Recortes de “The trascendence of ego” (J.P. Sartre)

**Translator´s introduction:**

“All the disagreement between Sartre and Husserl centers in this essay on a single question: whether consciousness can be found after a “reduction” to be presided over by a “transcendental ego” (…) The ego affirmed by Husserl and denied by Sartre is not, of course, the existing person.” (1960, p.17)

“His contention is precisely that there is no ego “in” or “behind” consciousness. There is only an ego *for* consciousness. The ego is “out there”, in the world, among objects. (…) Consciousness has no contents. All content is on the side of the object. Consciousness contains neither transcendental ego nor anything else. It is simply a spontaneity, a sheer activity transcending towards objects. There are no mental entities whatsoever. (…) Thus, all so-called “images”, “representations”, “ideas”, “phenomena”, “sense data”, etc., are objects *for* consciousness, not contents *in* consciousness. Like William James, Sartre insists that representational theories of knowledge violate our sense of life.” (1960, p.21)

“Consciousness is a great emptiness, a wind blowing towards objects. Its whole reality is exhausted in intending what is other. (…) Thus, whereas for Husserl intentionality is *one* essential feature of any consciousness, for Sartre intentionality *is* consciousness.” (1960, p.22)

“The rejection of the transcendental ego (…) had a radical consequence – seemingly not fully evident to Sartre himself at the time of the following essay – which led directly to existentialism, that is, to a philosophy of human existence. The radical consequence is that the important Husserlian technique of “reduction” or “epoché” is impossible.” (1960, p.23)

“Consciousness, rather, is never alone, is never isolated from the existing world. Not only the Husserlian technique of reduction is unthinkable within the framework of Sartre’s essay on the ego, but if accomplished (per impossible) such reduction would not make possible a reflexive investigation of anything at all, not even consciousness.” (1960, p.24)

“There can be no reflexive or phenomenological philosophy occupied with a consciousness shut off or separable from the world, even as a fiction for specified analytical purposes. (…) Thus, with no transcendental ego or contents to clutter up consciousness, phenomenology, or the reflexive study of consciousness, becomes directly occupied with human existence in its concrete relations to the world, with the nature of man as a consciousness of things, of himself, and of other selves. It is precisely such a phenomenological description of human existence in its "situation-in-the-world"—"phenomenological ontology, as the subtitle of *L´Etre et le Néant* proclaims—that constitutes the goal of Sartre's existentialism, as contrasted to the more logical and abstract purposes of Husserlian phenomenology.” (1960, p.25)

**The transcendence of the ego**

“For most philosophers the ego is an "inhabitant" of consciousness. Some affirm its formal presence at the heart of Erlebnisse, as an empty principle of unification. (…) We should like to show here that the ego is neither formally nor materially in consciousness: it is outside, in the world. It is a being of the world, like the ego of another.” (1960, p.31)

“The problem, indeed, is to determine the conditions for the possibility of experience. One of these conditions is that I can always regard my perception or thought as mine: nothing more.” (1960, p.32)

“The I that we encounter in our consciousness made possible by the synthetic unity of our representations, or is it the I which in fact unites the representations to each other?” (1960, p.34)

“Phenomenology is a scientific, not a Critical, study of consciousness. Its essential way of proceeding is by intuition. Intuition, according to Husserl, puts us in the presence of the thing. We must recognize, therefore, that phenomenology is a science of fact, and that the problems it poses are problems of fact, which can be seen, moreover, from Husserl's designation of phenomenology as a descriptive science. Problems concerning the relations of the I to consciousness are therefore existential problems. Husserl, too, discovers the transcendental consciousness of Kant, and grasps it by the “epoché”. But this consciousness is no longer a set of logical conditions. It is a fact which is absolute. Nor is this transcendental consciousness a hypostatization of validity, an unconscious which floats between the real and the ideal. It is a real consciousness accessible to each of us as soon as the "reduction" is performed. And it is indeed this transcendental consciousness which constitutes our empirical consciousness, our consciousness "in the world," our consciousness with its psychic and psychophysical me” (1960, p.35)

“It is ordinarily thought that the existence of a transcendental I may be justified by the need that consciousness has for unity and individuality. It is because all my perceptions and all my thoughts refer themselves back to this permanent seat that my consciousness is unified. It is because I can say my consciousness, and because Peter and Paul can also speak of their consciousnesses, that these consciousnesses distinguish themselves from each other. The I is the producer of inwardness.” (1960, p.37)

“The object is transcendent to the consciousnesses which grasp it, and it is in the object that the unity of the consciousnesses is found.” (1960, p. 38)

