

**ALIENATION AND VULNERABILITY
IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF
JEAN-PAUL SARTRE**

A Dissertation
Submitted
to the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
VINCENT BEAVER
AUGUST 2012

Examining Committee Members:
Lewis R. Gordon, Advisory Chair, Philosophy
Jane Gordon, Political Science
Owen Ware, Philosophy
Joseph Schwartz, External Member, Political Science

©
Copyright
2012

by

Vincent Beaver
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

This project has two aims. First, to provide a comprehensive interpretation of Sartre's theory of alienation, beginning with the discussion of alienation in *Being and Nothingness* and concluding with *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. I argue that the meaning of alienation throughout these works is the revelation or experience of being an object for another freedom. I argue that this experience is fundamentally an experience of vulnerability, in the sense of the capacity to be wounded. The meaning of alienation in Sartre's philosophy is therefore an experience of vulnerability. Understanding alienation as an experience of vulnerability provides an alternative to the conventional understanding of Sartrean alienation as equivalent to violence and oppression.

The second aim of this project is to discuss the way alienation is related to the concepts of violence and oppression. Violence and oppression are understood, by Sartre, in terms of alienation, but alienation itself is not identified with either violence or oppression. I explore Sartre's discussions of violence and oppression in the posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics* and in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, and show through these texts, that alienation consistently refers to the experience of vulnerability, but also, that and this experience is the basis of violent actions and oppressive social relations. Although alienation is not equivalent to violence and oppression, and these concepts must not be confused, violence and oppression must be understood in terms of alienation, according to Sartre's thought.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the support of numerous individuals, some of whom I would like to acknowledge. I would like to thank my parents, Tom and Carmella, for all their support beyond the context of this dissertation. I would also like to thank Katya Quinn-Judge, for reasons too numerous to list. I would also like to thank Paul and Sophia Quinn-Judge, who made it possible for Katya and I to spend a summer in France during which this project actually came together. And I would like to thank my good friend Zach Rosenau for our many conversations.

I would like to thank all my friends, colleagues, and students at Temple University. I benefited greatly from countless stimulating conversations over the years with Doug Ficek, Devon Johnson, Greg Graham, Anthony Dandridge, Joan Jasak, and Phillip Honenberger. I was also lucky enough to study Ancient Greek thanks to the generosity of David Wolfsdorf, and this opportunity allowed me to spend a great deal of time with Oz Blaker, Lior Levy, and Qrescent Mason, with whom I had a great deal of fun and learned much from.

I would like to thank the members of my Dissertation Committee, Lewis Gordon, Jane Gordon, Owen Ware, and Joseph Schwatz, thank you all for the supportive remarks and interesting comments on this project. Special thanks are due to Lewis Gordon. I was lucky enough to attend Professor Gordon's seminar on Sartre in my second semester in graduate school, and my interest has not abated since. I was also able to attend several fascinating international conferences thanks to Professor Gordon's generous support. Thank you Professor Gordon for advising this project to completion, and for everything else, I am truly grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. BACKGROUND	19
Preliminary Considerations.....	20
Being In-itself and for-itself.....	20
Existence and Knowledge.....	23
The Self and Possibilities.....	27
Others.....	33
Husserl’s Fifth Meditation.....	35
Sartre’s Criticisms of Husserl and Others.....	42
Sartre’s Criteria for a Valid Theory of Others.....	48
Sartre’s Theory Of The Look.....	52
3. ALIENATION IN BEING AND NOTHINGNESS.....	58
Alienation and “The Look”.....	59
Alienation of Possibilities.....	60
Ignorance and Obstacles.....	67
Alienation and Vulnerability.....	73
Alienation Beyond The Look.....	82
Language & Death.....	83
Being for Others.....	87
4. ISSUES AND CRITICAL DISCUSSION	96
Implications.....	96
Alienation & Violence.....	98
Alienation in “Concrete Relations With Others”.....	105
Bad Faith & Anguish.....	115
Critical Discussion.....	131

	v
The Meaning of Opposition	132
Work & Interchangeability	139
Vulnerability, Inescapability, and Risk.....	144
5. ALIENATION, VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION IN THE NOTEBOOKS FOR AN ETHICS.....	148
Questions.....	150
Alienation, Violence, Oppression	154
Alienation.....	155
Oppression	161
Violence	168
Alienation and the Origins of Oppression	180
Conclusions.....	186
6. ALIENATION IN THE CRITIQUE OF DIALECTICAL REASON.....	189
Alienation and Individual Praxis	189
Fundamental Alienation.....	191
Scarcity	199
Counter-finality.....	205
Seriality	207
Common Praxis And The Negation Of Alienation.....	209
The Group-in-Fusion	210
The Statutory Group	213
The Organization	214
The Institution.....	217
Alienation: The Deterioration Of Common Praxis.....	220
Conclusion	224
7. CONCLUSION.....	226
Summary.....	226
Alienation and Oppression.....	229
Potential Issues for Further Study.....	245
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	248

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO ALIENATION AND VULNERABILITY

Alienation is a concept of considerable importance in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. It is featured prominently in the theory of Others in *Being and Nothingness*, and it occupies a central place in the later *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. In the posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics*, which was a transition between the two previously mentioned works, Sartre reflects at length on the relationship between alienation and related phenomena of violence and oppression. While some scholars have dismissed the concept of alienation as too vague to merit philosophical attention,¹ or too romantic for political significance,² it has remained a topic of interest for scholars interested in Sartre's work and well beyond.³

¹ Whether the author claims the term is simply ambiguous, hopelessly ambiguous, or some other variant, does not alter the convention where one is required to mention its ambiguity. Richard Schacht, *Alienation* (New York: Doubleday, 1970); Bernard Murchland, "The Myth of Alienation," *Diotima: Review of Philosophical Research* 2 (1974): 203–215; "Alienation as a Concept in the Social Sciences," *Current Sociology* 21, no. 9 (1973): 9–39; Melviin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," *American Sociological Review* (1959): 783–791.

² Lewis Feuer is noteworthy in this regard, he claims that originally alienation was "a romantic concept, with a preponderantly sexual connotation," that was ultimately rejected by Marx and Engels despite influencing their "youthful" works. Lewis Feuer, "What Is Alienation? The Career of a Concept," *New Politics* 1, no. 3 (1962): 118. He goes on to say that "the metaphor of alienation...is peculiar to the drama of contemporary intellectuals in their most despondent mood. The contemporary intellectual's experience of alienation is concretely one of his withdrawal from political movements; he has disavowed identifications," (132) and that "its dominant overtone is social defeat." (134) David Bell agrees with Feuer regarding the insignificance of alienation (as estrangement) for the "mature" Marx and Engels. David Bell, "The 'Rediscovery' of Alienation: Some Notes Along the Quest for the Historical Marx," *The Journal of Philosophy* (1959): 933n–934n.

³ Both of these claims are substantiated in Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

While the charge of vagueness may be an insufficient reason for dismissing the concept of alienation from philosophical discussion, the reason for concern is readily apparent in scholarship on alienation in Sartre's thought. Alienation is uncritically associated with a variety of phenomena well beyond the context in which Sartre employs the term. Alienation has come to signify a state of violence to some scholars, while others claim bad faith is representative of self-alienation.⁴ The aim of this dissertation is to provide a unified and comprehensive interpretation of the meaning of alienation in the philosophy of Sartre. By "alienation in Sartre," I mean, however, alienation as Sartre uses the term. It is possible that Sartre discusses phenomena relevant to the concept of alienation, in terms of its common usage, without referring to such phenomena as alienation. But whether these phenomena should be referred to as alienation will not be our concern. The issue at hand is, what does Sartre mean by alienation when he uses this term? I will argue that the meaning of alienation in the philosophy of Sartre refers to an experience of vulnerability. I will argue that this meaning remains constant throughout his work, spanning from *Being and Nothingness* through to the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. This interpretation will occasionally overlap with its traditional meaning, but I will claim that the unique Sartrean sense of alienation is not reducible to its traditional meaning.

As for the traditional meaning of the concept of alienation as it appears throughout the history of western philosophy, the idea could be expressed as a problem.

⁴ The exception to these various interpretations is Richard Schacht, who makes it clear that the experience of Other subjects is "Sartre's only...distinctively 'existential' use of the term; and it is a very technical one, quite unrelated to anything most people have in mind when they associate the term with existentialism." Schacht, *Alienation*, 226–227.

Alienation refers to a transfer or exchange of ownership or loss of property.⁵ The problem of alienation might be expressed as follows: under what conditions is alienation legitimate? The answer to the problem is, typically: as long as it is not absolute. It is in defense of this answer, for instance, that Rousseau argues in *The Social Contract* against the argument that consent to absolute rule is just as legitimate as consent to enslavement. But Rousseau explains that “To renounce one's liberty is to renounce one's essence as a human being.” This renunciation or dispossession could never be based on a fair exchange, because “for the person who renounces everything there is no possible compensation...a convention which stipulates absolute authority on the one side and unlimited obedience on the other is meaningless and contradictory.”⁶ Someone who actually enters into such a relation, he claims, “is not in his right mind.”⁷

The problem appears in a similar form in Kant's *Doctrine of Right*. There, Kant does not seek (as Rousseau did) to reject an argument, but instead aims to show the constraints that must be placed on alienation for its legitimacy. Regarding married couples, for instance, he claims that in acts of sexual enjoyment “the human being *makes himself into a thing*, which conflicts with the right of Humanity in his person.” For this to be legitimate there must be a complementary act, so that the person who “is acquired

⁵ Rotenstreich considers this to be the “simple meaning of the term” as “found in its legal context.” Nathan Rotenstreich, “On the Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of ‘Alienation’,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 16, no. 3 (1963): 551. This sense “indicates the transferring of a thing, or of possession of a thing from one person to another. Through the act of transference, or *alienatio*, the thing becomes the property of another person. Through the act of transference it becomes alien to its former possessor and enters the domain of the new possessor.” Rotenstreich, “On the Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of ‘Alienation’,” 551.

⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 159–160.

⁷ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 159. Alienation is used to refer to madness, in fact, in several languages, at least French and German. For the latter see Rotenstreich, “On the Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of ‘Alienation’,” 550–551., and in French see also Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2008).

acquires the other in turn” and this “restores its personality,” which otherwise would have been renounced. Likewise, for Kant, the head of a household has “a right that is like a right to a thing” concerning the servant. But this does not mean the former should behave as if he owns them, “for a contract by which one party would completely renounce his freedom for the other’s advantage would be self-contradictory...since by it one party would cease to be a person.”⁸ The meaning of “person” here is simply the ability to be *subject* of property, as able to make claims on others—for instance, the claim for wages in return for one’s labor.⁹

Hegel’s views, presented in the *Philosophy of Right*, are largely consistent with the views offered above.¹⁰ “It is possible for me to alienate my property” Hegel claims, “for it is mine only in so far as I embody my will in it. Thus I may abandon as ownerless anything belonging to me or make it over to the will of someone else as his possession—*but only in so far as the thing is external in nature.*”¹¹ The domain of inalienable things, by contrast, “include[s] my personality in general, my universal freedom of will, ethical life, and religion.” However, the factual “possibility of alienation of the personality” is acknowledged in instances of “slavery, serfdom, disqualification from owning property,

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 101.

⁹ Orlando Patterson argues that “to define slavery only as the treatment of human beings as property fails as a definition, since it does not really specify any distinct category of persons. Proprietary claims and powers are made with respect to many persons who are clearly not slaves. Indeed any person, beggar or king, can be the object of a property relation. Slaves are no different in this respect.” Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 22. However, the situation Kant wishes to avoid is explained as the crucial difference by Patterson: “the slave was a slave not because he was the object of property, but because he could not be the subject of property.” Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 28. This is the crucial difference in terms of property, not Patterson’s argument as a whole, since that depends on the dishonor involved in the slave’s condition.

¹⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Alan Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 95; (my emphasis).

restrictions on freedom of ownership, etc.”¹² Hegel also places limits on the legitimate alienation of labor: “I can alienate individual products of my productive skills and active capabilities to someone else and *allow him to use them* for a limited period of time because, *provided they are subject to this limitation*, they acquire an external relationship to my totality and universality.” This limitation allows Hegel to *distinguish* legitimate from illegitimate alienation because the subject retains some control. This means “the use of my powers differ from the powers themselves and hence also from me—only in so far as it is quantitatively limited.”¹³ This limitation is what separates “a slave and a modern servant or hired laborer,” the former being uniquely “a slave because *the entire scope of his activity* had been alienated to his master.”¹⁴

On this point, Marx provides a classic response to Hegel in the first volume of *Capital*.¹⁵ While offering a critical view of Hegel, he does so in such a way that reaffirms the central form of the problem of alienation. Unlike Hegel, he views labor as the essence of human personality.¹⁶ The sale of labor involves, therefore, the alienation of personality.¹⁷ Whereas Hegel viewed the limitation as an essential condition to retaining personality, Marx views living labor as the essential personality of human being and the

¹² Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 96.

¹³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 97 (my emphasis).

¹⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 98; (my emphasis).

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1992).

¹⁶ “We mean by labor power...the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities he sets in motion whenever he produces a use value of any kind.” Marx, *Capital vol. 1*, 270.

¹⁷ Marx reports the view of traditional political economy, but seems to be playing coy when he says “Labor power can appear on the market only if, and in so far as its possessor, the individual whose labor power it is, offers it for sale or sells it as a commodity. In order that its possessor may sell it as a commodity, he must have at his disposal, he must be the free-proprietor of his own labor-capacity, hence of his person. He and the owner of the money meet in the market...on a footing of equality as commodity owners...both are therefore equal in the eyes of the law. Marx, *Capital vol. 1*, 271.

alienation of labor power as a ruse in the project for the extraction of surplus value.

Marx's problem is that this has been (and continues to be) considered *legitimate*.

This brief discussion of the traditional usage of alienation, and the problem that it often expresses, is not intended as an exhaustive discussion of the topic.¹⁸ The purpose was simply to indicate some of the features of the concept and the sort of problem involved.¹⁹ To the extent that alienation signifies a *transfer of ownership* over an essential property, it involves treating the essential property as a *thing* or *object* capable of being alienated. In the examples discussed above, that which is to be alienated is not legitimate if it cannot be treated as a thing *by right*. The essential personality of the human being, likewise, cannot be exchanged or transferred into someone else's

¹⁸ It would be impossible to consider the idea in more detail given the constraints of the present project. For instance, Rotenstreich traces the concept back to Plato (in Rotenstreich, "On the Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of 'Alienation'," 551–552.) and some of the aspects mentioned here can be found also in *Phaedo* where Socrates laments that the incarcerated contribute to their own incarceration. See line 83a in Plato, "Phaedo," in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997). We have left out the entire issue, much discussed in Hegelian and Marxian scholarship, regarding the difference between *Entausserung* and *Entfremdung*, which is not relevant to the discussion of Sartre (because he does not maintain any terminological equivalent nor acknowledge that one exists in German). For relevant discussions, see C. J. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and His Relation to Hegel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), Appendix; Bell, "The 'Rediscovery' of Alienation: Some Notes along the Quest for the Historical Marx," 933n–934n; Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: And the Communist Manifesto*, trans. M. Milligan (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1988), 10–11; Istvan Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (Harper and Row, 1972), 313n3; John O'Neill, "The Concept of Estrangement in the Early and Later Writings of Karl Marx," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1964): 68–69; Phillip Kain, *Hegel and the Other* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), 159; Phillip Kain, "Alienation and Estrangement in the Thought of Hegel and the Young Marx," *The Philosophical Forum* 11 (1979): 141–144; Schacht, *Alienation*, 37–39. Further discussion of alienation in Marx and Hegel can be found in Karl Löwith, "Man's Self-Alienation in the Early Writings of Marx," *Social Research* 21 (1954): 204–230; Gajo Petrović, "Marx's Theory of Alienation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 23, no. 3 (1963): 419–426; Jean Hyppolite, "Alienation and Objectification," *Philosophy Today* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 119–132; Loyd D. Easton, "Alienation and History in the Early Marx," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 22, no. 2 (1961): 193–205.

¹⁹ With regard to the choice of authors mentioned, the reason is that Hegel mentions the text of Kant, and Marx, the text of Hegel, in each of their discussions of the problem. In other words, they took themselves to be responding to the same problem explicitly.

ownership because it would forfeit the very right to transfer property. There is an aspect of deception in the factual occurrence of such an absolute transfer, since in the texts above, the transfer requires the *participation* of the one who is alienated—the agent who alienates is the one who is alienated. Since the agent participates in the alienation it is impossible for the agent to renounce their personality absolutely, unless the agent was deceived or taken advantage of by another. Alienation would then refer to something the agent brings on him or herself, even if illegitimately, because the thing that is to be alienated is something essential to the person. To the extent that the process of alienation is successful, the alienated person might be said to exist in a state of *separation* from what is his or her true essence, or from what is inseparable from his or her person, as each of the philosophers above maintain. The object of alienation, on this reading, always refers to that which is *inalienable*. Alienation was once used as a neutral term, being capable of referring to any such transfer, but it seems now used primarily to signify the *negative* experience of a transference of that which is inalienable.²⁰ It may also be used to refer to the result of the process, rather than to the process itself; in other words, it might refer to that state of separation, the state of being an object, or to the state of being under the control of an “alien will.”

²⁰ Consider one example that would substantiate this point. Simon Skempton considers whether one can plausibly claim a close proximity between Derridean *différance* and Hegelian *alienation*. He concludes, eventually, that the relation between the two terms must be considered remote, because the “celebratory attitude precludes the use of the term alienation, with its unhappy connotations, to describe the self-othering involved in *différance*.” Simon Skempton, *Alienation After Derrida* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 52. And yet Skempton simultaneously believes that the self-alienated spirit of culture in “Hegel’s portrayal of alienation has clear parallels with the Derridian notion of the play of *différance*.” (ibid, 53) But the latter is not ruled out despite the fact that it has a negative connotation. So either it must have a negative connotation, or, it is arbitrary, it seems. Hence the concern with vagueness among some scholars.

Sartre's thought could very easily be seen to overlap with this traditional understanding of the problem of alienation. Perhaps the best example of the theme of alienation (as traditionally understood) in his thought occurs in the discussion of bad faith. Someone who conducts him or herself according to "patterns of bad faith" might appear to the observer to behave as if their movements were entirely in the service of an "alien will." Sartre's famous example of the waiter who appears to be imitating "the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton" comes to mind here.²¹ And since bad faith is a form of self-deception, it would seem that it also shares with concept above that person who is alienated is ultimately responsible for being alienated. And the implication of these phenomena as bad faith includes the element of responsibility for the condition in which the "alienated" find themselves. While the determination of illegitimate alienation above involved renouncing one's personality entirely, someone in bad faith might be seen to renounce their freedom, or what amounts to the same thing, to attempt to become a thing.²² Neither of these are able to be accomplished in reality, however, in much the same way as the authors above denied that certain forms of ownership could be legitimate. While Sartre does not use the term 'alienation' in this discussion of bad faith, it is fairly clear that it shares many common elements with the problem discussed above.

It is not surprising then that scholars writing on Sartre's thought connect bad faith and other related ideas to the concept of "alienation." As a result, however, Sartre's actual use of the term 'alienation,' has been neglected or reduced in significance in favor

²¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 59

²² What Sartre says is that bad faith is a "negative attitude with respect to oneself," or, an attempt to deny oneself. (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 47)

of the self-alienation of bad faith.²³ The argument to follow is not mutually exclusive with the existing literature. Rather, my aim in this dissertation is to focus on the meaning of alienation as Sartre uses the term, and which I argue, he uses narrowly to refer to an experience of vulnerability, and this differs in important ways from other contexts in which the theme of alienation appears in his work. Furthermore, Sartre's explicit use of the term alienation complicates any attempt to reduce it to the traditional way the concept was understood: as seen above, alienation required the agent of alienation to be the one who is alienated. For Sartre, alienation is something for which the agent could not be responsible.²⁴

Sartre uses the term 'alienation' in *Being and Nothingness* in only one context: in discussions of being-for-others. He does not use this term in any of the philosophical texts prior to the publication of *Being and Nothingness*.²⁵ More specifically, the experience of alienation in *Being and Nothingness* occurs in discussion of "the Look." "The Look" is the manner in which the for-itself encounters the Other's freedom, according to Sartre. "The Look" is an experience of oneself-for-another. In fact, the experience of oneself-for-others is equivalent to being looked-at. The manner in which we apprehend ourselves looked at is what Sartre refers to as alienation. And what makes this experience unique in

²³ To claim that bad faith, as self-alienation, and alienation by others, are the same thing, seems to eliminate the distinction that made self-deception a unique problem in the first place. This will be discussed in Chapter 4.

²⁴ At least not in the manner of the traditional approach to the problem: "I can not make myself be for myself as an object; for in no case can I ever alienate myself from myself." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 275. We will see in the last section of Chapter 3 the way one is responsible for one's own alienation. One cannot be solely responsible, however. In other words, the emphasis is on the Other.

²⁵ This does not mean the theme of alienation, as traditionally understood, is absent from his works. Rather, he only uses the term in *Being and Nothingness*, and in *Being and Nothingness*, only in connection with being-for-others. He doesn't use it in any of the texts, which does not prove anything other than that he was selective about how he used the term.

Sartre's view is being an object for another freedom. To be alienated is to be an object for another freedom, and to be an object for another freedom, I will argue, should be understood to mean that one is *vulnerable*, and that vulnerability should be understood literally as the capacity to be wounded.²⁶ I argue that the experience of alienation should be understood as revealing one's vulnerability to another freedom.

A crucial point for the Sartrean sense of alienation, to be argued here, is that alienation must be understood in terms of *possibility*. The possibility of being wounded only makes sense if one has a horizon of possibilities which can be modified. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the alienation of possibilities is not simply to have limited possibilities. Alienation refers to becoming an object for an other freedom, and the modification that one's own projects undergo in light of this fact. Alienation is the *possibility* of being used for the Other's advantage, of being subject to the other's will, of being judged. But one experiences these possibilities in so far as they influence one's own possibilities. It does not *necessarily* refer to an actual act of domination, only to the *possibility* of such domination. Alienation refers to the way one lives this possibility.²⁷ I will show in greater detail in the chapters to follow that Sartre's idea of alienation should be understood in terms of possibilities. And I will argue that *vulnerability* is the appropriate sense given to the dimension of being for-others that is revealed in the

²⁶ Although it is not only a capacity to be wounded; it is also a capacity to be manipulated, deceived, violated, etc. Vulnerability refers to a possibility that requires another freedom, because the possibility can only be realized by another freedom. It does not refer then to the possibility of being injured, since this can happen through one's own carelessness. Vulnerability refers to one's capacity as an object of another's intention.

²⁷ "I grasp the Other not in the clear vision of what he can make out of my act but in a fear which lives all my possibilities as ambivalent." (264)

experience of alienation, precisely because it refers to an ambivalent condition of being able to be wounded. Alienation reveals the vulnerability of the for-itself.²⁸

The interpretation of alienation in *Being and Nothingness* will be demonstrated in full in the chapters to follow. The point of entry to this theory of alienation in Sartre's thought is, as mentioned above, the problem of Others. The problem of Others is not, as it first appears, an effort to "prove" the existence of Others, but rather to explain the manner in which the Other is given with certainty in experience. Alienation is the experience which provides this certainty of the existence of other subjects, a certainty Sartre believes to be on the same level as the consciousness one has (of) oneself.²⁹ In order to understand how Sartre believes alienation solves this problem, we must see first how he arrives at the problem. Chapter 2 provides the background to this problem as far as Sartre's theory is concerned. Sartre inherits the problem and solution largely from the problem of the "alter-ego," in Husserl's fifth *Cartesian Mediation*. As I will show, Sartre attempts to distance himself from Husserl, critical as he is of the latter's reduction of consciousness to knowledge. Sartre nonetheless retains Husserl's approach to both the problem and solution.³⁰ Since consciousness exists as consciousness (of) itself, for Sartre,

²⁸ One point on which the concept of vulnerability and the traditional themes of alienation intersect is when alienation is understood as not being at home. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel*; Wilfrid Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Doubleday, 1965). However, the sense of alienation as revealing vulnerability ultimately allows for the possibility that not being at home to mean "in public."

