

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1968)

La Nausee (1938) translated in 1949 as *Nausea*

Le mur (1939) translated as *The wall*

Reflexions sur la question juive (1946) translated in 1948 as *Anti-semite and Jew*

Baudelaire (1947) translated in 1950 as *Baudelaire*

Huis clos and *Les Mouches* (1947) translated in 1949 as *No exit* and *The flies (plays)*

Le diable et le Bon Dieu (1951) translated in 1952 as *Lucifer and the Lord*

Saint Genet: Comedien et martyre (1952) translated in 1963 as *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*

The transcendence of the ego (1936/1937) *La Transcendence de l'ego*

The emotions: outline of a theory (1939/1948) *Esquisse d'une theorie des emotions*

The psychology of imagination (1940/1948) *L'Imagination*(1936) *L'Imaginaire* (1940)

Being and nothingness (1943/1956) *Etre et le neant*

Situations I, II, and III (1947-49/1955)

The problem of method (1960/1964)

Critique of dialectical reason (1960)

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I. Overview: Sartre the philosopher

Sartre is a philosopher and phenomenologist but he is also a novelist, critic, playwright, editor, and political activist (see Iris Murdoch's *Sartre, romantic rationalist* for Sartre as novelist and Francis Jeanson's *Sartre par lui-meme* for Sartre as dramatist). But at the center of all these talents is Sartre the *philosopher*. These facts present some obstacles in understanding Sartre.

(1) His work is incomplete. It is one of Sartre's original doctrines that the future creates the meaning of the past and hence the meaning of the past must remain in suspense until the future comes *to an end* (e.g., Sartre's moral perspective on his ontology in *L'homme* has never appeared; also Sartre's social philosophy in *Being and Nothingness* is not reconcilable with his later pronouncement, in the context of Marxism, on existentialism).

(2) Sartre has offered almost nothing by way of tying together his various endeavors – hence anything that might be done in this regard must remain speculative.

(3) Sartre's excessively lengthy paragraphs (characteristic of French philosophers of the time) do nothing to state his immediate objective in tackling particular subjects. He often plunges the reader into a concrete phenomenological analyses from which his real purpose only gradually emerges (e.g., *L'imagination*, *L'imaginaire*, and *L'Être et le néant*).

(4) While his language is not as obscure as is Heidegger's and, until his *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre's writings were entirely within the French philosophical idiom, his style continually changes. Heidegger's *Being and time* (1927) and the writings of Hegel (his dialectics, and not Hegel's final glory of synthesis), as interpreted by Kojève, were no doubt influential in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943).

(5) Sartre obviously enjoys the shock value of his work on the general reader – as Beauvoir notes in *Harper Bazaar*, 1946, Sartre enjoyed himself most when he least understood his own writing.

(6) Perhaps, the major obstacle to reading Sartre is his assumption that the reader is familiar with German phenomenology (Husserl and Heidegger) even as Sartre was not that familiar with German phenomenologists.

(7) Sartre's non-philosophical writings are all about *futility and despair* – as the expression of French decadence and European thought more generally, as is the ending of *Being and Nothingness*: “**Man is a useless passion**”. This, in comparison to his more optimistic protestations of his partly disowned *Existentialism is a humanism* (1946), makes the latter seem somewhat forced. One way to account for this change is a change in Sartre himself, from his bleak pre-phenomenological writings long before the war to his post-war writings which are more optimistic when he becomes activist and belligerent. The difficulty is compounded because his literary works are almost impossible to place in his total output. Thus, the incomplete tetralogy (*The ways of*

wisdom) is mostly blind alleys (excepting the character of Goetz in *Lucifer and the Lord* (1951/1952 where Sartre focuses on “human existence” and claims that only human “exist”). It is therefore a mistake to see Antoine Rocquentin in *Nausea* (1938/1949) or Matthieu Delarue in *The ways of wisdom* as valid instances of Sartre’s program.

Why then did Sartre philosophy have such an impact? Part of the explanation is that Sartre was a successful novelist before becoming a philosopher. The success of *La Nausee* (1938), a diary in fiction form, followed by numerous short stories, critical writings in the literary field, and by such gripping dramas as *Les Mouches* and *Huis Clos* (1947) and *Lucifer and the Lord* (1952), were interrupted by B&N in 1941.

The humanistic character of Sartre’s work is derived from Christian, Cartesian, and Hegelian sources on “man”. What these diverse movements have in common is the passionate search for foundations of our *individuality* through some *rational necessity* which he also believes is doomed to failure: *man is a useless passion*. **Thus, he clearly recognizes the rational demand (borrowed from Hegel and Kojève) to found “human being”. But he also deems any such effort as doomed to failure. The reason is that consciousness refuses any characterization whatever, not even in action. This contradiction is the key to Sartre’s moral philosophy, namely consciousness has no foundation on the risk that otherwise it is no longer “free”.**

II. Sartre’s place in the phenomenological movement

One may ask how far, to what extent, is Sartre a phenomenologist?

There is no clear answer to this question. From the public (*pour autre*) perspective Sartre is the outstanding French phenomenologist. It was Sartre who demonstrated the potential of phenomenology at a time when phenomenology was past its prime in Germany. **Yet Sartre never referred to himself (*pour soi*) as a phenomenologist.** He only accepted the label “existentialist” with reluctance (after *Being and Nothingness*, but the word “existentialist” never occurs in *Being and Nothingness*). He does refer to phenomenology in B&N but in quotes (relative to Heidegger and Husserl) suggesting he did not want to identify with German phenomenology. Rather he looked on **phenomenology** as a **tool** for his **existential/phenomenological ontology**. In any case, since he resigned from Lycee Condorcet in 1944 he did not establish anything like a “school”.

For Sartre phenomenology was defined exclusively in relation to Husserl and Heidegger. He nowhere mentions Nicolai Hartmann and while Max Scheler’s name is mentioned with regard to phenomenological psychology and his insights into the intentional structure of emotional life, his theory of *ressentiment*, his essay on suffering, and his work on values, but he nowhere gives any indication that Scheler’s work on phenomenology was new or original. In any case, it seems Sartre’s knowledge of phenomenology was limited as it was to most French thinkers. Sartre did meet Heidegger in person (not so Husserl) in 1935 but he always felt closer to Husserl. Thus in his first philosophical work, *L’imagination*, he refers exclusively to Husserl. He notes that it was Husserl who reinstated our horror and chamr of the thing/object world, and ironically

claims that Husserl liberated us from the “inward life” (reference to Proust) and restored the world of the artists to us. Yet Sartre was also critical of Husserl (*La Transcendence de l'ego* (1936) where he takes issue, for example, with the notion of the transcendental (pure) ego (i.e., Husserl’s idealism).

Critique of Husserl

But Sartre becomes even more critical of Husserl in his B&N where he tries to develop an ontology beyond where Husserl ever wanted to go. Thus, while Sartre mentions Husserl and Heidegger in B&N, he praises neither of them. Instead he charges Husserl with

(1) infidelity to his original conception of phenomenology (Sartre thought Husserl was too Berkeleyan [idealism] in interpreting Being [the objects of intentional consciousness] as non-real),

(2) with the guilt of pure immanentism for not having escaped the thing-illusion by introducing the doctrine of hyle [sensation] into consciousness,

(3) with remaining at the level of functional description and hence of remaining stuck at the level of **appearances** and so unable to make the move to “existential dialectics”,

(4) with being a phenomenalist (and not a phenomenologist) and giving a mere caricature of genuine transcendence which should pass beyond consciousness into the world (and the immediate presents into the past and future),

(5) being unable to escape solipsism any more than Kant with his transcendental subject,

(6) of not taking sufficient account of the obstructiveness/resistance in our immediate experience,

(7) with mistaken believing that eidetic phenomenology of essence can reveal freedom (which Sartre says is consciousness and existence and at the root of all human essence), and

(8) Husserl never poses the ontological problem – namely that of the “being of consciousness” (this is also Heidegger’s criticism of Husserl). We never return from Husserl’s epoche to the world. This means that eidetic phenomenology fails.

Critique of Heidegger

Next, what was Sartre’s attitude towards Heidegger whose philosophy seemed so much more congenial than Husserl’s and Hegel’s in B&N?

Sartre thinks of Heidegger as an existentialist, an atheistic existentialist in his essay *Existentialism is a humanism*.

It is unclear that Sartre in his writings before B&N distinguishes between Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology. But B&N brings Sartre into direct rivalry with Heidegger's B&T. Sartre never criticizes Heidegger and he notes Heidegger's superiority to Husserl and Hegel.

Yet Sartre also charges Heidegger with "bad faith" when

- (1) Heidegger claims to move beyond idealism but, as Sartre claims, ends with pseudo-idealism.
- (2) Sartre also says about Heidegger's claim that no one can die someone else's death that this is true for any act of consciousness as well.
- (3) Sartre is also critical of Heidegger's *Mitsein* as barbarian which does not untangle the Gordian knot but simply cuts it.

More importantly,

- (1) Sartre objects to Heidegger's elimination of Descartes' and Husserl's consciousness from *Dasein* which Heidegger's then calls "human reality".
- (2) Sartre objects to Heidegger's attempt to ground the phenomenological concept of nothingness in the experience of *anxiety* (rather than as Sartre does in the *negation* grounded in human conscious spontaneity).
- (3) Sartre also thinks Heidegger's hermeneutics descriptions are insufficient in that he is silent about the fact that man is not only an ontological being with a certain comprehension of Being but also one whose projects bring ontic *modification* into the world.
- (4) Sartre is critical of Heidegger seemingly exclusive concern with *death* as the only authentic project. And also about Heidegger's entire focus on the future dimension of temporality.
- (5) Sartre is also critical of Heidegger's *Dasein* as bodiless and sexless.

For all this criticism however Sartre is closer to Heidegger than any other philosopher. But there is originality in Sartre that embraces Husserl's phenomenology of nothingness in a way that makes it impossible to see Sartre as merely a French Heidegger. [Heidegger himself is critical of Sartre "*humanistic existentialism*" in its exclusive concern with "men" and not with Being (see Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism, 1950*). Thus Heidegger sees in Sartre only "philosophical anthropology" that culminates in existential psychoanalysis. One suspects that Heidegger says nothing about Sartre's phenomenology because he does not want to repeat his criticisms of Descartes and Husserl's subjectivism.

For while Sartre may not have called himself a phenomenologist, phenomenology was a part of his method of philosophizing, and Husserl and Heidegger are closer to Sartre than any French philosopher other than Descartes. But this allegiance to Descartes also brings Sartre closer to Husserl than Heidegger, and anticipates his difference with the anti-Cartesian Merleau-Ponty.

III. Sartre central theme: freedom versus being

In the closing paragraph of his *Saint Genet* (1952), Sartre writes “To reconcile the object and the subject”. Why do these need reconciliation? They are rooted in the experience of the freedom and the experience of the “thing”. Both experiences may be culled from Sartre’s literary writings.

In connection with what situation do we experience freedom? Characteristically, freedom is threatened by nausea of the things. The hero of Sartre’s *La Nausee* decides to leave Bouville and looks out over the sea and reflects:

Is this what freedom is? I am free; there remains no reason for me to live...alone and free. But this freedom slightly resembles death.

This rather uneasy and diffident experience of freedom soon gives way to a more spectacular and positive expression of freedom (voice by Orestes in *The flies – Les Mouches in his challenge to Zeus*):

Suddenly freedom swooped down on me and penetrated me. Nature leaped back...And I have felt all alone in the midst of our little benign world, like someone who has lost his shadow...

Then there is an even more personal expression and yet at the same time a more social/public (paradoxical) expression of freedom in *The republic of silence* (the Nazi occupation):

Never have I been freer than under the German occupation. The very question of freedom was posed, and we were on the verge of the most profound knowledge which man can have about himself...This total responsibility in total solitude, was this not the revelation of freedom (*Situations*)

Closely aligned with this experience of freedom is one’s own consciousness. But this is by no means a happy one. Referring to his study of Baudelaire, Sartre writes:

Each one of us has been able to observe in his childhood the unannounced and shattering appearance of the consciousness of his own self.

This is not a happy experience for this freedom is everywhere shattered and threatened by one’s situatedness.

Thus, for example, Sartre writes about a peculiar metaphysical experience he calls “nausea” which attacks its victim without a cause (picking up a slightly moist pebble on the beach), or in the sight of the sprawling roots of a chestnut tree, or the grip of one’s own estranged body, results in the “thing” (*La Chose*) and its “existence”. Massive, opaque, and sprawling, the Thing is senseless, absurd, without reason, and excess which is insidiously aggressive. It swoops down on man in his freedom and is its constant threat to turn man’s freedom into a “thing”. The soft stickiness of the viscosity of matter! (One wonders if Bishop’s Berkeley’s fear of matter and Fichte’s battle with the non-ego are not similar expressions of the Thing.) The mere inertia of matter is one of indifference, if not obstructiveness, to human purpose. This is the opposition of the en-soi and the pour-soi, and this distinction precedes Sartre’s phenomenological acquaintance.

It is perhaps not unremarkable that Sartre grew up convinced that he was illegitimate and this may have taken on symbolic significance for him – the human condition is alien, hostile. Sartre renders Heidegger’s “thrown-ness” (*Geworfenheit*) as “abandonment”, and this uncertainty about man’s origins may well have pitted freedom against thing-ness.

