrary, according to Sartre, a relation of 'interpretation'. Once again, the necessity of making sense of the type of nihilations described in Sartre's phenomenological example is not the sole basis for Sartre's contention that we have to consider my present and my immediate psychic past as separ-

ated by a nothingness. There are, in this case as well, independent considerations that Sartre can appeal to in order to claim that the past cannot be conceived of as an in-itself independent from the present that yet can act on the present.

If the past were conceived as something that exists in-itself as *separate* from our present, as having a kind of honorary existence in itself, then all bridges between the past and the present would be cut, and we could ask how something that exists as completely separate from us could be efficacious on ourselves. If my past consciousness has to be efficacious on my present consciousness, as the determinist thinks, the relation between the past and the present cannot be conceived of as an *external* one between two isolated givens. Rather, the past must be understood as the past *of this present* and therefore as *my* past. However, as Sartre points out in the chapter on temporality, I cannot conceive of myself as *having* this past in the same way in which I can be said to have or own an external object (*B&N*, 135). Otherwise we would have reintroduced under a different form the above problematic separateness between present and past. An external relation of this kind would again 'hide an impassable abyss between a past and a present which would then be two factual givens without communication' (*B&N*, 136).

Therefore, we have to make this relation internal and say that I *am* my own past or that the present '*is* its past' (*B&N*, 136). For example, I am the man that was hurt yesterday by a comment made by someone regarding a certain action I performed, and it is because my past consciousness of feeling hurt is the past consciousness of the present consciousness that it can exist — it is because I am my own past that the past 'enters into the world' (*B&N*, 139). But how can the present 'be' the past? How can my present consciousness 'be' its past consciousnesses? Sartre's solution is to say that I can only be it in the mode of the 'was', i.e. that the past is what I am without being able to live it or in the mode of the 'was'. In other words, the past and the 'was' (as will be the case for the present and the future) are understood in terms of their *meaning*, as characterising *the way of being of the for-itself*. 'the meaning of the "was" [...] merely characterises the type of being of the for-itself—i.e., the relation of the for-itself to its being' (*B&N*, 141).

What the past means is my 'facticity', it is what I 'have to be' with no possibility of not being it, it is 'the in-itself which I am' and for which therefore I have to take responsibility. But precisely because I 'have to be' my past, I am not it. The fact that the past has the irremediable characteristics of an in-itself means on principle that, according to Sartre, I cannot be it in the mode of self-identity, because the for-itself is not what it is in the mode of self-identity. The only possible way in which I can conceive of myself as being the past in the mode of 'having to be it' is, according to Sartre, if I am separated by it by 'nothing-

ness'. It is this breadth of nothingness between my immediate psychic past and my present, of which I am conscious as a structure of myself, that makes it possible for me to dissociate myself from it, and the phenomenological description provided by the example of Pierre and the Café fleshes out what is involved in doing so.

Now if, as a result of the previous discussion, a motive cannot be something that, present in consciousness, provokes my action; and if similarly a cause cannot be an objective state of affairs that 'determines' my action, then the meaning of 'motive' and 'cause' stand in need of clarification. I will clarify how Sartre conceives of them and how they are related to the notion of 'end' in defining action and freedom. What is a motive, what is a cause? The distinction between causes and motives, according to Sartre, is generally *taken* to be that a cause (*motif*) is 'the *reason* for the act' or as 'the ensemble of rational considerations which justify it' (B&N, 445-446), whereas a motive (*mobile*) is understood more as a subjective fact, i.e. as an ensemble of desires, emotions, passions etc.

For instance, we may say that what *causes* Clovis (the King of the Franks who conquered Gaul in the 6th Century after Christ) to convert to Catholicism is that 'Clovis sees an opportunity of getting into the good graces of the episcopate, which is all powerful in Gaul' (B&N, 468). On this account, the cause is therefore characterised as an objective appreciation of the situation. However, what Sartre contends, as we have seen, is that this objective appreciation itself can be made only in the light of a presupposed end and within the limits of a project. In order for the power of the episcopate to be revealed to Clovis *as a cause* for his conversion, it is necessary for him first to posit as an end the conquest of Gaul. A cause is therefore redefined by Sartre as '*the objective apprehension of a determined situation as this situation is revealed in the light of a certain end as being able to serve as the means for attaining this end*' (B&N, 468).¹⁷

Now, Sartre points out that while we can easily rationally understand the technical usefulness of Clovis' conversion on the assumption that he has the conquest of Gaul in view as his end, we cannot do the same with his project of conquest itself. Clovis's project of conquest is not self-explanatory as the instrumentality of his conversion to the attainment of the conquest appears to be. Rather, it appears as irrational, as lacking justification. Why did he engage in this project of conquest at all? Now, the lack of self-explanatoriness of the end posited by the agent is, according to Sartre, what leads us to want to introduce a 'motive' into the picture, i.e. a subjective fact (like an ensemble of desires, emotions, passions) that interprets it, i.e. that interprets our positing of a certain end. In our ex-

¹⁷ Emphasis added.

ample, for instance, we may want to understand Clovis's project of conquest as the result of his *ambition*.

However, Sartre contends, this would not be explanatory at all, insofar as 'ambition' just *is* the purpose of conquering (B&N, 470-71). Ambition is not distinct from the project that it is supposed to 'incite' (in Clovis' case, the project of conquering). Therefore, we are led to the realisation that the project towards the end (in the light of which Clovis discovers a cause for being converted) *is precisely* the motive (*mobile*). More precisely, if a cause is the for-itself's objective apprehension of a determined situation as instrumental to the pursuit of an end, what it is for the for-itself to have a motive, Sartre says, is just to be conscious (of) it-self as conscious of a certain state of affairs as a cause. Cause and motive are therefore seen as correlative in the same way in which in Sartre's theory of consciousness, positional object consciousness and non-positional self consciousness are correlative:

The for-itself is therefore the consciousness *of* this cause. But this positional consciousness *of* the cause is on principle a non-thetic consciousness of itself as a project towards an end at the very moment at which it is constituted as a revealing consciousness of the organisation of the world into causes.

(B&N, 471)

Sartre's account of action and of the meaning of cause and motive, therefore, reflects and is supported by his account of consciousness.

To recapitulate what has been said until now: (1) action is intentional, and as such it is the projection of the for-itself towards an end; (2) this end is a non-existent, so to posit it, I need to detach myself from being and from the present; (3) as soon as the end is posited, I shall have shaped, I shall see the world in a different way, as organised in different instrumental complexes. I now apprehend a certain state of affairs as a cause, i.e. as a reason for action, and my motive is nothing but the contemporaneous consciousness that I have of myself as apprehending this state of affairs as a cause.

But crucially Sartre does not see these as different stages that are separated by a time lapse and can be ordered along a chronological line. Rather, he thinks that we need to introduce these distinct notions to explain action, but once we have done so we see that the meanings of these notions can only be understood with reference to each other, and that therefore we should renounce to explain action according to any particular ordered structure.¹⁸ As he puts it, 'the cause (*motif*), the motive (*mobile*) and the end are three indissoluble terms of the thrust of a free and living consciousness which projects itself to-

¹⁸ Because of these features, Sartre's theory of action has sometimes been assimilated to a variant of action theory. Cf. Atwell (1972 & 1980).

wards its possibilities and makes itself defined by these possibilities' (B&N, 471). Each of these three structures 'claims the two others as its meaning. But the organised totality of the three is no longer explained by any particular structure, and its upsurge as the pure temporalizing nihilation of the in-itself is one with freedom. It is the act which decides its ends and its motives, and the act is the expression of freedom' (B&N, 460).

We can see therefore how freedom serves, in Sartre's philosophy, as a final *explanans*: '[F]reedom appears as an unanalyzable totality; causes, motives, and ends, as well as the mode of apprehending causes, motives, and ends, are organised in a unity within the compass of this freedom and must be understood in terms of it' (B&N, 474). The concept of freedom, as Gardner (2009, 169) puts it, 'is locked into horizontal relations with other fundamental concepts, and the measure of success of Sartre's strategy is that we should reach a point where these merge into one another', which is what Sartre thinks he has shown.

On Sartre's account, freedom is therefore inseparable from the being that we are, and this is why he calls it 'ontological freedom'. This does not mean that because we are free ontologically we cannot be 'un-free' in other practical senses. As we have said, Sartre recognises other practical notions of freedom. This emerge clearly, for example, from the following passage:

Thus we shall not say that a prisoner is always free to go out of prison, which would be absurd, nor that he is always free to long for release, which would be an irrelevant truism, but that he is always free to try to escape (or get himself liberated); that is, that whatever his condition may be, he can project his escape and learn the value of his project by undertaking some action.

(B&N, 505)

It is the identification of ontological freedom with 'freedom as a whole', wrongly attributed to Sartre, that has given birth to a number of criticisms raised against Sartre in the literature. For example Anderson (1993, 25) accuses Sartre's theory of freedom of having a quietistic implication because '[i]f human reality is freedom, and human freedom is total, absolute and unlimited', then 'all situations are equivalent in freedom' and 'there is no reason to change the concrete conditions in which humans live, even if they appear terribly oppressive'. This is a similar type of objection to the one raised Markuse (1948) at the time, when he claimed for Sartre we are 'free even in chains'.¹⁹ It is true that there is a sense in which for Sartre we are free even in chains and under oppressive regimes, but

¹⁹ Although of course Markuse's critique of Sartre is not restricted to this point alone.

this by no means implies that we cannot be un-free in a different, practical sense, let alone that we should not strive towards the realisation of social and political freedom. On the contrary, as we shall see in chapter three, this is precisely the ultimate ethical message of Sartre's philosophy.²⁰

The passage on the prisoner quoted above allows us to make a further consideration on Sartre's conception of action. The fact of understanding action as an unanalysable totality (if not in terms of the meaning of the concepts that we employ to account for it) has the consequence, among others, of preventing us to distinguish between the action and the intention: 'Our description of freedom, since it does not distinguish choosing and doing, compels us to abandon at once the distinction between the intention and the act [...] and as it happens our speech informs us of our thought, so our acts of will inform us of our intentions' (*B&N*, 505).

It would seem to follow from this that for Sartre not only can I not act if I do not intend, but I cannot intend if I do not actually act. But if this was true, it would make the statement 'I intended to do X, but I did not' self-contradictory. Therefore I suggest that we reformulate Sartre's position in the light of what can be evinced from the passage quoted above. In other words, I suggest that we interpret Sartre as saying not that I cannot intend to do X if I don't achieve the result X, but that I cannot intend to do X if do not do anything to try achieve that result.

On the other hand, it is true that we usually think of ourselves as being able to plan and to commit to doing certain actions in advance. But in many cases, it is not obvious what I could possibly do now that would show that I intend to do something tomorrow. Therefore, it seems that the fact should be recognised that Sartre's account of action has the counterintuitive implication that I cannot really 'decide' now what I shall do at a later stage.

Another feature of Sartre's account that may be pointed out is that it does not seem to offer us a clear way of distinguishing between an action and a mere undergoing when it seems controversial that a certain bodily movement was done intentionally, for example. The intention is not distinguished by the action as a separate 'psychic event' that precedes it. As we shall see in the next chapter, Sartre's notion of 'original project' can be seen as providing the criterion to establish whether an event that might be exchanged for a mere undergoing (like a cough) was intentional or not.

²⁰ Cf. Baiasu (2015, 890-92).

Before moving to the next chapter, however, let us recapitulate the results achieved so far. In this chapter, I have characterised Sartre's account of freedom by way of contrasting it with the standpoint of psychological determinism. I have shown that Sartre does not (as McCulloch claims) merely 'assume' that we are free, nor does he ground his rejection of psychological determinism on a 'monstrous logical leap' by arguing that 'since I can *imagine* different courses of action [...] therefore I can act freely', as Blair (1970, 16) deceptively suggests. Finally, although the kind of metaphysical anguish in the face of freedom described in *Nausea* is important in Sartre's account in that it shows the possibility of 'experiencing' freedom, Sartre does not stake the merits of his account exclusively on this point.²¹ Rather, Sartre has three independent set of arguments, each of which can be seen as undermining psychological determinism. The first is contained in his discussion of the nature of consciousness, the second in his account of action and of the relation between nothingness and negation, and the third in his conception of temporality. I have attempted to show that Sartre's ontological claims are not stated as 'unproved premises', as suggested by Warnock; nor are they grounded exclusively on our acceptance of his description of everyday experience, as Morris, I think wrongly, suggests.

