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Nauseated, Anguished and Ashamed: Where Did Sartre Go Wrong?

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Philosophy

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of

Master of Arts in Philosophy

By

Doug Contri

June 2022

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Abstract

This thesis examines Jean-Paul Sartre's ontology and argues that his conception of consciousness as individuated nothingness is responsible for the discontented human condition he describes. It further argues that this ontology is at variance with our experience, and as such the human condition is not inevitably unhappy. Instead, a phenomenological description of consciousness as transpersonal and full is advanced. A transpersonal ontology of consciousness asserts that consciousnesses are not entirely individuated from one another, but constitutively constructed by "other" consciousnesses, which renders them full. Consciousness as transpersonal leads to a reconceptualization of the subject-other relationship as an *I-as-other-other-as-me* relationship. Transpersonal consciousness is then employed to re-interpret Sartre's discontents, and largely resolves the unhappy features of the human condition by leading to the possibility of peaceful relationships with ourselves and harmonious relationships with others.

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I. Chapter 1: Introduction

Sartre explicitly asserts his philosophy to be a phenomenological description and analysis of the human condition absent God. He advances an ontology that intrinsically entails an “unhappy consciousness”¹ characterized by anxiety, anguish, nausea, shame, conflict, exploitation, and dehumanization. The existence of these unhappy features of the human condition hardly needs defense given their ubiquity, but did Sartre successfully identify their origins in ontology? This thesis evaluates Sartre’s phenomenological ontology by describing and analyzing mundane experience to elucidate how it creates and might remedy our discontent. I ultimately reject Sartre’s ontology of consciousness as an individuated nothingness that creates discontent, and replace it with a transpersonal ontology of consciousness that largely rejects subject-other dualism and provides the ontological basis for human happiness.

Chapter 2 sets the stage for the investigation by explaining the phenomenological method that is employed and clarifying the language often used to communicate experiences with unverifiable intersubjective meanings that vary among persons and groups. Because figurative language is employed to express our phenomenology, caution is advised when making fine grained distinctions among subjective experiences and abstract concepts without concrete denotations. Given a phenomenological method and these limitations of language the success criterion for the investigation is identified as “phenomenological verisimilitude,” defined as accurate articulation of what it is like to be human.

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes, (U.S.A: Simon & Shuster, 1956), 140.

Part I of Chapter 3 reviews Sartre's ontology to provide the context within which the investigation proceeds. He conceives a tripartite structure of being composed of being-in-itself, being-for-itself, and being-for-others, which all exist in a "synthetic totality."² He designates the non-conscious stuff of the universe as being-in-itself contrasted with human existence characterized by consciousness that is being-for-itself. Being-in-itself is infinitely dense and self-identical, whereas being-for-itself is a nothingness. Sartre's third ontological structure is being-for-others in which we become aware that others are also consciousnesses, and as such foci of worlds they create in which we are objects incorporated into *their* worlds and goals.

Part II of Chapter 3 evaluates Sartre's ontology of consciousness and challenges his claim that consciousness is a nothingness by distinguishing between his most basic phenomenology and his cognized phenomenology, and concludes that he mistakenly privileges his cognized phenomenology. By contrast his basic phenomenology leads to a consciousness that is not a nothingness, but content-ed by telos that creates values, projects and their situations, and the ego.

Part III of Chapter 3 evaluates Sartre's overall ontology and concludes that his ontology of consciousness is based on language created to communicate about substances. Using this language from a different regional ontology to describe consciousness leads to a mistaken ontology of consciousness as a nothingness that contributes to the discontents Sartre identifies.

Chapter 4 begins by reconsidering Sartre's phenomenological reduction and finds that his conclusion that consciousness is a nothingness is based on *his* consciousness that is content-ed by others, rendering his conclusion self-negating. Sartre's inability to realize this feature of his

² Sartre, *Being*, 3.

consciousness is then identified as a general epistemic limitation in consciousness' ability to look at itself. Consciousness is then reconceived as transpersonal and thickly content-ed by others rather than individuated nothingness as Sartre describes. Transpersonal theory maintains that consciousness is not primordially individuated; instead, "each" consciousness is constitutively constructed by other consciousnesses, such that the boundary between consciousnesses is ontologically permeable and diffuse. We are not primordially anything but "others," who constitutively construct each of us. In this manner, there is a transpersonal constitutive process that challenges the idea of others as Other. Sartre's being-for-others is then reconsidered and found to advance a primordial consciousness that is also transpersonal. Next the origin of individuation within a transpersonal ontology of consciousness is explicated, and the peculiar ontology of consciousness is advanced. The chapter then closes by examining the phenomenology of grief to illustrate transpersonal consciousness.

Part I of Chapter 5 describes Sartre's discontents and connects them to his ontology of consciousness as an individuated nothingness. Part II begins by using transpersonal ontology to reconceive freedom as more than the capacity to make unimpeded choices, but to actually create previously unforeseen possibilities. The ego as an actual structure of consciousness is then rehabilitated given consciousness is no longer a nothingness, but a thickly content-ed peculiar being. Blending freedom as identification of novel possibilities and an actual ego, others then become critical to confer insight into the content-ed consciousness of individuals so that novel possibilities can be created that individuals could not see on their own. This conception of freedom and the role of others is then briefly distinguished from Simone de Beauvoir's view of freedom. Sartre's specific discontents are then re-interpreted using a transpersonally content-ed consciousness inhabited by an ego and the freedom expansion others promise to confer.

Chapter 6 concludes by providing a summary of the human condition within a transpersonally content-ed ontology of consciousness and considers some further philosophical implications of such an ontology.

II. Chapter 2: Sartre's Discontent and Redemption

A. The Problem

God had been moribund for centuries when Friedrich Nietzsche finally declared Him dead in 1882.³ In the wake of God's final demise and during the upheaval of the first half of the twentieth century Jean-Paul Sartre began articulating a philosophy of existence absent God.⁴ His phenomenological ontology leads to a grim depiction of the human condition succinctly expressed by the titles of his fictional works *Nausea* and *No Exit*, and the conclusion of *Being and Nothingness* that "Man is a useless passion."⁵ In *Existentialism is a Humanism* Sartre defends his philosophy against charges that it is grim, denying it is "...a pessimistic description of man, for no doctrine is more optimistic, the destiny of man is placed within himself."⁶ While his existentialism places human destiny within our own power, the claim that it is optimistic cannot be taken seriously given the description of the human condition in *Being and Nothingness*.

In particular, Sartre's ontology entails two distinct but related spheres of unhappiness: *intra*-personal unhappiness filled with anxiety, anguish, nausea, and similar experiences of and within ourselves, and *inter*-personal unhappiness characterized by shame, conflict, exploitation,

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007)

⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 784.

⁶ Sartre, *Existentialism*, 40.

dehumanization, and other relational discontents.⁷ These unhappy features of the human condition are indisputable, but does Sartre accurately identify their origin in ontology? Does he courageously “draw all the conclusions inferred from a consistently atheistic point of view” as he claims or is his ontology misconceived, which then leads to a dark depiction of the human condition?⁸

The current investigation seeks to answer this question by examining what Joseph S. Catalano describes as the “concrete situation of man’s existence”⁹ and Martin Heidegger describes as “‘Being-in-the-world.’”¹⁰ The investigation seeks to describe *human* existence as a lived situation, so-called *human-being-in-the-world*, by examining and then reconceiving Sartre’s ontology of consciousness and the human condition it creates.

Like Sartre’s project, this investigation does not seek to understand a particular person or group of persons. It is an ontological, not an empirical investigation, which seeks to understand our ontology as beings, the type of being that is *human* being. It follows Sartre’s conception of ontology, “In this sense ontology appears to us capable of being defined as the specification of the structures of being of the existent taken as a totality.”¹¹ Also like Sartre, it seeks to understand the structure of consciousness by examining human subjectivity, our first-person experience of ourselves and the world using a phenomenological method. An ontology of

⁷ Sartre’s ontology evaluated by this investigation is drawn from *The Transcendence of the Ego* and *Being and Nothingness*. For expository purposes intrapersonal and interpersonal are divided, and the somewhat artificial and misleading nature of this distinction becomes clear in Chapter 4.

⁸ Sartre, *Existentialism*, 53.

⁹ Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness*, (The University of Chicago Press: USA, 1974), xi.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (USA: Harper and Rowe). 79.

¹¹ Sartre, *Being*, 395.

human *being* and the human condition it creates is guided by asking Thomas Nagel's Question "What is it like to be a bat?" applied to human subjectivity.¹² Thus, our experience of "What is it like to be a human?" provides the phenomenology from which to understand our ontology, the most basic "structures of being" human and the basic structures of consciousness.¹³

The thesis argues that Sartre's ontology errs along two critical dimensions that lead inexorably to discontent: consciousness is a nothingness and consciousness is individuated. By contrast, a different ontology is proposed in which consciousness is thickly content-ed and constitutively identified with the Other. This conception of consciousness as full rather than a nothingness, and transpersonal rather than individuated, challenges the traditional subject-other dualism that Sartre employs, and leads the way out of his discontent to a very different description of what it is like to be a human. The following sections of this chapter lay the foundation on which the investigation will unfold by identifying its method as phenomenological, its language as largely figurative, and its success criterion as "phenomenological verisimilitude" and "articulation." Explicating this foundation for the investigation occupies the remainder of the chapter.

¹² This is a reference to Thomas Nagel's famous illustration of the subjectivity of consciousness by asking what it is like to be a bat. Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like To Be a Bat?" *Philosophical Review*, October, 1974.

¹³ Sartre, *Being*, 395.

B. Phenomenology and the Investigation

By subtitling *Being and Nothingness* “A phenomenological essay on ontology” Sartre signals his intention to use a phenomenological method. The phenomenological method advanced by Edmund Husserl seeks a return “back to the ‘things’ themselves” in their most primordial presentation in (or to) consciousness.¹⁴ M. A. Natanson describes the method as “the attempt to construct a ‘presuppositionless’ method and a philosophy which will begin with that ‘root’ experience or givenness which neither reflection nor dialectic nor scientific disciplines of any order can meaningfully deny.”¹⁵

Despite Sartre’s intention to follow this method, there is debate about how faithfully he deploys it. For example, Natanson asserts that in the Introduction of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre intends a phenomenological method using Husserl’s reduction only to abandon it as the book unfolds in favor of one that is “...a quasi-phenomenological sort of method.”¹⁶ This argument rests at least partially upon the observation that in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre affirms the existence of being as a consequence of the for-itself rather than via phenomenological reduction, Sartre’s so-called “ontological proof.”¹⁷ Sartre states, “Consciousness is consciousness *of* something. This means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is, that consciousness is born *supported by* a being which is not itself. This is

¹⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2nd edition, trans. J.N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001 [1900/1901]), 168.

¹⁵ M. A. Natanson, *A Critique of Jean Paul Sartre’s Ontology* (University of Nebraska: Lincoln, 1951), 67.

¹⁶ Natanson, *Critique* 71. Sartre’s fidelity to a phenomenological method as relevant to the current investigation is considered in Chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 23.

what we call the ontological proof.”¹⁸ Thomas W. Busch, on the other hand, argues that Sartre does employ a phenomenological method in *Being and Nothingness*, which yields insight into the nothingness of consciousness.¹⁹ Sartre’s fidelity to the phenomenological method is relevant to the current investigation and is examined in subsequent chapters.

The key feature of phenomenological investigation is its primarily descriptive character. Sebastian Gardner observes, “Phenomenology is a descriptive science, and what it describes is whatever is given to (pure) consciousness, qua given.”²⁰ Thus, rather than being critical or deductive, phenomenology proceeds by intuition and introspection. For phenomenology *intuition* is consciousness’ primordial encounter or confrontation with an object or itself. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick, editors of *The Transcendence of the Ego* describe intuition “...for the phenomenologist the primary mode of evidence is intuitive. An intuition is...an act of consciousness by which the object under investigation is *confronted*, rather than merely indicated *in absentia*.”²¹ *Introspection* for phenomenology is observing our stream of consciousness while suspending (bracketing) our naive, common-sense, “natural attitude” and its metaphysical and epistemological assumptions.²² Dan Zahavi asserts we should “...let the originary giving

¹⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 23.

¹⁹ Thomas W. Busch, “Sartre’s Use of the Reduction: Being and Nothingness Reconsidered,” in *Jean-Paul Sartre: Contemporary Approaches to his Philosophy*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and Frederick A. Elliston (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 17-29.

²⁰ Sebastian Gardner, *Sartre’s Being and Nothingness* (Continuum International Publishing Group: New York, 2009), 11.

²¹ Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. “notes,” In *The Transcendence of the Ego*, eds. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. (Hill and Wang: New York) 110.

²² John Cogan, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “The Phenomenological Reduction,” (USA).

intuition be the source of all knowledge, a source that no authority (not even modern science) should be allowed to question...”²³

Consequently, Natanson notes the naive so-called natural attitude is replaced by a “phenomenological attitude,” which is a “radical departure,”²⁴ and amplifies Husserl’s statement, “Instead of now remaining at this standpoint [the natural attitude], we propose to alter it radically.”²⁵ The method involves a “transcendental reduction” (*epoche*) that suspends philosophical assumptions and ““leads one back to the ‘pure’ consciousness of an individual knower as the starting point for philosophy”” and an “eidetic reduction” that seeks to discern ontological essences rather than empirical facts.²⁶ According to Husserl, the “‘pure’ consciousness” revealed by the *epoche* is a transcendental consciousness that discerns essences.²⁷

Though Sartre rejects the ideas of transcendental consciousness and essences, he follows Husserl’s attempt to discern an uncorrupted presuppositionless apprehension of the world by what he calls “pure reflection.”²⁸ By contrast impure reflection is consciousness reflecting upon itself with the agenda of conceiving itself as a thing, which violates the phenomenological method’s goal of being suppositionless. In *Being and Nothingness* he describes his phenomenological method:

²³ Dan Zahavi, “Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, no. 5-7 (2001), 45.

²⁴ Natanson, *Critique*, 67.

²⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: an introduction to pure phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (Eastford Connecticut: Martino Fine Books, 2017), 107

²⁶ Marvin Farber, *The Foundation of Phenomenology*, (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2006) 353, quoted in Natanson, *Critique*, 68.

²⁷ Farber *Foundations*, quoted in Natanson, *Critique*, 68.

²⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. Forrest Williams and William Kirkpatrick, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 13.

The phenomenon is what manifests itself, and being manifests itself to all in some way, since we can speak of it and since we have a certain comprehension of it.

Thus, there must be for it a *phenomenon of being*, an appearance of being, capable of description as such. Being will be disclosed to us by some kind of immediate access-boredom nausea, *etc.*, and ontology will be the description of the phenomenon of being as it manifests itself; that is without intermediary.²⁹

In *The Transcendence of the Ego* he states “Phenomenology is a scientific, not a Critical, study of consciousness. Its essential way of proceeding is by intuition,”³⁰ and affirms the definition of intuition noted above, “Intuition is the presence of consciousness to the thing.”³¹

The current investigation follows Sartre’s method of “reflective description”³² by looking deeply and carefully upon human experience while bracketing presuppositions, and thereby

²⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 7.

³⁰ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 35. Note that Sartre capitalizes “Critical” as a proper noun to denote the approach by Kant whose “Critical philosophy” examined the epistemic foundations required for knowledge.

Desan describes Sartre’s method in *Being and Nothingness*, “Phenomenology is a method which wants to describe all that manifests itself as it manifests itself.” p. 5

³¹ Sartre, *Being*, 240. Sartre observes that Husserl’s conception of intuition is a bit different and might be formulated as “presence of the thing (*Sache*) ‘in person’ to consciousness” (*Being*, 240), whereas Sartre focuses on the presence of consciousness to the thing. However, their different formulations of intuition are based on their differing ontologies, and need not concern us here.

³² Sartre, *Being*, 301. While this conception of Sartre’s method is different than he might advance, the features delineated are implicit despite their lack of explicit articulation. Detailed arguments supporting this revised description are left for another occasion.

gaining insight beyond the natural attitude. This is Sartre's "pure reflection"³³ or "pre-ontological, phenomenological description,"³⁴ and what I call "basic phenomenology."³⁵ Basic phenomenology is our most primordial confrontation with the object as it appears in (or to) consciousness. Eugen Fink, an exponent of Husserl's phenomenology explains,

...Husserl arrives at the "hypothesis" of phenomenology in the determination of *originarity as intuition*. For him seeing is original evidence. It is the mode of consciousness in which the existent shows itself in its "flesh and blood" existence, the mode in which the existent presents itself...Instead of speculating argumentatively about the justification for seeing and setting forth empty, contrary possibilities constructed by thought, seeing is to be exercised, original evidence is to be produced. It is precisely in this way that seeing is to be determined to be the ultimate "criterion" for all mere possibilities constructed by thought. Seeing is legitimized only by its accomplishment: the showing of the existent itself.³⁶

³³ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 13.

³⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 159.

³⁵ The term "basic" suggests an "unmediated" confrontation similar to Sartre's in that the confrontation is not mediated by mental representations; the object is directly confronted rather than representations of the object.

³⁶ Eugen Fink, "The Problem of the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl," in *Apriori and World*, W. eds. McKenna et. al. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 41.

Also like Sartre this investigation takes consciousness itself as the starting point, and in assessing the primordial confrontation with objects follows his use of mundane consciousness, the consciousness of daily experience, rather than mystical or other non-ordinary states of consciousness such as those articulated by Fink, who states,

Again and again the motion of the spirit, unfolding itself in that motion, is *snatched away* into some kind of *worldly position* of its self-understanding. Only the phenomenological radicalism which wants resolutely to ground philosophy upon the idea of pure self-meditation, without bringing meditation which has been set into motion under control by arguments and considerations which have sprung forth from the naive, pre-given understanding of 'self-meditation' - only this radicalism opens a *fundamentally non-worldly* position of the spirit from out of which the world can be grasped and spiritually over-powered.³⁷

The basic phenomenology of mundane experience then leads to two possible apprehensions. First it could produce *insight* that adds to our understanding of ontology and the human condition. Insight discerns some feature of human subjectivity or the human condition that is contrary, different, missed, or obscured by the natural attitude. Second, basic phenomenology could *disclose* or *reveal* something *beyond* or *other than* what is apprehend in

³⁷ Eugen Fink. "What Does the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl Want to Accomplish? (The Phenomenological Idea of Laying-a-Ground)," trans. Arthur Grugan, *Research in Phenomenology* 2, no. 1 (1972): 21-22.

our most immediate confrontation (insight), but which is hidden or unappreciated by the natural attitude; it could disclose or reveal our ontology in a manner similar to that employed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*.

Finally, basic phenomenology (insight and disclosure) can be the basis of what I call *cognized phenomenology*, which is basic phenomenology conceptualized and used for reasoning to derive additional conclusions beyond those of insight or disclosure; basic phenomenology can be exploited to go further than our direct experience alone permits. Wilfred Desan observes Sartre (and Heidegger) “...attempt to ‘systematize’ their experience and to build out of their subjective view some kind of objective and *universal* ontology.”³⁸

Following Husserl’s goal of returning back to the things themselves and the foregoing discussion, several conclusions about the phenomenological method used in this investigation can be advanced. While each type of phenomenological apprehension (basic and cognized) is valuable, basic phenomenology is considered the most persuasive because of its more immediate apprehension. When basic phenomenology conflicts with cognized phenomenology, basic is usually to be preferred given it does not require inferred or rationally derived conclusions. Insight is the core phenomenological apprehension, the closest to the thing itself, and as one moves away from it, first in disclosure, and further in cognized phenomenology, one becomes removed from the “thing in itself” and the persuasiveness of the conclusions becomes less compelling.

³⁸ Wilfred Desan, *The Tragic Finale*, (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1954), 7.

C. The Language and Success Criterion of the Investigation

Communicating an ontology based on a phenomenological description of consciousness raises problems of language. Consider that generally language denoting objects, actions, or processes with concrete external referents readily permits communication. Nouns, verbs, and adjectives attach to observable entities, actions, or their qualities, and while their exact boundaries may be fuzzy, communication is relatively unproblematic, and boundary disputes usually adjudicable. By contrast, communicating the ontology of consciousness, which is neither concrete nor external, does not permit direct referents.³⁹ Instead, experiences of consciousness must be communicated using figurative language that expresses them *as if* they were concrete external entities, events, processes, qualities, and so on. Thus, language describing consciousness must *necessarily* be figurative rather than literal. The language of one domain is used to explain a different domain for which no such readily understandable language exists.

Zoltan Kovecses calls the domain from which we draw the language and to which it applies by way of literal denotation, the “source domain,” and the domain to which we apply the language, the domain about which we seek to communicate, and which uses the source domain language figuratively, the “target domain.”⁴⁰ He observes that the most common target domains for which language with concrete verifiable denotations is used are abstract concepts and mental states. Following Kovecses formulation, in the current investigation the source domain is the

³⁹ The word “external” is being used in a purely conventional sense as that which is “outside” (also being used in a conventional sense) consciousness, and can be apprehended via sensory perception and empirically verified among people.

⁴⁰ Zoltan Kovecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, (Second Edition. Oxford University Press: New York, 2010).

extended, concrete physical world and its actions, processes, or qualities, and the target domain is consciousness, that is subjectivity.⁴¹

By way of example, consider the commonly described state of consciousness communicated by the word “depression.” While our culture readily understands “depression” as a state of consciousness (target domain), we easily forget that “depression” is a noun denoting an area of lower elevation resulting from compression or some other force pushing down on the area that depresses it relative to those surrounding it (source domain). An easy method for creating and observing a depression is to slam a hammer into a wooden table, which creates a dent or depression in the wood. The figurative use of depression to denote an experience of consciousness that feels *as if* one is a “depression” or “depressed” is so common that we often overlook that it is figurative.

But does figurative language have a role in philosophy? Does its use not begin to move us into literature or perhaps even poetry? Recall that this investigation seeks to investigate the ontology of consciousness from a first-person perspective to discern if Sartre’s grim conclusions about the human condition are inevitable. Therefore, the only avenue through which to verbally communicate is figurative language that expresses subjective experiences (target domain) with language that in its literal meaning applies only to objects, and their qualities and processes, with verifiable external referents (source domain). Not only does figurative language have a role to play in phenomenological philosophy describing consciousness, as noted above it is indispensable. Using a figurative statement such as “I feel *like* a depression” shortened to “I feel

⁴¹ Using the word “concrete” to denote physical reality is itself a figure of speech, but one that deploys the same domain for its source and target.

depressed” is the only type of verbal language that communicates the state of consciousness, though of course alternative figures of speech could be employed.

As noted, while literal language using words with direct denotations communicates about objects by referring directly to them, figurative language communicates by referring to something *other* than that to which it refers. Thus, in contrast to language with direct denotations, to literalize a metaphor or other figurative language, “to take it literally,” is to fail to understand it. Said differently, metaphors say one thing so as to mean another. But this raises the question of how one understands metaphorical language that does not mean what it means. How do we come to such an understanding? This question is central to the current investigation: the entire enterprise of constructing a phenomenological ontology can only be communicated via language, and if that language fails to be understood any insights from the investigation will remain private.

If the subjectivity that comprises a phenomenology of consciousness must be communicated figuratively, then these communications can be understood only if the peculiar meanings of their metaphors are known as learned knowledge or intuitively grasped by virtue of a background of intersubjective meanings or innate mental mechanisms. Lin Ma and Aihua Liu observe that common cross-cultural figures of speech for mental states are employed, which suggests they express a universal conceptual apparatus.⁴² Despite their observation, figures of speech still require interpretation and admit of greater idiosyncrasy than literal communication.

⁴² Lin Ma & Liu, Aihua, “A Universal Approach to Metaphors,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* XVII: 1 (2008).

For example, to say that someone is a “pig” presupposes familiarity with domesticated pigs and their socio-cultural role among a specific human group, which is then particularized by each individual’s own exposure to, and understanding of this information and its meanings; a pig likely means something different for an American pig farmer than an American suburbanite. Further, even assuming similar background knowledge, characterizing a person as a “pig” could assume a variety of meanings: poor hygiene, living in a slovenly physical environment, eating too much, or behaving boorishly, and discerning the use intended requires further social and intersubjective context without which the multiple meanings can be easily confused. Alternatively, consider the differing meanings of “pissed” for American and British English speakers; the former usually uses the expression to mean “anger,” and the latter “intoxication.” Nevertheless, despite the variability of meanings associated with figurative language describing subjectivity, there apparently exists a degree of precision adequate for communication, as exhibited in the broad consensus of the meaning of depression and other mental health descriptions that circulate through our society.

Based on the remarks above, five points about language important for this investigation can be advanced. First, all language communicating subjective experience is figurative. Second, figurative language uses locutions from one domain (source) that is literally understood with relative ease to communicate about another domain (target) that is more abstract or subjective, and therefore more difficult to understand. Third, because figurative language uses words whose meaning is different from that which would be indicated if understood literally, to understand such statements literally is to fail to understand them at all. Fourth, the translation of language from the source domain to the target domain relies, at least in part, on intersubjective socio-cultural knowledge and meanings, combined with individual experience, for its correct

interpretation. Fifth, despite the obstacles to communicating mental states using figurative language, there is some adequate basis for doing so that permits a fruitful investigation of subjectivity; we can talk about it meaningfully.

Therefore, given subjectivity constitutes the methodology and domain of this investigation, figurative language is required. However, such language cannot correspond tightly to objectively verifiable referents for several reasons: first, that which it describes, subjectivity, is neither extended in space nor consensually observable; second, the source language describing subjectivity originates from a different *ontological* domain; and third, the meaning of figurative language varies among peoples in different times and places, and even among peoples within similar times and places. Finally, novel ideas derived from a phenomenology of consciousness challenging subject-other dualism require unusual figurative language to communicate, and the extent to which these communications succeed necessarily relies on a common background of personal experiences and intersubjective meanings of the reader.

Thus, fine-grained distinctions of basic phenomenology or conceptual constructions based on them in cognized phenomenology are advanced cautiously, keeping in mind Aristotle's admonition, "...for it belongs to an educated person to look for just so much precision in each kind of discourse as the nature of the thing one is concerned with permits..."⁴³ Ultimately the conclusions of this investigation will succeed or fail based on their concordance with the reader's own experience; the criterion for the success of the investigation is that of "phenomenological verisimilitude" understood as *articulation* of the human condition. To illustrate this success

⁴³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport, Mass: Focus Publishing, 2002), 2.

criterion, consider a psychoanalytic interaction reported by John Bowlby in which a suicidally depressed patient's analyst "ventured a reconstruction" that the patient had witnessed his mother attempt suicide as a young child.⁴⁴ Upon advancing the reconstruction

...the patient became wracked with convulsive sobbing...Subsequently the patient described how it had seemed to him that, when the analyst made his suggestion, it was not so much that he was restoring a memory as giving him (the patient) permission to talk about something he had always in some way known about.⁴⁵

Similarly, phenomenological verisimilitude is not the *revealing* of the human condition, but the *articulating* of it in a manner that impresses as already known, but neither explicitly named nor described.

With these considerations of methodology, language, and a criterion for success, the investigation's course can be charted. Chapter 3 contains an expository overview of Sartre's general ontology, and then critiques this ontology, with a focus on his conception of consciousness as an individuated nothingness. Chapter 4 presents an alternative ontology of consciousness as transpersonal and thickly content-ed rather than an individuated nothingness. Chapter 5 then employs this transpersonal ontology of consciousness to re-interpret and resolve key manifestations of Sartre's discontent, thereby demonstrating that ontology does not doom

⁴⁴ John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*, (USA: Basic Books, 1988), 102.

⁴⁵ Bowlby, *Base*, 102.

humans to unhappiness, but permits space for a more optimistic human condition. Chapter 6 summarizes the main conclusions of the investigation and raises further philosophical implications of a transpersonal ontology of consciousness.

III. Chapter 3: Sartre's Ontology: Summary and Critique

The current investigation seeks to understand what it is like to be human in the context of Sartre's ontology in *Being and Nothingness*.⁴⁶ As such, Part I of this chapter summarizes those features of his ontology most relevant for this purpose. Part II critically evaluates his ontology and argues that he errs by privileging cognized over basic phenomenology. Part III examines the language by which consciousness is articulated and concludes Sartre is misled by figurative language that corrupts his ontology. To these tasks I now turn.

Part I. Exposition of Sartre's Ontology

Approaching Sartre's ontology requires appreciating its components comprise a synthetic unity, and that considering each apart from the others is only an expository strategy. Sartre states this position in the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness* and it remains integral to his philosophy.

The concrete can be only the synthetic totality of which consciousness, like the phenomenon, constitutes only moments. The concrete is man within the world in that

⁴⁶ Though Sartre advances an ontology of consciousness in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, his full ontology is not advanced until *Being and Nothingness*.

specific union of man with the world which Heidegger, for example, calls “being-in-the-world.”⁴⁷

Later in *Being and Nothingness* he similarly states “We know that there is not a for-itself on the one hand and a world on the other as two closed entities for which we must subsequently seek some explanation as to how they communicate. The for-itself is a relation to the world.”⁴⁸

Within this “synthetic totality” Sartre proposes a tripartite regional ontology composed of being-in-itself, being-for-itself, and being-for-others, which are briefly reviewed below.⁴⁹

A. Sartre’s Ontology: Being-In-Itself

Sartre’s being-in-itself corresponds roughly to inanimate matter, the non-conscious stuff of the universe. Natanson observes that being-in-itself most closely resembles a realist conception of substance, “...for the *en-soi* corresponds to the realistic element whereas the *pour-soi* corresponds to the idealistic aspect.”⁵⁰ Being-in-itself originates and exists independently of consciousness, and thus assumes ontological priority over it; it is most basic or fundamental. Being-in-itself is not subject to time and is infinitely dense and entirely self-identical. There is no nothingness as part of its being; it is completely and thoroughly what it is, neither more nor less. Indeed, Sartre observes that were being-in-itself not completely self-identical then it could

⁴⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 34.

⁴⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 405.

⁴⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 34.

⁵⁰ Natanson, *Critique*, 13.

have some kind of relation with itself, which would entail some nothingness within being-in-itself that he rejects. Moreover, though coextensive with its phenomenal appearance, being-in-itself is not exhausted by its phenomenal appearance, and accordingly can never be completely known or understood, which Sartre calls the “transphenomenality of being.”⁵¹ Finally, though without rational structure or organization, being-in-itself cannot support all arrangements; it is not infinitely malleable and therefore has limits to how it can exist.

