

**Notes and Reflections:**  
On Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*,  
a Study in Phenomenological Ontology

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*My personal collection of notes, thoughts, and contemplations written during my 2021 – 2022 study of Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness, in preparation for my upcoming Senior Essay at St. John's College. An approximately 100-page summary of an 800-page monograph, with a 10-page "epitome" that presents a sketch of Sartre's pursuit.*

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## 1.0 Epitome of Sartrean Ontology

What is Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* about? What is a “*phenomenological ontology*?” What is Sartre's conception of *nothingness*, and why does he place it central to *being*? This epitome (lit: to cut short) is a summary and a primer for Sartre's unique ontology, which we now call *Existentialism*. This summary is the text that you want, if you need to read ten pages about Sartre, but not a single page more.

### Introduction

*Being and Nothingness* aims to solve the problem of *being*. What is the *being* of something? Where does it come from? What is its foundation? In the INTRODUCTION, Sartre presents these problems, and lays the foundation for their inquiry. We begin with the acknowledgement that we live in a *phenomenal* world – a world that's full of appearances (i.e. phenomena). Can we use these readily apparent phenomena to account for being? Not all philosophers necessarily believe this is possible<sup>1</sup> – but Sartre rejects the possibility of a hidden ‘interior’ behind phenomena, as an unnecessary “troubling dualism”. Hence, we will use phenomena to account for being. But what is this *being-of-phenomena*?

Here Sartre makes the nuanced, but important distinction between the *phenomena-of-being* and the *being-of-phenomena*. The phenomena of a being (the first one) is only what we perceive of a being, in other words, an appearance. Presumably there are all kinds of phenomena for a being, and that's not really important or metaphysical. What we're truly trying to find in this inquiry is the *being-of-phenomena* – we're trying to find out what is the *being* that all phenomena shares. What is this being-of-phenomena, and where does it come from?

Well, what is a phenomenon in the first place? It is something that *appears*. For there to be a phenomenon in the first place, there has to be *someone* to *perceive* it! This someone is a *being* – but it cannot be just any being (like a table, or chair). It has to be a *conscious* being. What is this *being-of-consciousness*?<sup>2</sup> Here, Sartre asserts that consciousness is both *contentless* and *positional*. This means that consciousness does not have content in itself – but rather, it is like a spotlight that always shines upon (i.e. ‘posits’) an object of consciousness. You can be conscious of heat, of sensation –

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<sup>1</sup>For a counterexample, see Immanuel Kant's *transcendental idealism*

<sup>2</sup>There is strictly speaking, two “kinds” of consciousness. There is the *thetic*, positional consciousness – as well as a *non-thetic* pre-reflective *cogito* which is essential for our consciousness to be *self-conscious*. This distinction is fleshed out by Sartre in (Sartre 11).

which are all objects – but the consciousness itself is not filled with anything. But does this mean we can derive the being-of-phenomena from the being of consciousness itself? No, we cannot! Sartre rejects this absolutely. Consciousness is contentless, and it cannot give being to anything. The relationships of passivity and relativity do not allow consciousness to give its being to phenomena at all. Consciousness has its being, and phenomena has its being too. Phenomena cannot derive its being from the being of consciousness. But how does this make sense, especially when phenomena (as a perceived thing) can only exist if there is a perceiver?

This is the crux of Sartre's ontological innovation. *The being of phenomena derives its being only via an act of negation by the consciousness.* What does this mean? Well, let us first consider the being-of-consciousness. What is it? The being-of-consciousness is *pure subjectivity*. Everything within a consciousness is itself. It is a pure plenitude of selfness. It's a mantra that chants "... I am I am I am I am ..." without limit. How can any object (i.e. phenomena) enter this pure and absolute self-ness? A phenomenon cannot derive its being from this, because if it does so – it would simply become a part of consciousness. It would be one with the ceaseless chant of "...I am I am I am I am ..." until there is no more distinction between the subject and the object, and hence the phenomena would have no being at all. How can *anything* enter consciousness in the first place?

It would have to enter as a negation – as a *nothingness* of consciousness. Or in Sartre's words, *the being-of-phenomena is the non-being of the being-of-consciousness.* When a phenomenon enters consciousness, the mantra of pure and absolute subjectivity (this is my image, not Sartre's) is rudely interrupted all of a sudden by something that is *not* the self. The mantra goes: "...I am I am I am I AM NOT ..." – and all of a sudden, we have a being that is not the being-of-consciousness. This is the act of ontological baryogenesis that creates the being-of-the-phenomena. Where its very nature, is this negation. Hence, the title of Sartre's work: *Being and Nothingness*. Now we know what the being-of-phenomena is. As a final question, what is the being-of-consciousness? Sartre gives us the answer as well: "Consciousness is a being for whom in its being there is a question of its being, insofar as this being implies **a being other than itself**." (Sartre 23) Keep this thought in mind, as we proceed on to PART I.

## **Part I: The Problem of Nothingness**

So now that we discover that the being-of-phenomena comes not from any positive act of the being-of-consciousness, but rather from a negative act – namely, a *nothingness*,

we are faced with another question. Where does this nothingness come from? Where does this negation originate? Can nothingness simply come from being – as through an act of parthenogenesis? Or is there something special about the kinds of being which contain or generate nothingness? This is the subject of PART I of Sartre's work. We begin our investigation gently – looking first at the phenomena of *questioning* – since a question is a simple, direct, and practical example of *negation*.

We discover that not only the act of questioning allows for negation, but within the being of every question there must necessarily be an act of negation. What does this mean? Consider the simplest question: the yes-or-no question. If we allow “yes” as an answer, we must by necessity presuppose the possibility of “no” as an answer – otherwise this wouldn't be a question at all. More fundamentally, behind every question we *confront a being whom we interrogate*. We ask yes-or-no towards a being. And the possibility of a “no” therefore also *implies the possibility of a non-being*. With this, Sartre introduces *non-being as a necessary aspect of reality*.<sup>3</sup>

So where does non-being come from? Non-being is a nothingness. But can we dismiss nothingness as a simple *absence* of being? No, we cannot! To quote Sartre: “Nothingness can only nihilate itself on the ground of being: if nothingness can be given, it is neither before being nor after being; nor is it, in a general way, outside being; rather, it is right inside being, in its heart, like a worm.” (57) Hence nothingness can neither be before, after, nor outside being. So it can only come from *inside* being. What sort of being does *nothingness* come from? Do all beings generate nothingness on the tap? No! No being can *generate* nothingness – you can never derive non-being from being. Nothingness can only come from as a special *relationship* of a being to another being – a relationship where we question the being.

There is only one kind of being that possesses the unique ontology capable of his nihilating relationship (remember, not generation). This is the being that possesses within its ontology, the very *question of its own being*. This is the *being-of-consciousness*. Hence, only conscious beings possess this nothingness capable of negation.

After deducing this important ontological insight about where nothingness comes from, Sartre spends the remainder of PART I examining its effects in practice. He talks about how our own, human awareness of this nothingness manifests itself as the feeling of *angst* – the process of us extending our negation outwards. Likewise, he looks at what happens when we withdraw this negation *inwards*, which manifests itself as *bad faith*. After elucidating these practical manifestations of our being (as a

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<sup>3</sup>Rather, human-reality – but we don't get into this distinction until Part III.

being which contains the question (i.e. nothingness) of its own being), Sartre proceeds on to PART II.

## Part II: Being-for-Itself

In PART II, Sartre takes us on an examination of the *being-for-itself*.<sup>4</sup> But wait, what is a being-for-itself? So far, we talked about the being-of-phenomena, and the being-of-consciousness. Where did this being-for-itself suddenly come from? Well, recall that consciousness has two components – there’s the *thetic*, positional consciousness – which is the being-of-consciousness that we talked about earlier. But there’s only the *non-thetic*, pre-reflective consciousness, that serves as a necessary condition for our self-awareness. This section is an examination of this non-thetic pre-reflective *cogito* – that is the being-for-itself. We will be talking about the being-for-itself from now on for the rest of Sartre’s text.

So what is a being-for-itself? It is the foundation of our self-awareness – of how our consciousness is not only positional, but we are (self-) aware of what we are positing. Without the being-for-itself, we would be an unconscious consciousness (which Sartre calls an “absurdity”). What is the *being*, of this being-for-itself? The key property of the being-for-itself is *self-presence* – it’s what I called self-awareness earlier. What is self-presence? The being-for-itself has a reflective nature – after all, the very word *for* implies a certain degree of reflectivity. However, this reflectiveness is *not* simply identity! Our being-for-itself is *not* simply our being. It is not a co-incident of being, or an identity of being. But rather, our being-for-itself (the self-presence) is a *separation* from being. *Self presence is an act of separation from the self* (127).

What separates our being-for-itself from our simple being (the itself)? It is *nothing*. Nothingness is the foundation of our being-for-itself. The fundamental internal relationship of our self-presence (the being-for-itself) to our being is one of *negation*.

From this foundation in our understanding of the being-for-itself, Sartre takes us on a slight, but pedagogically significant detour, on an examination of *lack* and *value*. You’ll see why an elucidation of these more derivative concepts is important, once we reconvene on our inquiry on the being-for-itself. So far, we have discussed negation solely in the context of our being-for-itself in a relation with other beings-in-itself (things) – where the act of negation is our being-for-itself placing external in-itselfs in negation. But in this detour, we will look at how negation affects our

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<sup>4</sup>There’s also the *being-in-itself*, which denotes regular, non-conscious beings like tables, chairs, and rocks. I gloss over it in this summary.



being-for-itself.

Sartre begins with an exposition on the *lack*. The lack is the form of negation which “most deeply establishes an internal relation between what we negate and what our negation applies to ... [the lack is the form of negation] which penetrates most deeply into being – the one that constitutes *in its being* the being to which its negation applies with the being that it negates.” (137) Essentially, when we lack something, we state our very being is inadequate for the (lack) of something. Lack leads on to *desire* – which is a lack of being. For example, in more concrete terms. If I have a house, there is house-being. If the house doesn’t have a roof, the lack of the house is the roof which it doesn’t have. Its “desire” would be a roof – the desire is the hypothetical house-being which has a roof. This example is a flawed one, for houses are beings-in-itself, not for-itself. But humans are beings-for-itself!

This is where Sartre concludes the detour on lack and desire, and takes us on towards an important realisation of our being-for-itself. Human-reality – our being-for-itself – is a lack. That’s because we are the source of our own negation. What is our desire? It is a being that has what our current being-for-itself lacks. From this, Sartre takes us onwards towards radical, ontologically interesting discussions on temporality and the ontology of the being-for-itself as a temporal being.

### **Part III: Being-for-the-Other**

So far, we have examined the ontology of the being-in-itself (objects), and the being-for-itself (conscious beings). But the sum of human-reality is not just the being-for-itself, alongside the world of beings-in-itself. If that were the case, our world would be simply *psychological*. There’s an entire category of ontology that we are missing here. What are we missing? The world of human-reality is not just a single being-for-itself – but there are many beings-for-itself, namely, Other people! And the being-for-itself of the Other (person), is fundamentally *not* my own being-for-itself – otherwise there would be no alterity (Other-ness) at all, and we would be a hive mind. So what is the significance of the Other? And how does our own ontology change, when we are confronted with the Other, as a being-for-the-Other?

PART III is where Sartre examines these questions. In the first Chapter, he lays down the necessary ontology of the Other – showing that the Other cannot be distilled or derived from modalities of the for-itself, but is an integral part of the ontology of human-reality. So what *is* the Ontology of the Other? The Other is a negation – a sort of void for myself. That’s because the Other is the only being which is *fundamentally inaccessible to me*. In the world of human-reality, I have complete access to *myself*,

as the being-for-itself. And I have complete access to beings-in-itself, because it is through my perception of them, to which they derive their meaning (and being). But all of a sudden, the Other appears – as an independent consciousness which has an internal world of meanings just like myself, but yet not available to me. “The Other, on contrary, is presented as in some sense the *radical negation of my experience*, **since he is the one for whom I am not a subject but an object.**” (316)

This “radical negation of my experience” is best illustrated in Sartre’s example of the Other’s *Look* – the act of the Other from which all of a sudden I become the *object* of another being-for-itself. Sartre explores this look through *shame*, which captures well the ontological terror of being objectified. “In the first place, the *Other’s look*, as the necessary condition of my objectivity, is the destruction of all objectivity for me. The Other’s look reaches me through the world and is not only a transformation of myself but a complete metamorphosis of the *world*.” (368)

These are the ontological preliminaries of the Other, as a fundamental category of Sartrean ontology. Through these foundations, Sartre explores all the interactions of our for-itself with the Other, which comprises the sphere of our being-for-the-Other. He explores Love, Masochism, Sadism, and Indifference – all of which are manifestations and derived properties of the above axioms.

#### **Part IV: To Have, To Do, To Be**

In the final part of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre examines the physics of *our ontology in motion* (my phrasing, not his). In all the previous parts, we looked at distinct parts of the ontology of human-reality, as well as their interactions between each other. But here, we are taking a look at the ontology of the human *being*, insofar as it *acts*. Sartre begins with an examination of the three “fundamental categories of human-reality”: that being *to have*, *to do*, and *to be*. He ultimately elucidates how all three are reducible to the fundamental category of *to be* – which forms the foundation of all actions. So where does action come from? Sartre says that actions come from *freedom* – pure, and unadulterated freedom. He rejects the more materialist conceptions of action being contingent on reasons or passions (574) – and concludes that the only source of action is the freedom of our for-itself’s being.

So what is that freedom? Where does it come from? Once again, we return to the theme of nothingness. Remember how our being-for-itself comes from our negation of the in-itself? This negation of the in-itself is fundamentally a type of lack, which yields a desire. What is the desire which stems for this lack? It is a desire *to be* another being, (perhaps) a better version of our current being. This continuous action

of *to be*, that comes from this negation within the heart of our being, is the source of our freedom. This is a pretty big claim for Sartre to make – because by stating so, he pins our freedom *to our ontology*. Freedom is not some transient state that we possess or lose. But rather, we *are* free, for the sole fact that we are beings-for-itself who contain the question of our own being. We are not objects, we are not beings-in-itself, who can have no recourse to change their being, other than to submit to the ceaseless determinism of *what they are*. Rather, we are free because we are conscious beings – whether in bondage or in chains.

So our freedom comes from our freedom *to be*. While this may be acceptable on an ontological basis, isn't it absurd in the face of reality? After all, we are constantly constrained by the reality of our situation – one is not free to be rich or handsome, no matter how one wills it in one's being. The sum of the material obstacles which comprise human-reality is referred to collectively as our *facticity*. Sartre spends an entire chapter exploring facticity in all of its forms – whether it is our *place*, our *past*, our *surroundings*, our *fellow man*, even *our death*. The ultimate ontological discovery is that our facticity, far from being a limit or impediment to our freedom, is *necessary* for freedom to exist in the first place. Like the friction of the tarmac which allows a car to move, without facticity there wouldn't be freedom at all. "There can only be a free-for-itself if it is committed within a resisting world. Outside this commitment, the notions of freedom, determinism, and necessity lose all of their meaning." (631)

It is the very last, and concluding chapter of PART IV which is perhaps the most mysterious, but significant. After discussing freedom as a matter of our being's continuous fleeing away from its in-itself towards the lack – Sartre asks: what is the being which we are fleeing towards? First, Sartre presents the *method* to which we can use to reach this being. He calls it the *existential psychoanalysis*, in a parallel to Freudian psychoanalysis. He presents this method in its detail, and demonstrates its use through a few examples. We see that all superficial projects of our being, all stem from an ultimate being to which our being aims.

We come to understand that our being comes from the lack – and to ask what we lack is to ask what is our negation negating. Likewise, we are constantly negating our in-itself – and hence our being is headed towards an in-itself which it lacks. But this in-itself that is the subject of our being's desire cannot (and is not) the simple in-itself of unconscious beings. Rather, we seek the *in-itself-for-itself* – that is, the conscious being which is capable of *being the cause of its own foundation*. "The being that is the object of the for-itself's desire is, therefore, *an in-itself that might relate to*

*itself as its own foundation, i.e., an in-itself whose relation to its facticity would be like the for-itself's relation to its motivations.” (734)*

What is that ultimate *in-itself-for-itself*? Sartre ascribes the label *God* to it, and concludes that: “To be a man is to aim to be God; or, alternatively, man is fundamentally the desire to be God” (735). But a claim so momentous and teleologically significant cannot be discussed in any summary, let alone this epitome. It must be, the subject of an essay on for its own right.

## 2.0 Introduction

### 2.1 The Idea of the Phenomenon

In the opening sections of *Being and Nothingness*, [Jean-Paul Sartre](#) (1905–1980) introduces us to the problem of modern philosophy, which is its usage of incompatible dualisms. He shows how [Phenomenology](#) seemingly resolves these dualisms, but then introduces a dualism of its own: that of the finite and infinite, insofar appearances are concerned. He defines phenomenology as a philosophy in which the *being*<sup>1</sup> of existents are not somehow ‘behind’ the appearances of said existents (e.g. as [Immanuel Kant](#)’s ontology posits), but rather *the being of an existent is in its appearances*. Sartre then concludes that in order to properly know the nature of such a being, we must investigate the being of appearances in further detail.

*This would be a good place to compare and contrast [Martin Heidegger](#)’s conception of the problem of philosophy, i.e. his Fundamental Problem of Metaphysics.*

1. As a preface, Sartre states that one of the accomplishments of modern philosophy was to reduce ‘existents’ to merely the “series of appearances that manifest it” (1)
2. This is done in order to eliminate certain ‘troublesome dualisms.’
  - (a) Such as the dualism of the internal, versus the external.
3. “An appearance refers to the total series of appearances, not to some hidden reality that siphons off all the existent’s *being* for itself.” (2)
4. **Noumenal world** versus **Phenomenal world**: By noumenal, we mean the material (and potentially inaccessible) world outside us, versus the phenomenal world which consists of what appears to us. The phenomenal world can be understood as our mental world, in a sense.
5. Sartre proceeds to give us a **working definition of Phenomenology**:
  - (a) The being of an existent *is in its appearances*. “For the being of an existent is precisely the way which it *appears*” (2)
  - (b) The phenomenon is the *absolute-relative*. It remains relative, because the phenomenon has to *appear* to someone.<sup>2</sup> However, it is absolute because the appearance is not merely our perception of a deeper, transcendent being.
  - (c) But rather, the *appearance is being*.

*How does Sartre’s use of these words compare with the more traditional Kantian understanding?*

*What is absolute-relative?*

<sup>1</sup> *ὄντεια*, translit. *Ousia* – although Sartre’s conception of it may be different from the Greek.

<sup>2</sup> Naturally, it is the exploration of this *someone* which we are interested in. An understanding of the ontological foundations of *conscious being* is the first step in the *techné* of [artificial beings](#).

6. The benefit of phenomenology as opposed to other competing ontologies (e.g. Immanuel Kant's [transcendental metaphysics](#)) is that it resolves the 'troublesome dualisms' of an internal versus external being. However, it brings out new problems:

(a) The **dualism of the finite versus the infinite**: An object (i.e. existent) has an infinity of appearances, as there are unlimited amounts of phenomenal subjects to which the object can appear.

(b) This infinity is necessary for an *objective phenomenology*. "The reality of this cup is that it is there, and that it is *not* me." (4)

i. "We can express this by saying that the series of its appearances is connected by a *principle* that does not depend on my whim." (4)

(c) However, keep in mind that as subjects, *we only see a finite set of appearances for any given existent at any given time*.

i. And yet, the existent must have an infinite series of appearances.

ii. Hence, there is now a **dualism between finite and infinite appearances**.

iii. By resolving the dualism of the internal and the external, phenomenology has seemingly introduced a new dualism.

(d) "Thus, a *finite* appearance indicates itself in its finitude, but at the same time in order to be grasped as an appearance-of-that-which-appears, it demands to be surpassed towards the infinite." (4)

(e) Hence, from this line of reasoning the nature of the phenomenon's being are endowed with certain *transcendent* properties.

7. Recall that the essence, or being of an existent is now completely in its appearance. Hence, in order to properly ground phenomenology, we must investigate the *being* of the appearance itself.

*Is the very idea of dualisms being 'troubling' an unexamined preconception in the first place? If so, how can we substantiate it?*

*It seems like phenomenology, at least when misunderstood– can easily fall into the debasement of mere solipsism. How does Sartre defend his phenomenological ontology from such pitfalls?*

*What are these transcendent properties of the phenomenon?*

## 2.2 The *Phenomenon* of Being and the

### *Being* of the Phenomenon

Sartre presents an important distinction between the *phenomenon-of-being*, and the *being-of-phenomena*. We wish to study the latter, not the former – even though strictly speaking we only have access to the former (right now, at any rate). Sartre asks us whether the phenomenon-of-being is reducible to the being-of-phenomena, to which he concludes this reduction is not possible. This is because any phenomena (appearance) is founded on being: specifically, Sartre says that "being is the condition of a phenomena's disclosure" (7). Hence, the being-of-phenomena is not in the phenomena itself, but

*What would it mean for something to be the very precondition for disclosure?*

rather has a *transphenomenal foundation*. That is the ultimate conclusion of this section.

*The idea of a transphenomenal foundation and the process of transcending/transcendence is a motif that comes up often in Sartre's thought.*

1. **Eidetic reduction:** “a technique in the study of essences in phenomenology whose goal is to identify the basic components of phenomena. Eidetic reduction requires that a phenomenologist examine the essence of a mental object, with the intention of drawing out the absolutely necessary and invariable components that make the mental object what it is. This is achieved by the method known as eidetic variation. It involves imagining an object of the kind under investigation and varying its features. The changed feature is inessential to this kind of the object can survive its change, otherwise it belongs to the kind's essence.” (Wikipedia)
2. We wish to study the nature of *being*. We define earlier on that the being of any existent is in its phenomenon. Hence, we wish to study the *being-of-phenomenon*. However, *being* itself is also a phenomenon – that's how we can talk about and reason about it.
  - (a) Hence, there are two concepts we need to understand clearly:
  - (b) **The phenomenon-of-being:** an appearance of being.
  - (c) **The being-of-phenomenon:** the being of appearances. (This is what we want to study!)
3. “Is the phenomenon-of-being [that we can reason about] identical to the *being-of-the phenomena*?” (Sartre 6)
  - (a) After all, remember – the purpose of our investigation is in the *being-of-the-phenomena*.
  - (b) Which admittedly, we can only reach through the intermediary of the phenomena (the appearance) of being.
  - (c) These are somewhat tricky and nit-picky differences, but it is important to keep them in mind!
4. The being-of-phenomena cannot be simply resolved into the phenomenon-of-being (7).
  - (a) This is because phenomena itself can only exist on the foundation of being. Sartre calls being “the condition of all disclosure” for appearances.
5. This leads to a certain important ontological insight, which is that “*knowledge alone cannot account for being, i.e., that the being of the phenomenon cannot be reduced to the phenomenon of being.*” (7)
6. “The phenomenon of being requires the transphenomenality of being.” (7)
  - (a) “Although the being of the phenomenon is co-extensive with the phenomenon, it must escape the phenomenal condition in which existence is

*Is there such a thing as a 'method' for phenomenological inquiry?*

possible [only as a condition] that it is revealed [i.e. a phenomenon].” (7)

7. I’m not sure if I understand this completely, but essentially Sartre concludes that the being-of-phenomena has a transphenomenal nature, where it is grounded in something that is not strictly just phenomena.