There is also pride: *the choice to be someone and not just a thing*. In this sense Sartre was eternally grateful to Husserl for having eliminated “thing-ness” from consciousness. Sartre’s is a Promethean revolt against Romanticism (absorbed by nature). But it is more than blind revolt; it is the revolt of Cartesian reason whose light is needed in order to conquer/reveal/constitute the unconscious of en-soi (thing-ness).

Finally, there is also something of Kant in Sartre, in the sense that the autonomy of freedom brings about the kingdom of ends in which each freedom wants the freedom of every other.

IV. The role of phenomenology in the development of Sartre’s thinking

The solution of the problem of reconciling freedom and being in B&N was preceded by various prior attempts: (a) pre-phenomenology, (b) phenomenological psychology, (c) phenomenological ontology in B&N, and (d) existentialism.

(1) Pre-phenomenological period

Beauvoir’s reflections in *Memoires d’une fille rangee* give us some indication of Sartre’s thought beginning in 1923. Between 1924-28 (19-23 age) Sartre attended *Ecole normale*.

The legend of truth (1923) concerned itself with “morbidity”, and suggests that the genealogy of truth is nothing but a stage in history and which was soon to be replaced by “probability”.

A letter in *LeNouvelles Litteraires* (1929), Sartre claims that man is at root boredom and sadness; we are free but powerless to produce a synthesis of being and existence. Truth and knowledge are myths.

In his early years Sartre was dominated by a theological attitude (by the need for the Transcendent), which does not mean that Sartre was a theist (since he himself says that he abandoned religion at the age of 11), rather he expresses an attitude wherein he wants direct contact with Being itself; to escape the terrible relativity of man in the Absoluteness of Being. This powerful desire for the absolute persisted in Sartre well into the late 1930s (*La Nausee*, 1938). Up to this period (1938) the effort at reconciling Being and Freedom seems to have ended in failure. Nothing in French philosophy was able to overcome this defeatism and pessimism. Thus, Brunschvicg's idealism was nothing short of optimism and did not treat the problem of Being very seriously. Why Bergson, who anticipated much of German phenomenology, did not satisfy Sartre is puzzling but perhaps it was because Sartre was at the time in contact with Husserl.

Bergson in fact offered a theory of the imagination which was a promising alternative to Taine's associationist conception of the imagination. The trouble was that Bergson's theory of creative synthesis did nothing to resolve the dualism other than a kind of syncretism of consciousness and thinghood. According to Sartre, Bergson merely dissolved consciousness and thinghood in some kind of amorphous continuity. It leaves the image an "inert thing" and hence which is nothing but a materialist thing. Even as consciousness is creative intuition, it is nothing separate from things, leaving both freedom and time (duration) as passive and substantial *en-soi*. As Sartre saw it, freedom was saved only at the cost of metaphysical adulteration. In fact, Bergson assimilated freedom to thing-ness even as it persists in a non-mechanistic metaphysics of life.

2. Phenomenological psychology period.

It was Husserl who made the distinction between consciousness and object/thing clear. It is not clear just how Sartre came into contact with German phenomenology. It has been suggested that Sartre did so through Bernard Groethuysen (Dilthey scholar) who introduced him to Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger in the late 1920s (when Sartre was pursuing philosophical studies at the *Ecole normale*, 1924-28). In any case, Sartre (a young professor at Lycee of *Le Havre* at the time) became interested in the *Institut Francais* in Berlin between 1931-34 where he became acquainted with the works of Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger, and Jaspers, as well as psychoanalysis. He also went at this time (1933-34) to Freiburg (but Husserl had been in retirement for four years and Heidegger was *Rektor* of the University and had issued some of his strongest Nazi appeals) where Heidegger did announce a new course (*Fundamental questions of philosophy: of truth* as well as a course on *Nature, History, and State*) which would expand his 1930 lecture which approached the question of Being in a new direction compared to what had been his hermeneutic phenomenology of *B&T*). In fact, Heidegger has no memory of Sartre until after Sartre's 1953 lecture in Freiburg. In any case, Sartre remained convinced that Husserl *Ideen* was the most important book he had run across. This work influenced his early phenomenological writings on the transcendence of the ego, emotions and imagination.

This phenomenological period was very different from the pre-phenomenological period. Sartre was convinced that phenomenology can give us more than legend and probability.

Phenomenology enabled Sartre to make a fresh start without being burdened by traditional philosophy. But how far did phenomenology go in solving the issue of the relation between Being and freedom?

La Nausee suggests it didn't go very far. Roquentin seems to be defeated by the "thing" even as the end of the novel the metaphysical disease seems to be on the way to a cure with the creativity of Jazz the making beautiful of which will also make people ashamed of their existence. Similarly, in Sartre's studies on the imagination (three studies from 1936-39 on freedom and the imagination), Husserl's essences seem congenial to the liberation from an unjustifiable existence. More generally, Sartre believed that Husserl's intentionality of consciousness just might purge consciousness of the encroachment of the world. *If this is not yet reconciliation it is protection from the world.*

Perhaps more important is Sartre critique of Husserl. He radicalizes Husserl phenomenology by showing that the **transcendental ego** is itself the transcendent result of constitutive acts of consciousness (and not the immanent pole of all acts of consciousness). In fact, the ego is the death of consciousness (cf. Lacan). By liberating consciousness (as pure spontaneity) from the ego, this also shows that consciousness is itself impersonal and that every moment of conscious life is creation out of nothing. So that consciousness has no "owner"/"agent" this owner is merely the product of a set of acts of consciousness. So that the individual has no control over the spontaneity of consciousness (cf. "desire") – and it is not surprising that Sartre sees something very frightening ("anguish") in the freedom of consciousness. What this conception of the impersonal consciousness serves to do is to help get rid of the charge of solipsism, since all individuals are equally constituted in the impersonal stream of consciousness. It also serves to rid us of the inwardness of idealism (Brunschvicg) which is totally unsuited to realistic political action.

Sartre's work on the **emotion** is more puzzling. Contrary to James-Lange and Freud, the emotions have meanings in the sense they constitute purposive behavior. They are not passive states but "spontaneous degradations of consciousness" and basically insincere and in bad faith. Consciousness in emotion tries to reach its objective by running away from reality (thing-ness). To rid us of the deception of emotion requires a "purifying reflection" (related to the phenomenological reduction) which will reveal the bad faith of emotion. Man is responsible for his emotions (and not their passive slave). The same theme is taken up in the case of the **imagination**. It is the negative or ir-realizing function of the imagination in setting off an imagined world against a real one which suggests that the imagination is freedom pitted against thing-ness. This negativity of the imagination anticipates B&N.

The way Sartre pursues questions of the imagination, emotion, and ego, are all intended to be phenomenological – reposing on the eidetic and transcendental reduction as Sartre conceives of them. He shows that the ego is constituted by free acts of consciousness, the imagination is irreducible to any kind of perception, and the magic of the emotions is not fatal to our freedom – since we can be and are responsible for them.

But while we have a vindication of freedom here, we do not have an answer to the question of the relation between freedom (consciousness) and world (en-soi, unconsciousness). For this we need to turn to **phenomenological ontology**.

Essays belonging to the phenomenological period

Transcendence of the ego (1936)

The emotions: outline of a theory (1939)

Psychology of the imagination (1940)

1. Consciousness and ego

In the first three essays of his first period, Sartre is concerned to describe the *structure of consciousness* in a phenomenological (Husserlian) manner *without any concept of existence*. Yet it is clear that he is here working towards a concept of “existence” and *moving away from Husserl to Heidegger*.

In his first essay his moving away from Husserl is already evident. Sartre argued that Husserl failed to push the reduction far enough. That is, Husserl by identifying pure transcendental consciousness with the *self/ego* had produced an inconsistent amalgam of radically different elements. Thus, the self cannot, *as the pure transcendental ego can*, disclose itself to itself in immediate intuition (there is no transparency of self) and for that reason the self belongs to objects in the world that *transcend* consciousness. Since for Husserl the world is constituted in intentional acts of pure consciousness, so the *self must also be a synthesis of intentional acts*. Thus, the self is not itself the agency whereby such acts of agency occur, rather the self belongs to the contingent world (en-soi). Sartre therefore distinguishes between Husserl’s *agency of pure consciousness* and *self which belongs to the world* (Husserl had identified ego and self). Just how radical Sartre deemed this departure (during this pre-political period) from Husserl to be is unclear. What is clear is that Sartre **already opposes consciousness to world** (including the self).

What is also clear is that Sartre already at this pre-political stage of his career felt it necessary to answer the Marxist charge that phenomenology was a crypto-idealism that makes man a *spectator* rather than *agent* in the historical process. But if the self is part of the world (as Sartre implied in his critique of Husserl) *then the self must also be part of history* and so the Marxist charge fails (man as self is part of the world and can change it). That is, if the self is part of the world and so part of history, then the self is agentic in bringing about change (and not just spectator) – *although this self is then to be distinguished from pure consciousness*. **The problem that remains at this stage is whether Sartre’s distinction (dualism) between pure consciousness and self/world (Sartre’s radical critique of Husserl’s reduction) breaks down before the stubbornly un-conceptualizable fact of the contingency of existence. That is, the question presses does not the “contingency of existence” also include pure consciousness?**

2. Emotions

In his writings on emotion, Sartre uses both Husserl and Heidegger equally (without emphasizing their divergence) in providing a framework within which psychological phenomena can be understood. From a phenomenological perspective, *experience is a structured whole* with two poles: **pure consciousness as constitutive, meaning conferring activity**, and **the world as the transcendent correlate of these intentional acts of consciousness**. Emotion, Sartre argues, can only be understood within this context of *structured experience*. Thus, emotion is a *spontaneous activity of consciousness* in relating to the world. *Emotion does so in “magically transforming” situations thereby sidestepping reason (rationality)*. Thus, my feeling “sadness” makes the world (situation) appear sad so that it offers no hope of changing it and hence justifies our **passivity** in what Sartre calls a “**degradation of consciousness**” (a forerunner of “bad faith”).

But this analysis poses a problem to which Sartre returns time and again, namely, “how can emotion (or any other mental function) such as feeling sad, be interpreted as **spontaneous and purposeful** without attributing an intolerably sophisticated kind of self-consciousness to those who suffer the feeling/emotion? Sartre’s way of dealing with this problem is to establish a **pre-reflective consciousness** between events that are wholly unconscious (e.g., digestion) and **explicit consciousness**. This pre-reflective kind of consciousness is an awareness of what I am doing as I am doing it (my intention) but not *thinking* (speaking) about what I am doing. Thus pre-reflective consciousness is also called “**non-positional consciousness**” and, for example, emotions can be attributed to pre-reflective consciousness without running into the incongruities that would result if “feeling sad” was only possible in explicit consciousness (subject-object). [Note that body always presses towards the en-soi and that we must continually must re-establish or re-assert the freedom that is the activity of consciousness (pour-soi) against the self.]

3. Imagination

Psychology of the imagination is Sartre most ambitious project in phenomenological psychology even as it also is the transition to his later writings on ontology. The imagination like the emotion suffers the empiricist misconception of the structure of experience. Thus, empiricism confuses both perception and imagination as picture-like simulacra before the mind differing only in immediacy/vivacity. However, Sartre insists that the imagination (like emotion) is an *activity of consciousness* which has as its object the very thing of which we have an image (and not some “object” of mental content). Thus, the imagination is a **peculiar mode of consciousness** that is addressed to the same objects as perception but, and this is crucial, *to objects as they are NOT* (at least at the time of imagining them). Counter to the perceptual world, imaginative consciousness sets up an *unreal state of affairs*. The difference between the perceptual real world and the imaginative unreal world is that the former is never exhausted in intentional awareness whereas the latter is always so exhausted in intentional awareness. Again, in case of the

imagination, Sartre argues that the self-awareness involved in the imagination is “non-positional” and again insists that the passivity apparent in the imagination (e.g., hallucinations and psychosis) is in fact the work of a spontaneous activity of consciousness (*pre-reflective consciousness* that, as it were, “imprisons itself”).

Importantly, the imagination is not merely another psychic function rather it is a *reality negating function that is essentially characteristic of consciousness*. Consciousness through imagination “constitutes, isolates, and negates” the world and it can do so because consciousness is itself *non-being* (it is “consciousness”, namely, “difference”). Here we have then Sartre’s characteristic dualism: the *ontological status of being* and of *non-being or nothingness*.

3. Phenomenological ontology

Being and nothingness (1943)

Existentialism is a humanism (1946)

Baudelaire (1947)

Anti-semitism and Jew (1946)

Saint Genet (1952)

B&N (1943) had been in the making since 1930 – an effort in “destructive philosophy” on which Sartre had been working even before his becoming familiar with phenomenology. Obviously from the sub-title of *B&N* (“phenomenological ontology”) the focus of Sartre thought has changed from his previous studies in phenomenology. Here is now ready to tackle the question of Being (the reconciliation of freedom and Being) and phenomenology is the method/way to do it.

Of course, from the title *B&N* has very much to do with Heidegger’s *B&T* (without Sartre mentioning this, even as he is critical of Heidegger, and works to bring out the differences between Husserl and Heidegger).

1. Obvious both Sartre and Heidegger use “Being” in the title of their works and the meaning is somewhat similar. Sartre’s Being is not rigorously distinguished from “things-in-Being”, a distinction Heidegger is careful to make: distinguishing between Being and existents (things).
2. Time is for Heidegger the major property of Being, whereas Nothingness for Sartre is radically opposed to Being. The fundamental problem of Sartre’s ontology is the dualism of Being and Nothingness and not an account of Being through Nothingness (something Heidegger tried to do in *What is metaphysics?*). Nothingness is for Sartre free consciousness, the great challenger of Being (in contrast, Time is the great horizon for Heidegger’s Being). Sartre problem is the unity of Being and Nothingness.
3. Bringing about this unity of Being and Nothingness results in raising some peculiar notion (gaze, anomalies of sex, nausea, a new kind of psychoanalysis). In contrast,

Heidegger too had focused on peculiar notions such as everyday-ness and concern/care, topics which hardly occur in Sartre.