²⁹ A full discussion of the reason for the parentheses around 'of' will occur in the "Preliminary Considerations" section in the next chapter.

³⁰ It must be noted that the presentation of the problem of the alter-ego in the fifth *Meditation* resembles the problem of alienation outlined above, in so far as the problem involves the transfer of the sense "other conscious subject" beyond the original presence of consciousness to itself. In fact, Husserl later seems to refer to the perception of the alter-ego as an intentional modification as "self-alienation." Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 185. The similarity between Husserl and Sartre in the meaning of "alienation" is

any consciousness is mine, as for Husserl (with some differences).³¹ How then can an

noted in Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, trans. Christopher Macann (MIT Press, 1984), 251–252; see also 90–91. Richard Schacht goes further than Theunissen, however, when he claims that Husserl’s use of ‘self-alienation’ (ent-fremdung) in the *Crisis* is the source of Sartre’s view of alienation. He admits that, while Sartre does not refer to the text of the *Crisis*, he believes “it is plausible to assume his familiarity with it.” Schacht, *Alienation*, 227. But this is not a plausible assumption, for several reasons. First, the *Crisis* was not yet published when Sartre was writing *Being and Nothingness*, and it is doubtful that Sartre had access to the manuscripts of the unpublished text. He could not have accessed them while he in Berlin from 1933-1934 since Husserl did not begin work on the *Crisis* until 1934, around the time Sartre had left Germany. Husserl, *Crisis*, xvi–xviii. It is equally unlikely that he had access to the manuscripts in the period when others were orchestrating the war-time relocation of Husserl’s unpublished manuscripts. The evidence in favor of the view that Sartre would have been familiar with the text requires that one believe he was given access by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. There is reason to suspect that this did not occur, however. Merleau-Ponty certainly *did* have access to the manuscript at some point prior to the publication of his *Phenomenology of Perception* in 1945. The text actually includes a reference to the *Crisis*, unpublished at the time, but more significantly, Merleau-Ponty *actually quotes* the passage in question from the *Crisis*, to which Schacht refers. In Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of solipsism, the relevant text is: “Whether we are concerned with my body, the natural world, the past, birth or death, the question is always how I can be open to phenomena which transcend me, and which nevertheless exist only to the extent that I take them up and live them; how the presence to myself (Urpräsenz) which establishes my own limits and conditions every alien presence is at the same time derepresentation (Entgegenwärtigung) and throws me outside myself.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2005), 423. It has been documented that Merleau-Ponty consulted with Hyppolite and Sartre about establishing a Husserl center in Paris with the unpublished manuscripts as a centerpiece. H. L. VanBreda, “Maurice Merleau-Ponty Et Les Archives-Husserl à Louvain,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 67 (1962): 414–415. None of this, however, makes Schacht’s assumption plausible. Two anecdotes from Sartre provoke skepticism. First, Merleau-Ponty asked Sartre to postpone the publication of *Being and Nothingness* until after *The Phenomenology of Perception* was published. Speaking to John Gerassi about this text, Sartre says: “you realize how close it is to much of what I wrote in *Being and Nothingness*? He had read some of that work, and had asked me not to publish it until his book came out, chapters I had written during the war, before his, and he was hurt that I did not wait. For him it was a question of his career.” John Gerassi, *Talking with Sartre: Conversations and Debates* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 179. Unfortunately Sartre does not elaborate any further on this story. A second anecdote comes from Sartre’s “Merleau-Ponty Vivant” where Sartre, discussing the relationship of the two, says that both he and Merleau-Ponty were “too individualist to ever pool our research, we became reciprocal while remaining separate.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations*, trans. Benita Eisler (New York: Fawcett, 1965), 159. If the question is whether they pooled their research, the answer would seem to be negative according to Sartre himself. Schacht’s claim therefore seems entirely unfounded, or at best, mere speculation.

³¹ Michael Theunissen puts this point succinctly, that “the most important of the preconditions that have to be fulfilled in order that the other should become a philosophical problem is that the subjectivity that is made the object of philosophical reflection should be my own.” (16)

“other consciousness” come to be given in experience? Sartre’s answer is the theory presented in his discussion of “the Look.” I will argue, however, that “the Look” and the feeling of shame (the most prominent example in the discussion), are only instances of the more general experience of alienation, which is, generally, the experience of being for-others in all forms.

Chapter 2 discusses this problem of the givenness of the Other in detail. It begins, however, with an overview of the basic elements in Sartre’s ontology. Part I of Chapter 2 provides this background. First, by explaining the basic distinction between being in-itself and being for-itself, and Sartre’s theory of consciousness. One of the most essential aspects of Sartre’s theory of consciousness, and operative in the solution to the problem of Others, is his rejection of the “primacy of knowledge” over existence, also considered in Chapter 2. Following from the explanation of the consciousness (of) self of being for-itself, I explain the phenomenological context for Sartre’s theory of the “self” that exists for-itself. This “self” or rather “selfness” is understood in terms of its *possibilities*. Sartre’s theory of possibilities will be shown to be analogous to Husserl’s account of perceptual adumbrations, an important inheritance for understanding the alienation of possibilities later on. In Part II of Chapter 2, I address the problem of Others. Beginning with the problem of the alter ego in Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*, I show the general problem that Sartre believes is in need of solution. The discussion of existence and knowledge, considered in Part I, is crucial to understanding Sartre’s rejection of Husserl’s solution to the problem, as well as his rejection of the solutions of Hegel and Heidegger. Following from a discussion of these criticisms, I will show how Sartre outlines his criteria for the solution to the problem in terms of existence over knowledge. Finally, in

concluding Chapter 2, I will provide a brief overview of the solution offered in the experience of “the Look,” which is Sartre’s solution to the problem of Others.

Chapter 3 presents the theory of alienation as it appears in *Being and Nothingness* in the discussion of the fundamental relation to Others. I begin with the discussion of “the Look,” specifically with regard to the alienation of possibilities. Alienation understood in terms of possibilities will be based on the discussion of possibilities from Chapter 2. We will see what sort of modification this brings about by considering the way the alienation of possibilities allows for experiences of ignorance and obstacles different from such an experience in “isolation.” The consequence of the interpretation of alienation in the discussion of “the Look” is the theory of alienation as the revelation of vulnerability. I will not be concerned in this discussion with whether Sartre actually solves the problem of Others with his theory of alienation. I am interested in the features of the argument that *he believes* can solve the problem. I will extend the discussion of alienation and vulnerability to other contexts in the text of *Being and Nothingness*, specifically, to the discussion of language and death, in order to support the interpretation I have offered. I will conclude by showing the significance of the interpretation in the abstract discussion of being for-others. There, we will see how the other and the for-itself are mutually responsible for the alienation in which each apprehends the other.

Chapter 4 will provide a discussion of the implications of this interpretation, as well as a critical discussion in order to defend it against possible objections. Some of the implications of the interpretation of alienation as vulnerability include rejecting the widely held belief among Sartre scholars that alienation is equivalent to violence, and that conflict is equivalent to hostility or antagonism. I will also use this discussion to engage

some of the problems not addressed in the previous chapters, for instance, the discussion of “concrete relations with others,” bad faith, and some of Sartre’s more controversial claims. I will address the issue of the meaning of opposition, individuality, and risk, as important to understanding what Sartre means when he refers to the experience of others as alienation.

The primary aim of this study is not, however, to refute the existing interpretations of Sartre’s thought. The purpose of the interpretation offered in the first three chapters is to provide a basis to explore further how the meaning of alienation so interpreted can shed new light on the way it is related to the phenomena of violence and oppression. Both violence and oppression become more and more prominent in Sartre’s writings after *Being and Nothingness*. However, scholars have understood alienation in *Being and Nothingness* to be equivalent to violence and oppression. I will argue that alienation, as it appears in Sartre’s discussion of being for-others should *not* be equated with the reality of oppression.³² Rather than simply argue against the conventional interpretation, however, I will explore the actual relationship between these phenomena. While *Being and Nothingness* contains very little explicit or extended discussion of either violence or oppression,³³ we find in the posthumously published *Notebooks* Sartre’s effort to think through the concepts of violence and oppression explicitly. And when

³² Such criticisms are addressed in Chapter 4.

³³ With the exception of the discussion of Hatred and Sadism and the collective “us-object,” as we will see in Chapter 4.

pursuing these ideas, he takes his point of departure from the concept of alienation as a condition for their possibility, *but not their reality*.³⁴

In Chapter 5, I will demonstrate how Sartre's posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics* considers violence and oppression in terms of alienation, where alienation is a condition for the possibility of both violence and oppression—a necessary, but insufficient condition on its own. I will show that violence is a certain kind of realization of the possibility that is revealed in alienation, but in such a way that the possible/actual distinction is eliminated. Violence aims to destroy possibilities, whether by destroying the objects that indicate possibilities as *there for anyone*, or, the possibilities indicated by the presence of freedom itself. On the other hand, oppression relates to alienation in a twofold manner. Alienation in the *Notebooks* is extended beyond the relation among free projects to include the objectivity of actions. Actions occur in the presence of others, and thereby become vulnerable to the projects of Others. This is the meaning of alienation in the *Notebooks*, but the significance is that these results function as *proposals* for the free projects of others. Anything that is objective is *there for everyone*. Oppression is defined as a restriction placed on the object for some subjects. The proposal appears as there for everyone, but the possibility is limited by force and is restricted to a few (*there for some*). The possibilities for some are more extensive than they are for all, despite the fact that the possibilities themselves are objectively there for everyone. This restricting function of oppression is experienced as a much more radical modification of possibilities than is found in the account of alienation in either *Being and Nothingness*, or in *Notebooks*, and

³⁴ This distinction was after all that which Sartre made use of in the *Transcendence of the Ego* in criticizing the “dangerous tendency...of turning into a reality the conditions...for the possibility of experience.” (Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, 32-33)

the distinction between alienation and oppression is therefore substantiated. Chapter 5 will show, again, the importance of understanding alienation in terms of possibilities since this is necessary to understand the relationship between alienation, violence, and oppression.

I mentioned at the outset that the *Notebooks* function as a transition between the two major works of *Being and Nothingness* and the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Chapter 6 explores the development of the concept of alienation as it is utilized in the *Critique*, in light of the discussion of these concepts in the *Notebooks*. While in the *Notebooks*, alienation is a condition for the possibility of oppression and violence, I will show that in the *Critique*, Sartre requires the presence of a material condition in order to transform this possibility into a reality. This material condition is *scarcity*, and it allows us to see how alienation (as the revealing of vulnerability of human beings in the presence of other human beings) can be transformed into a state of constant antagonism (the sort that is often assumed to be present in *Being and Nothingness*). Scarcity *eliminates the distinction* between an actual and possible wound. But this occurs through human praxis in so far as human praxis is alienated in matter when it occurs in the same practical field of others. The emergence of group praxis will occur as the negation of this condition of alienation as the common vulnerability of a collective. Finally, alienation will be the demise of the group in so far as individual, constituent praxis that is the source of the dialectic, is an untranscendable statute, in the double sense of unobtainable for the group, and unsurpassable for the individual members.

I will conclude this discussion in Chapter 7, by detailing the relation between alienation and oppression as it is considered in the text of the *Critique* and show the

significance for contemporary discussions of oppression. I will indicate the political implications of the interpretation for Sartre's philosophy, as well as some of the issues that remained unresolved in his thinking.

Before beginning the project outlined above, a few words are in order regarding the scope of the discussions to follow. The considerations to follow are limited mostly to a discussion of the three texts of *Being and Nothingness*, *Notebooks*, and the *Critique*. It would be impossible to exhaust the discussion of alienation if, for instance, the four volumes of *The Family Idiot* were included.³⁵ Other texts, for instance, those published prior to *Being and Nothingness*, are mentioned only in passing or in the notes when relevant; since we framed the issue in terms of Sartre's narrow use of alienation in the discussion of being for-others in *Being and Nothingness*, it is not necessary to cover the *theme* of alienation as it appears in the other texts where it can be found, and plenty of scholarship already exists that serve that purpose.

³⁵ Including the support from the project on Flaubert would be redundant, however, it would be beneficial if the aim was to bring out some of the subtleties in the interpretation. But since the aim of this project is to argue for a comprehensive interpretation, and this text is largely consistent with my interpretation, inclusion in the present work is unnecessary.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

The present chapter will provide the background to Sartre's presentation of his theory of alienation in *Being and Nothingness*. The context in which the theory of alienation emerges is the "problem of others" and recent philosophical efforts to escape "solipsism." Sartre's approach to the problem resembles that of Edmund Husserl in the fifth of the *Cartesian Mediations*. Sartre, however, explicitly criticizes Husserl among others for supposedly failing to establish the relation to others in terms of being rather than knowledge. The rejection of knowledge in favor of existence is a theme that runs through the whole text of *Being and Nothingness*, and it can help to illustrate some of the central ideas of Sartre's philosophy. But most importantly, it will allow us to understand both the criticism of his predecessors and the theory of Others proposed in "the Look," both of which lead to the theory of alienation.

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of Sartre's ontology in *Being and Nothingness*. This is accomplished through a discussion of the basic relation between being in-itself and being for-itself, a discussion of Sartre's efforts to distinguish knowledge and existence, and finally, a discussion of Sartre's concept of the "self" understood in terms of "possibilities" as a consequence of the ontological claims in the preceding sections .

The second part provides an overview of the problem of others, first as it appears in the fifth of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, then, as it is criticized by Sartre, along with his criticisms of Heidegger and Hegel, for failing to overcome the errors of idealism. I

will show the results of these criticisms in the criteria Sartre enumerates for a valid theory of Others. Finally, the last part of this chapter, shows how Sartre intends to establish the fundamental relation to others in terms of being rather than knowledge through his theory of “the Look.”

Preliminary Considerations

The first part of this chapter provides some of the basic ideas in the philosophy of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*. Specifically, the primary distinction between being in-itself and being for-itself is explained in the first section, followed by a discussion of the rejection of the primacy of knowledge in the second section, and finally, a discussion of the “self” of being for-itself in the last section.

Being In-itself and For-itself

Sartre’s ontology begins with Husserl’s thesis of the intentionality of consciousness: consciousness is consciousness *of* something. “This means,” Sartre says, “that there is no consciousness which is not a positing of a transcendent object.”¹ This can be formulated in positive terms as follows: consciousness *is* this relationship to a transcendent object. The text of *Being and Nothingness* is an investigation of this fundamental relationship of consciousness to the world. The terms of the relation expressed in the principle of intentionality refer to two types of being: being in-itself and being for-itself. The relationship is not symmetrical, however. Consciousness depends in its being on the being of the phenomenon. The transphenomenal being of the object,

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), li.

however, does not depend on its appearing to consciousness. This is what Sartre refers to as being in-itself.

Being in-itself is independent from the consciousness of transcendent objects. If the objects of consciousness were created by consciousness, this would mean that consciousness existed prior to the relationship. Since this is not possible, the object must exist prior to this relation; if consciousness exists only to the extent that it posits an object and the object is not created by a pre-existing consciousness (which would be consciousness of nothing), it must *have been* prior to relation in which consciousness emerges as such. Sartre thus believes that if one affirms the intentional principle of consciousness, then one is committed to this “ontological proof”: that there is being independent of the knowledge (consciousness) we have of it.² Sartre claims being in-itself simply *is*, and nothing can be said about it other than *that it is*. To say more than this would be to smuggle in a conscious witness that had been previously ruled out.

There is a more fundamental point about being in-itself however, that can be derived from the principle of intentionality without saying anything more than that *it is*. The in-itself is not being for-itself. The object of consciousness is *other than* the consciousness to which it appears. Consciousness *is* the very emergence of the distinction between these two “regions” of being. Consciousness is the distinction from being in-itself and among things in themselves. To imagine objects independent of a witness is impossible. For instance, the distinction between houses on a street becomes imperceptible from a high altitude. Without presupposing a conscious subject who walks

² “Consciousness is consciousness of something. This means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is, that consciousness is born supported by a being which is not itself. This is what we call the ontological proof.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, lxi.

the street and flies overhead, there would be no point from which such a distinction would be meaningful.³

Being for-itself is this “decompression” of being in-itself. Consciousness is the negation of the in-itself in the sense that in every relation to an object, consciousness exists only as the awareness of the object and (of) itself as *not being* the object. It is in this sense of *not being*, of negation, that consciousness is *nothingness*. To say that it is nothing is not to say that it does not exist, but that its being is negative in relation to that which *is* in-itself.

There are an additional set of terms that can add some detail to what Sartre means by being in-itself and being for-itself in connection with this idea of negation and of distinction mentioned previously. The distinction between two things, as they appear to a witness, is what Sartre refers to as an *external* negation. An external negation is a form of relation between two things. They exist in a relation of exteriority. The “being” of the chair across from the desk is indifferent to where it is placed. There is only a relation between the two elements in so far as the witness posits them. An internal negation is different in that it affects the terms of the relation in their being. The negation of the in-itself by which consciousness exists is an *internal* negation, because the relation conditions the being of the terms. Since the for-itself is *not* the object of which it is conscious, it exists through the relation to things that it is not. Its existence depends on this relation and its existence is not indifferent to the other term. To conclude this point, relations of exteriority are indifferent and relations of interiority are not. A relation of

³ This is Sartre’s point made in the discussion of “destruction.” Something cannot be destroyed without supposing the point of view of a conscious subject. There would be two different arrangements of being. But even to say they were different arrangements would be saying too much. There would be an arrangement of being, that is all.

interiority exists to the extent that one of the terms is aware of its own existence as a relation to the object. This “self-awareness” is not, however, the same thing as awareness of objects.⁴ To understand this distinction we must consider how knowledge of objects differs from consciousness (of) self.

Existence and Knowledge

The relation between consciousness and its objects is a relation of knowledge. But consciousness is being for-itself; it exists only as a relating to an object that is other than itself. If being for-itself also involves a “relation” to itself, this relation cannot be explained in terms of a relation between subject and a object. Sartre had already rejected idealist explanations of the being of phenomena as seen above in the “ontological proof.” The errors of this view become clear once it is asked how such an idealist theory would explain the existence of consciousness. Such a view claims that “to know is to know that one knows,”⁵ but each knowing consciousness would need in turn to be known in order to be secured existentially (which for Sartre’s idealist means: epistemologically). For Sartre, all knowing consciousnesses are *positional* in relation to the object posited.⁶ If consciousness were then required to *know itself* in order to *exist*, it would be necessary to posit consciousness as an object through an act of reflection. But a reflective consciousness, like any consciousness, exists only in the relating to a transcendent object.

⁴ In the discussion that follows, consciousness of self, self awareness, etc., are being used informally, not to be mistaken to mean that there is a “substantial self.” In the present context, “self” refers only to the act of consciousness, (there is in fact no such thing as an isolated act of consciousness, as Sartre explains later, in the discussion of temporality).

⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, lii.

⁶ Sartre does not hold that all consciousness is knowing-consciousness: “Not all consciousness is knowledge (there are states of affective consciousness, for example), but all knowing consciousness can be knowledge only of its object.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, liii. The consciousness of the Other will in fact be an affective consciousness (of self).

The transcendent object, in this case, a prior consciousness does not need to be “secured” in terms of knowledge, precisely because it is not an in-itself. As being for-itself it exists as an awareness of objects, and awareness of objects is an internal negation of the object. Consciousness does not need to reflect on itself in order to exist. There is no distinction between its existence and appearance. Just as the in-itself *is* prior to the positional consciousness of the object, reflective consciousness is dependent on a prior consciousness that it takes for its own object.⁷ There is a prejudice in favor of relations of knowledge that are imported to explain the awareness consciousness has of its own existence, and this is what Sartre is trying to disprove when he says “there must be an immediate, non-cognitive [i.e., non-positional] relation of the self to itself.”⁸

Consciousness does not need to establish a positional relation to itself as an object in order to *exist*. But unlike the existence of the in-itself, which exists independent of the knowledge we have of it, the being of consciousness is for-itself. Its existence appears for itself only through its awareness of objects, as has already been mentioned. Consciousness is aware of itself *through* its awareness of objects, and in a manner different *from* its awareness of objects.⁹ The “immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself” must be non-positional. Sartre formulates the whole relation in the following manner: “every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-

⁷ On this point, Sartre is no different than Husserl. See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book*, trans. Fred Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 99.

⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, lii-liii.

⁹ “The reduction of consciousness to knowledge in fact involves our introducing into consciousness the subject-object dualism which is typical of knowledge.” Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, lii.

positional consciousness of itself.”¹⁰ In order to avoid some of the confusion that has persisted on this point, the whole relation could be formulated also in this manner: it is *non-positional consciousness* (of) self as *positional consciousness* of objects.¹¹

This awareness or non-positional consciousness (of) self is not independent from the positional consciousness of the object, but appears along with every such positional act. It does not violate the principle of intentionality that consciousness is *of something*, but adds another aspect to it, that it is aware of being such a relation. There is no reason, in Sartre’s view, for holding the objective forms of knowledge or reflective consciousness in priority to the pre-reflective awareness (of) self that *must* accompany every conscious act.

It would be a mistake to claim that Sartre is claiming that consciousness is *unaware* of itself, but it would be equally mistaken to claim that he believes consciousness *knows* itself. For Sartre, the existence of consciousness is to be aware of

¹⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, liii.

¹¹ Barnes’ translation indicates “‘Since English syntax does not require the ‘of,’ I shall henceforth freely translate conscience (de) soi as ‘self-consciousness.’” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, liv) And yet Barnes places the parenthetical (of) in between Sartre’s other forms of conscious awareness which seems inconsistent. Instead of rendering ‘conscience de plaisir’ as pleasure-consciousness, which is what consistency would require even though it might be awkward, she refers to it as ‘consciousness (of) pleasure.’ This gives the uneven impression of Sartre’s use of this parenthetical construction ‘(of)’ despite the footnote to the contrary. This is not to fault Barnes, since Sartre is himself far from consistent, as in the same discussion he refers to the ‘immediate unreflective consciousness of pleasure’ as ‘conscience de plaisir’, and in the next sentence, he writes ‘conscience (de) plaisir.’ Catalano says non-positional consciousness (of) self should be represented like this: (self) consciousness. Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1985), 32–33, 96–99. While this is definitely better than “‘self-consciousness,” it shows the focus is on avoiding a positing of the self which is not really the main point (though it is a point). Would Catalano propose the above passage to be rendered as (pleasure) consciousness? Perhaps he would, but it would be best to leave it simply as it was written. Consistently using consciousness (of) self could have avoided some of the confusion that seems to persist concerning what Sartre is saying in this section of the text. For discussion of this confusion, see note 14 below .

itself existing.¹² The difficulty with appreciating Sartre's argument is due to the prejudice of knowledge as the only form of awareness, or as he puts it, "the reduction of consciousness to knowledge."¹³ If one identified (self) awareness with knowledge, the formula "consciousness (of) self as consciousness of something other than itself," could be mistaken to mean "that one does not fully know oneself," or "that one only knows oneself to the extent that it is reflected upon." But the point of Sartre's argument here is rather that consciousness is aware (of) itself as consciousness of something else, and this awareness (of) self is of a different order than its awareness of the object.¹⁴ In order to

¹² "the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of something." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, liv.