B. Sartre’s Ontology: Being-For-Itself

Being-for-itself roughly corresponds to human consciousness, which is founded *on* or *from* being-in-itself, yet simultaneously comprises a different region of being.⁵² Strictly speaking being-for-itself refers to human reality that also includes the body and temporality, and some features of human reality, such as the facticity of our past, that include being-in-itself.

Nevertheless, Sartre notes “In the light of these remarks we can now approach the ontological study of consciousness, not as the totality of the human being, but as the instantaneous nucleus of this being...”⁵³ For the current investigation being-for-itself is largely synonymous with consciousness.

Sartre contrasts being-for-itself that is a nothingness with being-in-itself, which is entirely self-identical and infinitely dense. Though the in-itself can exist independent of the for-itself, the for-itself requires the in-itself to exist as its foundation; the for-itself cannot be its *own*

⁵¹ Sartre, *Being*, 9.

⁵² Regions of being and Husserl’s “regional ontology” are further explained later in this chapter.

⁵³ Sartre, *Being*, 116.

foundation of being. He states, “The for-itself has no reality save that of being the nihilation of being”⁵⁴ and describes it as an “upsurge into being.”⁵⁵ He further explains “...being [the in-itself] is indeed the foundation of nothingness [for-itself] as the nihilation of its own being...”⁵⁶

Thus, the for-itself is dependent upon the in-itself from which it upsurges, while remaining entirely devoid of the in-itself; the for-itself is the region of being antipodal to the in-itself by virtue of its complete nothingness contrasted with the in-itself’s self-identity and infinite density. Though the for-itself has an entirely different ontology than the in-itself, given it emanates from the in-itself by nihilating it, “...the For-itself feels a profound solidarity of being with it [being-in-itself]...”⁵⁷ Further, the upsurge of the for-itself, or we might say the appearance of human consciousness in the world, is entirely contingent or gratuitous, which is to say without intrinsic purpose or meaning.

Unlike the in-itself that is self-identical, the for-itself is *never* self-identical given its complete nothingness. Nevertheless, recall from Sartre’s “ontological proof”⁵⁸ that the two realms of being remain synthetically united by the intentionality of consciousness, which is always consciousness *of* something; consciousness never exists absent awareness of some object, which unites it to the in-itself, while retaining its separate being as a nothingness.⁵⁹ On this

⁵⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 786.

⁵⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 128.

⁵⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 128.

⁵⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 198. Sometimes Sartre capitalizes “For-itself” and other times does not for reasons that are unclear. I will not capitalize it unless quoting a passage in which Sartre does so.

⁵⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 23.

⁵⁹ As Chapter 2 notes the intentionality of consciousness as always being *of* something constitutes Sartre’s “ontological proof” of the existence of the in-itself. He asserts that given consciousness must always be *of* something, there must be some *thing* of which it is consciousness, some *being* that it apprehends.

rendering, the for-itself is always acting via its intentionality, always reaching out beyond itself, that is transcending itself into the world, apprehending objects. Further, because consciousness is a nothingness founded by nihilating the in-itself, consciousness *introduces* nothingness into being via its nihilations that then founds a world,⁶⁰ which Sartre describes “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.”⁶¹

Additionally, the “for-itself is not nothingness in general, but the privation of this being.”⁶² By virtue of its nothingness, the for-itself is empty in its relation with the objects that it intends, which allows their apprehension unmediated by its *own* contents. Thus, apprehension occurs devoid of contents interposing themselves between consciousness’ intentionality and that which it intends. In *The Transcendence of the Ego* he states, “Consciousness, Husserl stressed, is consciousness *of* an object, and composes no part of the object.”⁶³ Williams and Kirkpatrick describe Sartre’s consciousness, “Its whole reality is exhausted in intending what is other.”⁶⁴ Therefore, objects appear before consciousness purely as they are. Sartre states, “The For-itself

⁶⁰ The French words coined by Sartre are the verb *neantir* and the noun *neantisation*, which have been translated as nihilating/nihilation or negating/negation. *Neantir* might be most usefully understood as a French equivalent of the English verb “to nothing,” that is to make nothing or introduce nothingness. The noun *neantisation* refers to an entity or state of affairs that is nothingness or that has occurred by the “nothingness activity” (*neantir*) of consciousness. During this investigation the words nihilate/nihilation and negate/negation are used interchangeably.

⁶¹ Sartre, *Being*, 786.

⁶² Sartre, *Being*, 786.

⁶³ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 13. While Sartre agrees with this assertion his main purpose in *Transcendence* is to assert that Husserl failed to realize these two activities of consciousness in his own phenomenology.

⁶⁴ Williams and Kirkpatrick, *Transcendence*, 22.

is defined as presence to being”⁶⁵ which he characterizes as “...the revealed revelation of existents...” and “...a revealing intuition of something...”⁶⁶

The nothingness of the for-itself also entails that it is always other than itself. Sartre states “We have to deal with human reality as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is.”⁶⁷ Hazel Barnes further clarifies Sartre’s idea, “Thus he is not what at any instant we might want to say that he is, and he is that toward which he projects himself but which he is not yet.”⁶⁸ Hence, consciousness is *not* what it *is* because it “continually experiences itself as the nihilation of its past being”⁶⁹ in the sense that its being is a current nothingness projecting towards a future that is not yet rather than self-identical. Conversely, given its continual projection toward the future that does not yet exist, it *is* (currently we might say) what it *is not* (the future, the “not yet” future existence). This nothingness of consciousness gives rise to its complete freedom. Desan observes, “This freedom is not some accident of the For-itself or human consciousness, but *is* human reality itself.”⁷⁰ Given consciousness’ nothingness, it is entirely free of material or psychic determinants. Associated with the being of consciousness as a nothingness, indeed almost as a necessary corollary, is its spontaneity, which is another way to characterize its total lack of determinability. Sartre states,

⁶⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 177.

⁶⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 786.

⁶⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 100.

⁶⁸ Hazel Barnes, “Translator’s Introduction” in *Being and Nothingness* (U.S.A: Simon & Shuster, 1956), xxii.

⁶⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 64.

⁷⁰ Desan, *Tragic*, 120. Sartre’s conception of freedom is further explicated in Chapter 4 and expanded in light of a transpersonal ontology of consciousness.

We may formulate our thesis: transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity. It determines its existence at each instant, without our being able to conceive anything *before* it. Thus each instant of our conscious life reveals to us a creation *ex nihilo*. Not a new *arrangement*, but a new existence.⁷¹

Among the many roles consciousness as a nothingness plays in Sartre's ontology, two are central. The first is epistemic, whereby he seeks to escape Kantian epistemology in which consciousness' structuring activity precludes direct confrontation with objects, and thereby places strict limits upon knowledge.⁷² By contrast Sartre's consciousness is a nothingness, which permits unmediated apprehension of objects required for knowledge. The second role is ontological; Sartre conceives freedom as "total and infinite."⁷³ He states, "Man cannot be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all."⁷⁴ This totalist freedom becomes possible because the nothingness of consciousness permits choice unimpeded by intrinsic content to guide or inhibit it. Each choice is made in the context of that which is apprehended alone, rather than encroached upon by that which is constitutive of consciousness.

⁷¹ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 98-99.

⁷² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans by Werner S. Pluhar (USA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996).

⁷³ Sartre, *Being*, 680.

⁷⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 569. Freedom is further explicated in Chapter 5 where it is re-formulated via transpersonal ontology.

C. Sartre's Ontology: Being-For-Itself Continued and Internal Nihilations

As nothingness consciousness introduces or injects nothingness into being via nihilation, defined as “to encase with a shell of non-being.”⁷⁵ This non-being that the nothingness of consciousness *is* and *introduces* into being is the basis for several internal nihilations, that is the distinguishing by encasing with nothingness something about or interior to consciousness itself.⁷⁶

Consciousness' most fundamental nihilation is distinguishing itself from the in-itself, as aware of itself as not the in-itself, as *other than* the in-itself that it confronts.

The second internal nihilation is consciousness nihilating *itself*, by which it assumes distance from itself via nothingness *within* itself, in self-reflection, or one might say reflexive-awareness.⁷⁷ Here Sartre distinguishes pre-reflective consciousness from reflective consciousness.⁷⁸ Pre-reflective consciousness is our awareness of objects in the world; while we are also aware of consciousness when aware of objects, we are not aware of consciousness *itself as an object*; one might say that we are aware that we are aware, without reflecting on awareness itself. On the other hand, consciousness that reflects upon its *own* operations or contents as objects for it, Sartre calls reflective consciousness.

⁷⁵ Hazel Barnes, “Glossary” in *Being and Nothingness* (U.S.A: Simon & Shuster, 1956), 804. Recall that nihilation can also be considered synonymous with negation.

⁷⁶ Internal nihilations are distinguished from external nihilations in that the latter is the distinction via injection of nothingness into objects entirely external to consciousness, such that consciousness is not changed by the nihilation; by contrast internal nihilations in some manner modify the consciousness “performing” the nihilation.

⁷⁷ There are other internal nihilations, one of which occurs with reference to others, which is covered in the subsequent section.

⁷⁸ He also considers these perspectives of consciousness with respect to itself “pre-positional” and “positional” to denote the perspective, or lack thereof upon itself. These terms are used interchangeably during this investigation.

Thus, consciousness can be said to have two possible perspectives or positions with respect to itself: pre-reflective when aware of itself by virtue of being aware of objects without taking itself as an object, and reflective when deliberately taking itself as an object of awareness. Given reflective consciousness is dependent upon pre-reflective consciousness, the latter is ontologically most fundamental. Further, consciousness' *being* and its *knowing* or awareness of itself as it is aware are identical. There is not a consciousness *that* knows; the pre-reflective "knowing" (really awareness) of itself (its self-consciousness absent positional consciousness) is the *being* of consciousness.

A key feature of Sartre's ontology is that pre-reflective consciousness as primordial awareness does not *emanate from* or *have* a subject, ego or soul that somehow *possesses* or *deploys* it. Instead, consciousness is conceived as individualized *subject-less* awareness,⁷⁹ aware of itself as it perceives the world, but not *originating* from or *possessed* by a separate subject, ego or soul that *has* it (awareness) as a property or activity. Thus, pre-reflective consciousness is *empty* and *impersonal* absent an "I" or ego; strictly speaking, all that can be said of consciousness is that there is *awareness of some particular being*, rather than an *ego* or *subject* that is aware of some particular being; in the strictest sense consciousness is exclusively empty pre-personal awareness as a consequence of its nothingness. Therefore, conceiving the ego as a locus of awareness *separate* from consciousness is a reification, a fiction created by reflective

⁷⁹ Catalano in *Commentary* uses the term "pre-personal" and this might more effectively communicate the idea than "subject-less," which is intended to mean a lack of personalized awareness, but could be mistakenly understood to mean somehow absent subjectivity.

consciousness. Sartre states, “The ego is not the owner of consciousness; it is the object of consciousness.”⁸⁰

Hence, the self we experience, to include its contents, processes, and psychic structures (cognition, affect, volition, personal history, psychodynamics, etc.) is merely consciousness regarding its current and past activities as *objects* that it organizes into a coherent whole or subdivides *as if* they were objects or structures, which it then perceives as a *subject* (ego) that *has* experiences. By positing an ego, consciousness moves from pre-reflective to reflective awareness (non-positional to positional perspectives). In this manner the ego is wholly other than, that is separable from, pre-reflective consciousness rather than its progenitor; the ego is not synonymous with consciousness, but is another feature of the “world,” an object *for* consciousness.

Finally, consciousness’ awareness of itself (reflexive-awareness) can never be complete. When nihilating itself to look at itself, there is a reflecting position of consciousness (that which is “looking”) and a reflected position of consciousness (that which is “looked at”); the former regards the latter. However, the consciousness that is doing the reflecting, that is doing the “looking,” cannot also look at itself while looking; it cannot regard itself as a looking activity *while engaged in* the looking activity. It is aware that it is looking, but cannot look at itself as it looks. Therefore, consciousness’ awareness of itself can never be complete because it's looking is always outside it's looked at; its ontology as a “looking” limits knowledge of its being.

⁸⁰ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 97. The insight into pre-reflective and reflective awareness, and the realization that the ego is a construction of consciousness rather than a primordial constituent or owner of consciousness appears to have been derived from a bracketing of the Husserlian view of the existence of an ego. This bracketing permits a further phenomenological reduction that leads to the insight that the ego is a fiction, a point about Sartre’s methodology argued by Busch.

A second reason consciousness can never completely know itself arises from its spontaneous nothingness that always exceeds or “overflows”⁸¹ any constructed conceptualization of it, a conceptualization that always conceives it as a limited thing (an object) rather than a nothingness. Sartre states, “But the reflection which delivers the reflected-on to us, not as a given but as the being which we have to be, in indistinction without a point of view, is a knowledge overflowing itself and without explanation.”⁸²

Other features of the for-itself central to this investigation are its individuation and isolation, which render its relations with others an “inter-monad relation.”⁸³ Sartre conceives each consciousness as entirely individuated, and as such a locus of awareness known to itself alone. In *The Transcendence of the Ego* he states,

Furthermore, the individuality of consciousness evidently stems from the nature of consciousness. Consciousness...can be limited only by itself. Thus, it constitutes a synthetic and individual totality entirely isolated from other totalities of the same type, and the *I* can evidently be only an expression (rather than a condition) of this incommunicability and inwardness of consciousness.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Sartre, *Being*, 156.

⁸² Sartre, *Being*, 219.

⁸³ Sartre, *Being*, 302. Relations with others are more fully developed in the following section “Being-for-others” and the specific *types* of relations examined in Chapter 5.

⁸⁴ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 39-40.

D. Sartre's Ontology: Being-for-others

Awareness of others constitutes consciousness' third basic internal nihilation. Like the internal nihilation of the in-itself, consciousness is aware of others as subjects, but as subjects that are *not* itself. Sartre states, "In fact it is possible to deny that the Other is me only in so far as the Other is himself a subject."⁸⁵ Consequently, the Other is not encountered via knowledge, but by consciousness' internal nihilation of its own subject-ness as distinct from the subject-ness of the Other.

This Other is then revealed pre-reflectively via a dynamic Sartre calls the look.⁸⁶ Specifically, when another looks at me, I become aware of an additional aspect of my being, my exterior, my being-for-others. Sartre states, "Thus the Other has not only revealed to me what I was; he has established me in a new type of being which can support new qualifications."⁸⁷ The Other births a new structure of my being, what I am for the Other, that is as known by the Other, which cannot be known by me, but nevertheless remains mine.

For the Other (my being-for-others) I am made an object, and when looked at by the Other *my* consciousness is altered such that I am moved, by the Other's look, from pre-reflective awareness of myself to a positional, reflective awareness of myself as an object, *as looked at* by the Other, as an object for *him*. This alteration of *my* consciousness from pre-reflective to positional, effected by the look of the Other, reveals to me my being-for-others in the experience of shame. "But this new being which appears *for* the other does not reside in the Other... Thus

⁸⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 380.

⁸⁶ The first person perspective is assumed here and at other times for ease of exposition.

⁸⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 302.

shame is shame *of oneself before the Other...*”⁸⁸ Shame is the revealing intuition of our being-for-others. With this basic ontology in mind, the investigation can now turn to evaluating it.

Part II: Evaluating Sartre’s Ontology

Recall from Chapter 2 that *basic phenomenology* consists of two different apprehensions. First it refers to direct apprehension of objects or consciousness in their non-mediated confrontation as they are in our barest encounter (insight). The second refers to objects or consciousness *disclosed* (revealed) by our confrontation without comprising it. For example, Sartre’s description of anguish is a bare confrontation with his experience (insight), which is a revealing consciousness, a disclosing of something *other* than our experience of anguish, in his case freedom. Similarly, his experience of nausea is a bare confrontation, which reveals the contingency of our existence, to include the body.

By contrast, cognized phenomenology extends basic phenomenology as the basis for rational inferences. For example, Sartre’s “ontological proof” rationally derives the existence of objects from his basic phenomenology of consciousness as an intentional nothingness. If a nothingness consciousness is aware of objects in basic phenomenology, there must be some *thing* that is not consciousness itself, some *thing* of which it is aware. Therefore, there must be independently existing entities; this conclusion derives from cognized, rather than basic phenomenology.

⁸⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 303.

Employing these distinctions permits evaluation of Sartre's ontology in terms of his fidelity to his most basic phenomenology; does his ontology reflect his basic phenomenology or does he instead privilege cognized phenomenology, which leads him astray? To answering this question I now turn.

A. Is Sartre's Consciousness a Nothingness?

Busch observes that Sartre closely examines consciousness and finds that its being is a nothingness.⁸⁹ The most important insight Sartre obtains from the phenomenological reduction is that there is no ego, no owner or inhabitant of consciousness. Whereas Husserl performed the reduction and arrived at a transcendental ego, Sartre found only a nothingness that *constructs* an ego as an object to hide its spontaneity and reduce anxiety; by identifying a transcendental ego, Husserl's reduction did not go far enough to realize that the ego is produced *by* consciousness rather its organizer.

Recall that the complete nothingness of consciousness serves two critical goals. First, it is required, as Sartre sees it, for our freedom, which is either total and complete or not at all. Second, the nothingness of consciousness ensures that our phenomenological confrontation with objects remains uncorrupted by structures or processes of consciousness that impede their direct, unmediated apprehension. However, examining the consciousness that Sartre encounters in his

⁸⁹ Busch, *Contemporary*.

basic phenomenology, rather than the consciousness he *cognizes* to retain our freedom and unmediated confrontation with objects, indicates that it is not the nothingness he claims for it.

As a nothingness Sartre conceives consciousness as a *lack*, specifically a lack of identity with itself that characterizes the in-itself from which consciousness is nihilated. According to Sartre, consciousness attempts to remedy its lack by becoming a thing or appropriating others as things with which it can identify itself as a thing; consciousness seeks to become an in-itself entirely coincident with itself. He observes, “Human reality is its own surpassing toward what it lacks; it surpasses itself toward the particular being which it would be if it were what it is.”⁹⁰ Indeed, Sartre indicates “...the *cogito* is haunted by this being...”⁹¹ But this activity of the for-itself directly apprehended by basic phenomenology is also *deducible* from Sartre’s ontology as cognized phenomenology. He states,

Fundamentally 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, since desire is a lack and since the for-itself is a being which is to itself its own lack of being.⁹²

Sartre asserts that given consciousness is a lack, and desire is a lack, then consciousness is desire, the desire to be that which it is not, that which it lacks, a self-coincident being-in-itself.

⁹⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 139.

⁹¹ Sartre, *Being*, 139.

⁹² Sartre, *Being*, 722.

But this “*a priori* description” is simply the intentionality of a nothingness consciousness bound to the in-itself in synthetic unity.⁹³ Given consciousness is always *of* something and consciousness is a *nothingness*, there is no option but a lacking consciousness filled with objects it intends that are other than itself. Thus, by virtue of being an intentional nothingness bound in a relation with the in-itself, consciousness moves into the world remedying the lack that it is; consciousness’ intentionality is active.⁹⁴ Desan makes a similar point “Sartre’s statement on the contrary, is not so much empirical as *a priori*. Indeed it is founded on his basic notion of the For-itself.”⁹⁵

But Sartre asserts something *more* than simply the mechanics of an intentional nothingness consciousness bound in synthetic relation with the in-itself, something more than an *a priori* description of consciousness rationally derived from its lack. His descriptions of consciousness’ intentional movements into the world as a lack go further than his ontological deduction alone entails; he does not just describe a nothingness consciousness intending objects. He describes the movement of consciousness into and through the world seeking to be an in-itself using words such as “haunts,”⁹⁶ “desire,”⁹⁷ “pursuit,”⁹⁸ “flight,”⁹⁹ “profound solidarity,”¹⁰⁰ “failure,”¹⁰¹ and the like. Is he simply describing the mechanics of an intending nothingness consciousness using anthropomorphic figures of speech? It would be hard to argue that his

⁹³ Sartre, *Being*, 722.

⁹⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 722.

⁹⁵ Desan, *Tragic*, 125.

⁹⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 139.

⁹⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 722.

⁹⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 472.

⁹⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 472.

¹⁰⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 198.

¹⁰¹ Sartre, *Being*, 139.

language imputing human motives to consciousness is simply an anthropomorphic metaphor given the phenomenon being described is human; just about any description of human reality would struggle to be conceived as an anthropomorphism.

Further, consider what Sartre means by the words noted above in the context of the for-itself and the in-itself. Despite his claims, they are not just an “*a priori* description” of a synthetic relation of an intending nothingness consciousness and being-in-itself deducible from the nothingness of consciousness¹⁰²; they are descriptions of consciousness’ *purposes*, which we confront in our most intimate subjective experience; said differently we confront these purposes in our most basic phenomenology. Indeed, Sartre persistently describes consciousness throughout *Being and Nothingness* as an attempt to *appropriate* being, the being of others and objects, an omnipresent telos seeking to define itself by appropriating objects that it can identify *as* itself. He baldly describes “...an appropriative relation between the for-itself and the world...”¹⁰³ and later “Let us return to the original project. It is a project of appropriation.”¹⁰⁴

Consciousness seeks somehow to recover the in-itself from which it nihilates itself, and it does so telically, not as a logically necessary consequence of its nothingness and intentionality. By Sartre’s own assertion we have a telos of consciousness. Thus Sartre’s *own* most basic phenomenological description confronts a consciousness that is *not* an empty nothingness. Further, consider his claim to provide an “*a priori* description of the being of the for-itself.”¹⁰⁵ Such a goal *must* be the result of cognized rather than basic phenomenology because, as Desan

¹⁰² Sartre, *Being*, 722.

¹⁰³ Sartre, *Being*, 588.

¹⁰⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 722.

¹⁰⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 722.

points out, there can be no *a priori* description that is *phenomenological*, which would be an oxymoron.¹⁰⁶

Thus, Sartre advances two conceptions of consciousness, one confronted by basic phenomenology that is telic and one based on cognized phenomenology that is a nothingness intending objects with which it is synthetically bound. He then privileges cognized rather than basic phenomenology. He has confronted human consciousness as telic, as *seeking* to be, which threatens freedom and knowledge, so he attempts to derive desire, haunting, flight, pursuit, failure, and solidarity from the mechanics of an intending nothingness consciousness alone. His “*a priori* description” has strayed from his most basic phenomenology and led him away from the thing itself.¹⁰⁷ Sartre’s consciousness is not a nothingness.

But Sartre goes further. The for-itself not *only* seeks to become an in-itself, but does so while simultaneously desiring to preserve its freedom as a nothingness. Consciousness seeks to have it both ways, to be both a self-founding being, an in-itself, and a free and autonomous nothingness, a for-itself.¹⁰⁸ In Sartre’s language we seek to be an “in-itself-for-itself,” a self-founding, free and autonomous being, which he notes is God.¹⁰⁹ Consider his statements:

¹⁰⁶ Desan, *Tragic*.

¹⁰⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 722.

¹⁰⁸ Recall that the for-itself is not self-founding, but dependent upon the in-itself for its being as a nothingness, from which it cleaves itself, via nihilation.

¹⁰⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 582.

The best way to conceive the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God.¹¹⁰

...the project of being God...has appeared to us as the deep-seated structure of human reality.¹¹¹

The goal of the reflective scissiparity is, as we have seen, to *recover* the reflected-on so as to constitute that unrealizable totality ‘In-itself-for-itself,’ which is the fundamental value posited by the for-itself in the very upsurge of its being.¹¹²

Via reduction Sartre’s most basic phenomenology achieves deep insight into the telos of human reality, the telos of consciousness, and identifies a human essence explicitly rejected by his cognized phenomenology. As the passages quoted above note, he observes humans have a “*fundamental project*,”¹¹³ a “*deep-seated structure*,”¹¹⁴ a “*fundamental value posited by the for-itself in the very upsurge of its being*.”¹¹⁵ Indeed, by his own definition from the Introduction of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre has identified a human essence; he states, “The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it *is* the essence. The essence of an existent is no longer a property sunk in this cavity of this existent; *it is the manifest law which presides over the*

¹¹⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 724.

¹¹¹ Sartre, *Being*, 742.

¹¹² Sartre, *Being*, 582.

¹¹³ Sartre, *Being*, 724.

¹¹⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 742.

¹¹⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 582.

succession of its appearances, it is the principle of the series.”¹¹⁶ (italicized emphasis added) To his credit Sartre recognizes and addresses this difficulty.

For freedom is nothing other than a choice which creates for itself its own possibilities, but it appears here that the initial project of being God, which “defines” man, comes close to being the same as a human “nature” or an “essence.” The answer is that while the *meaning* of the desire is ultimately the project of being God, the desire is never *constituted* by this meaning; on the contrary, it always represents a particular discovery of its ends. These ends in fact are pursued in terms of a particular empirical situation, and it is this very pursuit which constitutes the surroundings *as a situation*. The desire of being is always realized as the desire of a mode of being.¹¹⁷

Sartre’s argument appears to depend on the distinction between pre-reflective and positional consciousness; his claim that the “*meaning* of the desire” does not “*constitute* the desire”¹¹⁸ indicates that consciousness’ desire to be God is not a positional, reflected upon project or goal. We do not move through the world reflectively aware of our goal to be God, through and by which we then direct our actions. Instead, the desire to be God is a *meaning* given to our individual projects when reflectively considered; the *meaning* is assigned when we

¹¹⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 5.

¹¹⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 724.

¹¹⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 724.

observe ourselves reflectively, as the “*law which presides over the succession of its appearances, it is the principle of the series*” as noted above.¹¹⁹

Further, our desires *produce* and are *enacted in* situations of our definition, and *constituted* by these situations that we define and construct. In the passage above he notes “These ends in fact are pursued in terms of a particular empirical situation, and it is this very pursuit which constitutes the surroundings *as a situation*.”¹²⁰ We seek to *be* in a certain manner within the situations we create, the meaning of which is the wish to be God.

I concur with Sartre that the *meaning* of our activities as the desire to be God is a construction of positional consciousness rather than a ““nature”” or ““essence.””¹²¹ But this meaning of our primordial activity of being does not eliminate that activity; it simply assigns to it a specific *interpretation* in positional consciousness. However one interprets the *meaning* of that desire, Sartre clearly identifies a nature or essence even seemingly by his own definition “as a principle of the series,”¹²² a universal human telos that moves through the world, though interpretations of it may differ and are not identical to it. Thus, there is a human essence, a being that is telic, that precedes the existence we create for ourselves through its enactment. Of course this telos is “*pursued in terms of a particular empirical situation*”¹²³ and even “*constitutes the surroundings as a situation*,”¹²⁴ but that does not mean that such a telos does not exist, merely

¹¹⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 5.

¹²⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 724.

¹²¹ Sartre, *Being*, 724.

¹²² Sartre, *Being*, 5.

¹²³ Sartre, *Being*, 724.

¹²⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 724.

that its instantiation by the situation it creates and the manner in which it uses and moves through that situation will differ based on empirical circumstances.

In conclusion, Desan's observation is well taken, "So once more Sartre...proves not that *existence precedes essence* but that *essence (logically) precedes existence*; that is to say, that human existence does not create itself in some wild and unlimited freedom but follows a general scheme which is called human essence or human nature."¹²⁵ Sartre's consciousness is not a nothingness. Indeed, Sartre identifies additional teloses of consciousness, which are explicated in the next section.

B. Values, Choices, Projects, Situations and the Ego

The previous section argued that Sartre's consciousness as depicted by his basic phenomenology contains telos as structures of its being, a telos seeking to make itself an object and a telos seeking to retain its autonomy while doing so, an in-itself-for-itself. Commensurate with Sartre's reduction that fails to find an ego that *has* or *uses* values as entities that might be deployed by an owner, values are primordially correlative with consciousness' upsurge from the in-itself. He states,

Value in its original upsurge is not *posited* by the for-itself; it is consubstantial with it - to such a degree that there is no consciousness that is not haunted by its

¹²⁵ Desan, *Tragic*, 165.

value and that human-reality in the broad sense includes both the for-itself and value... Value is merely given with the non-thetic translucency of the for-itself, which makes itself be as the consciousness of being.¹²⁶

Later in *Being and Nothingness* he states “Choice and consciousness are one and the same thing.”¹²⁷ According to Sartre, like the desire to be an in-itself-for-itself, consciousness does not *have* or *own* a valuing or choosing telos, consciousness *is* valuing and choosing telos, “*consubstantial with it*,”¹²⁸ “*one and the same thing*.”¹²⁹ He asserts that as a nothingness that intends the world, consciousness is always surpassing itself toward possibilities. Consciousness is always the nothingness that is not what it is and is what it is not, such that its surpassings that manifest values are a necessary corollary of its nothingness in the same manner as its “desire,” “pursuit” and “flight” noted above.¹³⁰

But again note Sartre’s use of the word “haunted”¹³¹ in the passage above describing value, which returns to the point argued previously that he is not simply describing the mechanics of an intentional nothingness consciousness synthetically bound to the world using anthropomorphic language, but has identified a telos. Basic phenomenology readily encounters values as primordial to our being, “*consubstantial with it*.”¹³² Indeed, Sartre agrees as indicated

¹²⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 145-146. A page earlier he states, “These considerations suffice to make us admit that human reality is that by which values arrive in the world.” 144.

¹²⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 595.

¹²⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 145.

¹²⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 595.

¹³⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 722, 472, 472.

¹³¹ Sartre, *Being*, 140.

¹³² Sartre, *Being*, 145.

by his own statements, but then abandons the most basic outcome of the reduction that identifies a telos in favor of a cognized phenomenology that derives values from the mechanics of intending nothingness consciousness; he strays from basic phenomenology to preserves his marriage to the nothingness of consciousness required for freedom and knowledge.

As Chapter 2 notes, when basic and cognized phenomenology conflict, basic phenomenology is usually more persuasive given its closer relationship with the thing itself. Sartre's reduction was successful. Valuing and choosing are readily confronted as basic structures of subjectivity, of "What it is like to be a human," and should not have been abandoned in favor of cognized phenomenology deriving values and choices from a nothingness consciousness that he neither finds, nor describes.