## 2.3 The Prereflective Cogito and the Being of the Percipere

In this section, Sartre asks whether the being-of-phenomena can be found in *knowledge*, which is the proportionality of an appearance’s *appearing* (e.g. we have more knowledge of a phenomenon, when it appears more strongly to us). He examines this knowledge-hypothesis of being (my term for it), before concluding that it is not an adequate answer, for to place the being of phenomena into knowledge invites an infinite regression.

He then (rather confusingly) goes on a tangent where he resolves this infinite regression, by showing that knowledge is related to consciousness – for in order to know (percipere) something (a percipi), there has to be a knower (percipiens). He examines the nature of the percipiens (consciousness), and elaborates on its characteristics. The most important is that consciousness is *positional*, namely that it *posits* towards something (i.e. an object of consciousness). But otherwise, consciousness is itself contentless and empty.

Finally, he explains how consciousness is self-conscious. He first posits that consciousness is by necessity self-conscious, and demonstrates the inadequacy of a simple consciousness-of-consciousness approach, because that too leads to an infinite regression. Instead, he shows that the self-consciousness of consciousness lies in a certain *non-cognitive, non-positional consciousness*, which he calls the *pre-reflective cogito*. It’s called pre-reflective, because it is prior to the more ordinary positional (i.e. reflective) cogito.

In the most confusing part, he demonstrates that this pre-reflective cogito is an essential characteristic of consciousness itself, and that they are one and the same. Every act of consciousness is both a consciousness of an object (positional), and conscious of itself. This is justified using Husserl’s factual necessity. With this, he finishes his digression on the nature of consciousness.

To begin, here are some introductory Latin definitions to keep in the back of our mind:

1. **Percipere**: Infinitive. To perceive, to learn, to secure.

*Does this question reduce itself to simply asking whether being is reduced to appearances?*

*What is the necessary relation between being and consciousness?*

*How does Sartre’s non-symmetrical conception of consciousness relate against Hegel’s conception of the lord and bondsmen?*



2. **Percipi:** Passive, the perceived.
3. **Percipiens** The perceiver.

### 2.3.1 The Knowledge-Hypothesis of Being

Sartre begins his exposition on the nature of being by first examining some preconceptions. The first one I call the “knowledge-hypothesis” of Being, which he explores and then refutes as inadequate.

1. Sartre addresses the hypothesis that the being of an appearance (i.e. being-of-phenomenon) is rooted in the way that it *appears*.
  - (a) “The being of an appearance is proportionate to its *appearing*.” (8)
  - (b) This hypothesis attempts to reduce the being-of-phenomenon to a simple matter of our knowledge (where knowledge is taken as the proportion of an existent’s appearing to us).
2. In Sartre’s Latin vocabulary, he names this knowledge-hypothesis with the following proportionality: The phenomena-of-being appears to a perceiver, as a *percipi* to a *percipiens*. This proportionality is *knowledge*.
  - (a) Hence, under the knowledge-hypothesis, the being-of-phenomena lays within knowledge.
  - (b) However, this hypothesis is inadequate, since we essentially move the burden of ‘where is being’ on towards knowledge:
3. “If any metaphysics presupposes a theory of knowledge, it is equally true that any theory of knowledge presupposes a metaphysics” (8)
4. A potential response to this inadequacy of the knowledge-hypothesis is to state that the being of the *percipi* is founded in the being *percipiens*, i.e. the perceiver.
  - (a) “One might allow that the *percipi* refers to a being that escapes the laws of appearance while still maintaining that this transphenomenal being is the *subject*’s being.” (9)
  - (b) This points us towards the direction of consciousness. Could the being-of-phenomena lie within consciousness?

*How does the pre-supposition of an underlying metaphysics behind a theory of knowledge relate against Gödel’s meta-mathematical propositions? Is meta-mathematics akin to a metaphysics behind the theory of knowledge of maths?*

### 2.3.2 Understanding Consciousness (As a Potential Resolution for the Being-of-Phenomena)

In order to properly evaluate the knowledge-hypothesis of being, we must have a good understanding of consciousness. This is what Sartre does next.

1. Sartre presents a very Husserl-style **phenomenological definition for con-**

**sciousness:**

- (a) “As Husserl showed, *all* consciousness is consciousness *of* something. In other words, there is no [act of] consciousness that does not *posit* a transcendent object” (9)
  - (b) Consciousness is a *posit*-ional consciousness of objects in the world, where consciousness has no content, but only aims to reach (or in other words, *posits*) towards objects.
  - (c) “Every knowing consciousness can only be knowledge of it’s [posited] object.” (9)
  - (d) Essentially consciousness is an action towards things (it posits). It is not an object which has content.
2. However, even though consciousness is a contentless action towards an object, *consciousness must always be aware of its own consciousness towards said object*. In other words, the act of consciousness must be conscious of itself being said act.
- (a) This is absolutely necessary, otherwise if I was conscious of an object without being conscious that I am conscious of an object, I would become an *unconscious conscious*, which is an absurdity.
  - (b) However, this strict requirement that consciousness must be aware of itself, also leads to its downfall so far as a hypothesis for the being-of-phenomena as consciousness, which Sartre will present in the following.

*When our consciousness posits towards something, does our ontology get affected in the process?*

### 2.3.3 The Inadequacy of Consciousness-of-Consciousness

1. “The reduction of consciousness to knowledge effectively imports the subject-object duality within consciousness.” (10)
2. Furthermore, recall how consciousness must be aware of itself? This leads to a consciousness-of-consciousness. But wouldn’t that consciousness need another consciousness, e.g. a consciousness-of-consciousness-of-consciousness? This by necessity leads to an infinite recursion.
  - (a) “Either we stop at some term within the series – in which case the phenomenon in its totality collapses into the unknown (i.e. we always come up against a reflection that is not conscious of itself and is the final term) – or we declare an infinite regress to be necessary, which is absurd.” (11)

### 2.3.4 The (Reflective) Non-Positional Consciousness Towards Positional Consciousness Hypothesis

In order to prevent the absurdity of this infinite recursion, we cannot have an isomorphic relationship of consciousness-to-consciousness. Rather, we must have an “immediate and non-cognitive relationship of self to self.” (11)

1. “Any positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself” (11)
2. My understanding of this step is not very clear, but the essential meaning is as follows. Every act of consciousness must have a relationship to itself which is non-consciousness (or at least, non-positionally conscious). Sartre provides the following example, which I will reproduce:
  - (a) Imagine yourself counting cigarettes (sartre’s example). You count that there are twelve of them. That’s an objective property which you are *positionally* conscious of (i.e. your consciousness posits the twelve-ness of these cigarettes).
  - (b) However, this positional awareness (i.e. consciousness) of the number of cigarettes appears to you *as a direct, immediate property of the world*. You don’t have a positional consciousness of counting them.
    - i. “I do not ‘know myself as counting’. Proof of this can be seen in the fact that children who are capable of spontaneous addition are unable to *explain* afterwards how they did it.” (12)
  - (c) Hence, any positional act of consciousness contains a reflective act that is non-cognitive and non-positional.
3. “Thus, reflection lacks any kind of primacy in relation to the reflected consciousness: it is not by the means of [reflection] that the [primary, positional] consciousness is revealed to itself.” (12)
  - (a) “On the contrary, non-reflective consciousness is what makes reflection possible. There is a prereflective *cogito*, which is the condition of the Cartesian [positional, primary] *cogito*” (12)
4. In summary, consciousness is contentless and positional. However, consciousness itself requires a reflection against a non-cognitive, non-positional act of consciousness, which Sartre calls a pre-reflective *cogito*
5. What is the nature of this pre-reflective *cogito*? Sartre explores it next.

*But what is a non-cognitive or pre-cognitive consciousness? Is it the being-for-itself?, as opposed to the being-of-consciousness?*

*There is a good parallel to be made with Galileo’s image of how only non-reflective objects are illuminated, in his Dialogues on Dual World Systems.*

### 2.3.5 The Nature of the Pre-Reflective Cogito

1. **The pre-reflective cogito**, i.e. the non-positional consciousness is essential to the positional consciousness.
2. We cannot talk of positional consciousness at all, without acknowledging that it is integrally tied with the consciousness of itself. Sartre puts this into more definite words:
  - (a) “Any conscious existence exists as the consciousness of existing. The most basic consciousness of consciousness is not positional, because it and the consciousness of which it is conscious [i.e. the aforementioned positional consciousness] are one and the same.” (12)
  - (b) “In a single movement, consciousness determines itself as consciousness of perception, and as perception” (12)
  - (c) “[This integral consciousness of self] is the only possible mode of existence for any consciousness of something.” (13)
3. Let me try to explain the above in my own words. The syllogism is thus:
  - (a) Consciousness is positional and contentless.
  - (b) However, to be conscious of something, we must *also* be conscious of our consciousness of something. We must be conscious of our positional consciousness.
  - (c) It is not possible to have this second consciousness to be the same as the first consciousness, for then we would yield an infinite regression, which is absurd.
  - (d) Hence, the second consciousness must be by necessity non-cognitive.
  - (e) We conclude that the consciousness of consciousness must be integral to the first consciousness.
4. It’s not the best explanation, but it captures the gist of Sartre’s idea.

### 2.3.6 Sartre’s Elaboration on the Nature and Qualities of Consciousness

Given the above understanding of consciousness, Sartre proceeds to explain and explicate certain characteristics. I’ll give a rough sketch of the points he makes:

1. Consciousness in its being implies the existence of its essence. There’s no essence behind consciousness. This is justified by **Husserl’s doctrine of factual necessity**:
  - (a) Consciousness does not necessarily have to exist. But once it does exist,

its non-existence is inconceivable.

2. “Consciousness is prior to nothingness, and ‘derives from being’” (15)
3. “This does not imply at all that consciousness is the foundation of its being.” (15)
4. The sort of conclusion of this section is that consciousness has a certain bootstrapping nature – it’s derives from its own being (?)
5. “[Consciousness] is a pure “appearance,” where this means it exists only to the extent to which it appears. But it is precisely because consciousness is pure appearance, because it is a total void (since the entire world is outside it), because of this identity within it between its appearance and its existence, that it can be considered as the absolute.” (16)

*Can the necessary existence of consciousness, as justified by my own consciousness right now – be an argument against the non-existence of other consciousnesses? Or in other words, does my own consciousness presuppose the consciousness of other people?*

## 2.4 The Being of the Percipi

This chapter of the introduction is ontologically sophisticated (as always, with Sartre) but thankfully simple in its general logical progression. After coming to a good understanding that consciousness has its own being (which is a transphenomenal being), we ask ourselves the big question: *“Is the transphenomenal being-of-phenomena” located in the transphenomenal being-of-consciousness?*

At first, this seems like a plausible argument. However, Sartre spends this chapter refuting it – demonstrating that the being-of-phenomena absolutely cannot be derived or founded in the being-of-consciousness itself. He presents two arguments which propose the above, and then refutes them. The first argument is that phenomena are *passive*, and hence it must derive its being from the consciousness to whom it appears, which is active. Sartre refutes this argument by demonstrating that *passivity is a relationship between being and (another) being*, and hence phenomena must have its own being, and not just be an emptiness to which the being-of-consciousness fills.

*Once again, what do we mean by the transphenomenal being-of-consciousness? Is it because the being-of-consciousness is outside phenomenal objects?*

The second argument is that phenomena is relative to the consciousness to whom it appears, but Sartre likewise refutes this argument by showing that phenomena and consciousness do not have a two-way relationship. Phenomena are relative to consciousness only, there is no case that consciousness is relative to phenomena. Hence, phenomena cannot derive its being from something that it has no access to.

*This is a theme continuing on how non-being cannot be derived from a plentitude (of being).*

Essentially, the goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that **phenomena must have its own being independent of the being-of-consciousness**. Thus, there is such a thing as a being-of-phenomena.

1. After the lengthy elaboration in the preceding section, we come to the definite

thesis that there is such a thing that is consciousness, which has its own being. Furthermore, consciousness is an essential condition for appearances (i.e. phenomena).

2. “We have escaped idealism, according to which being is measured by knowledge ... for idealism, all being is *known*, including thought itself ... and the philosopher in search of thought is obliged to consult the constituted sciences in order to derive thought from them as their condition of possibility.” (17)

- (a) This is the poor neuroscientist cutting slices of the pre-frontal cortex trying to find the being of thought.

3. Essentially, we now have a good working understanding of the *being-of-percipiens* – i.e. the being-of-consciousness. However, we must now ask ourselves: “*Is the being-of-consciousness the foundation of the being-of-phenomena?*”

4. At first, this seems plausible. After all, we demonstrate in the prior lengthy digression that consciousness is a necessary condition for phenomena. After all, you can’t have anything appear if there is no one for it to appear to.

5. “Are we satisfied? We have found a transphenomenal being, but is that really the being to which the phenomenon of being points? Is [the transphenomenal being of consciousness] really the being of the phenomenon?” (17)

6. Oh boy. It’s not, and Sartre will demonstrate in this chapter which is called the **Being of the Percipi**.

7. This is because the percipi (i.e. the perceived thing, the phenomena) has its own being which is *irreducible to the being of the percipiens* (i.e. the perceiver, consciousness)

- (a) “The known [thing] cannot be absorbed into our knowledge of it, we must recognise its *being*. This *being*, as we are told, is the *percipi* ... The most we can say is that [the percipi] is relative to [the percipiens].” (17)

*This line of reasoning seems to refute many of the more “materialist” perspectives that try to state that the being of the world comes entirely from the perceiver (a sort of relativism).*

### 2.4.1 Refuting Two Attempts To Derive Being-of-Phenomena From Consciousness

Sartre goes on to answer two other attempts to found the being-of-phenomena into the being-of-consciousness.

1. The first objection is that the phenomena is *passive*, and hence phenomena must derive its being from the consciousness to whom it appears (the consciousness is active).

- (a) But Sartre goes on to demonstrate that this passivity is an active action

between two beings:

- (b) “Passivity does not involve the very being of the passive existent: it is a relation between one being and another being, and not being a being and a nothingness.” (18)
  - (c) Hence, even though phenomena is passive, it still has a being that comes from elsewhere than consciousness.
2. The second objection is that phenomena is *relative*, to the consciousness to which it appears. “Is it conceivable that the being of the known [being-of-phenomena] should be relative to our knowledge of it?” (20)
- (a) This also cannot be the case, being an existent (i.e. a phenomenon) does not have a two-way relationship to the consciousness to whom it appears. An existent is relative to the consciousness, but a consciousness is *not* relative to the existent. Hence, just because phenomena is relative, does not mean the being-of-phenomena stems from the being-of-consciousness.
  - (b) “The perceived being stands before a consciousness that it cannot penetrate and that it cannot make contact with, and as it is cut off from consciousness, it exists cut off from its own existence [which is absurd].” (20)

*Relativity does not imply derived being.*

“Thus, there is no case in which either of the two determinations of *relativity* or *passivity* – which concerns the ways of being – is applicable to being itself. The *esse* [being] of the phenomena cannot be its *percipi*. The transphenomenal being-of-consciousness cannot provide the foundation for the phenomenon’s transphenomenal being.” (20)

## 2.5 The Ontological Proof

Sartre presents the ontological proof, which demonstrates that there exists such a thing which is a transphenomenal (outside the phenomena) being for phenomenon. This is the being-of-phenomena (*not* the phenomena-of-being!) which we have been searching for all along. He proves the existence of the transphenomenal being-for-phenomenon by using the being-of-consciousness as an instrument. Specifically, he looks at the way in which consciousness is positional towards objects (of consciousness).

First, he shows that the objects of consciousness must be related to the transphenomenal being of consciousness itself. They can only be related in two ways – either the transphenomenal being of consciousness is located in the object, or the transphenomenal being of consciousness is related to the transphenomenal being of phenomena (which we seek).

The first possibility is false, because a concrete object cannot contain a transphenomenal consciousness. This I understand reasonably well. Sartre goes on to show that the second possibility is equally false, for we have already demonstrated that the transphenomenality of the being-of-phenomena cannot be derived from the transphenomenality of the being-of-consciousness.

However, Sartre then proceeds to show a third possibility. Which is that the transphenomenal being of phenomena is found in consciousness not through certain forms of *presence*, but rather from *absence*. What does this mean? We are conscious of an object, because it appears to us as a phenomenon. However, any object can have an arbitrarily infinite amount of appearances, but we only see one. Hence, the being of the object is defined to us not as the presence of an appearance, but rather as the *absence of all but one appearance*.

From this, Sartre concludes that **the being-of-phenomena is a *non-being* of the being-of-consciousness**. Or in other words, the being-of-phenomena comes from the non-being which sets it apart as an object away from the being of our consciousness, hence making it *objective*. This is my best understanding of this section so far.

1. Sartre begins with the claim that “the transphenomenality of consciousness actually requires the phenomenon’s being to be transphenomenal,” (20) to which he then goes to demonstrate using an “ontological proof.”
  - (a) **Transphenomenal**: the quality of being beyond the phenomena, i.e. transcendent.
2. This ontological proof is very difficult to understand. Its logical structure seems to be of the following order:
  - (a) We grant that consciousness must be consciousness *of* something (such as an object). Now we flip the terms, and look at the above postulate from the perspective of the object. There are two possibilities:
    - i. Either consciousness is constitutive [i.e. the structure which describes] of it’s object’s being,
    - ii. Or consciousness is in its innermost nature related to a transcendent being.
    - iii. The only two options are non-transcendent but constitutive, versus transcendent but non-constitutive.
  - (b) The first possibility is absurd, because if an object is structured by consciousness, it would be conscious itself.
  - (c) The second possibility is the one which Sartre follows.



### 2.5.1 The Object of Consciousness Derives Its Being Negatively

What does it mean for consciousness to be related to a transcendent being? It's not possible for consciousness to directly relate to a transcendent being, because remember – consciousness is “real subjectivity,” and to posit anything transcendent beyond the conscious subject is against the very definition of consciousness.

Sartre resolves this issue by discovering that the *being of the object of consciousness comes from (i.e. is derived via) a negative act*:

1. “The fact that: it is necessarily impossible for the infinite number of terms [appearances] in the series to stand before consciousness simultaneously, in conjunction with the fact that all but one of these terms is really absent, is the foundation of objectivity.” (21)
2. “[For] if these impressions were present – even if their number were infinite – they would become merged into subjectivity; [hence it is the absence of the infinite term of impressions] which is what gives them [the object] objective being.” (21)
3. Hence, the being-of-phenomena (i.e. the being of the object) comes from consciousness as a “pure non-being”.

*How can we understand this “negative act” of consciousness?*

*Consciousness is the pure plenitude of “I am.” Everything that is of consciousness has the absolute self-ness of subjectivity. Hence, for a being to be both perceived (i.e. an object) by consciousness and to not become consciousness, it has to be a negation.*

### 2.5.2 Summary on the Being-of-Consciousness

Sartre wraps things up here by giving some concluding remarks on the self-bootstrapping nature of consciousness. “Consciousness is a being whose existence posits its essence and, inversely, it is conscious of a being whose essence implies its existence.” (23)

1. If consciousness exists, it posits that it exists.
2. If there are phenomena, the essence of the phenomena implies the existence of a consciousness to which it appears.
3. “Consciousness is a being for whom in its being there is a question of its being, insofar as this being implies **a being other than itself**.” (23)
4. What is this **being other than itself [consciousness]**? Sartre claims that this is the transphenomenal being of phenomena, the thing which we are looking for all along.

*This is because in order for consciousness to perceive an object, the objects must be not consciousness.*

## 2.6 Being in Itself

1. “Consciousness is a revealed-revelation of existents, and these existents appear before consciousness on the foundation of their being.” (24)

- (a) **Revealed-revelation:** A revelation that is not only objective (in the sense that an *object* has the status of a revelation), but it also has a subjective component, in the sense that the object's revelation is likewise revealed to *some subject*.
  - (b) In other words: Consciousness is an appearing appearance of existents.
  - (c) It is an appearing appearance because we are conscious of our own consciousness. Our positional consciousness contains the posited *content* of the existent (the revelation of the existent), but we are also aware of this revelation itself.
  - (d) These existents appear since they *are* (they appear since they have being).
2. Hence, we have the fundamental law of existents (my words): *For something to exist, it has to be.*
  3. Now Sartre presents a new, and important step in his reasoning. **Consciousness is ontico-ontological:** "Consciousness [as an action can] always surpass an existent, not towards its being but towards this being's *meaning*." (24)
    - (a) What is the *meaning* of a being? Sartre says that it is the phenomenon-of-being (?). "The meaning itself has a being," and because meaning has a being in the first place, it can manifest itself as a phenomenon.
  4. I'm not entirely clear, but it seems to me that the ultimate aim which we seek to understand is this meaning of being. It is the phenomenon, which can appear to our consciousness. However, we do not need to go on to find the meaning of the being of meaning any more, because they are the same. Hence, we no longer have a vicious cycle.
  5. Sartre notes that we must make the distinction between two types of being. Right now we are investigating the being-of-phenomena, which comes from meaning. However, this is different from the being of consciousness, which comes from being-for-itself.
  6. Sartre says there are two distinct regions of being:
    - (a) The being of the *prereflective cogito*. This is the ontology of the self.
    - (b) The being of the phenomenon (which we are investigating now). This is the ontology of objects.

*This makes sense as meaning is something we can assign to being. But consciousness cannot surpass to the being of an object, since then the object would become one with consciousness and lose its own distinct being.*

## 3.0 Part I: The Problem of Nothingness

After examining the nature of consciousness and finding out that the being-of-phenomena lies within the act of negation, a nothingness, we proceed to investigate the ontology of this nothingness itself.

### 3.1 Chapter 1: The Origin of Negation

Where does nothingness come from? This is the thematic question of chapter one. The general progression of this section's content and argument is as follows:

1. First, we inquire about negation, which appears as a simple and rather direct phenomenon of nothingness.
  - (a) After all, it's easy to posit positive being by making definite statements, e.g. "there is an apple." However, when we make a negation of a definite statement e.g. "there is no apple," it is clear that we are making a statement that's rooted in a certain conception of non-being.
2. We ultimately conclude that it is not possible to derive negation from being, but instead negation must be derived from a certain definite non-being, i.e. *nothingness*
3. We try to investigate where this nothingness comes from. Sartre ultimately concludes that this *nothingness cannot come from regular being, but it has to come from a being through which can be its own nothingness*
  - (a) Sartre concludes that this being is the human being (i.e. the Daesin).
4. Hence, in order to investigate nothingness, we have to investigate the human being.
5. How is it possible for the human consciousness to experience nothingness? The answer to this is *anguish*.