¹³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, lii

¹⁴ Kathleen Wider's discussion of Sartre's "by now famous example of...cigarette counting" is a case in point of misreading Sartre's intent. Concerning this example, she says that "I am positionally conscious of the cigarettes and their number, but I am *only* non-positionally conscious of my counting the cigarettes," as if the non-positional awareness were somehow *less than* its counter-part. She continues in saying we are "*explicitly aware* of the *cigarettes*, but only *implicitly* or *latently aware* of the *activity* of counting." The absurdity of this interpretation should be obvious from what it requires: "if asked what I were doing, I could reply 'I'm counting cigarettes.' In other words, *if I were to reflect on what I was doing, I would be explicitly aware of my present state or activity or object of consciousness.*" Kathleen V. Wider, "Through the Looking Glass: Sartre on Knowledge and the Pre-Reflective Cogito," *Man and World* 22, no. 3 (1989): 331; emphasis mine. It is wrong to say that in order to answer the question "what are you doing" that I must "reflect on what I was doing," in order to "*be explicitly aware of my present state or activity.*" For one thing, I would no longer be counting, and my "present state or activity" would be answering the question. I would not need to *reflect* on my answering activity in order to be *conscious of* my answering activity. In some activities, perhaps, one would need to reflect on what one is doing, but nothing must be gained by reflection *in this example* because counting *is* a conscious activity. When Wider says "I am positionally conscious of the cigarettes and their number," this is a clue. How else could I be *conscious of their number* if I was not aware of counting as *the unifying theme* of my activity? Whether other examples (activities unlike counting) fit Sartre's description is not the point, the point is that this example, and those like it, must be understood as we have argued. In case there remained any doubt, the point is made in TE in plain terms: "if someone asks me what are you doing, and I reply all preoccupied, I am trying to hang this picture...these statements *do not* transport us to the level of reflection." Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. Forest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1988), 89; my emphasis. For related misunderstandings of this point, see Dorothy Leland, "The Sartrean Cogito: A Journey Between Versions," *The existentialists: critical essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre* (2004): 158–159.

posit an object in distinction from itself, consciousness is aware of itself as existing this distinction. This is what it means to be for-itself; it exists as consciousness (of) existing.¹⁵

The Self and Possibilities

Consciousness is conscious (of) itself as consciousness *of* something. But what is the “self” (of) which it is non-positionally conscious? Sartre rejects the idea that a substantial self inhabits consciousness; but he also refers to pre-reflective consciousness as a self, though not in the manner it is usually understood.¹⁶ Unlike the pure coincidence or identity characteristic of the in-itself, the for-itself is characterized as existing as “presence to itself.”¹⁷ Presence to self is a characteristic of a being that “is what it is not and is not what it is,” as Sartre puts it. It is to exist in a manner of “not being his own coincidence” and “of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium.”¹⁸ It is “presence” in

¹⁵ This section can be supported by the claims found in the other works published around the same time by Sartre, for instance, in the *Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre says plainly that “consciousness of consciousness...is not positional...consciousness is not for itself its own object. Its object is by nature outside of it...consciousness posits and grasps the object in the same act...We shall call such a consciousness: a consciousness in the first degree, or unreflected consciousness.” Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 41. See also Jean-Paul Sartre, “Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self,” in *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, ed. Nathaniel Morris Lawrence and Daniel Denis O’Connor (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), 120–143.. The exception would appear to be in *The Imaginary*, in which Sartre seems to draw a distinction between non-thetic consciousness and non-positional consciousness, whereas in *Being and Nothingness* he uses these terms interchangeably. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. Jonathan Webber (New York: Routledge, 2004), 161–162..

¹⁶ “pre-reflective consciousness is consciousness (of) self. It is this same notion of self which must be studied for it defines the very being of consciousness.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 76; (translation slightly modified).

¹⁷ “The law of being of the for-itself as the ontological foundation of consciousness is to be itself in the form of presence to itself.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 77.

¹⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 77.

the sense that the self exists “at a distance from itself.”¹⁹ The for-itself exists as a presence to a self that is always an “elsewhere.” This self that is elsewhere is not, Sartre insists, the self of an Other. It is the self that the for-itself is not.²⁰ Sartre aims to explain this self that is at a distance and yet presence to itself in terms of the negation at the source of the existence of being for-itself.

Earlier we saw that the for-itself depends on the in-itself for its being, because it is the nihilation of the in-itself. This means “that it determines its being by means of a being which it is not.”²¹ This is what characterized an internal negation, as opposed to an external negation distinguishing two things from outside. “Lack” is the name given to the internal negation by which the for-itself exists as a nihilation of the in-itself.²² “Lack” is the way the for-itself exists as a presence to itself.²³ The Lack referred to here involves three terms, according to Sartre: an existent, the lacking, and the lacked. The existent is lacking that which it needs in order to be whole, and it is this whole that is lacked.²⁴ These terms can be better understood by making a brief detour into the phenomenology of Husserl. The theory of selfness that Sartre offers in these terms stands in relation to his

¹⁹ “The being of consciousness qua consciousness is to exist at a distance from itself as a presence to itself, and this empty distance which being carries in its being is Nothingness. Thus in order for a self to exist, it is necessary that the unity of this being include its own nothingness as the nihilation of identity. For the nothingness which slips into belief is its nothingness, the nothingness of belief as belief in itself...The for-itself is the being which determines itself to exist inasmuch as it can not coincide with itself.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 78.

²⁰ “It is the obligation of the for-itself never to exist except in the form of an elsewhere in relation to itself, to exist as a being which perpetually effects in itself a break in being. This break does not refer us elsewhere to another being; it is only a perpetual reference of self to self.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 78)

²¹ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 86.

²² “Of all internal negations, the one which penetrates most deeply into being, the one which constitutes in its being the being concerning which it makes the denial along with the being which it denies—this negation is lack.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 86)

²³ “Human reality as for-itself is a lack and what it lacks is a certain coincidence with itself.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 95.

²⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 88.

theory of alienated possibilities in the same way that Husserl's theory of perception stands in relation to his own theory of the alter ego.²⁵ Considering both in conjunction will provide the background necessary for the sections to follow and allow us to see the similarities in anticipation of the later discussion.

According to Husserl, it is essential to the perception of spatial objects that they appear in profile; this means the manner of givenness of perceptual objects is one-sided.²⁶ The perception of a spatial object involves the actual presence to consciousness of the side intended; but the side actually present to consciousness also presents itself as perceivable from other sides, and from the side perceived, of being perceivable differently from a different orientation of the subject. Any side thus presents one side as given in immediate, actual presence to consciousness, and at the same time, an infinite number of perceivable sides. The actual presence of the side intended indicates the other sides as an appresentation, a manner of being present in their absence. To say that there is a side perceivable from a point of view, over there, is to say that the conscious subject can walk around to the other side. According to Husserl, the decision to do so is left open to the free decision of the conscious subject.²⁷ If, for instance, the front of a building motivates empty intentions to the next side, there is another side able to be perceived. But

²⁵ This point has support in Theunissen, *The Other*, 46: "The difference [in Husserl's phenomenology] between what is originally present and what is appresent lays the foundation upon which the transcendental theory of intersubjectivity will be constructed." And in Theunissen's view Sartre offers "a more original repetition of the Husserlian account. For, in the conclusively decisive positions of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre goes back to the perceptual world established by Husserl as the foundation...So the model that Sartre adopts as the basis of his social ontology is then also wholly and entirely determined by the perspectival spatiality of the perceptual world." (399-400n12)

²⁶ Husserl, *Ideas book I*, 90-92.

²⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 45-48.

if, upon walking around, it is discovered that the other side is not there, that it is an illusion, this intuition is also given to consciousness as the correlate of actualizing the absence of the expected side. There is a correlation then between the perceivability of the sides not themselves present, but appresented, and the possible consciousness which will be made actual upon filling in the empty intention.

I will return to this doctrine of Husserl in a later section of this chapter. The purpose at the moment is to indicate how this is significant to Sartre's theory of "presence to self." For Sartre, the terms that are involved in the characterization of being for-itself as "lack," are value and the possible. Value, that which is lacked, is the totality of all possible (intentional) acts, in Husserl's terms. The object is the infinite series of adumbrations that are never to be actualized in fact. Value is the totality of the for-itself if it were to be identical with itself. That which is lacking, that which is not immediate presence or actuality for consciousness, is the possible.²⁸ The possible refers to a possible for-itself, in the same manner as for Husserl a possible perception refers to a possible conscious intending of that other side, and the unity of the Ego is the unity of the actual and potential subjective processes.

The result of this discussion is to provide a restricted account of the self. The following must be noted. First, the for-itself beyond the given, beyond the present, towards which the for-itself projects itself, is not an anonymous, impersonal self.²⁹ It is

²⁸ "the peculiar lack of each for-itself and what is strictly defined as lacking for this for-itself and *no other* is the possibility of the for-itself." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 96.

²⁹ This is a point of disagreement between the theory in *Transcendence of the Ego*, and *Being and Nothingness*. Or rather, it is possible that in this section of the text ("The Circuit of Selfness") that when Sartre says that he will not repeat his argument from *Transcendence of the Ego*, he intends to clarify a possible misinterpretation in which the unreflective consciousness is not "personal" and is made personal by a second level of consciousness, on the level of reflection.

not “anyone” or the “they” but it is “my possible” provided this is not misunderstand to be the object of an explicit thesis.³⁰ The possible is my possible, and the world surpassed toward my possible is mine, “the world by nature is mine in so far as it is the correlative in-itself of a nothingness; that is, of the necessary obstacle beyond which I find myself as that which I am in the form of ‘having to be it.’”³¹ This is not the object of a thesis. It is not “known” as mine, but the world has the character of “my-ness.”³²

This world is the totality of instruments that are encountered by the for-itself.³³ Any individualized “thing” in the world can be such an instrument, provided it “points beyond it to tasks to be performed which make known to it what it has to be.”³⁴ The for-itself is always beyond itself towards a possible for-itself that is lacking. But the for-itself projects this possible for-itself (that it is not) beyond the given, and the givens are the

But, it seems clear enough that he identifies "unreflective" with "impersonal" in TE: "unless this consciousness of unpleasantness turns back on itself in order to posit itself as an unpleasant state, we will remain indefinitely in the impersonal and un-reflected." Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 57. And yet, while he claims that consciousness is necessarily my own (“A consciousness cannot conceive of consciousness other than itself,” 96) he also claims that consciousness, once the Ego is eliminated as the 'source' of consciousness, is impersonal: “our thesis: transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity. It determines its existence at each instant, without our being able to conceive of anything before it.” (98) What is the meaning of impersonal if consciousness is indeclinable?

³⁰ “The possible which is my possible is a possible for-itself and as such a presence to the in-itself as consciousness of the in-itself. What I seek in the face of the world is the coincidence with a for-itself which I am and which is consciousness of the world.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 104.

³¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 104.

³² This point in the text is by no means clear: “the world's belonging to the person is never posited on the level of the pre-reflective cogito. It would be absurd to say that the world as it is known is known as mine. Yet this quality of ‘my-ness’ in the world is a fugitive structure, always present, a structure which I live. The world (is) mine because it is haunted by possibles, and the consciousness of each of these is a possible self-consciousness which I am; it is these possibles as such which give the world its unity and its meaning as the world.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 104.

³³ “The order of instruments in the world is the image of my possibilities projected in the in-itself, i.e., the image of what I am.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 200.

³⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 200

instruments of the world, the world as an “obstacle.” An obstacle does not present to the for-itself another side, present but absent, as in Husserl's doctrine of adumbrations; instead it presents itself as useful *for something*—as having a transcendence toward which it points. A full glass of water, for instance, is useful for satisfying thirst. In Sartre's view, it is also an obstacle to the satisfaction of thirst. It is an obstacle because it must be transcended—surpassed or overcome—in order to be used. The point here of using the term ‘obstacle’ is not that the glass stands in the way of the satisfaction of desires, but that instruments and obstacles only make sense in light of a projected end. And to use some instrument is to overcome or surpass its character as an instrument toward something else. In short, to satisfy thirst, the glass as full of water must be overcome. The possible toward which it is surpassed is a possible for-itself “drinking from the glass” and the present glass is a glass “to be drunk from.” There is no “I” in any of this; but it should not be thought that there is no relation between the consciousness (of) thirst and the consciousness (of) itself as drinking from the glass; the latter is only meaningful in being the project of the first.³⁵ While all this is explained prior to the elucidation of temporality, it will suffice to say that the for-itself does not exist “in the moment,” in the sense of an instant. The unity across time is necessary not just for the reflective cogito but also for the meaning of any project.

To conclude, it is through the instruments in the world that the for-itself finds a self, but this self is not an object of a thesis or positional consciousness. It is not revealed in reflective consciousness, but “on the world”: the “totality of instruments is the exact *correlate* of my possibilities; and as I am my possibilities, the order of instruments in the

³⁵ “the possible is...outlined beyond the world and gives my present perception its meaning as this is apprehended in the world.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 102.

world is the image of my possibilities projected in the in-itself; i.e., the image of what I am. I adapt myself to it in and through action.”³⁶ And the relationship between the for-itself and the world that reveals the for-itself to it-self across the in-itself is the “circuit of selfness.”³⁷

Others

In the determination of the in-itself and the for-itself, Sartre used “idealism” as a foil of sorts in order to present his own theses regarding being in-itself and for-itself. Sartre’s philosophy of existence should be understood as an effort not only to establish the priority of existence over essence, but also to overthrow the primacy of knowledge, and the reduction of consciousness (of) self to knowledge. This technique persists throughout the entire text of *Being and Nothingness*, and is particularly relevant to the discussion of the dimension of being referred to as *being-for-others*.

³⁶ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 200. Consider an example: I am thirsty. My possibility of being consciousness of thirst-being-satisfied organizes an instrumental complex by transcending itself toward itself. I am my thirst, it is not posited by reflective consciousness. The complex organized appears that there is a glass-to-be-drunk-from only because I am thirsty, but my thirst is nothing except the fact that there is a glass to be drunk from. The glass of water appears as both instrument and obstacle; the end to be attained—consciousness of thirst being satisfied—organizes the preceding moments and the whole organization exists only in relation to a free project of my possibilities. Since I am not on the reflective level of consciousness, my possibilities appear to me through the potentiality of instruments, as though they were objective qualities. My “self” does not appear at all.

³⁷ This idea of selfness that precedes the reflective determination of a “self” is consistent with Husserl’s statement in the *Ideas* that “If I am directed to [the *cogitare*], a new cogito is alive, one that, for its part, is not reflected on and thus not objective for me.” (Husserl, *Ideas book 1*, 54; and also: “When living in the cogito we are not conscious of the *cogitatio* itself as an intentional object.” *Ideas book 1*, 78, my emphasis). Compare also with Aron Gurwitsch, “A Non-Egological Conception of Consciousness,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1, no. 3 (1941): 331. “The only consciousness which has an egological structure is the conscious act grasped by reflection, or the act reflected-on, it did not have an egological structure before it was reflected on.” In other words, before it was made the object of an intentional act.

Sartre believes that “if we are to refute solipsism, then my relation to the other is first and fundamentally a relation of being to being, not of knowledge to knowledge.”³⁸ Sartre believes he must refute solipsism in order to explain the totality of relations of being for-itself in the world, and since this world includes the existence of other conscious subjects, this relation must be explored.³⁹ Sartre derives the problem of others, or the difficulty surrounding the explanation of other conscious subjects, most significantly from Husserl’s account of the alter ego in the fifth *Cartesian Meditation*. The problem for both Sartre and Husserl is, in what manner is the Other given in experience, with certainty, as a subject? In this next section, the problem and solution found therein will be discussed,⁴⁰ followed by Sartre’s criticisms of the Husserlian

³⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 244

³⁹ In presenting the problem, Sartre presents the task as one of *refuting* solipsism. Later, as we will see, he seems to say this way of presenting the problem is flawed, since the solipsist cannot be refuted, or rather, that if the solipsist *says* that the other’s existence is doubtful, this can only be words in the same way that someone can say they doubt their own existence. It would be better to understand his agenda as avoiding the “Reef of Solipsism”, which is the titles of the section discussing the problem. A reef is understood as trap to be avoided, and this is different from a “refutation.” The clarification is necessary given the quote which refers to a “refutation.”

⁴⁰ The status of Husserl’s concern with solipsism seems to have caused some confusion as to what exactly he is up to in the 5th Meditation, or at least, lead to the fact that there has been a great deal of disagreement regarding what he is doing. The presentation below generally follows the interpretation found in J. N Mohanty, “The Other Culture,” in *Phenomenology of the Cultural Disciplines*, ed. M. Daniel and L. Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 135–146; David Carr, “The ‘Fifth Meditation’ and Husserl’s Cartesianism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 34, no. 1 (1973): 14–35; P. Hutcheson, “Husserl’s Fifth Meditation,” *Man and World* 15 (1982): 265–284; Alfred Schutz, “The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl,” in *Collected papers*, vol. 3 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 51–84.. Schutz, for instance, described the Fifth *Cartesian Meditation* as “Husserl’s attempt to develop a transcendental theory of experiencing Others (empathy) as the foundation for a transcendental theory of the objective world.” This would be accomplished by explicating the sense constitution of “alter-ego.” Schutz, “The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl,” 55. But he also claims that the danger of solipsism appears only on the occasion that Husserl tries to defend against it.

solution, as well as the solutions of Hegel and Heidegger. This part concludes with an overview of the criteria Sartre believes must be satisfied by a valid theory of Others.

Husserl's Fifth Meditation

Why is the alter ego a problem for phenomenology? Sartre somewhat misrepresents the problem in presenting the issue as proving the *existence* of others. To inquire as to the existence of others already presupposes the sense of an ego (or, consciousness) *other than* my own; it is precisely the problem of how a consciousness that is not my own can *make sense* that is the phenomenological problem for Husserl. The alter ego becomes a problem more specifically for Husserl given the results of the phenomenological reduction, since the phenomenological reduction “restricts me to the stream of my pure conscious processes and the unities constituted by their actualities and potentialities.” We can simplify the terms to say that these unities are objects of consciousness, and that “such unities are inseparable from my ego.”⁴¹ Anything at all that appears in the reduced sphere appears necessarily as a an actual or potential correlate to pure consciousness. Conscious processes are as such necessarily *mine*, there is no *sense* of conscious processes that are not originally present. Husserl senses the need to explain how the sense “other conscious subjects” can be constituted in the reduced sphere, in order to forestall the possible objection that he cannot escape solipsism.⁴²

⁴¹ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 89

⁴² The problem for Husserl, in the course of the *Meditations*, is that if the sense of “other conscious subjects” cannot be constituted in the transcendental sphere, the project of phenomenology as capable of dealing with objective problems in a transcendental manner will be put in jeopardy. “The objection concerns nothing less than the claim of transcendental phenomenology to be itself transcendental philosophy and therefore its claim that, in the form of a constitutional problematic and theory moving within the limits of the transcendentially reduced ego, it can solve the transcendental problems pertaining to the Objective world.”

So the difficulty involved in constituting the sense “alter ego” takes the form that consciousness must be *for itself* an original presence, and the only *sense* of an *other* original presence, i.e., not actual, would be an original presence that is possible, i.e., of mine. Any and all consciousness has the sense of being my own, whereas an alter ego is an ego that is *other*. When we consider other conscious subjects, Husserl says,

neither the other Ego himself, nor his subjective processes or his appearances themselves, nor anything else belonging to his own essence, becomes given in our experience originally. If it were, if what belongs to the other's own essence were directly accessible, it would be merely a moment of my own essence, and ultimately he himself and I myself would be the same.⁴³

Since any “original sphere” will become “mine” by virtue of being given “originally,” the question becomes for Husserl how the other can be given in experience as an *other conscious subject*, and without concealing an identification of the other’s ego as simply another potential consciousness of my own. The problem involves the manners of givenness of phenomena, and we have already seen that the perception of objects involves an actual presence to consciousness and a possible presence that is absent but able to be made present.⁴⁴ This account of “appresentation” encounters its own problem when dealing with the issue of the alter ego.

Husserl does not believe that the alter ego can be conceived according to the doctrine of appresentation as it occurs in typical perception, because there, potentialities

Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 89. This follows from the fact that the sense “alter-ego” is necessary in constituting the sense “objective world”: “The existence sense of the world...includes...thereness-for-everyone. This is always cointended when we speak of Objective actuality.” Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 92. It is worth noting that Sartre, among others, claims the Husserl shows that the Other is necessary for the objectivity of the world, in a manner that would seem to imply that Husserl proves others through the objectivity of the world. This seems to be the opposite of what he is claiming, as far as I can tell.

⁴³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 109.

⁴⁴ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 61-62.

refer to the possibility of verification. But the verification of the other side, as it were, is what is ruled out on principle for the alter ego, since if it were brought to original, i.e., actual presence, it would become my own.⁴⁵

The problem demands a solution, according to Husserl, that employs a mediated form “of intentionality...which nevertheless is not itself there and can never become an ‘itself-there’.”⁴⁶ There must be a form of appresentation which cannot be brought to actual presence, or rather, a form of presentation that is appropriate to something being incapable of fulfillment in the manner of being given originally; it must have its own “style” of verification if it does not fit with the appresentation of objects in perception. This “verification” involves two prior moments, an “analogizing apperception” (or appresentation) and a “pairing” synthesis.⁴⁷

The pairing synthesis is a passive synthesis, distinguished from a synthesis of identification. By providing a synthesis other than identification, Husserl can avoid the problem of the “identification” with one’s own ego. Pairing occurs with the appearance in perception of an animate organism *similar* to my own animate organism.⁴⁸ Once the pair becomes “prominent,” in other words once it is clear that there is a prominent similarity, the other’s animate organism is transferred the sense of conscious life, and the ego

⁴⁵ “Appresentation [in the constitution of primordial Nature] involves the possibility of verification by a corresponding fulfilling presentation (the back becomes the front); whereas, in the case of that appresentation which would lead over into the other original sphere, such verification must be excluded a priori. How can appresentation of another original sphere, and thereby the sense ‘someone else,’ be motivated in my original sphere and, in fact, motivated as experience as the word ‘appresentation’ (making intended as co-present) already indicates?” Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 109.

⁴⁶ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 109.

⁴⁷ I have skipped over the issue of the “sphere of ownness” but the result of this “second reduction,” namely the constitution of my own animate organism, will be discussed briefly below.

⁴⁸ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 112-113.

receives the sense “perceived object” from the other animate organism.⁴⁹ Finally, since there is a similarity and not a pure identification, the other animate organism exists independently, not as simply another animate organism of my own.⁵⁰ This means the animate organism of the other shows itself to be governing over its own animate organism.⁵¹ The pairing makes possible the appresentation of the ego *through* the perception of a body apprehended as “similar” to the animate organism that is always present as the lived body.⁵²

The scholarly interest in Husserl’s account of the alter ego would be impossible to exhaust in this context, but there is one type of criticism that must be mentioned, since it bears similarity with the criticism made by Sartre. The criticisms at issue here are those that take issue with the reliance on a *perception of similarity*. Sartre will criticize this reliance for appealing to perception of an object *as such*. But even Husserl’s most sympathetic critics have pointed out the flaws in the approach based on a perceptual similarity. Eugen Fink, in the discussion of Alfred Schutz’s paper on the subject, claimed that “the character of the Other encountered in the mode of the opposite, complementary sex cannot be understood by virtue of an appresentation which extends, analogically, the

⁴⁹ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 113.

⁵⁰ “The second fundamental characteristic of the apperception in question plays a part here: that none of the appropriated sense specific to an animate organism can become actualized originally in my primordial sphere.” Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 113.

⁵¹ “The experienced animate organism of another continues to prove itself as actually an animate organism, solely in its changing but incessantly harmonious ‘behavior.’ Such harmonious behavior (as having a physical side that indicates something psychic appresentatively) must present itself fulfillingly in original experience, and do so throughout the continuous change in behavior from phase to phase. The organism becomes experienced as a pseudo-organism, precisely if there is something discordant about its behavior.” Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 114.

⁵² “the Other’s animate body and his governing Ego are given in the manner that characterizes a unitary transcending experience.” Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 114.

ways and the functioning of my body to the body of the Other.”⁵³ Fink presumably refers here to the perceptual dissimilarity from the “complementary sex” or different “functioning of the body” therein. But it seems that this somewhat misses Husserl’s point, if we ask the following question: what exactly is the similarity between the animate organisms?