Furthermore, the for-itself does not simply value and choose, it devises projects,¹³³ which are more complex than singular choices or value assignments to activities or objects. Like values, projects are consubstantial with the upsurge of the for-itself. Sartre states "...human reality in and through its very upsurge decides to define its own being by its ends. It is therefore the positing of my ultimate ends which characterizes my being and which is identical with the sudden thrust of the freedom which is mine..."¹³⁴ And what is the *goal* of our projects? He continues, "My ultimate and initial project...is, as we shall see, always the outline of a solution

¹³³ In her *Glossary* Barnes defines project: "Project. Both verb and noun. It refers to the For-itself's choice of its way of being and is expressed by action in the light of a future end." 806.

¹³⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 572.

of the problem of being.”¹³⁵ The “problem of being” for *human* beings is that our consciousness is a nothingness, that which entirely lacks identity with itself.¹³⁶

To understand Sartre’s projects requires appreciation of his conception of temporality. As noted earlier being-in-itself is not subject to time. Instead time is introduced by the nothingness of consciousness, which is diasporatically distributed across the past, present and future, that is de-totalized as that which is what it is not and is not what it is. This nothingness of consciousness that gives rise to its possibilities, indeed renders it a possible and nothing more, introduces time into being. “But temporality is the being of the For-itself in so far as the For-itself has to be it's being ekstastically. Temporality is not, but the For-itself temporalizes itself by existing.”¹³⁷

The nothingness of consciousness and the temporality it introduces make possible the concept of projects. A project is a temporalized manner of being in the world that synthesizes past, present, and future into a single unit; the present is defined by the future towards which it projects, and the future is built by the present on the facticity of past from which it emerges, all unified in a synthetic whole. Sartre states, “Past motives, past causes, present motives and causes, future ends, all are organized in an indissoluble unity by the very upsurge of a freedom which is beyond causes, motives, and ends.”¹³⁸ And continuing Sartre’s previous argument, projects are designed to fill the lack that we are in our being-for-itself as a nothingness; projects

¹³⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 596.

¹³⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 596.

¹³⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 195. He notes on p. 196 “...the meaning of ekstasis is distance from self.” Of course given the for-itself is never coincident with itself, which would make it an in-itself, but always that which it is not, and is not what it is, ekstasis is perhaps understood as another way to understand the for-itself’s nothingness.

¹³⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 581.

are consciousness' appropriative effort to be an in-itself. This is the solution to the "*problem of being*."¹³⁹

But what exactly is a project? It is a person's "...totality of his impulse toward being, his original relation to himself, to the world, to the Other, in the unity of internal relations and of a fundamental project."¹⁴⁰ In describing our desire to be an in-itself manifested by our projects, he continues,

There is not first a single desire of being, then a thousand particular feelings, but the desire to be exists and manifests itself only in and through jealousy, greed, love, art, cowardice, courage, and a thousand contingent, empirical expressions which always cause human reality to appear to us as *manifested* by a *particular man*, a particular person.¹⁴¹

Moreover, each of our acts manifests, literally or symbolically, our overall project to become a self-identical being that persists, an in-itself.¹⁴²

Further, Sartre indicates that our project, like our desire to be an in-itself-for-itself, is non-thetic; it is consubstantial with the upsurge of the for-itself and becomes known thetically only in reflective consciousness. Therefore, when placed into reflective consciousness our

¹³⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 596.

¹⁴⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 719.

¹⁴¹ Sartre, *Being*, 722-723.

¹⁴² He notes that each of our actions "...had to be interpreted in terms of an original project of which it formed an integral part." *Being*, 597.

projects disclose our choice of being (who we have chosen to be in the world) to *ourselves*; their placement in reflective consciousness reveals to us what we are, and thus give meaning not only to the future toward which we strive, but also to the past that has become our facticity. The specific actions that comprise our projects, and of which we are pre-reflectively aware, reveal what we are to *ourselves* when confronted in reflective consciousness, and cognized into an ego and narrative of our lives.

But before considering consciousness' construction of the ego, there is another dimension of projects to consider. Our project of solving the "problem of being" by becoming an in-itself does not take place in a pre-given situation; via our project we actually *create* the situation within which we seek by our project to resolve the "problem of being."¹⁴³ Not that our projects create the in-itself, but they move from the background to the foreground the situation as manifestations of the project itself. Therefore, the situation in which a project is enacted is itself a *creation* and *expression* of that project. Sartre observes, "In fact I am nothing but the project of myself beyond a determined situation, and this project *pre-outlines* me in terms of the concrete situation as in addition it illumines the situation in terms of my choice."¹⁴⁴

This consideration of projects and their situations leads to the conclusion that Sartre again unduly privileges cognized phenomenology at the expense of basic phenomenology. He again advances something akin to an essence or nature of consciousness as seeking to solve the "problem of being;" this was covered in the previous section.¹⁴⁵ But in advancing his idea of projects based on temporality he goes further; he indicates that consciousness creates "situations"

¹⁴³ Sartre, *Being*, 596.

¹⁴⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 706.

¹⁴⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 596.

that manifest our projects, and within which we instantiate our projects. Indeed, these situations reveal to *ourselves* the goals of our projects. Thus, we have a *situation creating* consciousness. Again Sartre explains our situation creating consciousness that defines and reveals our projects and our being, as a necessary corollary of our nothingness, as derivative of consciousness' temporally diasporatic nothingness.

But for the same reasons previously advanced, Sartre's cognized phenomenology that asserts the nothingness of consciousness explains projects and their situations is more akin to an ontological deduction than basic phenomenology. As such it unnecessarily moves us *away* from the "thing itself." Projects that *are* consciousness can be more readily apprehended exactly as Sartre confronts them in basic phenomenology, as a telic process of consciousness. Here can be seen the danger not of the naiveté of the natural attitude that reduction seeks to avoid, but of the excessively cognized attitude that dismisses that which the reduction renders apparent.

Of course, to identify a *process* in the "nothingness" of consciousness destroys its "total translucency"¹⁴⁶ and spontaneity. Sartre makes this point with reference to the ego, but it is no less forceful with respect to *any* telos or process.

In fact, however formal, however abstract one may suppose it to be, the *I*, with its personality, would be a sort of center of opacity. It would be to the concrete and psycho-physical *me* what a point is to three dimensions: it would be an infinitely contracted *me*. Thus, if one introduces this opacity into consciousness, one

¹⁴⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 89.

thereby destroys the fruitful definition cited earlier. One congeals consciousness, one darkens it. Consciousness is no longer a spontaneity; it bears within itself the germ of opaqueness.¹⁴⁷

Thus, Sartre must affirm the nothingness of consciousness to preserve its freedom (“*spontaneity*”) and unmediated confrontation with existence absent obstruction (“*opacity*”).¹⁴⁸ He maintains the nothingness of consciousness to achieve his epistemic and ontological goals despite its distance from his basic phenomenology.

But this strategy to achieve his epistemic and ontological goals, to preserve freedom and unmediated confrontation with existence, fails. Indeed, he betrays these goals by the very conception of projects that he advances. As he states above, we create situations that reveal our choice of project; we do not confront objects in themselves absent encroachment by consciousness that confronts. Consider Sartre’s own example,

Here I am at the foot of this crag which appears to me as “not scalable.” This means that the rock appears to me in the light of a projected scaling—a secondary project which finds its meaning in terms of an initial project which is my being-in-the-world. Thus the rock is carved out on the ground of the world by the effect of the initial choice of my freedom...Nevertheless the rock can show its resistance

¹⁴⁷ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 41-42.

¹⁴⁸ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 41.

to the scaling only if the rock is integrated by freedom in a "situation" of which the general theme is scaling. For the simple traveler who passes over this road and whose free project is a pure aesthetic ordering of the landscape, the crag is not revealed either as scalable or as not-scalable; it is manifested only as beautiful or ugly.¹⁴⁹

He asserts that each of us creates the "situation" in which we find ourselves enacting our projects¹⁵⁰, as manifestations of that project, and in which we then instantiate it. By his rendering we do not experience a primordial, unmediated confrontation with objects, within our situation; consciousness is not simply as he says "presence to being"¹⁵¹ as if naked before the existent. Certainly, consciousness does not *create* being, but it creates by its projects which beings, which "thises" exist in relief from the foreground of all being.¹⁵² Hence, we *create*, by the choice of our project, the objects that populate our situation, the "thises" that constitute that situation.¹⁵³

Therefore, consciousness is not a nothingness that confronts objects as they are; it is a project-choosing and situation-creating consciousness confronting "thises" of its own creation.¹⁵⁴ It does not *confront* the situation as a nothingness; it "confronts" a situation expressing and manifesting *itself*. Thus, Sartre's assertion that we create situations and their "thises"

¹⁴⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 627.

¹⁵⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 706.

¹⁵¹ Sartre, *Being*, 177.

¹⁵² Sartre, *Being*, 180.

¹⁵³ Sartre, *Being*, 180.

¹⁵⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 180.

undermines the unmediated confrontation he seeks to preserve for his epistemology. He betrays his basic phenomenology in favor of a cognized phenomenology for a goal that it cannot achieve.

But he identifies other processes of consciousness. Recall that in his phenomenological reduction Sartre went beyond Husserl by asserting that there is neither a mundane nor a transcendental ego as a primordial owner or constituent of consciousness. His phenomenological reduction discerns that the ego is a fictive entity constructed by positional consciousness. He further claims that consciousness is a unified whole, and that this unity is achieved by the activity of consciousness itself rather than a transcendental ego like Husserl claimed. He agrees with Husserl that “Consciousness must be perpetual syntheses of past consciousness and present consciousness.”¹⁵⁵ And as noted above, he asserts that we attach to our fictive ego as if it is our identity, as if it is what we *are* as an object. He states, “Everything happens, therefore, as if consciousness constituted the ego as a false representation of itself, as if consciousness hypnotized itself before this ego which it has constituted, absorbing itself in the ego as if to make the ego its guardian and its law.”¹⁵⁶

Thus, Sartre identifies additional ontological processes of consciousness, its self-organizing which unifies past, present and future; the systems of ends it enacts in its projects; and its ego creation in positional consciousness that protects it from full awareness of its spontaneity and freedom. Importantly, these processes are not post-hoc constructions of positional consciousness, but primordially discerned in his reduction and indicate that his most basic phenomenology does not reveal a nothingness consciousness, but one that is content-ed

¹⁵⁵ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 39.

¹⁵⁶ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 101.

with telos and process. Therefore, we again find that despite his cognized phenomenology that claims consciousness is a nothingness, his basic phenomenology discloses telic processes as the being of consciousness, *as* consciousness itself.

C. Conclusions

The purpose of Part II of this chapter has not been to delineate every feature of Sartre's ontology whereby he privileges cognized over basic phenomenology or to identify every instance in which he attributes a telos or process to the supposed nothingness of consciousness.¹⁵⁷ Instead the goal has been to show that Sartre's basic and cognized phenomenology lead to different ontologies of consciousness, and that had he followed his basic phenomenology he would have discovered, or perhaps more accurately *acknowledged*, that the consciousness he confronts in the reduction is not empty, but telic. Of course, recognizing a telic consciousness endangers complete freedom and unmediated confrontation with objects. However, it also exhibits greater fidelity to the reduction by acknowledging the superior persuasiveness of basic phenomenology over its cognized cousin. Further, as argued above his situation-producing consciousness precludes the unmediated confrontation with objects he seeks to preserve to escape a phenomenal-noumenal dualism. But there are deeper reasons for doubting Sartre's ontology, which are explained below.

¹⁵⁷ Depending upon how strictly one defines "telos," "process," or even "structure" there could be other instances. For example do the internal nihilations of consciousness constitute a telos or process? Does temporality as the "intra-structure of the for-itself" constitute a structure? (Sartre, *Being*, 202).

Part III. Language and the Ontology of Consciousness

A. Sartre's General Ontology Re-Considered

As previously argued, there are reasons to doubt Sartre's ontology given his basic phenomenology identifies several teloses as coextensive with consciousness, as *being* consciousness, which corrupts the clean bifurcation of being-in-itself and being-for-itself.¹⁵⁸ However, there is another reason for doubt.

Consider A. J. Ayer's criticism of philosophers like Sartre whom he accuses of misusing language. He states "What is called existentialist philosophy has become very largely an exercise in the art of misusing the verb 'to be'."¹⁵⁹ This is a strong claim. Consider a statement by Sartre that exemplifies the type of writing Ayer criticizes: "We have to deal with human reality as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is."¹⁶⁰ Does Ayer have a point? Is this statement and others like it a misuse of language absent coherent content, mere gibberish? For an entity to *be* a *nothingness*, like Sartre's consciousness, is contradictory. The verb "to be" means to exist, such that asserting consciousness is a nothingness is tantamount to asserting "an existent is a non-existent" or "an existent non-exists."

¹⁵⁸ One could reasonably argue that "situation production" is a *process* that serves the telic consciousness seeking to be an object (in-itself) or a self-founding object (in-itself-for-itself), rather than being a telos *itself*. This might be analogous to debating whether the stomach's actions are a *process* that serves the telos of the person, or are a telos themselves, a question left for another time. Though unclear how exactly Sartre would describe the ontology of telos, it is clear that he conceived *any* content of consciousness to corrupt its confrontation with objects.

¹⁵⁹ Ayer, A. J. "Novelist-philosophers, V, Jean-Paul Sartre," *Horizon*, July, Vol. XII, No 67. 1945, 16, quoted in Natanson, *Critique*, 107. For reasons unknown, this A. J. Ayer quote could not be found in the source Natanson cites.

¹⁶⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 100

Taken literally this *is* gibberish. Presumably Sartre is speaking figuratively to communicate something about the phenomenology of consciousness. As Chapter 2 argues, figurative language using verifiable external referents to describe consciousness is unavoidable, and understanding such language literally fails to understand it at all. Returning to Kovecses' distinction¹⁶¹ between the source and target domains of figurative language, it becomes apparent in Sartre's statement above and others like it that he is using the word "is," the singular present tense of "to be," figuratively as that which is *denied* to consciousness. He is saying that consciousness is *like* an existent that does not exist. He calls this existence, this being of consciousness, a nothingness. He understands subjectivity as that which is *not* objectivity; the subject is that which is *not* an object.

However, similar to the mistake of understanding figurative language literally, there is another closely allied mistake. Zahavi observes that Husserl divides ontology into formal ontology and regional ontology.¹⁶² *Formal* ontology investigates the properties true of most or all objects such as "...quality, property, relation, identity, whole, part, and so on." On the other hand, *regional* ontology "examines the essential structures belonging to a given *region* or *kind* of object..."¹⁶³ For example regions of being might be music, numbers, ideas, emotions, consciousness, and Sartre's being-in-itself.¹⁶⁴ Thus far in this investigation ontology has been

¹⁶¹ Kovecses, *Metaphor*.

¹⁶² Zahavi notes that regional ontology is also called *material* ontology, but the term "regional ontology" is used here because it appears more felicitous with respect to the overall point of this section.

¹⁶³ Zahavi, *Beyond*, 38.

¹⁶⁴ This simple list of regional ontologies reveals the crudity of Sartre's tripartite regional ontology.

used to denote *regional ontology* to reference the essential structures of consciousness and brute being, being-for-itself and being-in-itself roughly speaking.

We can now see that there is a cousin to the mistake of understanding figurative language literally, that of confusing *formal* and *regional* ontology. This mistake involves using the properties and concepts of the regional ontology of the linguistic source domain to understand the properties and concepts of the regional ontology of the linguistic target domain; metaphors are not just linguistic, but carry with them an ontology. George Lakoff observes “The generalizations governing poetic metaphorical expressions are not in language, but in thought: They are general mappings across conceptual domains...In short the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another.”¹⁶⁵ Thus, when employing figurative language it is a mistake to assume that the ontology of the source domain has the same *formal* properties as the target domain. There can be a covert ontological transfer attaching to language as it moves from its literal meaning in the source to its figurative meaning in the target, which can mislead. Lakoff continues to make this point in reference to a metaphor about love as a journey.

It is the ontological mapping across conceptual domains, from the source domain of journeys to the target domain of love. *The metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason. The language is secondary. The mapping is*

¹⁶⁵ George Lakoff, “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd edition, ed. A. Ortony (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 202.

primary, in that it sanctions the use of source domain language and inference patterns for target domain concepts.¹⁶⁶

For example, the formal ontology of Sartre's in-itself would be those properties true of *substances* such as identity, whole, part, extension, and so on. When using language from this ontological region as the source to figuratively communicate about a different ontological region such as consciousness that is the target, it would be a mistake to assume the target domain has the same formal ontology as the source domain, that both domains have the same properties organizable by the same concepts. By way of example, consider that Sartre's brute self-identical being-in-itself is not subject to time, juxtaposed with being-for-itself that introduces temporality by existing diasporatically in the past, present, and future. Similarly, the in-itself is always completely self-identical whereas the for-itself is never self-identical, always other than itself.

Thus, it is not self-evident that consciousness can be described using formal ontological properties applicable to the in-itself such as whole, part, identity, and the like, or conceptual rules like Aristotle's laws of Identity, Noncontradiction, or Excluded Middle. Recall Aristotle's Law of Noncontradiction from his *Metaphysics*:

For the same thing to hold good and not to hold good simultaneously of the same thing in the same respect is impossible...This, then, is the firmest of all principles, for it fits the specification stated. For it is impossible for anyone to believe that

¹⁶⁶ Lakoff, *Contemporary*, 7.

the same thing is and is not...But if it is not possible for contraries to hold good of the same thing simultaneously...and the opinion contrary to an opinion is that of the contradictory, then obviously it is impossible for the same person to believe simultaneously that the same thing is and is not...¹⁶⁷

Given that consciousness is of a different regional ontology than the in-itself, it may not be bound by these rules of thought; consciousness likely has a different formal ontology as well. Nagel makes a similar point in a more general way, “But philosophers share the general human weakness for explanations of what is incomprehensible in terms suited for what is familiar and well understood, though entirely different.”¹⁶⁸

This analysis challenges Sartre’s ontology in which he appears to use rules applicable to the ontology of substances such as identity and non-contradiction to describe and explain consciousness, which has a different formal ontology. Indeed, by Sartre’s own reckoning the in-itself and the for-itself have different formal ontologies; subjects are entirely different than objects, which suggests his figurative language unwittingly smuggles ontology from the source to the target domain.

For example, concluding that because consciousness is the opposite of the infinitely dense in-itself that it *must be* a *nothingness* borrows from substance ontology where the opposite of existence (being-in-itself) is non-existence or nothingness (being-for-itself); on this basis

¹⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, *Second edition*, trans. Christopher Kirwan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 7-8.

¹⁶⁸ Nagel, *Bat*, 435.

Sartre asserts that the *being* of consciousness is *nothingness*. He employs the language and formal ontology of the in-itself to explain consciousness such that consciousness is that which the in-itself is *not*, the “not-in-itself,” a nothingness. Sartre conceives consciousness by the ontology of the linguistic source domain used to communicate about the target domain; the being of the in-itself and the nothingness of consciousness are both conceived from *within* the ontology of *substance*, where the opposite of something is nothing. He uses the language and formal ontology of the in-itself to describe the for-itself, which by his own statement is of a *different* regional and formal ontology.¹⁶⁹

Recall that the previous chapter argued that Sartre’s consciousness is multiply telic rather than being a nothingness. However, following the argument advanced here this does not make consciousness akin to or draw it *closer* to the in-itself despite its *not* being a nothingness; its *non*-nothingness does not move it in the direction of a concrete thing, a substance. Consciousness has an entirely different formal ontology than being-in-itself, rather than the two existing as if on a single continuum with self-identical being (in-itself) on one end and nothingness (for-itself) on the other. Thus, the being and nothingness that are part of the formal ontology of the in-itself infected Sartre’s cognized phenomenology of consciousness via the language used to communicate that phenomenology.

In the formal ontology of *substances* where extended concrete existence is a property, the relationship between consciousness as nothingness and being-in-itself as infinitely dense is antipodal. However, it is not clear that this antipodal relationship holds for the formal ontology

¹⁶⁹ Presumably different regional ontologies do not all differ in their formal ontologies, though clearly the for-itself as consciousness and the in-itself as non-conscious certainly do. I leave aside the broader question of the relationship between regional and formal ontologies generally.

of *consciousness*, particularly given the gaping ontological difference between consciousness and the in-itself. Indeed, in the formal ontology of consciousness, being and nothingness are not *necessarily* opposites; they could be considered orthogonal or even unrelated. For example, consider the ontology of consciousness' teloses identified in the previous chapter, which are *actual existents* but of an entirely different kind than an in-itself. A verbal description of a telic consciousness might be an "occupied nothingness" or a "content-ed nothingness," which within the substance ontology of the in-itself would be incoherent, but for the regional ontology of consciousness accurately descriptive. A telos is an existent, but not of the kind found in substance ontology, and conceiving it as such misleads.

Thus, Sartre's desire to retain the synthetic unity of consciousness and the in-itself does not require that consciousness be interpreted *within substance* ontology as antipodal to the in-itself, which renders it a nothingness. Desan drives home this point,

Sartre would have done well to have reread Plato's *Sophist*, and understood that the idea of 'not being something' is simply the idea of otherness. It would then have appeared that what-is-not-a-car is not, therefore, non-being but merely something else, and that when my own consciousness is not the world, it does not follow that it is non-being.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Desan, *Tragic*, 143.

Said differently, just because consciousness is not the infinitely dense in-itself does not *necessarily* mean that it is nothingness; it could just be something *other* than an infinitely dense in-itself, simply something else.

To understand the implication of the different *formal* ontologies associated with different *regional* ontologies for this investigation, consider Sartre's insistence that consciousnesses between people must be individuated and separable. He states, "Unity with the Other is therefore *in fact* unrealizable. It is also unrealizable *in theory*, for the assimilation of the for-itself and the Other in a single transcendence would necessarily involve the disappearance of the characteristic of otherness in the Other."¹⁷¹ In the formal ontology of substances the Law of Identity holds strictly; an object is itself and cannot be something else. If it were to be assimilated by another object that other object would lose its ontological property of being *other*. What were once two objects that could have a relation with one another, are now one self-identical object absent any internal relation.

But to assert the rules and concepts that have proved useful for understanding the formal ontology of non-conscious being hold for the regional ontology of consciousness results from failure to appreciate that the language from a source domain has smuggled with it a formal ontology incommensurate with that of the target domain it intends to communicate. In this example, the Other could be assimilated by my consciousness while still remaining Other. The current point is that to claim this is *a priori impossible* by failing to appreciate that the language describing consciousness is sourced by substance ontology that covertly applies its formal ontology to the target, is akin to a category mistake. The ontology of substances and its rules and

¹⁷¹ Sartre, *Being*, 477.

concepts do not *necessarily* apply to the ontology of consciousness. Consciousness has its *own* formal ontology and will follow its own rules, possibly similar to those of substance ontology, possibly different.

A similar point is made by Amit Saad who notes that “Ucs. [unconscious] thoughts may be contradictory.”¹⁷² Saad uses “negationless-logic” developed by D. Nelson and P. G. J. Vredenduin to explain unconscious mental processes observed in psychoanalytic investigations.¹⁷³ Importantly for the current investigation, negationless-logic does *not* affirm the Law of Excluded Middle, disjunctive statements, negation, or falsity. For example, Saad summarizes an alternative to the Law of Excluded Middle:

The law of excluded middle - It is impossible to express *the law of excluded middle* in negationless-logic. According to this law every proposition is either true or false; it has *two possible truth values*. In negationless-logic we cannot state that a proposition is false, and consequently we cannot state that there are two possible truth values for a proposition. In a sense, in negationless-logic there is *only one possible truth value for a proposition* - every proposition is *true*.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Amit Saad (2020). “On the Logic of the Unconscious,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 101, no. 2 (2020): 240.

¹⁷³ D. Nelson, “Non-null Implication,” *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 31 (4) (1966); P. G. J. Vredenduin (1953). “The Logic of Negationless Mathematics.” *Composito Mathematica* 11 (1953).

¹⁷⁴ Saad, *Logic*, 245.

This same point can be observed phenomenologically. Consider the common experience in which a person is relieved of a responsibility or rescued from a danger he did not appreciate was burdensome or frightening until *after* it had passed. We hear the person say, “I did not realize that was burdening me” or “I did not realize how frightened I was.” The *subjective* experience of the emotion is not often experienced consciously, that is in awareness, until *after* the situation has passed; this is not uncommon. The person was afraid or burdened without experiencing the emotion accompanying the fear or burden. But this would seem impossible; how can a person experience a feeling that he does not experience? How can he be aware without being aware? In the regional ontology of objects this returns us to Ayer’s criticism and the claim that “An existent does not exist” or “An existent non-exists.” But the formal ontology of consciousness is apparently different, and the accepted laws of logic that apply to the in-itself do not necessarily apply to consciousness. Thus, I can be afraid without being afraid, or said differently, I can be aware without being aware.

But is it really possible that the concepts and rules that have been successful for understanding the ontology of objects might be of only limited applicability for understanding consciousness? Perhaps this question should be turned upside down. Is it likely that the concepts and rules of thought that have so utterly failed to solve the so-called hard problem of consciousness are the right ones? Does their failure not point to their inapplicability, or at least inadequacy, for the ontology to which they are applied? Consider David Chalmers’ description of the hard problem of consciousness.

The easy problems of consciousness include those of explaining the following phenomena:

- the ability to discriminate, categorize, and react to environmental stimuli
 - the integration of information by a cognitive system
 - the reportability of mental states
 - the ability of a system to access its own internal states
 - the focus of attention
 - the deliberate control of behavior
- the difference between wakefulness and sleep

There is no real issue about whether *these* phenomena can be explained scientifically. All of them are straightforwardly vulnerable to explanation in terms of computational or neural mechanisms. If these phenomena were all there was to consciousness, then consciousness would not be much of a problem...The really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of *experience*. When we think and perceive, there is a whirl of information processing, but there is also a subjective aspect.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ David Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness*. (New York :Oxford University Press, 2010), 4-5.

Chalmers' "really hard problem of consciousness" is "the problem of experience," the "subjective aspect" that is the focus of this investigation.¹⁷⁶ Possibly the "really hard problem" of consciousness has been stubbornly recalcitrant to the methods of science and rational thought because the ontology of objects that undergirds these methods is incommensurate with that of consciousness. Nearly forty years after Nagel wondered aloud about what it would be like to be a bat, he asserts a similar view challenging the idea that the concepts and methods used to understand objects are adequate to understand subjectivity.

Certainly the mind-body problem is difficult enough that we should be suspicious of attempts to solve it with the concepts and methods developed to account for very different kinds of things. Instead we should expect theoretical progress in this area to require a major conceptual revolution at least as radical as relativity theory...¹⁷⁷

Nagel's suspicion accords with Husserl's point about looking beyond the natural attitude by bracketing philosophical presuppositions in the phenomenological reduction. Sartre attempts to do the same, but appears to have been deceived by figurative language that smuggled an ontology of objects into his ontology of subjectivity that led him to conclude consciousness as the opposite of substance that is self-identical must therefore be a nothingness. Indeed, the basic phenomenology of consciousness that suspends the natural attitude of smuggling substance

¹⁷⁶ Chalmers, *Character*, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42.

ontology into conceptualization of it readily appreciates that consciousness is of a different formal ontology. Sartre notes this difference, but does not apply it to his most basic ontology of consciousness. He states,

Indeed it is impossible for a determined process to act upon a spontaneity, exactly as it is impossible for objects to act upon consciousness. Thus any synthesis of two types of existence is impossible; they are not homogenous; they will remain each one in its incommunicable solitude.¹⁷⁸

But if different regional ontologies, “two types of existence,”¹⁷⁹ cannot have “any synthesis,”¹⁸⁰ if different types of existence remain in “incommunicable solitude,”¹⁸¹ on what grounds would we presume *a priori* that they have the same *formal* ontologies? How can we know they have similar ontological properties validly organized according to similar ontological concepts, understood according to identical rules of thought? As Desan noted earlier there cannot be an *a priori* conclusion derived from phenomenology; not only does this violate the phenomenological method by moving away from the things themselves, it enshrines, rather than suspends, the natural attitude that contains our ontological, epistemological, and other philosophical presuppositions.

¹⁷⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 570.

¹⁷⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 570.

¹⁸⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 570.

¹⁸¹ Sartre, *Being*, 570.

Thus, returning to Sartre's statement above it is not at all clear that "Unity with the other is *in fact* unrealizable" or "unrealizable *in theory*."¹⁸² It is not clear that "assimilation of the for-itself and the Other in a single transcendence" would necessarily involve the "disappearance of the characteristic of otherness in the Other."¹⁸³ None of these assertions that are true of substance ontology are *necessarily* true for the different ontology of consciousness, and evaluating their possibility requires phenomenological investigation of subjectivity rather than application of *a priori* concepts and rules from a different regional ontology.

B. General Ontological and Methodological Conclusions

The argument of the preceding section can now be summarized. Chapter 2 argued that we use figurative language borrowed from the physical world to describe consciousness, and that literalizing this language misunderstands it. The current chapter further argues that using language from one regional ontology to communicate about another regional ontology also carries a risk of attributing identical formal ontologies to the language as it traffics from the source to the target. This is a mistake that Sartre appears to make. In his effort to show that consciousness is entirely *different* from the in-itself he conceives it as the *opposite* of the in-itself. Instead of being infinitely dense and self-identical, consciousness is conceived as being what it is not, and not being what it is. Sartre conceives the *ontology* of consciousness by the ontology of the language domain used to communicate about it, and thus the for-itself becomes largely the *not-in-itself*, its opposite, a nothingness.

¹⁸² Sartre, *Being*, 477.

¹⁸³ Sartre, *Being*, 477.

But as indicated it is mistaken to expect consciousness to conform to the language, concepts and rules developed for the in-itself, which has a different formal ontology. Instead, consciousness can be discerned using a phenomenological method that may yield basic phenomenology that *violates* the rules governing the formal ontology of objects, and as such does not need to be constrained by them. As noted, such constraints constitute a type of category mistake, and threaten the phenomenological method's apprehension of consciousness and/or distort its yield. Indeed, Sartre himself eventually came to appreciate the phenomenology of *Being and Nothingness* was unduly influenced by rationality, stating in 1969 "The conception of 'lived experience' marks my change since *L'Etre et Le Néant*. My early work was a rationalist philosophy of consciousness. It was all very well for me to dabble in apparently non-rational processes in the individual, [but]¹⁸⁴ the fact remains that *L'Etre et Le Néant* is a monument of rationality."¹⁸⁵

This is not to say that the concepts, rules of thought, and rationality generally associated with substance ontology are to be entirely rejected as inapplicable to consciousness, but they can be *subordinated* to basic phenomenology when they conflict with it. The current investigation seeks a theory of consciousness based on confrontation with subjectivity, not a "rationalist philosophy of consciousness" that subordinates subjectivity to the concepts and rules applicable to objects.¹⁸⁶ Though rationality remains useful, it is not likely to prove decisive in

¹⁸⁴ The sentence appears to call for the conjunction "but," which is not in the original text, possibly as an accidental omission.

