

The Transcendental Dimension of Sartre's Philosophy

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The thought that I will explore in this paper is that the Sartre of B&N and the earlier writings is in certain fundamental respects a *transcendental* thinker, and that viewing him in this light makes a positive, favourable difference to how we understand and assess his ideas, arguments, and position as a whole.

The use of such plastic and open-textured categories in the history of philosophy is, of course, notoriously treacherous, and 'transcendental philosophy' is probably in no better shape than most. Consequently there will be some interpretations of the claim that Sartre is a transcendental thinker which make it (pretty much) trivially true, and others that make it (pretty much) plainly false. If transcendental means simply lying in an open-ended line of descent from Kant, then of course Sartre is a transcendentalist, along with almost every other modern European philosopher. If, on the other hand, a philosophical position qualifies as transcendental only if it pursues the very same agenda as that of Kant's first *Critique*, then drastic reconstructive surgery would be required to show Sartre to be a transcendental philosopher.

The task, therefore, is to come up with an interpretation of the claim for Sartre's transcendentalism that is sufficiently strong to be interesting, but not so strong as to lack plausibility. Rather than attempt to fix the meaning of transcendental at the outset – which would lead off into thickets from which it would be hard to find an exit – I am going to work through half a dozen headings which will, I think, be accepted as denoting characteristic features of transcendental philosophy. These include transcendental argumentation and transcendental idealism, the hallmarks of transcendentalism. So if under each of the headings enough of a case can be made for their centrality to Sartre's concerns – if it can be shown not merely that Sartre says certain things which can be squeezed under those headings, but that he is deeply engaged with the relevant issue – then the cumulative effect, I hope, will be to vindicate the historical claim, and, much more importantly, to give an idea of why it matters.

1. Sartre's anti-naturalist strategy

Sartre uses the term 'transcendental' fairly freely in B&N, but that on its own does not count for much, and the Sartre who emerges from much of the analytic commentary on B&N, or who has been touted as a post-structuralist *avant la lettre*, does not look to be transcendental in any important sense. And it is true that many things seem to pull Sartre away from the transcendental paradigm, including his rejection of idealism and criticism of the transcendental subject of Kant's theoretical philosophy; his rejection of Husserl's transcendental ego and the *epoché* of transcendental phenomenology; and his dismissal (as it may seem) of epistemology in favour of a purely descriptive version of phenomenology. If Sartre is pictured as third in the phenomenological line, after Husserl and Heidegger, and as having stripped the transcendental reduction out of Husserl and anthropologized *Being and Time*, then he will seem to have shed precisely those elements in Husserl and Heidegger which are residually transcendental.

We begin, however, to get an idea of why Sartre may be counted a transcendental philosopher, if we reflect on the underlying *motivation* for his construction of a position which departs from Kant, Husserl and Heidegger. Any account of Sartre's philosophical motivation must give a central place to Sartre's opposition, on libertarian and axiological grounds, to philosophical naturalism. This itself is a thoroughly and famously Kantian matter, and so, more specifically, I want to suggest, is the anti-naturalist strategy that Sartre pursues, even as it brings him into conflict with Kant.

Kant's solution to the problem of human freedom, in so far as it rests on the conditions of transcendental idealism and the pure practical reason of Kant's metaphysics of morals, is rejected by Sartre, but Sartre takes over one key feature of Kant's solution, while regarding Kant's construal of the problem as in one basic respect misguided.

What Sartre *accepts* from Kant is the notion that we differ ontologically from natural objects; what he *rejects* is Kant's conception of us as enmeshed *ab initio* in the web of empirical causality, from which we need to extricate ourselves, our relation to our freedom being thereafter epistemically *indirect*. Instead, Sartre tries to show that we can regard our freedom as *primary* – rather than restricting knowledge of freedom to the context of morality, Sartre holds that freedom is implied by every aspect of cognition and self-consciousness, so that it is unnecessary, and a mistake, to think that we need to enter a special plea for exemption from empirical causality in order to lay claim to freedom.

Put like this, it may seem doubtful that Sartre's libertarianism can avoid being merely dogmatic. But there is a sense in which, far from irresponsibly *ignoring* the intuition in favour of naturalistic determinism and merely counter-asserting the reality of freedom, Sartre acknowledges the truth in naturalism, as he takes it to be, and allows the whole of his philosophy be shaped by it. The naturalist's conception of the independent reality of nature is expressed in Sartre's conception of being-in-itself, and Sartre considers that naturalism is correct in so far as the *paradigm* of an entity with full, genuine being is indeed a material object, or, put differently, that whatever falls outside the bounds of material nature cannot have (full, genuine) being and so must be 'nothing'.¹

Thus far Sartre's thought parallels eliminative materialism, but Sartre takes the following further step. Having made a clean sweep – having disposed of the idea that there is a unified ontological realm, an order of nature within which we find ourselves located – we are positioned to reaffirm our own existence and grasp correctly its ontological character: since it is true, as the naturalist says, that only material nature meets the conditions for full and genuine being, and because we must nonetheless think of ourselves as existing in *some* manner – eliminative materialism is, from the relevant subjective angle, literally unthinkable – we are required to think of our existence as exemplifying a different *mode of being* from that of material nature, *antithetical* to nature's mode of being; hence Sartre's identification of the human subject's mode of being with 'nothingness'.

Sartre's strategy, therefore, is to offer an interpretation of the philosophical intuition which underlies naturalism, grant its authority, and then, turning the tables, to *use* this intuition to *reveal freedom* – in a way analogous to that in which Descartes uses scepticism to reveal the true grounds of knowledge.

The immediate advantages of Sartre's strategy over Kant's, as I indicated, are that it avoids resting freedom on precarious moral conditions, and that (if it works) it secures freedom while leaving external reality intact, rather than reduced to a transcendental representation.

This second point is of particular importance to Sartre. Sartre objects to the manner in which the Kantian transcendental subject encompasses or *contains* the world, and sees it as his task to secure freedom without recourse to idealism. In Sartre's view, while realism makes freedom impossible, idealism makes it too easy – and thus gives a false account of freedom – by virtue of its failure to appreciate the nature and quality of our immersion in the world. Sartre

thinks that idealism removes from things their hard existential edge. For Sartre, the objects which surround and *bear* on us, and in relation to which our freedom needs to be sustained philosophically, are not – as he supposes they are for Kant – mere functions of our knowledge of them, things subject to the legislation of our understanding; the reality of freedom, Sartre thinks, requires that we be related to objects *qua* their being, and that objects be known to be *irreducible* to our knowledge of them. Sartre wants to think of the human subject not as containing the world, but as encountering it, so to speak, on an equal footing. Navigating between and beyond realism and idealism is thus necessary, on Sartre's view, for the vindication of freedom.

Sartre's rejection of the idea, accepted by Kant, that the mind instantiates empirical causal relations, is supported by B&N's theory of the theoretical and practical sources of the error which underpins the commonsense conception of human subjects as natural objects. Thus although Sartre's position is more revisionary than Kant's, the revision is defended.²

2. Sartre's transcendental argumentation

Sartre's anti-naturalist strategy would not qualify as transcendental, however, if the *grounds* given by Sartre for drawing the relevant anti-naturalist conclusions were not of the right kind, and as I noted earlier, it may be thought that Sartre's project is wholly descriptive and eschews questions of grounding, his indifference to foundational matters being most overt in the context of epistemology.