It is not clear in Husserl’s fifth *Meditation* that the similarity of *bodies* does anymore than pair the two in such a way that a process of verification can begin. This seems to be a very low level of similarity to require for the process to begin. Husserl does not say that animate organism appears with a face, two eyes, two arms, or the sexual organs Fink might have in mind. Would the silhouette of a human body, without features, be sufficient to become “prominent”? Husserl does not address any of this in so many words. But it seems that he must mean that it is the overall style of animation that allows for the similarity between the other animate organism and one’s own. Not, in other words, the specific attributes of the body or even the functioning of the specific organs that Fink might have in mind, but the overall style. This interpretation is supported by Husserl’s remarks on the restriction to the sphere of what is “one’s own,” from which the

⁵³ This point is made by Eugen Fink, in discussion with Alfred Schutz. Fink concludes from this point that “In a certain way, Husserl’s analysis remains caught in the reduplication of the ego. Even though he sees this danger, he does not succeed in overcoming it methodically.” Schutz responds to this criticism as follows: “Are we then in agreement or not? Fink: Yes, completely in agreement.” (Schutz 1966, 84) In addition, Schutz’ essay on BN claims that Sartre has adopted Husserl’s view on the body, and is highly critical of this aspect of Sartre’s discussion of Others; and yet, he claims in the essay on Husserl and Intersubjectivity, that Sartre had noticed the dissimilarity of the way the body is for-itself from the way of the Other’s body appears to us (and it is not the body for-others that is the second dimension, for the Other’s body is where we get the idea of the body lived as for- others, in its third dimension). See Schutz, “The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl,” 64–65; Alfred Schutz, “Sartre’s Theory of the Alter Ego,” *Philosophy and phenomenological research* (1948): 190–192.

animate organism is explicated.⁵⁴ He refers there mainly to such “animate” elements:

The first determinate content obviously must be formed by the understanding of the other's organism and *specifically organismal conduct*: the understanding of the members as hands groping or functioning in pushing, as feet functioning in walking, as eyes functioning in seeing, and so forth. With this the Ego *at first* is determined *only as governing thus somatically* and, *in a familiar manner, proves himself continually, so far as the whole stylistic form of the sensible processes manifest* to me primordially must correspond to the form whose type is familiar from my own organismal governing.⁵⁵

It is not *that* the hand has five fingers, or the body has two eyes, but *what they can do* that is important; it is the fact that they “can do” the same thing as is familiar from the point of view of “my ownness.” By this phrase “what they can do” it should not be understood that the focus is on the “what” in the sense of their object correlate but on the unity in their relation with the world.⁵⁶ It is “the doing” (Husserl says “conduct”) that seems to be the data that become paired and which form the basis of the similarity between bodies in which the transfer of the sense animate organism and other conscious subjects can take place.⁵⁷ But since the continual confirmation of the body governing “somatically” corresponds to the object given in profiles, the similarity does indeed refer to an object,

⁵⁴ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 97.

⁵⁵ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 119-120 (my emphasis).

⁵⁶ “Included in my peculiar ownness, I then find my animate organism as uniquely singled out namely as the only one of them that is not just a body but precisely an animate organism...the only Object ‘in’ which I ‘rule and govern’ immediately, governing particularly in each of its ‘organs.’ Touching kinesthetically, I perceive ‘with’ my hands; seeing kinesthetically, I perceive also ‘with; my eyes; and so forth; moreover I can perceive thus at any time.” Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 97.

⁵⁷ “The first determinate content obviously must be formed by the understanding of the other's organism and specifically organismal conduct: the understanding of the members as hands groping or functioning in pushing, as feet functioning in walking, as eyes functioning in seeing, and so forth. With this the Ego at first is determined only as governing thus somatically and, in a familiar manner, proves himself continually, so far as the whole stylistic form of the sensible processes manifest to me primordially must correspond to the form whose type is familiar from my own organismal governing.” Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 119–120.

but not the body by itself, but a body independent from “me” and unpredictable to the extent that it governs itself.

The relevance of all this for Sartre’s account of the encounter with others is as follows. The unity of the Ego depends on the stream of actual and possible consciousness, and on the sense of what “can” be done. The other, if the interpretation above is correct, is given through the perceptual similarity of a body being governed similarly according to what it can do, similar to what “I can do,” and the fact that this is independent from me. For Sartre, the other will also be given through this dimension of what can be done, but different in two respects. First, the perception of an object is deemed unnecessary for this purpose according to Sartre. Second, for Husserl, in order for an other to prove itself independent, it must be resistant, it must be *in opposition* to consciousness, and not in the manner of things in the world. And in order to continuously prove itself independent it must not be discordant. Sartre tries to offer an experience of the Other that reveals what the other “can do” as a modification of what I “can do.”⁵⁸ And it is a sort of “discordance” that reveals the Other for Sartre, rather than disconfirms as it would for Husserl. The discord does not apply to the Other’s conduct, however, but to the way my own conduct is modified by the presence of an Other conscious subject.

⁵⁸ What might be the opposite of the “fulfillment” of the “appresentation” that occurs in the somatic governing that is continually proven, as the quote in the previous note mentions? Perhaps something that appears like human conduct which turns out to be an illusion or mistaken perception, and perhaps the result is like that described in Freud’s “Uncanny”.

Sartre's Criticisms of Husserl and Others

All of Sartre's criticisms of Husserl's account of the alter ego follow from the distinction of being in-itself from being for-itself,⁵⁹ and from the criticism of idealism and the primacy of knowledge.⁶⁰ According to Sartre, Husserl's theory fails because he has proposed a relation to the other in terms of knowledge and beginning from the perception of an other body (object). This fails for two reasons, each pertaining to the above-mentioned distinctions.

First, Sartre believes Husserl's solution fails since it is based on the perception of an object. The alter ego, or another for-itself (for Sartre), is not the same being as an object of perception, i.e., it is not in-itself. To be fair, Husserl was well aware of both the distinction between the sort of being of mental processes and those of "spatial" objects. And the problem in the fifth *Meditation* followed precisely from the manner of being of the Ego, in the sense that to be given in original presence, a mental process has the sense of being "my own." But Sartre does not think that the solution matches an acknowledgment of these factors.⁶¹

Second, one of the consequences of this distinction is that consciousness and existence are simultaneous and prior to knowledge. It is the existence of consciousness as consciousness (of) existing that makes possible the knowledge obtained in reflection. But that knowledge is not "probable." Sartre claims that Husserl can only offer *probable knowledge* about the alter ego, because he begins with the other as an object of

⁵⁹ As seen in the section above: Being In-itself and For-itself.

⁶⁰ As seen in the section above: Existence and Knowledge.

⁶¹ This is a paraphrase of the criticism, Sartre does not give Husserl as much credit as the above might lead one to believe. The point in Sartre's criticisms is not whether Sartre is accurate with respect to Husserl (or anyone else for that matter) but why he thinks he is accurate, and what exactly he is trying to say in opposition.

perception. Probable knowledge is inadequate, he claims, to eliminate the possibility of doubting the other's existence. The other's existence must be *indubitable*, if one is to escape solipsism. Sartre concludes that Husserl maintains

that the Other's existence is as sure as that of the world, and Husserl includes in the world my psycho-physical existence. But the solipsist says the same thing: it is as sure, he will say, but no more sure. The existence of the world is measured, he will add, by the knowledge which I have of it; the case will not be otherwise for the existence of the Other.⁶²

Sartre believes that Husserl is to be grouped among the "idealists" who "measure being by knowledge" in contrast to his own theory in which knowledge is replaced with being. As discussed above, Sartre claimed that it was not necessary that consciousness *know* itself in order to be *aware* of itself. Knowledge is not the standard for the existence of a being that is for-itself. Knowledge is a relation to the in-itself. The relation to *another for-itself* must be explained as a relation of existence in the same way that to exist and to be conscious (of) existing are different expressions for the mode of being for-itself. What Sartre criticizes in Husserl is the primacy of knowledge. There must be an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to *the other*, as with the relation of consciousness to itself. Sartre makes this plain: "that each one must be able, by starting out from his own interiority, to rediscover the Other's being as a transcendence which conditions the very being of that interiority."⁶³ But as already indicated in the previous section, Sartre will adopt some of the insights and presuppositions from Husserl's formulation of the problem of Others and attempt to offer a more radical solution.

⁶² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 235

⁶³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 244

In contrast to Husserl, Sartre believes that Hegel had “put the discussion on its true plane.”⁶⁴ The difference between Husserl’s theory of others and Hegel’s theory of others is that the former “measures being by knowledge” and the latter “identifies knowledge and being.”⁶⁵ Hegel identifies knowledge and being by placing the *cogito* at the conclusion of the dialectic of lordship and bondage.⁶⁶ Without getting too far into the details, the main point of the criticism can be seen in what follows. In the account of “lordship and bondage,” the aim is to attain the truth of self-certainty. In order to attain this truth, the self must find this truth not in the consumption of an object and certainty of satisfaction that follows from it, but must get this recognition from a being that likewise exists in relation to things in the same way. The Other and I come into conflict precisely because each is trying to prove that they are independent from material existence. But in order for recognition to be reciprocal, the struggle for life and death must culminate in the negation that preserves what it cancels. Rather than the loser of this contest being killed, or killing each other, the one allows the other to survive as the other gives up the fight.⁶⁷ The relation that results from this is a relation of lordship over the other, who is in

⁶⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 244

⁶⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 244

⁶⁶ The details of this section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* will not be repeated here, other than to say that the struggle for life and death, between the I and the Other that results in lordship and bondage, is necessitated in order to attain the truth of self-certainty. For Sartre, there would be no self to attain the truth were it not already its own truth, or, self-certainty does not require recognition by an other. Later it will be seen that he shifts the emphasis so that selfness is “reinforced” while the Other is made to be other by the same negation that reinforces selfness. Whether this is the same thing as Hegel is not the issue as much as that Sartre does not believe it is the same thing.

⁶⁷ This is the moment of “alienation” in Hegel’s text. By giving up the fight, the loser of this life and death struggle alienates their freedom and independence and become servile to an “alien will.” The implication however is that this proves the bondsman to have judged that freedom was separate or external from his person, i.e., not essential.

bondage, because the latter had shown that they were not free from mere life but clung to it.

Leaving aside what follows after the struggle, where the bondman eventually discovers its being in and for self., we can see in the above overview the reasons for Sartre's rejection of the Hegelian theory. First, and primarily, the (pre-reflective) cogito is not an achievement for Sartre; rather, it is the only way to exist for a being that is for-itself, that is, consciousness (of) self. For Hegel, this self-certainty has no truth until it attains recognition, and this motivates the struggle for life and death. Sartre rejects that there is a need for recognition in order to be certain that one exists. Perhaps there is some attribute of the person that requires recognition in order to be certain of possessing, but the mere fact of existence does not depend on the recognition of another.⁶⁸ Second, since there is no selfness equivalent to the pre-reflective cogito, there can be no Other, in Sartre's view of Hegel's theory, since the Other is the one who is not the self, and lacking a self, there can be no other-self. Third, when known by the Other, we are known in the capacity of an object, and this is still opposed to what I am for myself. Hegel avoids this problem by taking the point of view from the outside, regarding two others and their relation. This is an external negation or a relation of exteriority that determines the distinction between self and other from the point of view of a third party. This is precisely what Sartre rejects in insisting that the point of departure must be the point of view of the consciousness involved in the struggle without reference to an outside party (who would in turn be an Other).

⁶⁸ This will be seen in more explicit terms in the discussion of abstract being for-others and the negations involved in this relation in the following chapter. What Sartre claims is that selfness is reinforced by the reaction to the Other, but the Other must be Other from the start, and this means there must be selfness.

Despite this rejection of Hegel's account of the self-other relation, Sartre believes that Hegel and Heidegger both indicate the correct path to be taken in order to establish the relation to others, since both express this relation in terms of *being*. And while Hegel fails to avoid the idealist identification of knowledge and being, Heidegger proposes this existential relation precisely in opposition to "knowledge."⁶⁹ Heidegger also seems to have the same idea as Sartre in terms of external negation.⁷⁰ Sartre's criticism of Heidegger consists mostly in rejecting the assertion of being-with as a priori to human reality. But this rejection needs to be understood according to what Sartre *thinks* the "being-with" will mean.⁷¹ Sartre believes being-with amounts to *monism*, and he believes a monism collapses into solipsism. And he believes this because Heidegger's account of *Mitsein* holds that Dasein is always already being-with others.⁷² Sartre believes the meaning of being-with is such that it does not include the *opposition* or "conflict" that is contained in the expression "being-for" (others).⁷³ According to Sartre the relation of being-with "is not a frontal opposition but rather an oblique interdependence."⁷⁴ This is because the "who" of everyday Dasein is not "me" but "das man," as reflected in the world of instrumental complexes to be utilized by "anyone."

⁶⁹ "This understanding...is not a knowledge derived from cognition." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ed. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 116.

⁷⁰ "The others are not encountered by grasping and previously discriminating one's own subject, initially objectively present, from other subjects also present." (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 111-112)

⁷¹ And the understanding of Heidegger in this paragraph is also Sartre's understanding of Heidegger.

⁷² "Initially, 'I' 'am' not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the they." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 121. I refer to Heidegger's theory of Others as Sartre does, since that is the reason for the discussion; Sartre refers to it as *Mitsein*, and not as it appears in the English translation cited above, as *Mitdasein*.

⁷³ "The original relation of the Other and my consciousness is not the you and me; it is the we. Heidegger's being-with is not the clear and distinct position of an individual confronting another individual..." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 246.

⁷⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 246.

According to Sartre, for Heidegger, “The unauthentic state—which is my ordinary state in so far as I have not realized my conversion to authenticity—reveals to me my ‘being-with,’ not as the relation of one unique personality with other personalities equally unique...but as a total interchangeability of the terms of the relation.⁷⁵ Since everyday being-in-the-world is “we,” that which is truly my own must be accomplished through the call of conscience, and through the withdrawal from this fallenness in the “they,” in authentic being-toward death as a possibility that is authentically *mine*.⁷⁶

To summarize the criticism, Sartre believes that if one is not initially a self, or selfness, there is no Other. Heidegger, in Sartre’s view, eliminates the Other as an other. If, Sartre says, the relation is a relation to *others*, it begs the question “to what extent is the negation which makes the Other an other and which constitutes him as non-essential maintained?” But to eliminate entirely the negation by which the Other is *other* begs the question, for Sartre: “are we not going to fall into a monism?” On the other hand, “if we are to preserve it as an essential structure of the relation to the Other, then what modification must it undergo in order to lose the character of opposition which it had in being-for-others and acquire this character as a connection which creates solidarity and which is the very structure of being-with?”⁷⁷ Here Sartre’s position seems open to the possibility of attaining such “empirical” states that he later refers to as an experience of “We.” Later, we will see he rejects this on principle. With respect to Heidegger, if the Other is still an *other*, and not eliminated as initially proposed, then how does the *Other*

⁷⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 246.

⁷⁶ As will be seen below, Sartre rejects that Death is my “ownmost possibility” for important reasons.

⁷⁷ All quotations in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 247

lose the character of being *opposed* to the self, which it would need as Dasein, since “the being of this being is always *mine*”?⁷⁸

The aim of these criticisms is to arrive at the conditions that are necessary in order for a valid theory of others to be proposed. The next section of this chapter will provide these criteria, and finally in Part III, the theory proposed in the discussion of “the Look.”

Sartre’s Criteria for a Valid Theory of Others

Sartre indicates that there are four criteria that must be satisfied for a valid theory of others. The first is that the Other’s existence must not be demonstrated as a probability. This, as we have already seen, was the problem (in Sartre’s view) with Husserl’s theory of the alter ego, and was a consequence of the “idealist” approach to the problem. The task is not “inventing a proof,” but rather to “make explicit the very foundation of that certainty.”⁷⁹ In fact, this certainty is explicitly located on the same level as that of the cogito: “there is a sort of cogito concerning it [the other’s existence]. It is this cogito which we must bring to light.”⁸⁰ The certainty will reveal a factual necessity on the level with our own existence.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 39.

⁷⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 251.

⁸⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 252.

⁸¹ Sartre’s use of the term “factual necessity” here is derived from Husserl: “Over against the positing of the world, which is a contingent positing, there stands then the positing of my pure Ego and Ego-life which is a ‘necessary’ absolutely indubitable positing. Anything physical which is given ‘in person’ can be non-existent; no mental process which is given ‘in person’ can be non-existent. This is the eidetic law defining this necessity and that contingency.” This necessity, Husserl continues, is not an “essential necessity”; rather “it is the necessity of a fact and is called so because an eidetic law is involved in the fact and indeed in this case is involved in the existence of the fact as fact.” (Husserl, *Ideas book I*, 103) Husserl is referring here to the fact that “each Ego...bears in itself, as an essential possibility, the guarantee of its absolute factual being.” (*Ideas*, 101) In the same section, he says further that “ideal possibility of a reflection having the essential characteristic of an evidently infeasible positing of

The second requirement, as if there was any doubt, is that the cogito must be the starting point. This is because “the cogito alone establishes us on the ground of that factual necessity which is the necessity of the Other's existence.”⁸² One will find in such a cogito “not reasons for believing that the Other exists but the Other himself as not being me.”⁸³ This indicates an implicit requirement that the other must be an *other*, not another me, not another possible consciousness of my own that is not yet actual. Nor must it reveal the other as an object of perception: this is the third requirement. The Other must be found not as an object of knowledge, but “as one who ‘interests’ our being, and...not as he contributes a priori to constitute our being but as he interests it concretely and ‘ontically’ in the empirical circumstances of our facticity.”⁸⁴ This requirement can be understood if formulated into a question: What sort of encounter will best illustrate the way others exist in a way that “interests” our existence? Since prior to reflection we understand ourselves in terms of the world, in terms of our own possibilities, Sartre will attempt to explain the way that the existence of Others bring about a modification of our possibilities. Sartre does not include this among his criteria, but by adding the factor of possibilities to the way the Other “interests” being for-itself, the extended discussion of the alienation of possibilities in the next chapter will be clear.⁸⁵

The last requirement, perhaps the most unclear, is that the Other's existence will be given through the intuition of transcendence, but that the point of view of the whole must

factual existence is grounded in the essence of any Ego whatever and of any mental process whatever.” (*Ideas*, 103)

⁸² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 251.

⁸³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 251.

⁸⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 252.

⁸⁵ And this is why it was necessary to explain the background for Sartre's theory of possibilities in the final section of the previous part of this chapter.

not be adopted because no such unity or synthesis of consciousnesses can be found. In addition to these criteria, other requirements implicit in the positive theory to follow can be seen. Sartre maintains at once that the other must be given or directly apprehended. But the problem that Husserl faced, *how* the other is given, persists through Sartre's theory of "the Look." The other-consciousness cannot be given in the same way consciousness exists for-itself. In fact, Sartre insists that there is no consciousness that is not mine, at this level of investigation of pre-reflective consciousness, although it is debatable whether he sticks to this claim. Since any apprehension of the other's consciousness as an object is also ruled out, it seems no other options remain. Also ruled out is apprehending the Other through the objects in the world since this would still involve an external negation. There needs to be an affective modification of existence for-itself by the other. So the only possibility that remains is through the way the for-itself exists for-itself. How can the way the for-itself exists for-itself be made other, into existing at the same time as existing not-for-itself? A mode of existing not-for-itself would not be possible in straightforward encounters with objects, whether as objects of other bodies or objects of things in the world. The modification Sartre has in mind requires that the being that must be for-itself is in some way *dispossessed* of being for-itself.⁸⁶

In the discussion of knowledge and existence, we saw that Sartre believes that there are consciousnesses other than knowing consciousnesses. For instance, there is non-

⁸⁶ We might understand this to mean that Sartre's claims are challenging the premise in Husserl's fifth *Meditation*, that mental processes are always my own. Sartre does not say that all mental processes are necessarily my own (nor call them 'mental processes'), but adopting this terminology, he might say that some mental processes give themselves as already affected by the Other. We will see below what this might mean.

positional consciousness (of) self, and as he mentions, affective consciousness. It is the latter that will be the basis for the experience of the Other. The other will be revealed through an affective consciousness. How is the meaning of “affective” to be understood in this context? First, it is not the consciousness of an object, in the sense of an object that is known. Another way to put this would be that it is not the consciousness given in adumbrations, as objects in spatiotemporal experience are in fact given. Second, it is not the consciousness (of) self that occurs along with any positional act of consciousness *of* something; for that consciousness (of) self is non-positional. The affective consciousness that Sartre has in mind, in this case at least, is that of consciousness (of) self *as an object* for another.⁸⁷

Finally, given that Sartre requires certainty equivalent to the certainty of one’s own existence, this affective consciousness must be strong enough to be indubitable. For this reason, Sartre descriptions have been typically misunderstood to be more restricted than he intended, as I will argue. The experiences to follow are not the only way others are encountered but they are the fundamental way we “make proof” of the Other’s existence in the same way we make proof our own existence in reflection on the cogito. In the next section, I will indicate how Sartre intends to provide his own theory of others, in the account of “the Look.”

⁸⁷ We intentionally have placed the ‘of’ in parentheses because if it were consciousness *of* ourselves as an object, we would have a positional consciousness of an object. But this is not what he says. It must be that we have consciousness (of) self as an object for another, in being conscious of something that reveals this non-positional awareness in unreflective consciousness. However, we saw above that knowing consciousness was positional, and this is not a knowing consciousness but an affective consciousness. Does this mean that it is not known (hence, not *of*) but also that it is not the same form as consciousness (of) self? The issue is not clearly resolved.

Sartre's Theory of "The Look"

"The Look" is for Sartre a mundane experience that can reveal the fundamental relation to the Other as a subject. It is necessary for Sartre that the Other is encountered *first* as a subject, because the affective consciousness through which the Other is given "must serve as my motivation for constituting the Other as an object."⁸⁸ For "these feelings themselves are nothing more than our way of affectively experiencing our being-for-others."⁸⁹ We can see here in outline the totality of the relation involved in being for-others, that is, being for-each-other. The purpose of the present section is to elucidate the manner in which the Other is given in the phenomenon of "the Look." Sartre is consistent in this discussion that the Other is given *through* and *across* a modification undergone by the for-itself. However, it would be debatable whether this means the Other is given in a *mediated* form. This is because "the Look" is also intended to explain an *immediate* encounter with the Other. This ambivalence persists through the discussion.⁹⁰ It should not be understood, however, that the immediacy of the encounter refers to a moment in time. The encounter described in "the Look" extends across time and into the future, as will be seen in the next chapter.

It is through "the Look" that we apprehend the Other as a Subject. What is "the Look"? It is *not*, Sartre insists, an object in the world. There is no object that necessarily reveals a look. While it is most often associated with a pair of eyes, Sartre is clear that

⁸⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 291.

⁸⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 288.

⁹⁰ According to Theunissen, Sartre turns "the Husserlian doctrine of the mediation of the Other through myself...into its opposite...in the theory that the Other mediates me with myself." Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, trans. Christopher Macann (MIT Press, 1984), 221. For Theunissen, Sartre's proposal depends on the immediacy of the Other, but as will be shown Sartre sometimes claims that the Other is not really even encountered.

“eyes” are unnecessary for “the Look.” In fact, Sartre goes so far as to maintain that *nothing is perceived at all*. Whatever object first indicates a look, once a look is grasped, the object is no longer perceived. To apprehend a look is to feel something about oneself, not about any specific object in the world: “to apprehend a look...is to be conscious of being looked at.”⁹¹ To apprehend a noise with the meaning “footsteps” can be one way the look is apprehended, if it “refers from me to myself.”⁹² To be conscious of being looked at is to “apprehend immediately...*that I am vulnerable...that I am seen.*”⁹³ This is presumably what Sartre means by the “cogito” of the Other’s existence. These consciousnesses reveal the certainty of the Other-Subject because the Other is “the one who on principle looks at me.”⁹⁴ To feel oneself looked at is the same thing as apprehending the Other as a subject. Thus the experience of being looked at “bear[s] indubitable witness to the cogito both of [our own consciousness] and of the existence of the Other.”⁹⁵ It is through an affective consciousness of “shame or pride [that] *reveals to me the Other's look and myself at the end of that look.*”⁹⁶

What sort of modification occurs in the experience the look? When engaged in conduct in the world, consciousness does not take itself as an object, it exhausts itself in the object of which it is consciousness. It does not thereby cease to exist as consciousness of something and consciousness (of) self. This is evident in Sartre’s famous example of the jealous lover spying on the scene through a keyhole, where the immediate consciousness is “alone and on the level of a non-thetic consciousness (of) self...there is

⁹¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 258.

⁹² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 259.

⁹³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 259 (my emphasis).

⁹⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 257.

⁹⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 272.