¹⁸⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Itinerary of a Thought," *New Left Review* 1/58 November/December (1969), 50.

¹⁸⁶ Sartre, *Itinerary*, 50.

understanding consciousness, which has a different formal ontology than the in-itself for which rationality generally proves successful.

But if rationality and consistency as the *sine qua non* are subordinated to basic phenomenology, what is the criterion by which philosophizing about consciousness obtains its force? How can the success of this investigation be judged? Recall Chapter 2 where the success criterion was identified as phenomenological verisimilitude, for which space has now been opened by subordinating rationality and consistency in the ontology of consciousness to basic phenomenology. Further, the usefulness of rational inferences and challenges to this investigation can be judged by their limiting or augmenting effect upon the phenomenological verisimilitude of the conclusions they advance. For example, the Laws of Identity and Noncontradiction applied to basic phenomenology may provide a cognized phenomenology that *advances* phenomenological verisimilitude in which instance they would be welcomed. Alternatively they might restrict it in which case they would be considered for rejection. Therefore, rationality retains a place in the investigation, though one subordinate to basic phenomenology and the verisimilitude it yields. With these considerations in view, Sartre's reduction and the transpersonal consciousness it reveals are considered in the next chapter.

IV. Chapter 4: Transpersonal Consciousness

Based on the aforementioned considerations of language, method, and a success criterion, and Sartre's ontology of consciousness and criticism of it from Chapter 3, the groundwork has now been laid to articulate a content-ed transpersonal ontology of consciousness.

The current chapter examines Sartre's analysis of the *cogito* through which he discerns the ego is constructed by, rather than directing consciousness, and argues that he again starts with basic phenomenology, only then to privilege cognized phenomenology that leads him astray. Had he remained faithful to basic phenomenology when discerning the fictive ego, he would have realized that consciousness is neither individuated, nor a nothingness, but instead transpersonal and thickly content-ed. This ontology of transpersonal consciousness is elaborated and then compared with Sartre's being-for-others. Next the chapter explains how individuation arises from a transpersonal consciousness, which brings into relief its peculiar ontology that challenges Aristotelian laws of thought characteristic of substance ontology. Finally, the chapter is closed by illustrating transpersonal ontology with the phenomenology of grief.

A. Examining Sartre's Phenomenological Reduction

In *The Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre argues that Husserl's phenomenological reduction that discerned a transcendental *ego* or *I*¹⁸⁷ fails to realize that the *I* is a product of the natural attitude

¹⁸⁷ *Ego* and *I* are considered synonymous for the current investigation.

associated with consciousness' operations; it is superfluous rather than primordial to consciousness. He states,

...the *I* never appears except on the occasion of a reflective act. In this case, the complex structure of consciousness is as follows: there is an unreflected act of reflection, without an *I*, which is directed on a reflected consciousness. The latter becomes the object of the reflecting consciousness without ceasing to affirm its own object...At the same time, a new object appears which is the occasion for an affirmation by reflective consciousness, and which is consequently not on the same level as the unreflected consciousness...nor on the same level as the object of the reflected consciousness (chair, etc.). This transcendent object of the reflective act is the *I*...the transcendent *I* must fall before the stroke of phenomenological reduction. The *Cogito* affirms too much. The certain content of the pseudo-“*Cogito*” is not “*I have* consciousness of this chair,” but “There is consciousness of this chair.” This content is sufficient to constitute an infinite and absolute field of investigation.¹⁸⁸

He continues with similar statements like “...the ego is an object apprehended, but also *constituted*, by reflective consciousness.”¹⁸⁹ By identifying the ego's existence as a mistake of the natural attitude's self-reflection, Sartre clears a path for a deeper understanding of

¹⁸⁸ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 53-54.

¹⁸⁹ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 80.

consciousness. However, his method then appears to take a subtle but important turn. Consider a later passage from *The Transcendence of the Ego*,

The Transcendental Field, purified of all egological structures, recovers its primary transparency. In a sense it is a *nothing*, since all physical, psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths, all values are outside it; since my *me* has itself ceased to be any part of it. But this nothing is *all* since it is *consciousness* of all these objects.¹⁹⁰

He makes a similar point in *Being and Nothingness* where he describes “the total translucency of consciousness.”¹⁹¹

In this sense it is necessary to see the denied qualities as a constitutive factor of the being of the for-itself, for the for-itself must be there outside itself upon them; it must be *they* in order to deny that it is they. In short the term-of-origin of the internal negation is the in-itself, the thing which is *there*, and outside of it there is nothing except an emptiness, a nothingness which is distinguished from the thing only by the pure negation for which *this* thing furnishes the very content.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 93.

¹⁹¹ Sartre, *Being*, 89.

¹⁹² Sartre, *Being*, 245.

But is this accurate? Does the elimination of the ego render consciousness empty of all “physical, psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths, all values”?¹⁹³ Does its elimination render consciousness “an emptiness, a nothingness?”¹⁹⁴ Desan’s earlier point about otherness failing to indicate non-being, but rather simply something else, again becomes relevant. The insight that there is no ego within or directing pre-reflective consciousness, no organized or organizing structure of consciousness, does not entail that there is *nothing* in consciousness, that it is a “total translucency,” “an emptiness, a nothingness.”¹⁹⁵

Because the landscape I see through the windshield of my car is really a mirage produced by the sun reflecting off my glasses does not mean that there is no landscape; it simply means that *particular* landscape that I see is a mirage. Analogously, to conclude the ego should be eliminated from primordial consciousness *entails* that consciousness is a nothingness is an inference *extending* the insight that the ego is fictive to the conclusion that consciousness is a nothingness; it uses basic phenomenology to produce cognized phenomenology. Is this cognized phenomenology persuasive? Does basic phenomenology indicate that once purged of the ego consciousness is an “emptiness, a nothingness?”¹⁹⁶

By “egological structures” Sartre presumably means *persisting* mental contents, broadly conceived to include processes, teloses, ideas, etc. that are *organized* in some manner, hence the word “structures;” indeed, the entities he cites “psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths,

¹⁹³ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 93.

¹⁹⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 245.

¹⁹⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 89, 245.

¹⁹⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 245.

all values” usually *do* have a structure, an internal organization or pattern. However, not every content, process or telos discerned by reflective consciousness needs to be an “egological structure.” On the contrary, much of what I view within and constitutive of my consciousness that I bring to objects, about which I become aware reflectively, is *not* a structure, is that which does *not* have a coherence for which an internal organization could be identified. Most of what I confront in introspection is basic experience combined with persisting content that I then *cognize* to *create* a structure. These cognized structures are Sartre’s “egological structures...physical, psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths, all values.”

Sartre appears right about this origin of the *structures* of consciousness; they are fictive constructions of reflective awareness. But there is a difference between the basic phenomenology observed by reflective awareness and the *structures* created by *cognized reflection*. This distinction appears inadequately appreciated such that elimination of the “egological structures” of consciousness mistakenly entails the *complete* emptying of consciousness.¹⁹⁷

Consider an example. I observe that I usually feel anxious when entering a hospital. The consistent pairing in space and time of “fear” and “hospital entry” leads me to create in reflective consciousness a structure I call a “hospital phobia,” which encompasses a history of experiences and explanatory psychodynamics, all happening to and within me. This would be an “egological structure” of the type Sartre discerns is fictive. But realizing this structure is fictively created in reflective consciousness rather than primordial to it, does not eliminate the persisting fear that hospital entry evokes; its persistence testifies to *something* occupying consciousness absent

¹⁹⁷ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 93.

cognizing it to create a fictive structure denominated “hospital phobia.” This is analogous to the point made earlier where it was noted that a cognized *interpretation* of consciousness understood to be fictive does not necessarily indicate that consciousness is empty nothingness.

On the other hand, rather than seeing the persisting hospital fear as an entity occupying consciousness, Sartre might advance a different explanation. He might account for it in terms of the project by which I seek to solve the problem of my being, to include the situations I create and their coefficients of adversity...and he may be right. But if the hospital phobia is *not* a persisting content of some kind, but rather a *manifestation* of my project, the very choosing and creating that births the project is itself the telos identified in the previous chapter. Thus, there is either a persisting fear of hospitals analogous to an “object” occupying consciousness or a project creating telos, either of which indicates consciousness is not a nothingness.

Further, consider again Sartre’s passage above, “The *Cogito* affirms too much. The certain content of the pseudo-‘Cogito’ is not ‘*I have* consciousness of this chair,’ but ‘There is consciousness of this chair.’”¹⁹⁸ This is simply a statement of the empty nothingness of consciousness that confronts objects. But if we step *further* away from the natural attitude Sartre’s reduction seems incomplete. Sartre brackets the natural attitude and discerns that the ego is fictively constructed. However, as observed above, discerning that “egological structures” are fictive creations does not *necessarily* mean that consciousness is empty.¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, nor does it indicate that consciousness is *not* empty; the mistake is to conclude either that it is empty or not empty based on *inference* instead of basic phenomenological investigation.

¹⁹⁸ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 53-54.

¹⁹⁹ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 93.

Putting aside for a moment the point above about my own phenomenology that discerns persisting unstructured contents basic to my consciousness, let us simply stay with *Sartre's* reduction. Once the ego is jettisoned, what does *Sartre* find? He claims to find an empty consciousness. Does he?

Consider the whole of Sartre's phenomenological enterprise in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and *Being and Nothingness*. These works emerge from and in response to works by Descartes, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, Hegel, Bergson, Leibniz, Spinoza, and others he cites. Thus, Sartre's entire effort, based on *his* consciousness, is not that of an empty nothingness. The supposed discernment of the empty nothingness of consciousness is derived from *his* consciousness that is full of the ideas of other thinkers; the idea of a reduction that leads him to conclude consciousness is empty derives from his consciousness that is full. But I need to go a step further. Sartre's consciousness neither "contains" nor is influenced by the ideas of these other thinkers that is only *knowledge*. For sure their ideas *are* knowledge, objects for his consciousness; however, to understand their role in his philosophy as *only* knowledge is too simple. Their ideas *constitute* his consciousness from and through which he philosophizes to conclude that consciousness is empty; they constitute much of his subjectivity. Sartre's claim that consciousness is empty is derived from his consciousness that is full.

But even that statement is not quite right. His consciousness is not *full* of the consciousnesses of the other philosophers, it is so *constituted* by them that they are the basis for his entire project, that *through which* his effort and its conclusions become possible. Sartre's empty nothingness of the for-itself derives from a consciousness that is anything but empty, and were it to be so, the claim of its empty nothingness would never arise because the entire

architecture of his consciousness that births his effort would not exist. Thus, Sartre's reduction does not go far enough in the suspension of his metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions. On the contrary, the other philosophers constitute the means and content through which he philosophizes and concludes consciousness is an empty nothingness; his conclusion is self-defeating, analogous to a skeptic's assertion that knowledge is impossible.

This same point can be made more from another angle. Recall his statement above about the *cogito* that concludes with ““There is consciousness of this *chair*.””²⁰⁰ “Chair?” This statement is too simple. Consider it in the light of Sartre's description of a “situation.”

We shall use the term *situation* for the contingency of freedom in the *plenum* of being of the world inasmuch as this *datum*, which is there only *in order not to constrain* freedom, is revealed to this freedom only as *already illuminated* by the end which freedom chooses. Thus the *datum* never appears to the for-itself as a brute existent in-itself; it is discovered always as a *cause* since it is revealed only in the light of an end which illuminates it.²⁰¹

Putting aside the implicit telos this statement contains, consider Sartre's claim that the “datum never appears to the for-itself as a brute existent in-itself.” A chair is not *in-itself* as a brute existent a chair. Agreed. Sartre's statement “There is consciousness of this *chair*” rather

²⁰⁰ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 93.

²⁰¹ Sartre, *Being*, 626-627.

than “*I am conscious of this chair*” removes Husserl’s ego, as noted above. However, the very notion of an object as a *chair* rather than something else, indeed to recognize it as an object at all, in Sartre’s language as a “this,” indicates that consciousness confronts it not as empty, but with some kind of conception that more than *confronts* it, but actually *creates* it as a chair rather than a “brute existent in-itself.”²⁰² Sartre even identifies the “egological structure” with which consciousness confronts the in-itself from which it fashions a situation; “it is revealed only in light of an end which illuminates it,” which is to say a project. To affirm the existence of an object and further assign it an instrumental meaning, Sartre’s “chair” in the passage above, reveals a non-empty consciousness; my recognition of the object *as a chair* reveals a situation creating telos that “illuminates” objects to my consciousness. Thus, Husserl’s and Sartre’s statements about consciousness above should be revised yet again to be something akin to “Consciousness creates a chair of which it then becomes aware.” Analogously, Sartre’s entire philosophical project that discerns an empty nothingness consciousness is created by *his* constructed-by-others-telos-content-ed consciousness. His conclusion negates itself.

Consider a different example of how consciousness creates situations and “thises” based on one’s project. I stand at the top of a steep densely moguled ski slope named Cannonball, assessing routes to the bottom. The slope is intimidating, and will require skill, concentration, and courage to navigate. I descend, coordinating the movements of my body in response to the terrain as it unfolds. I make it to the bottom successful, tired, and exhilarated. I board the ski lift next to a woman with whom I am acquainted. I ask what trail she had just skied, and she replies,

²⁰² This is not to say that consciousness creates the chair as a brute existent; recall the for-itself does not create the in-itself. What it means is that from a brute background consciousness “foregrounds” those objects by which to create a situation in which its project can be enacted and revealed.

“I was on Cannonball stopped in the middle while you skied by!” Though standing in the middle of the slope I descended, I had not even *seen* her. She was not part of the situation, not even a “this,” in the end that was illuminated by the ski slope for my consciousness. Outside my end that created the situation, she did not “exist.”²⁰³

What does this analysis tell us? First, in addition to the teloses described in Chapter 3, we find that Sartre’s entire project cannot disclose consciousness as an empty nothingness because such a conclusion derives from a consciousness that is *not* an empty nothingness. His reduction depends upon, indeed is, a situation producing project emanating from his full, richly content-ed consciousness. Stated crudely, a full consciousness discerns an empty nothingness consciousness, which of course means that consciousness is not an empty nothingness. Further, the objects Sartre encounters in the world, in the passage above a chair, indicate that consciousness *creates* situations containing “thises” according to its ends, its telos; the very existence of these “thises” created by consciousness’ ends further indicates that consciousness is not an empty nothingness. Why does Sartre’s not realize this? To this question I now turn.

²⁰³ It is important to note that this does not mean she did not exist at all, as an in-itself. Had my movement through space intersected with her location in space there would have been a collision. Thus, by creating a situation consciousness does not create the in-itself but it creates a world and situations *from* the in-itself via its nihilations/negations according to its ends.

B. Epistemic Limitations of the Reduction and a Revised Structure of Consciousness

As noted, Sartre's consciousness as described by his basic phenomenology creates ("illuminates"²⁰⁴) situations and "thises" according to its ends. For Sartre this realization occurs *through* the philosophers that have become *his* consciousness, not as internalized knowledge objects, but as his *subject*, through which he experiences and thereby philosophizes as them *as himself*. Unsurprisingly, he failed to see this about himself because consciousness in its reflecting activity cannot divorce itself from itself when looking at itself; it cannot assume a spectator perspective entirely *outside* or *apart* from itself by which to view itself, a point he acknowledges.

Reflection is a knowledge; of that there is no doubt. It is provided with a positional character; it affirms the consciousness reflected-on. But every affirmation, as we shall soon see, is conditioned by a negation: to affirm *this* object is simultaneously to deny that I am this object. To know is to *make oneself other*. Now the reflective cannot make itself wholly other than the reflected-on since it *is-in-order-to-be* the reflected on. Its affirmation is stopped halfway because its negation is not entirely realized. It does not then detach itself completely from the reflected-on, and it can not grasp the reflected-on "from a point of view."²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 627.

²⁰⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 218.

Said perhaps more simply, the looking activity cannot take itself as an object. Even when consciousness is looking at itself, there is a looking activity that cannot be reflexive, that it cannot see. While looking there is always some process that is *looking* (subject), rather than being *looked at* (object). He notes this in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, “For consciousness is always turned outward by its own activity, looking at or judging an object or state of affairs which is not the looking or judging....”²⁰⁶ This inability to be entirely apart from ourselves, that is outside ourselves to look at the looking when looking at ourselves, the so-called spectator perspective, places a veil of ignorance over a portion of our most basic awareness of ourselves considered reflectively. We cannot of our own accord completely know ourselves; a completely solo phenomenological reduction appears impossible. For these *epistemic* reasons Sartre concedes a certain self-ignorance.

However, he also advances an *ontological* reason for self-ignorance, which he attributes to the spontaneity of consciousness that “overflows” our fictive constructions that seek to describe, explain, and contain it.²⁰⁷ But as argued above, the viability of an empty consciousness needed for complete spontaneity has become untenable, which indicates that Sartre’s basic structure of consciousness needs revision. Recall that Sartre claims that consciousness as a nothingness (pre-reflective consciousness) regards itself (reflective consciousness) and its psychical contents and activities, from which it creates an ego. Recall further that pre-reflective consciousness is most ontologically fundamental because reflective consciousness and the ego it

²⁰⁶ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 15.

²⁰⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 156.

creates presuppose it; absent pre-reflective consciousness neither reflective consciousness, nor its ego, exist.

Based on the analysis above an initial revision of Sartre's structure of consciousness can be proposed. Most ontologically fundamental is not an *empty* pre-reflective consciousness, but a full *constitutively-constructed-by-others* pre-reflective consciousnesses. Recall that Sartre's own philosophizing creates a situation with "thises" and coefficients of adversity that reveal his purpose to *himself* as philosophizing, all performed by *his* pre-reflective consciousness constitutively constructed by previous philosophers. Thus, from a first person perspective, pre-reflective transpersonal consciousness creates "my" situation, its purpose and coefficients of adversity, through the consciousnesses of "others" that have become "me;" others' subjectivity becomes *my* subjectivity, not only as objects *in* or *for* my subjectivity, but *as* my subjectivity. Given "my" consciousness is constitutively constructed by "other" consciousnesses, my pre-reflective consciousness is not simply a nothingness, but a constitutively-constructed-by-others fullness that provides a rich teleology that directs my pre-reflective intentionality that creates and confronts a world. Hence, all intentional acts, all engagements with the world, indeed the very creation of a world are inherently the product of my history of interpersonal contacts that have and continue to constitutively construct what I am. This transpersonal pre-reflective consciousness then regards itself reflectively, from which it creates an ego. The task that unfolds then becomes explaining what is meant by *others* constitutively constructing *my* pre-reflective consciousness, which is explained in the next section.

C. Overview of Transpersonal Consciousness

A transpersonal ontology of consciousness conceives each “individual” consciousness as *constitutively constructed by* others. The constitutive construction by others is not one of perception and representations that constitute objects *for* consciousness, which is more akin to learning. Being advanced is an ontology of subjectivity more basic than the transfer of *knowledge*, which suggests objects *of* and *for* consciousness transferred from one consciousness to another. Other consciousnesses are not brought *into* my consciousness as objects; they *constitutively construct* the *subjectivity* that is “my” consciousness through which I create and then confront objects. Constitutive construction is the *process* by which the content and telos of my consciousness come to be and change over time.

Recall the argument above that Sartre’s reduction does not have solely as objects *in* and *for* his consciousness the ideas of other philosophers; instead they *constitute*, as content and telos, his consciousness in so fundamental a manner that he fails to realize that their consciousnesses have become *his* through which he philosophizes; they *are* his consciousness. In dualistic terms, *others’* consciousnesses are that which do the reflecting as *Sartre’s* consciousness. They do not do the reflecting *as if* they are Sartre’s consciousness; the assertion is not figurative. They do it *as*, indeed *are*, “Sartre’s” consciousness.

Chapter 3 notes that Sartre’s cognized consciousness is an empty nothingness exhausted by the objects it intends, a claim that was challenged by basic phenomenology that found consciousness content-ed by telos. The claim of transpersonal consciousness goes further by asserting that “*other*” consciousnesses become the consciousness content and telos of each

“individual” by constitutively constructing that “individual.” “My” consciousness is exhausted by the “Other” consciousnesses contenting and thereby constituting “me,” that “I” am.²⁰⁸

The transpersonal ontology of consciousness in this investigation is largely captured by Thich Nhat Hanh, who understands consciousness from a Buddhist perspective. He states, “True self is non-self, the awareness that the self is made only of non-self elements. There’s no separation between self and other, and everything is interconnected. Once you are aware of that you are no longer caught in the idea that you are a separate entity.”²⁰⁹ Deconstructed and interpreted via transpersonal ontology, Nhat Hanh’s statement asserts that “my” consciousness (“true self”) is entirely constituted by “other” consciousnesses (“non-self elements”) such that “I” am constituted entirely of “others,” which of course means there is no *I* or *Other* (“separate entity”) as ordinarily conceived.

This claim is analogous to Sartre’s observation that the for-itself is *temporally* diasporatic as existing in the past, present, and future. Analogously, transpersonal consciousness is *ontologically* diasporatic, existing across multiple “independent” consciousnesses ordinarily identified with different corporeal bodies. But transpersonal consciousness is also temporally diasporatic, not as an individuated consciousness with a past, present and future as Sartre conceives, but as transpersonally diasporatic through generations that have constitutively constructed it. Nhat Hanh makes this further point, “My spiritual ancestors, blood ancestors,

²⁰⁸ In later sections we will see that Others’ consciousnesses do not entirely exhaust “my” consciousness, but that is left aside for now.

²⁰⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, ““This is the Buddha’s Love,”” interview with Melvin McLeod. June 2010. <https://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/blog/2010/jun/3/buddhas-love-melvin-mcleod-interviews-thich-nhat-h/#:~:text=Thich%20Nhat%20Hanh%3A%20True%20self,you%20are%20a%20separate%20entity.>

spiritual descendants are all part of me. I am they and they are me. I do not have a separate self. We all exist as a wonderful stream of life.”²¹⁰ Indeed, Nhat Hanh extends this insight from past generations that have constitutively constructed “me,” into the future that extends me by virtue of my becoming a constructive constituent of others. He continues, “I am not an entity separate from my children, because I am continued by my children. They carry me into the future. My son, daughter, friend or disciple is me.”²¹¹ Thus, what I think of as my individuated, boundaried consciousness actually exists diasporatically among others, and across time from the past to the present, and into the future, rather than being contained within me alone.

A key point is that transpersonal consciousness asserts more than a necessary interdependence between firmly boundaried consciousnesses in a vastly complex system, a boundarying like Sartre’s “inter-monad relation.”²¹² It asserts that boundarying one consciousness from another, as different corporeal bodies are apparently boundaried, is a mistaken conception borrowed from substance ontology.²¹³ Consciousnesses are *mutually interpenetrating*, that is immanent, such that “portions” of “my” consciousness are identical to, indeed constitute, “portions” of “your” consciousness; “portions” of consciousness are shared in a manner that might be loosely visualized like the sharing of bodily structures in conjoined twins. Said differently and perhaps too simply, two bodies share “segments” of the same consciousness, which makes the consciousnesses ontologically immanent and interpenetrating, rather than boundaried.

²¹⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh, *No Death, No Fear* (Riverhead Books: New York, 2002), 141.

²¹¹ Nhat Hanh, *Death*, 137.

²¹² Sartre, *Being*, 302.

²¹³ The strict boundarying of the body is of course an oversimplification as well, but that is left aside.

A transpersonal ontology of consciousness might be distinguished from ordinary learning by contrasting the body's relationship with food on the one hand, and clothing, jewelry, tattoos, piercings, and hairstyles on the other. When food is consumed it *becomes* the body; it constitutes the body. The body is constituted by *nothing but* the molecules of the food it consumes. It is neither metaphor, nor exaggeration to assert that the human body *is* consumed food recombined according to internal structures, processes and telos; this is analogous to the constitutive construction of transpersonal ontology. By contrast, the body may be modified by the clothing we wear or the jewelry that adorns it, the hair we grow, cut, shave or style, and the piercings that penetrate its exterior. However, these accoutrements do not *constitute* the body; they are *added* to it as superficial modifications, which are akin to knowledge.

Analogously, the ontological assertion of transpersonal consciousness is that each person's consciousness is *constitutively constructed* from "other" consciousnesses like the body is constitutively constructed by food.²¹⁴ This is particularly so in the early years of life, perhaps most profoundly during those prior to verbal cognition. During these years the consciousnesses of caregivers constitutively construct the child's consciousness, not by being moved *into* the consciousness of the child as an object might exist *in* a container, but *as* the consciousness of the child. The consciousnesses of the caregivers are the ontological "food" of consciousness that constitutively constructs the child's subjectivity through which she encounters others, and creates

²¹⁴ Given transpersonal consciousness re-conceives what is meant by "person," in this section person is understood as defined by the boundary of the body.

the world, projects, and their situations.²¹⁵ By contrast learning and knowledge are objects *for* subjectivity analogous to clothing, jewelry, piercings, and so on.

But what is meant by *other* people's consciousness? Any "individual" consciousness assumes as a constituent any other consciousness of which it becomes aware *as a consciousness*, awareness being synonymous with interaction given consciousness' intentionality. Interactions with "others" constitutively construct "my" consciousness via direct interpersonal contact, as well as by indirect contacts like art, writings, tools, vandalism, litter, music and any other manifestation of "other" consciousnesses discerned as such. These discerned manifestations of "other" consciousnesses become "my" consciousness as constitutively constructive ingredients, just as each meal constitutively constructs my body. Following Sartre's use of "exist" as a transitive verb, "'My' consciousness *exists* 'Other' consciousnesses," thereby transcending in some measure the subject-other dualism.²¹⁶ Or as Nhat Hanh says, "my" self is "made only of non-self elements," that is the consciousness of "others," that "I" am.²¹⁷

In this rendering, the ontology of transpersonal consciousness is one of mundane emanation. Each individual consciousness is a combined emanation of every other consciousness, and/or its manifestations, with which it has interacted in the broadest sense. The metaphysical origin of consciousness is not addressed in this investigation, which seeks to

²¹⁵ By excluding reciprocity, the food metaphor is actually much too simple. The infant's consciousness is also constitutively imported "into" the consciousness of the caregiver, though of course the caregiver's consciousness has much greater content from prior constituents than the infant's. Thus, there is a reciprocal process that merges the two consciousnesses that is not captured by the one-way constitution of the food as a constituent of the body.

²¹⁶ "It would be best to say, using 'exist' as a transitive verb-that consciousness *exists* its body." Sartre, *Being*, 434.

²¹⁷ Nhat Hanh, "Love."

understand its structure and the human condition it births. Nevertheless, it should be noted that transpersonal consciousness is neither an emanation nor an instantiation of a Supra-Mind of which each “individual” mind is a moment or manifestation as G. W. F. Hegel conceives in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.²¹⁸ Nor is “each” consciousness subsumed in a mystical Mind that unifies the entire universe as articulated by D. T. Suzuki’s Zen Buddhism, captured in statements such as “He (Hung-jen), of course, being a follower of Bodhi-Dharma, believed in the Mind from which this universe with all its multiplicities issues...” and “...the Masters who followed him pointed to the presence of the Mind in each individual mind and also to its absolute purity...”²¹⁹

Finally, if not yet apparent, transpersonal consciousness asserts more than *inter*-subjectivity, the very notion of which entails *inter* subjective experience, experiences shared *between* subjects. Consider Jordan Zlatev, Timothy P. Racine, Chris Sinha and Esa Itkonen who state,

In its simplest terms, intersubjectivity is understood by the authors represented in this book as *the sharing of experiential content (e.g. feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and linguistic meanings) among a plurality of subjects....no human being is entirely devoid of the human intersubjective potential...These considerations underlie our bold contention that the human mind is*

²¹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

²¹⁹ D. T. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*, (Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1969). 23, 24.

quintessentially a shared mind and that intersubjectivity is at the heart of what makes us human.²²⁰

They continue,

Human beings are primordially connected in their subjectivity, rather than functioning as monads that need to “infer” that others are also endowed with experiences and mentalities that are similar to their own. The sharing of experiences is not only, not even primarily, on a cognitive level, but also (and more basically) on the level of affect, perceptual process and conative (action-oriented) engagements.²²¹

Transpersonal consciousness constitutes the ontological foundation that *permits* the intersubjectivity that Zlatev et. al. assert is “the heart of what makes us human,” and is the cognized *ontology of the phenomenology of being* “primordially connected.”²²² “The sharing of experiential content” can and does occur because the most fundamental ontology of consciousness is not individuated and separable among people (really bodies).²²³ Sharing the

²²⁰ Jordan Zlatev, Timothy P. Racine, Chris Sinha, and Esa Itkonen, “Intersubjectivity: What makes us human?” in *The Shared Mind: Perspectives on Intersubjectivity*, eds. Jordan Zlatev, Timothy P. Racine, Chris Sinha, and Esa Itkonen (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008), 2-3.

²²¹ Zlatev, *Shared*, 3.

²²² Zlatev, *Shared*, 2-3, 3.

²²³ Zlatev, *Shared*, 2-3.

phenomenology of others is achieved not via analogy, but directly via common constitutive constructants of consciousness comprising a transpersonal consciousness subsuming “individual” consciousnesses.

To clarify, consider Heidegger’s explanation of empathy. He states “‘Empathy’ does not first constitute Being-with; only on the basis of Being-with does ‘empathy’ become possible...”²²⁴ Transpersonal ontology extends this insight by articulating an ontology of consciousness that permits the “sharing of experiences”²²⁵ generally in what is commonly considered intersubjectivity.²²⁶ Thus, transpersonal ontology moves beyond notions of empathy, shared meanings, and shared experiences characterizing intersubjectivity, and articulates the *ontology* that undergirds and makes possible these features of what it is like to be human.