*The subjective phenomenon of the nothingness (of the self) is anguish.*

#### 3.1.1 Questioning

In this section, Sartre presents the necessity for non-being in all forms of questioning. Specifically:

1. In every question, we confront a being that we interrogate.
2. The answer to the interrogation can be either 'Yes' (affirmative) or 'No' (negative). To allow for an affirmative answer by necessity presupposes the possibility of a negative answer.

3. After all, the very being of an affirmative answer is defined by its shadow, which is the negative part. When we say that X is Z, we are also simultaneously saying X is not A, B, C, ... Y.
4. Hence, there is such a thing as non-being

With this, Sartre introduces the concept of *non-being as a necessary component of reality*, towards which we must investigate further throughout the rest of this section.

*Given every set, we may identify an element within the set both by a positive act of affirmation, and a negative act of excluding everything but the element we wish to identify. There is a strong resemblance to the procedure of the Dedekind cut.*

### 3.1.2 Negations

We begin our investigation into the nature of non-being by looking at *negations*, which are easily observable manifestations (phenomena?) of non-being.

1. "It is not true that negation is merely a quality of judgement." (38)
2. In the process of questioning, we expect a being (which is the answer). But we can equally receive a non-being as a response. Sartre's analogy is that if a watch-maker questions a watch on why it's not working, it is perfectly plausible to receive a non-being as a response, e.g. the mainspring is missing.
3. "A being is *fragile* if it bears within its being a clear-cut possibility of non-being." (40)
4. It seems that nothingness is distinct from the process of thought which is negation. We need nothingness in order to separate beings from each other, but the thought process that is negation is more simple and less fundamental.
5. Furthermore, Sartre claims that the thought process of negation must come from the being of nothingness.
6. "If there is being everywhere, it is not only nothingness that becomes inconceivable: from being we can never derive negation." (44)

*Are there such things as non-fragile beings? What are they?*

### 3.1.3 The Dialectical Conception of Nothingness

This section seems to be a general review of a dialectical (i.e. Hegelian) conception of nothingness. Being and Nothingness are not contemporaries.

### 3.1.4 The Phenomenological Conception of Nothingness

Sartre demonstrates that *it is impossible to dismiss nothingness* as either a shadow of being, nor as the absence or something before or after being. But rather nothingness has a definite existence as a special sort of being, which has the characteristic of its own negation (which he will elaborate in a later section). This crux of this demonstration

lies in the necessity of defining positive being using negations (in his example with distance and lengths), as well as with the existence of **negatities**.

In conclusion, nothingness cannot be outside of being.

1. Sartre presents a few examples here on how it is absolutely impossible to abstract away the being of nothingness into a simple quality of regular (i.e. *positive*) being:
  - (a) “Take for example the notion of distance ... it is easy to see the [distance] contains a negative moment: two points are distant when a specific length *separates* them.” (55)
  - (b) “How might wish to reduce distance to being *no more than* the length of the segments of which the [two points are] the limits ... [but] in this case we have switched the direction of our attention ... negation, expelled from the segment and its length, will take refuge in the two *limits*.” (55)
2. This leads to the introduction of the existence of **negatities**, i.e. *negative entities*. These things cannot be accounted for as positive being, but as beings which “inhabited in their internal structure by negation as a necessary condition of their existence.” (56)
3. “Nothingness can only nihilate itself on the ground of being: if nothingness can be given, it is neither before being nor after being; nor is it, in a general way, outside being; rather, it is right inside being, in its heart, like a worm.” (57)

### 3.1.5 The Origin of Nothingness

In this section, we try to find out where nothingness comes from, based on a set of restrictions which we demonstrated from the prior sections. I am going to rehash those prior conclusions again:

1. The qualities of nothingness:
  - (a) “Nothingness must be given in the heart of being”
  - (b) “But being-in-itself [i.e. the being-of-phenomena] is not able to produce this intrawordly [transphenomenal (?)] nothingness: the notion of being as a full positivity does not contain nothingness as one of its structures.” (57)
  - (c) “Nothingness cannot be conceived of, either outside being or on the basis of being” (57)
  - (d) Nothingness must have the power to nihilate itself, i.e. be the source of its own negation.

2. Based on the above restrictions, where does nothingness come from? Nothingness must be the result of some being, but it cannot be the being of the phenomena.
3. “*The being through which nothingness comes to the world must be its own nothingness.* And let us not construe this as an act of nihilation – which would in turn require a foundation in being – but as an ontological characteristic of the being which we are seeking.” (57)
  - (a) **Nihilation:** The act in which an object with being is negated.
  - (b) This latter qualification is important. If the being through nothingness comes is something that is nihilated – it would need another being to support it, which leads to an infinite regression. There has to be a being in which nihilation is the ontological requirement.
4. What sort of being is able to nihilate itself? The clue towards this being comes from the ability to *question*. For the act of questioning requires negation, as we have determined earlier already– but more importantly:
  - (a) “Every question posits, in its essence, the possibility of a negative answer. In a question we interrogate a being about its being, or its way of being. And this being, or way of being, is concealed; the possibility always remains open for it to be disclosed as nothingness.” (59)
  - (b) “But it follows, from the very fact of our envisaging that an existent can always disclose itself as nothing, that every question presupposes that **we have taken a nihilating step in relation to the given, which becomes mere presentation, oscillating between being and nothingness.**” (59)
    - i. This is the “permanent possibility in which the questioner is able to detach himself from the causal series that constitute being,” where:
  - (c) “In consequence, through a *twofold movement of nihilation*, [the questioner] nihilates the thing he is questioning in relation to himself:”
    - i. “By placing it in a neutral state between being and non-being”
    - ii. “[And also] by separating himself from being in order to draw out from himself the possibility of a non-being.” (59)
  - (d) It seems clear to me that this act of questioning takes its ontological characteristic as a *twofold movement of nihilation*. Where to question, is to complete the necessary two steps where:
5. Sartre’s conclusion is that **the being from which negativity (i.e. nothingness) comes from is the being of man, i.e. the being-of-consciousness.**
6. Keep in mind that this process is not a process of *generation*. **No being can generate non-being, never!** But rather, it is *a process of changing our being’s*

*Is there anything unique about the ontology of a question? Does asking a question affect the questioner in any way?*

*relationship to another being:*

- (a) “To disconnect some particular existent, for human-reality (i.e. Daesin) is to disconnect [human reality] in relation to [the existent]. In this case, human-reality escapes the existent and cannot be acted on by it; it is out of reach, having withdrawn beyond a nothingness”
- 7. Now that we conclude that the being which is the condition of negation and nothingness is the human being, i.e. the being-of-consciousness. But furthermore, we acknowledge that this is *not* a process of generation, but rather one of changing our relationship to definite beings.
- 8. **This process of bringing out nothingness in our being, is called *freedom*.**

## Nothingness as Freedom, the Phenomena of Freedom as Angst

In this second half of the section, Sartre talks about the practical implications of the being-of-consciousness’s ability to bring about nothingness as freedom. He first presents it more or less directly, but then he presents the consciousness-of-this-freedom as *angst*.

- 1. “If nihilating consciousness exists only as a consciousness of nihilation, it ought to be possible to define and describe a constant mode of consciousness, present as consciousness, that is the consciousness of nihilation.” (66)
  - (a) This **consciousness-of-nihilation** is the human emotion of *angst*.
  - (b) There are two types of angst, properly speaking. There is both angst for the future, and angst for the past.
- 2. A question that comes up at this stage is to ask: “How is *angst* different from fear?”
  - (a) Fear is the emotion of worrying of *external existents*.
  - (b) Anguish is the emotion of worrying about one’s own *being*.
- 3. These definitions will be developed by further examples. For instance, a key component of anguish is the *nihilation* or *nothingness*. It’s an awareness of the nothingness which conditions the vast array of possibilities of one’s own being. Sartre talks more about this from pages 66 and onwards (66), with a particularly definite example on (71) and (77).
- 4. In (80) Sartre talks about the ways in which one flees away from this anguish.
- 5. In the very end of this chapter, we look at ‘bad faith’ – which Sartre describes as the collection of behaviours (consciousness(es) (?)) in which we flee away from *anguish*. It’s important to Sartre that we examine bad faith next in our inquiry, for the following reasons:

*It seems like angst is our consciousness of our consciousness of (self) nihilation.*

- (a) Bad faith is paradoxical, since in order to flee away from anguish, we must aim at anguish itself (86). This means that the content of bad faith contains anguish.
- (b) As a result, bad faith serves as a very good and direct proxy to understand what this anguish is, which will allow us to go further in our question of nothingness.
- 6. As a sort of final sketch in this part of our inquiry, we can summarise the digression as follows:
  - (a) Nothingness must exist, but cannot come from or be generated upon, or be founded by being.
  - (b) Nothingness is a relationship between two beings, where one being negates the other (?).
  - (c) The only being that is capable of this action of nihilation is the human being, i.e. the Daesin or the being-of-consciousness.
  - (d) The way in which consciousness is conscious of this act of nihilation is in the phenomena of *angst*.
  - (e) We try to flee from angst through the application of bad faith. However, bad faith must contain the content of angst.
  - (f) Hence, finally – in order to understand where being and nothingness comes from, we must examine bad faith as our proxy.

## 3.2 Chapter 2: Bad Faith

### 3.2.1 Bad Faith and Lies

1. **New Working Definition of Consciousness:** “Consciousness is a being for whom in its being there is consciousness of the nothingness of its being.” (87)
2. “What must man be in his being for it to be possible for him to negate himself?” (88) Where self-negation serves as the foundation of bad faith, it seems.
  - (a) “We should choose and examine a specific attitude, essential to human-reality (i.e. Daesin), and in which, at the same time, consciousness, instead of directing its negation outward, turns it against itself. It has seemed to us that this attitude must be *bad faith*.” (88)
3. Bad faith is not simply lying, or even some extended or fundamental form of lying. For lies “requires no special ontological foundation.” (89)
  - (a) In ordinary lying, there is the liar, and the deceived.
4. “In bad faith it is from myself that I am concealing the truth. Thus, the duality of the deceiver and the deceived is not present here. On the contrary, bad faith

*Remember! The nothingness of the being of consciousness is where objectivity comes from!*



implies in its essence the unity of a single consciousness.” (90)

5. Sartre goes on to test, criticise, and ultimately reject the Freudian explanation for the foundation of bad faith. The Freudian explanation posits a trinity of the consciousness as the *id*, *ego*, and *superego* – upon which there’s an interference between one of the two.
6. For reasons that are not ultimately too important, the Freudian explanation is shown to be an inaccurate one at best.
7. The ultimate conclusion here is that **bad faith must know the thing which it denies, in order to actively act in denial of it**

### 3.2.2 Forms of Bad Faith

This section on bad faith is a more practical illustration of how the ontology of negation manifests in the real world. Sartre’s writing seems to follow a general form where we begin with an ontological (more abstract) investigation, often through the method of an eidetic reduction. After presenting the abstract exploration, we then see practical demonstrations of it in various human contexts, i.e. “in real life.”

1. In order to explore properly what bad faith is, Sartre takes us on an examination of various everyday-examples of bad faith in action.
2. In (98) Sartre presents an *amazing* example of a form of ‘bad faith’ in practice – the dance of flirtation. It’s really cool, and you should totally check it out.
3. **Characteristics of Bad Faith**
  - (a) Forming contradictory concepts, where an idea and the negation of the idea are united.
    - i. i.e. “I am not what I am”
  - (b) The method in which we generate these contradictions is through “the twofold property of human beings, of being a facticity and a transcendence.” (99)
    - i. This seems to mean we accept (acknowledge?) a facticity, but then escape it through our transcendence (?)
4. but Sartre also goes on to say that this facticity-transcendence dichotomy is not the only way in which we generate bad faith, but there are other ways?
5. (102) What does it mean to *play* at acting something? Sartre presents another marvellously beautiful example, that of the cafe-waiter. **I should examine this scene in more detail.**
6. Around (109) Sartre goes on a digression about sincerity, in an attempt to understand bad faith through its contrast.

7. “At the same time, [through sincerity] the malice is defused, since if it only exists deterministically it is nothing, and since, by acknowledging it, I posit my freedom in relation to it; my future is virgin, so everything is permitted. In this way, sincerity’s essential structure does not differ from that of bad faith, since the sincere man constitutes himself as what he is *in order to not be it.*” (110)
8. Sincerity and Bad faith seems to be both two sides of the same coin, for they both require one to objectify oneself – and to look on the self as an external object.
  - (a) “Sincerity [and bad faith] does not assign a particular quality or way of being to me, but in relation to the quality at issue, it aims to move me from one mode of being into another mode of being.” (111)

### 3.2.3 The “Faith” of Bad Faith

1. Bad faith requires a specific position to be held on our epistemology. To be in the state of bad faith is to be in a state where we are willing to accept *non-persuasive* evidence, since if the evidence was persuasive in the first place, we wouldn’t be in bad faith.
  - (a) “This primary project of bad faith is a decision, in bad faith, about the nature of faith.” (114)
2. “There is no cynical lie in bad faith, or any knowing preparation of misleading concepts. But **bad faith’s most basic act is to flee from something that is impossible to flee from: to flee from what one is.**” (117)

## 4.0 Part II: Being-For-Itself

What is the path or rhetorical structure of our progression up till now? In the introduction, Sartre first lay out the goal of understanding the being-of-phenomenon. That leads us to an investigation of consciousness, for a phenomenon needs a being that is conscious of it in the first place. However, we quickly realise that consciousness cannot be the basis of the being of phenomena. But rather, it is the negation of the phenomenon within the subjective plentitude of consciousness which is the basis of the being-of-phenomena. With this in mind, we proceed to examine the nature of this act of negation in Part I. Having done so, we now turn to examine the ontology of consciousness itself – not the positional consciousness, but the being of the pre-reflective *cogito*.

A quick definitional reference:

1. **Being-for-itself:** The being *for-itself* is the kind of being of consciousness. To quote Oxford Dictionary, being for-itself “is the mode of existence of consciousness, consisting in its own activity and purposive nature.” ([Reference](#))
2. **Being-in-itself:** is the existence of ordinary, non-conscious objects, like tables or chairs.

## 4.1 Chapter 1: The Immediate Structures of the For-Itself

Pages ([Sartre](#) 121 – 162).

### 4.1.1 Self-Presence

The key ontological distinction between a being-for-itself, and the being-of-consciousness, is that the being-for-itself possesses the property of *self-presence*. Remember, the being-of-consciousness is the higher level, *thetic* positional consciousness that is contentless. However, we also by necessity have a *non-thetic*, pre-reflective *cogito*, which is the being-for-itself. Being-for-itself is not simply the being of the being – the act of self-presence contains a separation. It is this separation that is the nature of the being-for-itself.

1. **The In-Itself:** Something that has an infinite density of being, a plentitude. I think when Sartre talks about the (Being-)In-Itself, he is talking directly about the being of the existent (perhaps analogous to the being-of-the-phenomena?).

2. "Identity is the limiting concept of unification ... at its extreme limit, unity vanishes and passes over into identity." (123)
3. "Consciousness is characterised, on the contrary, by its *decompression of being*. Indeed, it is impossible to define it as self-coincident." (123)
  - (a) What this means is that the being of consciousness is not a being that's in-itself. The example that Sartre gives is that when we talk about my belief, I cannot say that my consciousness is by belief. But rather only that "my belief is a consciousness (of) my belief." (123)
  - (b) See how in this base, the being-of-consciousness is not infinitely dense?
4. **Self-Presence as the foundation for self-consciousness:** I'm not too certain in my understanding of this right now, but Sartre elaborates on this in (126). The gist of it seems to be:
  - (a) The being-in-itself is the regular being of existents, i.e. the being-of-the-phenomena.
  - (b) However, what is the being-for-itself? The very use of the word *for* implies a strong reflective action.
  - (c) We cannot qualify the being-*for*-itself using any regular conception of the being-in-itself.
  - (d) The key difference in the being-for-itself is that there's a separation which makes the being not its own coincidence, but still requires its own unity (bottom of (126))
  - (e) Hence this self-presence must have some sort of separation, which will be shown to be *nothing*.
  - (f) "The law of being of the for-itself as the ontological foundation of consciousness is to be itself in the form of self-presence." (126)
5. **Self-Presence as an act of separation from the self:** Sartre elaborates this at (127). Self-Presence is taken as something different, or apart from identity – which is the dense plentitude of being, as we have explained above. In fact:
  - (a) "The principle of identity is the negation of any type of relation within the being-in-itself."
  - (b) "On the contrary, self-presence presupposes that an intangible fissure has slipped inside being. If it is present to itself, that is because it is not completely itself. Presence is an immediate degradation of coincidence, because it presupposes separation."
  - (c) "But if we ask now *what* separates the subject from himself, we are forced to admit that it is *nothing*." (127)
6. So once again, we are back at the discovery that nothing is essential for being –

in this case, nothing is essential for self-presence.

#### 4.1.2 The For-Itself's Facticity

1. It seems like this section Sartre ties down the being-for-itself into the being-in-itself. Essentially, there has to be some sort of foundation for the for-itself.
2. "Thus the for-itself is supported by a constant contingency that it takes up, and assimilates, without ever being able to get rid of it. We may call this constantly evanescent contingency of the in-itself – which haunts the for-itself and ties it to being in-itself without ever allowing itself to be grasped – the for-itself's *facticity*." (133)
3. It seems to me that this distinction – the idea that the being-for-itself is founded upon a factual circumstance – is important to avoid the illusion and absurdity of solipsism.
  - (a) "The for-itself, even while it chooses the *meaning* of its situation and constitutes itself in situation as its own foundation, *does not choose* its position." (134)

#### 4.1.3 The For-Itself and the Being of Value

This is the section where Sartre looks at how negation interacts with the ontology of our being-for-itself. In the previous sections we only examine negation as an external act – where our being-for-itself places external objects in negation. Now we are looking at how negation is able to act upon our own being.

1. **The Lack:** The lack is the form of negation which "most deeply establishes an internal relation between what we negate and what our negation applies to ... [the lack is the form of negation] which penetrates most deeply into being – the one that constitutes *in its being* the being to which its negation applies with the being that it negates." (137)
  - (a) "The lack does not belong to the nature of the in-itself, which is entirely positive. It appears within the world only when human-reality arises." (138)
  - (b) For example, given an unfinished circle – it is technically an open curve that is complete in its being as an open curve. It is only through the realm of human-reality, specifically human desire, to which we give to it the lack – the lack in which it is not a circle. (139)
2. Human reality itself must be a lack, because only through a lack can we derive

*What is the relationship between lack and desire?*

lacks. Sartre talks about this very definitively in (139):

- (a) “A psychological state whose existence had the sufficiency of that curve [i.e. the unfinished circle] could not in addition make the slightest ‘call’ for anything else: it would be itself, without any relation to anything other than itself” (139)
- (b) “In order to constitute it as a hunger or thirst, an external transcendence would be required.” (139)
- (c) “No recourse to psychophysiological parallelism [i.e. the doctrine that the psychological is a direct parallel to the physiological] can enable us to escape these difficulties:” (139)
  - i. Any physiological signs of a lack of water in an organism only posits a positive being of the state of the organism, referring to itself. Sartre presents this in vivid detail in (139)
  - ii. “[Any] exact correspondence between the mental and the physiological [requires] that correspondence [to be] established only on the basis of an ontological identity.” (139)
- 3. **Desire is a lack of being:** “and is haunted in its [desire’s] innermost being by the being that it desires [i.e. lacks].” (140)
- 4. **Lack is a trinity:** When we lack something, there are three components to the act of lacking (138):
  - (a) **The *manqué* (i.e. the lack):** The item that is missing
  - (b) **The incomplete existent:** That from which [the item] is missing [i.e. the existent].
  - (c) **The hypothetical whole:** A totality that is broken apart by the lack, and could which be restored by the synthesis of the missing item with the existent.
- 5. In (139) talks about how **value** comes from this lack. I need to investigate this further.

By “external transcendence”, is Sartre stating that the being of the lack has to be outside the being that is lacking?

## The Being to Which Consciousness Aims For

At this point, we can raise a valid pedagogical question. Why did Sartre take us on this digression on lack, desire, and value, which are (seemingly) derived properties of our more fundamental ontological exploration? This understanding of lack, desire, and value is important – because in this section Sartre is applying it to the *human-reality as a whole*. This lack within human reality is necessary for temporality, as we will see later on.

Sartre presents a rather tricky, but essential understanding on **the emergence of value from lack and desire**. It's essential that we understand what value is, and where does it come from. Right now, take value in this case to mean ethical/personal value, i.e. what is important to us, or what we aim for. Sartre's presentation goes as follows:

1. Recall that lack is a trinity.
2. Further, recall that **the human-reality is a lack** (since otherwise, the being of the human condition would be positive, and there would be no such thing as lacking).
3. Hence, *if the human-reality is a lack, what are the components of the lack's trinity?*  
Sartre answers this in (140), where he states:
  - (a) **The manqué (i.e. the lack):** "The *itself-as-being-in-itself*." (141)
  - (b) **The incomplete existent:** "The element that plays the role of the existent is given to the *cogito* as the immediacy of the *desire*." (139)
  - (c) **The hypothetical whole:** ...
4. From the incomplete trinity above, Sartre asks: what is this hypothetical whole from which the lack of the human-reality presupposes?
5. It seems to me that this hypothetical whole is a transcendence towards a better whole, a better version of the being [i.e. self] (?)
6. "This constantly absent being which haunts the for-itself is itself – but frozen in the in-itself [i.e. as an object]." (142)
  - (a) My interpretation of this sentence is essentially thus: Our human-reality is defined by a negative thing, a lacking. But a lacking must presuppose first a thing that is lacking (e.g. the missing puzzle piece), which Sartre calls the manqué – as well as the incomplete existent (e.g. the puzzle-hole) and the hypothetical whole (e.g. the complete puzzle.)
  - (b) The incomplete existent is manifest as desire.
  - (c) But the thing which we are lacking in our human-reality is another state of human-reality or being, which is the object of our consciousness. Our consciousness wishes to be something else, to be another consciousness – which it is not.
  - (d) Hence, the ultimate, hypothetical, and unachievable synthesis of what we lack from the lacking is where *value comes from*.
7. **Value: a transcendent thing which our current being lacks, which eludes our being.** (146)
8. "Value arrives to the world through human-reality." (147)

9. “Value haunts being insofar as it founds itself and not insofar as it is: it haunts *freedom*. So value’s relation to the for-itself is quite distinctive: it is the being that the for-itself has to be, insofar as it is the foundation of the nothingness of its being.” (148)

As a sort of parting remark on this section, it seems that Sartre’s ontology places an important role on the idea of a *transcendence*, or a *transcendent* thing. Whenever we are looking for something (i.e. some being, or quality of being) which does not exist in the thing (i.e. the being) itself, but comes from something which is beyond the given thing (i.e. being), we are looking for a transcendent thing. The transcendent thing is like a higher object to which a shadow is cast.