A recent study of Sartre claims, in his defence, that we should not always be looking for *arguments* in Sartre's texts, since if the phenomenological descriptions he gives are convincing, then arguments are not needed.³ Now if this were so – if Sartre's achievement were to merely *represent* the manifest image of the world in primary colours, and if he were merely *insisting on* this image, reminding us of our immersion in it – then Sartre would have broken with the transcendental tradition in a crucial respect. On such a reading, phenomenological description is what does the real work in B&N, Sartre's implicit claim being that the manifest image is ultimately self-sustaining. The ontological talk in B&N would then be either a rhetorical shadow cast by Sartre's map of human phenomenology, or the result of a simple, non-transcendental inference from the appearances. In other words, if the authority of phenomenology flows directly

from its actuality, then either Sartre has a phenomenology but no metaphysics, or he has a metaphysics, but this is grounded non-transcendentally.⁴

Sartre's apparently negative attitude towards epistemology may seem to be evidenced in his rejection of what he calls the 'primacy of knowledge'. According to Sartre, this mistaken assumption underpins swathes of modern philosophy, including Kant and Hegel. Sartre does not state in a single definition exactly what the assumption of the primacy of knowledge amounts to, but it is clear from the contexts in which Sartre uses the notion that it encompasses all philosophical methodologies which give *priority* to questions of knowledge or justification of belief, the result of which, Sartre supposes, is an implicit reduction of being to a function of thought or representation.

Sartre's objections to the primacy of knowledge include accordingly the objection which Jacobi makes to Kant and Fichte, and Schelling to Hegel, that being is irreducible to thought, and a correlative objection to the effect that philosophy which gives priority to questions of knowledge cannot overcome the logical separation of being from representation, and so cannot take us out of our subjectivity.⁵

Sartre may accordingly appear to be saying that, since epistemology is necessarily futile, we can rightfully ignore problems associated with knowledge and belief. (Sartre's self-association with and borrowing from Heidegger can also be taken as a ground for thinking this to be his view.)

I think, however, that it is a mistake to read Sartre as *substituting* phenomenological description for argument, or as simply turning his back on epistemology. The passages in Sartre which may seem to have purely and merely descriptive import are correctly viewed as instances of transcendental argumentation of the complex type analysed by Mark Sacks in his discussion of Sartre's account of other minds (2005a; see also Sacks 2005b and 2005c). The basic idea, stated in the roughest terms, is that (certain) transcendental necessities – for example, in the case that Sacks discusses: our judging our experience to be of a world which presents others to us – allow themselves to be grounded by thoughts as *indexed* to situations or situated thinkers. The non-inferential immediacy of a type of experience – in Sartre's other-minds case, the experience of concrete shame – is not itself the proof: the transcendental proof consists in *reflection* on the pre-reflective phenomenology which discloses the thought embedded in it, not with respect to its bare conceptual content, but as informed by the subject's perspectival situation. This type of

transcendental argumentation contrasts with the type found paradigmatically in Strawson, where the motor of argument is supplied by conceptual analysis and the discovery of relations of presupposition between (unsituated) propositions.

If this is correct, then Sartre is not in fact disengaged from the modern epistemological tradition in the manner of Heidegger. While it is true that Sartre does not aim to answer the sceptic directly and on his own terms, it is not true that Sartre follows Heidegger in *repudiating* epistemology on the grounds that an existential error is involved in the very posing of epistemological questions or entertaining of sceptical possibilities. Sartre's response to scepticism is more oblique than a traditional empiricist or rationalist response, but it incorporates a recognition that sceptical doubts are *meaningful*. The sceptic's and traditional epistemologist's shared mistake, Sartre believes, is to look to *reflective* consciousness for *answers* to epistemological questions,⁶ but no mistake is involved, *contra* Heidegger, in the posing of the questions themselves, which indeed have their answers, at the *pre-reflective* level. So, whereas Heidegger urges us to de-conceive ourselves altogether as Cartesian-Kantian subjects, Sartre holds fast to the idea that there are apodictic cognitions and that self-conscious subjectivity provides a terminus to demands for epistemic justification.

The transcendental mould is clearly visible in Part Two of B&N, which specifies on the one hand the structures of the human subject, and on the other, the formal features of empirical reality.

The most abstract and fundamental structures of subjectivity, on Sartre's account, are selfhood, temporality, and transcendence, and he aims to show that these are necessary for our conscious being. In place of any attempt to deduce for example the temporal form of experience from the *concept* of consciousness of objects, Sartre's transcendental method is to bring us to realize – at the phenomenological, situated level – that *our* consciousness could not fail to be temporal, by giving us insight into the ways in which our consciousness is connected *internally* with our temporality, in other words, to show how *what it is* for us to be conscious, and *what it is* for there to be time (for us), make one another intelligible. In place of Strawsonian chains of deduction, Sartre's transcendental argumentation offers lateral, horizontal interconnections revealing the mutual cross-conditioning of the immediate structures of the for-itself.

It follows that in tracing back the basic features of empirical reality – spatiality and temporality, determinacy, quality and quantity, causality and so on – to the structures of the

human subject, Sartre is concerned not to demonstrate the necessity of those features in the strong sense of showing the *conceptual impossibility* of alternatives (e.g., non-spatio-temporal awareness of the in-itself) but to indicate the way in which the formal features of empirical reality and the structures of the subject interlock, the latter making the former intelligible by supplying their *a priori* conditions. This is enough to support at least some weak claims regarding the necessary conditions of experience. For example, to the extent that Sartre shows how *spatialization* of the in-itself is what *for us* plays the role of allowing the subject to make itself co-present with being-in-itself, and how the principle of causality coheres with the temporality of the human subject, Sartre can be said to establish the necessity of space and causality for empirical reality, albeit in a weaker sense than Kant, or Strawson, claims to be able to establish. Sartre leaves it thinkable that the experience of some logically possible conscious subject might be, e.g., non-temporal, but if Sartre is right, then we should be indifferent to this possibility, since it cannot intersect with anything recognizable as *our* mode of being. (I will say more about this restriction of philosophical scope in a later section.)

Of particular importance is the way in which the *teleology* of the human subject provides the final foundation of Sartre's transcendental proofs. Teleology is involved, for instance, in the transcendental proof of other minds, in negative form: the Other is given to me *contra-purposively*, as a negation of my freedom. Without this, the ontological transformation of my being effected by the Other's Look could not be registered, and the Other could not be given as subject.

That knowledge as such and in general must be regarded as embedded in the subject's teleology comes out explicitly in Sartre's treatment of the concept of knowledge in Chapter 3 of Part Two, where the question addressed is not *whether* we have knowledge, *contra* the sceptic, nor of the conditions under which it is *rational* to form beliefs with whatever degree of confidence, but of *what* knowledge *is*. The result is what one might call a *metaphysics of cognition* as distinct from a theory of knowledge in the more usual sense. As Sartre puts it, 'knowledge is reabsorbed in being' (B&N: 216), where the being in question is the teleological being of the human subject; cognition is analysed as an essential moment in the subject's structure of transcendence.⁷

There is much more to be said about the distinctive features of Sartre's transcendental argumentation,⁸ but the point most important for present purposes is that Sartre, though evincing

none of the worry about objectivity, relativity and rational belief-warrants that sets in motion much epistemology, is not excluded from the transcendental tradition by an indifference to epistemological concerns, and is very much in the business of pinning down transcendental necessities by means of a situated form of transcendental argumentation.