4. Sartre *Introduction* is concerned with the “search for Being” (reminiscent of Marcel Proust’s great novel) and in doing so immediately sets up an opposition between being-for-itself and being-in-itself with the relation between them as “intentionality”. However, Sartre refers to being-in-itself only briefly as “massive and opaque” (already done by William James in his *The sentiment of rationality*), and then goes on to develop the “nothingness” of being-for-itself (in the next four parts).

5. The **first** part is concerned with the relation between “nothing” and consciousness? *Consciousness as questioning* (in addition to the imagining of consciousness) opens the way to nothingness. Consciousness sets itself off against Being in a fundamental act of negation – a negation that is “nothingness”.

The **second** part deals with the structure of consciousness itself: first with its “immediate structures” such as *facticity*, *temporality*, and *transcendence* (that is, in passing beyond itself towards Being). Here Sartre comes close to Heidegger although these characteristics are ascribed by Sartre to **consciousness** and not to **Dasein**.

The **third** part takes up in great detail a topic not dealt with by Heidegger, namely that of the relationship of consciousness to other consciousnesses. The being-for-others (*pour autrui*) is given when one’s gaze looks into, is confronted by, the gaze of the other. The role of the body in the experience of oneself and in relation to the other is also explored. Here we have the conflict of incompatible freedoms – for which Sartre had no solution.

In the **fourth** part, Sartre stresses, in contrast to Heidegger, the active and free nature of consciousness (“**existence**”). Man’s being is derived from his free activity for which he bears total responsibility based on choice. Here Sartre explores a new **existential psychoanalysis** based on phenomenology.

Sartre concludes by claiming that there emerges from the four previous parts an ontology which must have metaphysical and moral implications.

6. **How does Sartre reconcile Being and Nothingness?** Here the interpretation of consciousness as negation of being allows him a new synthesis. The lucidity of consciousness implies a lack of Being. Consciousness is, like Hegel, **a hole in the midst of Being**, or **decompression of its fullness**. Thus, consciousness which feeds on Being is also Being’s disintegrator (consciousness disintegrates Being). So that consciousness which depends on Being also preys on Being. This is in contrast to Being which could very well exist without consciousness and so has ontological priority. In a sense this is an inverted neo-Platonism, beginning with matter as the starting point and spirit as the negative derivation from matter. Thus, the unity is bought at a cost of the priority of Being over Nothingness (*is this not Christian, creation before freedom?*). Yet the consciousness of Being is also a positive freedom in the sense that it is *consciousness that introduces meaning* into Being. Hence, consciousness not only provides an opening for

nothingness in Being, but it provides for possibility and for the past and future dimensions of temporality which could not exist without consciousness.

For Sartre, **consciousness** also proves to be the counterpart of Sartre's conception of **world** (*monde*) and these are reconciled in a circuit (*circuit d'ipseite*) wherein which consciousness cuts a clearing in the "jungle of Being" (thereby retaining something of a reconciliation between subject and object). **The world, in contrast to Being is dependent on consciousness and its freedom/choice and, hence, in this sense phenomenological idealism is acceptable.** But the fundamental choice of consciousness also condemns consciousness not only to freedom but also condemns it to the impossible project of *combining* the lucidity of consciousness (nothingness) with the essential opaqueness of being-in-itself (hence, the **world** is one of tension – "**tragic**"). This seemingly self-contradictory effort entails Sartre's notorious atheism (disproof of God as the for-itself-in-itself), but also the essential futility of the human endeavor to become God – which is man as a "*useless passion*". Thus, active free consciousness can at best achieve only a kind of Pyrrhic victory over Being. **The reconciliation of subjective and objective is always secured at the cost of the subject (who falls into bad faith).**

But where in this grandiose scheme does phenomenology fit in? In what way is consciousness derived from Being? There is no discussion of phenomenology in B&N. In general Sartre begins with phenomenological description but quickly moves to a **hermeneutics interpretation** (especially evident in his existential psychoanalysis where is concerned to decipher consciousness through pre-reflective choices). What there is in style in B&N is a **paradoxical description of consciousness** as "*that which is what it is not, and is not what it is*" – a formulation meant to express that man's freedom is a projection of what he is not yet and has to be, and that he is at the same time a being which escapes from his essence as expressed in the past and which he hence no longer is. Even further goes the identification of consciousness with nothingness on the basis of the negative function of nothingness.

All this suggests a kind of Hegelian **dialectics** which do not appear at all in Sartre's earlier phenomenological writings. This is amplified in his use of for-itself and in-itself as well as the for-itself-in-itself which seems directly taken from Hegel (even as the meaning of these are not identical in Hegel). In fact, references to Hegel are as numerous as to Husserl and Heidegger in B&N. However, Sartre's conclusions are not Hegelian even as Hegelian motifs are found also in his social philosophy where he insists that each consciousness wants the death of other consciousnesses.

In some sense Sartre's depiction of "human reality" in *Being and Nothingness* amplifies Heidegger. But there are also major differences.

1. Heidegger was never interested in the intentional structure of consciousness. Heidegger focused on the ontic counterparts of these intentional structures thereby showing what the human world was like. Sartre believed that this "human world" needed to be supplemented by an account of the *structure of consciousness* as founding this "human world". Thus Sartre criticizes Heidegger for suppressing consciousness.

2. Heidegger proclaims that he has no interest in drawing out the humanistic potential in his doctrines in a way that seeks out the ethical consequences of these doctrines. Sartre in contrast is eager to search out the *moral implications* of his ontological structure of consciousness for understanding the human predicament.

3. Sartre's conclusion with respect to the possibility of a general ontology (of Being) from which the concepts of consciousness and unconsciousness could then be derived is entirely negative (there is no such general ontology). There is for Sartre, in his effort to synthesize being and non-being, or nothingness, only metaphysics (and Sartre never gets there in B&N). In contrast Heidegger claims that that is precisely his aim. That is Heidegger is engaged in a project of fundamental ontology: disclosing Being to the nature of being-in-the-world.

The subtitle of *Being and nothingness* is “*an essay in phenomenological ontology*”. However, this subtitle seems incongruous as there is a long tradition that contrasts “being” (the subject of *ontology*) with “appearance” (the subject of *phenomenology*).

Sartre explains this incongruity by claiming that his use of ontology is, like phenomenology, **purely descriptive** (and does not invoke extra-phenomenal reality, like Descartes and Kant do, to explain human experience). He regards the latter, namely to explain human experience with reference to extra-human/phenomenal reality as *metaphysics*. Ontology then differs from phenomenology only in that Sartre claims *ontology yields superior general concepts* (those of “being” and of “non-being”) than phenomenology does (which in its focus on “intentionality” can yield only explicit consciousness/experience).

As a first step to his **phenomenological ontology**, Sartre takes up the claim that “phenomenalism” has overcome the duality of appearance and reality by constructing both the physical and mental out of “appearances” which are neutral with respect to the distinction (Sartre's aim is phenomenism, rather than empiricism, because he addresses only the French tradition). Sartre claims that on the one hand phenomenism is correct: thus, “being appears” and there is no intermediary link such as “representations” between being and appearances (as there is in empiricism), however, on the other hand, Sartre insists (contra idealists and the phenomenologists) that being is *transcendent* of its appearances in the sense that being (as transphenomenal) can never be exhausted in appearances. **Thus, Sartre's ontology is dualistic: there is world and there is pure consciousness.**

Being and appearing

Sartre sets up his inquiry by distinguishing his position from Husserl's idealism.

(1) Sartre radically changes the notion of intentionality by his claim of the **trans-phenomenality** of objects which means objects cannot be reduced to appearances. For Husserl intentionality was *internal to the structure of mental states by virtue of which*

those states were directed to objects but Husserl made no claim that such objects were independent of consciousness. Sartre claims that objects *must* be so independent otherwise objects owe their being to consciousness (non-being) which he declares to be impossible (*how can non-being give rise to being?*). The argument that Sartre uses against Husserl is that (a) while Husserl is correct that objects (whatever their status) are never given instantaneously and, hence, (b) Husserl's claim that objects are therefore given in an intentionally infinite series of appearances, but (3) this claim also means that, all those objects not so given must, at the same time, not be intended, and Sartre claims that that is impossible. Sartre argues that the intentionality of consciousness cannot do this – that is, it cannot both intent objects given and not intent objects not given.

Being for-itself and being in-itself

(2) Just as Sartre sets up the trans-phenomenality of objects against the background in which they appear, he also argues for the *trans-phenomenality* of the *being of consciousness* in the sense that consciousness is *not* dependent on its appearing to itself in *explicit reflective awareness*. Thus, explicit reflective consciousness is preceded by a pre-reflective consciousness. ***The chief characteristic of the being of consciousness (the "for-itself") is its activity.*** The being of consciousness cannot be acted on from the outside but is exhausted in its own intentional, meaning conferring acts. In contrast, the being of things (the "**being-in-itself**") is completely incapable of any relationship to itself (it is *opaque* and *coincides with itself*). Being in-itself simply "is". Thus, Sartre establishes two *distinct types of being*, and *rejects both idealistic and realist* accounts of their relationship. But just what that relationship is (or what Sartre relegates to "metaphysics") he never actually says and, in any case, must depend on the prior analysis of the *structure of consciousness being*.

Conscious being is the being that creates its own nothingness

The principle clue to consciousness being is the human ability to ask questions and give negative answers. This is not just a logical function of judgment rather negative judgments are depended on an ontic counterpart which is **non-being**. Hence, the question what is non-being? Sartre rejects the Hegelian view that being and non-being are *interdependent* in favor of **Heidegger's** view of non-being as a medium in which **being is contingently suspended**. However Sartre also criticizes Heidegger for not showing how non-being can appear in *particularized local form within the world*. Sartre claims that this is possible only if there is a being which is, or one that generates, its own **nothingness (its own non-being in negation)**.

This being which generates its own nothingness is **human consciousness** which constitutes itself in contrast/resistance to its physical milieu, its body, and its history.

(1) Human consciousness *creates* (activity) within being-in-itself a "hole"/negation surrounded by being-in-itself which is the horizon that surrounds this negation and so becomes the world.

(2) Because human consciousness projects being-in-itself against the backdrop of its own non-being, human consciousness inescapably **apprehends actuality in the context of possibility**.

(3) Consciousness also apprehends itself as the **bridge** between the actual and possible in the sense that it must *determine which possibilities are to be actualized*.

(4) Finally, consciousness is **free** because it is forced to think itself as other than the world and so is not part of any causal order in that world. Thus, **freedom** is, as distinguished from the world yet determining its possibilities in the world, and this freedom is felt as **anguish**.

Problem of freedom and human existence

In the face of anguish of freedom human beings can take either of two attitudes.

1. They can attempt to hide their freedom from themselves (most often by some belief in psychic determinism). But all such efforts are doomed to failure. The reason is that we can hide our freedom from ourselves only to the extent that we recognize it. Thus the effort to hide our freedom from ourselves results in a paradoxical internal *duality* of consciousness in which *consciousness thinks of itself as a thing and at the same time recognize its freedom*. This *double-mindedness* is called “**bad faith**” (but must be sharply distinguished from Freudian manipulation of the consciousness by the unconscious).

2. The other alternative is that we recognize our freedom; that we are the absolute origin of freedom and solely responsible for the exercise (activity) of freedom. Presumably this is existence in “good faith”.

Human beings defined

It is in the contrast between these two life-attitude alternatives that Sartre then creates his **ethics**. Even as Sartre condemns all attempts by consciousness to objectify itself and put itself on the level of things, he basically **defines human beings as precisely this self-contradictory effort to achieve this status of thing-ness while remaining conscious of doing so**. Indeed, Sartre goes so far as to define “value” as this **impossible combination of being for-itself (consciousness) and being in-itself (thing-ness)**, and it is also in this impossible combination that he sees the **hopeless character of the human enterprise** (which he describes as making oneself in the image of God).

The irony is that this effort (to treat oneself as a thing and yet remain totally conscious of doing so) **must fail** because while human beings are absolutely responsible for their choices, **human existence is not itself the result of choice**. Human existence is simply a “fact” and **this radical contingency** makes it **impossible** for human beings to be ontologically self-sufficient (in the way God must be).

Time (temporality is internal to the structure of consciousness)

Temporality is a prominent topic in *Being and Nothingness*. The structure of consciousness is (1) **temporal**, and (2) **in relation to another consciousness**. Sartre here relies on Heidegger in adopting the view that past, present, and future **are internal structures of consciousness** and, hence so many ways in which the structure of consciousness is, *what it is not*, and *is not, what it is*. Thus, we are what we were in the past but in a mode of not being it any longer, and we are our future in the mode of not yet being it. Similarly, in the present, consciousness is inescapably tied to the world and to its present situation within this world, but once again, in a way that distinguishes between world and consciousness. Temporality is in all its dimensions activity of consciousness by which consciousness both *negates and transcends itself*.