⁹⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 261.

no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them.”⁹⁷ It is this structure of consciousness that is modified when I am seen. The modification occurs in unreflective consciousness, such that “the self comes to haunt the unreflective consciousness.”⁹⁸ Because this unreflective consciousness “is a consciousness of the world...the self exists on the level of objects in the world.”⁹⁹ It is not that I hear a noise and think someone might be there and turn my attention toward the noise in order to judge if it is in fact someone there; rather, I am already certain of myself as an object for an Other-Subject. I am consciousness only of myself as seen, or at least of the immediate possibility of being seen, if the Other has not yet appeared at the top of the stairs. The difference in this case, between an actual and a possible self being-looked-at, is of absolutely no significance for the feeling in which each is grasped. In either case, the self is present in so far as one is an object for another subject. What this means for me is that I am conscious of being vulnerable to another freedom. If the Other has not yet laid eyes on me, for instance, I am still conscious of myself as an object *to be hidden*. It is *not* the consciousness (of) self that I want to hide, but myself as an object for the Other who is coming up the stairs. Thus in both cases, I am consciousness of myself as an object in unreflective consciousness.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 259.

⁹⁸ To say that the self comes to haunt the unreflective consciousness is actually already established both through value and possibles; perhaps Sartre means that the “self as an object” haunts the unreflective consciousness; even in this case it would need to be explained further.

⁹⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 260.

¹⁰⁰ Sartre is clear about the structure as it appears in shame: “It is a non-positional self-consciousness, conscious (of) itself as shame.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 221) But this is almost misleading that the second clause would need to clarify the first, since the original French says: “Elle est conscience non positionnelle (de) soi comme honte,” Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’être et le néant: essai d’ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 259. literally, “it is non-positional consciousness (of) self as shame.”

But this apprehension of the self in unreflective consciousness “*does not apprehend the person [self] directly or as its object*; the person is presented to consciousness in so far as the person is an object for the Other.”¹⁰¹ The only means by which consciousness grasps itself directly as an object (or quasi-object) is in a reflective act. In the present case we have an unreflective consciousness, a consciousness *of* myself for-another—*not for me*. The unreflective apprehension of the self for another is thus an experience in which “all of a sudden I am conscious of myself as *escaping* myself,” and in which I feel “my foundation outside myself.” Sartre insists however that “this does *not* mean that I perceive myself *losing* my freedom in order to become a thing.”¹⁰² It means that I feel my freedom “outside my lived freedom,”¹⁰³ that I feel “my freedom escapes me in order to become a given object.”¹⁰⁴

It should be clear from these passages that Sartre does not intend to equate the loss of freedom with the feeling of freedom escaping itself, since these are presented in *contrast*. Nor does Sartre equate becoming a *thing* with becoming a *given object*, for the same reason. Therefore, it *must not be* understood that this modification brought about by the look is simply a loss of freedom and reduction to the status of a mere thing. Since these are indications of *alienation*, as Sartre considers it, we must not understand the alienation from the look to mean simply a complete loss of freedom or “objectification,” as is equally common. How then should this “escape” be understood, as distinct from a “loss” of freedom? How should becoming a “given object” be understood, as distinct from becoming a “thing”?

¹⁰¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 260.

¹⁰² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 263.

¹⁰³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 263.

¹⁰⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 261.

In the first place, the “object” that I am for another when seen, necessarily “preserves a certain indetermination, a certain unpredictability.”¹⁰⁵ This is because of “the fact that the Other is free.”¹⁰⁶ So while Sartre maintains, at the moment, that I am for the Other in the dimension of *in-itself*,¹⁰⁷ it is in-itself such that “the very stuff of my being is the unpredictable freedom of another.”¹⁰⁸ I find that I am “for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other.”¹⁰⁹

This feature of the Other’s freedom in the consciousness that reveals it is essential. I experience his or her freedom necessarily in this way, there is no other way to grasp the Other’s freedom without turning it into an object, or eliminating its *otherness*. This is how we “make proof” of an *other* freedom. I grasp “the Other’s freedom...*across* the uneasy indetermination of the being which I am for him.”¹¹⁰ An important aspect of this uneasiness is that “this self which I am—this I am in a *world* which the Other has made alien to me.”¹¹¹ The other makes the world alien through the way he or she exists for him or herself in the world, namely as a *possible* for-itself. Thus everything that has been mentioned in connection with the modification of the look has been explained in the immediate grasp of being looked-at. But since the constitutive structure of consciousness is *transcendence*, Sartre will explain how the look is apprehended through temporality

¹⁰⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 262.

¹⁰⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 262.

¹⁰⁷ “Shame reveals to me that I am this being, not in the mode of ‘was’ or of ‘having to be’ but in-itself.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 262. It must be noted here since he will later claim that it is *not* in-itself: “the Self-as-object, is not ideal; it is a real being. This being is *not in-itself*, for it is not produced in the pure exteriority of indifference. But *neither is it for-itself*, for it is not the being which I have to be by nihilating myself. It is precisely my being-for-others.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 286; my emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 262.

¹⁰⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 260.

¹¹⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 262.

¹¹¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 261.

and action in the world. This is the meaning of alienation, which will be discussed in the next chapter. “I grasp the Other’s look,” Sartre says, “at the very center of my act as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities.”¹¹² Alienation is the experience in which being for-others is revealed. The meaning of being for-others is to be vulnerable for another freedom. The meaning of vulnerability will be understood not in the immediacy of a threat but as a potential disruption in one’s projected possibilities and relation to the world.

¹¹² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 263

CHAPTER 3
ALIENATION IN BEING AND NOTHINGNESS

This chapter consists of an interpretation of Sartre's theory of alienation in *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre uses the term alienation first in the discussion of "the Look"; he later uses it in other contexts, for instance, alienation in language, work, and death.¹ In all these contexts, however, alienation is always used to refer to an experience of being for-others. In this chapter I will argue that alienation is the experience of being for-others, and this experience is fundamentally an experience of vulnerability.

The first part of this chapter considers alienation in the context of "the Look"; the second part considers alienation as it appears in contexts beyond "the Look." The first part shows the meaning of alienation in the context of "the Look," in the first section, through the discussion of the alienation of *possibilities*, in connection with the discussion of possibilities in the previous chapter. In the second section, this interpretation is explained further in terms of Sartre's understanding of ignorance and obstacles (as modified by the look). The third section argues, in light of the previous two sections, that the meaning of alienation is the revealing of being for-others, and that the meaning of being for-others is the vulnerability of the for-itself. This interpretation of alienation as the revelation of being for-others and the meaning of being for-others as the vulnerability of the for-itself, is extended to other contexts in which alienation appears in *Being and Nothingness*. In the second part, alienation as it appears in the discussion of language and

¹ I'm referring here to Sartre's use of the term explicitly, with the narrow meaning in connection with being for-others, and not the appearance of the theme of alienation in a more broad sense which can be found throughout.

death is discussed in the first section. In the second section, the general theory of being for-others is considered and it is argued that understanding alienation in terms of vulnerability can shed new light on Sartre's claims regarding the relation to others.

Alienation and "The Look"

Sartre intended "the Look" to function as the mundane experience in which we apprehend the Other as a subject, and this apprehension of the Other as subject is understood as the fundamental relation to Others: being for-others. However, "the Look" is only one way being for-others is revealed. The experience in which being for-others is revealed is always characterized by Sartre as *alienation*. Alienation refers to the experience of the other's freedom. To experience the other's freedom, and to experience one's being for-others, are one and the same experience. Alienation is a more general term that encompasses the variety of "affective consciousnesses" in which we "make proof" of the other's existence.

I will argue in this chapter that the fundamental sense of all experience of being for-others (and therefore, alienation) is *vulnerability*. The meaning of being for-others is being vulnerable to another freedom. Alienation is the revelation of this vulnerability. The vulnerability of being for-itself is revealed through a modification of the possibilities that the for-itself is, as seen in the previous chapter. It is necessary therefore to understand alienation in terms of possibilities. The first discussion of alienation in the text of *Being and Nothingness* in the context of "the Look" is referred to as the solidification and alienation of my possibilities. What does Sartre mean when he says that possibilities are alienated?

The possibilities of the for-itself are modified in the presence of an other for-itself. The presence of another for-itself means that there are possibilities that refer to me, but *not* for me. This possibility, which is the other's possibility, hence the other's freedom, is opposed to my possibilities; it is a possibility that is not my possibility. But this possibility is not simply the possibility that I will fall off a cliff, for instance.² If I am in danger of falling off a cliff, I *can be* more careful. The possibilities that come to me from outside through alienation reveal being concerned with the self in so far as it exists *for another*.³ The Other's freedom reveals the possibility of violence or for being wounded; but this possibility is not necessarily its actual reality. It must be understood primarily in terms of possibility.

Alienation of Possibilities

It is *through* the consciousness of ourselves that we experience the presence of Others. The Other is revealed not in the perception of an object, nor in a perceived similarity between the Other's body and mine, but in a feeling of *uneasiness*. The source of this uneasiness is the presence of a consciousness that is not my own. The Other is

² Sartre is clear that the threat of death presented by the precipice, in the discussion of *anguish*, reveals that I am a thing and subject to forces in the world. But there is a key distinction. "I am given to myself as a thing; I am passive in relation to these possibilities; they come to me from without; in so far as I am also an object in the world, subject to gravitation, they *not* are my possibilities." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 31. [italics indicate translation modified to match original in French: "ce *ne sont pas* mes possibilités." (Sartre, *L'Être et l'neant*, 65)] It must be noted, however, that since Sartre asks later "how could I be an object except for a subject," how are we to understand that one is "given to oneself as a thing" when looking over the precipice, without the presence of, or implication of, another subject? One way to answer this question would be that one can feel in danger over the precipice in a way that is not feeling vulnerable, the latter being unique to the experience of others.

³ The concern about oneself falling off a cliff, for instance, would be a concern for the self, but differs from vulnerability in the following way: "it is in relation to myself as subject that I am concerned about myself, and yet *this concern* (for-myself) *reveals to me a being which is my being without being-for-me*." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 221.

given *through* the feeling of uneasiness because the Other is an other *consciousness*. In order for a consciousness to be *not* mine, it must appear in opposition to, or as a *resistance* to the consciousness that is existence for-itself. This other consciousness must have an impact on consciousness. The impact of the other consciousness involves a modification of being for-itself that is revealed through the “affective consciousness” of oneself as an object (for-another). We saw that consciousness is modified by the look such that the self becomes present for the unreflective consciousness. But it must be understood that consciousness does not become fixed or cease to be consciousness of something. The look must be understood as affecting the for-itself in its transcendence, in its surpassing of the given.

It is through alienation that the for-itself apprehends the Other’s look, as it was through consciousness of shame. “I grasp the Other’s look at the very center of my act as the solidification and alienation *of my own possibilities*.” Unreflective consciousness is non-thetic consciousness (of) self, and it exists its “possibilities in the mode of non-thetic consciousness (of) these possibilities.” It grasps “these possibilities thetically on the world and in the world in the form of the potentialities of instruments.”⁴ The relation of possibilities to the instruments of the world (and thus the world itself) undergoes a modification when we experience the look.

Once I am seen, “my relation to an object or the potentiality of an object decomposes...and appears to me in the world as my possibility of utilizing the object, but *only as this possibility on principle escapes me*.”⁵ My possibilities become “present to my

⁴ Both quotes in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 263.

⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 263; my emphasis.

unreflective consciousness *in so far as* the Other is watching me,”⁶ and when “I perceive that these possibilities...[are] given as *about to be transcended* in turn by his own possibilities.”⁷ Although Sartre insists that the Other is present *immediately*, he also says, contrary to this, that it is grasped in an indirect or mediated fashion, through consciousness of *myself*: “I do not grasp the *actual* surpassing” since this would be to either grasp it as an object, or to live it as transcendence, in which case it would be my own. Rather, “I grasp simply the death of my possibility.”⁸ Although the self is present as an object in unreflective consciousness, the object does not even *appear* at all: “the Other’s presence does not cause me-as-object to ‘appear.’ *I apprehend nothing but an escape from myself* toward—.”⁹ This escape *is* the presence of an Other, as the Other is “the concrete pole of my flight, [and] of the alienation of my possibles...he can not be distinct from this same alienation and flow; he is the meaning and the direction of them.”¹⁰ This means “my possibility...becomes the fact that *the Other can surpass it* toward his possibility.”¹¹

In this discussion of the alienation of possibilities, it seems that the Other is mediated through our experience of ourselves in a certain manner. The Other is given *through* and *across* my relation to my possibilities, modified by the look. Alienation is the affective consciousness of my possibility when it is apprehended “through my anguish and through my decision to give up” a course of action. The decision is here made on the basis of the fact that “every act performed against the Other *can* on principle

⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 264; my emphasis.

⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 263; my emphasis.

⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 264.

⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 275; my emphasis.

¹⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 269.

¹¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 264; my emphasis.

*be for the Other an instrument which will serve him against me.*¹² The possibility that emerges with the presence of the Other is the *possibility* that my own actions will be *used* against me. The point here is not that alienation occurs only when a course of action is abandoned. The point here is that I *make proof* of the Other's possibilities by choosing myself in light of the impact of the Other's freedom on my own possibilities.

This seems to be what Sartre believes can satisfy the criteria for a valid theory of others, as seen at the end of the previous chapter. There, the formula was that we must not find reasons for believing in the existence of the Other, but at the heart of being, the other as not being me. When decisions are made in light of another freedom, this shows that we must be certain that the Other exists. How this sense of the other comes about is not relevant to Sartre, it seems.¹³ But it does not mean that the Other is imaginary. I make proof of the Other's subjectivity in abandoning a course of action because of *the Other's possibilities*.

Although the Other's freedom modifies my possibilities and alienates them, these possibilities must remain *mine*. Alienation makes proof of the Other by apprehending him or her as "the hidden death of my possibilities," but only "in so far as I live that death as hidden in the midst of the world." It is not necessarily that the Other has made something out of me of which I disapprove, but that "I apprehend my possibilities from outside and through him *at the same time* that I am my possibilities."¹⁴ In the decision to give up a course of action, it was and is a free choice to make this decision. How then should it be understood that my possibilities are alienated in this context? Or rather, *what is the*

¹² Both quotes in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 264.

¹³ And on this point, serious questions can be raised as to whether Sartre's criticism of Husserl shifted the goalposts, so to speak.

¹⁴ All quotes in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 264.

meaning of alienation, if these possibilities remain *my own*? If I do not *abandon* the *ownership* over these possibilities, or if they do not transfer entirely into the possession of the other, why are these choices *alienated*?

In order to answer this question, we can return to the discussion of possibilities in general seen in the previous chapter. If we transfer the discussion of the alienation of possibilities as Sartre expresses them in this context into the manner that Husserl presented his solution to the problem of the alter ego, we can see a symmetry between their solutions. Sartre's solution to the question: "how is the other is given in experience," is analogous to that of Husserl, in the same way that his theory of the possibilities of the for-itself was analogous to that of Husserl. Possibility was, for Sartre, the correlate of a possible for-itself indicated by the instruments of the world, while for Husserl, the presence to consciousness of one side of an object in perception presents other sides as perceivable by a possible consciousness.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the appresentation of the side of the object indicates to me the other side which I am not conscious of, but which "I can" walk around to the other side. The object must be given in profiles, but the object is the totality of actual and possible conscious acts corresponding to the adumbrations of the object. For Husserl, the alter ego presents a problem precisely because the an other subjectivity could not be simply a potential conscious act because it was not a possible act of *my own* consciousness but of *an other*. To be sure, the alter ego is a point of view on the object that I can also adopt, if I were over there. But the Other's independence refers to the fact that the Other's point of view as such could not be adopted *as* the Other's. In other words, if the Other was conceived only in terms of a possible point of view on an object,

it would be possible to remain within the confines of one's own subjectivity. For Husserl, the alter ego is a point of view that *can never become actually present* and yet is somehow indicated through the actual presence of the "animate organism."¹⁵

In Sartre's discussion of alienation, the same problem is dealt with. However, the difference is that he formulates the problem in terms of the relation of instruments and potentialities. As we saw in the previous chapter, the "totality of instruments is the exact correlate of my possibilities; and as I am my possibilities, the order of instruments in the world is the image of my possibilities projected in the in-itself; i.e., the image of what I am."¹⁶ As we saw, the look brings an object to presence in the unreflective consciousness. This is because it is the point of view *on* the totality of instruments and possibilities, a possible point of view that on principle cannot be my own.

This point of view cannot be my own for two related reasons. First, because such a possible point of view is a possibility that would be my own. Since it would be my own, it is thus recaptured by the totality itself and never gets "outside." Or rather, the outside would become inside. Second, the possibility that cannot be made actual (on principle, that is) cannot be my own. Possibility refers to what I can do, what could be done. That which cannot be done could not be *my* possibility.¹⁷ The outside that the Other confers on the totality of the instrumental complex is an outside that I can never "make actual," and therefore, not a possibility that can be identified as *mine*. This is what is experienced in the look and as alienation, that "the ensemble 'instrument-possibility,' made up of myself confronting the instrument, appears to me as surpassed and organized into a world by the

¹⁵ Husserl says, "can never be itself there." Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 109.

¹⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 200.

¹⁷ This formulation will be significant in the discussion of death below.

Other.”¹⁸ Thus my relation to the world, which is the transcendence of the given toward my possibles and the instruments which refer my possibles to me, and which I transcend, this whole system is itself transcended, as a point of view is taken on it from the outside. The experience of not being able to take this point of view of the whole is one sense in which the Other’s look alienates my possibilities. For “the Other as a look is only that—my transcendence-transcended.”¹⁹ To put it another way, the experience of one’s possibilities transcended presupposes another freedom. And when we feel our possibilities transcended, we make proof of the Other’s freedom and possibilities.

There is an obvious problem in this understanding of alienation, but it is not one of which Sartre is entirely unaware. If we claim that the Other’s point of view is what on principle I cannot bring to actual reality without losing the character of *otherness* or, without becoming mine, then how do we have a sense of it at all? The possibilities that are not my own, in the most radical sense, are those of which I do not even know. But as soon as we say that *there are* possibilities that are denied me that I am not even aware of, I become aware of them to the extent that I posit *that they are*, without being more specific as to what they are. So it seems that anytime we think of a possibility outside my own, it becomes present in some way and in some sense, can be actualized. I know that there are possibilities that are not my own, and to the extent that I determine them specifically, I bring them to actual presence. But for Sartre this would present the issue on the level of knowledge. What he has in mind is the immediate non-cognitive relation to self that reveals the Other’s existence with certainty, not with knowledge. In fact, he

¹⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 265.

¹⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 263.

explains this in terms of lack of knowledge, or ignorance.²⁰ A discussion of ignorance in this sense will also allow us to clarify some of the ways in which the Other's presence is understood to be different from material obstacles, as we indicated at the beginning of this chapter.

Ignorance and Obstacles

Given what was said regarding the “instrumental complex” of the for-itself in relation to the world, there are at least two ways to understand the failure to actualize these possibilities “in strict solitude.” The first involves an action in which “consequences...completely opposed to my anticipations and to my desires” occur. In such cases, “there is *nothing which I could not* have foreseen if I had been more careful...nothing which on principle escapes me.”²¹ This means that I could have foreseen it, even if *I didn't foresee it*. If, for instance, I am carrying a fragile object and drop it, this is not what I intended, but it would be true to say that “I could have been more careful.” It was my possibility to be more careful, and the vase referred me to this possibility by its fragility. To some extent then it was a choice not to be more careful, provided that we do not understand this in the sense of being a possibility considered in a calculated manner that is then denied. It is a choice in the sense that there was a choice to conduct oneself in a manner other than being careful. At least retrospectively, being more careful *was my possibility*.

²⁰ This should not be understood to mean that Sartre *still* presents his theory of others in terms of knowledge, only negatively. The knowledge that Sartre has in mind is knowledge about objects in the world, and the ignorance he refers to here is an ignorance about oneself as an object in the world for another consciousness.

²¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 265.

The second way to understand such failure is if we determine that it was *not* my possibility to be more careful. If for instance, the fragile item I am carrying is placed down gently on a table, and the table collapses because it could not support the weight, we might think that there was no way to foresee this possibility. I could not have been more careful; the structural flaw in the table was entirely unknown until it was too late. But in this case, the determination that the failure was due to a material obstacle is itself an achievement and therefore the knowledge acquired is a possibility fulfilled. It is possible, in other words, that any undertaking will fail and the reasons for the failure due to material conditions will not come to light until afterwards. Since this is a possibility for any undertaking, the unknown reason for failure that becomes known *is* in fact a possibility of realizing the failure as being determined beyond the agent's intentions.

As in the first case, Sartre is clear on this point: "a material obstacle, can not fix my possibilities; it is only the occasion for my projecting myself toward other possibles and can not confer upon them an outside."²² The other possibles in the example of material failure are the possible knowledge gained from the experience and the possibility of being more careful *next time*. The failure to achieve the result projects a possibility of learning the reason why the failure occurred, and this possible is realized in the knowledge gained.

This understanding of *obstacles* as only an occasion for the projection of other possibles (still mine) are essential to understanding the impact of the Other in the alienation of my possibilities. If for instance I choose to stay indoors because it is too hot, or too cold, neither of these are genuine obstacles, for "I surpass the obstacle...toward

²² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 270-271.

myself and I make an instrument of it.”²³ In other words, I use the occasion of the weather as a choice of myself. And since I am my possibilities, it is also a possibility that I completely change the organization of myself in relation to the instruments of the world, to the point of changing my very image reflected in the in-itself. This means that “to change one of my possibles is to change all of my possibles at the same time; it is to change my situation; it is to will myself other.”²⁴ This sense of willing oneself other is *also a possibility* of the for-itself, it is *my possibility*—it is not some type of “self-alienation.” Finally, one does not have the possibility of inhibiting one’s possibilities, or rather, this sense of *inhibition* becomes meaningless when we understand that it collapses back into another one of my possibilities. Any choice of limitation remains a choice to surpass something towards a possible for-itself that I am.²⁵

Throughout this discussion, Sartre is clear that I cannot limit my own freedom in any meaningful sense; or rather, while *I can* deny myself (for instance in the negating conduct of bad faith) this is still something *I can do*, and hence a free projection towards a possibility in surpassing the given (a denial towards another possible self). What the Other brings to this whole situation is precisely what I *cannot do*, in the sense that I cannot do it *on principle*, as opposed to the accidental determinations of what I did not do

²³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 271.

²⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *War Diaries*, trans. Quinton Hoare (New York: Verso, 1999), 41.

²⁵ This is intimately related to the way freedom comes to *diminish* itself given the impossibility of abandoning freedom. “In the idea of ‘stopping’ there’s the image of a sturdy arm coming to check my arm. But I do not possess an inhibiting arm; I cannot personally erect barriers in myself between me and my possibles—that would be to abdicate my freedom and I cannot do it. All that’s left me is the possibility of an internal diminution of my freedom, gnawed away from within until it collapses and freely re-forms a little further on towards some other possible.” (Sartre, *War Diaries*, 125).

in this instance. The conclusion is clear, that “in no case can I ever alienate myself from myself.”²⁶ We will return to this point shortly.

Alienation refers to the fact that it is only “for and by means of a freedom...that my possibles can be limited and fixed.”²⁷ The Other as a look is the transcendence of all my possibles precisely because he or she makes my world into an organized form *for him or her*—for the Other. And since any attempt to get hold of the possibilities of what the Other will make out of me will by definition be included in this organized whole, and hence a possible from my own point of view, I do not “grasp the Other...in the clear vision of *what he can* make out of my act but in a *fear which lives* all my possibilities as *ambivalent*.”²⁸ It is in the fear through which I live my possibilities as ambivalent that I *make proof* of the existence of an other subject, because I know that there are possibilities that are not *for me* but I must live them and surpass them *without knowing* if they will be used against me. This includes not only the possibilities denied me but also those which escape me on principle and which I live despite the fact that I do not know what they are. This is because “the appearance of the Other...causes the appearance in the situation of an aspect which...on principle escapes me since it is *for the Other*.”²⁹ This ignorance is not the same type of ignorance which we characterized above as that which we *could not have known*, for in that case, we did not know what was unknown until new knowledge

²⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 274-275.

²⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 271.

²⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 264.

²⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 265.

was gained. The ignorance of the type Sartre has in mind with respect to the Other is “ignorance lived as ignorance.”³⁰

The limit that is imposed on the “outside” which is experienced as alienation is characterized as “the unpredictable but still real reverse side,” the same as “that ignorance which...is lived as ignorance, *that total opacity which can only be felt as a presentiment across a total translucency*—this is nothing but the description of our being-in-the-midst-of-the-world-for-others.”³¹ The ignorance that Sartre refers to here is that dimension of existence of which we are unaware the extent to which we do not know. The ignorance revealed by the Other is an ignorance which we do not know, but live in anxiety that we do not know what we do not know, but know that there is a dimension outside our knowledge. The crucial point however is that what we our ignorant of is not simply objects in the world, but our relation to objects in the world, in other words, ourselves as an object in the world.

Consider for instance that we discover that the table that failed to support the fragile object was not materially deficient in an accidental manner, but had been intentionally manipulated so as to appear stable and collapse under any pressure of weight. The experience here seems to be of a different order than the discovery that we could not have known that it was deficient structurally, at least, not until afterwards. The difference here is that we could not have known, because our ignorance was the principle of manipulation, it was “used against us.” Even if we had been more careful, the Other could have used the our possibility of being careful against us.

³⁰ See also Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, ed. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 294–304; 393. .

³¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 266; the description refers to the mood conveyed in the fiction of Kafka, once the transcendence of God is removed.

This “opaque” and “unpredictable” side is the necessary consequence of the fact that the Other is free. The Other’s freedom is accompanied by an opacity and unpredictability appropriate to a being that is for-itself and therefore exists as freedom. This does not mean that the Other is unpredictable in the sense of chaos, but unpredictable in the sense that the Other governs over him or herself. The opacity does not mean the other is incapable of being understood, but that the Other can evade being understood, or rather, *can be* deceptive. But the opacity and unpredictability do not refer to the Other, it refers to a dimension of being of the for-itself . The Other reveals opacity and unpredictability as a dimension of the being for-itself, and it is this dimension that is being for-others.

The Other is a consciousness that is “immediately present,” “a trans-mundane presence,” it “is not an appearance in the world...By the Other's look I effect the concrete proof that there is a ‘beyond the world.’” The other is apprehended only through the feeling of all this. “In experiencing the look, in experiencing myself as an unrevealed objectness, I experience the *inapprehensible subjectivity* of the Other directly and with my being. At the same time I experience the Other's infinite freedom.” This “beyond the world” is not the same “beyond the world” that the for-itself projects itself toward; it is that which is beyond *my* beyond. But I must make proof of this by *living it*.³²

The aim of this section was to show the meaning of alienation as a modification of possibilities that differs from the sorts of failures that can be found in relation to objects

³² All quoted passages in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 270. The characterization of the experience of the Other in this section reveals what Sartre meant in the conditions for a valid theory of the Other in which he indicated that the Other’s existence would be shown in a manner similar to the way Descartes proves the existence of God through the intuition of transcendence.

in the world in “strict solitude.” In the next section, I will show that alienation as the revelation of the Other’s freedom, as the revealing of being for-others, can be understood as the revelation of vulnerability for the for-itself.

Alienation and Vulnerability

We are now in a position to consider a general interpretation of alienation on the basis of the reading I have presented of “the Look.” First, alienation must be understood as the general experience which refers to the experience of the Other’s freedom, in the sense that the other’s freedom is revealed through the ensemble in which we become aware of our being for-others. When Sartre first refers to the “subjective reactions” to the Other’s look, he refers to shame, pride, fear, *and* alienation.³³ Yet when referring to the manner in which we react to the other’s look, he *excludes* alienation from the set. In fact, he says “Shame, fear, and pride are my original reactions; they are only various ways by which I recognize the Other as a subject beyond reach.”³⁴ It might seem that, since he does not include alienation among these “original reactions,” that he is excluding it as subordinate to the others. I argue, however, that these “various” modes of recognizing the Other as subject can be all grouped under the concept of alienation. Alienation refers to the revealing of being for-another. Sartre all but says this himself, in concluding his discussion: “my reaction to my own alienation for the Other was expressed in my

³³ “We have only made explicit the meaning of those subjective reactions to the Other’s look which are fear (the feeling of being in danger before the Other’s freedom), pride, or shame (the feeling of being finally what I am but elsewhere, over there for the Other), the recognition of my slavery (the feeling of the alienation of all my possibilities).” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 268.

³⁴ The rest of the quote is worth including: “they include within them a comprehension of my selfness which can and must serve as my motivation for constituting the Other as an object.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 291.

grasping the Other as an object.³⁵ Finally, when providing the general account of being for-others, as we will discuss in the next section, he refers to the general process of the experience of being for-others as alienation.³⁶ It seems reasonable to conclude given these characterizations that alienation functions as the general experience of which shame, pride, and fear, are its various modes. It is reasonable to say that alienation is the revealing of being for-others.

Second, the look was a specific form of alienation, but not the only manner in which we experience being for-others. The look was intended to offer a mundane experience in which we “make proof” of the existence of the Other-Subject. Alienation was understood to be co-extensive with the look to the extent that it is the experience in which we make proof of the Other. But the look was also claimed to be felt as an "affective consciousness" which is simply "our way of affectively grasping our being for-others." Whether or not this is the only way to grasp one's being for-others is not indicated in the discussion. It is not until later in the text that we find, beyond these affective consciousnesses, the revealing of being for-others is consistently referred to as alienation.³⁷ The invariant sense of all the varieties of alienation refers consistently to ways of being vulnerable. The meaning of being for-others is the vulnerability of being for-itself. This will be argued in what follows. The relationship between alienation and vulnerability is that the meaning of alienation is the revelation of vulnerability. Next will be considered what is meant by *vulnerability*.

³⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 302.

³⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 283-287.

³⁷ The discussion below of language, work, and death, will illustrate this point.

Vulnerability can be understood in the literal sense of the word as the capability of being wounded. The sense of ‘wound’ in this definition refers broadly to anything experienced as a violation or as violence. The topic of violence will be discussed at length in a later chapter. But violence should not be understood too narrowly in this context. A wound can be as minor as disappointment and as severe as a mortal wound. We make no distinction between “emotional” and “physical” wounds. Perhaps a word of justification is in order for the reason for this. Sartre would maintain that a violation, in the sense that would result in a wound, can only occur as a violation of some human form of organization. The organization should obviously be understood as the instrumental complex previously discussed. A “psychological” wound can disrupt this complex just as much as a “physical” wound, so they are not distinct for the purpose of the argument. But the most important point to mention here is that vulnerability, or its revelation through alienation, *is not equivalent* to violence. It might be, but there is no necessary reason why it should be. Vulnerability is the possibility of violence, not its actual reality.

The “affective consciousness” that reveals the Other’s subjectivity, for instance in shame and fear, conform to the meaning of vulnerability outlined above. For example, with “shame” it is not the shame itself that is a wound; to be seen in a “compromising” situation reveals one’s vulnerability to the extent that the one who sees can judge one negatively.³⁸ The feeling of fear, likewise, is a revealing of vulnerability to the extent that one fears what *can* happen. While we can be afraid of being harmed by “natural” forces, this is not the fear that Sartre is discussing. Likewise, one cannot be shamed except by a

³⁸ While this might imply the emphasis on the other’s freedom rather than the passive construction that would emphasize the being a passive object, both sides are equally necessary. Just as important, Sartre is clear that I am ashamed “not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 289.

being capable of judgment. It is not a counter argument to this meaning to say that we can be vulnerable to a hurricane or earthquake. This is not what is meant by being vulnerable. Being vulnerable refers to the *possible* conduct of other human beings (i.e., in a natural disaster, whether they will provide assistance or hoard their resources). This idea of alienation as revealing vulnerability can also help to understand how, when a person or group feel vulnerable, they project an agency behind it. Such is the necessary connection between vulnerability and an other subjectivity.

Vulnerability expresses the sense of being for others, revealed in alienation, by expressing this revelation in terms of *possibility*. This possibility is something that comes from the outside to a recipient that is nonetheless not passive. As soon as vulnerability is revealed, we are responsible for it, but our being responsible for it can be transformed into another vulnerability. That vulnerability is a possibility to be wounded, and not an actual wounding, is supported by Sartre repeatedly saying that the alienation of my possibilities refers to what the other *can do*, not what the Other will do or is likely to do.³⁹ Likewise, in the revealing of the “unrevealed,” this experience is an anxiety about what *could* happen, an anxiety over the absence of knowledge of what is likely to happen, of the possibilities that are not mine but refer to my existence.

An obvious objection that might be raised at this point is that vulnerability is no less vague of a term than alienation. For instance, we can “feel” vulnerable without “actually” being so, vulnerability therefore explains nothing. On the other hand, we can

³⁹ “If there is an Other, whatever or whoever he may be, whatever may be his relations with me, and without his acting upon me in any way except by the pure upsurge of his being—then I have an outside, I have a nature. My original fall is the existence of the Other. Shame—like pride—is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 263.

be vulnerable without being aware of it. But neither of these objections seriously challenge the argument so far. First, while it is possible to feel vulnerable to threats that are entirely imaginary, this does not mean that one is mistaken about *the fact of being vulnerable*. Second, is there an intelligible distinction between being vulnerable and being aware of being vulnerable? We can clarify the point by turning to an example.

The attitude of *indifference* is characterized, by Sartre, as one in which the person is “at ease,” “not embarrassed,” “not outside,” and “does not feel alienated,”⁴⁰ by the Other. However, this attitude also aims to protect itself from “the danger incurred in being outside.”⁴¹ This attitude resembles Sartre’s characterization of idealism, in so far as the indifferent attitude involves a belief that existence depends on knowledge, and so if I can ignore dangers, they disappear. There is an obvious element of bad faith involved here, but we are not considering the issue of bad faith yet.⁴² The interesting thing about this example is the claim that alienation is not felt, and yet it is characterized as being alienated. This attitude fails because alienation is “there but unperceived,”⁴³ it is “not apprehended,” it is “not felt” and it “releases me from danger in appearance.” As a result, however, I would be “placed at the extreme end degree of objectivity.”⁴⁴ Indifference wants to see without being seen; the result is being seen without being aware of it. “I am seen and without being able by means of the same experience to defend myself against my ‘being-seen.’” Alienation at least allows one to be put on the defensive. “In making direct proof of the Other as a look, I defend myself by putting the Other to the test, and

⁴⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 378; my italics.

⁴¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 381.

⁴² See following chapter.

⁴³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 379.

⁴⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 382.

the possibility remains for me to transform the Other into an object. But if the Other is an object for me while he is looking at me, then *I am in danger without knowing it*. Thus my blindness is anxiety.”⁴⁵

So this attitude would seem to present a problem for the interpretation above. There are three ways to respond to this objection and show it is consistent with the interpretation of alienation as the revelation of vulnerability. First, this attitude is a reaction to the look, not prior to it. The attitude is by no means free from the concept of other subjects. It is furthermore aware of being for-others. But Sartre says that alienation is “there, but unperceived.” Who exactly is it *there for*, if not for the person adopting such an attitude? One of the interesting shifts in the discussion of others where indifference appears (in the section “Concrete Relations with Others”), is that Sartre adopts the perspective of an *outside* observer, that which previously had been ruled out. Once we understand this tactic, however, it becomes clear that the presence of being alienated, while unperceived, could easily refer to the people who pass by. But this is not an entirely satisfactory answer. After all, Sartre seems to say that the indifferent attitude is itself aware of that which is being avoided. This is why its “blindness is anxiety,” and not really being “at ease” as he first indicated. If someone walks into a busy street with their eyes closed, this does not mean that they are unaware of the dangers that surround them, but that they cross the street in anxiety of what they expect to be around them (speeding cars). The indifferent attitude is no different. By trying to prevent the emergence of the revelation of alienation, it is already revealed.

⁴⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 382.

This brings us to the third way to respond to this objection. Perhaps the attitude of indifference does not experience vulnerability as an alienation of possibilities. But this hardly means that they are free from the actualization of this possibility of being wounded. In other words, despite the anxiety in which this attitude finds itself, if it happens that the person is somehow wounded, then the possibility of being wounded is revealed in being made a reality. Vulnerability is revealed in the actualization of its possibility. So while their possibilities might remain (relatively) untouched, it would lose the possibility of being warned. Realizing vulnerability in an act of violence *is* in fact another way of revealing one's vulnerability, or of making proof of the Other. The attitude of indifference does not realize it can be wounded, until it is already wounded, and it makes proof of the possibility by its actuality. That it was already aware of this possibility in adopting the attitude, however, must not be overlooked.

So to the question of whether I can be vulnerable without being aware of it. Sartre would seem to require that we are always aware of being vulnerable, on my interpretation, since he requires being-for-others to be as certain as that of the cogito. We can be unaware of specific aspects of vulnerability, but that we are vulnerable seems fundamentally inescapable. This is not to say that our awareness of vulnerability is constant. If I am sitting at home, alone, my awareness of being vulnerable might recede into the background, or “pass by in silence,” as Sartre says of the body.⁴⁶ If I hear a noise outside, or even hear a knock at the door, or receive a phone call, I am put on notice that I am vulnerable. In the same way that we can always effect the cogito by means of reflection, without being unaware (of) ourselves in non-reflective consciousness of the

⁴⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 330

world, so we can be aware of being vulnerable without it being the object of a thesis.

But we reserve for the term *alienation* the experience in which we *do* become conscious of being vulnerable, as being the object of another consciousness.

But what about the objection that we can feel vulnerable without actually being so? It seems we could have responded to this objection by claiming that a vulnerability that is not experienced as such would be impossible because it can only be determined by an external witness. But we acknowledge that the external witness is a possible interpretation of the attitude of indifference. So it seems this would require saying that, to outside observers, we can determine where or when vulnerability is “legitimate” But Sartre seems to think this is simply a variation on the truth, which is, again, *that* we are vulnerable: we can be mistaken about specific aspects, but not *that* we are vulnerable, in the same way we cannot be unaware of being consciousness.⁴⁷ This in no way requires pathological attitudes towards dangers in the world; in fact, it should put in perspective the *impossibility* of total security, and raise questions about what conditions would be required in order to be able to be vulnerable and live among other people (in other words, the conditions for political life). One of the features of *oppression*, in fact, might be that it requires certain groups to live their vulnerability in certain ways, and others, not (as we will see later); but since this does not eliminate the aspect of existence as being-vulnerable, it simply shifts the focus to another level, i.e., imaginary threats.

⁴⁷ Sartre considers this problem explicitly. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 277-280. He argues that if I believe I hear an intruder and feel in danger, and discover I was mistaken, it is not true to say we are mistaken about being for-others (vulnerability). The mistake refers to the fact that the other is not “here” but not that there are no others, nor that we do not exist for-others, only not on this occasion. In terms of vulnerability, it is not that we are not vulnerable, but simply not in the way we initially perceived. Furthermore, alienation refers to the revelation of vulnerability, and this aspect of being is revealed whether the presence of an other as object is confirmed or not.

Another possible objection that can be eliminated might claim that we are not *in fact* looked at but only *possibly* looked at, and in this case, we are only *possibly* vulnerable. If I hear a noise outside and get up to find no one there, I was *not looked at*, only felt myself to be potentially the object of a look. Thus to explain vulnerability as a possible wound is ignore the possibility of vulnerability. However, this objection ignores the fact that not *actually* being seen does not matter to the revealing of our vulnerability. Vulnerability is a revealing of the outside of our possibilities. The possibility of being seen is a possibility outside our possibilities, and as soon as this possibility is considered, alienation has occurred in the sense that our vulnerability has been revealed. From the point of view of vulnerability, the possibility of being seen and actually being seen are equivalent. Consider Sartre's voyeur peering through the keyhole. Being quiet so as *not to be seen* is a form of conduct in which one avoids the possibility of being seen, which would *itself* be the wound (as the disruption of the project of *not being seen*). However, the possibility of being seen could not be construed as a wound in-itself. It is possible that the revelation of vulnerability occurs at the same moment as the wound itself. If I am attacked all of a sudden without any warning, I am at once wounded and my being vulnerable is revealed without any interlude. In this case I discover the possibility retrospectively in what has been actualized. But it is only when being seen itself is a wound⁴⁸ that, in terms of vulnerability, the possibility of being seen would be distinct from actually being seen. One of the consistent interpretations of Sartre's thought is to conflate the vulnerability revealed in the look with the actual presence of the wound. The

⁴⁸ As in the description of Genet's childhood when Sartre indicates the look itself was a rape. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, ed. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Pantheon, 1963), 79.

relation between the two should be understood in terms of possibility and actuality with the overlap just indicated. This issue of scholarly interpretation will be addressed again in the following chapter.

On the other hand, a person constantly exposed to threats and hostility can entirely lose the distinction between actual and possible wounds. But this is because they are treated as if there were no distinction between being wounded and the potential to be wounded. In other words, the agents view the possibility of the body (for instance) being wounded as *justifying* the realization of the wound. This problem will be considered in chapters to follow, in the discussion of violence.

Vulnerability is intended to be a broad concept, its ambiguity and generality is not a flaw but shows that it is intended to cover the whole of being for-others. For instance, the revelation of being vulnerable as in the look can function in some contexts as a warning, and in other contexts, as a threat. The experience of each are significantly different, but both satisfy what Sartre means by alienation, in that they reveal our being vulnerable, and both do in fact reveal being vulnerable. The generality of this conception should be understood broadly enough to capture normal and pathological instances of experience of vulnerability.⁴⁹

Alienation Beyond “the Look”

This interpretation of the meaning of alienation as the revealing of vulnerability, and the latter as the meaning of being for-others, can be found elsewhere in the text of *Being and Nothingness*, beyond the immediate discussion of “the Look.” Considering

⁴⁹ As Sartre says, even the madman realizes the fact of alienation. See below, section on language.

two of these contexts will support the interpretation offered thus far. These contexts are not the only contexts in which alienation is discussed; rather, they are straightforward examples of how alienation, beyond the look, retains the same meaning as the revelation of vulnerability. Other contexts in which alienation is considered will be addressed in the critical discussion of the following chapter.

Language & Death

Consider the discussion of *language*. In Sartre's view, it "is originally being-for-others...it is the fact that a subjectivity experiences itself as an object for the Other." And it "is not distinct from the recognition of the Other's existence." Here we have the ensemble indicated throughout the discussion, namely, that being an object is the reverse side of the Other-subject. The fact of this experience is what I argue Sartre means by his use of the term 'alienation;' the meaning for the one who experiences it should be understood as being *vulnerable* to another freedom. This applies not only to abnormal or pathological cases of language, although they are included in it. In this context, it means that "by the sole fact that whatever I may do, my acts freely conceived and executed, my projects launched toward my possibilities have outside of them a meaning which escapes me and which I experience."⁵⁰ This requires another freedom, for otherwise, they would meet the indifferent exteriority of the in-itself.

The dialectic of language generally, distinguished from language in the context of seduction in which this discussion appears, "is originally the proof which a for-itself can make of its being-for-others, and...it is *the surpassing of this proof and the utilization of it toward possibilities* which are my possibilities; that is, toward my possibilities of being

⁵⁰ All quoted passages in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 373.

this or that for the Other.” Sartre goes so far to say that “each word is on my side a concrete proof of the alienating reality of the Other. It is *only the psychopath* who can say, ‘someone has stolen my thought’—as in cases of psychoses of influence, for example. The very fact of expression is a stealing of thought since thought needs the cooperation of an alienating freedom in order to be constituted as an object.” It is not, in other words, that that the “psychopath” is entirely wrong, but he or she misinterprets the reality of the situation.⁵¹ It “is a special experience translated by myths, of a great metaphysical fact—here the fact of alienation. Even a madman in his own way realizes the human condition.”⁵²

The final context in which alienation must be considered is the discussion of death. Death provides “a case of alienation which we did not consider in the section of this work which we devoted to the For-others.”⁵³ But death is explained in terms of being for-others. Sartre explains the alienation of death entirely as a revealing of vulnerability, and it is explained in terms of possibilities. A fundamental aim of the discussion is also to challenge Heidegger’s claim that death is my “ownmost possibility.” Sartre rejects this view, for death is precisely what is *not* my possibility. For Sartre, death is the ultimate triumph of being for-others. It “gives the final victory to the point of view of the Other by transferring the combat and the prize to another level—that is, by suddenly suppressing one of the combatants.”⁵⁴ This means that “the unique characteristic of a dead life is that

⁵¹ Sartre is presumably using the term ‘psychopath’ loosely.

⁵² All quoted passages in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 373.

⁵³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 543.

⁵⁴ In Hegel’s dialectic of recognition, the struggle for life and death must ultimately lead to a proper negation which preserves what it negates. This takes the form that the struggle does not end in death but in the preservation of life in the service of another. Whether this results from the victor’s granting to the vanquished the “gift of life,” or the vanquished *alienating* his life

it is a life of which the Other makes himself the guardian.”⁵⁵ Just as the other is experienced as the alienation of my possibilities, death is “an always possible nihilation of my possible which is outside my possibilities.”⁵⁶ Note that death itself is not construed as alienation, but the manner in which we *live* in relation to death. In this sense it is precisely the representation of death as a possibility *outside* the range of my own possibilities, hence *not* my possibility, that makes it alienating. It is represented in the manner in which we are vulnerable for others after death.

While it might appear that life and death differ as the former is open, while the latter is closed, they differ in fact in the manner in which they are open. While the “dead life” still “changes” it can only “undergo its changes without being in any way responsible for them.”⁵⁷ Its changes are entirely undergone, it is “modified from the outside.” It “is a pure fact as is birth; it comes to us from outside and it transforms us into the outside.”⁵⁸ Thus “the very existence of death alienates us wholly in our own life to the advantage of the Other.” This is because “to be dead is to be a prey for the living.”⁵⁹ The key to these statements is that it *alienates us in our own life*, and that if it is to be

into the possession of the victor, is ultimately besides the point for the present issue. The function of death, which is the issue at hand, must be overcome if recognition is to take place. Death “remains without the requisite significance of actual recognition.” When death results from the struggle, the fact of demonstration of independence takes place but for nothing. “there has arisen the certainty that both did stake their life, and held it lightly both in their own case and in the case of the other; but that is not for those who underwent this struggle.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, ed. J.B. Baillie (New York: Harper Colophon, 1967), 223. Recognition fails to result from an “abstract negation” which follows from “seeking to have existence on their own account.” (234) For Sartre, it is precisely the reverse. That in death I am wholly for others, not reduced merely to being for-itself. They would seem to agree, however, that one can only view one’s own death from another point of view.

⁵⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 541.

⁵⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 537.

⁵⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 543.

⁵⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 545.

⁵⁹ This and the previous quotation are from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 543.

experienced in our own life, it must be *revealed*, it must be made present in some way.

Since alienation is an experience that cannot be “felt” by the dead, it must apply to the living. But since the living never experience their own death (in Sartre’s view) if it is to be alienating it must somehow be an experience in life that I will be dead through the experience of not being in control of what happens to me after I die. Sartre claims that anyone “who tries to grasp the meaning of his future death must discover himself as the future prey of others.”⁶⁰ If we try to grasp the meaning of our death as though we somehow still had control over it, then we are not grasping death. But this error would be easy to make, since it is my death and I try to think of the unthinkable, it must be from the point of view of the Other, or, presenting another’s death as though it were my own.

Death, in short, cannot be a possibility of mine, because it is *incapable* of being actualized, the actualization of it would mean the absence of being for-itself, the absence of selfness. Sartre would agree with the view of Epicurus that “when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not.”⁶¹ In fact, “we should not know this death [of ours] if the Other did not exist.” Death is thus formally equivalent to the alienation of possibilities.

Alienation consistently refers to such experiences in *Being and Nothingness*, to the manner in which the “unrevealed” is given. What is given in the experience of

⁶⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 543.

⁶¹ From the “Letter to Menoeceus,” in Jason Lewis Saunders, *Greek and Roman Philosophy After Aristotle* (Simon and Schuster, 1966), 50. Husserlian phenomenology seems to consistently affirm this view, as can be seen in Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 466–471; Robin May Schott and Sara Heinämaa, *Birth, Death, and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 88–89. For remarks on the connection to the problem of Others specifically, see Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 101; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 119–120.

alienation is oneself, but oneself as an object for others. Since one cannot have this experience of oneself as one is for-self, the term vulnerability has been argued to accurately capture the meaning of that which is revealed-as-unrevealed, in the different ways Sartre uses the term ‘alienation.’ What the for-itself is for-others is vulnerable. Its vulnerability is revealed by the encounter with another freedom, and the *revelation* of my being for-others, my being vulnerable, is referred to as alienation.