If it may be true that one of Sartre's chief aims in *Being and Nothingness* is to bring the reader to effectuate a conversion in the way she conceives of herself, the degree of sophistication of Sartre's ontological discussions seems irreconcilable with the thought that he does not also have an interest in establishing philosophical truths argumentatively. Once the unintelligibility of psychological determinism has been argued for, Sartre reconceptualises the notions of 'motive' and 'cause' and 'end' in terms of the the for-itself's *ontological freedom*, from which they receive their meaning.

²¹ As Olson (1956, 176-177) seems to suggest.

Ch. II - The Original Project and Choice of Myself

In the previous chapter we have seen how the freedom that Sartre attributes to the For-itself is 'ontological', i.e. how it is inseparable from (or more precisely consists in) the for-itself's peculiar ontological status. I have also examined how it is in terms of this original freedom of the for-itself that, according to Sartre, the meaning of 'action', and that of the subordinate notions of 'end', 'cause' and 'motive' should be understood.

However, if the for-itself's actions can in no way be explained in terms of previous determining motives or causes; if each one of the for-itself's actions must in fact be understood as the thrust of a free and living consciousness which constitutes its causes, motives and ends; if, in other words, there is no factual state either present or past in terms of which the actions of the *pour soi* could possibly be accounted for, do our actions not appear as comparable to a collection of capricious jerks completely unforeseeable, gratuitous and therefore ultimately unintelligible?

This objection is commonly found in the history of philosophy, for example throughout 19th century debates on the freedom of the human will. 'What would become of this world', Schopenhauer (1999, 55 [1839]) for example asks in his *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, 'if necessity did not permeate all things and held them together? [...]. A monster, a rubbish heap, a caricature without sense and significance - the work of true and utter chance -'. It would be a world in which we could expect everything from everyone at every moment - a world in which, as Williams James put is, 'a man's murderer may as probably be his best friend as his worst enemy, a mother be as likely to strangle as to suckle her first-born'²².

This picture, however, does not seem to square with our every-day experience. Indeed, while it may be true that sometimes people manifest uncharacteristic behaviour, they most often appear to show a degree of coherence in what they do, and it is precisely with respect to their usual patterns that we define what counts as uncharacteristic behaviour for them. Although it has sometimes been suggested that Sartre and existentialism more broadly endorse such a gratuitous view of our particular actions, this is not Sartre's position. Whilst there is both a sense in which for Sartre 'nothing' accounts for our behaviour and a sense in which our behaviour is ultimately absurd, as we shall see, this gratuitousness is not to be found at the level of *particular actions*, as it is sometimes suggested.

²² This is how James (1897, 157, note 1) colourfully presents the objection that is usually raised by the determinist against those who, like James himself, hold libertarian positions.

Nonetheless, due to the numerous reasons examined in the previous chapter, Sartre cannot of course explain actions in terms of their immediate antecedent causes, nor can he explain them in terms of the past taken as irremediably influencing our present behaviour. And yet, as Sartre himself asks at one point 'if my act can be understood *neither* in terms of the state of the world *nor* in terms of the ensemble of my past taken as an irremediable thing', how 'could it possibly be anything but gratuitous'? (B&N, 475).

What we need is a unitary sufficient reason that would account for *all* of my reasons. It might be suggested that the notion of 'character' could serve precisely as the required unity or ground that could account for each agent's behaviour as a whole. This explanation, which stays closer to ordinary psychology, is adopted for example by Schopenhauer. On the one hand, Schopenhauer recognises that there are no motives that are 'objectively irresistible'. Even what can appear as the the strongest of our motives, the 'instinct of self preservation', can be defied as is shown by the fact that people sometimes sacrifice their lives for the sake of others. However, Schopenhauer would say, if a person possesses a certain character, then a certain state of affairs 'must' appear as motivating to him. Therefore although there are no 'objectively' irresistible motives, there are, according to this conception, 'subjectively' irresistible ones.²³

Consider the following Sartrean example. Imagine that you go on a hike with a group of friends and that you suddenly give up and throw your knapsack down before you planned destination is reached.²⁴ 'Why did you give up, while your companions did not?'. You and your friends have more or less the same physique, you have trained for a similar amount of time and in similar ways in order to prepare for that hike. What accounts for the fact that similar motivational circumstances provoke a certain reaction in you while a different or even an opposite one in another agent, Schopenhauer would say, is the fact that you two possess a different *character*. While your companion is 'tenacious', for example, you are 'a sissy' (B&N, 477). It may be thought that this is the end of the story, so to speak, and that we reach a final *explanans* with the notion of the agent's 'character'. Although this character is not chosen in a sense, it is something that the individual cannot disavow, and can therefore be thought of as sufficient to ground our attribution of responsibility.

²³ Cf. Schopenhauer (1999, 5 [1839]): '[A] a motive can never be irresistible in itself or have absolute power [...]. For we frequently see that even what is usually the strongest of all motives, the preservation of life, is nevertheless overcome by others, e.g. in suicide [...]. But although it was evident from this that motives have no purely objective and absolute compulsion, a subjective and relative one could nevertheless belong to them, namely for the person concerned [...]'.

²⁴ Cf. B&N, 475-477.

But three reasons can be pointed out, I think, as to why such a unitary explanatory ground, just like any other similar principle that lay at the same level of explanation, could not appear satisfactory to Sartre. The first reason can be found in the implications of Sartre's theory of consciousness. As we have seen, the transcendental being of the subject is consciousness. But the original way of being of consciousness is the pre-reflective cogito, and at this level nothing can be 'in' consciousness. Therefore, notions such as those of 'character', 'mental state', 'disposition' and 'quality' cannot be predicated of the agent insofar as she is considered in her original way of being, and cannot therefore be employed as explanatory principles to confer intelligibility upon her behaviour. Moreover, as we shall see, at the reflective level the agent cannot be predicated of these notions either if the reflection is 'pure'.

The second reason can be found, I think, in Sartre's account of motivation. Let us go back to our example of the hike: 'Why did you give up, while your companions did not?'. If reproached, you will probably defend yourself by saying something like 'I was too tired' (*B&N*, 476). Your answer seems to imply that your unbearable sense of fatigue is something like a 'factual given' that caused you to give up. However, along the lines traced in the previous chapter, Sartre wants to deny that there is any such factual given. Your fatigue, he claims, can only appear as unbearable to you in the light of an end, and no positive state of affairs could possibly have produced the negative moment required for the constitution of the end. The character only tells us that when a certain motivational circumstance will present itself, the agent with a certain character will respond to it in a certain way. But the appearance of a circumstance as motivating presupposes a free act (a nihilation) by which the agent constitutes this circumstance as motivating in the light of the end.²⁵

Before we examine the third reason for rejecting the notion of character as the unitary explanatory principle of our actions, an interesting question may be asked (which is generally neglected by commentators) about this Sartrean example, i.e. 'What does it mean to *perceive my fatigue as unbearable*'? Given the derivative character of judgement-responses and ofthetic consciousness that we have highlighted in the previous chapter, the unbearable in question cannot for Sartre be a 'judgment' or a 'thought' that I have about my sensation of fatigue. On the other hand, it seems that the unbearable cannot be the 'meaning' of my sensation either, because in that case the meaning would refer to my

²⁵ However, as we have seen, this moment can be separated only at the reflective level, while in actuality it is one with the action according to Sartre.

freedom, and the impossibility of exercising my freedom cannot be presented to me as the *quality* of an object.

We may attempt to make sense of this along the lines suggested by Sartre in his *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*. In that work, Sartre provides a number of phenomenological characterisations of the emotions in terms of a certain 'colouring of the world'. For example, when I am sad the world appears as an 'indifferentiated structure' (2002, 44 [1939]), as a 'frightful, illimitable monotony'. Similarly, one might suggest, the unbearability in question could be understood as a certain colouring of the external world (the hiking trail) as 'too fatiguing to be followed through up until the end'. But the significant difference between the two scenarios is that none of the phenomenological characterisations provided in the *Sketch* directly incorporate a 'practical meaning'. They are functional for my project of no longer acting or 'freezing my will'. But the greyness, the flatness, the monotony of the world as I experience it does not 'say', so to speak: 'you have got to stop'. Whereas in this particular case, my fatigue seems to be telling me precisely that I cannot go on.

Thus it seems that we are presented with a further difficulty here. Sartre does not discuss this issue in *Being and Nothingness*, but I suggest that we can get an insight into what might be his proposed solution if we attend to his discussion of affectivity in *L'Imaginaire*. It seems plausible that if 'unbearable fatigue' is not a judgment about my sensation, nor a real object, it must be a kind of 'unreal' or 'imaginary' object. We are looking for an explanation of how this imaginary object can produce a real effect that can cause me to stop. This appears particularly difficult to account for in Sartre's case, because one of his main contentions in *L'Imaginaire* is that the image cannot be understood as a reborn perception, and that it differs fundamentally from a perception in many ways, one of which is crucially the fact that it lacks sensory qualities. Therefore, Sartre could not explain how the image produces an affective reaction by appealing to a mechanism of sensory excitations where the image 'causes' these sensory excitations.

Therefore these real effects, Sartre (1948, 195/262 [1940]) indicates, can only be sought in the 'layer' (*couche*) of *real* existence on which every image as such rests, i.e. on imaginative *consciousness*. In imaginative consciousness, Sartre distinguishes two layers: the 'constitutive' layer and the layer that is characterised by our 'reaction' to the image. Very briefly, the constitutive layer is made of those 'intentions, movements, a knowledge and sentiments' that combine to form the image or the unreal (Sartre 1948, 195 [1940]), while the second layer is constituted by the intentions, movements, knowledges and sentiments which represent our *reaction* to the unreal object (*ibid.*) As we would expect, Sartre

thinks that it is not at the level of the second layer that we can find an explanation for the sensory modifications or the affective response that we are required to account for. Once the unreal object is constituted, as we have said, it cannot act causally on us by producing sensory modifications because it has no sensory qualities.

Therefore if we are to find a solution it must be at the level of the *constitutive* layer. Sartre's suggestion is that the affective reaction is the result of the constitutive forces of imaginative consciousness 'over-reaching' their functions or being 'over-zealous' (1948, 197 [1940]). For example, in the case of vomiting, it is not the 'repugnant' trait of the unreal object that causes nausea and vomiting. It is rather that certain organic modifications are *constitutive* of my production of the unreal object. Sartre thinks that in some cases these manifestations are so intense that they call attention to themselves, so that my consciousness will no longer be directed to the unreal object, but rather to these bodily modifications—my vomiting for example. It is because the unreal object has now slipped into the past that I mistake it, according to Sartre, for the 'cause' of the organic disorder by which my consciousness is presently occupied.²⁶

However, one might ask, if the unreal object is not the cause of my vomiting, what is its purpose? Can we not just do away with it? Sartre thinks that while the unreal object is not the cause of my affective modifications, still *I could not produce my affective modifications without it*.²⁷ He thinks that this mechanism can be further elucidated by explaining the connection between constitutive imagining consciousness and the 'affective ground' on which it feeds. I will try to explain this by applying it to the fatigue example. At first, while I am hiking, my fatigue appears as a diffuse feeling. The affective state, being consciousness, must have a correlative. When a feeling is directed on a real thing actually perceived, the thing sends back to it, in the manner of a screen, the 'light' it has received from it. By a game of reflection, the feeling itself is enriched constantly as the object 'imbibes affective qualities' (Sartre, 1948, 199 [1940]). Thus while I hike, I am conscious of the rock as 'difficult to climb' for example. On the other hand the rock reflects back to me the the qualification 'difficult to climb', feeding my fatigue, which in turn leads me to perceive the path as increasingly fatiguing and so on: 'each affective quality is so deeply incorporated in the object that it is impossible to distinguish between what is felt and what is perceived' (*ibid.*).

²⁶ Cf. Sartre (1948, 197-198 [1940]).

²⁷ Cf. Sartre (1948, 200 [1940]).