“Consciousnesses must be perpetual syntheses of past consciousnesses and present consciousness. (…) Furthermore, the individuality of consciousness evidently stems from the nature of consciousness. Consciousness (like Spinoza's substance) can be limited only by itself. Thus, it constitutes a synthetic and individual totality entirely isolated from other totalities of the same type, and the I can evidently be only an expression (rather than a condition) of this incommunicability and inwardness of consciousnesses.” (1960, p. 39)

“The phenomenological conception of consciousness renders the unifying and individualizing role of the I totally useless. It is consciousness, on the contrary, which makes possible the unity and the personality of my I. The transcendental I, therefore, has no *raison d'etre*. (…) The transcendental I is the death of consciousness. Indeed, the existence of consciousness is an absolute because consciousness is consciousness of itself. This is to say that the type of existence of consciousness is to be consciousness of itself. And consciousness is aware of itself in so far as it is consciousness of a transcendent object.” (1960, p. 40)

“Consciousness (…) is not positional, which is to say that consciousness is not for itself its own object. Its object is by nature outside of it, and that is why consciousness posits and grasps the object in the same act. Consciousness knows itself only as absolute inwardness. We shall call such a consciousness: consciousness in the first degree, or unreflected consciousness. Now we ask: is there room for an I in such a consciousness? The reply is clear: evidently not. Indeed, such an I is not the object (since by hypothesis the I is inner); nor is it an I of consciousness, since it is something for consciousness. It is not a translucent quality of consciousness, but would be in some way an inhabitant.” (1960, p.41)

“All the results of phenomenology begin to crumble if the I is not, by the same title as the world, a relative existent: that is to say, an object for consciousness«” (1960, p. 42)

“Each time we apprehend our thought, whether by an immediate intuition or by an intuition based on memory, we apprehend an I which is the I of the apprehended thought, and which is given, in addition, as transcending this thought and all other possible thoughts” (1960, p.43)

“It seems that there is not one of my consciousnesses which I do not apprehend as provided with an I. But it must be remembered that all the writers who have described the Cogito have dealt with it as a reflective operation, that is to say, as an operation of the second degree. Such a Cogito is performed by a consciousness directed upon consciousness, a consciousness which takes consciousness as an object” (1960, p. 44)

“All reflecting consciousness is, indeed, in itself unreflected, and a new act of the third degree is necessary in order to posit it. Moreover, there is no infinite regress here, since a consciousness has no need at all of a reflecting consciousness in order to be conscious of itself. It simply does not posit itself as an object. …But is it not precisely the reflective act which gives birth to the me in the reflected consciousness?” (1960, p. 45)

“While I was reading, there was consciousness of the book, of the heroes of the novel, but the I was not inhabiting this consciousness. It was only consciousness of the object and non-positional consciousness of itself. I can now make these a-thetically apprehended results the object of a thesis and declare: there was no I in the unreflected consciousness.” (1960, p. 47)

“All the non-reflective memories of unreflected consciousness show me a consciousness 'without a me, and since, on the other hand, theoretical considerations concerning consciousness which are based on intuition of essence have constrained us to recognize that the I cannot be a part of the internal structure of *Erlebnisse*, we must therefore conclude: there is no I on the unreflected level. When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no I” (1960, p. 48)

“I am then plunged into the world of objects; it is they which constitute the unity of my consciousnesses; it is they which present themselves with values, with attractive and repellant qualities— but me, I have disappeared; I have annihilated myself. There is no place for me on this level. And this is not a matter of chance, due to a momentary lapse of attention, but happens because of the very structure of consciousness” (1960, p.49)

“Now we ask: when a reflective consciousness apprehends the I Think, does it apprehend a full and concrete consciousness gathered into a real moment of concrete duration? The reply is clear: The I is not given as a concrete moment, a perishable structure of my actual consciousness. On the contrary, it affirms its permanence beyond this consciousness and all consciousnesses, and—although it scarcely resembles a mathematical truth—its type of existence comes much nearer to that of eternal truths than to that of consciousness” (1960, p. 50)

“The I manifests itself as the source of consciousness. But that alone should make us pause” (1960, p.51)

“First, the I is an existent. It has a concrete type of existence, undoubtedly different from the existence of mathematical truths, of meanings, or of spatio-temporal beings, but no less real. The I gives itself as transcendent.” (1960, p. 52)

“Second, the I proffers itself to an intuition of a special kind which apprehends it, always inadequately, behind the reflected consciousness. Third, the I never appears except on the occasion of a reflective act. (…) This transcendent object of the reflective act is the I. Fourth, the transcendent I must fall before the stroke of phenomenological reduction” (1960, p. 53)