#### 4.1.4 The For-Itself and the Being of Possibles

1. In this section, Sartre takes the concept of *lacking* and relates it to the concept of being of *possibles*. He derives possibility from lacking through a similar transcendental meditation.
2. The being of possibility is not in the being of any existents, but rather comes from the human-reality.
3. However, possibility is also not subjective!
4. Possibility is not within the being of the human-reality, but it is also transcendent. It seems to be something outside human reality. (158)
5. “Let us call the for-itself’s relation to the possible that it is the ‘circuit of ipseity’ – and the totality of being, insofar as it is traversed by the *circuit of ipseity*, the ‘world.’” (158)
6. I’m not entirely certain at this point, but it sounds like that the world is the totality of possibility (in the context of human-reality), while the self traverses a subset of that as the circuit of ipseity.

#### 4.1.5 My Self and the Circuit of Ipseity

This seems to be a summary of the above sections and the chapter in general. I should revisit it sometime, in particular (161).

### 4.2 Chapter 2: Temporality

Having understood both possibility and the circuit of ipseity, we are now ready to proceed on to the being of temporality, both what it is ontologically, and how it manifests in practice.



### 4.2.1 Phenomenology of the Three Temporal Dimensions

In this part, Sartre wishes to examine the past, the present, and the future – without the explanation of time being a simple series of ‘nows’ or moments, since this naive approach yields Xeno’s paradox. In this discussion, he presents what he later refers to as the *three temporal ecstasies*, which are acts of unification.

#### The Past

Sartre rejects the naive materialism (or in his terms, the psychophysiological parallelism) of the theory of ‘memory traces,’ where the past is seen as something that is departed, and hence every memory is merely a physical, present trace in the mind. In the next pages, he presents a few non-materialist approaches to understanding where the past derives its being, and goes on to reject all of them. His conclusion is that the past must derive its being from the person to whom the past is for. He elaborates most keenly on this conclusion at (169). He presents an example with Pierre:

*My understandings of Sartre’s temporal ecstasies is not very clear at the moment. How can I deepen my understanding of their them?*

1. “Of *whom* is this past-Pierre the past? It cannot be in relation with a universal Present which purely affirms being; it is therefore the past of *my actuality*. And as a matter of fact Pierre has been for-me and I have been for-him.” (170)
2. “There are therefore beings that ‘have’ pasts.” (170) However, this *does not* mean all beings have pasts! Rather, *only a specific type of being* has a past, which Sartre elaborates in (172):
  - (a) “There is a past only for a present that cannot exist without being its past ‘over there,’ behind it. In other words, *the only beings that have a past are those beings for whom there is a question, in their being, of their past being – beings that have their past to be.*” (172)
  - (b) In my own words, the only types of beings that have a past, are the sort of beings which contain a question of their own being.
  - (c) Or in other words, the only beings that have a past, are the beings that are beings *for-itself*, (i.e. the being-of-consciousness). Beings that are only *in-itself* (i.e. the being-of-phenomena) do not have pasts!
3. Sartre then proceeds to learnedly make the important nuanced qualification that this “*does not settle the question of the past of living things.*” (172)
  - (a) Remember how we defined that the only beings which have a past, are the beings which are for-itself? In a more vulgar manner of speaking, we’re talking about beings that are conscious.
  - (b) There are of course, plenty of living things like moss or algae which obviously do not fulfil this definition.

4. In (174) Sartre talks about the relationship between the past and death. There are some particularly memorable quotes (you should revisit the cited page):

- (a) “Ultimately, at the infinitesimal instant of my death, I will no longer be anything but my past. It alone will define me.” (174)
- (b) “Through death, the for-itself [being of consciousness] changes for eternity into in-itself [being of phenomena], to the extent to which it has entirely slipped into the past. Thus, the past is the *ever-increasing totality of the in-itself that we are*.” (174)

*Is the first temporal ecstasy (the past) the unification of the past with the being (of the present)?*

5. “To explain the world in terms of becoming, conceived as a synthesis of being and non-being, is easily done. But has anyone considered that no being that becomes could be such a synthesis unless it were, in relation to itself, *an act that founded its own nothingness?*” (176)
6. “To sum it up, [the past] is an inversion of value, the for-itself reclaimed by the in-itself, thickened by the in-itself to the point at which it can no longer exist as a reflection for the reflecting, or as a reflecting for the reflection, but merely as an in-itself sign of the reflecting-reflection pair.” (180)
- (a) This is an important summary on Sartre’s conclusion on the nature of the past. To put into more simple words, the past is the *being-for-itself* (i.e. the being of consciousness) which has become the *being-in-itself*, the mere being of the phenomenon.

## The Present

“[Any] strict analysis that aimed to rid the present of everything it is not – i.e. its immediate past and future – would in fact find nothing more than an infinitesimal instant ... the ideal term of an infinitely pursued division: a nothingness.” (181)

1. With this opening passage, Sartre presents the fundamental problem of *the present*, and relates it thematically to the earlier conceptions of nothingness which we discovered in the past.
2. The first realisation that Sartre presents, is that the idea of the present – or formally speaking, the attribute of *presence* – is a quality that only exists between two beings.
  - (a) **Presence:** the quality of an object being *present*.
3. “The in-itself cannot be present, any more than it can be past; it *is*, quite simply. There can be no question of anyone in-itself existing in some kind of simultaneity alongside another in-itself – other than from the point of view of a being who was co-present to the two in-itselfs, and who had its own capacity for presence.” (181)

4. “Therefore **the present can only be the for-itself’s presence to being-in-itself.**” (181)

*Just like the past, the present is only possible to a being-for-itself.*

- (a) If I am understanding this argument properly, essentially the present is a quality which is only shared by a being which has consciousness in the first place. Objects (beings-in-itself) are present to a being-for-itself. But in a world without beings-for-itself (conscious beings), there would be no such thing as a present, or objects present to it.
5. Now Sartre segues to a new section, where we investigate “to which being does the for-itself make itself a presence?” (182)
6. “Our presence to any being implies that we are linked to that being by an internal-connection; otherwise no link between the present and being would be possible. But this internal connection is negative: it denies, with respect to a present being, that it is that being to which it is present. Otherwise, the internal connection would disappear into a straightforward identification.” (183)
7. I’m not sure how to quite summarise this section, but it seems to me the goal of this is for Sartre to present the necessity of negation in all of its forms within the being of consciousness (i.e. the being-for-itself). Negation is necessary for the past, for the present, and as we shall soon see, for the future as well.

## The Future

As a quick summary, Sartre’s conception of the future likewise derives its ontological foundation from the negative element present within the being-for-itself (i.e. consciousness). Where the future cannot and does not come from neither a simple material relation or quality, nor does it come from a simple quality of the being-for-itself. But rather, it is that negative aspect, a *lack*. The best way I can understand this argument is that just as the being of the for-itself flees from the past (because the past is what it’s not), the for-itself has to flee *towards* something – and it would not be inaccurate to call that thing to which it flees toward the *future*.

1. “Let us note first that the in-itself cannot be the future, and nor can it contain any part of the future. When I look at this crescent moon, the full moon is in the future only ‘within the world’ that is disclosed to human reality: it is through human reality that the future arrives in the world. In itself, this quarter of the moon is what it is. Nothing in it as potentiality. It is in actuality.” (184)
2. “Even were we to accept, as Laplace does, a complete determinism that would enable us *to predict* a future state, this future circumstance would still need to be profiled against an antecedent disclosure of the future as such, a being-to-come of the world.” (185)

3. With the first two statements, It seems clear to me that the future has to have a distinct, unique ontological existence – that cannot be dismissed away as a simple property of the material world. This understanding is developed more concretely in Sartre’s subsequent sections.
4. “Only a being who has to be its being, rather than merely being it, can have a future” (185)

(a) By a *being who has to be its being*, Sartre is talking about the specific, ontologically distinct kind of being whose own being *possesses the question of its being*. In other words, this being is the *Daesin*, or perhaps more generally, a conscious being (i.e. the being for-itself). This is in contrast to beings that are merely objects, i.e. beings of-itself.

5. Sartre states in the following paragraphs that the future is not merely “representation”, nor is it mere “a futurising intention”. This excludes the more popular and common ontologies of future-ness.

(a) In fact, Sartre is quite clear and unequivocal about how future-ness cannot be derived as a mere property of the material world, of mere beings-in-itself.

(b) Likewise, the future is not a simple property of just consciousness alone – this is a more nuanced thesis:

(c) “The for-itself can neither be ‘pregnant with the future’, nor an ‘awaiting of the future’, except against the ground of an original and prejudicative relation of the self to itself.” (186)

6. So what is the future, under Sartre’s phenomenological conception of ontology? There’s a specific argument that Sartre makes, where the future derives it’s being from a certain negative presence of the being-for-itself. I’ll try to present this argument to the best of my understanding:

(a) “Let us take a simple example: this position which I keenly take up on the [tennis] court has meaning only through the movement I will make next, with my racket, to send the ball back over the net. But I am obeying neither my ‘clear representation’ of the future movement, nor my ‘firm resolution’ to accomplish it ... it is my future movement which, without even being thematically presented, turns backward to the positions I adopt, in order to illuminate, to connect, and to modify them.” (186)

(b) **“There is not a moment of my consciousness that is not similarly defined by an internal relation to a future; whether I write, I smoke, I drink, or I rest, the meaning of my [acts of] consciousness is always at a distance, over there, outside.” (186)**

*In other words, if the ontology of a being does not contain negation (which leads to a lack), then this being with never contain a question of its own being, so there is no future for said being to “flee” into. Such a being would be reduced to a simple being-in-itself.*

*By prejudicative, is Sartre implying that the relationship of the self-to-itself requires the lack, where the lack serves as the foundation for judgement (i.e. prejudice)?*

*This inversion of causes present in his conception of the future is very interesting. In fact, Sartre calls it “causality in reverse ... the efficient power of a future state.” What does this mean for causes in general?*

- (c) “The future is *what I have to be* insofar as I cannot be it.” (187)
7. “Recall that the for-itself, confronted with being, presentifies itself as not being that being, and as having been its past. This presence is flight, because, in fleeing from the being that it is not [i.e. the past], presence flees from the being that it was. *What* does it flee toward? Let us not forget that the for-itself, insofar as it presentifies itself to being in order to flee from it, is a lack ... From this we can grasp the meaning of the flight involved in presence: it is a flight towards *its being*.” (187)
8. “[The for-itself reaches the future] in vain: the for-itself can only ever be its future problematically, because it is separated from it by the nothingness that it is. In brief, the for-itself is free, and its freedom sets its own limit to itself. To be free is to be condemned to be free. *Thus the future, insofar as it is the future, has no being*. It is not *in itself* and nor does it have the for-itself’s mode of being either, since it is the for-itself’s *meaning*. The future is not; it *possibilises* itself.” (191)

*When Sartre talks about possibility, we should refer to the section on the circuit of ipseity and possibility.*

#### 4.2.2 The Ontology of Temporality

After examining the tripartite division of *the past*, *the present*, and *the future*, Sartre turns to examine the ontology of temporality itself. In this section, he begins with the following dichotomy of *static temporality* and *dynamic temporality*, where:

1. **Static Temporality:** The elements of *before* and *after*.  
“What Kant calls the *order* of time.” (193)
2. **Dynamic Temporality:** The fact of succession, the motion of how every after becomes a before.  
“What Kant calls the *course* of time.” (193)

##### Static Temporality

Sartre separates the two and begins an examination of each individually. We will begin with static temporality.

1. “The ‘before-after’ order [of static temporality] is defined in the first place by its irreversibility. We call a series of ‘successive’ if its terms can only be considered one by one, and in only one direction.” (193)
2. “Without the succession of ‘others’ I could be what I want to be straight away, and there would no longer be any distance between me and myself, or any separation between an action and a dream.” (193)
3. It is this very atomic separate-ness of the temporality of *instants* that yields the

*Without negation, there will be no separation.*

ontological problem of temporality. After all, by reducing every moment to an instant, the casual order between instants seem to disappear. Sartre summarises this problem by stating:

4. “Thus, when we consider in isolation temporality’s power to dissolve, we are forced to admit that *the fact of having existed at any given instant does not constitute the right to exist at the following instant*, nor even mortgage or an option on the future.” (194)
5. At this point, Sartre exams three competing solutions to this problem of succession and order in atomic temporal ontology:
  - (a) **Kant**: Tries to resolve this by making the witness of time (i.e. the being who experiences time) temporal, and by having time come from a transcendental relationship of the witness towards God.
  - (b) **Descartes**: Same as Kant, except the ultimate unifying act of the witness with the temporal object is the *I think* of reason.
  - (c) **Leibniz**: Rejects Kant and Descartes, and attempts to view all time as “pure relation of immanence and cohesion”, where time is continuous and not atomic at all.
6. Ultimately, he finds all three approaches to be lacking and/or inadequate in some way.
7. “How can a timeless being, having to unify timeless elements, conceive of the kind of unification that belongs to succession? And if – as we would need to agree in that case – the *esse* of time is a *percipi*, how will the *percipitur* be constituted? ... Thus, insofar as [time] is at the same time a form of separation and a form of synthesis, temporality will not permit us either to derive it from something timeless or to impose it *from outside* on timeless things.” (198)
8. In that vein of questioning, both Sartre and the reader asks: “Who *draws* time?”
9. “What may we conclude, at the end of this discussion? In the first place, this: temporality is a force that dissolves, but it does so within an act of unification; it is not so much a real multiplicity [but] as a quasi-multiplicity, the first draft of a dissociation within unity” (200)
  - (a) “Time cannot be a real multiplicity for it could not subsequently receive any unity and could not, in consequence, even exist in the form of real multiplicity” (200)
  - (b) “If we start by positing temporal unity, we are at risk of no longer even being able to understand anything about the irreversible succession as the *meaning* of this unity.” (200)
  - (c) “We must conceive [temporality] as a unity that multiplies *itself*, which

Once again, we see the theme of nihilation in this act of dissolution. How does this relate to the broader theme of being arising from nothingness?

means temporality can only be a relation of being *within the same being*.” (200)

10. “**Temporality is *not***. Only a being with a specific structure of being can, in the unity of its being, be temporal. ‘Before’ and ‘After’ is intelligible only as being what is *before* itself.” (200)

(a) “Rather, the for-itself, in existing, temporalises itself.” (201)

11. “Temporality must have the structure of ipseity.” (201)

### The Birth/Emergence of Consciousness in Temporality

What is temporality? Temporality presents several irreconcilable problems and paradoxes, this resolution can only come from the following: Temporality is *not* an external being, nor can it be a simple container which the for-itself then assigns a being. But rather, the being of temporality can only emerge as a specific *internal* relationship of the being-for-itself, that comes from the being-for-itself’s question of its own being (the negation at its heart). This constant ontological process of “fleeing” allows temporality to emerge.

Around pages (204) of the preceding section, Sartre goes on a parallel, but *deeply* fascinating tangent on the absolute *necessity* of temporality for the being-for-itself. It begins with the question of “How can temporal things have a definite *beginning point*?”, otherwise called the ‘Problem of Birth’ and ends up as a deeper investigation on the ontology of emergence.

1. “In effect, it strikes us as scandalous that consciousness should come at some moment ‘appear’ and should come to ‘inhabit’ the embryo, or in short, that there should be one moment in which the living thing, as it develops, lacks any consciousness and another moment in which a consciousness without any past becomes imprisoned within it.” (203)
2. In order to resolve this paradox, Sartre takes his previous statements about the nature of temporality in being, and posits that absolutely it is impossible for any conscious being (being-for-itself) to lack a past.
3. “The for-itself’s being is originally constituted by this relation to a being that is *not* consciousness, existing within the complete night of identity, that the for-itself is, however, outside itself, behind itself” (204)  
(a) “The in-itself is what the for-itself was *before*. In consequence, it makes perfect sense that our past does not appear to us as if it were limited by a clean line, with no smudges” (204)

*What sort of being does Sartre refer to? Is this likewise the conscious being, the being-for-itself which contains negation “in its heart like a worm?” Likewise, how does this relate to, or differ from ipseity?*

*What parallels can we draw from the emergence of consciousness in temporal ontology, to the artificial creation of conscious minds?*

4. “There is no ontological problem: we do not have to ask ourselves how a consciousness can be born, because consciousness can appear to itself only as the nihilation of in-itself, i.e. as *having already been born*.” (204)

*Or in other words, the past – as an internal relation of a for-itself to itself, removes any metaphysical complexity from the in-itself that (merely) serves as the facticity of the for-itself.*

### The Temporal Dynamic

Now, after understanding the atomic temporal ontology of static temporality, we can turn to look at temporality as a motive force – i.e. the temporal dynamic.

The central theme of this section seems to be to answer the question: “where does the dynamism of temporality as a continuous progression/succession come from?” I’m not sure if I understand the entirety of the answer, but Sartre does present an interesting approach to this question from the perspective of change.

1. In the first segment of Sartre’s rhetorical progression, he explores the common idea of temporal progression as *change*, either as a symptom of change, or as something which emerges from change. Specifically, he responds to the idea that “temporality is reduced to being no more than the measure and order of change. Without change there would be no temporality, since time would have no purchase on the permanent and identical” (208). Sartre *rejects* this conception, calling it one “based on many mistakes”.
2. “In brief, the change’s *unity* with the permanent is necessary for the constitution of a change as such.” (209)
3. “The appeal to permanence in order to found change is, moreover, utterly useless. The idea is to show that any absolute change is, strictly speaking, no longer a change, since *nothing* remains that is changing – or in relation to which there could be change.” (209)
4. “But in addition, when we are dealing with human-reality, what is necessary is pure and absolute change, which moreover is perfectly able to be a change while *nothing* changes – and which is duration itself. Even if we allowed that a for-itself could be an absolutely empty presence to a permanent in-itself– *the very existence of that consciousness would imply temporality*, since it would have to be, without changing, what it is, in the form of ‘having been it.’” (209)

Now at the start of (211) Sartre begins his presentation on the main body of his argument, Which is that dynamic temporality derives its motive force from the process of the being-for-itself fleeing from an in-itself past towards the future. He uses the image of “a hole constantly being filled”.

*How is this continuous motion of “fleeing” related to the initial differential or pressure that comes from the lack, and the circuit of ipseity? We are trying to understand the image of the “hole constantly being filled.”*

1. “The present cannot *pass* [into the past] except by becoming the ‘before’ of a



for-itself that thereby constitutes itself as ‘after.’ There is therefore just one phenomenon: the arising of a new present that ‘pastifies’ the present that it was and in the wake of the past-ification of a present, the appearing of a for-itself for whom that present will become the past.” (210)

Keep in mind that temporality is a strict internal relationship of the for-itself.

2. We must take especial care and attention towards the generation of a “for-itself for whom that present will become the past.” It seems intimately related to the specific ontological being of past-pasts, and past-futures – which Sartre presents shortly following:

- (a) “The past of the present that has undergone in its past-ification becomes the past of a past – or the *pluperfect*. In relation to it, the present’s heterogeneity with the past is immediately eliminated.” (211)

- (b) “On the other hand, although the future is equally affected by the metamorphosis it does not cease to be the future – which means it remains outside the for-itself, in front of it, beyond being – but it becomes the future of a past, or the *future-perfect*.” (211)

What is the exact relationship or ontological difference between the ‘past of a past’ (i.e. the *pluperfect*), and the ‘future of a past’ (i.e. the *future-perfect*)?

3. It’s clear that the ontology of a past-of-a-past is essentially different from the ontology of a future-of-a-past, where the future-of-a-past still possesses some transcendental nature.

4. “The connection between the past and the *pluperfect* is a connection in the mode of the in-itself and it appears upon the foundation of the present for-itself” (211)

5. At this point I am at able to understand the following thematic idea: As the future moves in this dynamic motion into the past, the future loses the transcendental property (which I admittedly still cannot properly define) but becomes a matter of the *in-itself*. The past is absolutely fixed, and *objective* – it takes no part in the being of the living *being-for-itself*, but is merely the mundane *being-in-itself*.

Is this transcendental property (which the past does not have) related to the lack? Or perhaps, the fundamental negation that is the for-itself’s question of its own being?

6. “The past is a backward fatality: the for-itself makes itself what it wants, but [the for-itself] cannot escape the necessity that a new for-itself will be, irremediably, what it wanted to be.” (213)

7. “The past, therefore, is a for-itself *that has ceased to be a transcending presence to the in-itself*. As itself in itself, it has fallen into the midst of the world.” (211)

Consider how that as the past becomes objective, it no longer contains any question of its own being. Isn’t that the very nature of objectivity, or beings-in-itself?

8. “In the past the world hems me in and I become lost within a universal determinism, but I radically transcend my past toward my future, to just the extent to which I ‘was’ that past.” (213)

9. “What is the meaning of this arising of the for-itself? We must be careful not to regard it as the appearance of a new being. It is as if the present were a constant hole in being which, the moment it is filled in, constantly reappears: as if the

present were in constant flight from the threat of becoming bogged down in ‘in itself,’ a threat that continues until the in-itself’s final victory, which drags it into a past that is no longer any for-itself’s past. This victory is death, because death puts a radical stop to temporality, by past-ifying the entire system, or alternatively, by the in-itself’s seizing back of the human totality.” (213)

10. “The time of consciousness, therefore, is human-reality temporalising itself as a totality that is its own unfinished task; it is nothingness, sliding into a totality like a detotalising enzyme. This totality is simultaneously chasing after, and rejecting itself; it is unable to find any final term within itself for its surpassing, because it is its own surpassing, and surpasses itself towards itself; such a totality cannot, in any case, exist within the limits of an instant.” (216)

*Is this hole the constant nothingness that lies in the heart of the for-itself’s being?*

#### 4.2.3 Original Temporality and Psychological Temporality: Reflection

This is a great section, which serves both as a synthesis of the previous tripartite division of temporality, as well as a means of deriving psychological reality from temporality. In summary, the following process seems to occur. First, Sartre asks the question of “How does the being-for-itself actually perceive the passage of time?,” and in order to answer this question he makes the distinction between *original temporality* and *psychological temporality*.