3. Perennial issues of transcendental philosophy

So far I hope to have shown that the driving force and overall shape of Sartre's philosophy has a Kantian character – an obvious point – and, perhaps less obviously, that the method Sartre uses in pursuing his anti-naturalist strategy is, at least in substantial part, transcendental. Now I move onto other, more intricate aspects of Sartre's transcendental profile.

The following four issues are ones with respect to which any philosophical position which lays claim to be able to show the existence of transcendental conditions – and which in addition seeks to comprehensively rationalize (explain and justify) its use of transcendental argumentation, i.e. to explicate itself metaphilosophically – must take a stand:

- A. The (metaphysical) question of the *reality* or *ideality* of the *objects of cognition*.
- B. The (metaphysical) question of the *ontological status* of transcendental conditions themselves.
- C. The (metaphilosophical) question of the relation of the *theoretical* and the *practical*.
- D. The (metaphilosophical) question of the *standpoint* of transcendental philosophy and the correspondingly defined *perspectival* or *extra-perspectival* status of transcendental claims.

I will take these in turn and consider the answers that Sartre may be thought to give to these questions.

4. Sartre and realism/idealism

The first issue, then, is Sartre's position regarding the reality or ideality of objects of knowledge, and as I have already noted, Sartre describes himself (consistently and emphatically) as neither a

realist nor an idealist. The puzzle is, *why* Sartre should declare himself beyond *idealism* – given that, as I have said, demonstrating that empirical reality presupposes an *a priori* contribution of subjectivity appears to be a central part of the enquiry in B&N.

Supporting the construal of Sartre as a kind of idealist is the observation that, when Sartre talks of avoiding realism and of its incoherence, what he has in mind is a position which construes (i) objects as existing independently of consciousness just *as we are conscious of them as being*, and (ii) our cognition of those objects as due to their exercising some *causality* which is accidental to their intrinsic nature.⁹ This corresponds to the position which Kant describes as treating objects of experience as things in themselves and calls transcendental realism. So it may seem reasonable to interpret Sartre as rejecting *transcendental realism* – as well as of course the merely empirical idealism of Berkeley – and as affirming a combination of *transcendental* idealism with *empirical* realism, all on the familiar pattern of Kant. This would cohere with the fact that Sartre quite clearly takes the term 'idealism' on some occasions to mean phenomenalism, and on others, to involve a commitment to the primacy of knowledge – in short, he tends to equate idealism with Berkeley's idealism or with Kant's particular version of transcendental idealism (as he understands it).

If this were all, then there would be little reason for us not to override Sartre's self-description and re-categorize his position as a form of transcendental idealism, one which avoids reducing the *being* of objects to a function of cognition in the way that Sartre thinks Kant does. This proposal runs up, however, against Sartre's explicit anti-idealist statements.

Sartre wants to combine three claims: (1) That, *pace* realism, the 'problem of the connection of consciousness with existents independent of it' is 'insoluble' (B&N: xxxv), in so far as 'transcendent being could not act on consciousness' (B&N: 171). (2) That, *pace* idealism, 'subjectivity is powerless to constitute the objective' (B&N: xxxviii), and that 'consciousness could not "construct" the transcendent by objectivizing elements borrowed from its subjectivity' (B&N: 171); the for-itself 'adds nothing to being' (B&N: 209). In addition, I have said, (3) Sartre envisages a *correlation* – at the very least – of the intelligibly differentiated object-world with the fundamental structures of the human subject.

The problem is that, on the transcendental idealist interpretation of Sartre, it seems that this correlation will need to be understood as a relation of *constitution* (or 'construction') – in other words, (3) appears to conflict head-on with (2).

Is there any way of squaring (2) and (3)? The following possibilities suggest themselves: first, that the correlation of the object-world with human subjectivity is due to the structures of subjectivity, but is secured by some means *other* than a relation of object-constitution; second, that it is an instance of some sort of pre-established harmony; and, third, that the correlation does not need be regarded as 'due to' anything at all, because it does not stand in need of explanation.

The first possibility still carries an echo of idealism, but it would be understandable if, in the absence of object-*constituting* activity, Sartre considered it sufficiently remote from Kant and Husserl for the label to be dropped. It requires, nonetheless, a positive account of the manner in which the subject determines-without-constituting its objects. The second possibility similarly needs amplification, since if a harmony has been established between subject and world, then surely an explanation is owed for its having been established.

Attention to the following elements in Sartre's philosophy allows us to make some progress:

(1) There is a suggestion of a combination of the first two possibilities in Sartre's doctrine of the subject's 'responsibility for the (my) world'. What this may be interpreted as claiming is that the correlation is established, not by God, but by my *freedom*, in my 'original choice of self'. On this account, the accord between the for-itself and its world of objects is established in a way analogous to that in which the author of a fictional work engineers coherence within the fiction between (a) the characters, and (b) the scenes and plot which compose the world which the characters inhabit: the harmony is established not *within* the (fictional) world – as realism and idealism, by analogy, mistakenly suppose – but from a point *outside* it, i.e. by my pre-mundane choice of self.

(2) A metaphysical position which attributes the constitution of the objects of cognition to the structure of the subject, and which, like Kant, *stops* the story at that point, counts straightforwardly as a subjective idealism. But if the structures are traced back in turn to a *pre*-subjective source – such that, when the subject posits objects, its positing of objects derives ultimately, albeit indirectly, from *being itself* – then it is not so obvious that we have an idealism, or at any rate, that we have an idealism of Kant's *subjective* sort. And on Sartre's full metaphysical account, as I will explain later, this is exactly the picture – when the subject bestows structure on being-in-itself, yielding an intelligibly differentiated world of objects, it

follows an imperative which derives in the last resort from being itself. (This sort of position, it may be argued, is both Hegel's and Heidegger's.)

(3) Consideration of Sartre's conception of being-in-itself helps us to understand why Sartre does not regard his account of the subject-relatedness of the object-world as leading him to reproduce Kant's transcendental idealism. For Sartre, an object O may be considered in two respects: (i) *qua* its mode of being, viz. its being-in-itself (= the ground of its determinacy), (ii) *qua* its belonging to the differentiated object-world (= the respect in which the form of O interlocks with the structures of our subjectivity). This distinction is neither a distinction of individuals, nor of different sets of properties of one and the same individual. Instead, existing-in-the-mode-of-being-in-itself pervades, in adverbial fashion, O *qua* item in the object-world.¹⁰ The distinction of reality and appearance thereby gains no purchase, and thing in themselves are not invoked, for while it is true that O 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 categorially property-less – rather, it is the *ground* of things' having properties – we cannot talk of 'how', or 'the way that', being-in-itself is. Hence there is no sense in which Being-in-Itself can be thought to comprise Reality.