Sartre, I think, would say that what happens when I give up is that I have constituted an unreal object that serves as a *reflection* of my feeling(s) of fatigue. The unreal object is 'the simple reflection of the feeling' (Sartre 1948, 200 [1940]). It is not the *cause* of my organic changes, but it serves as an indispensable 'witness' (*un témoin*) for me to produce those organic changes. The feeling therefore 'feeds on its own reflection' (*ibid.*). The unreal object is what allows my previously indistinctly felt fatigue to become 'concentrated' and 'precise', Sartre would say.²⁸ The unreal object is posited beyond the affective developments as 'the unity of these developments' (Sartre 1948, 200 [1940]). But without this, Sartre (1948, 200 [1940]) claims, the reaction of disgust (or of fatigue in our case) could not be produced of itself: 'If the disgust swells beyond all measure and reaches the point of vomiting this happens because it is confronted by the unreal object; it reacts to itself as disgust *of that object*'. But this object, because it is nothing but the unitary reflection of our feelings, 'pertains *to the void*' (Sartre 1948, 200 [1940]). We vomit, Sartre (*ivi*, 201) affirms, '*because of nothing*'.

This explanation may not appear satisfactory, but what should be pointed out is, I think, that what Sartre is highlighting here is something profoundly problematic, i.e the complexity of understanding what it means for someone to experience an effort as 'too great to make', and if Sartre is right about the nature of the imagination, it may well be that there is no better way of making sense of this than the one suggested in *L'Imaginaire*.

Let us now go back to our examination of the reasons for rejecting the notion of character as the ultimate unitary ground of my actions. A third reason in addition to the two examined above can be found in Sartre's claim that the notion of 'character', quite apart from the legitimacy of employing it as an explanatory principle, if employed, is subjectively unsatisfactory *as an explanation*. Standard psychological explanations, Sartre indicates, account for the agent's behaviour in terms of her 'qualities' or 'dispositions' and so on, and on the basis of laws that explain how these interact in determinate situations. For example, the psychologist would explain Clovis' conquest of Gaul in terms of his 'ambition', as we saw in chapter one, or my giving up the hike in terms of my being a sissy. The result, Sartre claims, is that the psychologist's explanation boils down to the attribution to the agent of certain character traits, certain 'inexplicable givens' (*B&N*, 581) that as such do not satisfy us as an explanation.

The reason they do not satisfy us, however, is not that we can keep asking 'why' the agent presents those traits. In fact, Sartre recognises that our analysis must stop with

²⁸ Cf. Sartre (1948, 199 [1940]): 'Desire, disgust are at first diffuse, without precise intentionality. In organising itself with a knowledge into an imaginative form, desire becomes precise and concentrated'.

some irreducible. The objection is rather that the irreducible with which standard psychological explanations stop is not a *veritable* irreducible. By a veritable irreducible, Sartre understands an irreducible ‘of which the irreducibility would be self-evident’ (B&N, 581), that when used as a final *explanans* ‘would produce in us an accompanying feeling of satisfaction’ (*ibid.*), of ‘individual fulness’ (B&N, 584). This satisfaction and self-evidence are attained, according to Sartre, when the notion of ‘choice’ is exhibited as the ultimate irreducible. This irreducible, Sartre says, ‘receives its legitimacy as a *choice*, and we know that we do not have to push further’ (B&N, 592).

Sartre’s critique of psychological explanation, therefore, argues in two directions: downward from his metaphysics of the For-itself to the rejection of ordinary concepts of the mental as ‘applicable’ to it; and upwards from a critique of these concepts as lacking explanatory power to the need to find a better theoretical explanation of the for-itself’s behaviour. The notion of choice provides, according to Sartre, a satisfactory answer that is compatible with the results attained by his characterisation of the For-itself as ontologically free.

The choice in question of course cannot be the *particular* choice of giving up the hike or any particular choice of this kind. Rather, this particular choice ‘must be understood in terms of a primary project which is recognised as the project which can no longer be interpreted in terms of any other and which is total’ (B&N, 501). It is this initial or ‘original’ choice of an initial or original project that will explain why I made the particular choice of giving up. This original choice is particular in the sense that, as we shall see, it is unique for each for-itself, but on the other hand it is the explanatory ground of all my particular choices. At the same time, Sartre wants to say that the *meaning* of each particular ‘original choice’ can be made fully intelligible if understood as an exemplification—as a variation on a theme— of the fundamental project that, *qua* For-itself, we all have in common.

The ultimate common meaning of the For-Itself’s projects can be evinced, according to Sartre, if we reflect on the nature of its transcendental being, i.e. on the nature of consciousness.²⁹ As we have seen in the previous chapter, the fundamental law of consciousness is that it is positional consciousness *of* an object and at the same time non-positional consciousness (of) itself as consciousness of that object. To the extent that I am conscious of an object in this way, I am conscious of it in a particular *mode*, ‘as’ pleasurable, for instance, or as fearsome or else as the object of my belief . Therefore, for example, to be conscious of O as the object of my belief, is to believe O and at the same time to be con-

²⁹ Cf. B&N, 97-103 for the following discussion.

scious of believing O, where this latter consciousness of myself is non-positional as we have said.

It follows that while I can say of this table that it coincides with itself, I cannot say of my belief that it coincides with itself, because my belief is at the same time something 'other than' itself, i.e. non-positional consciousness (of) belief. The kind of being that belief has is therefore not that of self-coincidence enjoyed by the In-itself. On the other hand, consciousness (of) belief cannot be said to be self-identical either. This is because a consciousness (of) belief which would be self-identical would be a consciousness of belief that would be precisely nothing more than itself, i.e. that would not *also* be belief. But crucially, in order for my consciousness (of) belief not to be also belief, it would need to *dissociate* itself from belief, i.e. belief would need to stand as an 'object' before consciousness (of) belief³⁰, such that I can examine it and decide what to make of it. My consciousness would in that case be such that 'it would be free to determine itself as it pleased in the face of that belief' (B&N, 99), it would be able to perform the *epoche* or putting between parenthesis of that belief. But all this can happen precisely only at the reflective level, which however for Sartre requires a foundation in pre-reflectivity. My consciousness of belief so understood (i.e. where (of) is without parenthesis and belief is the object of my consciousness) would in other words need to 'assume consciousness of itself as consciousness (of) belief' (*ibid.*), and the problem of how to understand the relation between my consciousness (of) belief and belief in a way that is both unitary and dual will manifest itself once again. Thus we are obliged to admit, Sartre says, that just as belief is consciousness (of) belief, so 'consciousness (of) belief is belief' (B&N, 99).

However, as Sartre points out, it follows from what we have just said that these ontological statements cannot be understood as statements of identity. Rather, their meaning is that belief and consciousness (of) belief are both necessary and sufficient for each other, but as we have seen they can be identified neither with themselves nor with one another. Accordingly, we realise that as soon as we attempt to grasp the unitary being which comprises them both, this being, as Sartre puts it, 'slips between our fingers, and we find ourselves faced with a pattern of duality, with a game of reflections. For consciousness is a reflection (*réflet*), but qua reflection it is exactly the one reflecting (*réfléchissant*), and if we attempt to grasp it as reflecting, it vanishes and we fall back on the reflection' (B&N, 99-100). Therefore the self, Sartre (77) contends 'cannot be apprehended as a real existent' (B&N, 101) but:

³⁰ The parenthesis in (of) would need to be removed.

[R]epresents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of *not being his own coincidence*, of escaping identity while positing it as a unity - in short, of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of a multiplicity.

(B&N, 101)

Sartre calls this mode of being of the for-itself 'presence to itself' (*présence à soi*), and he (B&N, 101) states that '[t]he law of being of the *for-itself*, as the ontological foundation of consciousness, is to be itself in the form of presence to itself' (*ibid.*). To be present to itself is a way of 'not being wholly itself', a way of being separated by an impalpable fissure. But if we ask what it is that separates ourselves from ourselves, what it is that separates our consciousness (of) belief from our belief, we are forced to admit, he says, that it is 'nothing' (B&N, 101).

While distance and lapse of time can 'be apprehended in themselves and include as such elements of positivity' (B&N, 101), the fissure which separates us from ourselves is nothing except for the fact that it denies us coincidence with ourselves. Sartre accordingly defines this fissure as 'the pure negative' or as 'nothingness' (B&N, 102), and he calls the 'ontological act' the act by which the in-itself originally and perpetually 'degenerates' into presence to it-self. This ontological act is the original and perpetual nihilation by which the for-itself, Sartre says, determines itself 'to exist inasmuch as it cannot coincide with itself' (B&N, 102).

Similar considerations apply in the case of reflective-consciousness. Reflective consciousness, for the reasons explained in chapter I, cannot for Sartre be conceived as a 'second' consciousness that apprehends the consciousness reflected-on: 'reflection must be united to that which is reflected-on by a bond of being' (B&N, 174). And yet at the same time this internal bond of being cannot be that of total identification, because otherwise the phenomenon of reflection would be suppressed to leave a pre-reflective consciousness in place. Thus again it is necessary, similarly in the case of pre-reflective consciousness, that the 'the reflective simultaneously be and not be the reflected-on' (*ibid.*). Here the case is slightly different to the pre-reflective one because while belief and consciousness (of) belief were *unselbstständig* and 'became' one another when we tried to analyse them, here the reflected-on is already a constituted consciousness, and therefore has its own independence.³¹ Thus the nothing that separates reflective consciousness from the conscious-

³¹ Although Sartre points out that the consciousness reflected-on is inevitably affected by the fact that it is now reflected or 'observed'.

ness reflected-on, Sartre points out, 'divides them more profoundly than the nothingness of the for-itself separates the reflection (*reflet*) from the reflecting (*B&N*, 175)'.

Now again Sartre points out that neither the reflective nor the reflected-on can 'issue' (*B&N*, 175) this nothingness, and that it is only a 'unitary structure of being that can be its own nothingness in the form of *having to be it*' (*ibid.*). Sartre therefore conceives of and defines reflection as an 'intrastructural modification' brought about by the for-itself:

It [reflection] is not the appearance of a new consciousness directed on the for-itself but an infrastructural modification which the for-itself realises in itself; in a word, it is the for-itself which makes itself exist in the mode reflective-reflected-on, instead of being simply in the mode of the dyad reflection-reflecting [...]

(*B&N*, 175)

The motivation for the for-itself adopting this modification is explained by Sartre teleologically as the attempt of the for-itself to recover the coincidence with itself that it has lost and which however it cannot recuperate in reflection because the reflected-on is always 'present to' the reflective and not coincident with it. This, we shall examine in more detail in chapter III. Crucial for the present discussion, however, is Sartre's contention that, if the for-itself (both at the reflective and at the pre-reflective level) can exist only as 'presence' to itself and not as 'coincidence' with itself, then the for-itself exists in the world as a *lack*.³² What the for-itself lacks is *itself* in-itself, i.e the being of a 'self-as-being-in-itself'. This self-as-being-in-itself which we lack, Sartre claims, constitutes our supreme value: '[T]he supreme value towards which consciousness at every instant surpasses itself by its very being is the absolute being of the self with its characteristics of identity, of purity, of permanence, *etc.*, and as its own foundation' (*B&N*, 117-118).

Value is therefore 'consubstantial' with my upsurge as for-itself, because the free ontological act by which I make myself exist as for-itself is at the same time the act by which I posit this ideal value (the In-itself-for-itself) with respect to which I constitute myself as 'lacking'. Accordingly, Sartre says that 'value haunts freedom' (*B&N*, 118), because although value comes to 'be' through the *free* act by which the for-itself arises as 'not-being the In-itself', value is the being that as a result of this same free act the for-itself 'has to be insofar as it is the foundation of its nothingness of being' (*la valeur [...] est l'être qu'il a à être en tant qu'il est fondement de son néant d'être*, *B&N*, 118/155), and he adds 'there is then a total contingency of being-for-value and at the same time a free and absolute necessity' (*ibid.*) Because I live myself as a lack I will organise the world in motives, causes

³² Cf. *B&N*, 110-119.

and particular ends in the way we have seen in the previous chapter to try to fill my lack, but to fill it is impossible because the For-itself can only ever exist at a distance with-itself.