Original temporality is the abstract, ontological (i.e. non-thetic) synthesis of the past, present, and the future. It is the thing that we talk about when we are operating purely in the level of meaning and being, insofar the nature of the being-for-itself is concerned. Original temporality is concerned purely with the non-thetic nature of the being-for-itself (i.e. the un-conscious conscious). He talks about this division starting at (217)

*Once again, I would like to have a better understanding on the process of the ecstatic synthesis of the three temporal ecstasies.*

However, there is an impure derivative of original temporality, which comes as soon as the relation between the being-for-itself and temporality becomes *thetic*. When the positional consciousness of the mind *posits* about time, and the passage of time, all of a sudden the process becomes different. This is akin to moving one step down on the ladder of metaphysics. In order to answer what is psychological temporality, and indeed even distinguish the difference between the two – Sartre has to go on a slight detour to talk about the nature of *reflection* itself. Because remember – if original temporality is purely a component of the being-for-itself, then in order for there to be any positional (i.e. psychological) awareness of temporality,

the positional consciousness has to have *itself* (i.e. the consciousness) as its object of reflection. Hence, we must first understand reflection, in order to properly talk about the two.

1. “The for-itself endures in the form of a non-thetic consciousness (of) enduring. But I am able to ‘feel time passing’ and to apprehend myself as a unity of succession. In this case I am conscious *of* enduring. This consciousness is thetic and closely resembles knowledge, just as duration being temporalised before my eyes comes close to being an object of consciousness. *What kind of relation exists between original temporality and this psychological temporality*, that I encounter as soon as I apprehend myself ‘in the process of enduring?’” (217)
2. “Reflection is the for-itself as conscious *of* itself.” (218)
3. “For a consciousness, to become reflected is to undergo a deep modification in its being and precisely to lose the *selbstständigkeit* it possessed.” (220)
4. “The person who reflects on me is not some kind of pure, timeless gaze: it is myself, an enduring me, who is committed within the circuit of my ipseity, in danger within the world, and with my historicity.” (217)
5. “Reflection is knowledge; that is beyond doubt; it possesses a positional character, and it affirms the consciousness it reflects on.” (224)
6. “[Reflection’s] knowledge is totalising: it is a lightning intuition without any contrasts, or any point of departure, or any point of arrival. Everything is given at once in a kind of absolute proximity.” (224)
7. “But if reflective consciousness is what it reflects on – if this unity of being founds and limits the authority of reflection – we ought to add that what we reflect on is itself its past and its future.” (224)
  - (a) “We can reach this conclusion, moreover, from the fact that *thinking* is an act that commits the past, and is sketched out in advance by the future. ‘I doubt, therefore I am,’ said Descartes.” (224)
  - (b) “For there to be doubt, it is necessary for this suspension to be motivated by an insufficiency of reasons either to assert or to deny – which refers to the past – and that should be deliberately maintained until new elements intervene – which is already a project of the future.” (225)
8. “Now, if our findings are correct, reflection is a for-itself seeking to reclaim itself as a totality that is constantly in a state of incompleteness.” (225)
  - (a) “Reflection, as a mode of being of the for-itself, must be in the form of temporalisation and that it is, itself, its past and its future.” (225)
  - (b) “That, by virtue of its nature, its authority and certainty extend as far as

*The object of reflection is fundamentally temporal in nature, since the result of its discernment requires the separation of the past and the future.*

*This claim makes sense, insofar that the present is the presence of the for-itself to the in-itself.*

the possibilities that *I am* and to the past that *I was*.” (255)

9. “Thus reflection is a consciousness of *the three* ecstatic dimensions. It is a *non-thetic consciousness* of flowing, and a *thetic consciousness* of duration. For it, the past and the present of what it reflects on begin to exist as *quasi-outside*s, in the sense that they are not only held within the unity of a for-itself that exhausts their being by having it to be, but also *for* a for-itself that is separated from them by a nothingness.” (226)
10. “Reflection, therefore, grasps temporality insofar as it is disclosed as the unique and incomparable mode of being of an ipseity, i.e., as historicity.” (227)

It is after having a good understanding of reflection do we come to understand original temporality, and then proceed to talk about psychological temporality. I am very excited about Sartre’s presentation of psychological temporality, because it is metaphysically interesting. Psychological temporality is based upon the original temporality that is a part of the being of the for-itself – however, it is by necessity derivative. I’m not sure if I understand the complete difference right now, but it seems like a pretty important concept behind psychological temporality is that our reflection on temporal states is in-complete – there’s some sort of *nothingness* which separates our being from the reflected being. In some sense, the objects of psychological temporality are strictly beings *in-itself*. Which does make sense, because whenever we conduct an act of reflection, we are naturally not creating a whole new consciousness from the mere act of reflection.

*This is the same nothingness that separates the for-itself when we consider self-presence.*

1. “This psychological duration constituted by the concrete flow of autonomous structures – or, in other words, by the succession of psychological *facts*, of *facts* of consciousness – cannot be called an illusion: **indeed their reality provides the object of psychology**; in practical terms, it is at the level of psychological fact that concrete relations between men ... are established.” (228)
2. “We find ourselves therefore in the presence of two temporalities: original temporality, of which we *are* the temporalisation; and psychological temporality, which exists at the same time both as something incompatible with our being’s mode of being, and as an *intersubjective reality*, an object of science, a goal of human actions.” (229)
3. “At this point we need to distinguish pure reflection from impure or constituting reflection, *because it is impure reflection that constitutes the succession of psychological facts, or psychè*. And in daily life, impure or constituting reflection is given first, even though it incorporates pure reflection within it as its original structure.” (229)

4. “Thus, reflection is impure when it presents itself as an ‘intuition of the for-itself in the in-itself;’ what is disclosed to it is not the temporal and insubstantial historicity of what it reflects on but – beyond what it reflects on – the actual substantiality of organised forms within the flow. The unity of these virtual beings is called *a psychological life*, or the *psychè*, a virtual and transcendent in-itself that subtends the for-itselfs temporalisation. Pure reflection is only ever a quasi-knowledge, but the only thing of which reflective knowledge is possible is the *Psychè*.” (232)

It is this degree of *objectivity* which creates a whole new *psychological world*, which contains its own facts and happenings.

1. “We should understand *acts* as all of a person’s synthetic activity, i.e., every ordering of means in view of ends – not insofar as the for-itself is its own possibilities but insofar as the act represents a transcendent psychological synthesis that the for-itself is obliged to live.” (233)
  - (a) “In short, the only way of presentifying these qualities, states, or acts is by apprehending them through a reflected consciousness, whose shadow they cast into the in-itself, in which they are objectified.” (235)
  - (b) “The psychological object, as the shadow cast by the reflected for-itself, possesses the characteristics of consciousness in degraded form.” (236)
2. “The term ‘psychological’ applies exclusively to a special category of cognitive acts: the acts of the reflective for-itself.” (233)
3. “In this way, reflective consciousness is constituted as a consciousness *of* duration, and in consequence, psychological duration appears to consciousness. This psychological temporality, as the projection of original temporality into the in-itself, is a virtual being whose phantom flowing endlessly accompanies the for-itself’s ecstatic temporalisation, insofar as reflection grasps this latter.” (242)
4. “As soon as one takes up the standpoint of impure reflection – the kind of reflection that seeks to determine the being that I am – an entire world appears, to populate this temporality. This world – a virtual presence, and the probable object of my reflective intention – is the psychological world, or *psychè*.” (243)
5. “And with this transcendent world, which takes up residence in the infinite becoming of antihistorical indifference, the temporality that we refer to as ‘internal’ or ‘qualitative’ – which is an objectification of original temporality into in-itself – is constituted, precisely, as a virtual unity of being. Here we find the first draft of an ‘outside’ on itself, in its own eyes: but this ‘outside’ is purely virtual. Later on we will see how being-for-the-Other *actualises* the first draft of

*What is the relationship and necessity of there being an “Other,” which allows the actualisation of an “Outside?”*

*This outside (at this level of our inquiry) is purely virtual, for it is indistinguishable from our psychological world. It is only the presence of an Other, which yields an objective “outside.”*

this ‘outside.’” (243)

### 4.3 Chapter 3: Transcendence

Why is this chapter called transcendence? Why do we arrive at knowledge, in this progression of inquiry? In the beginning, we laid out the questions of phenomena and being. After an initial exploration of phenomena, we proceeded towards consciousness and the being-for-itself. We elucidated the nothingness that is present in the being-for-itself, and then the for-itself’s internal structures of temporality. We realise that the being of the phenomena (the in-itself) comes from the negation at the heart of the for-itself. All of these are valid, ontological inquiries – *but they do not answer the question of the relationship between the for-itself and the in-itself*. This relationship is the relationship of knowledge – that’s why Sartre brings us here in the progression of the inquiry.

This chapter is called transcendence, because in our exploration of the ontology of knowledge, we ultimately realise the relationship between the knower (the for-itself) and the known (the in-itself) is a *transcendental* relationship.

#### 4.3.1 Knowledge as a Type of Relation Between the For-Itself and the In-Itself

I’m afraid my understanding of this section is poor, but at least rhetorically it seems like Sartre’s argument consists of two sections. He first begins with a brief discussion on the question of *knowledge*, asking what is the ontological foundation behind the being of knowledge. He spends the first section defining what knowledge is, and concludes that knowledge is strictly intuition:

1. “The only kind of knowledge is intuitive. Deduction and discourse, which are incorrectly labelled as ‘knowledge,’ are only instruments leading to intuition.” (246)
  - (a) “When we reach the intuition, the means that were used to reach it are set aside;”
  - (b) “In cases where we cannot reach it, reasoning and discourse are left in the position of signposts that point toward an intuition that is out of reach.”
  - (c) “Finally, if an intuition has been reached but is not a present mode of my consciousness, the maxims that I employ persist, as the results of operations that I carried out earlier.” (246)
2. “Intuition is the presence of consciousness to the thing [object of intuition].” (246)

*What a delightful epistemology! I really should explore the idea of knowledge as intuition more – in particular, Sartre’s description of the ways we reach, or don’t reach intuition are very interesting.*

It seems like knowledge has to be a relationship of some kind between the *being in-itself* and the *being for-itself*. He elaborates that this relationship is one of *presence*, but beings that are simply in-itself (i.e. inanimate objects) cannot be present to anything. Hence, knowledge is the presence of the *being-for-itself* to the *being in itself*. We are present to the object of our knowledge. With this understanding of knowledge established, we begin asking the ontological questions between knowledge and being:

1. "What might this necessity – that consciousness should be conscious of something – mean, if we consider it at the level of ontology, i.e., within the perspective of being-for-itself?" (247)
2. "*Not-being* is an essential structure of presence. Presence includes a radical negation, as presence to something that we are not. What is present to me is not me." (247)
3. "We need, in fact, to distinguish between two types of negation: external *negation* and internal *negation*." (249)
  - (a) "[External negation] appears as a purely external connection between two beings, established by a witness. For example, when I say 'the cup is not the inkwell,' it is quite clear that the foundation of this negation lies neither in the cup nor in the inkwell."
  - (b) "[Internal negation] is a particular negative property of my being, which characterises me from inside, and also that – *qua negativity* – is a real quality of myself ... By 'internal negation' we mean a relation between two beings, where the one that we deny in relation to the other qualifies the other, at the heart of its essence, precisely by its absence."
4. "In this sense internal negation is a concrete ontological connection ... in internal negation, the for-itself is crushed against what it negates." (251)
5. "The for-itself's presence to the in-itself, which we cannot describe either in terms of continuity or in terms of discontinuity, is purely a *negated identity*." (253)

Sartre proceeds to talk about negation in specific detail.

So somehow, knowledge is a process of negation, specifically of internal negation. This seems to be understandable as far as how judgement (in the Kantian sense) is an act of discernment, but I'm still not very sure on my understanding of it right now.

1. "That is why the best term to use, to signify this internal relation of knowing and being, is the verb we were using just now: '*to realise*,' with its double meaning, ontological and gnostic." (255)

2. “We can give the name ‘transcendence’ to this internal and realising negation which discloses the in-itself by determining the for-itself in its being.” (255)

In summary, what is the Sartrean ontology of knowledge? Knowledge is the for-itself’s being present to the in-itself. However, such a presence cannot be an *additive* act. When we gain knowledge of an in-itself, we do not add anything to it. Rather, the presence of an in-itself to the for-itself must be a relation of negation: specifically, the for-itself is put into a relationship where *nothing* separates it from the in-itself. Compare this with the more familiar language that we use with knowledge, such as “I uncover knowledge”, or “the knowledge is revealed to me.” All of this indicates the same relationship of nothingness between the for-itself and the in-itself, specifically – nothing separates one from the other.

Hence, the being of the known (the in-itself) has to be present to the knower (the for-itself) against a background of nothingness. It is this internal and realising negation which we call *transcendence*.

#### 4.3.2 On Determination as Negation

Sartre begins this section with a long discourse on the nature of the for-itself’s presence to being *as a totality*, around pages (256). Honestly, I do not understand this section very well at all. It’s only around (262) when Sartre goes back to examine the title of this topic, determination as negation. He revisits the dichotomy of internal versus external negation. Having already explored internal negation in the previous section, he seems to dedicate this section to looking at external negation, which he terms determination.

*I should make sure to revisit Sartre’s thoughts on presence as a totality.*

1. “What remains to be determined is the type of being possessed by external negation, insofar as it enters the world through the for-itself. We know that external negation does not belong to the *this* [the being-in-itself]: this newspaper does not deny, in relation to itself ...” (261)
2. “The external negation constitutive of the *this* [object] cannot appear as an objective feature of the thing” (262).

This section was shorter than the other ones.

#### 4.3.3 Quality and Quantity, Potentiality and Equipmentality

In this (263 – 285) section, Sartre presents the nature of quality, quantity, potentiality, and equipmentality. I admit I do not understand the entirety of it, and my comprehen-



sion of this section is a bit lacking. But these properties seem to be not as essential to the nature of Sartre's ontology, but rather as more subsequent, derived facts.

1. **Quality:**

- (a) "Quality is nothing other than the being of the *this* [object], when we consider it outside any external relation to the world or to other [*this-es*]." (263)
- (b) "In this sense, a quality is not an external aspect of being, because being, lacking any 'inside,' cannot have any 'outside.'" (264)
- (c) "The for-itself's relation to quality is an ontological relation. The intuition of a quality is not a passive contemplation." (264)

2. **Quantity:**

- (a) Not sure if I completely understand this, but apparently quantity can be expressed as the negation of a unity of negations? (268)
- (b) If an individual object is a quality (which is a negation – an act of the being-for-itself negating), then multiple negations yields quantity.
- (c) "This external negation within the unity of a totality that can disintegrate is expressed by the word 'and' ..." (268)
- (d) "*This ideal and in-itself nothingness is quantity.*" (268)
- (e) "To count is to make an ideal discrimination, within a totality that can disintegrate and is already given. The number that we obtain through addition does not belong to any of the counted *this-es* [objects], nor to the disintegrable totality, insofar as that is disclosed as a totality." (268)
  - i. "Being 'a group of three' is not a concrete property of the group. But neither is it a property of its members. We cannot say of any one of them that he is three, or even that he is the third, because the quality of being third is only a reflection of our freedom of the for-itself doing the counting." (268)

3. **Potentiality:**

- (a) "To say 'this is not that one' is to posit the externality of *this* in relation to the *that* – either for now and the future – or strictly within the *now* – but in that case the negation has a *provisional* character, which constitutes the future as pure externality in relation to the present." (271)
- (b) "In both cases, the meaning comes to negation on the basis of the future; all negation is ecstatic." (271)
- (c) "Insofar as the for-itself negates itself in the future, the *this* of which it makes itself the negation is disclosed as coming toward it from the future.

The possibility that consciousness non-thetically is – as a consciousness of being able not to be *this* – is disclosed as the potentiality of what *this* to be what it is.” (271)

#### 4. Equipmentality:

- (a) Equipmentality is a Heidegger-related term for how ordinary objects can function as tools or the efficient causes as *equipment*. For example, a rock is just a rock – but a rock can also function as a hammer. The meaning or being of hammer-tool is somehow present in the rock. How does equipmentality emerge as a result of Sartre’s conception of ontology?
- (b) This is addressed by Sartre in (282 – 284), but I admit I do not understand it completely at this moment.

*Is an equipment simply an object (in-itself) that’s subsumed to my will?*

### 4.3.4 World-Time

In this section (285 – 300), Sartre explores and justifies the existence of an objective temporality, even though it is the being-for-itself which possesses temporality, and objects (beings-in-itself) do not. In order to do this, he borrows from Martin Heidegger the concept of the World-Time. He justifies the existence of objective world-time through a discussion of the past, the present, and the future:

“Universal time enters the world through the for-itself. The in-itself does not have temporality at its disposal precisely because it is in-itself, and because temporality is the unitary mode of being of a being that is constantly for itself at a distance from itself. The for-itself, on the contrary, is temporality, but it is not a consciousness of temporality, except when it puts itself into the ‘reflective-reflected’ relationship. In the unreflective mode it discovers temporality *on* being, which is to say outside. **Universal temporality is objective.**” (285)

I didn’t find this section to be entirely relevant to my question, so I did not take many notes as I read it.

### 4.3.5 Knowledge

The knowledge section (300 – 303) is a short, but good summary of all the previous sections. It talks about the ultimate conclusion on the relation of knowledge to beings for-itself, and the relationship between beings for-itself to the world in general. Sartre begins to talk about idealism first, realism next, and scepticism – comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between the ontology of knowledge and the world in each outlook. He ultimately concludes that his ontology takes on elements of

both realism, idealism, and scepticism – but avoids their pitfalls.

1. “We can concede, to idealism, that the for-itself’s being is knowledge of being, but we will add that there is a being to that knowledge.” (300)
  - (a) “The for-itself’s being is identical with the being of knowledge, but that is not because knowledge is the measure of being but because the for-itself becomes acquainted with what it is by the in-itself ... knowledge is nothing other than the presence of being to the for-itself, and the for-itself is only the *nothing* that actualises this presence”
  - (b) “It is just as if the for-itself, through its very nihilation, constituted itself as a ‘consciousness of ...,’ i.e., as if it escaped, through its very transcendence, that law of the in-itself by which any affirmation is thickened by what it affirms. The for-itself, through its negation of itself, becomes an affirmation of the in-itself.” (301)
2. “To the realist, on the other hand, we will concede that what is present to the knowing consciousness is being itself, and that the for-itself adds *nothing* to the in-itself, other than the very fact that *there is* an in-itself, i.e. the affirmative negation.” (302)
  - (a) “In this sense, everything is given, presented to me without distance and in the entirety of its reality: *nothing* of what I see comes from me; there is *nothing* apart from what I see or what I am able to see.” (302)
  - (b) “To say ‘there is being’ is to say nothing – and yet it effects a complete metamorphosis, because *there is* being only for a for-itself.”
  - (c) “Thus I find myself everywhere – between being and myself – as nothing that is *not being*.”
3. “The world is human. We can see the highly distinctive position of consciousness: being is everywhere, against me and around me, weighing on me and besieging me, and I am constantly referred from being to being.” (302)
4. “What we have here is neither a scepticism – which would presuppose precisely, that the ‘as it is’ belongs to being – nor a relativism. Knowledge places us in the presence of the absolute and there is a truth to knowledge. But this truth, although it delivers us nothing more and nothing less than the absolute, remains strictly human.” (303)

“The world is human” – this is a beautiful quote, and should be more widely known.

This marks the conclusion of Part II of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*.

## 5.0 Part III: Being-For-The-Other

In the INTRODUCTION, PART I and PART II, we explore the being-for-itself, as well as the being-in-itself, and then their relationship with each other. However, as Sartre has hinted – these two beings (of the for-itself and the in-itself) are not sufficient to completely account for the rich, phenomenological existence of human-reality. If the ontology of our world is only for a (singular) for-itself and in-itselfs, then this world would be fundamentally *psychological*.

There is in fact another modality of being which we haven't explored, that is essential for our *objective* world. This is the for-itself that is *not* our for-itself – in other words, this is the Other. In this section, Sartre explores both the ontology of the Other, as well as how our ontology becomes affected by the presence (and even the mere possibility) of the Other – in what Sartre terms the being-for-the-Other. Finally, after understanding their ontology – Sartre presents some practical manifestations in the Concrete Relations with the Other.

## 5.1 Chapter 1: The Other's Existence

### 5.1.1 The Problem

This is the introductory section (307 – 309) which lays out Sartre's exposition for "the problem." Sartre admits that in all the preceding discussions of the being-for-itself (i.e. the conscious being) and the being-in-itself (i.e. objective beings), we have left out one important and concrete mode of ontology. This mode of ontology is of the being-for-the-other – which from my understanding so far, is the mode of being that a being-for-itself takes, when it is contemplated by another being-for-itself. The example that Sartre uses to best highlight the distinct ontological nature of a *being-for-the-other* is through the emotion of *shame*. Sartre uses shame as the emotion to portray this distinction because shame is unique in how it contains a component of self-recognition. It also necessitates an *Other*, for it is impossible to feel self by oneself. "shame in its primary structure is *shame before somebody*." (308)

*We begin our exploration on the being of the Other through an eidetic reduction, where we examine shame – a practical phenomenon of the Other's presence.*

1. "Shame is *recognition*. I recognise that *I am* as the Other sees me." (308)
2. "Thus the Other has not only shown me what I was; he has constituted me in a new type of being, obliging me to support new qualifications." (308)
3. "But this new being that appears *for* the Other does not reside *in* the Other; I am responsible for it ... In this way shame is shame *of myself before the Other*;

these two structures are inseparable. But, by the same token, I need the Other in order to fully grasp all the structures of my being; my for-itself refers to my for-the-other.” (309)

### 5.1.2 The Reef of Solipsism

Sartre begins his exploration on the Other’s existence (309 – 322) through an examination of the inadequacy of both *realism* and *idealism* to account for the existence of the Other. We are confronted with the question of “How can there be an Other?” Right now, in this pre-Other ontology of ours, there are only two kinds of beings – beings-for-itself (the conscious being) which is the self – and beings-in-itself, objects of our positional consciousness (309).

#### **Inadequacies of *Realism* to justify the existence of the *Other***

We can attempt to furnish an explanation for the existence of the Other through *Realism*. We observe that there is another body, that can be the subject of our intuition and consciousness. Likewise, we observe the empirical phenomena associated with the other’s body – and that there are patterns that can be followed. We ultimately come to the conclusion that the other body’s behaviour can only be explained by the existence of another positional consciousness (a being-for-itself) other than our own. “The hypothesis that best accounts for [the Other body’s] ways of behaving is that of a consciousness that is analogous to mine, whose various emotions it reflects.” (311)

However, this hypothesis – while plausible, can never be ontologically certain – the realist will always have other equally plausible explanations of the Other as only a body – a mechanistic being, a perspective of pure behaviouralism. “if the Other is accessible to us only through the knowledge that we have of him, and if this knowledge is only conjectural, the Other’s existence is only conjectural.” (311) In fact, Sartre goes on to critique the inadequacies of the realist explanation for the existence of the Other as downright a recourse to idealism. After all, if the existence of the other is conjecture and hypothesis – it is no different from saying that it has no real foundation, but is merely ideal (312).