D. Sartre’s Being-for-others Re-examined

I can now return to Sartre’s phenomenological analysis of the Other and consider how it might be re-interpreted by a transpersonal ontology. Recall that Sartre articulates several internal nihilations whereby consciousness is that which it is *not* by virtue of its own nothingness, and by which it “encase[s] with a shell of non-being” entities that are not it.²²⁷ Said differently, the

²²⁴ Heidegger, *Time*, 162.

²²⁵ Zlatev, *Shared*, 3.

²²⁶ The transpersonal ontology of consciousness proposed in this investigation might be considered the basis for Heidegger’s general phenomenology of our existing primordially in an interpersonally connected world. However, working out the details of how a transpersonal ontology of consciousness might undergird Heidegger’s general phenomenology is left for another time.

²²⁷ Barnes, *Glossary*, 804.

“shell of non-being” is that which is the “separating” nihilation, the distance the nothingness of consciousness creates from that which it is not, by being *itself* a nothingness. Recall further that consciousness’ most basic internal nihilation is that of the infinitely dense, self-identical, in-itself that consciousness intends as other than itself.

There is an analogous internal nihilation with respect to the Other. However, consciousness’ internal nihilation of the in-itself has a different ontological character than its nihilation of the other, which is *another consciousness*. Consciousness’ nihilation of the in-itself entails negating the object world with which it can never be identified, but at most synthetically bound. But consciousness’ internal nihilation of others is that of their subjectivity, which is of the *same* ontology as the nihilating consciousness. Sartre notes this different character of the nihilation of the Other from the nihilation of the in-itself.

In the upsurge of the Other, however, consciousness is in no way different from the Other so far as its mode of being is concerned. The Other is what consciousness is. The Other is For-itself and consciousness...²²⁸

In fact, the nihilation of consciousness from another *subject* entails a “double nihilation” whereby “my” consciousness nihilates and thereby disowns the Other as not me, at the same time that the Other nihilates me as not him; both terms of the relation mutually nihilate one another. Consider Sartre’s description.

²²⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 378-379.

If in general there is an Other, it is necessary above all that I be the one who is not the Other, and it is in this very negation affected by me upon myself that I make myself be and that the Other arises as Other. This negation which constitutes my being and which, as Hegel said, makes me appear as the Same confronting the Other, constitutes me on the ground of a non-thetic selfness as “Myself.” We need not understand by this that a Self comes to dwell in our consciousness, but that selfness is reinforced as arising as a negation of another selfness and that this reinforcement is positively apprehended as the continuous choice of selfness by itself as *the same* selfness and as *this very selfness*....Thus, by utilizing the formulae applied to the knowledge of the Not-me in general, we can say that the For-itself as itself includes the being of the Other in its being in so far as its being is in question as not being the Other. In other words, in order for a consciousness to be able to not-be the Other and therefore in order that *there may be* an *Other* ...two things are necessary: consciousness must have to be itself and must spontaneously have to be non-being; consciousness must freely disengage itself from the Other and wrench itself away by choosing itself as a nothingness which is simply Other than the Other and thereby must be reunited with “itself.” This very detachment, which is the being of the For-itself, causes there to be an Other.²²⁹

²²⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 377-378.

What startles about this passage is that Sartre is not describing basic phenomenology that confronts, and thereby confirms an other. Instead, he describes the mechanics of what *must be true as a precondition* to account for “a primary and perpetual fact” of the existence of the Other.²³⁰ He uses phenomenology to explain the *preconditions* for experiencing an other as Other. Consider that he begins the passage with “If” so as to signal he is articulating the conditions of the Other’s existence; “*If in general there is an Other, it is necessary...*”²³¹

But the reason he needs to articulate the process by which an other comes to be other is because our primordial relation with the Other, contrary to consciousness’ “synthetic totality” with the in-itself, is a relation of *unity*, which is to say not a relation at all, but an *identity*. Sartre’s ontology of being-for-others reveals that he is explicating how consciousness interacts *after* becoming individuated from its primordial unity with “other” consciousnesses such that an “other” and a “myself” *come to be phenomenologically*. Thus, he is not describing our most primordial ontology as *individuated Others*. Instead he describes *the route to* our individuated “myself” and an other that is confronted. He is articulating cognized phenomenology to explain our basic phenomenology of individuation, which *emerges from* identity with the subjectivity of the Other. Therefore, by Sartre’s own description our most basic ontology is not individuated, but in some sense unified or even identified. Consider a later passage from the same chapter of *Being and Nothingness*.

²³⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 377.

²³¹ Sartre, *Being*, 377.

Thus we arrive at this contradictory conclusion: being-for-others can be only if it is *made-to-be* by a totality which is lost so that being-for-others may arise, a position which would lead us to postulate the existence and directing power of the *mind*.²³² But on the other hand this being-for-others can exist only if it involves an inapprehensible and external non-being which no totality, not even the mind, can produce or found. In one sense a plurality of consciousnesses can not be a primary fact and it refers us to an original fact of a wrenching away from self, a fact of the mind. Thus the question “Why is there a plurality of consciousnesses?” could receive an answer. But in another sense the facticity of this plurality seems to be irreducible; and if the mind is considered from the standpoint of the *fact* of the plurality, it vanishes...The ekstatic totality of the mind is not simply a totality detotalized; it appears to us as a shattered being concerning which we can neither say that it exists nor that it does not exist. Thus, our description has enabled us to satisfy the preliminary conditions which we have posited for any theory about the existence of the Other. The multiplicity of consciousnesses appears to us as a *synthesis* and not as a *collection*, but it is a synthesis whose totality is inconceivable.²³³

But perhaps Sartre’s “contradictory conclusion” can be resolved by a transpersonal ontology. His “totality which is lost” does not need to be a “mind” understood like a Hegelian

²³² Sartre’s *mind* in this passage is understood as similar to Hegel’s supra-mind referenced above.

²³³ Sartre, *Being*, 399-400.

supra-Mind involved in a “wrenching away from itself” to manifest “a plurality of consciousnesses”. Instead it can be understood as a *mundane transpersonal “mind.”* Thus, replacing a supra-Mind with a mundane transpersonal mind does not require a “totality detotalized” because no totality exists, if by totality one conceives an *all- encompassing* supra-Consciousness that gives rise to plurality.²³⁴ As noted in the preceding section, nor does rejecting a supra-Mind entail an individuated consciousness; there is a hybrid option.

A constitutively constructed mundane transpersonal consciousness is a “totality”²³⁵ of all consciousnesses with which it has *interacted*, and by which it comes to be constituted. Further, no supra-mind needs to be “shattered”²³⁶ to create the plurality of consciousnesses; “individual” consciousnesses exist and are endlessly constitutively constructing one another, thereby giving rise to “individuals” that Sartre identifies within plurality. Therefore, transpersonal consciousness is an “individualized totality” absent the need of a supra-Mind.

Further, by strictly juxtaposing *plurality* with *totality* Sartre risks smuggling the formal ontology of substances (the in-itself) to the ontology of consciousness (for-itself) via the figurative language used to communicate about consciousness. It is not at all clear that consciousness conforms to the conceptual juxtaposition these terms imply. Instead, “each” consciousness is both part of a plurality, an “individuality,” *and* a totality. It is an idiosyncratic totality of the other consciousnesses with which it has interacted and that now constitute it, which simultaneously “uniques” it as an individuality that gives rise to the plurality of consciousnesses.

²³⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 400.

²³⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 400.

²³⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 400.

Moreover, Sartre's "synthesis whose totality is inconceivable"²³⁷ also appears predicated on the juxtaposition of plurality and totality, such that a totality is "inconceivable," "vanishes"²³⁸ because of the incontrovertible confrontation with a plurality of consciousnesses. Again, using plurality and totality as antipodal is questionable and renders the problem of their concomitant existence insoluble. Thus, the entire "contradictory conclusion"²³⁹ appears based, at least implicitly, on a Hegelian like notion of Mind that entails positioning plurality and totality as mutually exclusive opposites. But a Hegelian supra-Mind is only one *type* of transpersonal consciousness, and contrasts with transpersonal consciousness proposed by this investigation distinct for its mundane transmission and manifestation.

Finally, if consciousness is a nothingness, the matter being considered is that of a "relation" among two nihilating nothingnesses, which is difficult to conceive as distinct from an identity; how can we talk intelligibly about the relation of "two" nothingnesses, without at least considering them to be a single entity? By what conception or method could "two" nothingnesses distinguish themselves by "encasing with a shell of non-being"²⁴⁰ themselves or one another, in *more* nothingness? Perhaps a pause is called for here given distinctions among extremely abstract notions expressed by language absent verifiable denotations risks violating Aristotle's admonition noted in Chapter 2 not to look for more precision than our language and concepts afford. Accordingly, the question of how nothingnesses might distinguish themselves from one another is left aside.

²³⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 400.

²³⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 399.

²³⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 399.

²⁴⁰ Barnes, *Glossary*, 804.

Of course, there remains the question of how the phenomenology of individuality arises in a transpersonal ontology, how Sartre's "facticity of this plurality" that "seems to be irreducible" can be explained.²⁴¹ If consciousness is constitutively constructed *as*-others, how do I come to experience and know myself as an "individual?" How can this universal phenomenology of what it is like to be human be cognized? To this question I now turn.

E. The Origin of Individuation and the Peculiar Ontology of Consciousness

To explain the origin of our phenomenology of individuation in transpersonal ontology, consider the peculiar ontology of consciousness that has thus far been introduced. Consciousness has been described as an entity entirely different from those comprising substance ontology, and as such may have a completely different formal ontology that requires different concepts and rules of thought. This peculiar ontology of consciousness can begin to explain the origin of individuation in transpersonal ontology, and is further revealed by it, as elaborated in the conclusion of this section.

Recall that Sartre's ontology conceives two structures of our being, being for-itself and being-for-others. He states,

This is the fact that being-for-others is not an ontological structure of the For-itself. We cannot think of deriving being-for-others from a being-for-itself as one

²⁴¹ Sartre, *Being*, 399.

would derive a consequence from a principle, nor conversely can we think of deriving being for-itself from being-for-others...It would perhaps not be wholly impossible to conceive of a For-itself which would be wholly free from all For-others...What the *cogito* reveals to us here is just factual necessity: it is found - and this is indisputable - that our being along with its being-for-itself is also for-others; the being which is revealed to the reflective consciousness is for-itself-for-others...It is as fact - as a primary and perpetual fact - not as an *essential* necessity that we shall study being-for-others.²⁴²

I previously argued that transpersonal ontology revises Sartre's locution being-*for*-others to being-*as*-others, in which the *central* ontological structure of the for-itself is the Other who is an *essential* structure of "me;" the "Other" *constitutes* "me;"; "Others" are what "I" am. By this rendering the Other is no longer a contingent fact revealed by the look, but a necessary structure of any "single" consciousness by virtue of its constitutive constructive role. Consciousness does not just reveal the other "as a factual necessity"²⁴³ as Sartre claims. Transpersonal consciousness *entails* the Other by *being-as-other*. Western philosophy's endemic problem of the *Other* becomes transformed into the problem of the *Me* or the *I*. Moreover, as argued earlier Sartre's *basic* phenomenology advances a telic, thinly occupied consciousness, whereas transpersonal ontology advances a thickly content-ed-being-*as*-others consciousness. Consciousness is neither

²⁴² Sartre, *Being*, 376-377.

²⁴³ Sartre, *Being*, 376.

a nothingness, nor a lightly content-ed telic quasi-nothingness, but a transpersonal constitutively constructed fullness.

But this raises the question: how can the emergence of individuality, that by which the Other is *other*, be explained in an ontology of being-*as*-others? This is the question Sartre wrestles with in the passage above describing plurality and totality. How does transpersonal consciousness that merges subject-*other* account for the phenomenology of ourselves as individuals?

Recall that transpersonal consciousness is a mundane emanation, by which any “single” consciousness is constitutively constructed by “other” consciousnesses with which it interacts. The constructive constituents are then “summed” and “recombined” to comprise any “single” person’s consciousness. Thus, there are two processes by which consciousness comes to be individualized. First, it is entirely constituted by the unique constellation of emanations of “Others” with which one interacts. Second, the unique constellation of emanations are then idiosyncratically summed and recombined to create an “individual” consciousness.²⁴⁴ This is the

²⁴⁴ The terms “summed” and “recombined” and the like, to include their variants, are intended figuratively, and do not carry the formal ontology of their regional ontology into the ontology of consciousness. For an overview of the Combination Problem addressed from an analytic perspective see David J. Chalmers, “The Combination Problem for Panpsychism” in *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Godehard Buntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 19-47.

ontological origin of the universal phenomenology of being an “individual” or “me.”²⁴⁵

Consciousness is entirely constituted by “Others,” yet entirely “mine.”²⁴⁶

The ontological process by which other consciousnesses are “added” as constitutive constructants to my consciousness is called the Combination Problem in panpsychism for which no satisfactory solution has yet emerged. The manner in which other consciousnesses are “recombined” within my consciousness is more akin to an ontical empirical question addressed by psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories building on Sigmund Freud’s legacy.²⁴⁷ The specific mechanisms or processes by which consciousnesses are summed or recombined are left aside in this investigation.

Perhaps our individuality can be illustrated by returning to the analogy of the relationship between food and the body. People eating the same foods would have the same body; their corporeal structure would be constituted by the same molecular components. By contrast, unlike “identical” foods that have identical molecular structures, every consciousness that emanatively constructs me constitutively and becomes “me,” is *itself* a *unique* combination of emanations idiosyncratically recombined within itself, which is then added to me as-others. Moreover, subsequent interactions with the “same” consciousness across time are interactions with a

²⁴⁵ Strictly speaking, a phenomenology of “I” or “me” may not be universal. However, those that claim to have moved beyond this phenomenology appear unusual, and as such are not considered in this investigation where the common mundane experience of what it is like to be a human is considered.

²⁴⁶ Analogously, this is the ontology of each “Other” one “encounters” or “confronts.” However, the verbs “encounter” and “confront” come from a subject-Other ontology and can mislead, but are retained for expository purposes.

²⁴⁷ For an introductory overview of psychodynamic models of consciousness see Nancy McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis: understanding personality structure in the clinical process*. (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).

consciousness differently constituted by the intervening constituents to which it has been exposed, rendering it a different consciousness that interacts with “me.” Similarly, in these interactions across time *I* am also a different consciousness by virtue of the intervening interactions and recombinations I have experienced. These processes, really interactions, create the unique consciousness that I am given my being-*as*-others is constitutively constructed by others and myself that are both constantly changing.

Related, this emanative process of other consciousnesses that are me also accounts for the phenomenology of privacy. Given no “other” transpersonal consciousness has the exact same constituents or recombinations, no other person can phenomenologically share *all* of my consciousness. No other person has the same constitutive emanations and as such cannot experience “me” as I experience myself; no two consciousnesses are alike or can see the whole viewed reflectively that confers my privileged perspective upon myself. This privileged perspective, so-called privacy, is founded on my unique constituents, and their recombinations, that have come to constitute “my” consciousness, the total field of which only I can see and experience given there is no other consciousness identical to mine.

This unique constitutive construction of experiences (“other” consciousnesses) and their recombinations is the ontological basis of the privileged “internal” knowledge perspective we have of ourselves, despite being composed entirely of “Others.” *I am* a being-*as*-others-*as*-myself, and as such can now be understood as both immanent with others that constitutively construct me and transcendent beyond, or more than, others. Hence, the assertion made earlier about subject-Other *identity* in transpersonal ontology is revealed as too simple.

Consciousnesses have a peculiar ontology by which they are neither entirely identical nor completely distinct.

Based on the arguments and analysis above, a peculiar ontology of consciousness can now be elaborated. Consciousness is a paradox. My consciousness is neither entirely identical with that of others, nor entirely distinct; it is individuated *and* transpersonal. It is an emanation of “other” consciousnesses, yet transcendent by virtue of being private and mine; I am myself and I am the Other. I am both an individualized totality that is me and a diasporatic plurality of others.

It is unclear at this stage of transpersonal theory if these paradoxes of consciousness violate Aristotle’s Laws of Noncontradiction, Identity, or Excluded Middle. Possibly transpersonal consciousness is not immanent and transcendent “in the same respect;” not individuated and transpersonal “in the same respect;” not comprised entirely of others yet mine “in the same respect;” not a totality and a plurality “in the same respect.”²⁴⁸ However, it might be. It might violate Aristotelian laws, which as previously argued would not be grounds alone for rejection given the focus of this investigation is what it is like to be human from a phenomenological, rather than a deductive or critical perspective. Indeed, violating Aristotle’s Laws might actually *recommend* transpersonal ontology by signaling the beginning of Nagel’s “major conceptual revolution as radical as relativity theory” required to understand consciousness.²⁴⁹ However, this matter is left for a separate investigation.

²⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 7-8.

²⁴⁹ Nagel, *Mind*, 42.

At this juncture in the investigation transpersonal ontology might become more understandable by considering our basic phenomenology, to which I now return by considering grief.

F. Transpersonal Phenomenology of Grief

Someone once asked me if his grief over the death of his father was really sadness for himself. “Am I really crying for myself rather than my father? Is my grief selfish?” These are important questions. Why do the living grieve if not for themselves? After all, the decedent is...dead.

But consider the common use of the word “loss” when expressing condolences, “I am sorry for your loss,” “That is a terrible loss.” Indeed, the death of a loved one is *experienced* as a loss. Freud observed this phenomenology of loss in psychoanalytic investigations, stating “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person...;” “Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of a loved person, contains the same feeling of pain...;” “In grief the world becomes poor and empty;” “On the one hand, like mourning, melancholia is the reaction to the loss of a loved object...”²⁵⁰ But who loses what? Am I aggrieved for the *deceased* that lost his life, but is now just a corpse?

Judith Butler elaborates on Freud’s view of grief associated with loss. She observes that according to Freud we mitigate the loss of others to whom we are attached (cathexis) as objects by internalizing them. We incorporate the lost others into our own ego, as if to retain them *in us*

²⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, (1917) “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV. (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 152-170. 153, 153, 155, 161.

and *as* us. This internalization of the lost other into our own psyche is effected as a maneuver to retain the other despite the other's absence as an object of cathexis; it is a mechanism to deny acknowledging the other's permanent absence and the grief such acknowledgement would entail.²⁵¹ She explains, "...those identifications which are formed from unfinished grief are the modes in which the lost object is incorporated and phantasmatically preserved in and as the ego."²⁵² She continues, "What Freud here calls the 'character of the ego' appears to be the sedimentation of those objects loved and lost, the archeological remainder, as it were, of unresolved grief."²⁵³

However, this psychoanalytic formulation appears to presuppose an ontology of consciousness different than that advanced in this investigation. To suggest that my consciousness performs a protective maneuver to mitigate grief by incorporating the lost other would seem to entail that the other retains the possibility of *not* being incorporated into my consciousness, that I could be attached to the other solely as an object without the other being incorporated into my consciousness as a constructive constituent of my subjectivity. By contrast, a transpersonal ontology of consciousness asserts not that the other to whom I am attached *can* become my subjectivity (the ego in Butler's statement above), but that the other to whom I am attached *cannot not* be a constituent of my subjectivity. To assert that I incorporate the deceased other into my consciousness as a strategy to avoid the full force of the loss fails to realize that the other I grieve already constitutively constructs the subjectivity that is me.

²⁵¹ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender –Refused Identification," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 5 (2), 1995.

²⁵² Butler, *Gender*, 166.

²⁵³ Butler, *Gender*, 167.

Thus, in transpersonal ontology the living “lose” something because the consciousness of the deceased that constitutively constructed and now comprises that of the living has been extinguished. The living “lose” something of that which is *already* themselves, not an object of attachment, but an existing constitutive constructant of their subjectivity. Indeed, a more accurate description might be something like “The ‘me’-constituted-by-(as)-the-‘Other’” as a transpersonal consciousness is no longer whole. Some part of “me” has ceased with the cessation of the “Other,” which truncates the transpersonal consciousness that is the other-*as-me*.

Said differently, when the Other dies a part of the transpersonal diasporatically distributed consciousness that “I” am is extinguished. The loss of the “Other” is the partial loss of “myself”-*as-the-Other*. I am now “alone”-*as-the-Other* rather than transpersonally the-Other-*as-me* and me-*as-the-Other*. Of course the Other’s constituents that are “me” remain, but their continued nourishment no longer occurs, and they can no longer be shared with the “Other” whose body is deceased. Because of our transpersonal ontology I lose a portion of “me.” Death of a loved Other is a hole in the diasporatic transpersonal consciousness that “I” am.

Further, the more constitutively constructive the deceased is of my consciousness, the more of “my” consciousness is comprised of this “Other” consciousness that is no more, or perhaps one might say the transpersonal consciousness that was the Other-*as-me* and me-*as-the-Other*, the greater is the truncation of “my” consciousness and “my” loss upon the “Others” death. Echoing Nhat Hanh’s earlier statement, the more prominent the “non-self element” that constitutes “my” self that has become absent, the greater my loss.²⁵⁴ Returning to the question above about the origin of grief, asking if it is for me *or* the deceased assumes subject-other

²⁵⁴ Nhat Hanh, *Love*.

dualism that distorts the ontology of subjectivity. Instead, by bracketing subject-other presuppositions, grief and loss in response to death reveal consciousness as ontologically transpersonal.

But attention must be given to the language of loss to describe death. On the one hand, “loss” can be understood by substance ontology as the absence of an existent that once existed, a no-longer-existing existent. On the other hand, this is exactly what occurs to transpersonal consciousness diasporatically distributed among persons. The transpersonal consciousness of which each person is a constituent is now *absent* a constituent; a constitutive existent is gone. Thus, the word “loss” associated with the phenomenology of death is not figurative, and as such there is no danger of smuggling substance ontology and its formal ontology of concepts and rules, into consciousness via language used to describe it.

Nevertheless, the consciousness that constituted the Other that is now deceased, is not entirely non-existent, given it is diasporatically distributed transpersonally as-Others; it is not extinguished with the body that was its precondition. Perhaps this is one function of funerary rituals whereby those that knew the deceased gather in remembrance. By coming together and sharing their experiences of the deceased, really their consciousness *as* the deceased, they transpersonally reconstruct him into some semblance of the “whole” that he was, so that each “individual” person can re-experience approximately, one last time, the deceased via this communal transpersonal reconstruction.

With these considerations in view, a brief return to Sartre, who asserts that nausea and anguish disclose the utter contingency of his existence and the unremitting freedom of his choices, is instructive. His phenomenology reveals his human condition as absurd and

condemned. Contrast Sartre's immediate disclosive confrontation with nausea and anguish with his confrontation with Pierre's suffering,

For example, if someone tells me of a particular painful event which has just darkened the life of Pierre, I shall exclaim, 'How he must have suffered!' I do not know this suffering and I do not actually *feel* it...we direct ourselves towards pain and shame [of the Other], we strain toward them, consciousness transcends itself-but emptily...what separates them from real shame...is the absence of the quality of being *lived*.²⁵⁵

For Sartre Pierre's suffering is phenomenologically opaque; he does not "actually *feel* it."²⁵⁶ His *experience* is absent Pierre's suffering, which he attempts to reach, but fails. At best Pierre's suffering appears to evoke in him some attenuated suffering rooted in analogical reasoning such as "I have suffered and know what that is like to suffer, and by analogy I *understand* what Pierre suffered." Nevertheless, Sartre's "consciousness transcends itself-but emptily" and has no "quality of being *lived*."²⁵⁷ Pierre's suffering is little more than knowledge.

Contrasting Sartre's immediately disclosive experiences of anguish and nausea with his anemic reaction to Pierre's suffering reveals why he does not understand grief as being

²⁵⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 435-436.

²⁵⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 435.

²⁵⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 435-436.

disclosive; it is apparently not “lived,” but experienced “emptily.”²⁵⁸ Indeed, his description of death in *Being and Nothingness* is entirely about what happens to the decedent, what will happen to *him* when *he* dies, rather than those left behind. The decedent can no longer choose; his meanings are gratuitously fixed; he is “...prey for the living. This means therefore that the one who tries to grasp the meaning of his future death must discover himself as the future prey of others.”²⁵⁹ It does not seem to occur to Sartre that like nausea and anguish, Pierre’s suffering or the grief associated with loss of a loved one could be disclosive because they are not intimate experiences for *him*; their phenomenology is apparently bland rather than immediate, such that these events confer knowledge, but disclose little if anything about the ontology of the human condition. This should not be a surprise. On the contrary, it is inevitable. Sartre’s ontology of individuated consciousness that isolates each person in “frontal opposition” to the Other forecloses the intimacy of these experiences.²⁶⁰ Thus, the disclosive power of the Other’s suffering and death fail to reveal the human condition; they disclose nothing.

With this conception of a transpersonally content-ed consciousness, the investigation can now evaluate and resolve Sartre’s discontents, which is the subject of the next chapter.

²⁵⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 435-436.

²⁵⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 695.

²⁶⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 331.

V. Chapter 5: Resolving Sartre's Discontents

The final leg of this journey is now upon us. Part I of this chapter describes Sartre's discontented human condition rooted in his ontology of consciousness as an individuated nothingness. Part II articulates a contrasting human condition based on a transpersonally content-ed consciousness that either resolves or mitigates these discontents, and opens the possibility for human happiness. To these final tasks of the investigation I now turn.

Part I: Discontents of Sartre's Ontology

A. Discontents within Ourselves: Meaninglessness, Nausea, Anguish, Anxiety and Isolation

Recall that Sartre conceives human reality, the being that is *human* being, as an upsurge from the in-itself. Like the in-itself we are entirely contingent, thoroughly gratuitous. He states, "It [the for-itself] has the feeling of its complete gratuity; it apprehends itself as being there for *nothing*, as being *de trop*."²⁶¹

For Sartre, this has two consequences. First, there is no intrinsic value or meaning to existence, either the in-itself or human life.²⁶² Second, because existence has no *intrinsic* value or meaning, *we must create* values and meaning and bring them and the world into existence absent

²⁶¹ Sartre, *Being*, 132. The French expression "de trop" means extra or unnecessary, or most literally "too much."

²⁶² This appears as a direct consequence of Sartre's "consistently atheistic position," though of course theism or other religious belief is not the only source of meaning/value.

any guidance while immersed in our absolute freedom, which is disclosed by the experience of nausea. Sartre ruefully states “But freedom is simply the fact that this choice is always unconditioned...Such a choice made without base of support and dictating its own causes to itself, can very well appear absurd, and in fact is absurd.”²⁶³ This absurdity is the foundation of Sartre’s famous assertion that existence precedes essence; first we exist, and *then* we create an essence for ourselves composed of the sum of our actions.

Further, our connection to the in-itself, indeed that a dimension of our being, our body, is an entirely contingent in-itself, is also revealed by nausea. He explains, “This perpetual apprehension on the part of my for-itself of an *insipid* taste which I cannot place, which accompanies me even in my efforts to get away from it, and which is *my* taste-this is what we have described elsewhere under the name of *Nausea*. A dull and inescapable nausea perpetually reveals my body to my consciousness.”²⁶⁴

If the absurdity of our lives and gratuity of our existence are revealed by nausea, then our complete freedom from which we can never escape is revealed by anguish. Our freedom is characterized in *The Transcendence of the Ego* as a “monstrous spontaneity” and our existence as “monstrously free.”²⁶⁵ In *Being and Nothingness* he asserts, “To be free is to be condemned to be free”²⁶⁶ and identifies one of the purposes for which consciousness creates an ego and other psychic structures in reflective awareness is to *hide* the spontaneity of consciousness from itself so as to diminish anxiety.

²⁶³ Sartre, *Being*, 616.

²⁶⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 445-445.

²⁶⁵ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 99 & 100.

²⁶⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 186.

Given this freedom we are responsible for choices that must be made absent any basis and repeated in each moment. He forcefully asserts,

It follows that my freedom is the unique foundation of values and that nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable. My freedom is anguished at being the foundation of values while itself without foundation.²⁶⁷

As nothingness, consciousness is never what it is, and is always what it is not, such that no past resolution can bind our freedom.²⁶⁸ We are anguished in the face of having to continually choose again while being free to choose differently; we cannot depend on ourselves given our radical freedom re-emerges in every instant of the present, which raises an ever-present possibility of self-betrayal. Sartre states, “We wished only to show that there exists a specific consciousness of freedom, and we wished to show that this consciousness is anguish. This means that we wished to establish anguish in its essential structure as consciousness of freedom.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 76.

²⁶⁸ In *Transcendence* he notes, “Then consciousness, noting what could be called the fatality of its spontaneity, is suddenly anguished: it is this dread, absolute and without remedy, this fear itself, which seems to us constitutive of pure consciousness...” (102).

²⁶⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 70-71. Sartre defines freedom as “...the unconditioned power of modifying situations.” *Being*, 459.

Moreover, consciousness of freedom revealed by anguish, the baseless, directionless, and absurd need to choose, takes place in a context of solitude. Others cannot diminish our anguish or ultimate isolation. Our absurdity, meaninglessness, anguish and anxiety are solitary burdens. He states, “I emerge alone and in anguish confronting the unique project which constitutes my being.”²⁷⁰ The suffering of our anguish remains within us as an unbridgeable reality closed to others. Others can *know* that we suffer, but they cannot *experience* it, as Sartre illustrated with his example of the suffering of Pierre. We cannot attenuate our suffering by distributing it among other consciousnesses given consciousnesses are entirely individuated.²⁷¹

B. Discontents within Ourselves: Bad Faith, Lack and Death Distress

Anguish and anxiety give rise to a dynamic of escape. Consciousness seeks to deny its freedom, and attendant anguish and anxiety by means of “bad faith;” consciousness deceives *itself*. Sartre observes that human reality is a blend of our past, which is a being-in-itself (facticity), and our present and future that are both entirely free, completely chosen in the manner described above (transcendence). Bad faith exploits this duality of our existence to deny responsibility for our actions and thereby eliminate or attenuate our anguish and anxiety. For Sartre, bad faith is a

²⁷⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 77. Elsewhere he states, “In this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens that there is a world...whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume this situation with its peculiar coefficient of adversity. He must assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it...” *Being*, 707-708.