In combination, these points provide Sartre with a metaphysical position which we may justifiably describe as a form of transcendental idealism, but which we can understand Sartre's declining to describe as idealistic, and which allows us to see beyond the apparently gross contradiction comprised by (1)-(3). If determination of the object-world in accordance with the structures of the for-itself is the joint result of the individual's original choice of self and an imperative deriving from being, then it proceeds at a different, higher level from that at which intra-subjective, object-constituting Kantian transcendental psychology operates. It is also important to recall that Sartre's account of this determination is not designed to answer the question that Kant's idealism addresses, namely the establishing of an anti-sceptical relation of knowledge, since scepticism, on Sartre's account, is put out of business at an earlier point, namely by the ontological proof in the Introduction. The transcendental argumentation in Part Two of B&N is therefore uncoupled from an idealism which, like Kant's, secures the 'matching' of self and world on the basis of form-giving processes occurring within the subject, and renders objects knowable only in so far as they possess an inferior degree of reality. By contrast, Sartre's

conception of being-in-itself provides for the irreducibility of the being of O, allowing Sartre to deny that O is constituted, in the Kantian sense, by subjectivity.

5. Sartre and the ontological status of transcendental conditions

The issue of the ontological status of transcendental conditions – that is, of whether truths which express transcendental necessities imply directly the existence of realities which make them true, or which are directly required for the truth of the conclusions of transcendental arguments¹¹ – is broached by Sartre on the very first page of his very first philosophical publication, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, a fact which is surely of significance for the claim that Sartre is attuned to the preoccupations of transcendental philosophy:

We have to agree with Kant when he says that 'it *must be possible* for the "I think" to accompany all my representations'. But should we thereby conclude that an I inhabits de facto all our states of consciousness [...]? It seems that this would be to distort Kant's philosophy. The problem of critique is a *de jure* problem: thus Kant affirms nothing about the de facto existence of the 'I think' ... The real issue is rather that of determining the conditions of possibility of experience [...] But there is a dangerous tendency in contemporary philosophy [...] which consists of turning the conditions of possibility determined by critique into a *reality*. This is a tendency that leads some authors, for instance, to wonder what 'transcendental consciousness' may actually *be* [...]

Transcendental consciousness is, for him [Kant], merely the set of [de jure] conditions necessary for the existence of an empirical consciousness. In consequence, to make the transcendental I into a *real* entity [...] is to make a de facto and not a *de jure* judgement, and that means we adopt a point of view radically different from Kant's. (TE: 2-3)

Sartre's concern here is with the transposition of Kant's thesis concerning the 'I think', into Husserl's thesis of the existence of a transcendental ego, which provides Sartre's target in this early work. Borrowing Kant's terminology, Sartre distinguishes *de jure* from *de facto* philosophical claims, and regards each as belonging to strictly different species of philosophical project, committed to a different philosophical method. Kant's thesis of the 'transcendental unity

of apperception' must be accepted, Sartre affirms, but such a thesis concerns, he says, 'conditions of possibility of experience', 'logical conditions' which as such can have no (direct, unconditional) existential presuppositions or implications: the transcendental unity of apperception has a purely *de jure*, and no *de facto*, character; it specifies, Sartre says, 'merely the set of conditions necessary for the existence of an empirical consciousness', not something that *itself* exists (TE: 3).

Husserl's *phenomenology*, by contrast, is supposed to be a scientific and *descriptive*, not a 'critical', study of consciousness: it proceeds via intuition and aims at determining (fundamental, absolute) facts of consciousness, i.e. real existences. Husserl's thesis of the existence of a transcendental ego – which, Sartre assumes implicitly, rightly or wrongly, Husserl wishes to base on considerations borrowed from Kant – rests therefore on a confusion of phenomenology with Critical philosophy. The mistake of deriving a *de facto* conclusion from a *de jure* consideration, and of identifying statements of conditions of possibility of experience with ontological assertions, is according to Sartre not peculiar to Husserl: it afflicts also, he claims, various other schools of contemporary philosophy, and shows itself in gross form in the conception (of Boutroux) of transcendental subjectivity as 'an unconscious' which 'floats between real and ideal realms' (TE: 4).

This early work shows Sartre's lucid awareness of the issue of the relation between transcendental conditions and ontological commitment, and Sartre's early position, we have just seen, is that (1) there are sound arguments for necessary conditions of possible experience, (2) the conclusions of which are necessarily ontologically *uncommitted*. In so far as philosophical investigation results in either positive or negative ontological assertions – as does Sartre's own account of the self in *The Transcendence of the Ego* – it is on Sartre's view doing something different from what Kant, properly understood, is doing.

Sartre never revisits the *de jure/de facto* distinction explicitly – these terms do not appear at all in B&N – but it is clear that in B&N he continues to think of Kant as engaged in a different species of philosophical project from his own 'phenomenological ontology', as he now calls his philosophical method, and what additionally becomes clear is that Sartre now thinks that Kant's project incorporates a mistake. Whereas in the earlier work Sartre leaves us guessing as to what attitude he wants to adopt towards Kant's *de jure* transcendental conditions, in B&N the very concept of such a condition is rejected, on the grounds that it reflects the assumption of the

primacy of knowledge, i.e. of conceiving being as a function of idea or representation: Critical idealism is, Sartre says, 'a system which reduces the ensemble of objects to a connected grouping of representations and which measures all existence by the knowledge which I have of it' (B&N: 225).

Sartre's claim in B&N is, therefore, that although the reasoning of Kant's transcendental argumentation may be valid, the *description* under which Kant brings the conclusions of those arguments – the interpretation Kant gives of them – incorporates a mistake, which can be avoided only by giving those conclusions an ontological, *de facto* interpretation.

We may now be wondering how much leverage Sartre has got against Kant, in other words, how effective Sartre's rather sweeping charge of 'assuming the primacy of knowledge' really is.

At this point I want to draw attention to a highly important passage in the chapter on transcendence at B&N: 175-6,. Here Sartre gives a different and independent argument against Kant's Critical project, one which, if Sartre is correct, shows that transcendental conditions *must* be construed ontologically. (The passage also offers, incidentally, an explicitly Kantian characterisation of the enquiry in the present section of B&N as directed to what 'must render all experience possible and ... establishing how in general an object can exist for consciousness', B&N: 176.)

The argument is, in summary, the following. The most basic transcendental condition of knowledge of any object is knowledge of the non-identity of the object known and oneself as knowing subject. This knowledge cannot, for obvious reasons, be empirical. But if transcendental conditions were *themselves* matters of knowledge – principles which are contents or objects of the intellect – then an intellectual operation of giving *application* to the relevant transcendental principle would be required, and this would presuppose the object's being *already* given in some way, in order for the transcendental principle to be applied to it by the intellect. But if the object were already given, then it would need to be given as either (i) belonging to my subjectivity, (ii) external to my subjectivity, or (iii) neither belonging or external to my subjectivity, i.e. undetermined. The first and the second options entail that the work which the principle is supposed to do has already been done. The third leaves room for the transcendental principle to be applied, but entails that objects are only ever grasped as distinct from my subjectivity *by virtue of* some feature which is *not* incorporated in what is originally given to me. And this is

unacceptable, for not only is it phenomenologically false, but it reduces the sphere of the not-I to a theoretical extrapolation.¹²

In other words, if there are to be *a priori*, transcendental conditions of cognition – as there must – then these must *precede* cognition, and so (in the absence of any alternative) must be deemed identical with the *being* of the subject, an aspect of its 'upsurge' (viz., the internal negation of being which the upsurge incorporates) rather than its stock of knowledge or representations; so they cannot be merely *de jure*.

