Allen Roush

Philosophy 453

Midterm

1.

I am keeping a diary to explain the sequence of events and actions that have stricken me with an intense feeling that I can most closely describe as *Nausea.* I do not know what exactly changed about myself or the world, maybe nothing at all has changed. One day, I walked down to the beach and grasped onto a stone. Grasping the stone’s cold, rainy presence in my hand lead to that same feeling rushing back furiously through my head and racing through my body, finally filling me like a knowledge-vessel. *Nausea!* The stone left my hands and rejoined the watery-earth henceforth.

I have spent a considerable amount of time researching the Marquis de Rollebon (a fellow from the same city as my birth). The more I research the life of this man, the more that this feeling of *Nausea* rampages through my being.

One day, I sat in the park and happened my gaze upon a root of a tree. Suddenly this peculiar feeling revealed it’s nature to me. The *Nausea* that I experienced was simply my perception of an objects (or actions) naked existence, devoid of the taste, smell, touches, senses, and worldly signs that I ascribe to it.

2. Pre-reflective positional consciousness is consciousness of self that is not altered by the reflection of the self to the self. This does not exist in a vacuum, but is “homologous with the reflective cogito since it appears as the first necessity for non-reflective consciousness to be seen by itself”[[1]](#footnote-1). We exercise this form of consciousness all the time. Sartre gives the example of children who are counting, which I will borrow for explaining his ideas. The children do not necessarily know about addition, but intuitively can add numbers. When an adult counts, and is asked what they have done to count, they answer “I am counting”. That recognition of self (I am) is the reflective positional consciousness. Awareness of the pre-reflective positional consciousness refers to abstract knowledge that one took the action of counting without having thought about counting in order to conclude how many objects there are. Awareness of reflective positional consciousness is the abstract knowledge of consciousness being conscious of consciousness. The self is the totality of these modes of consciousness.

3. The two fundamental regions of meaning for Sartre are “Being-in-itself” and “Being-for-itself”. Being for-itself is the reflective and pre-reflective consciousness. It is the subjective being that we mean when we say “I exist”. Being-in-itself is the being of objects within the world. These objects have no self-consciousness, are not bound to human concepts like “temporality”, and experience no difference between existence and essence. The nihilating nature of consciousness is the awareness of nothingness created by consciousness. Sartre uses the example of his friend Pierre, who he expects at to meet at a café. When he discovers that Pierre is not there, he explains that “This nihilation is given to my intuition; I am witness to the successive disappearance of all the objects which I look at — in particular of the faces, which detain me for an instant (Could this be Pierre?) and which as quickly decompose precisely because they “are not” the face of Pierre.”[[2]](#footnote-2) We believed Pierre was at the café, he was not. It is true that rest of humanity (baring the patrons) are also not within the café, but their nothingness was not nihilated (because I was not conscious of their non-being at the cafe).

4. Temporality is the concept of the past, present, and future existing as a synthetic totality, which can not be seen as separate entities for consciousness. This is how we consciously understand time. Sartre begins with the past: “I see first that the term “was” is a mode of being. In this sense I am my past. I do not have it; I am it.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Thus the past is the in-itself, that which is. Sartre compares the past with present to explain the presents subjective nature. “In contrast to the Past which is in-itself. the Present is for-itself.” The present is the individual consciousness of the in-itself by the for-itself. This takes the form of “flight”[[4]](#footnote-4), and the present converts that which is what it is not (the future) to that which is not what it is. The future is the being of which the for-itself has to become in order for it to exist in the moment of the future becoming the present. If we imagined time as a simple “now” which is not yet, we would imagine ourselves as the same “being” in the present that will exist in the future, which is absurd to Sartre.

5.

My absolute freedom is my ability to always make choices which is innate to human consciousness. No matter how many restrictions are put onto myself by others, I still possess absolute freedom to act however I would like to at all times. Even tied to a tree, I can choose to scream, snarl, or simply be silent (and any other number of possible actions). Sartre believes that any action taken by a human means that they would believe that any human in their situation should take it. In this way, he concludes that “I am thus responsible for myself and for all men, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself I fashion man.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The worst part about this responsibility and freedom is that we cannot escape it. It permeates throughout every one of our lives all the time. This is why Sartre believes that we are “condemned to be free”.

6. Sartre explains the nature of this waiter at the café on page 218. This waiter has exaggerated movements that look somehow like he is trying to be an object, and Sartre recognizes this: “Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray”[[6]](#footnote-6). The waiter is acting in bad faith because he is trying to be what he is not. He is allowing himself to be made an object by his employers, rather than being a conscious, free human. This concept of bad faith is ambiguous for 2 reasons. The first is that (we believe) that we are compelled to act in bad faith by our circumstances, such as the waiter waiting tables so that he will not starve. The second reason is that sometimes people act in ways that make it hard to tell if they acted in good faith or not. It is not easy to judge if someone acted “authentically” or acted “while-preserving their belief in their own freedom” or not.

7. Conflict is the pre-requisite for all human relations. Because our freely chosen actions ultimately are what define us, we also act in such a way to try to reduce the amount of freedom of others. If I want to eat a cheeseburger, and I ask someone else to make it for me, than I am asking them to reduce their own freedom (for a time) by acting in my interests. Sartre believes that the origin of “being for others” is conflict[[7]](#footnote-7). Love cannot escape the conflict inherent to all of our relations, because love requires one to freely give away their own freedom (for instance, to only be intimate with one person instead of many) to whom they love. A lover is always afraid of the one they love not loving them back, and that contingency of love is a pre-requisite for it (because love must be consensual).

8. Sartre rejects all forms of transcendentalism within consciousness. For an unconscious to exist, something must be conscious enough of the experience to “censor” it from our normal conscious mind, which implies that we were conscious of the act in some way. We don’t have to be aware of being conscious, but in that moment we are never-the-less still conscious. Sartre explains that humans are not divorced from their own mental structures: “The hypothesis of the Oedipus complex […] is nothing but an “experimental idea;” […] it is not to be distinguished from the totality of experiences which it allows to be […] Thus psychoanalysis substitutes for the notion of bad faith, the idea of a lie without a liar”[[8]](#footnote-8). This “lie” without the liar, is the self attempting to see a different aspect of the self as the other, which is inconsistent with the view of human consciousness as the totality of one’s experience and actions. Sartre instead articulates his ideas of “Existential Psychoanalysis” to remedy the failings of Freudian Psychoanalysis.

1. Priest, *Jean Paul Sartre: Basic Writings* (Routledge Press, 2005), 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 145 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 167 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 172 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 218 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 228 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 210 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)