²⁷¹ To “distribute suffering among other consciousnesses” and thereby attenuate an individual’s suffering is figurative language within a strict subject-other dualism; however, within the context of a transpersonal consciousness that challenges subject-other dualism such language is literal.

species of self-deception. He states, “We shall willingly grant that bad faith is a lie to oneself.”²⁷²

One dynamic of bad faith involves exclusively privileging our transcendence by denying that we are a facticity, that we have a past. We deny the significance of the choices we have made, which constitute our “essence,” by asserting their unimportance because we transcend them in the present; we assign exclusive significance to our capacity to make different choices *now*, irrespective of the past. This strategy of self-deception denies that we are the sum of our choices by asserting our essence is beyond that which we have been or chosen; we avoid the responsibility and anguish of past choices by telling ourselves that is no longer what we are. Instead we are a freedom that completely transcends, and thereby disowns, the past. “I am on a plane where no reproach can touch me since what I really am is my transcendence.”²⁷³

Alternatively, we can deny our transcendence, our complete freedom, by exclusively privileging our past and assigning pre-eminence to our facticity; we can deny our freedom by conceiving ourselves as objects without choices. In this strategy of bad faith we tell ourselves we are not free or that our past somehow defines or compels our current choices. Such compulsion, the lack of freedom characterizing an object, relieves us of the anguish and anxiety of freedom.

Given consciousness is a nothingness with respect to every object it intends, it is always what it is not, and is not what it is; consciousness is a lack, a lack of being of the type characterizing the in-itself. Sartre states,

²⁷² Sartre, *Being*, 87.

²⁷³ Sartre, *Being*, 99.

The for-itself in its being is failure because it is the foundation only of itself as nothingness. In truth this failure is its very being, but has meaning only if the for-itself apprehends itself as failure *in the presence* of the being which it has failed to be.²⁷⁴

As mentioned earlier consciousness feels “profound solidarity”²⁷⁵ with the in-itself from which it upsurges, and seeks to remedy its nothingness by becoming an object, a being-in-itself that is self-identical and can provide its own foundation. However, as a nothingness this effort is doomed to fail. It is forever separated from the in-itself, and therefore continually experiences itself as a lack.

Further, while seeking to remedy this lack by becoming its own foundation consciousness desires to retain its freedom. It seeks to become a self-founding nothingness, an “in-itself-for-itself,” which is contradictory and therefore impossible.²⁷⁶ A self-identical object cannot also be an empty nothingness. Nevertheless, consciousness pursues this impossible goal to retain its freedom as a nothingness while simultaneously being a self-founding object. “Thus the for-itself is both a flight and a pursuit; it flees the in-itself and at the same time pursues it...the pursuing flight is not a given which is added onto the being of the for-itself. The for-itself *is* this very

²⁷⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 139.

²⁷⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 198.

²⁷⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 472.

flight.”²⁷⁷ Therefore, the for-itself continually experiences itself as a lack that can never be ameliorated. It is always seeking an ontological completion or wholeness forever beyond its reach. Sartre grimly asserts,

The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it, precisely because it cannot attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself. Human reality therefore is by nature an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state.²⁷⁸

Given the absurdity of human being, its utter contingency, it is not surprising that Sartre considers death to be without meaning or significance. He states, “We ought rather compare ourselves to a man condemned to death who is bravely preparing himself for the ultimate penalty, who is doing everything possible to make a good showing on the scaffold, and who meanwhile is carried off by a flu epidemic.”²⁷⁹

However, the “absurd character of death” has another dimension.²⁸⁰ Sartre conceives the for-itself as temporally diasporatic, as a de-totalized totality spread across the past, present and future by virtue of always being what it is not, and not being what it is. Therefore, the meaning

²⁷⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 472.

²⁷⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 140.

²⁷⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 683.

²⁸⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 682.

of our lives, to include our past, is continuously re-created and re-defined by our current actions, which revise the meaning of our past by the future toward which they project. Similarly, the future toward which we project is given meaning and context by the past from which it temporally emanates. This disaporatic temporalization of the for-itself leads to the constant revision of the meaning of our lives by the choices we make in the present.

But we cannot choose the moment of our death, and therefore the meaning of the projects in which we are engaged, and which define the meaning of our past and future, become fixed by a random force outside our freedom. Thus, death not only ends our lives in a gratuitous manner, which renders it absurd, it steals from us the freedom necessary to give meaning to our past and future; death gratuitously fixes all of these meanings absent our consent. “Since death does not appear on the foundation of our freedom, it can only remove all meaning from life.”²⁸¹ He continues,

Conversely, if it [death] is the closing of the account which gives our life meaning and its value, then it is of little importance that all the acts of which the web of our life is made have been free; the very meaning of them escapes us if we do not ourselves choose the moment at which the account will be closed...If death is not the free determination of our being, it can not complete our life. If one minute more or less may perhaps change everything and if this minute is added to or

²⁸¹ Sartre, *Being*, 689.

removed from my account, then even admitting that I am free to use my life, the meaning of my life escapes me.²⁸²

Added to these absurdities, death also has an interpersonal dimension. As noted above, while alive, we continually revise the meaning of our past and future by the free choices we make in the present. Further, any meanings *others* might fix to our lives are subject to our assent or rejection by the choices we make in our freedom; we continually assert our nothingness that gives the lie to the fixed assignments others might confer upon us. Others might attempt to define us in ways at variance with our own projects, but these efforts fail to contain us and can always be proved mistaken by our free choices. Sartre states,

So long as I live I can escape what I *am* for the Other by revealing to myself by my freely posited ends that I *am* nothing and that I make myself be what I am; so long as I live, I can give the lie to what others discover in me, by projecting myself already toward other ends and in every instance by revealing that my dimension of being-for-myself is incommensurable with my dimension of being-for-others.²⁸³

²⁸² Sartre, *Being*, 689. In this section of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre contrasts his view of death with that advanced by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Sartre continues “Thus death is never that which gives life its meaning; it is, on the contrary, that which on principle removes all meaning from life.” 690.

²⁸³ Sartre, *Being*, 695.

However, once deceased the Other's power to define us becomes complete and exclusive of our freedom that has been terminated. Hence, not only is the meaning of our lives gratuitously fixed within our own perspective by our death given it is no longer subject to revision by our free choices, the meaning of our lives transfers to the power of the Other's definition. "Thus the very existence of death alienates us wholly in our own life to the advantage of the Other. To be dead is to be a prey for the living."²⁸⁴

C. Discontents with Others: Shame, Alienation, Exploitation and Guilt

Sartre's ontology also necessarily leads to discontent with others; we are chronically exploited by or in conflict with others, made known to us by basic phenomenological apprehension.

He indicates that we become aware of the existence of the Other and our relationship with the Other via the look. Contrary to my primordial experience of myself as a subject, when the Other looks at me, I become pre-reflectively aware that I am an object for the Other, an object for a subjectivity that is not mine. This look that reveals me to myself as an object for the Other, also reveals me as an object for *myself*; the Other's look shifts *my* consciousness from pre-reflective to reflective. This dynamic of the Other's subjectivity, which makes me an object for him and an object for myself, is pre-reflectively revealed to me by shame in a manner similar to that by which anguish reveals to me my freedom. Sartre states, "Now, shame, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter is shame of *self*; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes

²⁸⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 695.

me in order to become a *given* object.”²⁸⁵ Thus, shame emerges in response to the look of the Other. Paralleling Sartre’s earlier statement about anguish, it could be said that shame is the “essential structure”²⁸⁶ of consciousness of being an object for the Other and for ourselves.

The key feature of this dynamic is that by shifting awareness of myself from pre-reflective subjectivity engaged in projects to reflective objectivity, that is *as* an object, the Other’s look destroys me as a subjectivity with possibilities by inducing in me a positional consciousness whereby I am an object for *myself*. My transcendent possibilities are alienated from *me*. Sartre describes the dynamic, “The Other as a look is only that-my transcendence transcended. Of course I still *am* my possibilities in the mode of non-thetic consciousness (of) these possibilities. But at the same time the look alienates them from me.”²⁸⁷ This stealing of my possibilities, really of my subjectivity, constitutes the alienating effect the Other has upon me. By making me an object, he alienates me from *myself* as a subjectivity enacting *my* possibilities in the world: “I grasp the Other’s look at the very center of my act as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities.”²⁸⁸

Further, the Other incorporates *me* into *his* projects as an object in *his* world; I become an instrument by which *he* achieves *his* project; my subjectivity becomes an object for his subjectivity. Thus, what was my transcendence, that which I was as a possibility, is now transformed into an object by the Other, *for* the Other; the Other makes me and my world an object for *him*. The only avenue by which I can recover my subjectivity and again assert myself

²⁸⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 350.

²⁸⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 71.

²⁸⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 352.

²⁸⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 352.

as a transcendence is to reverse this process. I must transform the Other from a subjectivity that makes me an object, into an object for *my* subjectivity, to shift the Other from a subject to an object in *my* world, for *my* project, which of course shifts his consciousness from pre-reflective to positional in the same manner that occurred for me by *his* look. I then make the Other a “transcendence-transcended.”²⁸⁹ Hence, in Sartre’s rendering two subjectivities cannot simultaneously pursue their projects without each attempting to make of the Other an object for his own project.

Concretely, this relationship with the Other, in which he incorporates me as an object for his projects, leads the Other to obstruct my projects should they conflict with his or use me as an instrument by which to further his projects. I become an obstructive object to be eliminated or a tool to be used. Therefore, relationships are inherently conflictual and exploitative. Sartre states, “Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others,”²⁹⁰ and the possibility of interacting with the Other not as a “transcendence-transcended,”²⁹¹ but as a “transcendence-transcending” is foreclosed.²⁹²

An outcome of the look and its dynamics is existential guilt. In contrast to shame that characterizes one’s being before the Other, guilt characterizes the relationship with oneself. On the one hand, I am guilty if I permit the Other to deny my transcendence and make me an object for *his* projects, for *his* transcendence, which denies my own. On the other hand, absolving myself of this guilt by reclaiming my subjectivity, my transcendence, can only be achieved by

²⁸⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 393.

²⁹⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 475.

²⁹¹ Sartre, *Being*, 393.

²⁹² Sartre, *Being*, 387, 536.

making the *Other* an object, that is by inflicting upon *him* that which he induced in me, and which led to my guilt in the first place. Therefore, every person in every relationship must either betray the Other by making him an object, or betray himself by permitting the Other to make him an object. Every person in every relationship becomes either a perpetrator or victim in what Andrea Nye aptly calls "...the Sartrean theory of separate warring consciousnesses."²⁹³ Hence, existential guilt derives from our ontology as *human* beings.

Of course, on Sartre's rendering of the relationship with the Other described above there is little possibility for love conceived as care, concern, and affection for another *beyond* what the Other might offer for oneself. Others are obstacles to be cleared or resources to be used for *my* projects; they are not transcendences to be preserved or expanded beyond my own.

But to fully consider love requires returning to consciousness as a nothingness, as lacking the self-identical being of the in-itself, yet dependent upon the in-itself for its existence. On this rendering, consciousness' relationship to others, even in love, becomes part of its project to become an in-itself or an in-itself-for-itself that thereby eliminates the problem of the contingency of existence. Catalano summarizes,

The for-itself is relational, and the ideal of love is another attempt by the for-itself to found its being and remove the absolute contingency of its existence...In love, I desire the beloved freely to return to me my very objectification that came-to-be by my relation to the other. The beloved will redeem me from my original fall,

²⁹³ Andrea Nye, "Preparing the Way for a Feminist Praxis," *Hypatia* Volume 1, no 1 (Spring 1986), 107.

which is my exteriorization before the other; and the beloved, as the other, will unite me with my alienated self, freely returning to me the free and hidden evaluation of my exteriorized being. Because of the beloved, I am not a tool. The beloved's look makes me into that unique center and origin from which all things have their meaning and value.²⁹⁴

In love we seek to appropriate others as “freedom-objects”²⁹⁵ to incorporate into ourselves *as* ourselves, in an effort to be a self-founding freedom, an in-itself-for-itself. Sartre states, “Thus my project of recovering myself is fundamentally a project of absorbing the Other” and “My project of recovering my being can be realized only if I get hold of this freedom [the other person] and reduce it to being a freedom subject to my freedom.”²⁹⁶ But given the individuation of consciousness a merging with the Other can never be achieved, and this appropriative desire fails. Therefore, the most fundamental relation with the Other even in love is appropriative, and because the Other pursues the same aim inevitably conflictual. Sartre states “Such then is the real goal of the lover in so far as his love is an enterprise-*i.e.*, a project of himself. This project is going to provoke a conflict.”²⁹⁷

Moreover, the very desire to incorporate the lover as a freedom-object is in principle contradictory, in that rendering the lover an object, even a freedom-object prevents the lover from being an unlimited freedom that can then love the lover. As Sartre notes, “Thus the lover

²⁹⁴ Catalano, *Commentary*, 181.

²⁹⁵ A term I coined.

²⁹⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 475 & 477.

²⁹⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 484.

demands a pledge, yet is irritated by a pledge. He wants to be loved by a freedom but demands that this freedom as freedom should no longer be free.”²⁹⁸ On the other hand, we also long for the beloved to make us an object for the beloved. As Sartre indicates, we long to be the “‘whole world for the lover;’”²⁹⁹ we seek to be an idealized object for which the lover longs, the lover’s ultimate object of desire, of transcendence, but not transcended. We wish to be “...the object limit of transcendence, that toward which the Other’s transcendence transcends all other objects but which it can in no way transcend.”³⁰⁰

Thus, in Sartre’s vision love becomes a dynamic of exploitation of the Other and/or bad faith with myself. Either I seek to appropriate the beloved as a freedom-object and thereby truncate the beloved’s freedom or induce the beloved to make me a “freedom-object,” and thereby agree to truncate my own freedom. Moreover, these rather unpleasant outcomes ultimately fail because as Sartre notes union with the beloved “is *in fact* unrealizable.”³⁰¹

D. Conclusions Regarding Sartre’s Ontology and Its Discontents

This exposition of Sartre’s discontents reveals their origin in two features of his ontology: consciousness is a gratuitous nothingness and consciousness is an isolated individuality. In the gratuitous upsurge from the in-itself consciousness’ nothingness leaves us bereft of guidance or resources by which to make moral choices or create a world or meaning. Rather than a resource

²⁹⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 479.

²⁹⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 479.

³⁰⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 479.

³⁰¹ Sartre, *Being*, 477.

content-ed consciousness from which to draw, we must choose how to fulfill these tasks *ex-nihilo* in complete freedom, which leaves us anxious, anguished, nauseated, and lying to ourselves in bad faith. Despite this predicament, or perhaps because of it, consciousness seeks to solve its “problem of being” a nothingness, which is experienced as lack.³⁰² However, its nothingness provides no basis for the resolution of its nothingness. The structure of the problem prevents its solution.

Moreover, though others might offer guidance or succor, there is no escaping our complete freedom originating ontologically in the nothingness of an individuated consciousness. But even if others could in some manner attenuate these burdens, by virtue of its ontological individuation consciousness is alone; others cannot *share* the burdens. On the contrary, the radical individuation of consciousness leads others to exploit and appropriate us as objects to remedy their own nothingness. This leads to the dynamics of the look where we deny the subjectivity of others to exploit them as objects and thereby alienate others from *themselves*, which they experience as shame. As Sartre starkly observes, this ontology entails conflict. Nye similarly locates these conflictual dynamics in ontology stating, “Acting for others or with others would always be problematic given an existentialist metaphysics of separate consciousnesses who must see each other as threats.”³⁰³ Moreover, this dynamic creates existential guilt as we deny the transcendence of others or ourselves; we either exploit others for our projects or permit them to exploit us for theirs.

³⁰² Sartre, *Being*, 596.

³⁰³ Nye, *Praxis*, 105.

With this ontology love becomes simply another manifestation of an individuated nothingness consciousness seeking to resolve its “failure” to be an in-itself, via appropriation of the Other.³⁰⁴ Finally, given the upsurge of consciousness as an individuated gratuitous nothingness, death becomes a catastrophe gratuitously terminating our existence, contingently fixing the meaning of our projects, and subjecting us to the judgements and interpretations of others who make of us an object for their own transcendences for which we have no recourse. The aforementioned features of Sartre’s human condition clearly contradict his claim that “no doctrine is more optimistic.”³⁰⁵

However, Chapters 3 and 4 critiqued this ontology and found it to be untenable, which led to its replacement with a transpersonally content-ed consciousness. This revised ontology promises to give rise to a more optimistic human condition that addresses Sartre’s discontents. This final task of the investigation occupies the remainder of this chapter.

Part II: The Resolution of Sartre’s Discontents

A. Freedom in Transpersonal Ontology

Chapter 3 argued that by Sartre’s own phenomenology, consciousness is not a nothingness, but telically content-ed. Chapter 4 went further by arguing that consciousness is more than thinly content-ed by telos, but transpersonal and thickly content-ed as-others. But this raises an

³⁰⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 139.

³⁰⁵ Sartre, *Humanism*, 40.

important question that can now be addressed: can a thickly content-ed being-*as-others* consciousness be free? Recall Sartre's claim that consciousness *must* be a nothingness to retain its freedom. Does he have a point that any content of consciousness restricts "spontaneity" and freedom, such that a transpersonal thickly content-ed as-others consciousness cannot be free?³⁰⁶

A response based on transpersonal ontology can be proposed. Like Sartre's nothingness consciousness, transpersonal consciousness retains its freedom to *act*. Indeed, that "choice is always unconditioned"³⁰⁷ in any given situation is so immediate for basic phenomenology that it constitutes a problem only in a strictly deterministic worldview advanced by a metaphysical interpretation of the natural sciences; the insistence by determinists that freedom is *illusory* is so belied by subjectivity that it is difficult to take seriously. To suggest that forces within consciousness, or anywhere else, compel me to continue typing this essay rather than text my child violates my most basic phenomenology. For this meaning of freedom, transpersonal content-ed consciousness' choices remain "always unconditioned."³⁰⁸

However, suspending the natural attitude in favor of a deeper consideration of choices reveals a more complex picture. Though every choice before me remains unconditioned irrespective of what might be occupying my consciousness at any given moment, the *possible* choices are actually *created* by my consciousness; *my* consciousness creates and then lays out before me in my phenomenological field the choices I confront. I create a situation composed of choices analogous to Sartre's situation that he created and then confronted in the performance of his philosophical enterprise described in the previous chapter. Recall that I argued Sartre's

³⁰⁶ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 42.

³⁰⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 616.

³⁰⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 616.

discernment of a nothingness consciousness was predicated upon his *full* consciousness that created the situation he confronted and revealed his choices, absent which no reduction could have been conceivable in the first place. Similarly, the simple choice above of whether to type or text is not created or discerned *ex nihilo*. Instead, it comprises part of a “situation” *I create*, ensconced in and birthed by a fundamental project, whereby I have chosen how to relate myself to others and the world to achieve some overarching goal; this goal is manifested by every choice I make, which “illuminates”³⁰⁹ my project to myself. Sartre’s insights here are invaluable.

But Chapter 4 argued this all emerges not from an individuated nothingness consciousness, but from a transpersonally content-ed consciousness. The “other” consciousnesses that are “me,” those that transpersonally content and direct “my” consciousness as a being-*as*-others, are that from which I create the world, my projects, my values, their situations, choices, and so on. *Within* this world constituted by others-*as*-me, and the choices others-*as*-me disclose to me, I am free to choose; my choices are unconditioned.

Returning to the example above, I am entirely free to type or text; however, the very concepts of typing and texting that constitute my possibilities, and thus reveal my choices to myself, emerge as activities created by “other” consciousnesses that are “mine,” my consciousness as being-*as*-others. Consider that if Plato were suddenly transported to the present he would not be free to make such a choice, not because he is unable to exert volitional control over which device on which to move his fingers, but because for him no *devices* would even exist from which to choose. His consciousness, as constitutively constructed by those of his time, does not create a world, situation, or project where electronic devices exist as possibilities

³⁰⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 706.

to reveal his choices to him. In this respect he is *not* free to choose the device over which to move his fingers, despite unconditioned freedom to move his fingers.

Thus, there are two types of freedom: the capacity to make unconditioned choices from among possibilities I confront, and the capacity to *create* possibilities to confront from which to choose. Like Sartre's freedom, a transpersonal content-ed ontology leaves me free to make unconditioned choices within the worlds and situations "I" create; however, the possibilities I create and confront from which to choose are not freely created *ex nihilo*, but constructed by my being-*as-others-as-myself*, my being-*as-others* that I *am*. Sartre's conception of freedom as total or non-existent is therefore moderated in favor of a nuanced ontology that retains unconditioned choices within worlds and situations created by others-*as-myself*. I am free to choose, but others-*as-myself* create the possibilities from which I choose and thereby limit my freedom.

However, freedom reveals itself to be still more complex. There are two additional dimensions to freedom resulting from a thickly content-ed transpersonal consciousness to consider, that of the ego and the role of others, which are addressed in the next two sections.

B. The Ego in Transpersonal Ontology

Sartre insightfully observes that a phenomenological reduction reveals that many of our daily actions are *choices* that we fail to see as such. He states,

...there exist concretely alarm clocks, sign-boards, tax forms, policemen, so many guardrails against anguish. But as soon as the enterprise is held at a distance from me, as soon as I am referred to myself because I must await myself in the future, then I discover myself suddenly as the one who gives its meaning to the alarm clock, the one who by a signboard forbids himself to walk on a flower bed or on the lawn, the one for whom the boss's order borrows its urgency, the one who decides the interest of the book he is writing, the one who finally makes the values exist in order to determine his actions by their demands.³¹⁰

According to Sartre a nothingness consciousness freely “gives its meaning”³¹¹ to all these “demands,”³¹² to which it then responds as if they are externally imposed. We refuse to acknowledge that the meanings of these objects and events are *chosen* by us in an effort to avoid freedom and anguish. Sartre argues the reduction reveals the *external* meanings and their demands to be illusory, the product of the natural attitude that fails to appreciate they are *chosen*.

However, a transpersonally content-ed ontology cognizes the phenomenology of these demands differently. Instead of discerning that *I* originate these meanings and their demands to avoid freedom and anguish, I realize that they originate in “*others*” that have constitutively constructed “*me*” given my consciousness is a content-ed being-*as-others*. I do not *choose* to originate these demands to *avoid* my freedom; I *discover* these demands as originating in others-*as-me*, which *limit* my freedom.

³¹⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 77.

³¹¹ Sartre, *Being*, 77.

³¹² Sartre, *Being*, 77.

Once I realize these demands are my being-*as-others-as-myself* that I do not originate, I can make them objects *for* my consciousness reflectively observable by my *subject*-consciousness. Rather than *being* my *subject*-consciousness that performs the observing, the demands become objects *for* my subject consciousness that observes. This re-positioning of my being-*as-others-as-myself* within consciousness from subject that looks to object that is looked at, permits my freedom to embrace or repudiate them, not because they are now understood as *external* “guardrails”³¹³ that I have *chosen*, but via realization that they are *my* being-*as-others-as-myself* that I have *not* chosen. Said differently, reflectively regarding my consciousness as an object permits me to realize the demands I experience are others-*as-myself*, which then positions me to repudiate them as a “portion” of my being-*as-others* should they be inimical to my purposes, a process that can be understood as transitioning from being-*as-others-as-myself* that I am to being-*as-others-for-myself* that I seek to *become*.

Further, if freedom is not an all or nothing ontology, I can *develop* my freedom via insight into “my” consciousness that is being-*as-others-as-myself*. But what is meant by “insight into ‘my’ consciousness?” Recall that “my consciousness,” really my subjectivity, rather than being individuated nothingness is transpersonally content-ed, and as such can be known and “conceptualized,” at least in principle. Of course, care must be taken to avoid the mistake of conceptualizing consciousness as if it were an object; inevitably, the language of extended objects will be used to describe transpersonally content-ed consciousness, and the mistake of using the formal ontology associated with that language should be avoided. Possibly the most

³¹³ Sartre, *Being*, 77.

accurate rendering of transpersonal consciousness may be hermeneutic or some other as yet undeveloped method, though this question is left aside.

The critical point for this investigation is that given a transpersonally content-ed consciousness, the ego is no longer an entirely fictive obscuring construction of consciousness. Though “cognizations” of my consciousness are likely forever incomplete, they are not fictively created owners, occupants or organizers of consciousness, but cognizations of its peculiar transpersonally content-ed ontology. Primordial subjectivity has content and telos that are being-*as*-others that can be described with more or less persuasiveness depending on the phenomenological verisimilitude of the description.

Moreover, the ego can help me understand and master my being-*as*-others-*as*-myself by facilitating its placement into reflective consciousness as an “object” where I can repudiate it if needed. Thus, the ego is not a fictive entity constructed to *limit* my freedom, but an *articulation* of my subjectivity as-others that promises to expand my freedom by facilitating my dis-identification with portions of my being-*as*-others-*as*-myself contrary to my aims. Sartre’s ego that *limited* the freedom of a spontaneous individuated nothingness consciousness, now promises to *expand* the freedom of a thickly content-ed being-*as*-others consciousness via the insight it confers.

Certainly, *cognizations* of my consciousness are neither synonymous with my consciousness nor its occupier as Sartre notes. Instead any proffered cognization stands in relation to consciousness in a similar manner that an interpretation of a poem articulates the poem, but is not synonymous with it. Consequently, the ego properly understood as a cognization of the content-ed transpersonal consciousness that is “me” is resurrected as a useful

concept, and different cognizations can be judged by their phenomenological verisimilitude. Therefore, the locution above “insight into ‘my’ consciousness” becomes intelligible in the same manner that insight into a poem becomes intelligible: there is a being (consciousness) and an interpretation of that being (insight), and the interpretation can be judged by its phenomenological verisimilitude.

This has relevance for freedom, which recall occurs *within* the context of possibilities I create from my being-*as-others-as-myself* that *restrict* my freedom. Thus, an essential feature of freedom is *knowledge* of my consciousness, that is knowledge of my being-*as-others-as-myself* that constitutes “my” consciousness and which *creates* the possibilities I confront. Given the resurrection of the ego as an articulation of primordial consciousness, I can now *discover* myself and the choices my being-*as-others* creates, rather than simply *create* myself *ex nihilo*. Absent such discovery, I cannot know the choices “I” create that limit my freedom; I simply operate within the field of those possibilities as if they are intrinsic to existence, as described by Sartre in the passage above, rather than *created* by my being-*as-others*.

Therefore, knowledge of my being-*as-others-as-myself*, understood as phenomenologically verisimilar cognization, develops my freedom by conferring awareness of the choices I create for myself, which is the foundation of creating *different* choices that expand my freedom beyond unconditioned choices. Said differently, this insight into my own consciousness transforms me from being-*as-others-as-myself* with its attendant possibilities into being-*as-others-for-myself* in the reflective process noted above, which permits the creation of new possibilities. Absent such knowledge I cannot choose to retain or reject the choices I create for myself because I do not realize *I am creating* them. The world, and its projects and situations

where I create and reveal “my” possibilities to myself remains opaque to my awareness as a self-creation of my being-*as-others*, and thus the creation of different choices that expand my freedom is foreclosed.

Perhaps an example might make this clearer. Consider someone that was chronically mistreated as a child. These experiences created his being-*as-others-as-himself* that he now “exists” as an adult confronting others as deceitful and predatory.³¹⁴ Absent awareness of how these early experiences have constitutively constructed him, he experiences his consciousness as translucent, failing to realize that he encounters the world, indeed creates the world, *through* these early experiences; they comprise the subjectivity through which he confronts others. Accordingly, he is guarded and hostile, and the *possibility* of loving interpersonal relations is not a part of any “situation” that he constructs. He does not realize that the hostility he sees in others as *objects* of his consciousness, is really the hostility that he brings to relationships as his paranoid subject-consciousness. What he confronts in others is not the Other, but *himself*, his being-*as-others-as-himself* that constructs his subjectivity and through which he confronts others as hostile. If he could move this feature of his subjectivity from the subject that performs the looking to the object that is looked at, it would no longer be a feature of the world, but a feature of his consciousness to which he is subject as a being-*as-others*, and could cognize as a “paranoid disorder.” Upon observing this feature of his consciousness as an object, he can then decide to repudiate it should it work against his goal of establishing constructive interpersonal relationships. In this capacity to decide to accept or repudiate this feature of his consciousness

³¹⁴ Following Sartre’s example, “exist” is being used here as a transitive verb. Sartre, *Being*, 434.

he moves from being as-others-*as*-himself to being-*as*-others-*for*-himself, which enhances his freedom. By contrast, the failure to appreciate that he encounters the world as a being-*as*-others-*as*-himself that constitutes his subjectivity leaves him trapped by his being-*as*-others, rather than free of it to create new possibilities as *for*-himself.

However, there are challenges to the notion of verisimilar cognizations of my being-*as*-others-*as*-myself that promise to expand my freedom. First, Nagel and Chalmers point out in Chapter 3 that the *ontology* of subjectivity, to include any particular consciousness such as mine, does not admit of ready cognization. Absent Nagel's "major conceptual revolution"³¹⁵ it is difficult to conceive how the infinite constructive constituents of transpersonal consciousness, to include their summations and recombinations, can be more than cautiously cognized. Therefore, knowledge of my consciousness that promises to reveal to me new possible choices is limited by the ontology of my transpersonal consciousness. This might be called the *ontological* challenge to the knowledge conferring insight that reveals to me the world that I create and then confront in my possibilities.

Second, recall from Chapter 4 Sartre's *epistemic* problem that haunts this investigation: consciousness cannot look at itself when it is doing the looking; it cannot spectate itself independent of itself. I cannot *remove* myself from the transpersonal content-ed consciousness that I am, in order to look at the transpersonal content-ed consciousness that I am. Thus, when I perform the phenomenological reduction seeking knowledge of my consciousness as-others-*as*-myself, which creates the possibilities from which I choose, the reducing *necessarily includes* that which I seek to discern and evaluate *apart* from my consciousness. The reduction is

³¹⁵ Nagel, *Mind*, 42.

doomed to be at best incomplete. Sartre recognizes this limitation near the end of *The Transcendence of the Ego*.