In sum, although Sartre regards his philosophy as divided sharply from that of Kant – 'phenomenological ontology' as opposed to 'critique' – we can re-characterize their relation in terms of a difference of view as regards the ontological status of transcendental conditions.

The next point that needs to be made explicit is that, on Sartre's account, there is fundamentally but one transcendental condition, and this, of course, is simply *consciousness* – consciousness holds the place, in Sartre's ontological order, of the principle of apperceptive unity which stands at the summit of Kant's non-ontological order of transcendental principles. This point can be elaborated in several ways.

First, in order to appreciate the full strength of Sartre's claim, we should note its difference from the claims of Kant and Husserl. To say that consciousness is *itself* a transcendental condition is something different from, and stronger than, saying either (i) that consciousness is *subject to* transcendental conditions, or (ii) that investigation of consciousness *discloses* a transcendental field. The former, Kantian claim does not attribute transcendentality to consciousness *per se* but to certain representations that consciousness must deploy *in so far as* it attains objective cognition, while the latter, Husserlian claim reserves the attribute of transcendentality for that which is attained *via* consciousness. Both make consciousness a transcendental functionary, but they do not *identify* its mode of being, as I am suggesting Sartre does, with transcendentality.¹³

Second, making explicit the identification of consciousness with transcendentality casts in a new light the extremely bold claims concerning the nature of consciousness made in the Introduction to B&N. If consciousness were something merely come across *a posteriori* in empiricist-introspective fashion, or even in some more sophisticated phenomenological manner, then claims about the nature consciousness would need to be constrained accordingly, and in such a light Sartre's foundational claims about consciousness are bound to appear dogmatic or at

least under-argued (as many have found them to be). If, *per contra*, consciousness simply is transcendental – if consciousness is equivalent to *that-which-enables* a world of objects – then consciousness cannot be likened to any other item and must be regarded as inherently *non-objectual*, meaning not just that consciousness should be accorded some or other feature(s) not possessed by objects at large, but that it must not be burdened with any feature whatsoever borrowed and carried over from the object-world. Any such feature would interfere with its transcendental role. In order for consciousness to have the requisite purity, it must be conceived in a way which implies positively that it *could not have* object-derived features.¹⁴ The transcendental conception of consciousness is connected directly, therefore, with its specific ontological characterisation as nothingness: whatever is held to be transcendental cannot have anything of the character of an object – not even its being – and so, if it has existential status, must *be* 'nothing(ness)'.

Third, we should note that the ground-floor question of why Sartre commits himself *ab initio* to a Cartesian method in philosophy hereby receives its answer. The justification for starting with consciousness or the *cogito* is discussed in some detail in a paper written after B&N (Sartre 1948), where Sartre's defence of his Cartesianism consists of a rebuttal of the usual objections that it entails solipsism and idealism,¹⁵ and an argument that every alternative epistemology reduces knowledge to mere probability, destroying certainty and thereby knowledge.¹⁶ This account allows us to relate Sartre's Cartesianism to the standard reasons found in modern philosophy for adopting a first-person, subjective starting point. However, these epistemologically orientated reasons are not rehearsed anywhere in B&N, where the question of Cartesianism's justification is not even raised, and a concern with the possibility of knowledge can hardly be adduced as a sufficient explanation of Sartre's adoption of Cartesianism in that work. More plausibly, the fact that no specific and explicit reason is articulated in B&N for starting with consciousness is due to Sartre's axiomatic conviction that consciousness is a transcendental condition.

6. Sartre and the relation of the theoretical and the practical

The next issue concerns Sartre's relation to the thesis or principle of the primacy of practical reason, a notion which plays an important and complex role in post-Kantian thought. Because the

rational integration of theoretical reason with practical consciousness and axiological interests is integral to the transcendental tradition, the question presents itself for all forms of transcendental philosophy, of the conditions under which the agreement of the practical and theoretical images of reality can be secured. The question is, therefore: Does Sartre think that the rationality of beliefs about theoretical matters is properly *determined*, at least in some contexts or at some levels, by our practical interests, or does he regard theoretical enquiry as wholly *autonomous* in relation to the practical?

On the one hand, it can seem that Sartre leans heavily on the primacy of practical reason, and that he attempts to show how we must conceive things *in order that* we may consider ourselves free. On this view, B&N should be regarded as showing what results when a libertarian conception of freedom is assumed, and our theoretical image of the world is recast in its light.¹⁷ A suggestion of this emerged earlier, with the point that the teleology of the for-itself provides the bottom line of Sartre's transcendental argumentation.

This reading B&N as practically grounded underlies the suggestion that B&N results in a species of fiction which has regulative force for the practical point of view,¹⁸ and it is assumed also by critics of Sartre who claim that B&N provides a *reductio* of the libertarian conception of freedom, or alternatively, that it discredits the principle of the primacy of practical reason by showing how its employment (at any rate, in Sartre's unrestricted form) licenses metaphysical absurdities.

On the other hand, the very structure of B&N, by virtue of its beginning with questions of ontology and pursuing these on a basis which makes no explicit reference to values or practical interests, moving slowly towards an ethics, seems to imply firmly the autonomy of theoretical reason.

Remarks made by Sartre in a late interview support this interpretation (Sartre 1975, 45). Sartre repudiates the definition of ontology as 'an interpretation of things that enables us to see at a distance the conditions necessary for human fulfilment', and affirms that ontology is instead the study of being 'for the purpose of reconstituting the edifice of knowledge' and 'nothing else', declaring that our practice and evaluative beliefs must give way to whatever ontology dictates. B&N's intended revision of our values – Sartre's attempt to get us to stop treating value as a feature of the in-itself and ourselves as substantial entities, by persuading us of certain theoretical propositions concerning the ontology of value and the self – seems to follow exactly this pattern.

The text of B&N gives every suggestion that once again, as with the choice between realism and idealism, Sartre considers that he does not need to choose between the two options, and I think that we can understand why he should think this.

Because consciousness for Sartre is from the outset *already* practical and value-orientated – consciousness is an expression of being-for-itself, and the for-itself, as the term implies, is constituted by a teleology – practical and theoretical reason are fundamentally united at a subjective level, in the being of the subject. Sartre's idea, which has an important historical precedent in Fichte, is that an 'ought', or 'having-to', or 'obligation' – a fact or structure describable only in a practical, imperativial idiom – belongs to the fabric of reality, and that theoretical cognition, though differentiated in specific ways from practical consciousness, is a necessary aspect of the practical necessity in which human subjectivity consists. This gives us a *subjective* unity of the functions of theoretical and practical reasoning, i.e. a unity within the subject.