“For Kant and for Husserl the I is a formal structure of consciousness. We have tried to show that an I is never purely formal, that it is always, even when conceived abstractly, an infinite contraction of the material me. But before going further we need to free ourselves of a purely psychological theory which for psychological reasons affirms the material presence of the me in all our consciousnesses.” (1960, p. 54)

“In a more general way, it has been admitted as a consequence that the me, if it is not present to consciousness, is hidden behind consciousness and is the magnetic pole of all our representations and all our desires. The me seeks, then, to procure the object in order to satisfy its desire. In other words, it is the desire (or, if one prefers, the desiring me) which is given as end, and the desired object is the means. Now the interest of this thesis, it seems to us, is that it puts in bold relief a very frequent error among psychologists. The error consists in confusing the essential structure of reflective acts with the essential structure of unreflected acts. It is overlooked that two forms of existence are always possible for a consciousness.” (1960, p. 55)

“We arrive then at the following conclusion: unreflected consciousness must be considered autonomous. (…), it is on the reflected level that the ego-life has its place, and on the unreflected level that the impersonal life has its place.” (1960, p. 58)

“The me must not be sought in the states of unreflected consciousness, nor behind them. The me appears only with the reflective act, and as a noematic correlate of a reflective intention. We begin to get a glimpse of the fact that the I and the me are only one. We are going to try to show that this ego, of which I and me are but two aspects, constitutes the ideal and indirect (noematic) unity of the infinite series of our reflected consciousnesses. The I is the ego as the unity of actions. The me is the ego as the unity of states and of qualities. The distinction that one makes between these two aspects of one and the same reality seems to us simply functional, not to say grammatical.” (1960, p. 60)

“The ego is the unity of states and of actions —optionally, of qualities. It is the unity of transcendent unities, and itself transcendent.” (1960, p. 61)

“It is exclusively in magical terms that we should speak of the relations of the me to consciousness.” (1960, p.68)

“Purely psychical actions like doubting, reasoning, meditating, making a hypothesis, these too must be conceived as transcendences. What deceives us here is that action is not only the noematic unity of a stream of consciousnesses: it is also a concrete realization. (…) One can say that the spontaneous doubt which invades me when I glimpse an object in the shadows is a consciousness, but the methodological doubt of Descartes is an action, that is to say, a transcendent object of reflective consciousness.” (1960, p. 69)

“The ego, we shall see, is directly the transcendent unity of states and of actions. (…) The relation of the quality to the state (or to the action) is a relation of actualization. The quality is given as a potentiality, a virtuality, which, under the influence of diverse factors, can pass into actuality. Its actuality is precisely the state (or the action).” (1960, p. 70)

“We have been learning to distinguish "the psychic" from consciousness. The psychic is the transcendent object of reflective consciousness. It is also the object of the science called "psychology." The ego appears to reflection as a transcendent object effecting the permanent synthesis of the psychic.” (1960, p. 71)

“The ego is on the side of the psychic. Let us note here that the ego that we are considering is psychic, not psycho-physical. It is not by abstraction that we separate these two aspects of the ego. The psycho-physical me is a synthetic enrichment of the psychic ego” (1960, p. 72)

“For these very reasons we shall not permit ourselves to see the ego as a sort of X-pole which would be the support of psychic phenomena. Such an X would, by definition, be indifferent to the psychic qualities it would support. But the ego, as we shall see, is never indifferent to its states; it is "compromised" by them. (…) The ego is nothing outside of the concrete totality of states and actions it supports. Undoubtedly it is transcendent to all the states which it unifies, but not as an abstract X whose mission is only to unify: rather, it is the infinite totality of states and of actions which is never reducible to an action or to a state. If we were to seek for unreflected consciousness an analogue of what the ego is for consciousness of the second degree, we rather believe that it would be necessary to think of the World, conceived as the infinite synthetic totality of all things” (1960, p. 74)

“The ego is to psychical objects what the World is to things. (…) The ego, (…), always appears at the horizon of states. Each state, each action is given as incapable of being separated from the ego without abstraction” (1960, p. 75)

“But if it is in the nature of the ego to be a dubitable object, it does not follow that the ego is hypothetical. In fact, the ego is the spontaneous, transcendent unification of our states and our actions. In this capacity, it is no hypothesis. (…) The relation of the ego to the qualities, states, and actions is neither a relation of emanation (like the relation of consciousness to emotion), nor a relation of actualization (like the relation of the quality to the state). It is a relation on the order of poetic production (in the sense of poiein), or if you like, a relation of creation” (1960, p. 76)