The significance of this interpretation has yet to be indicated. The following section aims to indicate the potential significance of this interpretation in Sartre’s explanation of the negations that are involved in the relation being for-others (in the same way the for-itself and the in-itself are explained by such negations). This will support the argument that has preceded, and indicate the direction to be pursued in the following chapter.

Being for Others

When Sartre attempts to describe that “fundamental relation to the Other” that was promised at the beginning of Part III, he returns to the criteria established at the outset. He believes that his account of “the look...has revealed to us the indubitable existence of this Other for whom we are,”⁶² in accordance with the first requirement for a valid theory of Others, and this certainty was arrived at by starting from the cogito, the second requirement. In the concluding discussion to the section of “the Look,” Sartre provides a highly abstract account of the relation of being for-others as a whole. This is intended to satisfy the third and fourth requirements, both of which can be combined in the requirement that the relation “for-others” is a reciprocal, internal negation.

⁶² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 282.

This reciprocal internal negation can be understood in terms of and in contrast to the negations involved in the relation of the for-itself to the in-itself. This relation was a unilateral relation. The in-itself was unaffected by the negation which determined the existence of the for-itself. The for-itself is the negation of the in-itself. The Other is another for-itself, and not an in-itself that would remain in *indifferent* exteriority. But as a for-itself, the Other exists only as a nihilation of the in-itself, a self that is for-itself. So “originally the Other is the Not-Me-not-object.” And since Sartre went to great lengths arguing that the other as subject must be given first, before he or she can be an object, the Other must first exist as “the being who is making himself not be me.” This is necessary first so that the relation can be a reciprocal relation, I must “make myself not be this being by denying that he is me.” But since neither of us are “beings” in the mode in-itself, and since the other exists only as the negation making him or herself not be *me*, there is nothing for the negation by which I would make myself “not be this being denying me” unless it were already denying me. In other words, the negation that the for-itself contributes “can not be direct, for there is nothing on which it can be brought to bear.”⁶³

The indirect negation occurs through the mediation of the object that I am for the Other. The Other refuses to be me, and I refuse the “Me” that the Other refuses. It should be obvious that the refused Me is that which is for the other, an object. The Other is making him or herself not be Me (in the same way that the for-itself is a negation of the in-itself). But this would seem to indicate that he or she is refusing me as an in-itself, as an object, i.e., in the look. I refuse this Me that the Other refuses, and thereby refuse the

⁶³ All quotes in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 285.

Other, “indirectly” as it were. This refusal is a tearing away from what I am for the Other, and by doing so, I accept that Me for the Other, as *mine*. It is accepted as mine in being refused. This is significant, for if it bore no relation to me, if the Other were making him or herself not be the tree, the wall, whatever, it would not be *Me* that he or she was refusing to be. I could then be indifferent towards it. What the Other is refusing to be is *Me*, and this is what is also refused by me but recognized as mine in the very act of refusal: “it is precisely as me escaping myself that I claim this me as object. This me as object is the Me which I am to the exact extent that it escapes me.” The result is that both the Other and the for-itself are responsible for their relation. “I escape the Other by leaving him with my alienated Me in his hands...I assume and recognize as mine this alienated Me.”⁶⁴ It might seem that this abstract account of alienation returns to the problem of alienation in the previous chapter. It would seem that we refuse the alienated-Me, and assume it as *mine*, but *give* it to the Other. This is true, but it does not capture the whole significance of the relation.

In what sense is “the refused Me” refused? In what sense is the Other left with the “Me” that has already been refused? And in what sense can the for-itself be understood as responsible for this relation? Sartre says, “I am the one who *makes there be an Other by means of the affirmation of my selfness*, the Me-as-object is mine and I claim it; for the separation of the Other and of myself is never given; *I am perpetually responsible for it in my being.*”⁶⁵ It is through the object that I am for the other and that is the original relation to me that I make him or her the Other. The Other is the one who makes this possible because “the Other ...is *before all else* the one for whom my For-itself is.” Both

⁶⁴ All quotes in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 285.

⁶⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 285; my emphasis.

the one looking and the looked-at are “co-responsible for our original separation.”⁶⁶

How should we understand the responsibility for our own alienation and our seeming to be unaware of our responsibility? Sartre says this happens necessarily “at first I *must* grasp only that one of the two negations for which I am not responsible, the one which does not come to me through myself.”⁶⁷ All this refers to the *first* moment, when I am an object. There is a suppressed negation in the moment of being looked-at, and this suppressed negation will be explicated in the moment of making an object of the Other; in fact it will be its motivation.⁶⁸

This can be understood by acknowledging that “the For-itself causes there to be an Other.” But “this does not mean that it gives being to the Other but simply that it gives to the Other its being-other,” meaning, its “otherness” or the distinction or opposition from the for-itself. This is the aspect that I must be responsible for, it is by the “negation effected by me upon myself that I make myself be and that the Other arises as the Other.”⁶⁹

In order not to be the Other, there must be a choice of self. “The not-being-the-Other is never given but *perpetually chosen* in a perpetual resurrection: consciousness can not-be the Other only in so far as it is consciousness (of) itself as not being the Other.”⁷⁰ This means, quite clearly, that a real, total, absolute, loss of self, would

⁶⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 285.

⁶⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 287.

⁶⁸ “Since I can not realize both negations at once, the new negation, although it has the other negation for its motivation, in turn disguises it. The Other appears to me as a degraded presence. This is because the Other and I are in fact co-responsible for the Other's existence, but it is by two negations such that I can not experience the one without immediately disguising the second.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 287.

⁶⁹ All quotes in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 283.

⁷⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 284.

eliminate the Other as Other. For there to be an Other, there must be a self. In fact, “the disappearance of the alienated Me would involve the disappearance of the Other through the collapse of myself.” Finally, “my Self—is by its essential structure an assumption as mine of this Me which the Other refuses—we can even say that it is only that.”⁷¹

What Sartre is saying here is that our experience of alienation is necessary in order to experience an *other*. The question that can be raised immediately, regarding the previous quotation, is: what would it mean for the disappearance of the other through the disappearance of the alienated me? An answer might be understood as follows: if the Other’s refusal of me were not in turn refused, the Other’s will would be identical with our own. But even this way of putting it is not precise, for this gives the impression of a union of some sort. The point is in fact that there would be no prior resistance between the transcendence of each. It would be like a possession that was not known as a possession, and would not be a relation between self and other at all. It would be at most the self that was explored in *Being and Nothingness* before the Other was considered. In other words, there must be an explicit negation for the Other to be distinct from the self. But the Other’s negation, the one by which the Other exists as not being me, *conceals* or disguises the negation that *must* be there in order for us to be conscious (of) not being the Other. Since we are aware of the Other, there must be the negation for awareness to be present. It is a negation that is concealed by the Other’s negation. When the Other is made into an object, it is simply the same negation that was already there but concealed. But we are trying to understand the first negation, which is concealed. The concealment of the negation is not such that it results in a lack of awareness, it leaves awareness but

⁷¹ This and the previous quote from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 285.

conceals our *responsibility*. So the presence of awareness and the concealment of responsibility is what occur in the experience of alienation.

This relation can be expressed if we return to the above mentioned formula that the Other would disappear if the alienated Me disappeared. The alienated me is necessary for the Other to appear as Other. Now consider an example where we perform an action but say we are being *forced* to do it by another. If we took away the Other from this example, we would be left with an activity but without it making sense to say that it is forced. In other words, it would disappear as force and become a free action. If we did not choose ourselves as ourselves when someone tries to force us to do something, it would not be experienced as *compulsion*. This means, that when we feel ourselves forced to do something, we *choose* the fact that we are forced to do it. In fact, the very expression “I am being forced to do it” implies that I am still the one that carries out the action, but that there is some “influence” that is affecting “Me.” The point is that there is a distinction between this “alien force” and “Me.” It is this distinction that is the choice of self that makes the Other be as Other. Without it, external impositions could be taken up without being forced. The significance of this point must be understood properly.

Consider the following criticism of Sartre provided by T. Storm Heter: “Sartre’s view in BN implies that *coercion is impossible* since all situations are chosen. Such a view rules coercion out by fiat.”⁷² This is what seems to be the implication that we are responsible for the choice of the Other. But we can defend Sartre here against Heter. The latter says “freedom requires not being coerced, not being enslaved, and not being

⁷² T. Storm Heter, *Sartre’s Ethics of Engagement: Authenticity and Civic Virtue* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 17. (my emphasis)

oppressed.”⁷³ Likewise, “The rape victim does not choose to be raped; she is forced into rape. This is true even if the rapist presents her with a devil's choice. ‘Your body or your life’ is not a recipe for freedom.”⁷⁴ What Sartre is actually claiming is quite the contrary: that without freedom, *there could be no coercion*. Coercion does not destroy freedom; it requires it in order to be *coercive*. It is a choice of self that determines whether an act is freely chosen or whether it is felt as an imposition. There is a fallacy involved in thinking about responsibility that says that if we are responsible, we could choose otherwise. *Therefore we have nothing to complain about because we are responsible*. This sort of claim is basically a diminution of subjectivity, precisely what it claims to be arguing against. But in fact, it is only on the basis of being a responsible subject on the basis of a choice of self in the world, who can be a victim at all. In some obvious sense, it is true that the victim of rape does not choose to be raped. But it is only on the assumption or expectation of consent that the absence of choice is even relevant. The victim *does* in fact choose to experience the act as a violation, as opposed to accepting it as what he or she *deserves* or what is *natural*. The violation occurs as a transgression of the limits of his or her project to be a person who does not have sexual relations without consent.

There are contexts in which the limits to what we consent to are much more blurry. Heter also mentions slavery. Would it be wrong to say that slaves are responsible for their condition as slaves? This would imply to Heter that one could make a project of slavery, which is the radical rejection of any project. The sentiment is shared, actually, in what has been and will be discussed regarding alienation. But the point here is that slaves who

⁷³ Heter, *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement*, 17.

⁷⁴ Heter, *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement*, 18.

experience their condition as being forced and imposed, *maintain* selfness. This should not be minimized. It is one thing to say that the slave is not as free *as the master*.⁷⁵ But if the slave was not free, and if the slave did not retain selfness, there would be no possibility for rebellion, let alone an actualization of it. The actual occurrence of rebellion occurred because some slaves experienced their slavery precisely *as slavery*, and in doing so, maintained a sense of their own agency.⁷⁶ Without an awareness of freedom, the coercion could not be experienced negatively, as a violation. At most, it could be accepted as a *natural condition*. Coercion without freedom is simply a force of nature, in other words, it is not coercion at all. Coercion requires freedom, because we choose to retain enough dignity for something to be coercing and not otherwise. And this is what the experience of alienation reveals as a *possibility*.

This is the essential point then, in the claim that “I am The One who makes there be an Other by means of the affirmation of my selfness.” A *loss* of selfness would also eliminate the Other. An experience of one’s vulnerability is still an affirmation of self, with the addition that we are certain of a consciousness other than our own. In short, in order to experience being a victim, one must experience one’s freedom, and in order for this freedom to feel opposition, there must be a freedom posited as *not my own*.

It is for the reasons argued above that Sartre is able to say (perhaps too nonchalantly given the historical context in which it was written), that prohibitions such

⁷⁵ Sartre is often criticized for saying that the slave is free. The rebuttal often brought against him is that the slave is less free than the master, to which Sartre replies, freedom is either present or it is not. This is often misunderstood, as critics fail to recognize the possible condition of freedom suppressed, since to be suppressed, it must be free.

⁷⁶ One of the difficulties I find in characterizing the wage contract as “wage slavery,” for instance, is precisely that it seems to be experienced as a free choice, whereas slavery is a forced choice that conceals the responsibility of the slave that is nonetheless there.

as a sign reading “No Jews allowed” has meaning “only on and through the foundation of my free choice.” This means, “I can disobey the prohibition, pay no attention to it, or, on the contrary, confer upon it a coercive value which it can hold only because of the weight which I attach to it.” He is not saying we are free to accept them or not, but that the project of being human and demanding respect from others is a choice that is concealed in the encounter with such prohibitions, when they are encountered as the coercion they truly are.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The quotes in this paragraph are from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 524; the discussion in which it occurs continues on to 525.

CHAPTER 4

ISSUES AND CRITICAL DISCUSSION

The present chapter has two primary aims. First, to explore the implications of the present study to the existing scholarship in Sartre studies. Second, to consider some possible problems with the interpretation offered in order to better support the claims in the preceding chapters and those that follow. I will begin with some positive contributions that the present study can provide.

Implications

Vulnerability in the context of “the Look” has not been entirely overlooked by scholars; by itself, this concept is not new and Sartre himself says this is something revealed by the look.¹ However, the consistent interpretation of alienation as the experience of vulnerability has not been taken to its logical conclusion by the scholars that recognize vulnerability as an aspect of “the Look.” Some of these scholars also take the less conventional view regarding the meaning of “conflict” in Sartre’s characterization of being for-others, arguing that conflict does not refer to “antagonism”

¹ The scholars who have noted vulnerability in connection with the look include John D Scanlon, “Desire, Need, and Alienation in Sartre,” in *Dialogues in phenomenology*, ed. Don Ihde and Richard M. Zaner (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 216–217; 221; Monika Langer, “Sartre and Merleau-Ponty: A Reappraisal,” in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. P. A Schilpp (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1981), 315; Thomas R. Flynn, “The Alienating and the Mediating Third in the Social Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre,” in *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy: Heirs and ancestors*, vol. 6 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1973), 6; Debra Bergoffen, “Casting Shadows: The Body in Descartes, Sartre, De Beauvoir and Lacan,” *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française* IV, no. 2–3 (1992): 236; Thomas W. Busch, “Sartre and the Senses of Alienation,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 15 (1977): 153; William Ralph Schroeder, *Sartre and His Predecessors* (New York: Routledge, 1984), 196.

or “hostility” but rather to “opposition.”² The aim in the previous chapters was to take these insights to their logical conclusion and disassociate Sartre’s account in *Being and Nothingness* from the often wholly negative sense of alienation that is often attributed to him, and argue that alienation refers fundamentally to an experience of vulnerability. Understanding vulnerability in the sense argued in the previous chapter can allow us to see Sartrean alienation in a much more ambiguous light. The ambiguity of alienation here refers to the fact that the experience itself should be understood in neutral rather than negative terms.

Although scholars have acknowledged vulnerability as a dimension of being for-others, they have not carried it as far as I claimed in the previous chapter that vulnerability is the meaning of being for-others. My interpretation shows that the experience of alienation provides a certainty, which Sartre believes to be on the same level as the *cogito*, that the other exists. The experience of alienation reveals our being for-others, and the meaning of being for-others is understood as vulnerability.

The benefits of this interpretation are that it will allow us to understand the invariant sense of alienation throughout Sartre’s works, and that it will allow us to establish an intelligible relation between alienation and the related phenomena of violence and oppression. This was set up by emphasizing alienation as a modification of “my” possibilities, and understanding alienation in terms of possibilities. I will show in the next chapter that Sartre’s point of departure for his reflections on violence in the posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics*, is the same fact of being for-others:

² As noted in Langer, *Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, 313 and 317. This point can be seen in Scanlon’s essay as well.

that “violence appears in the world as a pure *possibility* from the moment men appear.”³ This statement is already present in *Being and Nothingness* provided we interpret being for-others as vulnerability, and understand vulnerability as this “pure possibility.” But this will be the subject of the next chapter.

The issue at present, however, is not violence in the *Notebooks*, but in *Being and Nothingness*. The interpretation of alienation presented in the previous chapter can clarify the role of violence in this text. While Sartre rarely mentions violence at all in *Being and Nothingness*, the dominant interpretation of being for-others and concrete relations with others has stated that alienation is equivalent to violence.⁴ Having clarified the sense of alienation as vulnerability, distinct from and prior to violence, critical remarks on this interpretation of “the Look” as violence can be offered.

Alienation & Violence

First, I reject the criticism, directed against Sartre, that claims “conflict and oppression inevitably resulted when free subjects were objectified by other free subjects.”⁵ We can already take note of the sort of analysis that is involved in the topic at hand. Is oppression really *the same thing* as conflict, as this statement would seem to suggest? The motivation for these considerations is derived from a belief that they are not. I have already argued in favor of rejecting the meaning of the term ‘conflict’ in the

³ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 215.

⁴ The attitudes of hatred and sadism are the exceptions rather than the rule, as these discussions the only context in which it is appropriate to see violence in Sartre’s discussion.

⁵ Thomas C. Anderson, *Sartre’s Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1993), 81.; Anderson also claims that “in a radical departure from the view that dominates BN, Sartre now [in *Notebooks*] insists that objectification, although it makes oppression possible, is not itself oppression.” (79) But it was not considered oppression at all, except in the case of the “us-object.”

sense it is meant here.⁶ To ask if oppression is really the same thing as *opposition* would be the actual question, to which the answer should be obvious. The issue of the relation between alienation and oppression is one that will need to be addressed, in the following chapters. But first, a critical discussion of the existing scholarship on this issue is in order.

The claim that “conflict and oppression resulted” from the objectification involved in the look is made by Thomas Anderson. Anderson has been criticized in turn by Ronald Santoni for “over-interpretation” with regard to the term “objectification.” Santoni argues that such over-interpretation occurs when Anderson attributes the subject-object relation (of self for another) in the epistemological sense with something more nefarious.⁷ Of course, they are not *merely* epistemological notions, as Santoni admits; after all, Sartre refused to allow the fundamental relation to Others to be expressed in epistemological terms. But despite this correction of Anderson’s view, Santoni claims “that violence is at the core of my ‘original fall’ and my original ‘being-for-others,’” although he does not indicate what it means to say it is “at the core.”⁸ My interpretation

⁶ In Chapter 2, in the second section of the second part, in the discussion of Sartre’s criticism of Heidegger.

⁷ Ronald E. Santoni, *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 30.

⁸ Santoni *Sartre on Violence*, 19. Santoni’s argument is a bit strange. He claims that “Although in BN Sartre does not employ the word ‘violence’ to characterize my or the Other’s attempts to ‘steal,’ absorb, assimilate, or recover my or the Other’s freedom, it seems clear that these mutual violations have a claim to that word, for, etymologically, to violate (violate)–ion this case, to violate free, conscious subjects—is at the root of the word ‘violence.’” If Sartre employed the term ‘violate’ or its derivatives with any frequency, Santoni’s claim would be perfectly legitimate. The problem is that Sartre does not use the word violate with any more frequency than he does violence. The passage in which violation is clearly posited is the same discussion in which he uses the word violence, and would not require recourse to etymology. We have indicated our understanding of the way in which violation functions in the attempt to “respect” the Other’s freedom in the previous chapter. For the discussion in *Being and Nothingness*, see 409-410.

has offered an explanation of exactly how violence might be understood “to be at the core” of being for-others. But my interpretation found that it was not quite “at the core” at all. Being for-others is an experience of the *possibility* of violence, and this is a possibility that emerges with any plurality of freedoms in Sartre’s view. Santoni acknowledges the absence of overt violence from the discussion of being for-others, but he believes nonetheless that it is an “entry into [Sartre’s] developing understanding of violence” that might entail “also, its inevitability.”⁹ Whether this can be maintained regarding Sartre’s writings that *explicitly* address violence (i.e., *Notebooks*) is a separate issue. The point for the moment is that the attribution of violence to the core of being for-others, or speculation as to its inevitability based on what was found in *Being and Nothingness*, is misguided. The alienation of possibilities was a modification of possibilities such that one experienced oneself as being vulnerable to another freedom. This vulnerability is a factual necessity on par with the factual necessity of the *cogito*. Sartre is far from asserting that there is even a *violation* at work in the discussion of alienation, and he explains it primarily, as I explained in the previous chapter, as an *uneasiness* concerning what *might* happen—without any reference to *likelihood* whatsoever. That the “pure possibility” of violence *can* become a reality of violence is undeniable; but does this mean it is *inevitable*? Both Santoni and Anderson collapse the difference between violence as a possibility and an actuality.¹⁰

Consider a typical remark to demonstrate this collapse beyond the scholars mentioned thus far. Stanley Hoffmann says that “we don’t find much about [violence] in

⁹ Santoni *Sartre on Violence*, 19.

¹⁰ This might be significant, considering this is how Sartre will understand the normative violence of oppression in later works as we will see in the chapters to follow.

L'Être et le néant, which is much more concerned with bad faith. But *the seeds of Sartre's position on violence are there: my liberty is limited, and can be threatened*, by yours; you are an object for me, and vice versa."¹¹ First, Hoffman admits the absence of violence, then appeals to it as a potentiality, as the "seeds" of his opinion that reveal it is actually present. But if the seeds of Sartre's position on violence are actually there *as seeds*, i.e., not as full reality, perhaps this is because Sartre is aiming to show precisely the reality of the potentiality of violence. If this is accurate, it would be a mistake to focus on the full actualization of the seed rather than the seed itself. Hoffmann claims that violence is present in seed form in the sense that "liberty...can be threatened." This formulation of "can be threatened," is a weak way of putting it. For a threat can be empty or real, and a threat can be already an act of violence. What exactly is the status of this threat? But what is more, the threat is only a possibility, Hoffman says my liberty "*can be threatened*." But is it actually threatened? If the threat itself is only a potential threat, what exactly is being said? It seems to imply that the existence of Others is itself a violation of some solipsistic project. This is true *of solipsism*, But Sartre's point is that precisely because the solipsist would be threatened it would be as impossible to deny the Other's existence as it would be to deny one's own. But this is an extrapolation, as Sartre was arguing how *anyone* can "make proof" of the Other's existence. The point here is not to criticize Hoffman, as much as to indicate how the issue can be confused unless one is clear about how this relation to the Other is understood as a *possibility*, as distinct from the actuality, of violence.

¹¹ Stanley Hoffmann, "A Note on Sartre and Violence," *Journal of Romance Studies* Volume 6, no. Numbers 1 & 2 (2006): 61.

Consider another claim from Anderson where he takes issue with the fact that “Sartre asserts boldly that no matter what I do for another, even if I aid him, I necessarily violate his freedom! I violate it because I inevitably limit it,” and “this seems to imply...that Sartre wants...one without any limits.”¹² This is really two claims. The first is that the look is necessarily a violation, and the second, that this implies Sartre’s desire for a freedom without limit. The first is accurate as to what Sartre says. But when understood in its context, we see that Sartre also claims that “toleration for the Other’s freedom is an empty word.”¹³ Sartre claims that the Other reveals to the for-itself its vulnerability. Anderson believes Sartre is claiming that the Other *must* experience the look returned as a violation. But to claim that the look *must* be experienced as a violation is just as false as claiming that respect *must* be experienced as tolerance. The Other *can* experience toleration itself as a violation. This is because the Other is free. This is understood in any act of looking at the Other. Any look at the Other runs the risk of violating the Other’s freedom, since the Other is free. But if this happened by necessity, the relation between self and other would be a relation of pure exteriority. If the Other does not feel a violation, there is no violation. But we “risk” violating the Other in tolerating as much as in other conduct, because ultimately the Other is free to decide the meaning of the look, in the sense that the possibilities alienated therein are only meaningful in the light of some project. The project adopted is that which will be modified by the presence of the look. Since this organization is free we are always at risk for violating the Other’s freedom in this sense. The other might think that I have done some harm and then discover that, on further consideration and conversation, the

¹² Anderson, *Sartre’s Two Ethics*, 35.

¹³ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 409.

judgment was mistaken.¹⁴ But this raises another problem: Can *strictly objective* criteria for the experience of violence be determined, when violence is something inherently *subjective*?¹⁵ I claim that it is possible, provided we understand *objective* in the sense of “*there for everyone*,” and not “*there for no one*.” If objectivity were understood in the latter sense it would be a relation established from outside, by a third party, and not for the person who experienced the violation. This would collapse into a situation where violence is determined by an external witness and not the person who is violated.