In a word the *Cogito* is impure. It is a spontaneous consciousness, no doubt, but it remains synthetically tied to consciousness of states and actions. The proof is that the *Cogito* is given at once as the logical result of doubt and as that which puts an end to doubt. A reflective apprehension of spontaneous consciousness as non-personal spontaneity would have to be accomplished *without any antecedent motivation*. This is always possible in principle, but remains very improbable or, at least, extremely rare in our human condition.³¹⁶

Recall from Chapter 2 Fink's solution to this epistemic problem entailed assuming a "*non-worldly* position of the spirit."³¹⁷ However, the current investigation privileges mundane phenomenology to the exclusion of non-ordinary experiences like Fink's proposal. Though such a perspective may not be impossible to achieve, it is too removed from common experience to be useful here; it sounds like mysticism. But if no such perspective becomes available in the reduction, how can this epistemic obstacle to knowledge of my consciousness as a being-*as-others-as-myself* and the freedom it confers be overcome? How can I reposition my being-*as-others-as-myself* into an object of reflection that renders it being-*as-others-for-myself* needed to devise new possibilities that expand my freedom? This question is addressed in the next section.

³¹⁶ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 92.

³¹⁷ Fink, *Accomplish*, 21-22.

C. The Other and Freedom in Transpersonal Ontology

Consciousness' inability to look at its looking activity when looking at itself restricts its knowledge of itself, which limits its freedom. The strategy to overcome this limitation is for my consciousness to gain a perspective on itself *apart* from itself, which is *impossible* for my consciousness. But here the solution emerges. Though *I* cannot spectate *myself* while spectating, *others* can spectate *me* and *my* spectating. The verisimilar cognization I need of my being-*as-others-as-myself* to articulate my possibilities to myself, which I cannot fully know due to the epistemic obstacles noted above, has a dimension that can *only* be revealed by others. Absent others my "autonomy of choice"³¹⁸ is restricted by the possibilities that "my" autonomy as a being-*as-others* *creates* and confronts. Thus, contrary to Sartre the Other is found not to threaten my freedom, but to be essential for it. To illustrate this point, consider the cartoon below.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 622.

³¹⁹ Gary Larson, *The Far Side*, <https://www.designingyourlife.coach/blog/2018/6/12/who-is-challenging-your-worldview>



The painter does not realize that the fly he perceives is part of himself; in the context of this investigation it is analogous to his being-*as-others-as-himself* to which he remains subject given it constitutes his looking, his subjectivity through which he confronts the world. Absent insight into this feature of his consciousness he cannot move into being-*as-others-for-himself* by examining it reflectively as-himself. And the epistemic obstacle to this re-positioning of his consciousness from subject that looks to object that is looked at, often can only be remedied by others who confer insight into the being-*as-others* that is his consciousness. In the cartoon others would inform the painter that his perception of the world and its attendant possibilities is limited by his consciousness that *creates* the world and its possibilities; his possibilities are contaminated, and thereby restricted by the fly. Analogously, the paranoid person described in the example above requires others to confer insight into his being-*as-other-as-himself* that projects hostility in the world, to which he is then subject as if it is a feature of others, and which restricts his freedom to establish interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, others enhance my freedom beyond providing knowledge conferring *insight* into my being-*as-others-as-myself*. I can also reflectively *choose* to interact with other consciousnesses that promise to *re-construct* “my” consciousness with constituents consonant with interests independent of those that initially constructed “me,” and thereby further enact my being-*as-others-for-myself*. Said differently, I can choose the constructive constituents of my consciousness by choosing those Others with whom I interact. In this respect, I am free to deliberately *re-construct* my consciousness and the worlds, projects, situations, and choices *I* create, which augment my freedom. I can *re-construct* the consciousness that is my being-*as-others-as-myself* that I *discover* by my own reflection and the insights conferred by others.

This type of effort is commonly observed in those that choose to live in intentional communities such as monasteries, where practitioners surround themselves with others with whom they wish to live and interact, and thereby *re-construct* themselves via the other consciousnesses that become their being-*as-others*. Similarly addicts and criminals seeking rehabilitation often choose to immerse themselves in communities that eschew thinking patterns that lead to destructive choices, so-called therapeutic communities. Immersion in therapeutic communities pro-socially *re-constructs* the consciousnesses of the members, apart from the insight or knowledge into their being-*as-others-as-themselves* they might acquire through their interactions with others.

For example, consider a maximum security prisoner whose rehabilitation I had been attempting to develop in my role as a psychologist. He had been seeing me regularly for over a year, and had been taught problem-solving strategies, interpersonal skills, and how to identify and modify criminal thinking, all standard features of criminal rehabilitation. But the therapy

had an additional and rather unusual dimension: at the close of every session he asked for a hug, which I provided. I cannot say that this request was a conscious desire to constitutively *re-*construct his consciousness with mine, but it probably facilitated that process by adding a tactile embodied dimension to our interactions.

One day he entered my office with a look of pained contempt, and exclaimed, “This whole prison is disgusting!” This statement was not born from the skills I had taught him or the insight I had disclosed to him about his being-*as-others-as-himself*, really the criminal socialization to which he had been subject, but through some mysterious process by which my “citizen” values had *re-*constructed his being-*as-others* with *my* consciousness. I never expressed contempt for prison culture the way that he did, but my values could easily give rise to such a sentiment, values that were now his being-*as-himself* that permitted him to move into reflective consciousness his prior values as objects for examination and repudiation. The constitutive *re-*construction of his consciousness with my consciousness permitted him to move from being *as-others-as-himself* to being-*as-others-for-himself*. He did not just *learn* a new way of looking at himself and the world, he was *converted* to a new way of being himself in the world via constitutive *re-*construction with my consciousness.

Thus, in relationships with others, there are two avenues by which they can *increase* my freedom. First, they can provide me with *insight* that is knowledge about my being-*as-others-as-myself* that permits me to expand my possible choices. Such insight can be relatively superficial as might occur when reading a self-help book or deep as when a psychoanalytic interpretation liberates a patient from neurosis. Second, others can provide their consciousness as a *re-*constructive constituent for “my” consciousness, which also expands my possible choices. This

latter mechanism of constitutive *re*-construction of my consciousness by others' consciousnesses is the ontological foundation of beneficial role-modeling effects exhibited by mentoring and psychotherapeutic relationships, and accounts for the more profound effects these relationships usually confer relative to *knowledge* or *insight* alone, as exhibited by the prisoner above.

It is important to emphasize that both avenues through which others can expand my freedom depend on an ontology different from that advanced by Sartre's consciousness as an individuated nothingness. The freedom expanding effect of insight provided by others that I cannot accomplish myself is predicated upon a *content-ed* consciousness amenable to verisimilar cognization that is more than purely fictive. Similarly, the *re*-construction of my consciousness by others chosen by my being-*as-others-for-myself* is predicated upon consciousness being *transpersonal*. This ontology gives rise to an entirely different relationship with others, who no longer restrict my freedom, but are required to potentiate it.

The description of an alternative human condition that resolves Sartre's discontents can now be advanced in the subsequent sections of this chapter. This alternative emanates from an ontology of consciousness as a transpersonally content-ed being-*as-others*, the resurrected ego it entails, and the freedom conferred by others. To this description I now turn.

D. Sartre's Lack Re-interpreted

Sartre's basic phenomenology of incompleteness or absence of internal unity that he cognizes as the lack of a nothingness consciousness can be *re*-cognized by a thickly content-ed transpersonal

consciousness. For ease of exposition first person language characteristic of subject-other ontology is employed.

To the extent that I fail to discern my being-*as-others* I “degenerate”³²⁰ the being that I am as-others, and experience myself as a lack. I retain a “profound solidarity”³²¹ not with the in-itself from which I originally upsurge and on which I depend, but from the constitutively constructive others from which my consciousness as a unique transpersonal combination that assumes being-*as-others-for-myself* depends and upsurges. This failure to realize my being-*as-others* that results in the phenomenology of lack emanates from mistaking my uniqueness and being-*for-myself*, both *derived from* my being-*as-others*, for my *essence*; I fail to appreciate that my most basic ontology is being-*as-others-as-myself* who have constitutively constructed me.

Using Sartre’s language, the internal nihilation of my consciousness from other consciousnesses permitted by its unique combination of other consciousnesses idiosyncratically summed and recombined and employed *for-myself* tricks me into experiencing others as ontologically *separate* from me, rather than *constitutively constructing* me. The natural attitude mistakes the unique consciousness that I am and assume as a being-*as-others-for-myself* for my most basic ontology. This mistake is discernible in Sartre’s own phenomenological reduction where he states, “This negation [of the Other] which constitutes my being...makes me appear as the Same confronting the Other, constitutes me on the ground of a non-thetic selfness as ‘Myself’.”³²²

³²⁰ Sartre, *Being*, 126.

³²¹ Sartre, *Being*, 198.

³²² Sartre, *Being*, 377.

The “non-thetic selfness” Sartre experiences as his “Myself” is a cognization of the natural attitude,³²³ that of pre-reflective consciousness that privileges its unique constitution positioned *for-itself*, rather than insight obtained in a reduction performed by reflective consciousness that discerns its most basic essence as-others. Indeed, Sartre concedes “The Other exists for consciousness only as a *refused self*.”³²⁴ Said differently, I discern the Other, actually create an Other, by refusing my being-*as-others* in favor of exclusively privileging my idiosyncratically summed and recombined uniqueness positioned for-myself.

However, even this movement by which I separate and individuate from my being-*as-others-as-myself* by reflecting upon it as an object does not entirely supersede my most fundamental ontology as being-*as-others*. Consider that as I effect this re-positioning of my consciousness into reflective awareness as an object my thickly constituted by-others consciousness that *does the reflecting* remains *predicated* on my being-*as-others*; my reflecting subjectivity is as-others. This is the epistemic limitation to solo efforts to achieve self-insight noted earlier. The natural attitude’s failure to appreciate this epistemic limitation can lead to the mistaken conclusion that my most basic ontology is an autonomous individuated observing consciousness independent of and absent the being-*as-others*, which is me, that performs the observing.

These two mistakes of the natural attitude, privileging my uniqueness and failing to realize my being-*as-others-as-myself* does the reflecting in my being-*as-others-for-myself*, lead to the false view that I am an individuated consciousness. These mistakes separate me not from

³²³ Sartre, *Being*, 377.

³²⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 379.

the in-itself from which I upsurge as a nothingness that I then experience as lack, but from others from whom I derive my thickly constituted being and from whom I upsurge as a unique consciousness that assumes being-*as-others-for-myself*. These mistakes that separate me from others result in the phenomenology of lack. Thus, consciousness' desire to be reunited with the in-itself from which it upsurges can be re-interpreted as a desire to be reunited with *others* that constitute its subjectivity. This is the lack Sartre experiences and mistakenly cognizes as degeneracy of the in-itself.

Recall Sartre's claim that unity with others is unrealizable and would eliminate the otherness of others. However, basic phenomenology transpersonally cognized concludes just the opposite; unity with others that resolves my lack is *not* unachievable. On the contrary, unity with others characterizes my most fundamental ontology and requires only my awareness of such to be realized. Rather than being impossible to achieve, such unity is impossible to *avoid*. The "profound solidarity"³²⁵ I seek is entirely present and available if I can only become aware of it by avoiding the mistakes noted above by which I conclude my individuality is my most basic ontology, rather than a derivative of it.

Thus, contrary to Sartre's claim that existence precedes essence, I have a transpersonally content-ed "essence" constitutively constructed by others-*as-myself* that I then choose how to exist as others-*for-myself*, the first step of which is viewing my "essence" as-others-*as-myself* reflectively. Note that like Sartre, my "essence" is not intrinsic, but constructed; however, unlike Sartre the construction of my "essence" is not primordially performed by myself, but by others,

³²⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 198.

which I can then accept or repudiate as I become aware of it and assume my being-*as-others-for-myself*.

Moreover, Sartre's claim that consciousness cannot be self-founding accords with transpersonal ontology, but is also reinterpreted. Rather than being dependent on the in-itself from which it derives via its nothingness, my consciousness is disclosed as dependent upon other consciousnesses that have constitutively constructed me, and from which I derive my being as-*others-for-myself*. My unique subjectivity assumed *for-myself* is not self-founding, but primordially founded by others that have constitutively constructed me. From within a transpersonally cognized phenomenology, Sartre's desire to be an in-itself-for-itself can also be re-interpreted as the "contradictory" desire to be *both* transpersonally as-*others-as-myself* and individually as-*others-for-myself*. As noted in Chapter 4, though perhaps impossible for the for-itself and the in-itself to be identified given their different regional ontologies, no such obstacle necessarily exists for consciousnesses that are "mine" and "others;" I am a unique consciousness constructed by consciousnesses that are not me. Nor do Aristotelian laws of thought necessarily apply to consciousness should a strict contradiction emerge between being simultaneously as-*others-as-myself* and as-*others-for-myself*.

Indeed, the process by which this possible contradiction is overcome was described earlier in which I become as-*others-for-myself* by becoming aware of my being-*as-others-as-myself*. By repositioning myself-as-others from within my basic subjectivity that does the looking to the field of objects at which I direct the looking, I become both being as-*others-as-myself* that is observed and being-*as-others-for-myself* that does the observing, though as noted earlier the observing is never completely free of that which it observes. In Sartre's lexicon, my

being-*as-others-as-myself* is analogous to the in-itself and my being-*as-others-for-myself* is analogous to the for-itself, both of which I am. Thus, the desire to be as-others-*as-myself* and as-others-*for-myself*, or perhaps more colloquially to be dependent upon others yet autonomous, is achievable in a transpersonally cognized ontology of consciousness. I am a *being-as-others-as-myself-for-myself*.

E. Sartre's Shame, Alienation, Exploitation, and Guilt Reinterpreted

Given a transpersonally content-ed consciousness and its reinterpretation of freedom and lack, the basic phenomenology of shame, alienation, exploitation and guilt can also be re-cognized to improve their phenomenological verisimilitude.³²⁶ First, consider Sartre's claim that I am an object for the Other in the look in which he observes that I experience the Other *primordially* as a subjectivity. He states, "In view of this presence of the Other-*as*-subject to me in and through my assumed object-ness, we can see that my making an object out of the Other must be the second moment in my relation to him."³²⁷ But must I assume this "second moment" and make the Other an object?³²⁸ Could I not *look* at the Other as a subject rather than an object that leads

³²⁶ Shame, alienation, exploitation and guilt are employed here using standard conceptions. Shame is the painful feeling accompanying awareness of wrong-doing, foolishness or dehumanization before the Other; for Sartre the dehumanization before the Other by being rendered an object by the Other is the most prominent origin of shame. Similarly, alienation is understood as consciousness being separated from itself in some undesirable manner such that its cleavage undermines its dignity, freedom or subjectivity. Exploitation is being used by another as a resource for the Other's goals that denies one's subjectivity. Finally, guilt is a painful or uncomfortable feeling within oneself accompanying consciousness of moral transgression.

³²⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 382.

³²⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 382.

to alienation, exploitation, shame and guilt? In fact, this investigation has argued that an ontology exists for interpersonal relations absent these discontents.

As a thickly content-ed consciousness as-others, I am not lack motivated to solve my “problem of being” by making others objects to appropriate or exploit.³²⁹ On the contrary, because of my content-edness, I *need* others to expand *my* freedom, by conferring insight into *my* being-as-others and the possibilities it creates. For others to do this requires that I encounter and maintain them as *subjects* standing *outside* my projects as their own transcendence, so that they can communicate to me insight about *my* transcendence. If I confront others as objects their ability to provide such insight for me is destroyed by the denial of their subjectivity that is the source of the insight. An object cannot reveal to me what I am as a being-as-others, by which I create my possibilities. Therefore, I need to confront and maintain others in their subjectivity. Only as subjects *outside my projects*, as transcendent to me, can others confer to me insight into my being-as-others that I cannot discern myself given my inability to look at my looking, and which I need to create for myself new possibilities that are the core of my freedom expansion. Further, only if *I* show-up as a subject, that is exhibit my subjectivity to others’ subjectivity for confrontation, can they achieve this purpose for *me*. Only by showing them who I am in my subjectivity can they gain the knowledge they need to confer insight into my being-as-others-as-myself that I need from them to expand my freedom.

Thus, if I confront others as less than a complete subjectivity or I show-up as less than a complete subjectivity, the promise others hold for expanding my freedom to create new possibilities is truncated. For identical reasons others seek to encounter *me* as a subject, and

³²⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 596.

show up as subjects *for* me. Rather than a struggle in which each person seeks to turn others into *objects* to advance their freedom for unconditioned choices, both parties are motivated to show up as subjects and maintain Others as *subjects* to discern new possibilities that expand freedom.

Moreover, the Other's look that repositions *my* consciousness from pre-reflective to reflective does not render me an object that induces shame and alienates me from my possibilities. Instead the Other's look that repositions my consciousness of *myself* permits me the reflective awareness of my being-*as-others-as-myself* that I *need* to develop my freedom as a being-*as-others-for-myself*, and to which I am partially blind in my looking. The Other's look reveals my being-*as-others-as-myself* to *me* by moving my being-*as-others-as-myself* into reflective consciousness.

Thus, the Other's look does not *alienate* me from my possibilities, but *reveals* to me my possibilities; the Other's look does not induce me to see myself as a *shamed* object, but as a *human* subject with a constitutively constructed human essence as-others. Said differently, the Other's look is the mechanism by which my being-*as-others-as-myself* can be transformed into my being-*as-others-for-myself* that I need to potentiate my freedom. The other's look does not *shame*, *alienate* and *exploit* me, but promises to *affirm* my humanity as a being-*as-others* while liberating me to be a being-*as-others-for-myself*.

Further, recall the second avenue by which others promise to expand my freedom by constitutively *re-constructing* my consciousness so that it might more closely conform with my desired being-*as-others-for-myself*. Also recall that for Others to assume this constitutively *re-constructive* role they must be encountered *as* consciousness, that is as subjects rather than objects. Hence, I again find that based on my desire to expand my freedom via disclosure of new

possibilities, I am motivated to maximally preserve others' subjectivity rather than deny or diminish it by confronting them as objects. Reciprocally, others are maximally motivated to preserve me as a subject so that I might assume the same constitutively *re-constructive* role for their freedom expansion. By this additional mechanism of freedom expansion, I am motivated to preserve the subjectivity of others, rather than confront them as objects to exploit, shame, or alienate, which might expand my capacity for unconditioned choices, but forecloses their promise to reveal to me new possibilities.

This alternative cognization of the phenomenology of the Other indicates that exploitation, alienation, shame, and guilt characterizing human interactions at all levels of sociality are not the inevitable product of *ontology*, but mere *ontical* possibilities in the sense observed by Heidegger when he states, "Ontological inquiry is indeed more primordial, as over against the ontical inquiry of the positive sciences."³³⁰ Thus, these discontents arise not *from* our ontology. They arise from *ignorance* of our ontology as being-*as*-others, in which my freedom is expanded by others whom I need to move me from being-*as*-others-*as*-myself to a being-*as*-others-*for*-myself. But is this not simply a re-statement of Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist ethics? This question is addressed in the next section.

F. Simone de Beauvoir and Transpersonal Ontology

Despite her many similarities with Sartre, Beauvoir articulates a more optimistic and interpersonally constructive existentialist vision of the human condition. In *The Ethics of*

³³⁰ Heidegger, *Time*, 31.

Ambiguity she affirms an ethic with freedom as its highest goal, stating “In setting up its ends, freedom must put them in parentheses, confront them at each moment with that absolute end which it itself constitutes, and contest, in its own name, the means it uses to win itself.”³³¹

Specifically, the means used to secure my freedom must not restrict the freedom of *others*. In this context she explicitly lauds Christian and Kantian ethics, “which treats each man as an end.”³³² She summarizes her ethic “To put it positively, the precept will be to treat the other...as a freedom so that his end may be freedom...”³³³

However, this more sanguine vision of the human condition is based on a different interpretation of Sartre’s ontology. Consider her statement “Man, Sartre tells us is ‘a being who *makes himself* a lack of being *in order that there might be being*.’”³³⁴ The interpretation of Sartre’s ontology in this investigation is not that consciousness *makes itself* lack of being, but that consciousness *is* lack of being. Indeed, consciousness is continually seeking to remedy its lack of being by becoming an in-itself, a project Sartre explicitly states it cannot achieve; its lack of being is not a choice but an inherent and inescapable “structure” of its nothingness. It cannot be other than a lack of being.

Beauvoir asserts that consciousness chooses to make itself a lack of being so that it can be separated from being, which is required to bring the world into existence. Further, our

³³¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Open Roads Media, 1974), 144.

³³² Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 145

³³³ Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 154.

³³⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 10. Beauvoir attributes this quote to Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*; however, the page number is not cited and it could not be found using a phrase search of a pdf of *Being and Nothingness*, possibly because the translations do not match exactly. Nevertheless, Beauvoir’s interpretation is different from mine.

fundamental project is not to *become* a being, an in-itself, but to *disclose* being, which requires becoming a lack of being separate from being, which is achievable. Thus, consciousness is not intrinsically unhappy. She states, “There is an original type of attachment to being which is not the relationship of ‘wanting to be’ but rather ‘wanting to disclose being.’ Now here there is not failure, but rather success.”³³⁵

Accordingly, because consciousness’ lack of being is not a problem to solve, but a solution that permits its freedom, it does not advance a fundamental project of appropriation of being or others. Instead, its fundamental project is *disclosure* of being, specifically the meanings and significations created by others *within* which we choose to engage our projects. Beauvoir states “My freedom must not seek to trap being but to disclose it.”³³⁶ Moreover, the meanings consciousness, which has chosen itself as lack, discloses in the world that become part of my individual project are created by *others*. These meanings are the material from which I fashion my projects. She continues,

Thus, every man has to do with other men. The world in which he engages himself is a human world in which each object is penetrated with human meanings. It is a speaking world from which solicitations and appeals rise up. This means that, through this world, each individual can give his freedom a concrete content. He must disclose the world with the purpose of further

³³⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 11.

³³⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 30.

disclosure and by the same movement try to free men, by means of whom the world takes on meaning.³³⁷

This ontology provides the basis for more cooperative interpersonal relationships than those Sartre characterizes by shame, alienation, exploitation and guilt. However, Beauvoir's cognized phenomenology differs from that advanced in transpersonal ontology. First, transpersonal consciousness is neither a lack, nor capable of becoming a lack. This point returns us to Sartre's failed reduction; recall from Chapter 4 that Sartre used his full consciousness-*as-others* to claim that primordial consciousness is a nothingness. In the same vein Beauvoir re-conceives Sartre's ontology and claims that consciousness can choose to *become* a lack, an idea clearly derived from her consciousness that is Sartre-*as-herself*. The lack she claims consciousness must choose in order to achieve freedom and found the world is predicated on non-lack, on her content-ed consciousness that is Sartre-*as-herself*; the assertion is self-negating. Thus, when I deliberately engage the meanings of others to incorporate into my own project, I do so not as an achieved lack, but as a transpersonally content-ed being-*as-others-for-myself* that relies in some measure on the others that have constitutively constructed me, my being-*as-others-as-myself*. Beauvoir's achieved lack suffers the same pitfalls as Sartre's nothingness consciousness.

Beauvoir's ontology also differs from transpersonal ontology by locating the meanings created by others incorporated into my projects as existing *in the world* such

³³⁷ Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 79.

that they require disclosure, which is the primordial teleology of consciousness as it seeks to enact its freedom. As noted earlier, transpersonal ontology agrees that disclosure of novel possibilities is the key feature of freedom expansion. However, the possibilities to be disclosed are not created by others that I encounter in the world to incorporate into my projects as Beauvoir asserts; instead they are encountered in my being-*as*-others-*as*-myself that I then project into the world and discover in my choices, like the painter with a fly on his glasses. Thus, I need others to be free so that they can expand my freedom not so that they can create new meanings that I can disclose, but to help me see the possibilities *I* create as-others-*as*-myself. Perhaps said differently, contrary to Beauvoir, others do not populate the world with meanings derived from their lack for my projects; they help me to see how *I* populate the world with meanings derived from my being-*as*-others-*as*-myself that limit the possibilities of my projects so that I can devise new possibilities and thereby expand my freedom.

A transpersonally content-ed ontology also provides the basis for a different cognization of bad faith and authenticity, to which I now turn.

G. Sartre's Bad Faith and Authenticity Reinterpreted

Sartre's bad faith and authenticity rely on an individuated nothingness consciousness and the conception of freedom it entails. By contrast a thickly content-ed transpersonal ontology *re-*cognizes the phenomenology of bad faith and authenticity. Recall the two types of freedom, that of creating possibilities from which to choose and then making unconditioned choices within

those possibilities. Denying the freedom of our unconditioned choices in either the past or the present is a freedom rejecting self-deception of bad faith consistent with transpersonal ontology. However, the deeper freedom by which consciousness *creates new possibilities* to confront becomes particularly relevant to re-interpreting bad faith and authenticity.

As conceived by transpersonal ontology, bad faith involves denying my primordial ontology of being-*as-others-as-myself* in favor of exclusively privileging my derived unique consciousness positioned as being-*as-others-for-myself*. In bad faith I conceive myself as a self-founding autonomous consciousness *for-myself* rather than a constitutively constructed being-*as-others*. This self-deception denies that the situations and their possibilities that I create *manifest* my essence as a being-*as-others*, rather than being a spontaneous *ex nihilo* choice *independent of* others. Denying my possibilities are created by my content-ed others-*as-myself* consciousness in favor of an autonomous spontaneous nothingness consciousness denies my essence as a being-*as-others* and the necessary role others play in my freedom expansion.

Thus, bad faith is ontological self-deception involving enrapturement by my unique consciousness positioned as being-*as-others-for-myself*, which denies my being-*as-others-as-myself* or my epistemic need for others' insight to create new possibilities. Further, in bad faith where I believe I exist and create situations *ex nihilo* absent others, I assume a posture exclusively *for-myself* that confronts others as obstacles to overcome or resources to be exploited, as if the advancement of my unconditioned choices is the core of freedom rather than its superficial expression. By denying my being-*as-others* I avoid confronting what I am, the possibilities I create as-others, and the responsibility for changing my possibilities with the assistance of others, all of which are the conditions for the expansion of my freedom to create

new possibilities beyond the unconditioned choices I currently confront. Like Sartre's bad faith, transpersonally re-cognized bad faith is self-deception that restricts my freedom, though through a different process associated with a different ontology.

Further, in bad faith the primary focus on unconditioned choices leads to the dynamics of the look, in which the need to show up as a subject and confront the Other as a subject are denied. I deceive myself into believing I no longer need the Other to expand my freedom for new possibilities, and resist showing up as a subject or confronting the Other as a subject because it risks curtailing my unconditioned choices that I mistakenly believe are the core of my freedom, rather than acknowledging that possibility creation is the core, which requires others as complete subjects for its potentiation.

By contrast authenticity acknowledges the deeper dimension of my freedom, which entails recognizing that I create my possibilities as-others rather than *ex nihilo*, and therefore need others for my freedom as *re-constructive* constituents and insight into the others-*as-myself* that I am. This need of others for my freedom entails that they are confronted as full subjects, whom I confront as a full subject myself, all of which is predicated on acknowledging my basic ontology of others-*as-myself*. The core of my freedom and authenticity then becomes not the enactment of my unconditioned choices emanating from an autonomous nothingness consciousness, but recognition of my most basic ontology as being-*as-others* that creates my possibilities, and requires others for the freedom expansion they promise.

H. Sartre's Anguish, Anxiety, and Isolation Reinterpreted

Much of the analysis so far depends on freedom experienced as desirable such that we are motivated to show up as subjects encountering others as subjects, which is another way of saying we are motivated to affirm rather than deny our transpersonal ontology. By contrast, recall that Sartre indicates we are condemned by our freedom that creates anxiety from which we flee, awareness of which is anguish that must be endured alone.

However, the phenomenology of freedom is cognized differently by a thickly content-ed transpersonal ontology. First, as argued above the ego is not entirely fictive. Instead it is an attempted articulation of content-ed transpersonal consciousness that can be evaluated by its phenomenological verisimilitude. Second, recall the two meanings of freedom that have been advanced: unconditioned choices *within* possibilities created by consciousness and the capacity of consciousness to create *novel* possibilities. The latter has been considered the deeper meaning of freedom by which projects, and their situations and accompanying possibilities are revised. Thus, a phenomenologically verisimilar ego can develop the creation of new possibilities by revealing *to me* my being-*as-others-as-myself* as an object for my reflecting, which permits me to assume my being-*as-others-for-myself* that expands my freedom. Rather than limiting my freedom, a phenomenologically verisimilar ego promises to enhance it.

While agreement with Sartre has been noted that my capacity for unconditioned choice within possibilities my consciousness creates are unrestricted, they do not occur absent *any* basis. As argued throughout this investigation, possibilities do not emerge from a nothingness consciousness, but from a thickly content-ed transpersonal being-*as-others*. Though my being-

as-others does not *compel* any specific choice, it does provide contextual *grounds* from which the choice emerges, and resources by which to consider the choice. The choice is not made in a vacuum of nothingness consciousness, but within the human world that transpersonally constitutes me. *I* must choose, but to assert *I* make the choice spontaneously and entirely alone would seem to be an over-simplification.

Indeed, the challenge within transpersonal ontology is not some unrestricted spontaneity that risks violating my moral prohibitions or fundamental project, the possibility of which manifests anguish. On the contrary, the risk is being stifled by my being-*as-others-as-myself* from which I struggle to emerge as a being-*as-others-for-myself*. Said differently, the anxiety and anguish I experience derive not from unbridled spontaneity, but from the experience of being trapped among painful or frightening possibilities I can neither abide nor escape. I am not victimized by a spontaneous unbounded consciousness; I am trapped by an inability to conceive choices beyond those I find in my being-*as-others-as-myself*. The risk is less my individual spontaneity, which is relevant to the interpretation of freedom as unconditioned choice, and more my oppression as a transpersonally constructed being-*as-others* that cannot escape into being-*for-myself* needed for the freedom of new possibilities. Further, the truly revolutionary choices I might make, such as abandoning or significantly revising my fundamental project, are almost certainly going to be made in an interpersonal context, given others are required to identify novel possibilities that constitute such fundamental changes.

Thus, both unconditioned choices within known possibilities conferred by my being-*as-others-as-myself* and novel possibilities deriving from my being-*as-others-for-myself* occur from within an interpersonal context that is my transpersonal ontology. I do not decide entirely alone.

This cognization does not resolve all of the anguish and anxiety associated with freedom that Sartre describes, as any weighty decision reveals in mundane experience. However, it does attenuate anguish, anxiety, and isolation by placing my choices in the interpersonal context that is my transpersonal ontology.