Now that we have laid out Sartre's understanding of consciousness and its relation to value in some detail, we are in a position to tackle a number of interpretative issues and philosophical problems that emerge in connection with them. The first issue I want to discuss is this. It seems that Sartre wants to derive the ultimate meaning of our motivations *a priori*, i.e. as a necessary consequence of his account of the nature of consciousness. But even if his account of the nature of consciousness is correct, it seems that it does not follow necessarily from the fact that we are not coincident with ourselves that we are a 'lack' if this notion is value-laden.

In the *Cahiers*, Sartre (1992, 531 [1947-48]) correctly points out, I think, that one does not acknowledge a lack in terms of pure indifference, and that 'a lack makes sense only if it present to itself as a refusal to be a lack'. But what I am suggesting is that, consistently with Sartre's own views, we cannot understand 'lack' as an objective feature of ourselves. Sartre himself (1992, 531 [1947-48]) states that a lack 'cannot appear as a pure Lack in itself unless there is a witness who acknowledges and affirms it'. So just as he claims that a well 'lacks water in an already unveiled world and on the foundation of a project' (*ibid.*), the For-itself, we might say, 'lacks' being and the pursuit of being is the ultimate meaning of his projects only if it 'acknowledges' itself as a lack of being, rather than as simply 'not having' the characteristics of an In-itself-for-itself. After all, as we shall see in the next chapter, a crucial part of Sartre's ethical message is that the For-itself should cease to consider itself a 'lack' of being, and cease to pursue an unattainable appropriation of itself.

Nevertheless, it may well be that we are naturally led to pursue our appropriation of ourselves as in-itself, especially if Sartre is right that the the presence of the 'other' and of social institutions lead us to conceive of ourselves primarily in alienated terms and not in terms of our freedom. It may well be therefore that, although it does not follow of strict necessity from our not-having the characteristics of the in-itself that we perceive our 'not-having' as 'lack', our attempt to appropriate ourselves could still correctly describe the common meaning of our particular pursuits.

The ground for Sartre's description of the ultimate meaning of the For-itself's actions as the need to fill our 'lack' of being might be seen partly as an argument by elimination. On the one hand, it is impossible for states of affairs in the in-itself to explain my consciousness as directed forward in time, or as having a practical dimension. On the other hand, if Sartre's account of the nature of consciousness is correct, it is impossible for there

to be any representational state of any kind within the subject that could have motivated her. Now if there is nothing else that can explain why we find ourselves as 'practical beings', i.e. as projecting ends in the world, then for want of any other explanation, this is one that recommends itself—that I am conscious of myself as a 'lack'.

At the same time, if Sartre's theory of consciousness is correct, then what most intimately defines the way of being of the For-itself is precisely that it is not in-itself, that it does not have the characteristics of being in-itself. If on the one hand we are lack, and on the other hand that which at the most fundamental level we do not possess is 'being', it seems correct to conclude that we are a 'lack of being', and that the meaning that unites all particular original projects is crystallised in the idea of a pursuit of being, in the attempt to fill the lack of being that we are.

If Sartre's 'semi-*a priori*' discussion so far is correct, he can claim that the ultimate meaning of desire is the desire to be. But it seems that this contention could still be falsified *a posteriori* by pointing out that our particular desires are not characterisable as desires to 'be' the object of the desire. Sartre recognises that 'desire' is not defined exclusively in relation to the In-itself-for-itself, and that it is also relative to 'a brute, concrete existent which we commonly call the object of the desire' (*B&N*, 596). However, by way of what we might call an 'hermeneutic' discussion in chapter II of Part IV of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre wants to show that the three main categories in which our desiderative attitudes can be grouped—desire to do, desire to have, and desire to be—the desire to be is the one to which the other two can be reduced.

We don't have the space to reconstruct Sartre's discussion in detail here, but its main points can be summarised as follows. First Sartre seeks to show that the desire to do, with the important exception of the activity of 'play' (which we shall examine in the next chapter), can be reduced to the desire to have. If I cut a cane of sugar, it is because I desire to have it. If I compose a score, or if I make an important scientific discovery, this activity is relevant to me only 'to the degree that the bond of creation which I establish between it and me gives to me a particular right of ownership' (*B&N*, 597). Knowledge in general is the desire of possessing: 'to know', as Sartre puts, 'is to devour with the eyes' (*B&N*, 599).

The meaning of the desire to have is then ultimately reduced to that of the desire to be. The meaning of possession, Sartre claims, consists in an 'internal, ontological bond' which realises symbolically the desire to be in-itself-for-itself, insofar as I desire to be reunited with the object that I possess. Going back to the example of the hike, if I don't give up and reach the summit, Sartre claims, I 'am' the mountain which I climb:

This mountain which I climb is myself to the extent that I conquer it; and when I am at its summit, which I have “achieved” at the cost of this same effort, when I attain this magnificent view of the valley and the surrounding peaks, then I *am* the view; the panorama is myself dilated to the horizon, for it exists only through me, only for me.
(*B&N*, 611)

Sartre’s argumentative strategy, therefore, is to argue both from his account of consciousness to the meaning of particular desires, and to support the results of this semi-*a priori* discussion by way of an hermeneutic of desiring, so that if these two discussions meet there is comprehensive coherence. Once again, Sartre’s contention that the ultimate meaning of each particular project is the project to realise an impossible unity of In-itself and For-itself is not therefore grounded exclusively on Sartre’s phenomenological examples or on his hermeneutic of desiring alone.

I will now consider a second issue that emerges in connection with Sartre’s notion of the original project, and that is seen by some as potentially threatening his account of freedom. From the way Sartre presents his position in in part II of *B&N*, it might seem that Sartre thinks that there is *one and the same* goal (the project of being a Self-in-itself) that is ultimately disguised under all our empirical actions, and that we all and necessarily pursue this one goal. Along these lines, Fell (1970, 34) for example writes: ‘Therefore Sartre’s assertion that all men are free must be qualified to read: all men are free, ultimately, to do one and the same thing and to do it, for the most part, unknowingly’.³³ In other words, the objection is that men are not truly free because they are in fact all destined to choose the same end, and can only choose the *means* to realise it. An advocate of this interpretation is, for example, Mary Warnock (1973, 10), who writes: ‘How can he [Sartre] assert both that individual human projects are totally free, and also that the overriding human project - ‘the original project’ - is necessarily identical for all of us, and is something from which we cannot escape?’

It is true that in the *Cahiers*, for example, Sartre seems to think that the idea of there being one purely universal end that we *must* pursue entails being a ‘slave’ of this universal. Thus the criticism in question might have its own force and pregnancy if understood as an internal criticism. Nevertheless, Sartre conceives of this common end in a way that, I think, shields him from the objection. Although Sartre often expresses himself ambiguously, I think on the whole it becomes clear in *Being and Nothingness* that for Sartre there is not just *one and the the same* desire to be God or the In-itself-For-itself that motivates us. It is true that Sartre (*B&N*, 586) makes statements such as the following: ‘Fun-

³³ ‘Unknowingly’ because, according to Sartre, we are only non-thetically *conscious* of the project we are pursuing.

damentally man is *the desire to be*, and the existence of this desire is not to be established by an empirical induction; it is the result of an *a priori* description of the being of the for-itself'. But later Sartre clarifies that this desire to be is always the desire *to be something in particular*.

[T]he desire to be by no means exists *first* in order to cause itself to be expressed subsequently by desires *a posteriori* [...]. There is not first a single desire of being, then a thousands particular feelings, but the desire to be exists and manifests itself only in and through jealousy, greed, love of art, cowardice, courage, and a thousand contingent, empirical expressions which cause human reality to appear to us only as *manifested by a particular man*, by a specific person.

(B&N, 586)

In other words, the project to pursue the In-itself-for-itself has only an *ideal*, and not a *real* existence. Nobody sets to achieve this abstract totality, whether knowingly or not. This is why Sartre variously characterises the project of realising the In-itself-for-itself as the ultimate 'meaning' (B&N, 587) of our our particular desires and of the particular original project that we have chosen for-ourselves, or as the '*truth of freedom*' (B&N, 589) or else again as the 'human meaning of freedom' (*ibid.*). But the project to be In-itself-for-itself, Sartre says at one point is 'an abstract structure which can by no means be considered as the nature or essence of freedom' (B&N, 588). And this is because the upsurge of consciousness and freedom is always immediate and concrete, and as such it is always characterised by a specific way of relating to one's facticity and therefore by an *unique* choice of one's situation

Therefore, at least so far freedom seems to be preserved because it is not true that one can not choose the ultimate goal of one's behaviour but only 'the means' to it, as Fell (1970, 197) misleadingly suggests. Nor is it true that the project to be In-itself-for-itself 'is supposed to constitute an overriding necessity', as Warnock (1973, 13) states. This is because this project is only the ideal *meaning* of our particular projects, but these projects are precisely always particular and unique, and our freedom consist for Sartre in the fact that it is ourselves who have chosen them. After all if there were only one goal that we are all unknowingly pursuing, it would be unclear what the purpose of existential psychoanalysis was - the Sartrian psychotherapist could just tell the patient *a priori* what the goal he was unknowingly pursuing was. This of course would be of no benefit, he will be unable to recognise this because he would not be pursuing this goal in the abstract, but always in a concrete way (by becoming a thief like Genet, a poet like Baudelaire, by constituting himself as inferior etc.). Therefore all that ontology tells us *a priori* (or semi-*a priori*, as I have suggested) is that the *ideal meaning* of each unique original project is the project to be.

I now would like to consider a third issue that emerges in connection with the notion of the original project. This is whether Sartre can legitimately claim that the original project is 'chosen' by the For-itself. To contextualise this issue and understand the nature of the criticisms that have been levelled to Sartre on this point, it will be helpful to keep in mind Sartre's rejection of the libertarian idea of a *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*. We have already seen that the primary *locus* of freedom is not the agent's 'will' for Sartre, but her ontological constitution. But in the chapter on freedom of *B&N*, Sartre also seems to reject the very idea that we can choose between two alternative courses of action that are *equally* possible for us at the moment of choice, as on the libertarian assumption. This of course cannot be because our will is determined by a prior sufficient 'cause', as per the determinist. It is because, Sartre reasons, the act of willing is a reflective decision in relation to certain ends. But these ends, he claims, while they are spontaneously created by the for-itself, are not created at the level of reflective willing. Rather, reflective deliberation *presupposes* the positing of ends by the for-itself in the light of which only a certain course of action can appear motivating (*B&N*, 472-473).³⁴

This means, Sartre claims, that by the time she comes to deliberate, the agent has already conferred a *value* upon those alternative motives towards which she is allegedly neutrally inclined. A value that consists in their instrumentality to the pursuit of the end that she has freely posited for herself. It follows from this, Sartre affirms, that all deliberation is illusory. When I deliberate, Sartre (*B&N*, 473) says, the 'chips are down' (*les jeux sont faits*). I can only deceive myself that I am genuinely deliberating (by treating motives as entirely transcendent), but that *too* is part of my project. In truth, I will always choose the course of action that is more instrumental to the pursuit of the specific end that I have set for myself.

On the other hand, as we have said, Sartre sees particular projects that we pursue as the symbolisation of our original choice:

It is this original choice which originally creates all causes and all motives which can guide us to partial actions; it is this which arranges the world with its meaning, its instrumental complexes, and its coefficient of adversity.

(*B&N*, 487)

Accordingly, it would seem that depending on what my original choice is, in each circumstance I will act in one way rather than another. In our previous example, I will either

³⁴ In the same way in which for Sartre reflection must be grounded on a pre-reflective cogito, the will must 'presuppose the foundation of an original freedom in order to be able to constitute itself as will' (*B&N*, 465).

live my body as something to distrust and my fatigue as something to get rid of because, for example 'it incarnates my body and my brute contingency in the midst of the world at a time when my project is to preserve my body and my presence in the world by means of the look of others' (B&N, 479). So while previously I have said that, in the example, the act of giving up is a 'choice', it now seems that this must be qualified to read that it is a choice that I could not not have done unless I had redetermined my original choice. The points I now want to discuss are whether my original choice is in fact my choice and whether in fact I can redetermine my original project and how.