Exactly such points of unity are employed in Sartre's transcendental argumentation, as the following illustrates. In the chapter on temporality (B&N: 142 ff.), Sartre seeks to show, as I said earlier, that our consciousness is necessarily temporal, and that its temporality has a 'dynamic' character, meaning that the for-itself necessarily apprehends itself as having '*become* Past' and as arising 'to become the Present of this Past' (B&N: 142). Sartre argues that this dynamic cannot be grasped in terms of concepts of permanence and change and that it requires us to conceive the subject as 'a spontaneity of which we can say: it *is*. Or simply: *This* spontaneity should be allowed to define itself' (B&N: 148). The crucial point for present purposes is Sartre's use of the normative-deontological expression 'should be allowed to ...', *devrait se laisser définir par elle-même*, and his equation of this with '*is*': Sartre is suggesting that in thinking this spontaneity, we do not think of ourselves as objects of theoretical judgement alone; the judgement 'I am a spontaneity' is *both* a theoretical assertion *and* an expression of practical consciousness, and so manifests a point of indifference between theoretical and practical thought. This is confirmed shortly afterwards when Sartre explains that the thesis which he has just presented 'by using the concept of spontaneity which seemed to me more familiar to my readers', can be restated in his own terminology as a matter of the for-itself's 'having to be', *ayant à l'être* (B&N: 149).

In the terms I used earlier, the situation, or perspective, of having-to-determine-oneself, provides the necessary frame for Sartre's transcendental argumentation.

As regards the *objective* unity of practical and theoretical reason, the agreement of their respective images of the world: On Sartre's account, the correct ontology is necessarily one that is extrapolated from consciousness – this is his explicit commitment to Cartesianism as a philosophical methodology – and the only ontology which *can* be derived from consciousness, so B&N argues, is one that underwrites our practical orientation, in a revised, purified and corrected form. The agreement of the theoretical and the practical images of the world, the objective unity of practical and theoretical reason, is therefore no mere fortunate accident – it is guaranteed by Sartre's Cartesian method in theoretical philosophy in conjunction with his conception of consciousness as an expression of freedom.

The axiological motivation of Sartre's philosophy referred to earlier is therefore taken up and fulfilled directly within his system, meaning that Sartre has no need to formulate and invoke (as Kant does) the primacy of practical reason as a *distinct principle* within his system, appeal to which is required in order to direct theoretical reasoning from the outside in directions favourable to our practical interests.

7. Sartre and the standpoint of transcendental claims

With respect to the first three perennial issues in transcendental philosophy, I have argued that Sartre's position is both consistent and in important ways original. The situation changes – as regards not originality, but consistency – when we come to the final issue, concerning the standpoint from which Sartre's philosophy is made out. This involves a difficulty which, I will argue, takes us to the outer limit of Sartre's project.

There can be little doubt that Sartre regards the philosophical outlook which he articulates in B&N as encompassing and making transparent reality in its entirety.¹⁹ Sartre of course regards some matters as ultimate brute 'facts', to be accepted without further explanation: for instance, at the very highest level, the existence and nature (or non-nature) of the in-itself. But the ultimacy of these 'contingencies' is *not* due, for Sartre, to any failure or our conceptual, linguistic or other abilities to keep pace with the projected objects of our knowledge. Nowhere does Sartre acknowledge limits to human or philosophical cognition: when we reach a terminus in our attempt to grasp matters philosophically, it is not because we have run out of cognitive resources, but because that is where the end of things lies in reality. It is not, therefore, that the in-itself has

a concealed constitution which God or perhaps some future physical science could grasp but which we are unable to make out – according to Sartre there *is nothing more* to the in-itself than what we know of it. As he puts it, 'all is there, luminous' in the broad daylight of consciousness (B&N: 571).

There are reasons, moreover, why it may be thought of paramount importance for Sartre that the claims of B&N should be comprehensive, complete, and unqualified. For one thing, Sartre's thesis of absolute freedom needs to be able to withstand sceptical doubt, and (arguably) any concession that his philosophy offers only a limited view of our situation will fail to rule out the possibility that the freedom which he claims for us is absent from reality and merely belongs to a great, systematic illusion. More generally, the contingencies which Sartre describes need to be interpreted as metaphysically ultimate in order that Sartre can claim for them the crucial significance of exposing the metaphysical *loneliness* of the human situation, the humanly restricted scope of the principle of sufficient reason, an unclouded appreciation of which Sartre regards as essential for our assumption of self-responsibility. Anything less than metaphysical ultimacy would, in Sartre's view, open the door to speculative possibilities – which Sartre associates with theology and Hegel, and wants to exclude at all costs – to the effect that there is after all a rational structure in reality at large which transcends the being of the for-itself, and which may be regarded as grounding and rationalizing human existence; the effect of which, Sartre believes, would be to relieve us of the task of self-determination at the most fundamental level. This is enough to explain why, at an early point in B&N – at the end of the Introduction – Sartre emphasizes that the work aims to locate man's place in relation to being as a whole.

Now the idea that philosophical enquiry can achieve unrestricted compass is naturally associated with the idea of a 'view from nowhere', a philosophical standpoint above all mere particular, conditioned points of view. However, it is also undeniable that a great deal of Sartre's discussion is emphatically *perspectival*: much of Sartre's philosophical labour is directed towards taking us inside the correct angle of philosophical vision, in order to induce in us a heightened awareness of the *perspectival character* of the phenomenon under discussion. Indeed this point – that Sartre's accounts of how things should be conceived are conditional upon our grasping them from such-and-such an angle – came out in connection with Sartre's 'situated' form of transcendental argumentation.

By way of illustration, consider Sartre's statement, in the context of his theory of freedom, that 'there is no question here of a freedom which could be undetermined and which would pre-exist its choice. We shall never apprehend ourselves except as a choice in the making' (B&N: 479). This is naturally read as demanding that we shift from attempting to conceive freedom as an aperspectival metaphysical fact, to a perspectival appreciation of freedom. Numerous examples of this kind of argumentation in B&N could be given. In a late interview Sartre said that in B&N he 'wished to define [consciousness] as it presents itself to us, for you, for me'.²⁰

There is therefore a puzzle. Sartre appears to offer at one and the same time both a view from nowhere or *extra-perspectival* conception of reality, and a view from somewhere or *perspectival* conception. These two standpoints are not distributed across different sets of phenomena or relativized to different topics of discussion; characteristically Sartre combines both within the breadth of a single paragraph or even sentence.

With regard to the historical affiliations of each, the perspectival standpoint suggests an 'immodest', absolutist, Fichtean version of Kant's strategy of a Copernican revolution in philosophical method, a conception of the task of philosophy as an elucidation *of* the human point of view, *from* and *for* the human point of view, fortified by the claim that this is the *only* point of view, i.e. that all would-be 'God's eye' conceptions are null and void. The extra-perspectival standpoint, by contrast, is associated with the metaphysical ambition and theocentric orientation of early modern rationalism, or of Hegel. Which, then, represents Sartre's true metaphilosophical view?

I suggest that Sartre regards the two standpoints as equally necessary, and yet again not as excluding one another but as *coincident* and *complementary*. The coincidence of the two standpoints consists in the idea that it is only by pushing the perspectival standpoint to its limit that we can come to grasp aperspectival reality. The phenomenological ontology of B&N does not merely and modestly describe how we should *suppose* things to *be* in the light of how they *appear* to *us*, rather it expresses Sartre's metaphilosophical conviction that it is only when things are exhibited in their fully perspectival character that can we know them as they *are in themselves*, i.e. as they would be if apprehended 'from nowhere'. This fits well with Sartre's claim to have dissolved the very opposition of realism and idealism.

The complementarity of the perspectival and extra-perspectival standpoints is expressed in Sartre's intention to offer two, interlocking views of the for-itself, one interior and one exterior.