Other people/consciousnesses

In his analysis of other minds Sartre clearly moves beyond Heidegger. (1) He argues that other minds cannot be proven by analogical arguments – and to this extent he thinks that **solipsism** is true. *Rather he argues that the apprehension of my existence is so structured that it presupposes the existence of other conscious beings*. For example, in the case of the feeling of shame there is the presupposition that the other has access to my body. While Sartre finds that this is also recognized in Husserl, Husserl only recognized it as a *logical requirement* that must be met if there is going to be an *inter-subjectively shareable world*. But Husserl does not actually account for our **concrete encounters** with others.

In general, my experience of **myself** is inseparable from this **public** dimension of my existence. According to Sartre, Heidegger grasped the relationship between consciousnesses in a way that moves beyond the requirements of our internal conceptual system, but as a feature of our **being** that is presupposed by that system. However, Sartre finds Heidegger's **Mitsein** (being with others) has to be supplemented with an analysis of experience in which I apprehend myself as I am perceived by another – that is as an object, reified, and deprived of the transcendence that is central to my own sense of being. This is the experience **of being looked at** by another (the “look”, or the “gaze” of another). Now I can adopt either of two positions with respect to this look of the other:

- (1) I can try to dominate and suppress the transcendence of another who threatens my own, or
- (2) I can treat myself as an object to be dominated by the freedom of the other.

In either case I am **destined to fail** because I must recognize my freedom or that of the other in order to suppress it. What is *impossible* in either option is a **moral consensus** that is anymore than an accidental convergence of independent individual projects.

Action, freedom, and choice

The last part of *B&N* deals with human action and freedom, and it takes place in the form of an analysis of consciousness in relation to its milieu or situation in which consciousness finds itself. The principle claim is that the intentional *object* of consciousness (situation) cannot determine the *direction that is or ought to be taken* by human activity (activity of consciousness) of which the object is the premise. Hence, moral autonomy rejects both causal determinism and any kind of natural law. It is human consciousness that first seeks out particular situations that are experienced as incomplete and call for complementation through human action. Similarly, these situations can only be assigned goals by human consciousness towards which they are to develop. Therefore it is not only the means but also the ends that are dictated by **choice** (and not by contingencies of circumstance or by rational controls). **Even reason, appraisal, itself is guided by choice.**

However **choice** is not to be conceived of as a single episode; rather it must be considered as human action **doing one thing rather than another in a situation that is endowed with possibilities by human consciousness.** Taken together these choices form a system wherein particular choices are derivative from the “total choice of oneself”. However, such particular choices are not deducible from the “total choice of oneself”, and even the most passive acquiescence is at bottom an autonomous choice of this total kind.

However, what **I do not choose** is the necessity of choice itself or the situation in which I am obliged to choose. Even so Sartre argues that by acting in a situation and conferring on it the meaning it has for me, I may be said to accept it and to make myself responsible for it. **The individual human person (existence) is in fact a choice, and by himself defines a complete moral universe.**

Our choices are not necessarily the objects of reflective awareness (**explicit consciousness**). Normally, our understanding of our actions will be in a **non-positional mode of consciousness.** [Therefore a properly conceived of psychoanalysis will try to interpret the system of choices that our actions express and would reject all reduction of these choices to non-choice like states of the unconscious. In contrast existential psychoanalysis would treat empirical needs and desires as symbolizations of total choices by which our relation to being is defined. Thus, the meaning of our activities (behavior) must remain internal to the consciousness of the person whose activity it is, even if in the mode of bad faith. In these interpretations the analysts is guided by the expressive values of certain qualities in our experience through which the nature of our relationship to being is conveyed.] The example that Sartre gives of this quality of experience is “**sliminess**” whose metaphysical coefficient is the fear that being-in-itself (*en-soi*) will absorb being-for-itself (*pour-soi*).

Thus, the general conclusion that Sartre reaches with respect to the relationship between the duality of being is that their synthesis that would compose a total being **causa sui** is impossible and hence the general concept of Being is in a permanent state of **disintegration.** Thus, what is lacking is some kind of prioritizing of being. Even as

being-for-itself presupposes being-in-itself, the latter remains radically independent. The project of constituting an ontological self-sufficient being is peculiar to being-for-itself. However, this is a **hopeless undertaking** because a genuine logical synthesis is precluded by the **negating action of consciousness** which perpetually creates anew the distinctions that such a synthesis is intended to overcome.

Marxism

Critique of dialectical reason (1960)

At the end of *B&N* Sartre promised a full-scale treatment of the ethical implications of the human reality expounded upon in the course of the book. This book never appeared. Instead, in recent years Sartre has turned towards a kind of *dialectical sociology* that is very remote from the *individualism* that characterized his early moral theory. Sartre now criticizes his own lack of understanding of how moral autonomy is qualified by an exploitative society. True moral freedom is now projected into the *future* that will not be realized until the dialectic of human antagonism has run its course – and of which we can know nothing. Thus, while Sartre is now dissatisfied with his earlier neglect of the social aspect of morality, his current effort to place existentialism within the enclave of Marxism exaggerates the extent to which his previous position has changed.

Sartre is still not a materialist or a determinist, and he is still critical of Marxism's unwillingness to deal with individual personality. He does hold now that a material fact (**scarcity**) is the motor that sets dialectical human relationships going, but he would still say that this "natural fact" assumes its significance only within the *context of a conscious project of some sort*. Furthermore, Sartre always recognized that human beings always stand in passive relation to the products of their own spontaneity, and what he does in his Marxist stage is simply to give new emphasis to this passivity which he now conceives in relation to the dual fact of natural scarcity and the resulting dialectic of human antagonism. He still argues that human beings have to be understood by methods totally different from those used in the study of nature and he still maintains that scientific inquiry attains its full significance only within the context of dialectical comprehension of man.

4. Phenomenological existentialism.

The word "existentialism" is absent from *B&N*. It stems from critical reaction by both Catholics and communists to *B&N*. In *Existentialism is a humanism* (1946) where Sartre uses "existentialism" and asserts the "ethics of authenticity" (already hinted at in what was to be *L'Homme*). In fact, Sartre did not approve of "existentialism" but he did let it slide. The question is whether existentialism issues in a new phase in Sartrean thought and moves towards a resolution of the question of Being?

The fact that this is so is suggested in Sartre's use of **existentialism** in the context of **humanism** a word (humanism) which Sartre had derided in his earlier thought. Existentialist humanism is presented as a new form of *humanism* which asserts that there

is nothing but *the human universe (monde)* which results from man's self-transcending projects and so constituted by human subjectivity.

This humanism is belligerently asserted in *Lucifer and the Lord* (1951) where it is atheistic and social (there are only men). Indeed, Sartre maintains that the existence of both God and man is incompatible. "*If God exists man is nothing, if man exists...*" but one may well wonder whether this formulation in which existence is opposed to nothingness is not inconsistent with *B&N*. ("Man is 'nothing'" is place in the mouth of Goetz-Sartre's main antagonist, the theist Heinrich in *Lucifer and the Lord*). In contrast to *B&N* where "existence" is negative, Sartre later makes existence more positive in tenor; it is no longer a "useless passion", but a "hard optimism" in the name of **man's total freedom and responsibility for the world**. Also in his social philosophy Sartre moves away from deadly conflict between freedom in choice (which is a freedom of all men), and the **possibility of a "pact of freedoms" in, for example, between writer and reader**.

This is the period when Sartre becomes a political activist and when "existentialism" becomes a philosophy of political engagement (commitment). All this was occasioned by the resistance movement followed by painful reconstruction. Thus, instead of escape into aesthetics and art (cf. Schelling), human existence now finds expression in social revolution in the interest of the freedom of all in the proletariat. Thus, Sartre finds Marxism, even as he rejects dialectical materialism – his alliance with the communist is only conditional (as in his 1949 attempt to bring about a non-communist revolutionary democratic rally). In spite of these political activities, Sartre did not give up his larger philosophical interests. Thus, his 550 page defense of Jean Genet's *Journal d'un voleur* (and a proposal for an existential psychoanalysis that shows the limits of psychoanalysis and Marxist explanation) pits freedom against ethics (as bad faith).

Sartre here attempts to push the subjective side of man in a match with the objective approach of Marxism. As he now sees it, the reconciliation between subject and object can only come about through a courageous effort in pushing the limits from both directions simultaneously. But what evidence is there that such a move will be successful? Phenomenology is mentioned only once here!

Thus, his existential psychoanalysis of Genet's original choice of becoming a thief (of which Sartre attempts to provide a phenomenological description) leaves little doubt that the whole enterprise of interpreting Genet's development (his metamorphosis from orphan to thief, esthete, writer, and man) constitutes for Sartre a case study in existential psychoanalysis and hence phenomenological analysis – an applied phenomenology. Thus, phenomenology remains part of Sartre's enterprise even during the existentialist phase. Yet it is a phenomenology applied to another person (objective fact). Nevertheless existence is primarily a subjective phenomenon based on Cartesian consciousness and this calls for a phenomenological approach even this existentialist stage. This insistence that existence is subjective is the ultimate reason that Sartre eventually combines phenomenology and existentialism. However, the priority of phenomenology and

consciousness is at the same time Sartre's reason why existentialism is incompatible with dialectical materialism of Marxism.

V. Sartre's conception of phenomenology

What is distinctive about Sartre's phenomenology?

In fact, Sartre is interested in phenomenology only incidentally. None of his works carries the word phenomenology. In his theory of emotions, when he was still under the influence of Husserl, he tells us that phenomenology is the basis for an empirical psychology, and in his theory of the imagination he draws a sharp distinction between the phenomenologically certain and the empirically probable psychology, but he also draws freely on empirical psychology. In his theoretical writings, Sartre charges phenomenology with finding a *synthetic unity* within phenomena analyzed by empirical science. And with determining their significance as goal-directed ways of behavior – the chief instance of such a hermeneutic interpretation is that of emotions. Thus while phenomenological psychology is characterized by eidetic description of the essential relationships of behavior, it is also presented as hermeneutics in Heidegger's sense.

In *B&N* there is no discussion of the relationship between phenomenology and ontology, nor is there any such discussion in the context of existentialism. This leaves only Sartre's phenomenological writings prior to *B&N* as a clue to his conception of phenomenology.

At first sight Sartre's conception of phenomenology might seem to fit easily into the general framework of Husserl's phenomenology. Sartre's phenomenological studies are descriptive and intuition is the test of these descriptions based on reflection. Eidetic insight into essences is stressed even as Sartre is critical of Husserl's "pointillism of essences". He refers to the reduction as a matter of course (purifying function), but in *B&N* especially in the context of the phenomenology of the other he expresses grave doubts that the phenomenological method can help. In 1947 he critically claims that in Husserl we begin in the world, then we leave the world by way of the reduction, and we never return to the world from this reduction. Here he also complains about those Platonic philosophers who are dragged from the cave but who then refuse to enter it while in fact it is in the cave that we act and think. Yet Sartre leaves plenty of room for the constituting function of consciousness – consciousness constitutes the world of our experience at least as far as its meanings are concerned. Thus, while Sartre draws on Husserl's phenomenology he also finds room for assimilating Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology. Thus, he borrows Heidegger's conception of the phenomenon as "what reveals itself". Sartre borrows Heidegger's hermeneutics as a legitimate project. Hermeneutic is here a legitimate enterprise and in fact provides the framework for a descriptive phenomenology. Sartre shares Heidegger's critique of Husserl's enterprise as ignoring the problem of Being insofar as consciousness is concerned in favor of mere **essence**. But there is one momentous difference between Sartre and Heidegger and that concerns Heidegger's *phenomenology of Dasein* (of human being) as contrasted to Husserl's *phenomenology of consciousness*. Sartre sides here with Husserl in that Sartre conceives of *Dasein* as consciousness. In this sense, Sartre's consciousness like that of

Husserl sails under the French flag of **cogito** which Heidegger repudiates. Thus, Sartre is ultimately a version of Descartes (although he rejects Descartes metaphysics). Sartre motto is: “*One must start from the cogito*”.

How does Sartre’s phenomenology differ from Husserl and Descartes?

Sartre’s embrace of consciousness does not mean however that he conceives of consciousness in the same way as Descartes or Husserl does. Let’s distinguish Sartre’s conception of consciousness from the other two.

1. Elimination of the transcendental ego – and its significance for a phenomenology of human existence.

In his very first article, Sartre, even as he accepts the phenomenological reduction and constitution, rejects Husserl’s concept of transcendental ego. Husserl had claimed the ego as part of the indubitable field of consciousness; he had also developed a whole theory of “egology” which was to account for the constitution of the transcendental field. Sartre challenged this concept of ego even as he did not deny the ego (as Hume did). For Sartre the ego was **transcendent** not transcendental. Thus, the ego is not part of the structure of consciousness but something that grows out of consciousness’ constantly renewed stream of constituting acts. These acts support and relate all objects whether internal or external to which consciousness refers.

Why did Sartre reject this Husserlian insight? Sartre notes that while in reflecting on experience (explicit consciousness) we always find an “I”, but in pre-reflected experience we find no such “I” – all that is given is the book and its characters but without the reading “I”. Thus while we are conscious of reading the book, the reading “I” is only given in reflection which constitutes the “I”.

The main reason Sartre rejects the transcendental ego is that it is unnecessary; it is **useless** (in a claim that sounds more like Occam’s razor than phenomenology). But for Sartre, the idea of an **identical (transparent) ego** in the flux of consciousness is a threat to the unity of consciousness, an “opaque blade” which would end in the *death of consciousness*. Only a completely impersonal consciousness is completely transparent! What is left for Sartre is a “transcendental sphere” as an impersonal stream of consciousness without an “I” which is the constituting foundation of the ego as in fact this stream of consciousness is for every other phenomenon in the world. Thus, what was with Husserl the hinge of phenomenology with Sartre becomes part of the world of human existence. The self becomes a phenomenon along with all other phenomena in the world.