To begin with, it must be stressed that it seems crucial that our original project be 'our choice' and not the mere unfolding of an 'essence' that is *given* to us because that would not make us free on Sartre's own account. This is why Sartre rejects Kant's and Schopenhauer's notion of 'intelligible character' as the a-temporal, non-phenomenal ground of our empirical character. Indeed, if our empirical character is grounded on and the mere temporalised unfolding of an intelligible character that is outside time, we cannot be said to have 'chosen' it and, therefore, who we are: 'The structure of the choice necessarily implies that it be a choice in the world' (B&N, 501-502). The contention that our original project is 'chosen' by us, however, is a point on which Sartre, as I have mentioned, has been quite strongly attacked by a variety of critics³⁵ (starting with Merleau-Ponty at the time) who deny that Sartre can legitimately talk of 'choice' of our original project.

What is seen as problematic in Sartre's account is that, on the one hand it seems that in order to be able to talk of choice of our original project, this choice must take place in the world and therefore in time, otherwise our project would look more like the the unfolding of an 'essence' as we have said. However given Sartre's own metaphysics, it seems that this choice cannot be 'in time' either, because time and the world (in its unity and meaningfulness) and therefore the very constitution of a certain *situation* come to exist through consciousness' choice of this latter. Consciousness, time, and choice are inextricably linked in mutual relations of presupposition or, as Sartre puts it, '[o]ne must be conscious in order to choose, and one must choose in order to be conscious' (B&N, 484).

Some commentators at this point object that Sartre cannot legitimately talk of choice. All these criticisms are predicated on the assumption that only deliberative choice counts as choice. To be sure, if we allow that, we cannot allow Sartre to talk of original choice, because reflective choice presupposes that there can be a plurality of options that I am conscious of, among which I decide. However, plurality exists only for a conscious-

³⁵ Cf. for instance Merleau-Ponty (2002 [1945]), Olson (1956), and more recently Grüne (2003).

ness, and each particular consciousness is already the selection and, according to Sartre, the choice of a certain plurality.

Expressing this line of criticism, Baldwin (1979, 42) comments that 'choice can only be made where we are drawn in two ways at once', and that therefore Sartre cannot talk of choice here. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty (2002, 509 [1945]) pointed out at the time how 'the idea of an initial choice involves a contradiction', and Olson (1956, 186) reminds us that choice requires 'deliberation and consciousness of possibility'. It should be noticed, however, that Sartre is well aware that the kind of consciousness that is involved in, or better is identical with, what he calls our original choice is not and cannot be of the self-reflective, or 'thetic' kind:

[W]e must insist on the fact that the question here is not of a deliberate choice. This is not because the choice is *less* conscious or *less* explicit than a deliberation, but rather, because it is the foundation of all deliberation and because as we have seen, a deliberation requires an interpretation in terms of an original choice.

(B&N, 483)

It is therefore misguided to conceive of this choice as though it is a psychological event that has taken place in time, as Warnock (1973, 11) seems to imply when she states that Sartre thought that everyone '*has formed*' the original project. Similarly, there is not an 'act of existential choice', as Thody (1970, 91) affirms, nor is there a 'super-choice' that is distinct and super-added to and that 'in some measure controls subordinate choices', as Olafson (1967, 171) claims. Rather, the original choice should be thought of more, I submit, as an 'attitude to the world'. Indeed, Sartre explicitly says that 'to be' and to 'choose' is one and the same thing:

[...] the choice is nothing other than the being of each human reality, and because it amounts to the same thing to say that particular behaviour *is* or expresses the original choice of this human reality since for human reality there is no difference between existing and choosing for itself.

(B&N, 593)

Still, one might ask, how is Sartre's notion of original project (if 'chosen' in this way) any different to the unfolding of an essence? It may be pointed out that, contrary to accounts such as Leibniz's³⁶, in Sartre's account there is not an ideal time at which the total concatenation of my possibles has been determined *and* 'I am not conscious of it'. This is because for Sartre the determination of our original project and the origination of con-

³⁶ Cf. Leibniz (1967 [1686-1690]).

sciousness and time are perceived as occurring in a single upsurge, and thus it follows that *there is no time at which it can be said that our original project has been determined and we are not conscious of it.*

Moreover, contrary to Leibniz, for Sartre, my project is not equivalent to a totality of possibles that is given all at once and before our positing of them. Therefore, although our deeds can to a certain extent be foreseen as they stand in an interpretative relation with our past, they cannot possibly be predicted with certainty: prophecy is strictly impossible however well positioned we are epistemically. Accordingly, it would be wrong to talk of our original choice, as Olafson (1967, 171-172) does, as a 'total choice [...] operating from the wings throughout the course of our lives'. My original project *will be* the synthetic totality of my choices, but this totality does not pre-exist my living it, as well as not amounting to a mere quantitative summation of my particular choices.

Secondly, it may be pointed out that while in accounts such as Leibniz's there is something 'other than ourselves' (God) that determines the range of our possibles, it follows from Sartre's thinking that he has provided an account of ontology as a whole that *nothing but ourselves could possibly be responsible for the original project that we are.* The fact that from the very beginning of our project (1) we are conscious of it and (2) nothing but ourselves could possibly have determined it, might be thought as sufficient to deny that in Sartre's notion of (original) choice, 'nothing but the word is left' (Olson, 187). That 'the foundation of conscious deliberation must be as conscious as the deliberation itself', however, is not 'a thesis that Sartre attempts to make true by definition', as Olson (1956, 187) suggests. Instead, it is the consequence of Sartre's metaphysically argued position that reflective consciousness is *grounded* on the pre-reflective cogito. What Sartre is saying when he talks of original choice is, as Olafson (1967, 165) nicely puts it talking about existentialism more broadly is that 'there is no valid alternative mode of description of what did occur in the relevant portions of our past that does not make use of the concept of choice'.

Nevertheless, perhaps what we are reluctant to accept is not so much the fact that the choice in question is of the non-reflective kind, as a passion would be for Sartre, but rather that this initial choice or attitude seems a choice against nothing, as it were. And yet Sartre recognises that this choice is absurd in the sense that we can give no reason for it, and contends that the fact that we are unable to give any reason for a certain original project except that we freely chose it is the peculiar character of freedom.

For those who are not satisfied with this, the biographical works that Sartre wrote around the same time of *B&N* may be interpreted as a welcome dissociation from the

views expressed with regards to the notion of original choice in *B&N*. In the biography of Baudelaire that he wrote in 1947, Sartre talks of the original choice that Baudelaire made as having happened 'in time'—at the age of six. After his father dies, Baudelaire's mother remarries with a soldier. Instead of accepting that his mother's diminished care for him might be temporary, he reacts with anger as though he had been definitively rejected and condemned to solitary confinement. From this moment onwards, Baudelaire's life will be centred around the project of being a reject, *un autre*, and to identify with the rejection that appears to him as 'destiny'. Commenting on this, Sartre (1947, 21) writes:

Nous touchons ici au choix originel que Baudelaire a fait de lui-même, à cet engagement absolu par quoi chacun de nous décide dans une situation particulière de ce qu'il sera et de ce qu'il est. Délaissé, rejeté, Baudelaire a voulu reprendre à son compte cet isolement. Il a revendiqué sa solitude pour qu'elle lui vienne au moins de lui-même, pour n'avoir pas à la subir.

Sartre will, in the course of the biography, greatly enrich his description of what he thinks Baudelaire's original project has been. What is important for the present purposes, however, is that he characterises Baudelaire's original choice as happening in time, in this particularly case at the age of six. The same is true of the the other biographies he wrote on Genet, Flaubert and himself.

Now the obvious question is, how are we to square this with Sartre's contention in *B&N* that to be and to choose is one and the same? One possibility would be, as I have mentioned previously, to see these biographies as a development of Sartre's thought in contrast with the view expressed in *B&N*. We could therefore think that Sartre is advocating what Thody (1970, 91) calls 'a modified version of the accommodation principle'. The idea is that for the Sartre of the biographies there is a period which precedes our original choice in which we have not yet defined our project, and then something happens (for example Baudelaire's mother remarries, Genet is put out as a foster child etc.) which makes us embrace a certain original project as a reaction to what is happening to us. If this is the case, then surely this represents a major departure from Sartre's views in *B&N*. Moreover, it appears unclear how Sartre could reconcile his conception of consciousness as a spontaneity that creates its own meanings with the idea that there is a period of interpretative neutrality in which we are the passive recipient of experiences that come with a value attached that is independent from our spontaneous creation.

I do not think there is a conclusive reason to reject the idea that Sartre might have already changed his views in this early period. I think however that there is room to make

an alternative interpretative suggestion and see *B&N* and the biographies to a large extent in continuity. The idea is that it is not a period of neutrality that precedes the original choice that Sartre talks about. Rather, that period is already characterised by a certain original choice of being in the world. It is simply that around a certain age the agent ‘redetermines’ her original choice and Sartre, from his perspective, can point to this redetermination of her project as the one he thinks characterised her life thereafter. The fact remains that my original project, being the synthetic totality of my choices, will also include the period that precedes that redetermination of my project which Sartre sees as crystallising the meaning of my pursuit from a certain point in time onwards. A converted atheist, as he would say, is not merely a believer.

In providing material in support of one or the other interpretation, the biography on Baudelaire seems ambiguous to me. The way in which Sartre describes Baudelaire’s way of relating to his mother before she remarries could be described both as the result of a unique original choice and as a period of neutrality that precedes the formation of one’s individuality. On the one hand he describes Baudelaire’s relation to his mother as a sort of incestuous and sacred unity: ‘il se sentait uni au corps et au cœur de sa mère par une sorte de participation primitive et mystique [...] il n’y avait là qu’un foyer, qu’une famille, qu’un couple incestueux [...] loin de se sentir une existence errante, vague et superflue, il se sentait comme *fil de droit divin*. (Sartre, 1947, 18-19). At the same time, however, Sartre says that before the death of his father, Baudelaire ‘ne savait pas encore qu’il existât comme une personne’ (*ivi*, 18) and that it is only the sorrow and the anger resulting from his father’s death that ‘l’ont jeté sans transition dans l’existence personnelle’ (*ivi*, 20).

At all events, Sartre does think that our original choice, whether it happens in time or not, can be, if not changed, at least redetermined. Indeed, our original choice is not made once and for all, it is not ‘coextensive with the entire ‘life’ of the for itself’. Instead, since, consciousness is a being that continually experiences itself as the nihilation of his past being, in order for our original project to subsist, Sartre points out, it must be constantly renewed. By constantly, however, we should not understand at each instant, because to choose, Sartre says, is to ‘effect the upsurge along with my engagement of a certain finite extension of concrete and continuous duration’ (*B&N*, 487).

Therefore, although from an *objective* point of view—since my original project will be the synthetic totality of my choices—I cannot be said to have ‘changed’ my project and my possibles, what is relevant for Sartre and for our discussion on freedom is the *subjective* point of view. From this point of view, I can constantly redetermine what I take my

project to be, and it is me who freely unfolds my project by constantly renewing it through my choices.

Nevertheless, it is true that in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre claims that our present choice of our original project 'is such that it furnishes us with no *motive* for making it past by means of a further choice' (*B&N*, 487) because 'it is this present choice which originally creates all causes and all motives which can guide us to partial actions' (*ibid.*). In other words, until I am 'within' an original project, what counts as a value or as reason for action is determined by the nature of this project.

For example, if my project is to realise my inferiority, I will be motivated to choose a job in which I am inferior to the average instead of pursuing my talents. But Sartre thinks that until I live my project, until I am within it, I don't 'know it'. Precisely because to have a project is to arrange the world in certain instrumental complexes and to attribute to it a certain coefficient of adversity, this project does not stand before me as an object. Sartre thinks however that I must be pre-reflectively conscious of it, but I don't see it: I don't conceive of it thematically, just as as long as I am immersed in a task, I am not reflectively conscious of myself as engaged in that task.

However, can I not change it reflectively? Here I think that what appears to be Sartre's position in *B&N* is, if taken as definitive, problematic. Sartre seems to suggest that just as deliberation 'is always a deception' because I have already placed a value upon one of the courses of action towards which I am allegedly neutrally inclined, so for the same reason I cannot redetermine my project by means of an act of will. My act of will serves only the purpose of choosing the 'instruments' for the ends already posited by my original project.