#### **Inadequacies of *Idealism* to justify the existence of the *Other***

Moving on, Sartre then looks at explanations of the *Other* from the perspective of *Idealism* (312). He takes an early look at Immanuel Kant’s perspective of the transcendental metaphysics – which presents the other as an object of our experience. This makes the Other entirely a phenomenon. However, there still exists the difficulty of explaining

*This “hesitancy” within realism is a dangerous step towards solipsism: if your ontology can only endow yourself with the absolute certainty of consciousness, but attribute only “plausible explanations” for others – than you are effectively stating that only you are conscious.*

the *being* that's behind the Other. It's hard to not see the Other as *noumenal* – which would make it a thing that's entirely beyond our intuition altogether.

In this line of reasoning, Sartre proceeds to examine other (315) potential explanations for the foundation of the Other's being, such as the Other as a "regulative concept" or "organising principle." All are weak and inadequate:

"Consequently, the Other is not, within my experience, a phenomenon that points toward my experience [i.e. any idealist perception] but rather one that refers in principle to phenomena that are situated outside any possible experience for me ... the concept of the Other is not purely instrumental [i.e. any organising principle]: rather than its existing *for* use in the unification of phenomena, we ought on the contrary to say that various categories of phenomena seem only to exist *for* it." (315)

### Where is the Other?

It's that final line – where "various categories of phenomena seem only to exist *for* it" – that hints towards the ultimate ontological foundation of the Other:

1. "That *Other*, whose relation to myself cannot be apprehended, and who is never given, is gradually constituted by us as a concrete object: he is not the instrument of which I make use to predict an event within my experience; rather, it is the events in my experience that used to constitute the Other as Other, i.e. as a system of representations that is beyond reach as concrete and knowable object." (316)
2. From this fundamentally separate foundation of the Other's being, we are able to experience co-incident phenomena which are valid and possible events in our experience, i.e. "the Other's feelings, the Other's ideas, the other's acts of will, the Other's character." (316)
3. "That is because the Other is not, in point of fact, the only one whom I see **but the one who sees me**. I aim at the Other insofar as he is a connected system of experiences out of reach, within which I figure as one object among others." (316)
  - (a) "The Other, on contrary, is presented as in some sense the *radical negation of my experience*, since he is the one for whom I am not a subject but an object." (316)
4. "At the origin of the problem of the Other's existence there is a fundamental mental presupposition: that the Other is indeed the *other*, which is to say that [it] is *not* me; here, therefore, we are apprehending a **negation as a constitutive structure of Other-being**." (319)

*Do we once again see the familiar them of separation, or negation, as the root behind a being's ontology?*

*The is the Other is a radical negation of my self-hood?*

At this stage of our inquiry, we now have an additional being in our ontological menagerie: the Other. Here's a quick manifest of the beings:

- The Self (being-for-itself)
- The Object (being-in-itself)
- The Other (being-for-itself that is not me, but whom I am the object of).

Sartre ends this section (316 – 321) with further looks at how both Kantian idealism and realism are insufficient to give account for the Other, but the specifics are not that important. He then proceeds to examine the perspective of the other from the perspective of Husserl, Hegel, and Heidegger in the following section.

### 5.1.3 Husserl, Hegel, Heidegger

In this section, Sartre continues with the exploration of the other from the perspective of Husserl, Hegel, and then Heidegger– and discusses both their strengths, and their inadequacies.

#### Husserl's Conception of the Other

Husserl's phenomenology makes the other a necessary part of the world's existence, where "The Other is present within it not only as this concrete and empirical appearance but as a permanent condition of its unity and its richness." (322) However, this account for the existence of the Other fails to explain how is it possible for the self to know the Other. "It is evident too that the meaning of 'the Other' cannot come from experience, or from an argument from analogy made on the occasion of experience: rather, and quite to the contrary, it is in light of the concept of the *Other* that experience is interpreted." (323) If there is a realm of experiences that are rendered objective by the other, we may always have access to the experiences themselves. But how can we have access to the other behind these experiences. Here, Sartre critiques the Husserl explanation as sharing the same flaws of Kant's idealism– namely that the Other it speaks about has a transcendental, unreachable side. "... Husserl was able to establish between my being and the Other's is that of *knowledge*; [however] he cannot therefore, any ore than Kant could, escape Solipsism." (325)

#### Hegel's Conception of the Other

The Hegelian conception of the Other (325 – 328) is a richer, more elaborate development, where the Other is seen as a self-recognition of consciousness. Hegel's Lord and Bondsman relationship is used to explain aspects of both the self-recognition, and of the difference between the self and other.

However, ultimately Hegel's conception also proved to be lacking, as Sartre explains starting from (329). I'm not sure if I follow his reasoning in the entirety, but the essence seems to be how the Lord-and-Bondsman relationship requires the consciousness to hold itself in objectivity. This is ontologically impossible, since the for-itself cannot conceive of itself as an in-itself (334).

### Heidegger's Conception of the Other

What is Heidegger's conception of the Other? It is perhaps the most complete one yet. I think the thing that is the most persuasive to me, is the idea that the relationship between the self and the other cannot be mediated in any case as relationships of knowledge and being, or being and knowledge – but it is only possible on the condition of being and being.

1. "What have we gained from this lengthy critique? Simply this: if it must be possible to refute solipsism, my relation to the Other is, first and fundamentally, a relation of being to being, and not of knowledge to knowledge." (336)
  - (a) "Indeed, we have seen the failure of Husserl, who, on this particular front, measures being by knowledge, and the failure of Hegel, who identifies knowledge and being."
2. "It seems that Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, has profited from the meditations of his precursors and has profoundly absorbed this twofold necessity:" (336)
  - (a) "The relation of 'human-realities' must be a relation of being;"
  - (b) "this relation must make 'human-realities' depend on each other in their essential being."
3. "Our [the self and the Other] relation is not a *frontal* opposition; rather, it is an interdependence *alongside*: insofar as I make it the case that a world exists as a structure of equipment, of which I make use for the purpose of my human-reality, I come to be determined in my being by a being who makes it the case that the same world exists as a structure of equipment for the purpose of his reality." (338)
4. "What I make myself to be is, therefore, a mode of being. And this truth means that I am responsible for my being for the *Other* insofar as I actualise it freely, in authenticity or inauthenticity." (338)
5. "In particular, when I am in the mode of inauthenticity – of the 'they' – the world sends back to me something like an impersonal reflection of my inauthentic possibilities in the guise of implements and structures of equipment that belongs to 'everyone,' and which belongs to me insofar as I am 'everyone:' ready-made clothes, public transport, parks, gardens, public spaces, shelters that are built so

*This section of Sartre's discussion on Heidegger's conception of the Other touches upon the themes of authenticity, in-authenticity, individuality, and the pursuit of such. I find this section to be of immense personal interest to me, especially the idea of acting ever more authentically.*



that *anyone* can shelter there, etc. In this way I become acquainted with myself as *anyone* by the referential structure of equipment, which refers to me as a ‘*Worumwillen*,’<sup>1</sup> but as a complete interchangeability in terms of the relation” (339)

6. “**Authenticity and individuality have to be won:** I will be my own authenticity *only if*, under the influence of the call of conscience (*Ruf des Gewissens*) I throw myself toward death, as toward my ownmost possibility, with resolute-decision (*Entschlossenheit*). At that moment I am disclosed to myself in authenticity, and I raise others, too, along with me, in the direction of authenticity.” (339)

Sartre’s presentation turns towards a critique starting at (340). For Heidegger to claim that the foundation of the Other’s existence is in ourselves through the process of our own *being-with* (e.g. the analogy of the team), it is still absolutely necessary for us to explain the nature of the being-with, which he does not do satisfactorily.

1. “What would need to be shown, in fact, is that ‘being-with-Pierre’ or ‘being-with-Anny’ is a constitutive structure of my concrete-being. But that is impossible, from the standpoint that Heidegger has taken up.” (341)
2. “My *being-with*, apprehended on the basis of ‘my’ being, can be regarded only as a pure demand, founded in my being, and which does not constitute the least proof of the Other’s existence, the least bridge between me and the other.” (342)
3. “The nature of the Other’s existence is that of a contingent and an irreducible fact. We *encounter* the other; we do not constitute him.” (344)

*What is the specific nature of this common inauthenticity called the “they”, and how do we manifest it in our everyday lives or as a member of an impersonal society?*

*I know that Sartre is quoting Heidegger here, but what does he mean by the call of conscience, and by the throwing towards death?*

#### 5.1.4 The Look

After examining the prior three accounts for the Other, as well as sharing their merits as well as flaws, Sartre begins his exploration of the Other from his own account. Sartre titles this section “The Look,” (347) and this is because understanding the look between the self and the Other, as well as the Other and the self, is important to understanding the ontology of the Other. From my understanding, the Other cannot be an *object* of the being-for-itself, but in the image of the drain or whirlpool, it is a locus of being which drains the objectivity of the being-for-itself just like how a massive body warps space and time.

In fact, the definitive nature of the Other’s being seems to lie in the fact that it is capable of looking – of both looking towards objects of its own experience, but also of looking to the being-for-itself:

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<sup>1</sup>Heidegger’s translators render the phrase *Worumwillen* as “for-the-sake-of-which.”

1. "What is the original presence of the Other to which it refers? ... If the object-Other is defined in connection with the world, as the object who sees what I see, it must be possible to sum up my fundamental connection with the subject-Other through the constant possibility of my *being seen* by the Other" (352)
2. "'Being-seen-by-the-Other' is the *truth* of 'seeing-the-Other.'" (353)
3. "The description of this fundamental connection must provide the basis of any theory of the Other; if the Other is, as a matter of principle, *the one who looks at me*, we ought to be able to explicate the meaning of the Other's look" (353)

Starting at (354) Sartre begins his exposition on the Look.

1. "... Thus the look is in the first place an intermediary by which I am referred to myself. What is the nature of this intermediary? What is the meaning for me of being seen?" (355)
2. I am too tired to complete my notes for this section, but I highlighted some important quotations around (362 – 366). I should make sure to revisit this section, if only because Sartre presents an interesting image using the watchman (guard) and the robber.

*I should make sure to revisit Sartre's story of the nightwatchman and the robber, since it seems to present an interesting duet of the Other and the one looked upon.*

Why is the original presence of the Other defined by Sartre as the being-seen? This is because when we (the being-for-itself) is seen, the fundamental relationship of our ontology is one that which our self is taken as the object of another consciousness. This can only happen in the presence of an Other. Hence, the original presence of the Other comes from the being-seen.

### **On the Other's Look, Objectively**

A new day's worth of notes: In the previous section, Sartre talks about the Other's look from the perspective of the *cogito* of the being-for-itself (i.e. the person being looked at by the other). In this subsequent section starting from (368 – 375), Sartre examines the Other's look from the perspective of *objectivity*. As I am much better rested now, I have more quotes to present:

1. "In the first place, the *Other's look*, as the necessary condition of my objectivity, is the destruction of all objectivity for me. The Other's look reaches me through the world and is not only a transformation of myself but a complete metamorphosis of the *world*." (368)
2. "But, in addition, by freezing my possibilities, the Other reveals to me that it is impossible for me to be an object unless it is for another freedom. I cannot be an object for myself ... for how could I be an object, other than for a [looking]

subject?” (369)

3. “By the same token [as the Other’s look freezes my freedom (of possibilities) into the objecthood of (probabilities)], I experience his infinite freedom. That is because it is for and through a [the Other’s] freedom – and only for and through it – that my possibilities can be limited and frozen.” (369)
4. “Thus, through his look, I experience the Other concretely as a free and conscious subject who makes it the case that there is a world by temporalising himself towards his own possibilities.” (370)
5. “The presence to me of the Other-look is not, therefore, an item of knowledge; neither it is a projection of my being, or a form of unification or category. It is, and I am unable to derive it from myself.” (371)

Essentially, it sounds like just as my own look (as the being-for-itself) is one of freedom that objectifies the world, the Other’s look is its own freedom which both objectifies and limits myself. Starting from (372), Sartre begins to qualify the above observations with some caveats: “But here we must also note that: ...”

1. “My objecthood for me [stemming from being looked upon by the Other] is not in any way an explication of Hegel’s ‘*Ich bin Ich*.’ There is no question here of a formal identity, and *my object-being or being-for-the-Other is radically different from my being-for-myself*.” (372)
  - (a) This is an important caveat to keep in mind, for it would be inconsistent if our *being-for-itself* is affected by the look of another *being-for-itself*.
2. “Moreover, the Other does not constitute me as an object for myself but *for him*. In other words, he is not used as a regulative or constitutive concept of instances of *knowledge* that I can have of myself.” (374)
3. “Thus my me-object [i.e. the object-ness of myself when I am Looked upon by the Other] is neither knowledge nor a unity of knowledge but unease, a lived separation from the for-itself’s ecstatic unity, ... The fact of the Other is incontestable and reaches right to my heart. I actualise it through my *unease*.” (375)

### On False Looks

Having completed the exploration of the effects of the look on our being-for-itself, and it’s relationship to objectivity, Sartre now begins a new section on a different line of thought (375 – 376). This exploration is sort of addressing the question of false or mistaken looks, i.e. if I encounter a puppet or a painting that has eyes and appears to be another man at first, do I still go through all those complex ontological motions?

Essentially, the question that is posed is: *How does this account of the Other's look remain true and valid, during cases where the self believes there is an Other, but in fact there is none?*

"I grasp myself a certain 'being-looked-at' with its own structures [all of which we mentioned above], directing me to the Other's real existence. But it is possible that I am mistaken: ... perhaps these concrete objects were not *really* manifesting a look. In that case, what becomes of my certainty that I am *being looked at*? My shame was in effect *shame before somebody*: but there is nobody there. Does it not thereby become *shame before nobody* ... a false shame?" (376)

Sartre does not find this to be a difficult objection, and after reading with him, I agree. Essentially, the nature of the relationship between the self and the Other is an ontological relationship, on a level which is above, and transcendent of the factual level. The image that he presents is that the motion of *shame*, where we believe we are seen – is still as real and as visceral as when we think we are seen, even if we realise it is a false alarm. His quotes best explain his conception on the difference between the factual presence of a looking-Other, versus the ontological level of the Other which is present in our very *human-reality*:

1. "Being-looked-at cannot therefore *depend* on the object which manifests the look ... If therefore, *being-looked-at* considered in its purest form, is not linked *to the Other's body* any more than my consciousness of being a consciousness ..." (376)
2. "In brief, what therefore was it that misleadingly appeared and was then destroyed during the false alert [of being looked at]? It is not the subject-Other, or his presence to me: it is the Other's *facticity*, i.e. the contingent connection between the Other and an object-being within my world." (377)

## On Absence

Starting from here (378), Sartre addresses a slightly different topic – the idea of *absence* (opposite of *presence*), which has been implicit in the whole getting-caught-by-the-Other discussion. After all, if we get started and look up – believing that we were caught in the Look of the Other – but only to see that there is nobody, a false alarm, it means that there is an *absence* of the other's *object-being*.

1. "[Absence] is a connection of being between human-realities and not between human-reality and the world. It is through his relation to Thérèse that Pierre is absent *from this location*." (376 – 377)
2. "Being-for-the-Other is a constant fact of my human reality and I grasp it, with

*And surely, this connection between the Other and an object-being is truly a contingent one. Just think about the technologies of telepresence – surveillance cameras, livestreams, et cetera.*

its *factual* necessity, in the slightest thought that I form about myself.” (380)

3. “To move away, to come closer, or to discover this particular Other-object is only to enact empirical variations on the fundamental theme of my being-for-the-Other.” (381)
4. “I may well believe that a man is watching me in the shadows, and discover that it is a tree trunk which I took to be a human being: my fundamental presence to all men, the presence to me of all men, is not thereby altered, because the appearing of some man as an object within the field of my experience is not what teaches me that there are men. **My certainty of the Other’s existence is independent of these experiences, and it is the former, on the contrary, that makes them possible.**” (381)

In summary, absence is a quality that is only possible between “two or more human-realities, which necessitate the fundamental presence of each of these realities for the others.” What follows now is a good and succinct summary of the Look and the Other, offered by Sartre in (382):

“We are now able to grasp the nature of the look: in every look an object-Other appears within my perceptual field as a concrete and probable presence and, on the occasion of various attitudes of this Other, I determine myself to grasp – through shame, anguish, etc. – my ‘being-looked-at.’ This ‘being-looked-at’ is presented as the pure probability that I am presently the concrete *this* – a probability that can derive its meaning, and its very nature as probable, only from a fundamental certainty that the Other is always present to me insofar as I am always present *for the Other*. The experience of my condition as a man as an object for *all* other living men, thrown into the arena before millions of eyes – and escaping millions of times from myself – is concretely actualised by me on the occasion of an object’s arising within *my* universe, if this object indicates to me that I am probably an object now as a *differentiated this* for some consciousness. That is the *totality of the phenomenon that we are calling ‘the Look.’* Each look makes us concretely experience ... that we all exist for all living men.” (382)

Finally, in some concluding remarks, Sartre talks about shame, fear, and pride in pages (392 – 395). He best sums it up by saying: “Shame, fear, and pride are therefore my original reactions, they are merely the various ways in which I recognise the Other as a subject out of reach, and they include within themselves an understanding of my ipseity which can and does provide me with the motivation to constitute the Other into an object.” (395)

## 5.2 Chapter 2: The Body

How do we arrive now at the body, from our exploration on the ontology of the Other? In the previous section, Sartre implicitly talks about how the difference between human-reality and the world-of-facticity. Our human-reality is very much real, but it is contingent on our facticity. After adding the being-of-the-Other to our ontology, our structure of human-reality is more or less complete. Hence, this is now a good time to talk about facticity – and our body is one of the most fundamental ways in which we interact with facticity.

From now on I will only try to take more high-level and over-arching notes, and refrain from providing such an exhaustive level of quotations. In this chapter, Sartre presents the three ontological dimensions of the body.

*Starting from here, my notes are not as exhaustive. I should make sure to revisit these sections to make sure I understand things as completely as I can.*

### 5.2.1 The body as Being-For-Itself: Facticity

This is the first ontological dimension of the body. I'm not sure if I understood this section (409 – 453) of Sartre's work as well as I could, but it seems like at least for the first part, Sartre is trying to refute the mechanistic and reductionist idea of the body as a being of pure physicality, or biology. My body cannot be reduced to experiences or sensations, but rather it is simply facticity. Now I admit I do not understand this process completely, but it seems persuasive.

### 5.2.2 The Body-for-the-Other

Section (453 – 468). This is the second ontological dimension of the body, which is the body of the self for the Other.

### 5.2.3 The Third Ontological Dimension of the Body

Section (468 – 478). This is the third ontological dimension: the body as an object for the Other, which I perceive. Or to slightly rephrase it– the third ontological dimension is my perception of the being of my body, insofar as it is an object for the Other.

## 5.3 Chapter 3: Concrete Relations with the Other

We are given an introduction to the *concrete* relationships between the for-itself towards the Other, in (479 – 482). By concrete relationships, Sartre means in opposition to the previous chapter, and it's three *ontological* relationships. These concrete relationships stem from the fact that we perceive the ontological relationships of the for-itself

through the body – although Sartre takes care to caution us not to think of the Body as an instrumental or efficient means: “It is not that the body is the instrument and cause of my relations with the Other. But it constitutes their meaning, and it marks out their meanings: it is as a body-in-situation that I apprehend the Other’s transcended-transcendence, and it is as a body-in-situation that I experience myself, as alienated for the Other’s benefit.” (479)

The primary relationship between the being-for-itself and the *Other* (i.e. another being-for-itself that is not actually me) is a relationship of the *Look*. Although Sartre doesn’t quite use this particular phrase, I would say that this relationship is first and foremost, a relationship of *fear*. That’s because the Other is a pure negativity, someone from whom “meaning seems to drain away to.” Our selves experience an ontological shock, knowing that our being is not self-supporting – but rather we are the *object* of an Other from whom is fundamentally unknowable to us.

In Sartre’s words, we realise that the foundation of our own being – who we are – is now “intolerably contingent”. How can we escape from the torture of this contingency? If we aim to do this through the Other, then this method is a unique, ontologically distinct relationship that for a lack of a better word, we call “love.” Love in this manner manifests in two modalities, where either we try to capture the Other’s freedom and make it support our own, or we try to lose ourselves within the objectivity of the Other’s gaze.

1. “These are the two basic attitudes that I take up in relation to the Other.” (481)
  - (a) “Transcending the Other’s transcendence or, on the contrary,”
  - (b) “Swallowing up this [the Other’s] transcendence within me without taking away its character of transcendence.”

These two different modalities of being are discussed in the subsequent parts of this chapter:

### 5.3.1 Our First Attitude Toward the Other: Love, Language, Masochism

The layout of this section is roughly as follows. First there’s an introductory segment where we talk about the first attitude to the other on more abstract, ontological grounds (482 – 485), which is then subsequently followed by its four more concrete manifestations. The first one is on love (485 – 493), and the second one is on seduction (492 – 493) (which is closely related to language), the third one is on language (493 – 499), and finally the third is on masochism (499 – 501).

1. “The relations we are concerned with here are not at all unilateral relations to an object-in-itself but reciprocal and shifting relationships. The following descriptions should therefore be envisaged within the perspective of *conflict*. *Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-the-Other.*” (483)

(a) “If we set out from the Other’s initial revelation as the *Look*, we are obliged to acknowledge that we experience our elusive being-for-the-Other in the form of an [object’s] *possession*.” (483)

*We are possessed by the look.*

(b) “Thus I have some understanding of [my being-for-the-Other’s] ontological structure; I am responsible for my being-for-the-Other, but I am *not* its foundation; it appears to me, therefore, in the form of a contingent datum for which I am nonetheless responsible, and the Other founds my being insofar as this being takes the form of the ‘there is.’” (483)

*Why is our contingency intolerable and dangerous? Sartre explores the same idea in a different vein in PART IV, when he explores the ontology of freedom.*

(c) “[Hence] my object-being [in the look of the Other] is *intolerably* contingent and a pure ‘possession’ of me by another.” (483)

2. This objecthood which our being experiences as we are regarded by the Other’s look, in our condition of the being-for-the-Other is “intolerably contingent”, as per Sartre’s own words. It is an endangerment of our being, where our freedom in the being-for-itself is reduced in the other’s eyes as a simple, *objective* being-in-itself. This ontological *endangerment* is the foundation of Sartre’s conflict, where there are only two possible modalities of resolution:

(a) “[this objecthood in the Other’s look is what] I have to retrieve and to found, in order to be the foundation of myself. But this is conceivable *only if I can assimilate the Other’s freedom*. In this way, my project to reclaim myself is **fundamentally a project to reabsorb the Other.**” (483)

3. What does it mean for us to embark upon this project, or to “reabsorb the Other?” Sartre explains this under two qualifications:

(a) “In order to do this, I do not stop affirming the Other, i.e., denying, in relation to myself, that I am the other: as the foundation of my being, the other cannot become so diluted in me without my being-for-the-Other vanishing.” (483)

(b) “The other whom I want to assimilate is not at all the object-other ... My concern is not to erase my objectivity by objectifying the other – which would amount to my *delivering myself* from my being-for-the-Other – but, quite to the contrary, *it is as an other-who-looks* that I wish to assimilate the other.” (484)

4. In more practical terms, when we “assimilate the Other’s freedom”, we are neither denying the existence of the Other, nor are we objectifying the Other.