The former shows us how the human subject is related to itself and how the object-world arises in the context of that self-relation. In entertaining the interior view, we *occupy* the perspective of the for-itself, *participating* in its upsurge. Sartre's transcendental argumentation serves this end. The latter involves an apprehension of the for-itself in relation to what is not itself, unmediated by its self-relation. In entertaining the exterior view, we *contemplate* the perspective of the for-itself, *beholding* its upsurge.

We are led then to ask whether this position, as Sartre himself works it out, is coherent and defensible, that is, whether Sartre succeeds in harmonizing the two standpoints. For although there is no contradiction in the idea of conjoining the (external) description *of* a perspective with a (internal) description of what is revealed *from* that perspective, a question is raised unavoidably when this schema is taken, not in its ordinary empirical application, but to define a philosophical project: What standpoint do we occupy in so far as we entertain the conjoined description? What provides for the coherent integration of the conjoined standpoints?

Here I need to be brief.²¹ There are several contexts where, I think, a tension between the perspectival and extra-perspectival standpoints is visible,²² but there is one in which it becomes especially salient and acute.

This is Sartre's anthropogenetic story. Sartre makes a claim regarding the genesis of being-for-itself, namely that being-for-itself is being-in-itself which has undergone a nihilation:

The For-Itself is like a tiny nihilation which has its origin at the heart of Being; and this nihilation is sufficient to cause a total upheaval to *happen* to the In-itself. This upheaval is the world [...] As a nihilation *it is made-to-be* by the in-itself (B&N: 617-18).

What is the importance for Sartre of this idea? One might perhaps suppose it to be a mere speculative aside, a bit of picture-thinking, but it proves essential to B&N, in two ways. First, Sartre thinks that the anthropogenetic story is necessary in order for him to be able to claim that he has a conception of being *as such* and in general – it is needed, he says, if we are to think of the two realms of being-in-itself and being-for-itself as *linked* to form being as a whole. Second, the anthropogenetic story is essential for many of the key claims in Part Two of B&N. It is presupposed by Sartre's accounts of self-consciousness (B&N: 79), of 'lack' as a structure of the for-itself (B&N: 86 ff.), of the metaphysics of human motivation, and of the 'facticity' of the for-

itself (B&N: 84), without which Sartre would have no theory of freedom to speak of. It also plays an important role, I suggested earlier, in resolving the puzzle regarding Sartre's professed non-idealism.

The difficulty comes with the fact that the anthropogenetic story gives rise, as Sartre notes, to a 'metaphysical problem which could be formulated thus: Why does the for-itself arise from being (*à partir de l'être*)?' (B&N: 619). Sartre establishes that there is only one candidate for an answer to this question: namely that being-in-itself gives rise to being-for-itself in order to rid itself of contingency, to 'found itself', to become God or cause-of-itself.

This would mean, however, that the in-itself's generation of the for-itself has been conceived as a *purposive project*, and the attribution of a project to the in-itself contradicts, of course, Sartre's conception of being-in-itself. Sartre recognizes all of this:

[O]ntology here comes up against a profound contradiction since [...]n order to be a project of founding itself, the in-itself would of necessity have to be originally a presence to itself, i.e., it would have to be already consciousness. (B&N: 620-1)

The contradiction suggests that at this point, if not at others, Sartre's two standpoints are not in harmony: the perspectival standpoint instructs Sartre to restrict himself to the human standpoint, the interior view of the for-itself, and so to declare the question regarding the origin of the for-itself gratuitous or empty; while the extra-perspectival standpoint, the exterior view of the for-itself, demands that we find a way of thinking being-for-itself and its genesis in relation to being as a whole.

In Section 1 of the Conclusion (B&N: 621 ff.) Sartre leans towards the first option, though not without considerable ambiguity, and perhaps without realizing that if his anthropogenetic story is empty or a mere fiction, then the danger presents itself that so are the theories – of self-consciousness, facticity, and so on – which presuppose it.

8. Fichte or Schelling

Light can be shed on this problem in Sartre by drawing comparison with an earlier point in the history of post-Kantian philosophy.

I have referred several times to the similarity of Sartre's views with Fichte's, and there is much more to be said on that topic. The philosopher whom Sartre recalls with his anthropogenetic story, however, is undoubtedly Schelling, Fichte's critic and successor. Schelling does not tell the same story as Sartre, but the accounts that Schelling gives of the genesis of self-consciousness in writings of the period from roughly 1800 to 1813 are unmistakably of the same order as Sartre's anthropogenetic theory, and directed to the same *explanandum*, namely, to grasping how individual self-conscious subjectivity can arise out of pre-self-conscious being.²³

The contradiction which we saw emerge in Sartre's anthropogenetic story, I now want to suggest, mirrors and reproduces the differences and disagreement between Fichte and Schelling. While Fichte asserts, in orthodox transcendental fashion, the priority and sufficiency for all legitimate philosophical purposes of the perspective of self-consciousness from which his *Wissenschaftslehre* is developed, Schelling counter-asserts the need for this idealistic perspective to be supplemented and completed by a 'realistic' philosophy which starts from *being* rather than self-consciousness, alleging, in criticism of Fichte, that a philosophy of self-consciousness which shirks this task is deficient and ultimately ungrounded.

The relation of the straightforwardly transcendental, subjectivity-based elements in B&N to Sartre's anthropogenetic story parallels, I am therefore suggesting, the relation of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* to Schelling's idealist-realist speculative philosophy. And the contradiction which surfaces in Sartre's account may be regarded as the result of his having as it were, on the one hand, adhered to Fichte's metaphilosophy, which says that the perspective of the I suffices to give us an absolute picture of reality, and, on the other hand, accepted Schelling's position that taking the absolute view requires us to think of self-consciousness from the standpoint of being as a whole.

If Sartre were to succeed in defusing the contradiction – and, as I noted at the end of the previous section, he at any rate makes an attempt to do this – then it could be claimed on Sartre's behalf that he shows a way of mediating the opposition of Fichte and Schelling and that his position provides an alternative, arguably superior, to each of theirs. If, on the other hand, the contradiction abides, then it is fair to say that Sartre's position can be made consistent only by resolving itself in the direction of either Fichte or Schelling, where each of these resolutions will entail, in different ways, a profound alteration to Sartre's conception of the in-itself.²⁴

9. Sartre and the transcendental tradition

It is surely remarkable that Sartre – whose knowledge of Fichte and Schelling in the period of composition of B&N was either negligible or non-existent, though he had enough knowledge of Hegel to recognize that Hegel's system should be regarded as at least putting a question mark over the reality of individual freedom – should have come so close to reproducing the early German idealist positions, and that the Fichte-to-Schelling development from 1794 to 1813 should be (so to speak) rerun, in the way I have tried to indicate, in Sartre's philosophical development from 1936 to 1943, in the course of which Sartre is carried far from his original mid-1930s conception of himself as a phenomenologist who has said goodbye to metaphysics and returned to the purely concrete.