Sometimes it can happen that I make a mistake in choosing the instrument. For example, while my original project may be to realise my inferiority, I might reflectively decide to do everything possible to get rid of those traits that make me feel inferior. But because my original project precisely *is* to be inferior, even if I manage to eliminate my inferiority in a particular instance, this will represent itself again in other life circumstances that I choose for myself in order to realise that inferiority. It would therefore be wrong to say, as Plantinga does (1958, 248), that for Sartre it is impossible to make a wrong choice, although it is true that the sense in which it is 'wrong' (at least in this context) is that is not instrumental to the pursuit of my end.

This possible conflict between the reflective and the pre-reflective levels can be seen as mirroring the conflict between reflection and the pre-reflective cogito in general. Sartre conceives of the occurrence of reflection (especially impure reflection) as the at-

tempt to recover that coincidence with-itself that consciousness at the pre-reflective level has already lost. However, reflection does no more than creating a further separation, a further distance within the for-itself's being.

It would seem therefore that our original project cannot be redetermined reflectively. However, Sartre insists, we can redetermine our project by acting, we can be 'a beginning and an end to ourselves within the unity of a single act' (*B&N*, 488). This pre-reflective act by which we redetermine the course of our lives causes the temporal *instant* to appear as the necessary intersection between the project that we are abandoning and the project that we are beginning. But this instant, Sartre states, 'remains perpetually unpredictable and incomprehensible' (*B&N*, 487).

What is difficult to see, however, is how to distinguish this incomprehensible re-determination of our project from an event that we just passively undergo. It may be true that the redetermination is the result of my spontaneity because nothing else could have determined it, but the fact that every link with my reflective apprehension of myself is severed makes it appear an absurd fact over which I have no control. In order to avoid this result, a continuity would need to be allowed between my reflective apprehension of my project as unjustifiable and the act by which I am a new beginning to myself.

The speculative suggestion could be made that Sartre's notion of the temporal 'instant' and his distinction between 'pure' and 'impure' reflection may provide some material to explain *both* how when reflection occurs when 'chips are down' and yet how reflection is registering something correctly and provides a continuity with the act by which we are a new beginning to ourselves. Time, Sartre points out, is not conceivable as a succession of temporal instants separated by a nothingness (*B&N*, 487). However, the instant can arise as a result of the For-itself redetermining its project as an 'ambiguous, temporal reality' (*B&N*, 488), that is both a beginning (of my new project) and an end (to my 'previous' one). Sartre therefore says that the instant is limited by a double nothingness, i.e. by the project that no longer is and the project that is not yet. However, he declares:

[T]he instant is by itself only a nothingness, for wherever we cast our view, we apprehend only a continuous temporalization which will be in accordance with the direction in which we look: either the completed and closed series which has just passed dragging its final term with it—or else the living temporalization which is the beginning and whose initial term is caught and dragged along by the future possibility.

(*B&N*, 489)

Thus when I ask myself reflectively 'what should I do?', if I apprehend myself 'impurely' in reflection, i.e. if I conceive of myself as 'being' the reflected-on, then my reflec-

tion will be complicit with my project and it will inevitably be reapprehended by it. I will only choose the course of action aimed at realising what I reflectively take myself to 'be'— *les jeux sont faits*. But if I apprehend myself in anguish; if I apprehend my self 'purely', i.e. not as being the reflected-on but as 'having to be' it, then my project will appear unjustifiable to me. This reflective apprehension is not by itself sufficient to cause the instant to appear and for me to actively redetermine my project, because I can always recover this latter. My reflective apprehension, however, stands in a direct continuity with the act by which I cause the instant to appear.

Now as we have seen, the temporal instant in which I am a beginning and an end to myself is ambiguous and so, it may be suggested, is my *act*. 'It is the future alone', Sartre states, 'which can turn back on the pure present in order to qualify it as a beginning' (*B&N*, 488). But when the future turns back on the present to re-qualify it, can it not illuminate *a posteriori* my pure reflection as the true beginning of my redetermination of my project? This would allow Sartre to show that an intelligible continuity can be exhibited between my reflective episode and the act by which my project is redetermined. The reflective attitude, while not sufficient in itself, is *a posteriori* reconfigured as the beginning of my redetermination. But this is possible only if my reflection is not complicit with my project, i.e. if it is pure. To the extent that Sartre's ethical message consists partly in urging us to redetermine our project, it seems that it is crucial that we can attain the catharsis of a pure reflection. We shall say more about how for Sartre this can be attained in the next chapter.

Chapter III - Freedom and Ethics

In the previous chapter I examined Sartre's notions of the original project and original choice as well as a number of philosophical issues that arise in connection with them. Sartre indicates in these two connected notions the principles that allows us to interpret each one of the For-itself's actions in a unitary way that is at the same time consistent with freedom. As we have seen, although each particular original project is unique to each For-itself, the ultimate 'meaning' of all original projects is captured by the attempt to achieve the kind of existence that a For-itself-in-itself would have. This claim is grounded, as I have pointed out, both on Sartre's (semi- *a priori*) argument from the nature of consciousness as well as on his hermeneutics of desiring.

This project, moreover, can be changed or better 'redetermined', and I have made a suggestion as to how we might implement Sartre's discussion of the 'instant' so that this redetermination does not appear as a passive event that we undergo, bearing no connection with our reflective occasions. Nevertheless, the fact remains that our original project, however re-determinable and unique, is ultimately understandable in terms of the attempt to realise a kind of ideal being that for Sartre is contradictory by definition — a For-itself-in-itself. The project, in other words, is destined to fail. The fact that Sartre's account of freedom appears to have this pessimistic implication, it should be noticed, by no means jeopardises the theory of freedom itself. However, whether Sartre's philosophy of freedom must necessarily have an implication of this sort is, I think, interesting in its own right. Does Sartre make us free at the cost of making of us a 'useless passion'? Can there be a way out of our problematic existential situation?

In a sense it seems natural to think that if I cannot achieve what I lack, and if on the other hand, as I have suggested, it depends on myself alone whether I live myself as a lack or not, the solution must reside somehow in accepting my way of existing in the world, in not constituting my way of existing as a 'lack'. Sartre himself seems to suggest this at the end of *Being and Nothingness*. Although value—as represented by the ideal synthesis of In-itself and For-itself—haunts my freedom, through pure reflection, he says, I can come to realise that it is only my freedom that keeps this value standing. In other words, I can become aware that my quest for being and the appropriation of the in-itself, which so far has been the unifying theme of all my choices, is only *one* possible value that I can make the ultimate guiding principle of my actions, as exemplified in my particular project:

[Freedom] will apprehend by and in anguish that they [my previous possibles] are possibles only on the ground of the possibility of other possibles. But hitherto although possibles could be chosen and rejected *ad libitum*, the theme which made the unity of all choices of possibles was the value or the ideal presence of the *ens causa sui*.
(*B&N*, 647)

Thus it seems that, at the end of *B&N*, Sartre points to the possibility of replacing the In-Itself-For-itself with another guiding value. What is this value? Why should we choose this value and not others as our supreme value? What does it mean to 'live' this value as our supreme value, and how can we achieve the conversion required to turn to it? Sartre indicates at the end of *B&N* that similar questions belong to an 'ethics', and he announces that he will devote another work to it.

I think the text which can be seen as developing the attempt to develop an ethics on the basis of the ontology of *Being and Nothingness* is Sartre's *Cahiers pour une morale* ('Notebooks for an Ethics'). Sartre did not have these notebooks published while he was alive, and the character of the discussions contained therein is often exploratory, which I am pointing out as a preliminary qualification of my referring to the material considered as Sartre's views. But still the *Cahiers* were written by Sartre, and they contain, I think, interesting material to see how an Ethics grounded on the basis of *B&N*'s ontology of freedom *could*, if at all, be developed. Thus in what follows I will draw from this material to examine what answer can be given to the questions I have raised above.

The value that we should replace with the unattainable in-itself-for-itself is already indicated by Sartre at the end of *Being and Nothingness*. It is suggested by his claims that the For-itself that has achieved a radical conversion is a freedom that 'holds *itself* in awe' (*B&N*, 647)³⁷. It is a freedom that accepts itself, that 'chooses as the ideal of being, being-what-it-is-not and not-being-what-it-is' (*ibid.*). A freedom that chooses 'not to *recover* itself but to flee itself, not to coincide with itself but to be always at a distance *from* itself' (*ibid.*). This value is, in other words, the For-itself as freedom.

What is the ground for choosing this as one's supreme value instead of another value? In commenting on this issue, Anderson (1993, 58-59) for instance asks 'why not, for example, choose pleasure or power as one's primary values? For they too are attainable goals?'. Contrary to the unattainable goal of becoming God, which 'it makes eminent practical sense to reject [...] lives centred on the acquisition of pleasure or the accumulation of power are also meaningful, purposeful ones' (*ibid.*)

³⁷ Emphasis mine.

Anderson does not think that Sartre has no ground for choosing freedom, but this characterisation of the question is already, it seems to me, slightly misleading. Indeed, as I attempted to show in the previous chapter, nobody sets himself the goal of becoming God or the In-itself-for-itself, just as nobody, Sartre would say, sets himself as a goal the realisation of the Oedipus complex. One always pursues particular original projects; it is rather that the 'meaning' of our original project, the meaning of our particular desires and of desiring as such before conversion is elucidated by this ideal being. Moreover, as we have seen, one of the chief aims of Sartre's hermeneutics of desiring is precisely to question our assumptions about 'what it means' to desire. If the meaning of our desiring before conversion is captured by the ideal expressed by the In-itself-for-itself, and if this ideal is unattainable, then it makes eminent practical sense not to desire power, pleasure or anything for that matter *in the way we do*.

Therefore the first thing that one should do is to accept one's own way of being, or to *will* one's way of being, which will lead one to desire in a different, non-appropriative way (we shall soon see precisely in which way). Therefore, it may be suggested, because we must first of all value ourselves so that the value of dependent ends may be accessible, and because at this stage Sartre is identifying the for-itself with freedom, we have to value first of all the freedom that we are as the *source* of all other values.

But importantly, Sartre furnishes another reason in the *Cahiers* for valuing freedom above all. This reason is strictly connected with his hermeneutic of what it means to desire to be an In-itself-for-Itself (although as we have said this desire is only manifested in the pursuits of *particular* projects). Sartre claims that the type of existence of the In-Itself-For-itself or God is that of a being 'which would be to itself its own *foundation*' (B&N, 587)³⁸; that is, which would be to its facticity in the same relation as the for-itself is to its motivations'. In other words, just as the for-itself creates its motivations, the In-Itself-for-itself would create its very facticity. The ideal In-Itself-for-itself is a being which 'would be the foundation of its own being in-itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself' (*ibid.*). The meaning of the In-itself-For-itself is therefore captured, according to Sartre, by the notion of *causa sui*.

³⁸ Emphasis mine. Cf. also Sartre (1992, 439-440 [1947-48]): 'What does man *lack*? Being its own foundation. Through what and in what does this lack appear? In and through freedom. For freedom is precisely this foundation. There is a manifestation of freedom when an object is comprehended only if one assigns a project to it as its own foundation [...]. Thus the pre-ontological comprehension of the foundation appears in freedom and this comprehension which illuminates the world and man within the world makes it apparent that man is not his own foundation. This profound contradiction is the motor of all human action'.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre further expands the scope of this hermeneutic by suggesting that the very onset (*surgissement*) of the for-itself may be understood as the result of the the in-itself's attempt to get rid of it's own contingency. Without the for-itself, the in-itself would be a merely contingent being, a shapeless and meaningless plenitude. The for-itself, Sartre suggests, may be seen as an attempt to give meaning and 'ground' this contingency, to make it necessary, or as the product of 'a revolt of the in-itself, which nihilates itself against its contingency' (*B&N*, 587). The for-itself is what makes the in-itself be 'for' a consciousness. Sartre, however, qualifies this suggestion by saying that it is only 'as if' the in-itself had attempted this revolt against its own contingency, because no intentionality can be attributed to the in-itself.³⁹

Nevertheless, what Sartre's theory of consciousness shows, if sound, is that consciousness in fact *is* (at least before conversion) this attempt to found itself.⁴⁰ This attempt of the in-itself to ground it-self is, as Sartre's conception of consciousness shows, unsuccessful. The for-itself cannot ground it-self as 'in-itself', i.e. become an In-Itself-for-itself. Rather, the for-itself exists always at a distance from itself. Moreover, Sartre thinks that the very concept of *causa sui* is contradictory. There cannot be a being that 'would be the foundation of its own being in-itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself'. This follows, Sartre thinks, from the negative, or derivative 'being' of consciousness. Consciousness is an internal negating relation, it needs to 'negate' being in order to constitute itself as consciousness *of* this being. The only way in which the For-itself (as consciousness) can arise is as the result of a 'decompression' happening in being in-itself. The for-itself therefore presupposes being, and cannot be the foundation of its being.