We need to preserve the other's ontological character as a *looking-Other*, or in Sartre's words, an "other-who-looks."

5. However, this project to reabsorb the other is ultimately impossible. "This ideal can be achieved only if I overcome the original contingency of my relations to the Other, i.e. the fact of there being no relationship of internal negativity between the negation through which the Other establishes himself as other from me, and the negation through which I establish myself as other from the other" (484).
  - (a) Recall how in the previous sections on the ontology of the other, we realise there has to be no relationship between the self and the Other, in order to preserve the Other's alterity and distinct being? This means that we cannot actually reabsorb the other, since there's no relation of "internal negativity," as Sartre explained above.
  - (b) But just because something is impossible (and indeed, this impossibility is both *de facto* and *de jure*, as Sartre states in (485)) – doesn't mean we can't attempt this project.
6. How does the attempt of this unrealisable project look like in practice? In terms of *concrete relations with the Other*? Well ...
7. "This unrealisable ideal, insofar as it haunts my project for myself in the presence of the Other, cannot be equated with love, insofar as love is an enterprise, i.e., an organic set of projects concerning my own possibilities. But *it is* love's ideal, its motivation and its goal, the value that belongs to it." (485)
8. **"Love as a basic relation to the Other is a set of projects through which I aim to realise this value."** (485)

## On Love

Here (485 – 493), Sartre examines love as a "basic relation to the Other." So what is love, under Sartre's existentialist conception? This is a very rough summary, but my understanding is as follows:

1. "These projects [of love] place me in a direct relation with the Other's freedom. It is in this sense that *love is conflict*." (485)
2. "We have noted that the Other's freedom is, in effect, the foundation of my being. But precisely because I exist [objectively] through the Other's freedom, I lack all security, and I am in danger in that freedom." (485)
3. "My project to reclaim my being can be fulfilled only if I take hold of that freedom and reduce it to being a freedom that submits to my freedom." (485)

So what does it mean for a lover to “take hold of [the beloved] freedom and reduce it to being a freedom that submits to my freedom?” Sartre proceeds to elaborate:

1. “Why does the lover want to be *loved*? If in fact love were merely the desire for physical possession, it could, in many cases, be easily satisfied. [But this is not the case] ... It is certain therefore that love wants to captivate ‘consciousness.’ But why does it want this? And how?” (486)
2. “Why should I want to appropriate the Other, if not precisely because the Other makes me be?” (485)
3. “But this implies, precisely, *a specific mode of appropriation*: it is the other’s freedom as such that we want to seize.” (485)

There’s no point in taking further notes from this section, because it’s all good. It’s all so expertly written. Instead, I recommend to just re-read (485 – 493) in its entirety. Philosophy is beautiful!

### **On Seduction**

In pages (492 – 493), Sartre takes us on a slight but interesting digression on how our ontology of love ultimately manifests itself in our act of seduction. When we try to captivate the being of the other, we are ultimately trying to present a certain being-for-the-Other that is ontologically interesting:

1. “Through seduction I aim to constitute myself as a fullness of being and to make myself *recognised* as such. To that end, I constitute myself as a signifying object. My actions must *indicate* in two directions” (492)
  - (a) “On one hand, they point toward a depth of objective, hidden being, which we refer to incorrectly as ‘subjectivity’; the action is not merely done for its own sake but indicates an infinite and undifferentiated series of other real and possible actions that I offer as constituting my objective and unperceived being. In this way I try to guide the transcendence that is transcending me, to refer it toward the infinity of my dead-possibilities, precisely in order to be unsurpassable – and to the extent to which the only thing that cannot be surpassed is, precisely, the infinite.” (492)
  - (b) “On the other hand, each one of my actions attempt to indicate the world in the greatest possible breadth, and to present me as being linked to the world’s vastest regions:” (492)
    - i. “Whether I *present* the world to my loved one and try to constitute myself as the necessary intermediary between her and the world,”
    - ii. “Or whether I simply demonstrate, through my actions, my endlessly

varied powers over the world (money, power, connections, etc.)”

2. “Through these various methods I *propose* myself as unsurpassable.” (493)

### **On Language**

In pages (493 – 499), Sartre segues away from Seduction, and generalises it into Language. In fact, Sartre claims that the being of language is related to seduction, insofar that seduction is an original act of trying to put our being into an ontological relationship with the Other.

### **On Masochism**

In pages (499 – 501), Sartre looks at a failure-mode of love – how it can descend into Masochism. This is *not* the second attitude towards the other, but more like the second side of the coin of the first attitude! If the Other’s freedom prove too strong, where we cannot have it support our own freedom – than a debased way of alleviating the contingency of our being (which is objective under the Other’s gaze and freedom) is to relish in our objectivity, and try to derive the contingency of our being from being the Other’s *object*. It is this which yields masochism – where we debase our being to become all the more *objective* in the Other’s freedom, where we ultimately want to become the *instrument* of the Other’s desire. This method is also ultimately fruitless, just as love is.

## **5.3.2 Our Second Attitude Toward the Other:**

### **Indifference, Desire, Hatred, and Sadism**

Whereas in our First Attitude Towards the Other, we try to mollify the danger of our contingent from the Other’s look by trying to have their freedom (which is what lies behind their Look) support our own freedom; in the Second Attitude we try to use our own Freedom instead to somehow confront, or otherwise nullify the danger present in the Other’s freedom. Just like with the first Attitude, Sartre first takes us on an examination of the ontology of the second Attitude – before going on to illustrate its practical manifestations as *indifference*, *desire*, *hatred* and *sadism*.

1. “In this case, to look at the Other’s look is to posit myself in my own freedom and to attempt, from the depths of that freedom, to confront the Other’s freedom.” (502)
2. However, just as with our First Attitude towards the Other, the ultimate aim of the Second Attitude is also unachievable:
  - (a) “But this intention is bound to be immediately disappointed because, by

the mere fact of affirming myself in my freedom as I confront the Other, I make the other into a transcended-transcendence, i.e. [into] an object.” (502)

(b) “[When] it seems I have achieved my aim, since I possess the being who has the key to my objecthood and I am able to make her experience my freedom in a thousand ways. But in reality, everything has collapsed, because the being that remains between my hands is an object-Other.” (502)

(c) “That is insofar as she is an object in the world and, as such, not in any position to recognise my freedom.” (502)

3. “This disappointment will give rise to **my subsequent attempts to seek the Other’s freedom through the object that she is for me**, and to find the special strategies through which I might appropriate this freedom, through a total appropriation of the Other’s body. We can anticipate that these attempts are necessarily doomed to failure.” (502)

### On Indifference

In pages (503 – 505), Sartre presents the first (and perhaps the simplest) way in which we can use our freedom to attempt to nullify the danger of the Other’s look. This manifestation of the Second Attitude is called Indifference, where we treat the Other not as a true being-for-itself, but as *objects*:

1. “[I] build my own subjectivity upon the collapse of the Other’s subjectivity. Let us call this attitude *indifference towards the Other*.” (503)
2. “I at as if I were alone in the world ... their object-freedom means no more to me than their ‘coefficient of adversity’; I do not even imagine that they might *look* at me.” (503)
3. “These ‘people’ are functions; ... on that basis I can make use of them to maximise my interests, if I know their *keys* and the ‘watchwords that can activate their mechanisms.’” (503)
4. “I am at ease, and not an embarrassment to myself, because I am not *outside*, and I do not feel myself to be alienated.” (504)

However, this Indifference is ultimately ineffective. Because it is fundamentally an example of *bad faith*: we are trying to fool ourselves and negate a fundamental modality of our own ontology, the being-for-the-Other. And like any form of bad faith, it is insufficient.

1. “This state of blindness can continue for a long time, if it suits my fundamental bad faith; it can extend, with interruptions, over several years, over a whole

*By transcended-transcendence, we mean that the Other is a transcendence (a for-itself) which we have then in turn transcended (made into an object).*

*Sartre uses the word outside with significance: it is the same outside that we talked about earlier in PART II of the notes, where the lack of an Other presents a solely “psychological” world populated only by in-itselfs and the for-itself*

lifetime: some men die without – apart from some *brief and terrifying moments of illumination* – ever suspecting what the *Other* is.” (504)

*This is also a great quote, one that is deserving of further contemplation.*

2. “This explains my constant feeling of unease, of something missing.” (504)

## On Sexuality and Desire

Next, after exploring Indifference, Sartre takes us on an analysis of Sexuality and Sexual desire in pages (505 – 526). It seems like Sexuality is the more ontological side which serves as a foundation for desire. Sexuality is primarily explored in pages () where Sartre justifies *sexuality as a fundamental part of human ontology*. He examines and rejects alternative accounts of sexuality as being solely contingent on the sexual organs – but rather, claims that our being is fundamentally a *sexed being*. “It seems that desire and its opposite – sexual horror – are fundamental structures of our being-for-the-Other.” (506)

1. “We must acknowledge that sexuality, which appears at birth, only disappears at the moment of death.” (507)
2. “To be sexed, in effect, means ... to exist sexually for an Other which exists sexually for me.” (507)

Having effected an ontological understanding of sexuality as a component of our being-for-the-Other, Sartre then takes us to explore how it manifests through the phenomena of Desire.

1. “We should abandon immediately the idea that desire is always a desire for sensual pleasure to a desire to bring some painful state to an end ... it is not merely a state of satisfaction that we desire but *a woman*. So we should define desire in terms of its transcendent object.” (508)
2. “Desire on its own does not remotely entail the sexual act; it does not present it as a theme; it does not even make a start on it ... Similarly, desire does not desire any particular amorous practice; ... In general terms, desire is not a desire *to do* something.” (508)
3. “[Desire] is not directed to a collection of physiological elements but to a complete figure, or better still, to a figure *in situation*.” (508)
4. “By this same token we do not desire body as a purely material object: a purely material object is precisely not *in situation*. In this way, the organic totality that is immediately present in desire *is desirable only insofar as it reveals not only a life but, in addition, an adapted consciousness*.” (509)

It is these ideas of a *figure in situation*, or an *adapted consciousness* which seems to

form the core of Desire's object. When the being-for-itself desires, it desires the Other in a very specific state of objectivity, that is quite nuanced and difficult to summarise. Sartre begins his exposition on this object of desire properly around (512), and uses the language of *incarnation [into body]*, and *complicity*, and *compromise*. He presents a very detailed and sophisticated exploration on our being-as-flesh, and the actualisation of ourselves as flesh starting around (515). All of this should be revisited in detail. Ultimately, desire is also doomed towards failure (523). With that in mind, we move on towards Sadism.

### On Sadism

At pages (526 – 540), Sartre talks about Sadism – another manifestation of our Second Attitude towards the Other. This is a proper time to introduce Sadism, because the way that Sadism ultimately fails often results in its debasement towards mere Desire, which we explored in the previous section. What is Sadism? Sadism seems to take pleasure in obscenity – but in order to understand what obscenity is, we must understand what is the *opposite* of obscenity. The opposite of obscenity is *gracefulness*, and thus it is with an examination of gracefulness and obscenity (528 – 530) that Sartre begins his exposition on Sadism.

1. "As for the type of incarnation that sadism would like to actualise, it corresponds exactly to what we would describe as an 'obscenity'." (526)

Sartre's exposition on gracefulness:

1. "When a body appears with *grace*, it shows itself as a psyche in a situation. Above all, it reveals its transcendence, as a transcended-transcendence; it is in actuality, and it is to be understood on the basis of the situation and the pursued end." (527)
2. "Accordingly, a graceful action has on the one hand the precision of a well-adapted machine *and* on the other, the supreme unpredictability of the psyche." (527)
3. "A graceful action is therefore perfectly comprehensible insofar as we consider the element within it has *flowed*. Better still, this flowing part of the action is underpinned by a sort of *aesthetic necessity implied by its perfect adaptation*." (527)
4. "The graceful body is an instrument that manifests freedom. The graceful action, insofar as it reveals the body as a precision tool, provides it at each moment with its justification for existing." (528)
5. "Grace figures therefore as the objective image of a being that could be *its own foundation in order to ...* Grace therefore, clothes and conceals facticity." (528)

Grace is the perfect embodiment of a transcendence, of a being-for-itself's being away from its fleshly material body. In contrast, obscenity is a specific type of ungracefulness that is the embodiment of all of above's opposite:

1. "*Obscenity* appears when the body adopts postures that unclothe it entirely of its actions and reveals the inertia of its flesh." (529)

So we have this dichotomy between grace and obscenity – which seems to be a body's ability to "wear" its facticity well, versus a body being forced to be its base, fleshly facticity. With this understanding, what is Sadism? Sartre brings us back towards that inquiry starting around (530), but the essential conclusion is this: "Sadism does not seek to eliminate the freedom of the tortured person but to force that freedom to freely identify itself with her tortured flesh." (531) Ultimately, Sadism – like indifference and desire, is also ultimately a fruitless pursuit. Sartre ends this section with a few concluding remarks, such as how Sadism and Masochism come together to form the two ends of human sexuality: "In this way sadism and masochism are the two reefs of desire, whether I surpass my troubled arousal towards an appropriation of the other's flesh [sadism] or whether – intoxicated by my own trouble – attend only to my own flesh, and cease to demand anything from the other, apart from that she should look at me, which will help me actualise my flesh [masochism]. It is because of this flimsiness in desire, and its constant oscillation between these two reefs, that we habitually refer to 'normal' sexuality as 'sadomasochistic.'" (533)

There are also a few minor sections of note, such as the section on hatred in () and a brief digression on education in (539). But with this treatment, we conclude the two fundamental attitudes towards the Other.

### 5.3.3 "Being-With" (*Mitsein*) and the "We"

The section on *Mitsein* (543 – 566) forms the last section of the chapter on the *Concrete Relations with the Other*. Sartre illustrates the unique ontological status of the "we-being" by a quick illustration: imagine you are in front of a café, and suddenly a minor traffic accident occurs on the street below. All of a sudden, you and your fellow cafe-goers are embroiled in an unexpected spectacle. Is there not an idea of "we" as the audience, and "them" as whomever we spectate? Sartre proceeds to unpack this *mitsein* (lit. we-being), which was originally Heidegger's idea. He distinguishes two modalities of the *mitsein*, one which he calls the *we-object* (546 – 557), and the other which he calls the *we-subject* (557 – 566).

1. “If the sentence ‘We are being looked at’ is to refer to a real experience, it is necessary that in this experience I should feel myself committed with others in a community of transcended-transcendences of alienated ‘Mes.’” (546)

### **The We-Object**

The We-Object is the form of the We when the for-itself is included within it. Essentially, that is when you and your compatriots are all captured in the objective glaze of an Other.

### **The We-Subject**

In contrast, the we-subject is the for-itself identifying itself with its compatriots.

In the end of this chapter, Sartre ultimately makes sure to caution us and to state that the fundamental modality of relations between consciousness is *not* Mitsein, but ultimately one of conflict (564).



## 6.0 Part IV: To Have, To Do, and To Be

So what is PART IV about? In the introduction and the three parts, we've explored the ontology of the in-itself (i.e. the being-of-phenomena), the ontology of the for-itself, and finally the ontology of the Other – as well as all their interleaving relationships such as the relationship of the for-itself to the in-itself (knowledge) or the relationship of the for-itself to the Other (the being-for-the-Other). With the above ontology established, we are finally able to explore the nature of the being-for-itself as an agent that *acts*. It is this exploration of action that serves as the theme of Part IV. This part serves as the final third of Sartre's monograph on Phenomenological Ontology: *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre introduces this part to us with the following opening-question:

“Having, doing, and being are the fundamental categories of human reality. Every type of human behaviour can be subsumed within them. ... Is the supreme value of the human action *to do* or *to be*?” (567)

### 6.1 Chapter 1: Being and Doing: Freedom

In this chapter, we are interested in the ontology of freedom. To begin this investigation, we first look at *actions* – which are things that our being partakes (i.e. our being *acts*). This first chapter of PART IV is actually the much longer (and in my opinion, more important) chapter of the two chapters in this Part.

#### 6.1.1 The First Condition of Action is Freedom

From where does an action derive its being? Sartre rejects the naively rationalist perspective that actions simply emerge from a series of contingent reasons (even erroneous reasons). Rather, he claims that no material contingency can bring about, or generate the impetus for action – this is because any material contingency will simply be an objective description of the world in its facticity – there will be no *lack* that yields the space for action (574). Instead, action has to come from a *nothingness* – and that nothingness, which is the same nothingness that founds our lack and desire – is the source of our freedom. Hence, in order to understand action, we must understand freedom – the first condition of action.

1. “The point we should note at the outset is that an action is, by definition, *intentional*.” (569)

2. "An action necessarily implies, as its condition, some recognised 'desideratum' i.e., an objective lack or even a negativity." (570)
3. "It is the act that determines its end and its motives, and the act is the expression of freedom." (575)
4. **Relationship between Freedom, Unfreedom, For-itself, and In-Itself:**
  - (a) "The innermost meaning of determinism is to establish within us an unfailing continuity of existence in itself ... Thus, the rejection of freedom can be conceived only as an attempt to apprehend oneself as a being-in-itself" (577)
  - (b) "Freedom coincides with the nothingness that lies at man's heart. It is because human-reality *is not enough* that it is free, because it is constantly separated from itself, and because a nothingness that separates what it has been from what is, and from what it will be." (578)
  - (c) "Man is free because he is not an [in-] itself but self-presence. *A being that is what it is cannot be free.*" (578)
5. "Human-reality is entirely abandoned, without any help of any kind, to the unbearable necessity of making itself be, right down to the last detail: In this way freedom is not *a* being: it is man's being, i.e. his nothingness of being." (579)
6. "Man cannot be sometimes free and sometimes a slave: he is free in his entirety and always, or he is not." (579)

What is this understanding of freedom? Freedom comes from nothingness – not just any nothingness, but the very nothingness that lies inside our being-for-itself, like a worm in its heart. This is a *very* strong claim for Sartre to make, because all of a sudden freedom is not a contingent, material property of a human – but rather, our freedom is founded on our very being, on our ontology. Human beings are not born free, only to lose it later on. Human beings – so far as we can *be* in any case – have the ontology of freedom. As this freedom comes from the same nothingness which serves as a foundation of our being as a being-for-itself, it means that consciousness implies freedom. Anything else would be objectivity (a being-in-itself), and hence absolute determinism.

Sartre goes on to defend and elaborate on this audacious claim in the subsequent pages, with a special focus on the idea of "passions" (581 – 585) encroaching or affecting our freedom. He rejects passions as an external force upon our freedom – because any admission of a passion being beyond freedom will make our freedom deterministic to it: "This discussion shows that only two solutions, and only two are possible: either

man is entirely determined ... or, indeed, man is entirely free.” (581)

Likewise, with this rejection of passions having any special hold over our freedom, Sartre also rejects reason as having any special hold over our freedom. Sartre makes the distinction between reasons and motives, but ultimately both are equally non-essential to our freedom. In fact, Sartre states that “In relation to freedom, no psychological phenomenon [either passion nor reason] is favoured. All my ‘ways of being’ manifest it equally, since they are all ways of being my own nothingness.” (585)

1. “In fact, reasons and motives only have the weight that my project – i.e., the free production of the end, and of the act as having to be actualised – confers on them. When I deliberate, the die is already cast. And if I must come to deliberate, it is simply because it is a part of my original project to take account of my motives *by the means of deliberation* rather than through this or that other means of discovery.” (591)
2. Essentially, reasons and motives only bind our action, insofar as we ascribe their importance to them (roughly speaking).

Once again, freedom comes from the core of our being. Sartre illustrates this quite well using an image involving a hike with friends at (595) that deserves revisiting:

1. “[When giving up to fatigue] is not a contemplative apprehension of my fatigue [i.e. ‘thought’]; rather – as we saw in relation to pain – I suffer my fatigue [i.e. a relation of being].” (596)
2. Essentially, Sartre is telling us that we *act* in a certain way, because we *be* in a certain way. This line of reasoning is much clearer on an examination of (596 – 600).
3. He presents another example of this in effect, by looking at a person with an “inferiority complex” which manifests in certain ways:
4. “This inferiority, which I struggle against and yet recognise, was *chosen* by me at the outset ... to give in to fatigue, for example, is to transcend the path still to be covered by constituting it with the meaning ‘the path that is too difficult to follow.’” (601)
5. “Thus the inferiority complex is a free and global project of myself, as inferior next to another; it is the way in which I choose to take on my being-for-the-Other, the free solution that I find for the insurmountable scandal of the other’s existence.” (602)

On how we are free to change our being:

1. “[all phenomena] which is in the end of the world which I am constantly conscious – at least as the meaning implied by the object that I am looking at or using – everything teaches me, myself, about my choice, i.e. about my [choice of] being.” (607)
2. “Earlier we raised a question: I gave in to fatigue [in the example of the hike with friends], we said, and probably *I could have done* otherwise, but at *what cost?*” (607) Or in other words, how are we free to change our choice, if our choice comes from our being?
  - (a) “We are now in a position to answer it Our analysis has just shown us, in effect that this act was not *gratuitous*. Of course, it could not be explained by a motive or reason conceived as the content of an earlier ‘state’ of consciousness; but it needed *to be interpreted on the basis of an original project of which it formed an integral part.*” (607)
  - (b) “In consequence it becomes clear that we cannot suppose the action could have been modified without at the same time supposing *a fundamental modification in my original choice of myself.*” (607)
  - (c) “[Hence] I can refuse to stop only though a *radical conversion of my being-in-the-world*, which is to say by a sudden metamorphosis of my initial project, which is to say by a different choice of myself and my ends.” (607 – 608)
  - (d) “Moreover, this modification is always possible. The anguish which, when it is disclosed, manifests our freedom to our consciousness testifies to this constant alterability of our initial project. In anguish, we do not simply grasp the fact that the possibles we are projecting are constantly eaten into by the freedom still to come; in addition, we apprehend our choice – which is to say ourselves – as being *unjustifiable* [i.e. we can always change our being].” (608)
3. “In this way we are constantly engaged in our choice, and constantly conscious of the fact that we ourselves can suddenly reverse this choice and change course, because we project the future through our very being, and we constantly eat away at it through our own existential freedom, declaring to ourselves by the means of the future what we are, and lacking any grip on this future, which remains always *possible* without ever passing into the ranks of the *real* Thus we are constantly *threatened* with the nihilation of our current choice, constantly threatened with choosing ourselves – and in consequence with becoming – other than we are. Just because our choice is absolute, it is *fragile*, which is to say that, by positing our freedom through it, we posit at the same time the constant possibility of becoming something that is ‘on this side’ and pastified,

in relation to an ‘over on that side’ that I will be.” (608)

For the remainder of the section, Sartre examines the various nuances and manifestations of freedom and choice being an element of our ontology. There’s a particularly interesting section on bad faith and choice in (620), and he finally reiterates and summarises the conclusions of this chapter in an eight-point summary at (622 – 628). Having completed his elucidation on freedom, we move on to the next section.