But this leaves the **impersonal transcendental consciousness** as the root of all phenomena and Sartre has never denied this root even as he moves from phenomenology to psychology to ontology. In his actual analyses Sartre deals only with consciousness at the level of man, the constituted ego, his imagination, his emotions, and his relationship

to the human world. That is, Sartre's phenomenology is completely established at the level of human existence, and he gradually and implicitly drops the transcendental dimension. This radically changes Husserl's phenomenology, with Sartre it becomes the phenomenology of human existence concerned with phenomena as these occur at the level of concrete human existence: the *mundanization of consciousness*.

Except for Sartre's interpretation of existence as a form of consciousness, Sartre's phenomenology coincides with the philosophy of existence in Heidegger's sense of "existentielle Philosophie" (a philosophy which Heidegger explicitly disclaimed), although not with Heidegger's analytics of existence which only deals with the ontological categories of existence. There is also a more important difference between Sartre and Heidegger dealing with Sartre's claim that "**existence precedes essence**" which to Sartre meant that the character of man (his essence) is the outcome of free acts of consciousness. Hence, Sartre uses "existence" as the title for the concrete consciousness of man in its free activity. In contrast, Heidegger whose "existence" is usually nothing but the possibility of authentic or inauthentic being which supposedly forms the essence or at least one of the major constituents of the essence of man. Hence, for Heidegger existence certainly does not precede essence.

Related to this property of Sartre's existence is the fact that he uses the verb "to exist" transitively, as for example, of "existing one's body". What is involved here is that consciousness may or may not maintain our body in the way we live in and through it. In other words, Sartre is not concerned with existence as a particular mode of being (authentic or inauthentic), rather existence is the concrete behavior of a human being in his conscious situation within an experienced world and responding to that world. This is a program of *philosophical anthropology* (and as such Sartre's rival is Max Scheler).

2. What is pre-reflective consciousness: reflection and phenomenology

Pre-reflective consciousness. For Sartre, existence does not simply coincide with human consciousness in the world. Sartre's most important addition to phenomenology is his enlarged conception of consciousness. There is for Sartre an unconscious consciousness, or a pre-reflective consciousness. For Husserl (but not for Descartes) too there was a consciousness which was not reflective (consciousness directed straight towards objects in the natural attitude), but for Husserl phenomenology was largely concerned with reflective consciousness. But Sartre raises the question about how we know about our own reflective consciousness (without falling into an infinite regress). This non-thetic consciousness ("conscience") constitutes a phenomenon different in kind from explicit consciousness ("connaissance"). This pre-reflective cogito accompanies all acts of consciousness including explicit consciousness. In pre-reflective consciousness our reflecting actually coincides with that upon which we reflect. For example, the feeling of pleasure (conscious) is pre-reflective consciousness in being engaged somehow. That is, in pre-reflective consciousness our reflecting coincides with that which we reflect upon.

This pre-reflective consciousness is there in Husserl's *Ideen* as well as in the writings of Pfander and Geiger. But in Sartre this pre-reflective consciousness extends the Cartesian

cogito far enough to embrace all human existence, allowing us to see in all existence human consciousness. This is the triumph of Cartesianism which is then clarified through subsequent reflection. But even for Sartre phenomenological reflection proper is based on acts of explicit reflection. *But Sartre claims that reflection can be pure or impure within the context of the temporality of consciousness.* The idea of purifying consciousness is moralistic in its implications, insofar as Sartre suggests that purifying consciousness can break the vicious cycle which condemns the utter failure of our relationships to others. Impure consciousness is consciousness that constitutes the ego with psychological states in an effort to achieve absolute Being. Evidently, pure reflection has something to do with recovering the pristine innocence of consciousness which does not lose itself in the effort at achieving absolute being. Phenomenological reflection is assigned a role in ethics.

3. The negative character of consciousness.

The most original feature of Sartre's conception of consciousness is his insistence on its essential negativity (in contrast to both Husserl and Heidegger).

Already in his early writings the imagination poses its objects as a nothing, non-existent, absent, and existing elsewhere. The interrogation of Being (which Sartre shares with Heidegger) implies "yes" or "no" and also the readiness to be faced by the non-existence of the situation inquired about. Nothings are a constant possibility of experience – consciousness is shot through with "nothings" (functioning as a foil to Being and even at the very heart of Being). Nothing is like a worm (contrasted to Heidegger's positive description of Dasein) gnawing its way through Being.

But what is meant by "nothing"? Its manifestations are phenomena such as absences, gaps, missing parts in the total field of Being. These "negativities" (in contrast to Heidegger who sees in "nothing" the background to all Being; why there something rather than nothing?) come into the world only through the expectations of consciousness. That is "nothing" comes into the world by way of existence's (conscious beings) interrogations of being.

But then Sartre makes a much bolder claim "that the being through which nothing come into the world must be its own nothing": consciousness as "nothing"! This does not mean that consciousness does not exist; it means that consciousness' interrogation can yield negativity (something non-conscious beings cannot do).

4. Freedom

This negative aspect of consciousness is connected to another one of its features namely **freedom**. Freedom is the structure of consciousness (as Husserl also noted that free consciousness is "I can"). *This freedom is absolute even as it is always situated.* But it changes the meaning of the situation within freedom's freely chosen projects. Whereas for Heidegger freedom was linked to the essence of truth as its foundations, for Sartre

freedom is the very structure of all consciousness as consciousness can negate even the causal world order which it must do if it is to be itself.

However, Sartre's primary evidence for the freedom of consciousness – consciousness' absolute freedom – in a situation – means that free consciousness can always change the meaning of any situation, of any of its freely chosen projects.

5. Anguish

Anguish (*Angst*) is probably the most ridiculed concept of existentialism. Yet Sartre and Heidegger differ in their interpretation of it. For Heidegger *Angst* is the privileged access to the phenomenon of nothingness and revealed to consciousness by Being as a whole. For Sartre, Angst has a more limited and practical concern, notably our own freedom. It is freedom that sets consciousness apart from man's essence as sedimented in the past. I emerge "alone" in anguish in the face of all my projects, including my primary project "to be". I can have no values/assurance against myself, cut off as I am from the world and from my-self. I must decide my essence and my world alone... Thus anguish has nothing to do with cowardly timidity in the face of danger rather anguish expresses the individual human's response to his assumed responsibilities that embrace no less than the world as a whole. All human values (all past values and articulations of these) depend on our freedom for their affirmation/rejection/life.

6. Bad faith

This anguish accompanying freedom leads to **bad faith**. This anguish is often conspicuous by its absence and it is precisely this absence of anguish which is the phenomenon of **bad faith**. We seem to be hiding the anguish even from ourselves – the "flight from anguish" – which is also then the denial of freedom. The most important example of this flight from freedom is our turn to psychological determinism which is merely to refuse our responsibility. ***This bad faith is obviously not the conscious lie. It occurs at the pre-reflective level (psychoanalytic unconscious)... hence all efforts at good faith or sincerity then become impossible and merely so many efforts that result in bad faith. The more I try to bring about good faith by demanding utmost sincerity, for example, the more I fail.***

7. Intentionality and trans-phenomenality.

Intentionality is the most important feature of consciousness. Yet Sartre and Husserl differ decisively in its meaning. Sartre compliments Husserl for ridding us of the idea of immanence thereby expelling the "thing" from consciousness (freeing consciousness), but for Husserl intentionality constitutes the object and for Sartre this is completely unacceptable as for Sartre the object is completely independent of consciousness.

"Consciousness-of" means for Sartre, like Brentano, intending an object beyond, meaning that the object intended is independent of consciousness. Consciousness is congenitally oriented towards being other than itself. That is, intentionality does not

constitute the object but it **reveals** the object. It reveals (it is ontological proof of) the trans-phenomenality of being/objects. Thus, for Sartre intentionality is the expression of the strict separation and existential independence of its referent (almost like the Latin consciousness “de” meaning its origin of its referent). However, this claim raises questions as to where Sartre stands in relation to the idealism-realism controversy (which, like many phenomenologists, he claims to have overcome). He obviously rejects idealism in his critique of Husserl who rejected realism as immanentism. But the question is whether some kind of realism (obviously not naturalism in the sense of a causal genesis of knowledge) cannot overcome Sartre dualism.

Certainly Sartre’s phenomenology is anti-phenomenalistic. One of his main concerns is to make room for the trans-phenomenal or ontological. This could be interpreted as Kantian in-itself (en-soi) but Sartre’s rejects Kantian dualism. Spiegelberg suggests that Sartre’s solution may be “a phenomenalism of essences” and a “realism of existence”. Thus, Sartre holds that phenomena is all there is, and that the distinction of reality and appearance is without foundation. He therefore, like any British phenomenalist, defines objects in term of phenomena. But he differs he differs from say Berkeley in that Sartre claims that both the perceived and the perceiving have a characteristic being over and above their essence which cannot be fully described in terms of perceiving. Thus, Sartre calls the being of two poles of this relationship, between perceiving and perceived, “trans-phenomenal”. What Sartre means here is (1) consciousness in its being is independent of appearing to itself, especially to reflection, and (2) what we are conscious of is also independent, autonomous, in its being, and is not merely constituted by consciousness. If we can never reach beyond consciousness (nor do we have a right to do so) and yet the phenomena that appear in consciousness are “trans-phenomenal” in the sense that they have a being of their own.

Sartre seems to be a realist concerning being-in-itself, this is not a commitment that all phenomena are independent of consciousness. He distinguishes between the in-itself and the world (as meaningful). It is the world which is the correlate of our conscious projects and freedom- the self and world is a circuit. The question is whether this commits Sartre to saying that the world is constituted (in an idealist sense) since any and all projects/engagements in the world must cope with a “coefficient of adversity” (Gaston Bachelard).

8. Facticity and engagement

Consciousness is always for Sartre “engaged” consciousness. That is consciousness is characterized by what Sartre calls “**facticity**”. Borrowed from Heidegger who used the term to characterize Dasein, Dasein is characterized by “thrown-ness which Sartre translates as “abandonment”, in a connotation of cosmic loneliness and condemnation. Evidently, this notion of facticity cannot be applied to Husserl’s eidetic purity of transcendental consciousness, and it is apparent therefore that Sartre phenomenology shifted to concrete human experience (which would for Husserl be “psychologism”). Hence it is also apparent that Sartre’s phenomenology is tied to the philosophy of existence, and why he can work out phenomenologies of particular individuals (like

Genet). Phenomenology is no longer a matter of apriori essences but of individual concrete experience – as in Kierkegaard.

The notion of “**engagement**” remains ambiguous; it is the involvement of both (1) our involvement in an actual situation pre-reflectively, and (2) involvement in an actual situation in explicit choice (reflectively). In both cases it means that consciousness is always already engaged in the concrete world, and it is phenomenology that studies consciousness in this world.

9. Transcendence

Sartre also borrows the term “**transcendence**” (and uses it very differently than either Husserl or Heidegger) to characterize pour-soi. It suggests that consciousness always refers to something beyond itself, to something consciousness “lacks” (manque). But Sartre also uses transcendence to mean “flight” or “escape” beyond consciousness (to other dimensions of time away from the present and towards other people) and hence transcendence is also bad faith. In this sense transcendence is reminiscent of Heidegger’s falling into inauthentic being (Verfall). **In any case, transcendence is for Sartre always the incompleteness of consciousness – its lack of ontological self-sufficiency. Consciousness always passes beyond itself, is never satisfied with itself or the present, which consciousness therefore negates.**

Summary: consciousness is concrete human existence situated in a human world, as pre-reflective, absolutely free (though haunted by anguish and bad faith) as contingent (facticity) and as transcending itself. This conception requires that we change the phenomenological method.

10. Phenomenological method and existential psychoanalysis.

Sartre later on avoids all methodological discussion except to introduce existential psychoanalysis which results in new phenomenological interpretation of consciousness.

What has psychoanalysis to do with ontology? If we recall that Sartre’s ontology has to do with man (I have the passion to understand man!), then this connection is perhaps not so strange. Moreover, since for Husserl consciousness always something we have full access to in reflection, Sartre pre-reflective consciousness – our desires - becomes more puzzling and demands understanding. [Sartre studied Freud, Adler, and Stekel while in Germany studying phenomenology.] Yet Sartre was less interested in the therapeutic aspects of psychoanalysis than it in theoretical views.

Sartre agreed with Freud that we must move to understand beyond the manifest of self-interpretations. Our manifest behaviors are symbolic of deeper purposes. What Sartre objects to in Freud is the structures of the self (Id and Superego, mechanisms of repression, and the instincts of libido and will-to-power, as impenetrable and opaque) as

universal mechanistic determinism. Sartre also maintains that the interpretations of psychoanalysis must be subject to direct verification.

In contrast existential psychoanalysis, everything is open to consciousness/freedom and choice. Both in his analysis of Baudelaire and Genet it is choice that is at the bottom of their mode of being-in-the-world. If one asks why be in the world as a martyr, saint, failure, etc., Sartre appeal to his ontology and to the general project of man which consist in wanting to be God. Thus, existential psychoanalysis ultimately rests on the validity of his ontology.