Our existence, therefore, is contingent—the For-Itself cannot found its being In-itself by arising as consciousness. But crucially, Sartre thinks that if we make of ourselves as freedoms the supreme value, we can 'found' our being *a posteriori*:

Thus in the self-caused cause we ultimately find a being that grasps itself as lacking a foundation and that founds itself *a posteriori* through the very unveiling of this lack of a foundation. That is, its retrospective, retroactive activity consists of assuming itself.

(Sartre, 1992, 520 [1947-48])

³⁹ Cf. *B&N*, 640: 'Nothing allows us to affirm on the ontological that the nihilation of the in-itself in for-itself has for its meaning—from the start and at the very heart of the in-itself—the project of being its own self-cause'.

⁴⁰ Accordingly, Sartre affirms that what ontology does tell us is that 'Consciousness is *in fact* a project of founding itself' (*B&N*, 640).

Moreover, this *a posteriori* foundation, according to Sartre, is *absolute*. This is because the For-itself, while it cannot found its facticity and so is not 'absolute' in this sense, is absolute in the sense that it is the absolute source of value and meaning. Therefore by turning back upon itself in reflection, and by *willing* its own way of being, the For-itself can found itself in the sense that it can confer upon itself an absolute value and meaning: 'It is me, which nothing justifies, who justifies myself inwardly' (Sartre, 1992, 482 [1947-48]).

If what defines our existence is the attempt to found ourselves, and if however this is an impossible goal to achieve in terms of being, then it makes sense for Sartre to suggest that we attempt to realise our aim in the best possible way. This consists, for the reasons explained, in valuing ourselves and our ontological status as freedom, to justify ourselves retrospectively. This justification is absolute and is itself the result of a free act. This justification, however, although absolute, is at the same time subjective. It is only to my own eyes that I can justify myself. The For-itself, which justifies itself thus, is never able 'to justify itself to others in its subjectivity' (Sartre, 1992, 482[1947-48]) But my justifying myself *a posteriori* is still sufficient to confer absolute value on myself: 'I am justified in willing it because I will to will what I will' (*ibid.*).

Sartre's proposal is therefore that in order to achieve its aim and found itself, the For-itself should will its own way of being. In light of this, we may ask, what is the *Cahiers'* answer to the question Sartre raises at the end of *Being and Nothingness* as to whether freedom, 'in its very turning back upon the in-itself-for-itself' will be 'reapprehended from behind' by this very value (*B&N*, 647)? I think it is both 'yes' and 'no', because although the for-itself after conversion still attempts to attain to the value expressed by the *causa sui*, it at the same time realises that the only way to achieve that end is precisely to reject that ideal and to will instead to be a *manque d'être*. The For-itself is therefore, we may say, both within and outside its project, and it saves itself by losing itself, i.e. by willing to be a being that is not what it is.

It is sometimes suggested in the literature that Sartre needs to presuppose the value of 'consistency' or of 'rationality' in order that his recommendation to value freedom as the supreme value may have a universal validity, and that this is incompatible with his conception of the subjective origin value. I don't think this is so much a critique to Sartre as the mere ascertainment that people may not want to be rational and that arguments may not suffice to persuade them to embrace a certain ideal. Sartre could perfectly well recognise this, as anyone else, while still pointing out that if his account of the nature of consciousness and of desire is correct, and *if* you want to be rational and desire the fulfilment of your desire or of your project, then you will have to value your freedom above all. This does not

mean that consistency must be recognised as a value that is independent of my attributing it to it. It simply means that it is required that I implicitly value rationality if the project Sartre is indicating is to appear motivating to me.

Nevertheless, how can we achieve the conversion required to renounce the project of appropriating being and value freedom above everything else? While in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre had said very little about how the pure reflection that is required of this conversion can be attained, in the *Cahiers* we can find, I think, three triggering factors mentioned. The first factor is very simply the necessary failure or the impossibility of recovering oneself.⁴¹ This is in line with what Sartre writes at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, when he points out that it is not necessary to know the principles of existential psychoanalysis laid down in *B&N* in order to achieve conversion. 'Many man', he writes, 'know that the goal of their pursuit is being; and to the extent that they possess this knowledge, they refrain from appropriating things for their own sake and try to realise the symbolic appropriation of their being in-itself' (*B&N*, 646).

However, the *Cahiers* further expands on this by suggesting that a second motive for achieving conversion can be seen in the failure of the For-itself to re-appropriate itself through 'accessory' or 'impure' reflection. In impure reflection, as we have said, the consciousness reflected-on is posited as an object by the reflecting consciousness so that the reflecting consciousness can take it-self to 'be' the reflected on. The reflected-on, being a reflected/reflecting has the characteristics of an In-itself-For-itself, so the meaning of reflecting consciousness is, as we have said, that of a second attempt to achieve this ideal unity. But this attempt ends in failure—the reflected-on is still *for* the reflecting, and not coincident with it.

Accessory reflection is moreover a further ground for 'alienation', insofar as it is 'the product of a unification of my objective behaviour' (Sartre, 1992, 473 [1947-48]) 473) just as that brought about by the other is. Just as the other conceives of me as *being* an 'angry man', through accessory reflection I unify the series of my behaviours in the same way—I come to believe that I *am*, or that I intrinsically possess the quality of the consciousness reflected on. The objective unification brought about by the other and by impure reflection, Sartre says, are 'homogenous' and therefore 'interchangeable' (Sartre, 1992, 473 [1947-48]).

To see how the alienated for-itself conceives of itself, consider the following pregnant Sartrian example. Imagine that you are in a place where many Jews are present and

⁴¹ Cf. Sartre (1992, 470 [1947-48]).

that you think of your uncle as being an anti-semitic. You say to your-self 'Well, uncle Fred would be furious if he were here. He detests Jews' (Sartre, 1992, 410 [1947-48]). Now the For-itself that conceives of himself in alienated terms could be compared to a person who makes this sort of judgement *while being himself the Fred in question*: 'This Fred who I am is irritated to see so many Jews, whereas my me as pure ipseity may think nothing of it, being absorbed by an enterprise that excludes any consideration about Jews' (*ibid.*) But because I conceive of myself in these alienated terms, I suddenly storm out, I make an anti-semitic comment, say, to *comply* with what I take myself to *be*.

Similarly, sometimes I can get angry because I perceive the situation as one that should make *me* (an angry person) react with anger. The same thing happens when I conceive of myself primarily as *being* the reflected-on. But due to my ontological status I can never succeed in making myself *be* the reflected-on. The result of impure reflection is therefore 'a radical and constant failure in my psychological life'. I cannot 'touch' my character. My character is a 'spectre' (Sartre, 1992, 473 [1947-48]), and yet I conceive of myself in terms of this spectre, just as the prisoners in Plato's cave point to their shadows and exclaim 'that's me!'. By constantly failing to attain to myself in accessory reflection, I can be led to a purifying conversion as a result of which I conceive myself reflectively as free, as being the reflected-on in the mode of 'having to be' it, and not in terms of identity.

Finally, Sartre suggests that the possibility of conversion is contained in the very *structure* of oppression. Every oppressed or alienated person 'grasps himself as the foundation of every system of alienation' (Sartre, 1992, 472 [1947-48]) insofar as she or he is non-thetically conscious of themselves as having submitted their will to an heteronomous will. Contrary to Hegel and Marx, Sartre thinks that it is neither fear nor labor that makes the alienated person or the slave self-consciously aware of himself. This self-consciousness, he says, 'is already there' (*ibid.*) pre-reflectively, and the most common human activities and situations contain in themselves the potential to lead man to thematically conceive of their situation of oppression. *Hunger*, for example, which for the animal is a mere *conatus*, for man may become 'the demand for a reason for living [...] man can place the whole of humanity [...] as transcendence and the realm of ends into his effort to assuage hunger'. Conversion, he concludes, is 'virtually possible among all the oppressed' (Sartre, 1992, 472 [1947-48]).

However, assuming that this conversion is possible, what would it mean concretely, we may ask, to embrace freedom as our supreme value? What does this new way of being 'authentic' consist in? It consists first, as we have said, in renouncing the project to 'be' something — to 'be' courageous, for example. The project of being courageous is unat-

tainable because we always live at a distance with ourselves and with our past, and it is only at the degraded level of the psyche that these attributions become possible. I cannot 'be' courageous. But I can project to *do* a courageous action. The engagement in particular actions, the desire to 'do' should therefore take precedence over the desire to 'be' which can never be attained. But I also, crucially, have to become aware and accept the fact that I am and am not any of these behaviours: 'in authenticity, not only do I reduce the internalised objective quality to a sequence of behaviours, I also discover that I *am not* anyone of these behaviours, or rather that I am and am not' (Sartre, 1992, 475 [1947-48]).

I am not 'courageous' because this is not a quality I can possess, there is always the possibility that I reveal myself as a coward in an other circumstance. At the same time, it is true that I *have been* courageous or that I have been a coward, and this I must assume and accept. In other words, authenticity consists first and foremost in grasping myself, as Sartre puts it, 'in terms of my original tension' (Sartre, 1992, 474 [1947-48]). In this sense, Sartre points out, the answer to what it means to be authentic 'can already be found underlying the dialectic of bad faith' (*ibid.*). What makes bad faith possible is precisely the fact that the person in bad faith does not accept either one or the other of the terms of the tension that characterises her way of being. Similarly, sincerity is excluded because it has to do with what I *am*, whereas authenticity has to do, Sartre says, with what I 'will' (Sartre, 1992, 479 [1947-48]).

By renouncing the achievement of the kind of unity of the In-itself-For-itself, I therefore achieve another kind of unity for myself—it is the unity of the 'question'. Through pure reflection, Sartre (1992, 478 [1947-48]) says, 'existence appears to itself in the form of a theme and a question. It does not identify itself with itself, but it maintains itself since immediately the problem arises of knowing whether it will continue or stop'. In other words, once I have made of my freedom my guiding principle, existence appears to me as the terrain on which my creativity can be exercised. I discover myself as a *creative* force, as the source of the legitimacy and of the meaning of all my projects. I grasp my existence as my own work of art, utterly gratuitous and at the same time absolutely meaningful and justified by myself—humanity is conceived as a 'quasi subjectivity. A creative will' (1992, 471 [1947-48]).

Similarly to Schiller's aesthetic man, the authentic Sartrean existence is one in which the For-itself abandons the spirit of seriousness and begins to 'play'. 'The first principle of play', Sartre says in *Being and Nothingness* (601), 'is man himself'. Through play man 'escapes his natural nature; he himself sets the values and the rules for his acts and consents to play only according to the rules which he himself has established and defined [...]

his goal is to attain himself as a certain being, precisely the being which is in question in his being' (*B&N*, 601-602).