### 6.1.2 Freedom and Facticity: the Situation

This section of the chapter is both essential as it is illuminating. After coming to an understanding that our freedom is an essential part of our ontology, it is easy for one to throw one’s hands up and say: “But in practice, how can we be free if we have homework/debt/obligations?” To quote Sartre’s own introduction of this chapter: “The decisive argument brought by ‘good sense’ against freedom is a reminder of our powerlessness. Far from being able to change our situation at will, it seems that we are unable to change ourselves. I am not ‘free’ to escape the destiny of my class, my nation, my family, or even to build up my power or my wealth, or to overcome my most trivial appetites or habits.” (629) This section is entirely dedicated to understanding the relationship between our freedom, which is ontological – and our facticity, which is a sole in-itself of the world.

Sartre dedicates this section towards addressing five broad manifestations of facticity that our freedom encounters. These are *My Place*, *My Past*, *My Surroundings*, *My Fellow Man*, and *My Death*. Note the significance of using the personal possessive pronoun “my” – these are fundamentally “my” facticities.

1. “In particular, the coefficient of adversity of things cannot be an argument against our freedom, because it is *through us*, which is to say by means of an end that we have posited beforehand, that this coefficient of adversity arises.” (629)
2. “Thus, although brute things may limit our freedom of action from the outset, it is our freedom itself which must previously have constituted the framework, the technique, and the ends, in relation to which these things will show themselves to be limits ... it is our freedom therefore which constitutes the limits it will thereafter encounter.” (630)
3. “Of course, after these remarks, an unnameable and unthinkable *residuum* remains, which belongs to the in-itself in question ... But this *residue* is far from being an original limit to freedom; rather, it is thanks to it – i.e., thanks to the brute in-itself, as such – that our freedom can arise as freedom.” (630)

- (a) "If it is sufficient to conceive of something for it to be actualised, I will find myself suddenly plunged into a world resembling the dream-world, where the possible is no longer in any way distinct from the real. I am condemned, then, to see the world changing in accordance with the changes *of* my consciousness." (630)
- (b) "With the abolition of the distinction between a mere *wish*, a *representation* that I might be able to choose, and the *choice*, freedom will disappear too." (630)
- 4. "There can only be a free for-itself if it is committed within a resisting world. Outside this commitment, the notions of freedom, determinism, and necessity lose all of their meaning." (631)

The key realisation here is that *we need facticity in order to have freedom*. The material opposition which facticity offers us is like the friction of a tarmac which allows a car to move in the first place. A car upon a frictionless surface is like a being-for-itself in a dream world – there cannot be any motion, nor freedom at all without facticity.

- 1. "Thus freedom is a lesser being, which presupposes being, in order to subtract from it. It is free neither to not exist nor not to be free. We can grasp the connection between these two structures immediately; in effect, because freedom is an escape from being, it cannot occur *besides* being ... *one cannot escape from a jail in which one is not locked up*." (634)
- 2. "To exist – as the *fact* of freedom – or to have, in the midst of the world, a being to be is one and the same thing, which means that freedom is from the outset a *relation to the given*." (635)
- 3. "The given in itself in the form of *resistance* or *aide* is revealed only in the light of the pro-jecting freedom. ... Therefore it is only in and through freedom's free arising that the world can develop and reveal the resistances that may make the projected end impossible to achieve. A man can encounter an obstacle only within the field of his freedom." (637)

In the remainder of this chapter, Sartre explores the five different forms of facticity that our freedom encounters.

### **My Place**

Pages (639 – 646). This is the facticity of my geography – but more generally, the immediate world of the in-itselfs that surrounds us.

- 1. To be completed later.

## My Past

Pages (646 – 657). This is the facticity of my past – which while does not determine our actions, still forms as an inescapable part of our being. We cannot not have a past – even to deny one’s past is to be in a certain relationship with the past. Generally the meaning of the past changes depending on the project of our present (649).

1. To be completed later.

## My Surroundings

Pages (657 – 663). Our surroundings are not the same as our place – but rather, it is a specific term for the “implement-things that surround me, with their own coefficient of adversity and their equipmentality”. It’s sort of like the solution space of our surrounding which lets us evaluate how easy our project is.

1. To be completed later.

## My Fellow Man

Pages (663 – 689). This is one of the more interesting sections in this series. My Fellow Man is a distinct category of facticity that we must examine, because we live in a world that is filled with the Other. Specifically, the *meaning* of an object (i.e. its equipmentality) is not always determined by ourselves, by often by other people. This section explores our relationship with objects that already have a meaning – i.e. the imposition of another’s freedom upon our own. Out of all the sections, it is this section that deserves a closer re-visit.

*I should make sure to revisit this section, as it is the most interesting out of the series.*

1. To be completed later.

## My Death

Pages (689 – 719). Death is the ultimate absence of being, and what Sartre calls an *absurdity*. It is also the section that I least understand. I think at least one of the more important philosophical takeaways from this section is Sartre’s insistence that death itself has no meaning, and cannot have any meaning: “Thus death is in no way an ontological structure of my being, at least not insofar as it is *for-itself*; it is *the Other* who is mortal in his being. There is no place for death in being-for-itself; it can neither await it nor actualise it, nor project itself towards it. It is in no way the foundation of its finitude.” (710)

1. To be completed later.

### 6.1.3 Freedom and Responsibility

Pages (719 – 722). In this last, but very short section on freedom and responsibility, Sartre presents the double-edged sword of this absolute, ontological freedom. Just as we are always free, we are likewise always responsible. We cannot dodge responsibility, just as we can't dodge our freedom. We maintain the ultimate authorship of all our actions through our very being. "The essential consequence of our previous remarks is that man, being condemned to be free, carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders: he is responsible for the world and for himself, as a way of being." (718)

To end this chapter on a concluding thought from Sartre: "In this sense, the for-itself's responsibility is overwhelming, since he is the one who makes it the case that *there is* a world, and since it is he, too, who *makes himself be*; whatever the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself has to accept this situation in its entirety, with its own coefficient of adversity, even if it is unsustainable. He has to accept it with the proud consciousness of being its author because the worst disadvantages, or the worst threats from which my person is in danger, can have meaning only through my project, and they appear against the ground of the commitment that I am." (718)

*These are very powerful quotes, which gives our life a lot of brilliance. I should definitely revisit them in time.*

## 6.2 Chapter 2: To Do and To Have

There are two main parts in this chapter – the first part is the first section entitled *Existential Psychoanalysis*, and the second part are the next two sections (which are respectively To Do and To Have: Possession, and the Revelation of Being Through Qualities). Of these two sections, the most interesting is the first one on Existential Psychoanalysis – and it is for a specific reason. In Existential Psychoanalysis, Sartre first presents the *aim or object* of existential psychoanalysis – which has a pretty strong effect on our understanding of a human being's ontology. The aim of existential psychoanalysis (i.e. the object hidden in our being which this psychoanalysis aims to uncover and reveal) is the fundamental *project* of our being. Recall how our freedom comes from our being – any of the more material and superficial projects that we pursue in life ultimately draw their meaning from our *being*. What is our being? Our being is the question of its own being – hence our being is this continued flowing into a being that we wish to become. What is that being? That is the aim of existential psychoanalysis.



## 6.2.1 Existential Psychoanalysis

Pages (723 – 746). In the first ten pages (723 – 732) of this section, Sartre begins with a more mundane preliminary on what *existential psychoanalysis* is as a field, and he compares it with regular Freudian psychoanalysis. This is just scene-setting, and not quite interesting on its own. It is after setting out the preliminaries do we move on to the ontologically interesting questions on the ultimate aim of our being.

*On the teleology of human apotheosis.*

1. “[Any superficial projects] as the totality of my being, expresses my original choice [of being] in some particular circumstances; it is nothing but the choice of myself *as a totality* in these circumstances [which manifests as the project].” (732)
2. “It is therefore by means of a *comparison* of a subject’s various empirical tendencies that we may attempt to discover and to isolate the fundamental project that they have in common” (732)
3. “Man is fundamentally the *desire to be*, and the existence of this desire is not to be established through empirical induction; it comes out of an *a priori* description of the for-itself’s being, since desire is a lack and the for-itself is the being that is, in relation to itself, its own lack of being.” (733)
4. “The original project that is expressed in each of our empirically observable tendencies is therefore the *project of being*.” (733)
5. “As for the being that is the object of this desire, we know *a priori* what it is. The for-itself is the being that is, in relation to itself, its own lack of being. And the being that is missing from the for-itself is the in-itself.” (734)
  - (a) “The for-itself arises as the nihilation of the in-itself, and this nihilation is defined as a pro-ject toward the in-itself: between the nihilated in-itself and the projected in-itself, the for-itself is a nothingness.” (734)
  - (b) “Thus the goal and the end of the nihilation that I am is the *in-itself*. Thus, human-reality is the desire to-be-in-itself.” (734)
  - (c) “But the in-itself that it desires cannot be pure in-itself, contingent and absurd, and comparable in every respect to the in-itself that it encounters and nihilates.” (734)
  - (d) “In fact, as we have seen, we can understand nihilation in terms of a rebellion on the part of the in-itself, which nihilates itself in opposition to its contingency.” (734)
  - (e) “... nihilation [itself] is a being’s futile endeavour to found its own being and that its withdrawal, in order to found it, is the source of the infinitesimal gap through which nothingness enters being.” (734)

6. “The being that is the object of the for-itself’s desire is, therefore, *an in-itself that might relate to itself as its own foundation, i.e., an in-itself whose relation to its facticity would be like the for-itself’s relation to its motivations.*” (734)

It’s that very last sentence here that presents a very big and important idea, so we’ll take care to unpack it here. Every human pursuit (or project, in Sartre’s terminology) – is an action taken through freedom, the freedom that comes from our being. But what is our being? Our being is the nihilation of the in-itself, which yields the for-itself. The for-itself is a *lack* – so what does our for-itself want *to be*? Or in Sartre’s words: “What is the object of the for-itself’s desire?” What our for-itself ultimately lacks is the in-itself – the in-itself which we continuously nihilate in order to derive our being as a for-itself.

However, the ultimate pursuit of our being cannot be a simple in-itself. We do not desire to become unconscious. Rather, the being that we desire is ultimately an in-itself which will allow us to be our own foundation – without needing to nihilate it. Recall how our being is always *endangered* and at risk – we are endangered by contingency, by the gaze of the Other. All of these *ontological dangers* come from how our being is not self-supporting – we are not our own foundation. Hence, in Sartre’s words – the being that we seek, is “an in-itself whose relation to its facticity would be like the for-itself’s relation to its motivations.” Just like how our motivations completely come from our freedom (which completely comes from our being) – we want an in-itself whose *facticity* completely comes from our freedom – and is not an arbitrary child of contingency:

1. “The for-itself’s project is *to be as for-itself* a being that is what it is:” (735)
  - (a) “[The for-itself right now] is as a being that *is* what it is not [i.e. the nihilation]”
  - (b) “and that [contingent existence] is not what it is”
  - (c) “that the for-itself has the project to be what it is [the better, self-standing being]”
2. “[The for-itself] is as a consciousness that it wants to have the in-itself’s impermeability and infinite density”
3. “That is why the possible is generally projected as what is missing from the for-itself in order for it to become in-itself-for-itself; and the fundamental value presiding over this project is precisely, the in-itself for itself, i.e. the ideal of a consciousness that could be the foundation of its own being-in-itself *purely by the means of its own being conscious of itself*” (735)

4. “To this ideal, we can give the name ‘God.’ So we can say that the best way to conceive of the human-reality’s fundamental project is to regard man as the being whose project is to be God” (735)
5. “To be a man is to aim to be God; or, alternatively, man is fundamentally the desire to be God” (735)

This audacious conclusion, of the ultimate aim of man’s being to be God – serves as the ontological conclusion of this section. Following this, Sartre presents the *existential psychoanalysis* which serves as a practical toolkit for finding a man’s ultimate project of being, from the beginning point of his external projects. “Existential psychoanalysis seeks to determine the *original choice* [of being].” (739)

More specifically: “This original choice, which is made in the face of the world and is the choice of a position within the world, is totalising. Like the complex, this original choice is prior to logic; it *chooses* the person’s attitude in relation to logic and principles.” (739) This section concludes with a further discussion on the method, the practical application, and the limitations of existential psychoanalysis as a practice (739 – 746).

## 6.2.2 To Do and To Have: Possession

Pages (746 – 777). In this section, Sartre begins with the opening question: “What therefore does ontology teach us about desire, insofar as desire is the being of human reality?” (746) Remember how human-reality, as the reality of the being-for-itself, is characterised by the lack, which manifests as desire. Having explored desire implicitly in the previous section from a more abstract, ontological perspective (abstract as in, the object of our desire is to become God – which is pretty impractical). Hence, it makes sense to revisit the object of desire – or rather, the act of desire itself, to see how it manifests more practically.

*This is the section where Sartre presents an interesting examination on luxury as a type of possession. I should make sure to revisit it in further detail.*

1. “Desire is a lack in being, as we have seen. As such, it is immediately *directed on* the being that it lacks This being, as we have seen, is [the] in-itself-for-itself, a consciousness that has become substance, a substance that has become its own cause, a Man-God.” (746)
2. “Human-reality is purely the endeavour to become God, an endeavour that is without any given substratum, in which there is *nothing* to make this effort. Desire expresses this endeavour. Nonetheless, desire is not defined only in relation to the in-itself-that-is-its-own-cause. It [desire] *is also relative to a brute and concrete existent, commonly known as the desire’s object.*” (747)

3. "In this way desire expresses in its very structure man's relation with one or several objects in the world; it is one of the aspects of the being-in-the-world."  
(747)

Here, Sartre presents an interesting point. He makes the claim that all forms of desire can be reduced to an act of possession. Beginning with a cursory examination of the objects of various practical desires, Sartre condenses them to manifestations of three "great categories of human existence," namely the categories of *to do*, *to have*, and *to be*. From these three categories, Sartre ultimately concludes that they are fundamental because they are all a certain modality of our relationship to the in-itself – and that this fundamental relationship is ultimately the relationship of the *to have*, i.e. *possession*.

1. "It may seem to be gratuitous, as in the case of scientific research, sport, and aesthetic creation. Yet the *doing*, in these various cases, is not irreducible either. If I create a painting, a play, a melody, it is in order to be at the origin of some particular existence." (748)
2. "It is not only that this painting, for which I have had the idea, should exist: it must, further, exist *through me*." (748)
3. "[Any creation of mine] is also necessary that it should exist *in itself* [as opposed to just being thought], i.e. that it should constantly renew its existence *by itself*. Thereafter my work will appear as a creation that is continuous but frozen into the in-itself it forever bears my 'mark'." (748)
4. "I am therefore in the twofold relationship with it [the object of my creation] of a consciousness that *conceives* it and a consciousness that *encounters* it. It is precisely this twofold relationship that I express when I say that it [the object] is *mine*." (748)
5. "And it is in order to maintain this twofold relationship within the synthesis of appropriation that I create my work." (748)

### **Knowing as an act of (Sexual) Possession**

From this, it seems that the most fundamental (and ontologically pure and authentic) mode of possession is solely the possession of something that we have created ourselves. Because it is only through an act of pure, independent creation, do we maintain the twofold relationship of renewing our existence through an in-itself – where the being of the in-itself owes its existence to the being of our for-itself. This act is transcendental – it bears *a lot* of resemblance to our (ultimately fruitless) attempts at supporting the "intolerable contingency" of our own existence through the Other. This is why

possession in its purest form of creation is so satisfying: “We find the unity of a single project, from the case of artistic creation to that of the cigarette which ‘is better when you have rolled it yourself.’” (749) Sartre subsumes *knowing* as the possession of knowledge within this dynamic. Specifically, he is keen to point out the ontological similarity between the possession of knowledge, and the possession of the sexual act:

1. “Within the very idea of discovery, of revelation, an idea of the appropriation involved in using something is included. Sight is an *enjoyment*<sup>1</sup> of something; to see something is to *deflower* it.” (750)
2. “All the images [of discovery] emphasise the object’s ignorance of the investigations and instruments targeted at it: unaware that it is known, it goes about its business without noticing the spying eyes, like a woman surprised by a passer-by as she was washing.” (750)
3. “Knowledge is a hunt. [Francis] Bacon calls it ‘Pan’s Hunt.’ The scholar is a hunter who surprises a naked white figure, and violates her through his gaze.” (750)

*Is this why acts of pure creation (scientific, aesthetic) are somehow so satisfying to our being?*

The remainder of the section on knowledge (750 – 752) examines knowledge as a sexual, and even consumptive act in greater detail. It is uncomfortable in its Hellenistic depictions of knowing as a defloration – but the section remains of ontological interest.

### **On Play and Seriousness**

In pages (752 – 760), Sartre takes us on a detour examining seriousness, and play. He uses an extended metaphor of snow and skiing – the act of gliding – as a way to examine the ontology of these concepts. Somehow playfulness is more closely related to our transcendental existence – whereas seriousness is to root oneself within the mundane nature of the in-itself. This section takes up a surprisingly large amount of space, and deserves revisiting.

1. To be completed later.

### **On Luxury and Capitalistic Possession**

Moving on in pages (764 – 768), Sartre also embarks on an interesting examination on the possessions of luxuries, which he takes as a degenerate form of this more original, ontologically authentic possession of creation: “In a short while we will return to

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<sup>1</sup>According to the translator, the use of the French verb *jouissance* has strong and unmistakable sexual connotations.

this project in relation to a special type of property, akin to a degraded version of it [the ontologically purer act of creative possession], which goes by the name of *luxury*" (749). In this section, he also segues into a discussion of possession through monetary means, which seems to be an implicit examination of possession under capitalism specifically – the ontology of our relationship to objects that we acquire by the act of purchasing them.

*What connections and parallels can we draw from this existential conception of the ontology of money, with Karl Marx's own monetary metaphysics, that of "natural relations between commodities, and unnatural relationships between men?"*

1. "Luxury is a degraded version of [creative possession]; in luxury's primitive form, I possess an object that I have *had made* for me, by people who are *mine* (slaves, servants born in the house). Luxury is therefore the form of property that comes closest to primitive property [which comes solely from self-creation] and which throws the next best light, after it, on the relation of *creation* by which appropriation is originally constituted." (764)
2. "Money becomes effaced by its *buying* power: it is evanescent, made in order to disclose the object, the concrete thing; it has only a transitive being. But *to me*, it appears as a creative force: to buy an object is a symbolic act equivalent to creating the object." (765)
3. "In this way money establishes a connection of appropriation between the for-itself and the total collection of objects in the world." (765)

### On Possession through Destruction

In pages (769 – 771), Sartre takes us on an examination of *possession through destruction*, which later on develops into a more general description of the consumptive aspects of possession. From my understanding, destruction is the not quite the opposite of creation, but more of a certain antimatter of creation – namely whereas with creation I serve as the foundation of the object's being, with destruction I serve as the foundation of the object's non-being.

1. "It is precisely the for-itself's recognition of the impossibility of *possessing* an object that brings in its wake a violent wish, on his part, to *destroy* it. To destroy something is to absorb it into me, and to maintain a relation with the destroyed object's being-in-itself as profound as that of creation." (769)
2. "Here I rediscover the relation of being that characterises creation, but in reverse: I *am* the foundation of the burning barn [the destroyed object]; I *am* this barn, since I am destroying its being." (769)
3. "To destroy something is to re-create it by assuming sole responsibility for the being of that which had existed *for everyone*." (769)

Sartre concludes this section with a summary at page (776).

### 6.2.3 The Revelation of Being Through Qualities

In pages (777 – 798), Sartre wants to take a step to the side – and look at being from a more orthogonal angle – namely, by examining qualities. A quality is something that we attribute to being – and Sartre quite rightfully calls this section the *psychoanalysis of things*. This section begins a little obscurely, but Sartre latches on to the quality of *viscousness* starting around (784). Viscousness seems to be a form of *ontological horror* – our being abhors at being *viscous*. This horror is expressed more by Sartre through images and feelings than through reason – but it is quite powerful and compelling – somehow viscousness derives its horror from being a quality that reminds us of our material nature. Our natural state as a transcendent being is the state of the *flow* – of this constant motion and movement. Viscousness is an impediment to this flow. It makes it quite difficult to summarise, but here are some key presentations:

1. “To touch the viscous is to risk becoming diluted into viscosity Now this dilution is, taken alone, already terrifying, because it is the for-itself’s absorption by the in-itself. But it is additionally terrifying, if one is to be metamorphosed into a thing, that this precise metamorphosis should be into something viscous.” (790)
2. “A consciousness that *became viscous* would therefore be transformed by the thickening-out of its ideas.” (790)
3. “The horror of the viscous is a horror of time’s becoming viscous, of facticity’s continual and imperceptible progression, and that it might suck up the for-itself which *exists* it. It is the fear neither of death, nor of the pure-in-itself, nor of nothingness but of a particular type of being, which has no more existence than the in-itself-for-itself and which the viscous merely *represents*.” (791)

Sartre ends PART IV with this final parting thought: “**Every human-reality is a Passion**, in that its project is to lose itself in order to found being and at the same time to constitute the in-itself as escaping contingency by being its own foundation, the *Ens causa sui* that the religions know as God In this way man’s Passion is the opposite of Christ’s, because man loses himself as man in order that God should be born. But the idea of God is contradictory, and we lose ourselves in vain; **man is a useless Passion.**” (796)

Thus, we conclude Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness: an Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*.

## Bibliography

All page numbers cited are in reference to the US-edition of Sarah Richmond's 2021 translation of *Being and Nothingness*, published by Washington Square Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Trans. and introd. Sarah Richmond. Forew. Richard Moran. New York: Washington Square Press, 1 Sept. 2021. [Web](#). Rpt. of *L'Être et le Néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. Éditions Gallimard, 1 Jan. 1943.

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