Why should this be? What most deeply distinguishes Sartre from Husserl and Heidegger at the level of philosophical motivation is the concern with human freedom, and it is this Kantian motive which, it seems correct to suppose, causes Sartre not only to remodel phenomenology on a more orthodox Kantian pattern, but also to modify Kant's position in profound ways, leading Sartre into Fichtean and Schellingian territory. I began my discussion by suggesting – in a reconstructive spirit – that Sartre is helpfully viewed in direct relation to Kant, but Sartre did not of course regard himself as setting out from and attempting to get beyond Kant. Rather, to the extent that Sartre took his orientation from classical German philosophy, his aim was to get away from Hegel. These two paths may be thought to converge, however: if Kantian idealism is insufficient to realize its own philosophical ends, and if Hegel's transformation of Kantianism sacrifices too much of what originally animates the project of Critical philosophy, then we are directed towards the non-Hegelian forms of German idealism represented by Fichte and Schelling.

Two things are thereby signalled for transcendental philosophy in general. First, the case of Sartre contradicts a widely accepted narrative of the development of transcendental philosophy, according to which the overall historical trajectory of transcendentalism consists in a progressive thinning of its metaphysical commitments, and in its finally coming down to earth at a point where it is able to unite with a rich naturalism. Second, consideration of Sartre indicates the likelihood that, in so far as the transcendental project is committed to a *strong* conception of human freedom, a system of freedom along the lines of either Fichte or Schelling is hard to

avoid. Whether that commitment is to be retained or shaken off, and whether in its absence the transcendental project is sufficiently well motivated to hold our interest, are questions which – to the extent that our interest lies in Sartre's philosophy as a systematic whole – there is compelling reason to pursue.

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¹ Nature and being-in-itself are not the same, of course, but the differences are not presently relevant.

² The view I have ascribed to Sartre – that Kant's position is insufficiently anti-naturalistic and ends up compromised, a half-way house – reproduces an attitude to Kantianism prominent in the early post-Kantian period.

³ Morris 2008, 55.

⁴ The way is then open to the comparison, pursued by Katherine Morris, of Sartre with the late Wittgenstein, as offering philosophical therapy.

⁵ A point which echoes the famous objection of Barry Stroud to transcendental arguments.

⁶ Answers of the type that a Strawson-type transcendental argument could supply.

⁷ The teleology of the for-itself demands its transcendence, one aspect of which is the *knowing* of the object: knowledge is an immediate presence of consciousness to the thing (B&N: 172), necessitated by the for-itself's having to constitute 'itself as *not being* the thing' (B&N: 174). Space does not allow me to pursue the point, but Sartre's approach to epistemology has an important similarity with that of Fichte: see Horstmann (forthcoming) on 'grounding-oriented' as opposed to 'justification-oriented' anti-sceptical positions.

⁸ Two brief observations, which for want of space I will have to leave unexplored. (1) In consequence of Sartre's ontologization of the transcendental, the distinction is elided between the two tasks of giving (a) a proof of a transcendental necessity, and (b) a metaphysical explanation of why the necessity obtains. For example, Sartre merges the question, 'How can we *explain* this dynamic character of temporality', with the task of 'show[ing] that its dynamic is an essential structure of the For-itself' (B&N: 147). (2) Sartre is not always clear about the necessity he wants to attach to the formal features of empirical reality: see, e.g., his statements at B&N: 204 and 209 regarding the possibility of a world without motion or change. There is also considerable variation by topic in the modality of what Sartre holds to be shown by his enquiry. For example, Sartre seems to argue that there must *be* motion (B&N: 213), while with respect to the principle

of causality (B&N: 207-8), his claims seems to be restricted to only a *correlation* of formal features of empirical reality with structures of the for-itself.

⁹ See B&N: 151, 223, and the definition of realism at 588. See also Sartre 1939, 4.

¹⁰ Note that 'consideration' here has ontological, not merely methodological, significance: the qualification 'in-itself' attaches not to the mode in which we do our considering, but to what is under consideration, viz. O itself.

¹¹ See the formulation and analysis of this issue in Sacks 2000, ch. 6.

¹² The question of the conditions of the absolutely primitive distinction of I and not-I figures in Fichte too as an important reason for going beyond Kant, in sections 1-5 of the Second Introduction to the 1797 *Wissenschaftslehre*, but Fichte does not draw an ontological conclusion.

¹³ An alternative formulation of the contrast I want to draw: Kant and Husserl allow a distinction to be drawn between transcendental *roles*, and that which *occupies* them, while Sartre denies, with respect to consciousness, that this distinction can be drawn.

¹⁴ This shows the remarkable similarity between the concept of consciousness in Sartre, and Fichte's conception of the 'I' as a *Tathandlung*, a non-objectual self-reverting Act which furnishes a transcendental foundation.

¹⁵ And that it cannot escape instantaneity, an objection Sartre finds in Heidegger.

¹⁶ Sartre 1948, 113-14 and 119. The only alternative to the *cogito* in the theory of knowledge, Sartre claims, is (Hegel's) coherentism.

¹⁷ See EH: 44-5, where Sartre says that 'the dignity of man' leads us to 'postulate' subjectivity 'as the standard of truth'.

¹⁸ See Bürger 2007.

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty criticizes Sartre on this exact count: see Merleau-Ponty 1959-61, e.g., 74, 77, 91.

²⁰ Sartre 1975, 40. Also: 'The field of philosophy has its limits set by man [est borné par l'homme]' (Sartre 1966, 83).

²¹ For more detailed discussion, see Gardner 2006.

²² These include Sartre's accounts of intersubjectivity, transcendence, and value. Compare Sartre's affirmation that lack is an objective ontological structure of the for-itself (B&N: 89) with his claim that the teleology of the for-itself 'exists only *for* the For-itself' and 'disappears with it' (B&N: 217). The point can be made also with reference to assertions such as: 'For the

indifference of being is *nothing*: we can not think it or even perceive it' (B&N: 191). In such characteristically Sartrean movements of thought, perspectival and extra-perspectival elements are juxtaposed forcibly: we step outside our perspective, or seem to do so, when we judge that being is indifferent to us, only to realize that this judgement is empty, because it requires us to escape our perspective, which is impossible. At times Sartre wrestles quite explicitly with this doubling and superimposition of standpoints. For example: 'The For-Itself is God in that if it decides that Being has a meaning, Being will have a meaning *for the for-itself*. But since the For-itself is an absolute/subject, it is absolutely certain that Being will have a meaning ... if the In-itself has a meaning for the Absolute/subject, this meaning, absolutely experienced, is absolute' (NE: 485-6). In this instance, the tension is located in Sartre's simultaneous (i) extra-perspectival elevation and installation of the for-itself in God's vacant place, making it appear that the for-itself receives metaphysical certification, and that its claims are sanctioned, from an external standpoint, and (ii) absolutization of the perspective of the for-itself; making it difficult to determine what 'absolute experience' of the In-itself's 'absolute' meaningfulness might consist in. The case can be made that the contradiction resurfaces in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*: see Sartre's fascinating discussion of 'matter' (1960, 180-2) and acceptance of 'the following two true but [*prima facie*] contradictory propositions: all existence in the universe is material; everything in the world of man is human' (ibid, 181); Sartre's claim is that his newly avowed, non-theological 'monism' transcends the contradiction.

²³ See, e.g., Schelling 1813, 123-124, 136, discussed in Gardner 2006.

²⁴ Suggesting that Sartre has an inkling of the option represented by Schelling, note the (somewhat obscure) remarks on the possibility of a 'metaphysics of nature' at B&N: 625.