Similarly, all the mechanisms of repression/sublimation are phenomena of bad faith: engineered by our pre-reflective consciousness which engineers these evasive measures in concealing knowledge of ourselves. Here choice and faith are within experience. In liberalizing Cartesian consciousness, Sartre claims that the unconscious mechanisms of psychoanalysis become accessible to conscious reflection. That is, existential psychoanalysis is the reflective elucidation of pre-reflective consciousness according to its structures and meanings with the intent to intuit and describe the fundamental phenomena based on deciphering of their more immediate manifestations. This is an extension of Husserl's program for sure even as Sartre intends to submit his findings to the ultimate test of intuitive evidence.

VI. Sartre's phenomenology in action

What is at issue here is that Sartre believes that consciousness can penetrate the surface of life to get at the fundamental choices of human existence. It can do so because man is *whole*: everything we do, think, feel, etc. is related, by way of deciphering, to fundamental choices. All human functions reveal these fundamental choices. Thus insight is not abstract (as in psychoanalysis) but concretely intuitive (staying with Husserl) – and hence phenomenological.

When we examine illustrations of Sartre's phenomenology in action, we have to look in his plays *La Nausee* and *Huis clos*, and to his essays on Baudelaire and Genet (as he considers them all phenomenological – existential psychoanalysis). Here we see that Sartre's shift from psychological to existential phenomenology has some defects.

We can examine the changes in Sartre's phenomenology in the following:

(1) In his book *L'imagination* Sartre pleads for Husserl's new approach in *Ideen* even as he points out its incompleteness. Sartre gives Husserl credit for distinguishing between perception and imagination, for the insight into the intentional structure of the imagination according to which we must distinguish sharply between the immanent act of imagining and the transcendent object imagined (immanentist theories overlook this distinction).

In his book *The world of the imagination (L'imaginaire)* Sartre presents his own phenomenological psychology (as opposed to probable empirical psychology).

“The image is a consciousness”, writes Sartre, and so challenges the immanentist idea that there is an image in our imagination. The difference between perception and imagination is not the presence or absence of an image but the differing ways in which we refer to an intentional object of consciousness. That is, what distinguishes perception from the imagination is the imagining act. Second, the difference between perception and imagination is the way we look at the object. Perception depends on observation and can bring in new objects, while the imagination knows no such richness. Or better, the richness of the imagination is in the original act of imagining. Third, the imagination presents its object with a negative character – absent, non-existent. Fourth, imagining consciousness is spontaneous in supporting the imagined object.

(2) Sartre’s book on the **emotions** presents a very different kind of phenomenological analysis. Here he is less concerned with the essence of emotion as with the function of emotion. Of what significance is emotion – and so emotion is supposed to possess a teleological structure (and is not simply a by-product). Emotion is a form of conduct – as means-ends – as an unconscious solution, as Gestaltists and psychoanalysts would have it. But Sartre rejects the mechanistic conception of emotion that Sartre deems incompatible with purpose. Using his pre-reflective unconscious he tries to account for the non-rationality of emotional life. Sartre sees emotion as a form of conduct which refers to how we find ourselves in the world, conduct which is the result of frustrations in dealing with the world, and so we engage the world magically. Thus, if we cannot faint or take flight, we can magically change the world by way of emotion.

Not only the emotions, but also the imagination and our social conduct have this magical quality. Magic is a kind of make-believe, supported by pre-reflective bad faith which allows us to change the world (its meanings) by incantation verbal or not. This make-believe is backed up by changes in the body as the mediator of consciousness and world. Emotions are the result of frustration and constitute a form of degraded consciousness, an act of bad faith in which we try to tamper with the world beyond reach. This is a kind of Stoic move in which emotion need to be purified to attain authentic existence (and very Cartesian in the sense that emotions are irrational, magical escapes from the freedom of consciousness).

(3) The role given to *nothingness* (absence) is also given in his phenomenological analysis. One example is the way we are confronted by negativity. Usually a critique of nothingness is to consider it semantically syncategorematic (having no independent existence). Sartre wants to establish the phenomenon of negativity and then interpret it. Husserl too considered negativities as phenomenologically genuine: e.g., disappointment of prior anticipations. Heidegger too suggested that negativity has a status on par with Being even though it is has a mode of being called “naughting” (anxiety in extreme situations). But this is not so for Sartre for whom anxiety belongs to the vertigo of freedom – and not to “nothing”.

Sartre's account is therefore closer to Husserl's and it is more direct and concrete than Heidegger's. Sartre begins with phenomena as absence or destruction in the midst of daily life (experience). For example, absence is the futile search for a friend in a café where I had expected him. Here the locality is a positive without any negativity. But this positivity becomes the "ground" for the "figure" of our missing friend whom I expected to be there. At this point everyone we see appears as not my friend- which Sartre calls the "slipping away" (neantisation) or constitution of a nothing, resulting eventually, when I abandon all hope of finding my friend, in a "vanishing". If here the phenomenon of absence constitutes itself as good and, in a similar way, Sartre tries to show that nature does not contain any absences/destructions. So that all that occurs even in a hurricane catastrophe is positive transformation – the quality of being remains the same. Negativity manifests itself only in man with man's expectations and plans. Negativity is a human phenomenon.

Of course, this leaves the phenomenon of the negative in a strange twilight. For on the one hand, Sartre tells us that the negative is not a matter of human negation but has a status of its own (and that it haunts being which is surrounded by the nothing - as Heidegger has it), on the other hand, we learn that nothing differs essentially from things and depends on man for its manifestation. But if it depends on man then negativity is "subjective" and reduces ontologically to secondary status far below what Heidegger attributed to negativity. A solution to this dilemma is that while Sartre credits man with being the actualizer of the nothing, he nevertheless thinks that nothing has its root in Being. In other words, nothing is a hybrid, and the outcome of man and things – a passive constitution by consciousness.

Eventually this leads Sartre to speak of the nothing as consciousness itself, but this ontological move does not affect Sartre's initial phenomenological description of negativity.

(4) One of Sartre's most remarkable phenomenological descriptions during his ontological phase occurs in the context of his social philosophy: namely the **human gaze**. French phenomenologists, including Sartre, never took solipsism, including Husserl's transcendental solipsism, seriously. Sartre rejects Husserl's egology and the whole transcendental approach allowed him to ignore this stumbling block of solipsism. But Sartre did address the problem of other people and their existence as constituted in our consciousness. In B&N he advances the gaze as the most concrete phenomenological demonstration of the gaze [which Husserl and Pfander had also spoken of as the glance (*Blick*) or beam (*Blickstrahl*)].

Sartre demonstrates the gaze with reference to our passing a stranger. At first we see the stranger as an object in juxtaposition with other objects, but this changes when we recognize him as a human being when we see him as someone with a gaze looking at the same objects we ourselves see. So that these objects are now

not private objects but public objects; these objects in a since escape me in being his focus as well. Yet even now the other remains a object for my gaze. But there is a decisive moment when the other becomes a subject for me when his gaze turns from the world of objects to me, and I find myself “looked at” (especially when I am ashamed in being surprised in an embarrassing situation). Now the other is an indubitable fact. Note that the other’s gaze here is very different from my seeing his eyes. Perceiving his eyes and seeing his gaze are mutually exclusive experiences. In fact we may sense the other’s gaze without being looked at.

Now the other’s gaze profoundly affects my consciousness; it petrifies and curdles me; in fact it enslaves me (as in the gaze of a hypnotist); he leaves me no exit (huis clos). The magic function of the gaze is that it provides the basis for interpreting the social fabric as one of essentially conflict – and it also signals the futility of trying to reconcile this conflict between consciousnesses. This sinister account of the gaze will be modified by Merleau-Ponty.

5. French phenomenology is known for its concern with the phenomenology of the **human body**; yet there were German predecessors, notably Husserl, Scheler and others. The French reputation was probably the result of Heidegger’s lack of any body consciousness.

Sartre originality with respect to the phenomenology of the body derives from his introduction of the subject in connection with social existence/ontology. The body is our social link/contact. Sartre’s concern is with the body as experienced and functioning in relationship. Our body consciousness has three dimensions/facets: one for the owner, one for others, and for the owner as being conscious of the other’s consciousness of the owner’s body.

The first, the owner’s awareness of his body is on the pre-reflective level where we “exist” or “live” our body. Consciousness is automatically engaged in the body and even identifies itself with the body. Only in reflection can we dissociate ourselves to some extent from our bodies. Our bodies serve as observation standpoints in relation to the world. Thus we can have various perspectives on the world which we cannot have in relation to our own body. The body is our primary instrument presupposed in the use of all secondary instruments. In general we transcend the body in our relationship with the world (we pass over the body in silence), yet it is part of our pre-reflective awareness and there is a peculiar contingency in our experience of the body of which we are particularly aware in nausea.

The body as it appears to others presents a much richer phenomenon. As a complex whole of flesh and blood it can present many different facets.

Consciousness with other people’s concern with our bodies leads to timidity and embarrassment. This is the second layer of our consciousness of our body and it is

far richer than our first consciousness, hence we are resigned to see ourselves through the eyes of the other.

VII. Conclusion.

Sartre is no doubt the first French philosopher to reactivate phenomenology after a period of mere assimilation and interpretative study. His picture of Husserl is probably skewed, but it is still Sartre who resurrected Husserl after Husserl was obscured by Heidegger (who rejected the subjective approach altogether). It is also Sartre who fused French phenomenology to existentialism and not only, as did Heidegger, with fundamental ontology of existence. The question is how far did this fusion distort phenomenology? The fact, that phenomenology was directed towards human existence is hardly a distortion.

The danger to phenomenology comes in from the methods and practices of some existentialists. Sartre retains the principle of intuitive description. However in trying to incorporate it in a hermeneutic method of deciphering, he not only introduces interpretations of the meaning of phenomena which run way beyond the evidence but might in fact interfere with unbiased description.

Some of Sartre's descriptions are striking for their originality and penetrating depth. But repeatedly one wonders why Sartre focuses on one aspect of a phenomenon and ignores another (e.g., the gaze is aggressive but why not loving?). There is in Sartre an activism which expresses itself as a kind of revolt against the "thing" and the "given" as such. He sees the given as a challenge (like Fichte), a task, and a threat. This slant is hardly conducive to phenomenological analysis and is more akin to Sartre's existential project of fundamental choice. Sartre's phenomenology is then one with preconceptions.

Nevertheless, it was Sartre who naturalized phenomenology in France: he remodeled and emancipated it at various points. But he not reconstruct phenomenology systematically (as did Merleau-Ponty later).

As Beauvoir writes in her review of Merleau-Ponty's *PoP*:

Phenomenology restored man to authentic existence by abolishing the opposition between subject and object. The object is defined by the subject and for the subject. The subject in turn reveals itself through the object in which it engages itself. The affirmation of this merely makes explicit naive experience. But it is rich in consequences. Only by making phenomenology, as subject revealed in the object, one's foundation, can one succeed in building an ethics. It is extremely important that man can say "here I am".

Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)

Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenological movement

M-P is the first French philosopher to write a book with “phenomenology” in its title. MP identifies philosophy with phenomenology. His accession to the Chair at College de France in 1952 (once held by Bergson) was unprecedented. Few have in fact ever commented on MP’s work (including Sartre and Heidegger), and hence no one has disputed MP’s place as a phenomenologist. The question is what place MP has in relation to say Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger and Sartre. This question must be answered in terms of MP’s own evaluation of his relation to these figures. MP himself considers Husserl to be the key figure in phenomenology. But neither MP’s Husserl nor Sartre’s Husserl are the conventional Husserl and neither agree with each other on Husserl. MP draws largely on the late Husserl but is never uncritical of Husserl even as he is not as blunt in his criticism as Sartre was of Husserl. MP in criticizing Descartes’ cogito also criticized Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* and its tribute to Augustinian inwardness/subjectivity. MP rejection of all idealism also includes Husserl’s version of it. Yet MP considers himself the best executor of Husserl. However, we should note that MP often invokes unpublished Husserlian texts which we should be cautious in taking at face value. For example, MP claims that Husserl maintained that “transcendental subjectivity is intersubjectivity” but nowhere is this text to be found in Walter Biemel’s edition of *Husserliana*, and it is clear that Husserl gave priority to transcendental subjectivity over intersubjectivity. Similarly, MP claims that Husserl held to the view that our “reflections form an influx into the world” yet this phrase occurs only in Fink and Fink claims that our relation to the world is that of naïve apperception of the world.

MP almost never refers to Scheler except on specific points of a psychological or sociological nature and usually compares him to Husserl without the latter’s rigor.

MP’s relation to Heidegger is not clear. MP frequently refers to Heidegger, more so than to Husserl, yet he seems to equate Husserl and Heidegger. Thus, in the PofP he presents Husserl’s phenomenological reduction (as MP interprets it) as the indispensable foundation for Heidegger’s conception of being-in-the-world, and implies that *philosophie existentielle* is a legitimate prolongation of Husserl’s phenomenology. Also Heidegger discussion of time is the basis of the temporality chapter in PofP. Nevertheless, MP (1951) ranks Heidegger’s phenomenology behind Husserl’s. Thus, MP sees a basic inconsistency between Dasein and Heidegger’s claim to absolute access to Being itself. MP also has higher regard for the sciences than Heidegger, and a more modest estimate of what (phenomenological) philosophy can accomplish in terms of absolute truth.

MP and Sartre

MPs relation to Sartre is more difficult and also more important. It is customary in France to see MP as merely a disciple of Sartre’s – a more academic version of Sartre. Not until

the publication of *Les Aventures de la dialectique* (1955) do we find MP openly dissenting from Sartre. Until that time M-P had complimented Sartre in his phenomenological studies on emotion and imagination in the sense of reflecting Husserl's middle period (MP draws largely on Husserl's last period). Little is said of Sartre's B&N which probably reflects Sartre's split (what Sartre terms "friendly secession") with M-P over the Korean War in 1953.