I. Sartre's Meaninglessness and Nausea Reinterpreted

In contrast to Sartre's gratuitous absurd human condition manifested as nausea, the human condition arising from a transpersonal ontology is entirely different. First, transpersonal consciousness is a continuously constructed by-others fullness that confronts and creates objects *through* its being-as-others, and which seeks to enhance its freedom by reflecting on itself or *re-creating* itself so that it can become a being-as-others-*for-itself*. Therefore, the meaning I experience, Sartre's "fixed movement of transcendence,"³³⁸ is at least partially, if not primarily, *discovered* in my being-as-others-as-myself, which is the "Other" that is "me." My transpersonal consciousness created by others not only deliberately *re-creates itself* in relationship with others as explained above, it also *discovers* itself and its meaning in relationship with others who confer insight into what I am as-others, which is possible because my subjectivity is thickly content-ed rather than a nothingness.

Hence, as noted earlier contrary to Sartre's claim *essence* precedes existence, and is *discoverable* as a source of meaning, a "fixed movement of transcendence"³³⁹ that is others-as-

³³⁸ Sartre, *Being*, 452.

³³⁹ Sartre, *Being*, 452.

myself, rather than exclusively, or even primarily, created by me *ex nihilo*. The world I create and then confront, to include its meanings, is not generated by my unbounded choices as a nothingness consciousness, but by my being-*as-others-as-myself*. Thus, I do not *create* the world from nothing; I *discover* the world and its meaning as created by me-*as-others*. The next step in which I *create* meaning as-others-*for-myself* also emerges inevitably from an interpersonal context given my need of others for its full realization. Nevertheless, there remains some moment of choice independent of others that conduces to anxiety like Sartre notes. However, my autonomy from others in my being-*as-others-for-myself* is not the *ex nihilo* act Sartre conceives, but always in some measure founded on others-*as-myself* that provides grounds and resources for decisions.

Still, a transpersonal cognization of consciousness remains in one sense gratuitous; it fails to articulate a metaphysical or divine significance to human life. Kitaro Nishida observes, “A world of pure meaning and value is thought of only in so far as the being which has its place in consciousness mirrors the content of something trans-conscious.”³⁴⁰ No transcendental consciousness (“trans-conscious”) is advanced. This is not to deny necessarily metaphysical significance to human life, but arguing for it would move beyond mundane consciousness that is the subject of this investigation’s effort to discern what it is like to be a human. On the other hand, a transpersonal consciousness is anything but gratuitous given it is constructed by and diasporatically exists among others; it is thus entirely and inescapably *of* and within the human world where I reside.

³⁴⁰ Kitaro Nishida, *Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness*, trans. Robert Schinzer, (Pantianos Classics: USA, 1958), 49.

Further, although I did not construct the consciousness that I am as a being-*as-others-as-myself*, it would be misleading to assert that this consciousness that I am is entirely contingent. On the contrary, my consciousness did not spontaneously upsurge from the in-itself by its own nothingness, but was constructed by others, often deliberately in their rearing efforts that are most fundamentally constitutive of the consciousness that I am. The deliberate actions of others' content-ed consciousnesses constitutively constructed my consciousness by purposefully guiding me into the human world, and thereby imparting meanings to my being-*as-others-as-myself*. Even when I move into being-*as-others-for-myself*, I do so in relationship with others that necessarily entails meanings given I must show-up as a transcendence and preserve the other as a transcendence.

Consequently, from a metaphysical or divine perspective my consciousness may remain gratuitous and without meaning. In a different, but perhaps no less important sense I remain firmly ensconced in the human world where my being and the world I confront is constitutively constructed by others who *confer* meaning to my being-*as-others-as-myself* that I discover as-myself, and my being-*as-others-for-myself* that I create through my relationship with others.

Of course, the being-*as-others-as-myself* that I discover may be worthily revealed as nausea. For example, I recall a New York mobster's disgust that he had been "socialized" into the mafia, which led to 18 years in prison. "A waste!" he exclaimed. He discovered his being-*as-others-as-himself* to be contemptible. Similarly, a drug dealer expressed his fondest wish that he be bound and beaten for the choices he had made at variance with the values with which he had been reared by his family. His being-*as-others-for-himself* was revealed by an experience worse than nausea, one worthy of expiation via torture. But as noted in the section on guilt,

nausea that reveals my being-*as*-others is ontical rather than ontological, which of course creates a very different human condition. And this different human condition makes love possible, as described in the next section.

J. Sartre's Love Reinterpreted

As richly argued, a thickly content-ed by others transpersonal consciousness is no longer a lack of being, but experiences lack by denying its essence as-others in favor of privileging its uniqueness and being-*as*-others-*for*-itself as primordial. Accordingly, its project to solve the “problem of being”³⁴¹ is that of realizing phenomenologically its being *as*-others rather than remedying its lack; therefore, appropriation no longer occupies transpersonal consciousness as a primordial telos, and has been revealed as contrary to its freedom expansion conceived as identifying new possibilities. Therefore, the appropriative dynamics found in love relationships founded by an individuated nothingness consciousness ignorant of our being-*as*-others no longer need monopolize our attention, and can be substituted by other dynamics more phenomenologically verisimilar and congruent with transpersonal ontology.

Consider that love has impressed humans for as long as recorded history for its beauty, pleasure, and profundity. Plato's Phaedrus concludes his remarks in the *Symposium* by affirming “Thus, then I claim that Eros is eldest and most honored of gods and most authoritative in respect

³⁴¹ Sartre, *Being*, 596.

of possession of virtue and happiness for men both living and dead.”³⁴² Recall that this investigation conceives fraternal, familial, and romantic love as *affection and concern for another greater than for oneself*. This entails that love at its core is not enlightened self-interest or contractual negotiation. The concern for the other greater than oneself distinguishes love from other relationships by its desire to give without return, or at least give *more* than it expects in return, which incurs uncompensated hardship, pain, loss and the like upon the giver.

Hence, self-sacrifice for the Other becomes one of love’s most revealing manifestations and distinguishes it from other relationships based on self-interest.³⁴³ This view of love is canonized by Jesus in the Gospel of John where he states “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”³⁴⁴ Love conjoins affection *and* sacrifice, and thus pleasure *and* pain. Virtually every human activity can be understood along an antipodal continuum of pleasure on one end and pain on the other, except for love where the two often merge.³⁴⁵ For example, consider a favor performed on behalf of a loved one that incurs an uncompensated cost. How often do we say “I am happy to do it?” Though often stated in a perfunctory manner to facilitate future cooperation, it also reveals the deeper truth that in loving another we commonly

³⁴² Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato, Volume 2, The Symposium*, trans. R.E. Allen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991). 120

³⁴³ Self-interest here is not considered synonymous with selfishness or egoism, but is simply the pursuit of one’s own best interest.

³⁴⁴ John 15:13, NIV.

³⁴⁵ Certainly there are other continua of human motivation, though it is difficult to deny that pleasure and pain, as conceived by each individual, are omnipresent considerations. Perhaps one might consider an analogous continuum with meaning on the one end and meaninglessness on the other, whereby the pursuit of meaning concomitantly induces pain such that the pain attendant to the meaning seeking is chosen, rather than the pleasure associated with the meaningless course of action. Possibly one could argue that the suffered meaningful action has a *net* pleasurable effect greater than the rejected pleasurable *meaningless* action, which renders the essence of the chosen act pleasure seeking in disguise. However, these types of questions are set aside in this investigation.

sacrifice ourselves willingly, even happily. *My* sacrifice for the Other makes *me* happy; by virtue of my love for the Other, my pain becomes my pleasure.

For example, consider a mother's love for her child that leads to a life-sacrificing act on behalf of the child. Of course, a mother's love for her child is only one example of such a love relationship, as illustrated by Jesus' statement about friends and Plato's about lovers in the *Symposium*. However, maternal love may be the most powerfully revealing. Viewed from a spectator perspective, a mother's life-sacrificing act appears to trade her life for that of her child, which she values more than her own. This is the common interpretation of the natural attitude that tacitly affirms subject-other dualism. But the spectator perspective fails to adequately capture the mother's *phenomenology*, which is that the performance of this act is not experienced *only* as a sacrifice, an interpretation that would exclusively privilege subject-other ontology that this investigation challenges. A feature of her phenomenology of the life-sacrificing act is her awareness of her ontological unity with her child. Specifically, her consciousness is so fully constituted by, so thoroughly identified and interpenetrating with the child's consciousness, that ontologically it is *as if* there is only *one* transpersonal consciousness. As noted in the previous chapter, the peculiar ontology of consciousness is such that she is both individuated and unified with her child, and to fully understand her phenomenology during such an act requires that both dimensions be considered, the sacrifice for her child who is other than herself *and* the unity of the child and herself.

Thus, the mother does not save her child *entirely* at the expense of herself because in some primordial ontological sense there is no "child" and "herself." Instead, she and the child comprise a peculiar transpersonal consciousness on whose behalf she acts to further the child's

consciousness, which might be best characterized as the child-*as-the-mother*. Of course the mother's freedom and individuation as a being-*as-others-for-herself* is sacrificed upon her bodily death, and as such the sacrifice identified by the spectator is accurate. However, there is also her consciousness-*as-the-child* that persists *as* the child, and will develop *as-the-child* as the child's consciousness is constitutively constructed by-others and *as-others-for-herself* through time after the mother's death.

But perhaps a mother's life-sacrificing choice on behalf of her child moves us too far from the mundane experience on which this investigation is founded. Consider instead the second portion of the definition of love "*concern for an other*." To deeply love someone commonly reveals a phenomenology of concern beyond duty or other abstract dicta. The concern I experience with respect to the Other rises and falls as I become aware of his pain or pleasure. The Other's pain and pleasure, as I become aware of it, is not just *known* by me, or *vicariously experienced* by me, but somehow *directly experienced* by me-*as-the-other* that I love, *as-myself*. The Other's pain or pleasure is mine to the extent that the mutual constructive constituents of consciousness that transpersonally constitute "me" and the "other" are activated. Said differently "I" experience the "other's" pain given I am being-*as-the-other* rather than separated from the other. At the same time, the pain between us is never entirely identical given the idiosyncratic constellation of constituents and their recombinations that individuates each of our consciousnesses.

This phenomenology of love in which my experience mirrors that of the other occurs because I *am* the other, a being-*as-the-other*. Thus, the ontology love discloses is analogous to the ontology of freedom that anguish discloses for Sartre. Recall his statement that the "essential

structure” of “our consciousness of freedom” is anguish.³⁴⁶ Transpersonal ontology holds that there is a specific consciousness of my being-*as*-others, which is love, and that love is the “essential structure” of my consciousness of being-*as*-others. Said differently love most distinctly manifests our primordial ontology *as*-others.

Further, consider the transpersonal ontology revealed by my suffering contemporaneous and identical with that of the Other whom I love contrasted with Sartre’s phenomenology of Pierre’s suffering. Sartre’s inability to *share* Pierre’s pain, or alternatively stated, the absence of his intersubjective experience synonymous with Pierre’s, is inevitable in light of his ontology. His cognized phenomenology in *Being and Nothingness* and *The Transcendence of the Ego* conceives an isolated individuated consciousness that would seem to permit little alternative given the “incommunicability and inwardness of consciousness.”³⁴⁷ At best such an isolated consciousness can only reach the Other via *analogical knowledge*, which is how Sartre describes Pierre. The pain of the Other cannot be “lived;” it is only *known*.³⁴⁸ This is the ontological foundation for Sartre’s human relationships as “frontal opposition” and the dynamics that appear to exclude the possibility of love as defined in this investigation.

K. Sartre’s Death Distress Reinterpreted

Like Sartre’s other discontents, a transpersonally constituted being-*as*-others consciousness reinterprets his three dimensions of death distress. Consider the revised ontology of human

³⁴⁶ Sartre, *Being*, 70-71.

³⁴⁷ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 39-40.

³⁴⁸ Sartre, *Transcendence*, 39; *Being*, 436.

identity this investigation advances. Each consciousness is not an individuated bounded entity interacting with, or even interdependent among other such entities. Instead, the person is conceived as a consciousness diasporatically distributed among other persons. “Each” consciousness is transpersonal, that is as-others, rather than an enclosed subjectivity. Of course, as argued above, there *is* a dimension of consciousness that individuates itself by its unique combination of constituents and by becoming a being-*as-others-for-itself*. But these autonomous dimensions of consciousness are derived from its most fundamental ontology that is being-*as-others*. A transpersonal ontology that reconceives human identity diasporatically distributed among others then leads to a different meaning of death.

Returning to Sartre’s first source of death distress, transpersonal ontology does not alter the absurdity of death, its often perplexing and unpredictable timing, and lack of apparent meaning. In this sense, death remains astonishingly gratuitous, the force of which can hardly be overstated given COVID19, which shocks us by its very existence that starkly illustrates what Butler aptly deems “the precariousness of life.”³⁴⁹ She observes “One would need to hear the face as it speaks in something other than language to know the precariousness of life that is at stake.”³⁵⁰ But life is more than simply *precarious*. It can also be undeniably *absurd* by its apparently gratuitous termination exemplified by the capricious mortality of COVID19. Some healthy and vigorous people succumb and some frail elderly people survive. Adding to the absurdity of COVID19, in what we like to consider a rational universe, is the presence of long terms ill effects that are not strongly associated with the severity of disease. But perhaps most

³⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, (Verso: London, 2004), 142. The “face” is a reference to the work of Emmanuel Levinas. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

³⁵⁰ Butler, *Life*, 151.

absurd is the very existence of pathogens like Covid19 that are invisible in their existence and transmission, and phenomenologically arise *ex nihilo* independent of human aims or explanations. Indeed, contrary to many dangers the phenomenology of most pathogens is little more than an abstraction until millions die, which testifies to the absurd quality of death that Sartre describes and which is not altered by a transpersonal ontology.

However, Sartre's second source of death distress, that of projects, can be revised. Certainly upon my death I can no longer make choices that revise the meanings of my past and future for *me*; my being-*as-others-for-myself* is terminated. Nevertheless, my consciousness as a constructive constituent of others continues as-*them*, and the meaning I had for them *as-them* continues to be revised by *them* as incorporated by *their* unfolding projects as a constituent. Beauvoir expresses a similar point stating "...the death of an individual is not a failure if it is integrated into a project which surpasses the limits of life, the substance of this life being outside of the individual himself, in the class, in the socialist State..."³⁵¹ But I can make a statement stronger than Beauvoir's. The diasporatic transpersonal subject that I am as-others and is others-*as-me* cannot be *other than* "integrated into a project which surpasses the limits of life."³⁵² Further, the constituents that are me as-others never were and never will be just *objects* for others as Sartre claims. Recall that transpersonal consciousness is only constructed by other consciousnesses confronted *as consciousness*, that is as a subjectivity, which is what I am as-others. Therefore, the constituent that I am *as-them* is always my subjectivity and remains my subjectivity-*as-them* after my death, just as it was during my life.

³⁵¹ Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 111.

³⁵² Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 111.

Said differently, in death the transpersonal diasporatic consciousness that I *was*, and continue to *be* as-others escapes my grasp as my being-*as-others-for-myself*, but remains as-others who continue to re-interpret the consciousness that I was, and which *constitutes* them, as they move forward with their projects as-others, part of which is “me” as a subject. Thus, by my being-*as-others*, my consciousness in some literal sense continues to exist and participate in their projects after my death. Indeed, “my” consciousness as a diasporatic entity is not limited or fixed by incorporation into their projects during my life or after my death, but *enlarged* transpersonally by being-*as-them*, which encompasses me as a constituent of their consciousness. By being a constituent of their consciousness, my ontology is expanded and extended beyond my being-*as-others-for-myself* and persists upon my death.

Thus, the living with whom I once interacted do not *prey* on me, they *are* me, in my life and death. Upon death I am not “prey for the living”³⁵³ who confer upon me a meaning that fixes my past and future any more than I was a prey for the living in life when I showed-up as a subject and was confronted as a subject to potentiate my freedom. Instead, I remain a constructive constituent that continues to exist most prominently in those with whom I was closest in life, and as such was a pre-eminent constructional constituent that they carry into their projects *as-themselves*.

Of course, in death some might prey upon me as Sartre describes, just as some might prey upon me in life as a resource to overcome their self-created coefficients of adversity that limit the enactment of their unconditioned choices, rather than engaging my subjectivity that promises to expand their freedom by helping them identify new possibilities. However, such an outcome

³⁵³ Sartre, *Being*, 695.

would be ontical rather than ontological; what appears most ontologically fundamental is the continued existence of “my” consciousness as-others that persists and instantiates “me” in their projects in different ways over time. To illustrate this point, consider the continued and changing influence one experiences from an other, with whom one had a strong relationship, long after the other’s death. The other persists *as-me*, and rather than being a fixed object used in my projects is a continuously changing subjectivity that is me as my subjectivity as it continues to interact and unfold with others and the world. Given the transpersonal ontology of consciousness it could not be otherwise.

On the other hand, the unique combination of constructive constituents that are “me” and that can become my being-*as-others-for-myself* comes to an end upon my death. This is an unpleasant reality, but is mitigated by awareness that my most basic being does not end given its diasporatic distribution among others, as-others; indeed, the catastrophe of death emanates from misunderstanding my ontological essence as individuated based on the natural attitude. To assert that my consciousness is entirely extinguished upon the death of my body again mistakes my being-*as-others-for-myself*, or the private perspective I have upon my uniquely constructed consciousness, for my primordial ontology, which is being-*as-others* that persists as me-*as-others*.

Those seeking a divine after-life or other transcendental meaning for death may argue that this simply relocates the absurdity of my death to the absurdity of the transpersonal consciousness of which I am a constructive constituent, and which will presumably end with the extinction of humans. The absurdity of death has not been eliminated; life has simply been extended by which the final reckoning is delayed. This point is acknowledged. However, as

noted above this investigation seeks to articulate what it is like to be a human from a mundane perspective, and as such does not address metaphysical or religious possibilities. But conceding that no after-life or divine purpose exists, the resolution of death distress proposed here relies upon the ultimate value of the *human* world, and the relationships we have with others as the source of at least adequate, if not ultimate, meaning.

VI. Chapter 6: Conclusions, Implications, and Afterthoughts

A. Summary of Discontents and Ontology

The effort to resolve Sartre's discontents and articulate a sanguine human condition that carries phenomenological verisimilitude has been long and involved. Perhaps the most important conclusion has been that discontent is not intrinsic to our ontology as *human* beings, but only one ontical possibility among many; our discontent is largely gratuitous and chosen rather than necessary.

The ontical possibility of discontent emanates from the misconceived individuated nothingness consciousness Sartre articulates. This consciousness gives rise to intra-personal discontents of meaninglessness, nausea, anguish, anxiety, isolation, bad faith, death distress and lack by leaving us bereft of internal resources. We are adrift in absolute freedom without purpose or guidance; this is the freedom that condemns. By contrast, a transpersonally content-ed consciousness grounds us in our being-*as*-others, which either resolves or mitigates our discontents by placing them within an intersubjective ontology that provides resources and guidance, and can diasporatically distribute our fear and pain among others, rather than existing them alone. Furthermore, our consciousness content-ed by our being-*as*-others re-conceives inter-personal discontents of shame, alienation, exploitation, and guilt, and renders love possible. Others are no longer objects to be used or overcome, but subjects essential to conceive new possibilities that expand our freedom.

Sadly, Sartre's roster of discontents, particularly the intra-personal ones, could hardly be a more accurate description of the current American moment where they are almost universally conceived and/or experienced as endemic mental health problems. This should not be a surprise in a culture excessively weighted in favor of our being-*as-others-for-ourselves* where our most fundamental ontology as being-*as-others* is considered either an obstacle or afterthought to our freedom. Moreover, the prescription often proffered for our distress is *more* individuation or individuation absent forethought of the consequences for our basic ontology as-others. But perhaps these remarks are better left for a slightly different investigation.

By contrast transpersonal ontology births a human condition in which we are not condemned to be free and alone, but exist diasporatically as-others who can potentiate our freedom. Contrary to Sartre's claim in *No Exit*, the other is not hell; the other frees me, expands me, and is me.³⁵⁴ Conforming my actions with the realization that I am the Other, and the Other is me, and that both need to present themselves and interact with one another as a subjectivity is the basis for living an authentically human life that conduces to my freedom and that of others. On this rendering, Sartre's discontents largely derive from ignorance of our ontology and the choices consequent to that ignorance. Sartrean discontents that we commonly recognize are not the result of malice, but mistaking our uniqueness and being-*as-others-for-ourselves* as our most basic ontology; this is our fall from grace or what Beauvoir calls our "flaw within the manthing."³⁵⁵ Of course, this mistaken ontology characteristic of the natural attitude is not easy to dislodge, and might offer a social purpose for philosophers able to articulate it more clearly and persuasively than done here.

³⁵⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *No exit, and three other plays*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

³⁵⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 9.

Certainly, resolving Sartre's discontents with transpersonal ontology does not eliminate all suffering, but only those discontents resulting from ignorance of our ontology as-others. Echoing Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud's statement that psychoanalysis promises to turn "neurotic misery into ordinary unhappiness," transpersonal ontology fails to resolve much fear and pain.³⁵⁶ However, the "ordinary unhappiness" we inevitably confront is neither shouldered alone, nor simply known by others analogically.³⁵⁷ Instead it is diasporatically distributed among others whose consciousnesses I am and are me; the fear and pain are distributed among us, and thereby attenuated. Indeed, this is readily experienced by the emotion regulating effect talking with others about our fear and pain commonly achieves. Simply telling others about our "ordinary unhappiness" appreciably diminishes it, as witnessed in the success of supportive and non-directive psychotherapies.³⁵⁸

But where does a transpersonal ontology leave Sartre's project? Recall his twin goals: an ontology of absolute freedom and an epistemology of pure confrontation with objects, both of which he sought to preserve by advancing an individuated nothingness consciousness. As noted, Sartre's freedom as unconditioned choices is preserved; however, the deeper freedom identified in this investigation as the creation of new possibilities assisted by others is not without limits. Others may help me to conceive new possibilities, but they can only do so, whether by conferring insight or providing themselves as *re-constructive* constituents, within the limits of *their* consciousness as-others. Thus, we are not completely free to devise every possibility that

³⁵⁶ Josef Breuer and Freud, Sigmund. *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. by James Strachey, (New York: Basic Books, 1957), 305.

³⁵⁷ Breuer, *Studies*, 305.

³⁵⁸ Breuer, *Studies*, 305.

exists within the possible arrangements of the in-itself, and as such there are limits to our freedom at any given moment despite the best efforts of ourselves and others.

Similarly, because consciousness is not a nothingness, but a content-ed being as-others that confronts objects, pure apprehension of objects absent encroachments by consciousness becomes impossible, and complete knowledge unattainable. We are again in Kant's phenomenal-noumenal dualism that would appear to foreclose metaphysical knowledge. Said differently, we confront being *as* and *through human* consciousness that is our being-*as*-others; we can only know and live in a universe humanized by our being-*as*-others consciousness that confronts the world.

Moreover, Sartre's contingent gratuitous vision of existence, to include *human* being is not entirely redeemed. Transpersonal ontology neither posits, nor rests on some ultimate meaning or purpose to our lives. Certainly as Chapter 5 argues, it is not likely that our consciousness, either as-others-*as*-myself or as-others-*for*-myself is entirely gratuitous given both are deeply contexted by our being-*as*-others. Indeed, though I can *create* meaning as being-*as*-others-*for*-myself with the assistance of others, the majority of meaning I encounter will likely be *discovered* as being-*as*-others-*as*-myself. Nevertheless, this meaning as-others, whether created or discovered remains in some ultimate sense gratuitous; it is still a purely human creation. The meaning of our lives then becomes less absurd by being embedded among and created by others with whom we are ontologically connected and share the world. But this simply re-locates the gratuity of our existence from the level of the individual to the species. For many of us this may suffice, for others perhaps not. Finally this investigation closes with some

reflections on the broader philosophical implications of transpersonal ontology, to which I now turn.

B. Other Philosophical Implications of Transpersonal Ontology

Echoing Zlatev et. al.'s empirical claim that consciousness is intersubjectively shared and fundamental to our humanity, transpersonal ontology challenges subject-other dualism that characterizes Western philosophy. Indeed, the near ubiquity of subject-other dualism is what led Zlatev et. al. to characterize their challenge as “bold.”³⁵⁹ But at this juncture in Western philosophy, is it so bold?

Nearly 100 years ago Heidegger characterized subject-*object* dualism as “superficial, formal” where there “lurks as much ‘truth’ as vacuity.”³⁶⁰ Consider the passage below expressing these complaints reinterpreted, such that substituting his italicized key terms with bracketed bolded terms expresses the problem of subject-*other* dualism.

It would be unintelligible for *Being-in-the-world* [**others’ subjectivity**] to remain totally veiled from view, especially since Dasein has at its disposal an understanding of its own *Being* [**subjectivity**], no matter how indefinitely this understanding may function. But no sooner was the ‘*phenomenon of knowing the*

³⁵⁹ Zlatev, *Shared*, 2-3.

³⁶⁰ Heidegger, *Time*, 86-87.

world’ [**phenomenon of knowing the Other**] grasped than it got interpreted in a ‘superficial’, formal manner. The evidence for this is the procedure (still customary today) of setting up knowing as a ‘*relation between subject and Object*’ [**relation between subject and other**] - a procedure in which there lurks as much ‘truth’ as vacuity. But subject and *Object* [**Other**] do not coincide with Dasein and the *world* [**Other**].³⁶¹

The next step in challenging subject-*object* dualism would appear to be challenging subject-*other* dualism using an ontology of being-*as-others*. On this rendering, transpersonal ontology transforms the problem of the Other into the problem of the Me. Consider Sartre’s claims with respect to the problem of the Other,

...ontology is powerless to overcome it...But even if we could succeed in making the Other’s existence share in the apodictic certainty of the *cogito* - *i.e.*, of my own existence - we should not thereby “surpass” the Other toward any inter-monad totality. So long as consciousnesses exist, the separation and conflict of consciousnesses will remain; we shall simply have discovered their foundation and their true terrain.³⁶²

The present investigation turns this problem upside down. Ontology is not “powerless to overcome”³⁶³ the problem of the Other, but finds the Other intrinsic to our

³⁶¹ Heidegger, *Time*, 86-87.

³⁶² Sartre, *Being*, 329.

³⁶³ Sartre, *Being*, 329.

ontology and therefore impossible to avoid; the “separation” of consciousnesses are not the result of ontology, but of *misapprehending* ontology by the hypnotization of our natural attitude by our unique consciousness regarded positionally as being-*as-others-for*-ourselves; and the “conflict of consciousnesses” that limits our freedom is replaced by a transpersonal consciousness that requires the Other to expand our freedom.³⁶⁴

Finally, the “apodictic certainty”³⁶⁵ of Descartes *cogito* becomes “*I think*; therefore an *Other* exists.” The other is not confronted *after* I discover myself existing, but is the *precondition* for the most basic activity of my consciousness from which my *I* emerges to confront the Other; to say that *I* exist presupposes the existence of other consciousnesses that have constitutively constructed mine. Thus Beauvoir’s claim “It is rather well known that the fact of being a subject is a universal fact and that the Cartesian *cogito* expresses both the most individual experience and the most objective truth” appears to conflate two disparate assertions.³⁶⁶ To affirm “the fact of being a subject” does not entail an “individual experience” as Beauvoir claims, but rather confirms a transpersonal experience. To what extent this truth becomes apodictic would appear to depend on the extent to which the natural attitude that assumes subject-other ontology can be replaced with a more basic phenomenology absent this assumption.

Therefore, Sartre’s “inter-monad totality” that merges me with the Other becomes not impossible to achieve, but impossible to avoid.³⁶⁷ The puzzle that emerges from this

³⁶⁴ Sartre, *Being*, 329.

³⁶⁵ Sartre, *Being*, 329.

³⁶⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 17.

³⁶⁷ Sartre, *Being*, 329.

transformed *cogito* is not the existence of the Other, but the existence of myself apart from the Other, the derivation of my being-*as-others-for-myself* from my being-*as-others-as-myself* and the manner in which other consciousnesses constitutively construct mine. Chapter 4 attempts to address this question and the success of that effort can be determined by the reader. The core point is that the investigation of our ontology is given a new direction, the results of which will unfold over time.

Furthermore, transpersonal consciousness advances a paradoxical and exceedingly peculiar formal ontology at complete variance with that of substances. This ontology was noted in Chapter 4 where consciousness was articulated as transpersonal, yet individuated; emanating from and immanent with others, yet transcending others; both private and as-others; and an individualized totality that is me and a diasporatic plurality as-others. Some of these paradoxes may be only apparent and thereby escape Aristotle's Law of Noncontradiction. However, some may be irreconcilable contradictions that should not unduly trouble us given consciousness' peculiar formal ontology, particularly if they articulate a high level of phenomenological verisimilitude. In fact, such contradictions might be understood not as problems with the theory but as clues to revealing the "hard problem" of consciousness that has been recalcitrant to resolution.³⁶⁸

Indeed, a different formal ontology absent Aristotelian laws of thought might be entirely necessary to effect Nagel's revolution "as radical as relativity theory..."³⁶⁹ Such a re-thinking of consciousness again raises questions of language, in particular the extent to which language

³⁶⁸ Chalmers, *Character*, 5.

³⁶⁹ Nagel, *Mind*, 42.

derived from perception of substances has molded our primordial consciousness to conform conceptually to the formal ontology of substances from which we struggle to escape. Language derived from substance ontology may do more than simply impede communication about consciousness, it may warp our thinking about consciousness based on an ontology incommensurate with it. Thus, the method by which we seek to solve the mystery may preclude its resolution. If this were so, then presumably novel concepts based on non-verbal language might be required to approach the problem and communicate the findings. What such a method and its concepts might be is beyond this investigation, but may be analogized with branches of physics that could not be understood until new mathematical tools were devised. Hopefully, this investigation that has sought to articulate an ontology that does not entail Sartre's discontent has advanced Nagel's aspiration in some small way.

Lastly, recall that this investigation sought to advance a description of the human condition by examining our subjective experience; specifically it advanced an ontology of consciousness different from Sartre's in an attempt to make space for human happiness. The success criterion for the investigation was identified as phenomenological verisimilitude defined as articulation of our subjective being that is some primordial manner known, but not previously named or described. Each reader will have to evaluate if the ontology of consciousness proposed by this investigation satisfies this criterion.

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