But to acquire this autonomy the existent must first, as we have said, accept and take up its 'diasporic' mode of being. Once the For-itself has done so and conceives of himself in creative terms, there is a further value in its new authentic way of life that, according to Sartre, is disclosed to it. If we accept the ambiguity that characterises our way of existing, i.e. if we accept that we are a being that is-what-it-is-not, and is-not-what-it-is, we can find in our very way of existing a 'task', or goal to pursue. We realise that it is only by not-being ourselves but rather being presence to ourselves that Being can be *revealed* through us and manifest itself. Through the For-itself, Sartre explains:

Being is saved from Nothingness, Being manifests itself: the For-itself springs up so that Being may become Truth. In this way, the For-itself has a task of quasi creation since it extirpates from the shadows of indifferentiatedness what in essence always falls back into them. The For-itself is the pure clarity of Being. It saves Being [...] (1992, 484 [1947-48])

And Sartre thinks that this activity of unveiling can be a source of 'joy' in life: 'it is in *its* [the For-itself's] perception that Being perpetually blossoms forth, it is to *its* look that this dizzying and unmoving setting up of the Whole takes place' (Sartre, 1992, 494 [1947-48]). What explains the source of the joy is the fact that this revelation is *absolute*. As we have seen, although for Sartre no appearance reveals the phenomenon 'completely', every appearance reveals it *absolutely*. On the contrary, in both realism and idealism, Sartre (1992, 496 [1947-48]) points out, 'we lose the joy of revealing what *is*'. In realism consciousness becomes 'pure contemplative passivity'; in idealism the world appears as 'pure relativity' (*ibid.*) In both cases we lose the joy of being indispensable to make being what it *is*.

Moreover by unveiling the 'other', and by the other unveiling me, the For-itself is enriched with a new dimension of being. While in *B&N* this objectification was seen as inevitably problematic, in the world after conversion in which both I and the other conceive of ourselves primarily in terms of freedom, the unveiling look of the other can now positively enrich my existence by adding to it a new, objective dimensions:

[T]hrough the other I am enriched in a new dimension of Being: through the other I come to exist in the dimension of Being, through the other I become an object. And this is in no way a fall or a threat *in itself*. This comes about only if the Other refuses to see a freedom in me *too*'. But (and this is crucial) if he recognises this freedom in me, by

making me exist as an object in the world 'he *gives a meaning* to my existence *in addition* to the subjective meaning I myself give it [...].

(1992, 499-500 [1947-48])

Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that, although in some passages of the *Cahiers* Sartre seems to speak of the activity of unveiling in terms of a 'task', this 'task' cannot be something that we were somehow summoned to perform by a metaphysical destiny, because then our value would be determined by this metaphysical destiny that we have not decided, and we would once again try to justify ourselves in relation to an end that we have not ourselves chosen and in relation to which we are the inessential. This task therefore is something that we must freely give to ourselves or that is simply manifested through our creative activity of play and creative freedom. The activity of unveiling is therefore not the *primary* goal of the For-itself, I would suggest; rather it is a secondary goal, that can be the source of joy but that appears only within and through the primary goal of creative freedom.

The for-itself as creative freedom is, we have said, the supreme value that authentic man should choose for himself, and we have examined the reasons that can be provided in support of this claim. In the *Cahiers*, Sartre has a lengthy and one may say beautiful discussion about how my creative projects can come to be integrated with those of others in a way that, if it is not unproblematically harmonious, at least does not recreate hell on earth as it the case for Sartre before conversion. But this is only possible if the other wills freedom as her supreme value and if she respects not only *her* creative freedom, but also *mine* and that of everyone else.

However, it does not seem to follow necessarily from the fact that I should value my freedom that I should value that of others. What reasons could Sartre provide in support of the rationality of valuing other's people freedoms as well as my own? The *Cahiers* seem to say explicitly very little in this regard. Sartre, it may be suggested, must have simply thought that if you truly undergo the required catharsis, you will simply see that you have to value other peoples freedom as well.

However, there is more to be said, I think, in support of Sartre's conviction that I cannot will my own freedom without willing and actively seeking to realise that of others. First it may be pointed out that in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre offers what seems to be a reason for the *universalisation* of my affirmation of freedom. 'In creating the man each of us wills ourselves to be', he states in that work, 'there is not a single one of our actions that does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to

be' (Sartre 2007, 24 [1945]). Although it may be an exaggeration to think that this is the case for 'each and everyone' of our acts, Sartre seems to have a point at least in suggesting that in the case of our supreme value, we do create this universalised image of man. It seems plausible that someone who makes of freedom his own supreme guiding value does not acknowledge with indifference whether another person chooses 'un-freedom'. If this is correct, then it follows from this that we must at least implicitly value that every person takes up freedom as their own supreme value, and model their lives around it.

Nevertheless, it may be observed, it does not seem to follow necessarily from my hope that everyone makes of freedom the supreme value for *themselves*, that I have to value their freedom as my own, nor that I should actively create the conditions for their freedom, which is what Sartre thought one should do. It may be pointed out, along the lines suggested by Bell in her book *Sartre's Ethics of authenticity*, that Sartre's account of action might hold the key to provide the basis for his claims. If I will that the other takes up freedom as her supreme value, in order to be consistent I must also at least will that she has the conditions to pursue that value. But as we have seen in chapter one, and as Bell herself points out, for Sartre there is no separation between 'willing' or 'choosing' and 'acting'. 'Choosing' presupposes a commencement of the action that you have chosen, as we have pointed out in commenting on the example of the prisoner. Accordingly, Bell (1989, 66) points out:

If choosing and acting, then, are bound inextricably, Sartre needs little more than universality to ground his contention that as moral individuals we must will and further the freedom of all. To will freedom (one's own) as a value, is to both to will that everyone similarly circumstanced will freedom (his or her own) as a value and *to act accordingly*.⁴²

This argument is interesting, although it must be said that Sartre never employs it, and that it has the potential disadvantage, I think, of staking the necessity of respecting the other's freedom on the correctness of Sartre's understanding of the relation between choosing, willing and acting. I think a stronger case can be made for Sartre on the basis of his account of alienation. In a crucial passage of the *Cahiers Sartre* (1992, 366 [1947-48]) writes that 'Originally, each person is an oppressor inasmuch as he is Other, oppressed insofar as he is himself', and that 'by demanding *to be* me from myself, I cannot even conceive of a relationship of oppression with the Other'. 'The oppressor', he continues, 'even though he may have filched the element of Otherness for his own profit, conceives of him-

⁴² Emphasis in the original.

self as Other'. If Sartre is right that the oppressor conceives of himself in alienated terms (as 'the master' for example), and if he is also right that if one conceives of himself primarily in alienated terms then one is bound to end up in desperation, then Sartre has a reason to claim that nobody should be an oppressor and that he or she should respect the freedom of others.

Conclusion

In the present work, I have attempted to provide what may be labelled an 'ontological' reading of Sartre's theory of freedom as it was developed by him in *Being and Nothingness*. Contrary to what is often suggested in the literature, I have sought to show that Sartre is highly engaged in providing an argued ontological foundation for his theory of freedom, and I have provided a sympathetic as well as inevitably partial reconstruction of it. In chapter one, I have attempted to show that material to undermine the intelligibility of psychological determinism (which constitutes a crucial part of Sartre's account of freedom), can be found (1) in Sartre's account of the nature of consciousness, (2) in his account of the relation between Nothingness and Negation and finally (3) in his account of temporality. Although in Sartre's ontology these three accounts are closely connected and clarify each other, each of them independently, I have suggested, can be seen as undermining the presuppositions that make psychological determinism intelligible. In examining them, I have pointed out how Sartre's claims are not grounded exclusively on our acceptance of his phenomenological descriptions of everyday experiences, and I have suggested how the relation between Sartre's examples and his ontological-phenomenological claims should be conceived. Finally, I have conveyed how the results achieved by these three accounts compels us to re-conceptualise the nature of action, and how via this reconceptualisation we come to grasp what Sartre means by ontological freedom.

In chapter two I examined the two connected notions (original project and original choice) by which Sartre attempts to provide a unitary principle to interpret the For-itself's behaviour, so that our ontological freedom does not have the consequence of making our actions seem gratuitous. I pointed out that Sartre's reasons for rejecting alternative, more traditional explanatory principles lie both in his account of consciousness and in his critique of these explanatory principles as ultimately unsatisfactory *qua explanantia*. I attempted to show that a number of criticisms that have been raised against Sartre can be dispelled once the fundamental project of becoming For-Itself-In-itself is correctly understood as the 'meaning' of our unique particular original projects. I also examined how the claim that the ideal In-Itself-For-Itself can be seen as grounded *a priori* (or, as I have claimed, semi-*a priori*) on Sartre's account of the nature of consciousness as 'lack' of Being, as well as on his hermeneutic of desiring. I then considered the sense and the way in which we can claim to be able to choose and 'change' our original project, and I made a suggestion as to how Sartre's account of the instant might be implemented so as to estab-

lish a continuity between our reflective episodes and our pre-reflective redetermination of our project.

Finally in chapter three I have endeavoured to show that the *Cahiers* can be seen as carrying out the attempt to demonstrate that an ethics is possible on the ground of the ontology of freedom put forward in *Being and Nothingness*. The guiding value of this ethics is man. It is ourselves as creative freedoms, and secondarily the unveiling of being that results from it. I have suggested what may be Sartre's grounds for proposing this as the supreme value of the for-itself and the ground for thinking that we should respect the freedom of others as well.

Nevertheless, it may be still be pointed out that to refrain from curtailing other people's freedom and to actively engage to free them from the oppression of others are two different things, and that Sartre thought that the latter too is required by the 'converted' or 'authentic' man. Therefore, I want to ask in conclusion, 'what could be the ground for this further step?'. I think an interesting proposal in this regard has been put forward by Gardner (2006). Gardner suggests that Sartre's conception of the relation between the in-itself and the for-itself should be re-conceived in Schellingian terms so as to enable him, among other things, to account for the origin of the for-itself, an issue that in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre problematically evades.

In the fashion exposed by Schelling in the *Weltater*, Being should be conceived of as 'an original conflict of principles, which generates conscious subjectivity, and in so doing transposes itself into the relation of subject to world' (Gardner 2006, 253). In order to accept this emendation, Sartre would need to revise his claim that being-in-itself is absolutely independent of the for-itself, as well as his claim (found both in *Being and Nothingness* and in the *Cahiers*) that the notion of *causa sui* is contradictory⁴³. However, as well as providing greater intelligibility as to the origin of the for-itself and the relation between in-itself and for-itself (compared to Sartre's contradictory concept of 'de-totalised totality'), this would also and crucially provide Sartre with a ground for actively pursuing the freedom of others.

This is because, as Gardner (2006, 263) points out, if the for-itself 'traces back its own point of origin to pre-individual being', as would be allowed and required once this Schellingian emendation of Sartre's ontology is in place, then the For-Itself 'can no longer coherently restrict its grasp of the purposiveness of revealing being to its own individual

⁴³ Cf. Gardner (2006, 259).

existence, and so does have a ground for conceiving its task of revealing being in universal rather than egoistic terms, i.e. for setting value on the freedom of others' (*ibid.*).

The task of unveiling Being, according to Sartre, consists not only in saving being from nothingness, but in making being 'meaningful': 'one acts *so that* Being has a meaning. To act and to fail is to prove that the meaning of Being is to make human life impossible' (1992, 486 [1947-48]). But if I trace my task to a pre-personal origin, then I cannot consistently act so as to make *my life alone* meaningful, but also that of others. And the only way in which I can do so is by actively restoring to them the only source that can provide that meaning for them—their creative freedom.

As Gardner (2006, 263) points out, Schelling's form of onto-theology 'is one in which the will does *not* follow from 'the understanding' [of God], and in which it is held that the transition from the being of God to that of the human subject is *not* a relation of purposive creation through which human beings are bound to a concept of an end lying in the divine mind, supplying them with their essence which precedes their existence'. This means that such emendation may be thought to be compatible with Sartre's theory of freedom and with his motivations for rejecting God, which consist precisely in the desire to reject those features that Schelling's onto-theology *does not* display.

It may be true that providing this rationale for seeking the freedom of others may not be sufficient to 'persuade' one of doing so, and we might see Sartre's active political engagement (however controversial) as clearly manifesting this awareness. Nevertheless, what I have attempted to do in this work is to show that Sartre is *also* engaged in the task of providing arguments and rationales for his philosophy of freedom, which is also a fundamental task of an intellectual. If what has been suggested in conclusion is correct, then it looks as though, paradoxically for Sartre, the rationale for accepting his call to actively pursue not only my freedom, but also that of everyone else, is sustained by the acceptance of a form of onto-theology. This consideration opens the way, I submit, to new interesting possibilities of reconciling God and freedom within a Sartrian framework.

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