Up until the break, MP had critically reviewed Sartre's writing on the imagination (as leaning too heavily on Husserl), and defended Sartre against attacks by Marxists (like Lukacs and Catholics like Marcel) between 1943-1948. Also up to 1950 MP and Sartre were coeditors of *Le Temps modernes* and *Bibliothèque de Philosophie* (German translations of phenomenological classics). Yet the differences between Sartre and MP were always evident.

These differences did not appear until *Les Aventures* chapter "*Sartre's Ultra-bolshevism*" wherein M-P engages in a wholesale open critique of Sartre. Before we turn to this chapter however we can get some idea of their differences both in *P of P* and in *The primacy of perception (lecture)*.

1. In *P of P* (1945), M-P states that "we are condemned to meaning" ("we are always condemned to express something") in contrast to Sartre's "we are condemned to freedom". M-P rejects Sartre's absolute freedom, and claims that our existence is imbued with *sense*. Thus, he rejects a meaningless opaque Being-in-the-world whose meaning depends entirely on freedom. *Meaning is not a matter of choice*.

2. In *No exit* Sartre claims that "*hell is other people*" but in the *Primacy of Perception*, M-P claims "*history is other people*". This is a direct challenge to the diabolic conflict between hostile gazers, and MP makes history into the center of social existence – history is not only a *field of conflict* it is also the *realization of meaning*.

3. But it is only in *Les Aventures* (1955) that M-P rejects Sartre dualism between man (free ego) and things (en-soi). M-P claims that Sartre does not see the historical and practical relation to the world in which Sartre already always finds himself confronted. (Indeed, MP speaks of Sartre "folly" of the ego.) Thus, behind this dualism and the consequent social and political difficulties, Sartre suppresses (in indignation and by way of negation) the historical and practical *world of perception* which M-P uses as the basis for his interpretation of existence and coexistence. M-P rejects the alternative "he or I" of either solipsism or abnegation (self-denial). No longer the head-on collision of two consciousnesses rather, MP claims, it is the convergence and commonality of two consciousnesses residing in the same world.

4. The basic difference between Sartre and M-P comes out especially in relation to the role of philosophy and their different conceptions of dialectics. In *Sense and Nonsense*, M-P in a chapter on "*Existentialism in Hegel*" (1946) MP writes that whereas Hegel converts death into higher life, moving from the individual to history, Sartre maintains that the contradictions between self and other are beyond remedy. Hence, Sartre's

dialectics is *truncated*: it stops with antithesis (Cartesian subjectivity and the opaqueness of being) and does not know synthesis (whereas M-P unites subjectivity and objectivity in the phenomenon of the *world or of "lived existence"*). We must remember that such a synthesis for Sartre (between the in-itself and the for-it-self is impossible and belongs only to God (God is a contradiction in terms). Such a synthesis is not only possible for M-P; it is everywhere evident in front of our eyes – *being-within-the-world*. The world is one of potential unity, of finite sense and the contingent, ambiguous and risky, but a world wherein man has a fighting chance to enlarge the area of meaning (contrast with Sartre's hopelessness in the struggle between existence and being).

5. This contrast has effects on their respective views of phenomenology. M-P criticizes Sartre for his failure to do justice to "mediations" between subject and object and to the synthesis of history. This blinds Sartre, in his activism, especially to the unity that precedes our constituting acts. That is, M-P challenges Sartre's starting point (the Cartesian cogito as Husserl had it) in his phenomenology. It is precisely M-P's contribution to de-center this starting point – to purge Husserl's phenomenology of its Cartesianism. Heidegger of course also tried to do so, but Heidegger in the process of doing so lost transcendental phenomenology. M-P tries to develop a non-Cartesian phenomenology which nevertheless preserves the intentions of transcendental phenomenology. This is Alphonse de Waelhens book on M-P which the latter prefixed to *The structure of behavior* – however this book "*A philosophy of ambiguity*" shows little interest in M-P's phenomenology.

Guiding themes of MP's philosophy

MP's writings always avoid the first person singular. His focus is not on the ego but on the phenomenon "ahead" (Sache). Perhaps that is why MP has not given an autobiographical statement or an outline and summary of his writings. The "phenomenon ahead" always has sense/truth against the background of the absence (nonsense, but not absurdity or counter-sense which is the pitch of Sartre and Camus) of meaning/sense (*Sense and nonsense*). Here MP neither embraces the irrational (as it is sometimes claimed of existentialists) nor does he return to the ego. He claims that reason must not forget the experience of unreason. This enlarged sense of reason derives from Hegel without however laying claim to the latter's inevitable victory of reason. What is real is only partly rational and what is rational is only partly real. Furthermore reason is not as it is for Hegel self-sufficient, rather it is a *mystery*. In this world contingency/adversity is as fundamental as reason/meaning. Thus, the universe consists of *radiating centers separated by panels of night*. This is the world of half and half of William James pluralism with its clearings in the jungle. It is this contingency of existence and the factor of adversity that are also the reasons that MP refuses the answer of theism. His philosophy refuses the infinitely infinite (absolute being) since MP sees the world in its strangeness/contingency. This atheism is very different from Sartre's belligerent atheism which is based on the ontological contradiction of God. In fact, MP's can find meaning in the incarnation/resurrection of Christ which he sees reflected in Nietzsche death of God.

MP's philosophy has been called the *philosophy of ambiguity* (1947 by Ferdinand Alquié and taken up by de Waelelens in a positive sense). MP finds the word "ambiguity" (it is much more negative in English than it is in French) confusing and never uses it – *although the philosopher is one who seeks clarity and tolerates ambiguity* – as the repudiation of absolute knowledge. MP's philosophy is not that of **twilight but of chiaroscuro**. Philosophy is for MP inquiry, *interrogation* which he deems to be omnipresent in history. His is concrete philosophy dominated by existence and dialectics, and forgoes all apriori claims.

MP is an avowed **existentialist** – meaning "engagement" (both consciousness and philosophy is committed to action, social action), but it is the balanced engagement of Socrates (an existentialized rationalism). MP himself begins in the "crisis of philosophy" (of the sciences of man) and turns to Husserl for his inspiration.

Husserl understood that the human sciences have entered a stage of permanent crisis; if we are to end the rift between these sciences and philosophy, we must find a unity of subject and object.

What this means concretely is that MP must find a new unity between objectivism and subjectivism. This unity he finds in *perception* – as it is the matrix for both science and philosophy - the world as experienced (life-world) is the basis for both science and philosophy. This then is the first task of phenomenology to take experience or perception as fundamental to all interrogation. Interrogation begins in the lived life-world.

This basis of perception does not mean however that philosophy or science functions at the level of perception. MP articulates this in his *The primacy of perception* (1947). The task of philosophy is to move unto higher levels of judgment, truth, history, language, art. How are these basic themes related to phenomenology?

The development of MP's phenomenology

Before answering that question we must examine the development of MP's phenomenology. Prior to his first book, *The structure of behavior*, 1942 (probably written in 1938 before the war), MP had only written two reviews one of Sartre's *L'Imagination* and the other of Marcel's *Being and having* in 1936.

In *Comportment*, he opens with "our goal is to understand the relation between *consciousness and nature*". He is unsatisfied with both naturalism (especially in psychology and biology) and Brunschvig's critical idealism. Neither can bridge the gap. He seeks therefore mediation and synthesis in the fields of psychology and biology. He began by first looking at psychology (which became his specialty, child psychology, or developmental psychology, in 1950). Gestalt psychology (Paul Guillaume) was coming to France in the early 1950s, which had found an even more authorized interpreter in Germany, Aron Gurwitsch, who in the 1930s knew Husserl and Scheler as well as Goldstein's organismic biology. There was also Alfred Schuetz (from recently came from Vienne) who introduced phenomenology of the social world based on Husserl, Scheler,

and Weber. MP subscribed to all these ideas in personal contacts with their German interpreters.

But it was Sartre who after his return from Germany in 1934 first acquainted MP with Husserl's *Ideen* and later *Logical Investigations*. Later again, *Cartesian Meditation*, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, and *Crisis* (1936) interested MP much more. It was particularly Husserl's "life-world" as the foundation for both science and philosophy in the form of transcendental phenomenology which attracted MP to Husserl. But MP never studied in Germany nor did he ever meet Husserl – even as he visited Louvain in 1939 and again in 1947. One can see MP's interest in Marcel (having reviewed *Being and having* in 1936). There was also the spell of Hegel by way of Kojève. MP's interest in history and coexistence no doubt stem from the war years. *P of P* appeared in 1945; and numerous articles were collected in *Humanism and Terror* (1947) and *Sense and nonsense* (1948). The central topic in the last two works is man and the social problems raised by Marxism, communism, and the human sciences, but phenomenology does not figure prominently as it does not in *Les Aventures*. [MP was one of a few Frenchmen who escaped captivity or the ravages of war even as the war left an indelible trace in his thinking. The notion of history as the medium of our essential incarnation – "*etre-au-monde*"s borrowed from Marcel – and of existence as essentially coexistence, began to play major roles in MP's philosophy.)

Merleau-Ponty's concept of phenomenology

"*Phenomenology is everything or it is nothing*". In contrast to Husserl who still held to a distinction between phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy, MP maintains that *phenomenology commits us to an entire philosophy*. What is this all-embracing phenomenology?

In *Comportment* MP seldom mentions phenomenology but uses phenomenology in the last chapter (on relation between body and soul as these are involved in knowledge). Phenomenology was to solve the problem of behavior which even Gestalt had not been able to solve. Yet phenomenology is used as a philosophy of "criticist" largely idealist and inspirational. MP mentions only Husserl as its fountainhead, and speaks of the intimate relation between objects and the subject and the presence of solid "structures" in both which distinguish phenomena from mere appearances. However, there is no mention of "essence".

In the *Preface to P of P*, MP states that there is no agreed upon definition of phenomenology – *phenomenology is accessible only in its method, in its style or mode of thought*.

Phenomenological description

As MP sees it, Husserl's attempt to go to "things themselves" is a protest against sciences in favor of the life-world as lived. Yet MP does not follow Husserl in his effort to return from the lived world, by way of reflective analysis, to the subject – thus MP interprets

Husserl's motto "to things themselves" as refusing the idealistic return to consciousness. The world is "here" before any analysis of it. The real of the world must be described and not constituted or constructed in the subject (this is MP's refusal to follow Husserl appeal to St. Augustine's inwardness in *Cartesian Meditations*). For MP truth does not reside within the subject rather man is always *within the world* and it is in the world that man recognizes himself. "Truth does not dwell only in inner man, or rather there is no such thing as inner man: man is always within the world (au monde), it is in the world that he recognizes himself. What I find in myself is a subject vowed to the world."

Phenomenological reduction

The Husserlian phenomenological reduction becomes for MP a way of discovering the spontaneous surge of the life-world (i.e., the reduction loosens our habitual ties with the world in an amazement that can never be overcome). Hence, the great lesson of Husserl's reduction is the *impossibility of reduction*. Thus, for MP reduction becomes the means of refuting the constitutive or phenomenological idealism.

Similarly, Husserl's eidetic reduction which was his way of moving from existence to essence becomes for MP merely *means* (not an end) of capturing the living relations of experience. Thus, phenomenology attempt to grasp experience prior to all *linguistic formulations*. Eidetic reduction helps here by letting the world (the particular of the world) stand out against the backdrop of essences (language) before reducing it to the subjective states of thought. Thus, in a reversal of the phenomenology of essences, phenomenology becomes subservient to the study of existents (this is the existentialist move from essence to existence). According to MP, Husserl himself gave up essences in his *Crisis*.

Intentionality

Accordingly, intentionality as fundamental to the structure of consciousness also received a new interpretation in MP. Intentionality in Husserl was the way to the theory of constitution, but for MP it now functions to reveal to world as ready-made ("there") very much as Sartre had also used it in his "ontological proof" of trans-phenomenal being. MP enlarges the conception of intentionality such that it applies not only to conscious acts but also to our entire relation (our behavior comportment) to the world and others.

What is most important about phenomenology is that it combined subjectivism and objectivism in the idea of the world or of *rationality* (history). Whereas Husserl tried to locate certainty in the cogito, MP shifts to a *bi-polar phenomenology* of "world" (perhaps anticipated in Husserl's later "life-world"). There is here a de-centering of the self/person/cogito by MP to one that re-centers on the world – the life world as lived. For Husserl too phenomenology became increasingly world-based (never world-centered) when he proposed the *Lebenswelt*.

What remains of Husserl is his focus on rationality although MP also radically reinterprets Husserl's rationality. For phenomenology must reveal the *mystery* of the

world and the *mystery* of reason. **Rationality is now “engaged” in the task of revealing the mystery of the world and the mystery of reason; engagement is a violent act justified in its performance.**

How much of this is still phenomenology? MP even on his own account moved far beyond Husserl. But can this moving beyond be justified in the light of Husserl’s expressed intentions? We will examine MP conception of phenomenology on its own merits, in *P of P*, of whether it meets the criterion of back to “thing themselves” where however he does not give a detailed account of method that he promised in the Preface.

In any case, MP in *P of P* begins in the first (of three) part to proceed via the **first reflection**, not restricted to psychology, to deal (in *P of P*) with the body as the vantage point of perception and with the world as perceived. The function of the first reflection is to describe the phenomenal field as perceived/lived. But the phenomenal field is not self-sufficient or self-explanatory. Gestalts and meanings are more than merely accidental. Thus, these lead to the question of how they constitute themselves in consciousness.