“The ego is the creator of its states and sustains its qualities in existence by a sort of preserving spontaneity” (1960, p. 78)

“According to different consciousnesses (prelogical, childish, schizophrenic, logical, etc.), the nuance of the creation varies, but always it remains a poetic production. (…) The spontaneity of the ego is not negated: it is in some way spellbound, but it remains. But this spontaneity must not be confused with the spontaneity of consciousness. Indeed, the ego, being an object, is passive. It is a question, therefore, of a pseudo-spontaneity which is suitably symbolized by the spurting of a spring, a geyser, etc. This is to say that we are dealing here with a semblance only” (1960, p. 79)

“The ego is always surpassed by what it produces, although, from another point of view, it is what it produces. (…) the ego is an object apprehended, but also an object constituted by reflective consciousness. The ego is a virtual locus of unity, and consciousness constitutes it in a direction contrary to that actually taken by the production: really, consciousnesses are first; through these are constituted states; and then, through the latter, the ego is constituted. But, as the order is reversed by a consciousness which imprisons itself in the world in order to flee from itself, consciousnesses are given as emanating from states, and states as produced by the ego” (1960, p. 80)

“We are thus surrounded by magical objects which retain, as it were, a memory of the spontaneity of consciousness, yet continue to be objects of the world. This is why man is always a sorcerer for man. Indeed, this poetic connection of two passivities in which one creates the other spontaneously is the very foundation of sorcery, the profound meaning of "participation." This is also why we are sorcerers for ourselves each time we view our me.” (1960, p. 81)

“Everything that the ego produces affects it. We must add: and only what it produces” (1960, p. 82)

“Just as the ego is an irrational synthesis of activity and passivity, it is a synthesis of interiority and transcendence” (1960, p. 83)

“These diverse formulations permit us to conclude that one lives interiority (that one "exists inward"), but that one does not contemplate it, since interiority would itself be beyond contemplation, as its condition. (…) And this is just how the ego gives itself to reflection: as an interiority closed upon itself. It is inward for itself, not for consciousness. Naturally, we are dealing with a contradictory composite: for an absolute interiority never has an outside. It can be conceived only by itself, and that is why we cannot apprehend the consciousnesses of others (for that reason only, and not because bodies separate us).” (1960, p. 84)

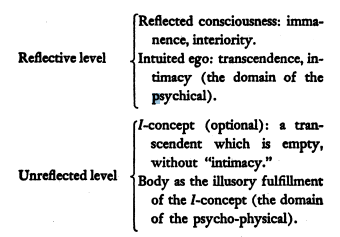
“In reality, this degraded and irrational interiority may be analyzed into two very special structures: intimacy and indistinctness. In relation to consciousness, the ego is given as intimate. Everything happens as though the ego were of consciousness, with only this particular and essential difference: that the ego is opaque to consciousness. And this opaqueness is apprehended as indistinctnes” (1960, p. 85)

“The me, as such, remains unknown to us. And this is easily understood. The me is given as an object. Therefore, the only method for knowing it is observation, approximation, anticipation, experience. (…) If we step back for vantage, the me accompanies us in this withdrawal. It is infinitely near, and I cannot circle around it” (1960, p. 86)

“Thus, "really to know oneself" is inevitably to take toward oneself the point of view of others, that is to say, a point of view which is necessarily false. And all those who have tried to know themselves will admit that this introspective attempt shows itself from the start as an effort to reconstitute from detached pieces, from isolated fragments, what is originally given all at once, at a stroke. Also, the intuition of the ego is a constantly gulling mirage, for it simultaneously yields everything and yields nothing. How could it be otherwise, moreover, since the ego is not the real totality of consciousnesses (such a totality would be a contradiction, like any infinite unity enacted), but the ideal unity of all the states and actions?” (1960, p. 87)

“The ego is by nature fugitive” (1960, p. 89)

“The body there serves as a visible and tangible symbol for the I.” (1960, p. 90)

 (1960, p. 91)

**Conclusions**

“In conclusion, we would like simply to offer the three following remarks: 1. The conception of the ego which we propose seems to us to effect the liberation of the Transcendental Field, and at the same time its purification. The Transcendental Field, purified of all egological structure, recovers its primary transparency. In a sense, it is a nothing, since all physical, psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths, all values are outside it; since my me has itself ceased to be any part of it. But this nothing is all since it is consciousness of all these objects.” (1960, p. 93)