Hence, MP suggests a **second reflection** in a shift from the phenomenal field to our consciousness of this phenomenal field (“the phenomenon of the phenomenon”). Transcendental phenomenology will examine the phenomenological cogito as the transcendental ground upon which the primary phenomena constitute themselves, with a view towards finding a more fundamental stratum (or “Logos”) than the cogito, notably “existence”.

This leads to the **third stage of being-for-onself (etre-pour-soi) and being-present-within-the-world (etre-au-monde), see below.**

MP’s reinterpretation of the transcendental fields as not based in pure consciousness does not mean that that transcendental existence is impersonal or super-individual subject. Indeed, in contrast to the transcendental subject (of idealism and transcendental phenomenology) who is located nowhere and everywhere, **MP’s transcendental existent subject is concrete.** The transcendental subject is the center of individual existence (our *engaged/rational* consciousness within the world).

Thus, the first phenomenological reflection (first reflection) is to describe the world as experienced, free from scientific hypotheses, as the life-world.

The second phenomenological reflection requires no special technique merely a change in the direction of our reflection (from phenomenological field to our consciousness *of* this field especially its temporal structure). The second reflection will reveal the foundation of perception and its possibility. It will demonstrate that engaged consciousness is “within the world” or present to the world.

In a mimeographed manuscript, “The sciences of man and phenomenology” (1950-51) MP relates Husserl’s phenomenology to the various sciences of man. MP claims that phenomenology and descriptive psychology are actually one. Scientific induction and

phenomenological intuition (*Wesenschau*) are essentially the same thing. Nor is there a difference between the certainty of essences and the probability of facts as Sartre, for example, maintained. Phenomenology and the sciences man converge. This is a turn-about for MP as in the Preface to the PofP he maintained the opposition of science and phenomenology. By going back to things means the repudiation of science – meaning the French objectivist approach to science for which there are only things in external juxtaposition and causal interaction ignoring the lived meaning of experience. In MP view the “objectivism” of science breaks down in the human sciences which cannot do away with the subjectively lived experience and meanings and incorporating these means “going back to things themselves”. Hence, it is not surprising that MP now sees a convergence of science and man.

MP also repudiates Husserl’s aim of a phenomenology as a rigorous science. He is much more bent towards an epistemological humility conceiving of truth as historical (contra Husserl’s battle in pitting phenomenology against historicism and relativism). Phenomenology is not yet, for MP, a science, but it is a *foundation of the sciences* insofar as it describes reflectively the phenomena of lived experience from which the human sciences must take their cue. This means then that phenomenology is for MP not a science (as it was for Husserl) but it is a foundation for science, for the lived world from which even objective science must take its cue. **This is phenomenology as philosophy.**

Merleau-Ponty’s writings

In “The structure of behavior and the phenomenology of gestalt” (*Comportment*) it is clear that MP is sympathetic to science (he begins with it) and shows that “behavior” is to be understood not as mental or physical but as “structure” or gestalt (already evident in Dewey’s *The reflex arc concept in psychology*, 1896). Also in his critique of gestalt theory (Kohler), he claims that it remains too naturalistic (remnant of un-philosophical realism). Here he imitates Dilthey, in that the human sciences are still too imbued with causal hypotheses. However, neither can one reduce behavior to phenomenon – rather MP introduces the term “existence” (manner of existing): behavior is a gestalt/structure. Thus, the world insofar as it consists of living things is no longer matter filled with parts next to each other but “hollows” itself precisely at the place where behavior appears. Thus, behavior is not quite the “hole” (that Hegel and Sartre deem consciousness to be) in being, but rather is a decompression in the compact fabric of being which allows it to become centered in focal points. Thus, existence expresses a pre-conscious type of behavior – a transition between the massive opaqueness of the in-itself to the perfectly transparent for-itself (consciousness). All life, all living beings, has existence although different from human existence.

In *Comportment*, MP outlines different structures of behavior and different orders of nature, culminating in a philosophy of nature (metaphysics). This is then followed by an attempt to reconcile consciousness and nature (in a way that would dispose of naïve realism and idealism). The answer is a phenomenology of perception in which concepts of forms, structure, and meaning have a prominent place. In a sense *Comportment* is not

yet a phenomenology and merely points out the inadequacies of behaviorism and to a lesser extent gestalt theory.

In *Perception*, MP points out the primacy of perception as the ground level of all knowledge that precedes all knowledge. What distinguishes MP's account from that say of Price (1933) in the Anglo-American tradition is that MP makes no mention of sense data, *sensa*, etc. which are for Price all meaningless. In fact this book is not a phenomenology of perception at all in the sense that it is about perception as such. Nor is the book Husserlian in the sense that perception is fulfillment, or about bodily given objects, or modifications in perception. Rather, MP is busy trying to explore the basic stratum of experience of the world **prior** to our knowledge of it. Perception is simply our access to the lived world. Hence the task is to describe how the world presents itself to perception as concretely as possible, without omitting its meanings, absences of meaning, its ambiguities, and clarities. Thus, the book is about the phenomenology of the world-as-perceived.

The return to the life-world is blocked by the classical prejudice of empiricism (the prejudice of a pre-given sense data world) which MP tries to defeat by using gestalt theory of form). Once this empiricist prejudice is given up, we can turn to the first (psychological) reflection and MP does so by turning first to the body – i.e., to the “mode of our existing our body”, also in gesture, speech and language – and next to the world-as-perceived, that is the world as engaged, including the human-cultural world.

MP then turns beyond the psychological reflection to the question of how it is possible that the phenomenal world (with all its clarities and ambiguities) constitutes itself in us. Under the title *Being-for-itself and Being-within-the-world*, MP gets rid of the cogito and in place puts “our-presence-within-the-world”. Strictly speaking this third part is no longer concerned with perception.

What is unique about perception in MP is that it is prior to all interpretations – it is a “believing world” (not one of absolute certainty) but one of faith. Perception is an act in which we are existentially engaged. This world is not merely receptive or creative; it expresses our essentially ambiguous relationship to, of existence in, the world.

The *Being-within-the-world* (of existence). While phenomenology is often identified with Cartesianism (Husserl and Sartre), there is also a strain of phenomenology which is anti-Cartesian. Scheler criticism of the idols of self-knowledge and Heidegger's concern with *Being* were anti-Cartesian. But so is MP (surprisingly since he otherwise claims to be carrying out Husserl's final intentions). MP rejects the indubitability of the consciousness in all its various modes (e.g., perception). Consciousness is transcendence through and through. But MP also hangs on to the “true cogito” which is my-being-present-within-the-world which remains ambiguous unless the ambiguity is eliminated through commitment. Indeed, committed (engaged) consciousness is the very meaning of “existence”. Yet all such freely chosen commitment presupposes that consciousness is already committed by birth, in a body, in a particular time, and place, and hence in history and in language. I can never step out of being. Thus subjectivity is always already

inherence in the world. The world is the field of our experience; we as subjectivity are merely a certain perspective of that inherence in the world. Thus, the subjective and objective are inseparable: the world is all in us, and I am all outside myself. We are not inside the world (Heidegger) but we are within the world. Man is nothing but a knot of relations (Saint Exupery).

This notion of existence is an explicit challenge to subjectivism both in Descartes and Husserl. It does not deny the subjective merely it denies that the subjective is separable from its embracing structure. But the question is whether this is still phenomenology, and whether it is indeed possible.

Presence-within-the- world may seem like an ingenious way of replacing the ego cogito, but does it really do so? Is this not a degrading of the world, the en-soi of the realist, to an “interworld”? But what if this en-soi of the realist really does need to be abolished just like the cogito of the idealist, what are we then to say about the world independent of ourselves?

MP’s recasting of the ego as existence depends on his analysis of temporality (central to *P of P*). Here MP attempts to combine Husserl and Heidegger – to the effect that temporality is the meaning of existence.

Past and future can only be found imbedded in our subjectivity, in the field of the present (cf. G. H. Mead’s *Philosophy of the present*). Here MP uses a diagram taken over and modified from Husserl’s inner time consciousness. This past and future can be supported in the present only by a subject that is a temporal being. Thus, a subject in this sense breaks up the fullness of being and introduces into being the phenomenon of perspective, and of non-being. Thus, in breaking up this fullness of being by introducing perspective the subject can move (ecstatic, as used by Hegel, Heidegger and Sartre) beyond the present into the past and the future. Thus temporality has an ecstatic character and so does the temporal subject have an ecstatic character – hence subject is time and time is subject. Thus, the subject is engaged in time, is permeated in time.

This ecstatic outreaching of temporality makes possible subjectivity but also sense and reason, as these imply an open-ness to referents other than themselves. Thus, ecstatic outreaching of temporality constitutes “operative intentionality” that underlies the intentionality of consciousness. This operative intentionality implies a being that transcends itself towards the world (the subject is inseparable from the world). It is this interdependence of subject and world made possible by the operative intentionality which in turn is made possible by the temporality of the subject, who breaks the fullness of being in the non-being of perspective, is MP’s answer to the controversy over idealism and realism and settles the problem phenomenology has yet to resolve. Thus, subject and object are the poles of a single structure called “presence”. Thus, the ecstatic transcendence laid out in the temporality of the subject is the ultimate bond of interconnectedness.

Incarnate consciousness changes the existentialist notion of freedom. Sartre had claimed that freedom is either total or there is no freedom. Yet in actual practice all freedom is within a situation which then serves as a basis for free choices of new meanings. Now this “situation” is for MP man “being-within-the-world”. MP argues that we can never start from zero and hence there can be no first choice as Sartre would have it. Since we exist in a situation (incarnation) we already have a certain essence along with our existence. Therefore MP would disagree with the Sartrean phrase “existence precedes essence”. It is not only we that choose the world but the world chooses us just as much. Thus, freedom stands out against a field of sedimented meanings (using Husserl’s phrase) History forms the background to every free act. (Perceived) phenomena reveal existence as conditioned freedom within a lifestyle. (MP’s example of the rise of class consciousness, contra Marx, is not an intellectual project but an existential project.) Projects are lived in ambiguity, in interrogation, in the subjunctive of the vow and then wait. It is I who give a meaning and future to my life, but these are not conceptual; they surge from my present and from my past and in particular from my present and past coexistence.

Hence, freedom begins in a situation which I exist and over which I have no control, and my choice is not conscious but an existential one. Thus freedom never starts from nothing – as Sartre would claim. We are always full of being, condemned to express something even in death. Thus, unlike Sartre, MP claims that we do not constantly choose ourselves under the pretext that I could constantly refuse to be what I am. MP claims that we cannot distinguish clearly the part of the situation and the part of freedom – we are mingled with the world and with others inextricably. But there is the engagement of history together with the disengaging freedom of our acts. The ambiguity of existence is real enough.

For MP the gaze is insufficient as a basis for a social phenomenology. The gaze has to be seen in the context of the situation and of communication, speech and language. Thus, MP’s first approach to the social world is by way of the phenomenology of perception, beginning with the perception of one’s own body; it is the body which is the primary focus of varying perspective on the world. “It is precisely in my body which perceives the other’s body and finds there something like a miraculous prolongation of our own intentions...thus the other and I am bound in a single whole, the face and the reverse of one sole phenomenon”.

Of course, cultural phenomena are as important as the body in bridges – especially language. Finding his roots in de Saussure, MP finds in language, in dialogue, a common operation in which neither of us is creator. There is here a being-at-two, in mutual collaboration, in perfect reciprocity, coexisting in the same world, which then becomes part of my history. In his *On the phenomenology of language* (1951), MP writes that when I speak or understand, I experience the presence of others in myself and of myself in others, a presence which is the cornerstone of the theory of inter-subjectivity... leading me to understand Husserl’s enigmatic saying that the ‘transcendental subjectivity is inter-subjectivity’”. I am for myself when I am speaking a different other (un autre ‘autre’) and to the extent that I understand I no longer know who is speaking and who is listening. This coexistence of inter-related subjectivities is also the foundation of a non-subjectivist

phenomenology of inter-subjectivity. Such coexistence does not prevent the fact of solitude (or even the relative truth of solipsism) but solitude and communication are two aspects of the same phenomenon. Here again perception is once again the wedge which allows us to break through our immediate data into a phenomenal field into which they are inserted. Our own world passes over unnoticeably into a wider world of coexistence which we have open to us in the body but also in all cultural expressions.

Phenomenology without MP would have become a mere tool in the hands of Sartre. But phenomenology with MP attains its philosophical stature. In a sense MP practices phenomenology, and he is not a philosopher of phenomenology. MP brings phenomenology down to the level of concrete life, incarnate in bodily and cultural existence. Sartre of course had also emphasized the body, particularly in the gaze which was his foundation for social phenomenology. But MP more fully identifies human existence with the body, and we may rightly ask whether this does not come dangerously close to selling out phenomenology. How far does the engagement in the body and in history still allow phenomenology to look on itself from the necessary distance? That is, can phenomenology be attached to engagement? MP affirmation of the phenomenological reduction (in P of P) indicates that he is aware of this problem.

MP's phenomenology is a phenomenology of ambiguity. He does fuse the difference between consciousness and unconscious in introducing the notion of "existence" which he never quite clarifies. His dialectics keep things ambiguous. Even as he breaks down the deadlock between idealism and realism, between empiricism and rationalism, and rejects the role of causation in phenomenology, yet this does not rule out causation. So that MP rejects any finality and as such his phenomenology is a human phenomenology – one of human unfinished business.

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