“When two men, according to this conception, talk about the same chair, they really are talking about the same thing. This chair which one takes hold of and lifts is the same as the chair which the other sees. There is not merely a correspondence of images; there is only one object. But it seemed that when Paul tried to understand a psychical state of Peter, he could not reach this state, the intuitive apprehension of which belonged only to Peter. He could only envisage an equivalent, could only create empty concepts which tried in vain to reach a reality by essence removed from intuition” (1960, p. 94)

“The emotion, after all, remains attached to the me. This emotion "sticks to" the me. If one draws the me into consciousness, one draws the emotion along with it” (1960, p. 95)

“I cannot conceive Peter's consciousness without making an object of it (since I do not conceive it as being my consciousness). I cannot conceive it because I would have to think of it as pure interiority and as transcendence at the same time, which is impossible. A consciousness cannot conceive of a consciousness other than itself. Thus we can distinguish, thanks to our conception of the me, a sphere accessible to psychology, in which the method of external observation and the introspective method have the same rights and can mutually assist each other, and a pure transcendental sphere accessible to phenomenology alone.” (1960, p. 96)

“Thé ego is not the owner of consciousness; it is the object of consciousness. (…) The reflective attitude is correctly expressed in this famous sentence by Rimbaud (in the letter of the seer): "I is an other."” (1960, p. 97)

“We may therefore formulate our thesis: transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity. It determines its existence at each instant, without our being able to conceive anything before it. Thus each instant of our conscious life reveals to us a creation ex nihilo. Not a new arrangement, but a new existence. There is something distressing for each of us, to catch in the act this tireless creation of existence of which we are not the creators. At this level man has the impression of ceaselessly escaping from himself, of overflowing himself, of being surprised by riches which are always unexpected.” (1960, p. 98)

“Perhaps, in reality, the essential function of the ego is not so much theoretical as practical. (…) But perhaps the essential role of the ego is to mask from consciousness its very spontaneity.” (1960, p. 100)

“Everything happens, therefore, as if consciousness constituted the ego as a false representation of itself.” (1960, p. 101)

“Fink admits, not without some melancholy, that as long as one remains in the "natural" attitude, there is no reason, no "motive" for exercising the “epoché”. In fact, this natural attitude is perfectly coherent. There one will find none of those contradictions which, according to Plato, lead the philosopher to effect a philosophical conversion. Thus, the “epoché” appears in the phenomenology of Husserl as a miracle “” (1960, p. 102)

“2. This conception of the ego seems to us the only possible refutation of solipsism.” (1960, p. 103)

“Finally, then, it is really the me who must produce the world. Small matter if certain layers of this world necessitate by their very nature a relation to others. This relation can be a mere quality of the world that I create and in no way obliges me to accept the real existence of other “I”s. But if the I becomes a transcendent, it participates in all the vicissitudes of the world. It is no absolute; it has not created the universe; it falls like other existences at the stroke of the “epoché”; and solipsism becomes unthinkable from the moment that the I no longer has a privileged status. Instead of expressing itself in effect as "I alone exist as absolute," it must assert that "absolute consciousness alone exists as absolute” which is obviously a truism. My I, in effect, is no more certain for consciousness than the I of other men. It is only more intimate.” (1960, p. 104)

“The theorists of the extreme Left have sometimes reproached phenomenology for being an idealism and for drowning reality in the stream of ideas. (…) Nothing is more unjust than to call phenomenologists "idealists” “(1960, p. 104)

“On the contrary, for centuries we have not felt in philosophy so realistic a current. The phenomenologists have plunged man back into the world; they have given full measure to man's agonies and sufferings and also to his rebellions. (…) Unfortunately, as long as the I remains a structure of absolute consciousness, one will still be able to reproach phenomenology for being an escapist doctrine, for again pulling a part of man out of the world and, in that way, turning our attention from the real problems. It seems to us that this reproach no longer has any justification if one makes the me an existent, strictly contemporaneous with the world, whose existence has the same essential characteristics as the world.” (1960, p. 105)

“It is enough that the me be contemporaneous with the World, and that the subject-object duality, which is purely logical, definitively disappear from philosophical preoccupations. The World has not created the me; the me has not created the World. These are two objects for absolute, impersonal consciousness, and it is by virtue of this consciousness that they are connected” (1960, p. 105)

“This absolute consciousness, when it is purified of the I, no longer has anything of the subject. It is no longer a collection of representations. It is quite simply a first condition and an absolute source of existence. And the relation of interdependence established by this absolute consciousness between the me and the World is sufficient for the me to appear as "endangered" before the World, for the me (indirectly and through the intermediary of states) to draw the whole of its content from the World. No more is needed in the way of a philosophical foundation for an ethics and a politics which are absolutely positive.” (1960, p. 106)