As to the second part of the claim, that the statement implies that Sartre wants freedom “without any limits,”¹⁶ this is a frequent criticism, alluded to in the remarks on Hoffman’s claims above, that deserves some more attention. Despite the claim being refuted frequently, it is just as frequently forgotten.¹⁷ Perhaps there is a reason for the

¹⁴ It might be thought that this begs the question, for how can he be wrong about the experience if the experience is to reveal the certainty of an other subject? He was mistaken about the combination of the aim to violate, or the negligence that would be equivalent, but his experience depended on my attitude which he was mistaken about. Of course, this does not mean it is necessary that the experience be “certified” by an other, or that we “make sure” that they really meant it. For that simply shifts the priority back to the Other, such that he will teach me whether I have been violated. It is obvious that contextual considerations must be present to pursue this point further and I have tried only to explain the general issue at hand as its generality is what is at stake. It is also worth noting that, as can easily be observed in children, we do in fact learn whether we are violated from others. Children (often) do not feel hurt until they see they are hurt in the reaction of adults. Adults may occasionally feel they have been harmed retrospectively, if someone convinces them of it; or, they may feel harmed, only to discover that they were wrong.

¹⁵ In *Phenomenology and Violence*, James Dodd makes precisely this point: “violence has an essentially subjective aspect that must be taken into account in order to grasp the full breadth of its significance in and for human action.” James Dodd, *Violence and Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 49. Despite the possible overlap between some of the claims in Dodd’s work and the present study the ultimate conclusion as to the meaning of violence in Sartre’s *Notebooks* seem to be in disagreement.

¹⁶ A recent criticism that repeats these claims can be found in Diane Enns, *Speaking of Freedom: Philosophy, Politics, and the Struggle for Liberation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 30–35.

¹⁷ Judith Butler makes note of this in *Subjects of Desire*. Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 139–140.

persistence of this criticism. Perhaps it is due to the fact that the response to those passages in which Sartre insists on the limits of freedom does not seem to make sense or actually explain the other passages. In effect, the refutations amount to saying “that is not what is said.” What might be lacking in the view of the critics, however, is a demonstrable intelligibility between the counter claims and the claims initially criticized.

My interpretation of alienation addresses the issue directly. Rather than appeal to the passages indicating that “freedom is situated,” the criticism may be answered directly by showing that Sartre could not have “implied” that he desires a freedom without limits, given the problem that stimulated the theory of “the Look.” Since the criticisms are probably not due to the critics being unaware of passages expressing that freedom is situated, it would be necessary to show their compatibility. Having understood that alienation is how we experience the Other’s freedom, Sartre’s intention in “the Look” and elsewhere is primarily to show how freedom is situated, not that situatedness is a curse. An other consciousness necessarily appears as a consciousness opposed to mine; otherwise, it would not be *other*, and if it was not other than my consciousness, it would be in-itself. That is all that Sartre is trying to show. This does not “imply” that he wants a freedom without limits, but rather that freedom can try to reject these limits precisely because it is opposed to them. Sartre believes that *failing to experience* the Other as an opposing freedom would collapse his theory into solipsism. What for Sartre is a rejection of solipsism seems to some of his readers to be a desire for it. It is one thing to claim that he fails to escape solipsism, but another to say that the passages *imply a desire* for it.

Furthermore, the appeal to an “implication” here is inappropriate. Sartre does not imply that he wants an unlimited freedom. Sartre understands the other as imposing a

limit also on knowledge, in the sense that it is only through the Other that we can “live ignorance as ignorance.” Yet I am not aware that any scholar has claimed that Sartre implies that he wants *unlimited knowledge* (unless, that is, this is a claim equivalent to unlimited freedom). The claims about Sartre’s desires by appeal to implication fails to acknowledge the thrust of the discussion of Others, which seems oriented toward showing how violence is *possible*. Without a plurality of freedoms, violence as well as dialogue would be impossible. But given the fact of the plurality of freedoms, it is only possible.¹⁸ For a solipsist, violence would be impossible, since there would be no other freedom to violate or to be violated.¹⁹

But to be fair, Sartre’s critics are not arriving at their conclusions simply by a misreading. The critics are typically focused on the chapter of “Concrete Relations with Others.” At the very least, Sartre seems to provide, in this chapter, a bleak portrait of human reality. A discussion of concrete relations is in order before assuming the defense of the interpretation I have offered has been shown sufficiently.

Alienation in “Concrete Relations With Others”

I have shown that for Sartre, the “object [that] I am for the Other” is the experience of oneself as an object. As an experience it includes selfness and subjectivity. But this also meant that, as an object, I am a vulnerable object. Since “my concrete

¹⁸ It is ironic that Anderson, and Santoni to some extent, have claimed that Sartre moves beyond this narrow view of interpersonal relations in the *Notebooks*, since the *Notebooks* reproduce much of the same. The source for their optimism resides in the sections devoted to “reciprocity,” which show Sartre *struggling* to maintain a distinction of self and other without the opposition in a strong sense. We find such phrases as “conflict no longer as the sense of going against.” But the upshot is that these are inconclusive remarks that are abandoned if not reformulated in later works.

¹⁹ This will be part of the ambivalent project of violence discussed in the next chapter.

relations with the Other...are wholly governed by my attitudes with respect to the object which I am for the Other,”²⁰ that which governs my relations with others can be understood as my attitude toward this vulnerability. Much criticism of Sartre’s theory of others is based on the problems perceived to be inherent in the account of “concrete relations.”²¹ In what follows attention will be paid specifically to the meaning of alienation and vulnerability in the discussion of “Concrete Relations.”

Consider first the attitude of “love.” Sartre claims that “the true ideal of love’s enterprise: [is] alienated freedom.”²² What does this mean? Alienated freedom means that freedom gives itself up to the mercy of the Other, it chooses to live only for the Other. Alienated freedom in this context is a sort of “consensual enslavement” as alienation often indicates. But what is the consequence of an alienated freedom, or, what does this ideal wish to accomplish? It is clear that the alienation of freedom would result here in the unity of a single freedom, a single transcendence, despite being broken in two. There would be two but without *opposition*, there would be a pure “concurrence of wills.”²³

But the two are not really one; in fact, they *become divided* precisely to the extent that the relation is *reciprocal*. Love fails because it *cannot* achieve a consensual enslavement without reciprocity, thereby eliminating the character of enslavement. The error of love’s ideal is that “each one of the lovers wants to be an object for which the

²⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 363

²¹ I will refer to this chapter and the examples from it as “concrete relations” in order to abbreviate it to some extent.

²² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 375

²³ As in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: “my will, as externalized, is at the same time another will. Hence this moment...is the unity of different wills, which therefore relinquish their difference and distinctiveness. Yet it is also implicit (at this stage) in this identity of different wills that each of them is and remains a will distinctive for itself and not identical with the other.” Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 104.

Other's freedom is alienated in an original intuition which" they think to be "love in the true sense." But this ideal of love "is only a contradictory ideal of the for-itself" because "each one is alienated only to the extent that he demands the alienation of the Other."²⁴ In other words, the ideal fails because of the reciprocity required, and the contradiction involved in the demand. It demands that one choose freely to enslave oneself, and it requires that even in bondage the enslaved remains free, but that freedom would be used only in order to freely choose to remain in bondage. The relationship fails because it is reciprocal: love does not want reciprocity—because reciprocity entails conflict—meaning *otherness, not unity*.²⁵ In short, love wants to be free from the vulnerability before the other's freedom, but if the demand is reciprocal, then the escape from vulnerability is conditional, and not guaranteed. The reason why love fails as a relationship is because its ideal aims to escape vulnerability, while in reality, it makes one *more* vulnerable.

Consider next the masochistic attitude. The Masochist likewise "consents to...absolute alienation."²⁶ The masochist gets rid of subjectivity in order to not feel the Other's freedom as a counter-freedom; the masochist wants subjectivity "to be assimilated by the Other." But by "refusing to be anything more than an object,"²⁸ the

²⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 376

²⁵ Compare these considerations with Kant's *Doctrine of Right*. Kant considers what would be the legitimate claims of right in the marriage relation, with respect to acts of sexual enjoyment. The problem is first that "the human being makes himself into a thing, which conflicts with the right of Humanity in his person." For this to be legitimate, there must be a complementary act, so that "while one is acquired acquires the other in turn" and this "restores its personality" and eliminates the problem. The same principle is operative in the relation of servants to the head of household. The latter has "a right that is like a right to a thing" concerning the former, and yet he can never behave as if he owns them, "for a contract by which one party would completely renounce his freedom for the other's advantage would be self-contradictory...since by it one party would cease to be a person." Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 101.

²⁶ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 378.

masochist is unable to be violated. "Thus the more I shall feel myself surpassed toward other ends, the more I shall enjoy the abdication of my transcendence." This abdication is alienation, it is a transfer of one's own transcendence into the possession of the Other. But as mentioned previously this is not possible. Despite the fact that one can *try* to accomplish this task, it is on principle what is not a possibility for me: "this alienated Me...remains on principle inapprehensible." Finally, the contradiction is plain in that "it is in and through transcendence that he disposes of himself as a being to be transcended."²⁷ The masochist cannot be rid of the transcendence through which one would enjoy the abdication of transcendence. While it might seem that the masochist accepts the vulnerable object that he or she is for the Other, the failure of this attitude follows from the fact that the masochist cannot apprehend the vulnerable object that one is for the Other, precisely because this is what it means to be vulnerable.

We saw the descriptions of language and indifference in the previous chapter. Consider now the attitudes of Sadism and Hatred, but from a different angle. Just as with indifference in the previous chapter, the significance of alienation in the context of sadism and hatred is the radical refusal of alienation. If Sartre intended alienation to be *violence* as such, these attitudes would need to be grouped in what are commonly understood to be acts of self-defense. While the attitudes of love and masochism might seem *neurotic*, the attitudes of sadism and hatred are downright malicious. And yet they are the attitudes that respond *negatively* to the experience of alienation. If alienation were violence, would it make sense to treat a negative response to it as somehow misguided?

²⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 378

Sadism, along with hatred, is in fact the only attitude involving actual violence in Sartre's descriptions. Sadism is motivated by "anxiety in the face of the Other." Unlike Love, or even Masochism, both of which try to use one's own objectivity in order to use the Other's freedom for its own ends, the sadist tries to simply deface the other, thereby avoiding the principle condition of the anxiety associated with vulnerability. But in addition, since one is aiming at the Other's freedom through objectivity, this can occur in relation to objects that have a human origin. There is some sadism in the disposability of objects that were made by human labor, which is not to say they should be prioritized over people themselves, but simply, it is a form of the same attitude. I will show in the next chapter how (for Sartre) the destruction of objects can indicate a project of aiming at what is human in them.

Hatred also "aims to get rid of its being-for-others" and "consents to being only for-itself."²⁸ Being unable to realize being-only-for-itself, hatred is provoked "by any act which subjects him to the Other's freedom."²⁹ Since for hatred alienation is already a violation, any action taken on its part is conceived as legitimate self-defense. It is based on the realization that one must "abandon the effort to realize any union with the Other."³⁰ It seems from this passage that such a conclusion (of disunion) is *necessary* given Sartre's express refusal to allow such a "unity," to which we will return shortly. But this attitude could be understood also to achieve this unity by other means. It achieves a unity of consciousnesses by *eliminating all but one*. In this sense it resembles the viewpoint Sartre criticized in the discussion of the "being-with," which "solves" the

²⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 409-410.

²⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 411.

³⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 410.

problem of solipsism by eliminating the “otherness” of the Other. But Hatred solves the problem by means of a *final* solution: by eliminating the Other. It is a more extreme version of Love, where Love aims to love in solitude, as a closed system, Hatred aims to close itself off and simply gain solitude. But this only eliminates the facticity or the objectivity of Others, in other words, their presence as an object. Hatred cannot be free from the experience of vulnerability as it is “haunted by the perpetual *possibility* of its alienation.”³¹ In this attitude, the *possibility* of alienation, i.e., the revelation of vulnerability for another freedom, *is* its alienation. For Hatred, the contact with another freedom is *itself* a wound. But to eliminate *this possibility* would require the elimination of the Other. This is why I claimed in the previous chapter that there is no difference between the possibility of being seen, and being seen; that is, these both have the same result: the revelation of being for others (and therefore vulnerability).

But this escape from vulnerability was also present in the attitudes of love and masochism; it is not limited to the second series of attitudes. Consider for instance, that love responds to the fact that “I exist by means of the Other’s freedom,” that “I have no security; I am in danger in this freedom...my being receives from it a perpetual passive escape from self.”³² In *response* to this condition, Love pursues a “project of recovering my being,” and this recovery “can be realized only if I get hold of this freedom and reduce it to being a freedom subject to my freedom.”³³ The Lover’s aim is to be “secure within the Other’s consciousness,” “protected against any eventual devalorization,”

³¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 411 (my emphasis).

³² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 366.

³³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 366.

“reassured;”³⁴ such that “facticity is saved” and so that one will “no longer feel uneasy” for one’s “unjustified” existence.³⁵ This requires that the Other’s look should be disarmed, so that “the Other’s look no longer paralyzes...with finitude.”³⁶ As a result of being loved by this Other, “alienation and facticity are no longer a fact but a right.”³⁷ All this means, love aims to avoid the revelation of being vulnerable, and is able to convince itself that it is not vulnerable if it has not been revealed, or that it is able to “accept” its vulnerability provided it is “justified.”

The meaning of all these attitudes, Sartre concludes, is that “we are always, no matter what attitude is adopted, in a state of instability in relation to the Other.”³⁸ The meaning of “instability” in this context, is the same thing as “transcendence” with respect to consciousness. It is a perpetual surpassing. But the surpassing does not refer to the transcendence of the given by one’s own free projects, but by the transcendence from outside. And it is precisely this instability that the attitudes described in “concrete relations” find *intolerable*. That critics have criticized Sartre for not providing the stability that these attitudes themselves desire seem to miss the point.³⁹ But most importantly, this instability in relation to another freedom is what is meant by vulnerability. When Sartre claims, somewhat pessimistically, that “we shall never place ourselves concretely on a plane of equality; that is, on the plane where the recognition of

³⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 369.

³⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 371.

³⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 369.

³⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 371.

³⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 408.

³⁹ And for all the speculation as to Sartre’s desire for “unlimited freedom” it seems less likely that his critics would ask what *they desire* from the mystical harmony of consciousnesses that he fails to provide.

the Other's freedom would involve the Other's recognition of our freedom,"⁴⁰ this is because such an equality would collapse into the selfness of subjectivity as it exists for-itself. It would not appear to itself as being opposed by another at all. If there is a recognition of freedom, it includes the recognition that this Other freedom will not recognize our freedom as it is for us, and *might not* recognize it as we might wish it to be recognized by Others.

This brings us to the final issue to be dealt with in "Concrete Relations." Sartre is often criticized for rejecting the possibility of "subject-subject" relations.⁴¹ This criticism has two aspects to it. First, Sartre fails to allow for the experience of a "we-subject," or at least he refuses to allow for such experiences as anything other than an epiphenomenon or psychological anomaly. Second, that the subject-object relation that is constitutive of the relation to others is undesirable. To the last point, it should be obvious that if Sartre meant a subject-object relation in the manner which consciousness takes the in-itself as an object, this would not be a relation to *others* at all. The relation to Others is a relation to *other consciousnesses*, not other objects, which had been established previously. In other words, if Sartre was only explaining a relation of subject-object as a relation of consciousness-to-thing, then he had no need to address the problem of others at all. In addition, the relation to Others would be only an *exterior relation* for the object side, whereas this is precisely what the "problem" of others is intended to avoid. The experience of being an object for a subject, perhaps better expressed as "object/subject" refers to the experience of a subject being an object, or what I have referred to as alienation or the revealing of the vulnerability of the for-itself. I have emphasized what it

⁴⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 409.

⁴¹ This is a common criticism, for example, see Anderson *Sartre's Two Ethics*, 33.

means to be an object for another freedom as being vulnerable, in an effort to distinguish it precisely from the mistaken view that to be an object for another is equivalent to being reduced to a *mere thing*. In other words, the undesirability of the relation object-subject depends on the presumptions of what this relation would mean. It does *not* mean a relation of exteriority. If the desire for a “subject-subject” relation was replaced with a desire for a reciprocal relation of interiority, the result is that Sartre believes he is explicitly providing the latter, but not the former. Thus he must mean something else, primarily when rejecting “subject-subject” relations, and he must not believe that a “subject-subject” relation would be a dual relation of interiority.

What Sartre believes is meant by “subject-subject” relations is a “hyper-consciousness” of some sort.⁴² Once this is understood, it will be clearer why he must reject it. In fact, the argument appears much earlier in the text than the discussion of being for-others, when given a clear formulation in the discussion of Freud and the unconscious, in the context of bad faith.⁴³ In this discussion, Sartre claims that the thesis of the unconscious “introduces into my subjectivity the deepest intersubjective structures of the *mitsein*.”⁴⁴ Why is this significant? Because if one aims to explain self-deception by dividing subjectivity into a duality on the model of a liar and a lied-to, it would not explain self-deception at all, rather it would explain *straightforward deception*, since the structure of liar–lied to would be reproduced. But if self-deception collapses into deception, and deception involves a subject lying to another subject, then each of these

⁴² Whether he is justified in this view is a separate issue. But he is consistent in his rejection of subject-subject relations on this basis.

⁴³ We have avoided talk of bad faith until now, and only to postpone it again; it will be addressed in the next section of the present chapter.

⁴⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 51.

subjects (contained in the unity of one subject) are also divisible. If any and every unit of subjectivity is divisible *in this manner*⁴⁵ than the two subjects contained in the one subject can be each divided, and the new set of each divided again, and so forth. Ultimately it would lead to infinity and it would be impossible to explain even the basic form of deception that was presupposed, since each of these units would be unable to claim responsibility or be aware of what they were doing.⁴⁶ In the same way that it would be absurd to explain deception in the unity of a single subject by means of an appeal to a dual subjectivity, it would be inappropriate to explain the coexistence of multiple subjectivities in terms of a single subjectivity. This is what Sartre detects in the thesis of subject-subject relations, or “We-subject.” Whether there is a good reason for this concern is not the issue at stake in my claim; I claim only that Sartre believes that to “unify” consciousnesses eliminates the sense “other-consciousness.” Additionally, the elimination of otherness in the formation of a unity *would not* eliminate the sense of otherness, it would only *displace* it. This is why the collective object has more reality (in *Being and Nothingness*) than the epiphenomenon of the we-subject: it is based on the relation of self-other and does not eliminate the sense of otherness.⁴⁷

The key to Sartre’s rejection of a unity of subjects or of “subject-subject” relations is not based on a pessimism of interpersonal relations but on the meaning of

⁴⁵ i.e., not in the manner in which the subject is presence to itself with the implicit separation and distance to itself, separated by a nothingness, etc. This is a different manner of division, as Sartre makes clear it is not a duality in the sense under consideration at the moment.

⁴⁶ i.e., there would be no liar, since the liar might be deceived by the liar within subjectivity, who in turn, might be deceived by the liar within subjectivity, and so on.

⁴⁷ It should be noted in advance of the discussion to follow in Chapter 6 that, in the *Critique*, when Sartre argues that the group in fusion forms through direct human-human relations, this occurs only to the extent that they unify against an *external enemy*. When this enemy disappears, it maintains its unity by rooting out the enemies *within*. It cannot be free from otherness, and the desire to be so is perhaps the reason for its dissolution.

being for-itself. To be for itself is to exist as free, and this would be the meaning of *another* for-itself to the for-itself. The meaning of this encounter is, for Sartre, one of conflict, or as I have argued, opposition. As we saw previously, consciousness is necessarily my own, so either consciousness is indeclinable, since any sense of consciousness always refers to my own (actual or possible) consciousness, or, the meaning of other consciousness is a resistance and opposition to the consciousness that is mine. Now, if the relation to others is understood in terms of opposition, the whole spectrum of the ways we are opposed to others, and the way we are vulnerable to others who oppose us, can be brought to light. Some of these oppositions are undesirable, while others might be actually desirable. The point that must be asked of Sartre's critics is whether they actually want to eliminate all opposition, as their criticism would imply.⁴⁸ We will return to the issue of "opposition" in a later section of this chapter. Before doing so, we must consider another topic of scholarly attention often associated with alienation: bad faith.

Bad Faith & Anguish

As mentioned in the introduction, bad faith is often considered to be a type of "self-alienation," where the for-itself makes itself into an object (as opposed to being made into an object by the look of the Other). This section will consider how the interpretation of alienation provided in the previous chapters fits with the conventional

⁴⁸ And we could add to this: historical examples of actual meaningful collective action often resembles something closer to a fragile unity than a hyper-consciousness. The fragile unity, for this supposed collective subject is its alienation, i.e., its possible dispersal. The significance of this point obviously points ahead to the *Critique*.

understanding of bad faith as “self-alienation.” But before considering this comparison, more must be said about the characteristics of Sartrean “bad faith.”

Bad faith is explained in *Being and Nothingness* after the discussion of anguish, and anguish is relevant for the present purposes since the experience of alienation has several features in common with anguish, not the least of which being that alienation was grasped *through* anxiety. In both anguish and alienation, what is at stake is my relation to my possibilities as *mine*. Anguish is understood by Sartre as the reflective apprehension of freedom.⁴⁹ It is not a fear of things in the world but an anxiety of the nothingness of freedom and the apprehension of—or questionable character of—possibilities as *mine*.⁵⁰ We saw that possibilities are revealed in the world as non-thetic consciousness (of) possibilities, through the infinite reference of instruments. The only way out of this non-reflective circuit of selfness is with “reflective scissiparity.”⁵¹ With the reflective consciousness, the possibilities that are found on things in the world become questionable; not in so far as they are possible, but whether they are *possible for me*. It is the reflective move that makes these possibilities *personal*.⁵²

However, although anguish is encountered in reflection, reflection by itself is not sufficient to apprehend one’s possibilities as one’s own. There can be a reflective *defense* against anguish and against raising the question of the status possibilities, i.e., against positing them as mine. It is even possible that one can apprehend one’s possibilities *in*

⁴⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 39.

⁵⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 37-38.

⁵¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 200.

⁵² “From its first arising, consciousness by the pure nihilating movement of reflection makes itself personal; for what confers personal existence on a being is not the possession of an Ego—which is only the sign of the personality—but it is the fact that the being exists for itself as a presence to itself.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 103.

anguish precisely in order to *avoid* anguish. This is what leads to the question of bad faith.

Bad faith is a paradoxical conduct or attitude “of negation toward the self” that “raise[s] a new question: What are we to say is the being of man who has the possibility of denying himself?”⁵³ Bad faith is self-deception, but self-deception is a difficult problem given Sartre’s characterization of the for-itself as consciousness (of) itself. In order for bad faith to be possible, “the principle of identity must not be constitutive of human reality, and human reality must not necessarily be what it is and must be able to be what it is not.”⁵⁴ Thus the attitude of bad faith can accept what it flees the better to flee it. “I can make myself guilty of bad faith while apprehending the anguish which I am.”⁵⁵ Now Sartre’s purpose in this inquiry into bad faith is to reveal something unique about human reality, already seen in the denial of the principle of identity applied to it. The primary finding is that “if bad faith is possible, it is because it is an *immediate, permanent* threat to every project of the human being; it is because consciousness conceals in its being a *permanent* risk of bad faith. The origin of this risk is the fact that the nature of consciousness simultaneously is to be what it is not and not to be what it is.”⁵⁶

The purpose of the present section is not, however, to provide an exhaustive treatment of bad faith. The issue under consideration is the relationship between bad faith and alienation. Bad faith is commonly understood to be a form of self-alienation. This

⁵³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 47.

⁵⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 58; my emphasis.

⁵⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 44.

⁵⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 70.

view has been so common that it is practically taken for granted.⁵⁷ Yet Sartre insists that alienation (in the narrow sense) is *not possible for me* (“in no case can I ever alienate myself from myself”), nor can I make myself a thing (“I can not make myself be for myself as an object”).⁵⁸ Much of the scholarship on Sartre and alienation that focus on “self-alienation” ignores this fact.⁵⁹ So the question must be asked how they can be reconciled.

⁵⁷ The extent to which this has been taken for granted could not possibly be shown in full in the limited space of this chapter. A representative sample should suffice. Thomas Busch claims that the rejection of the “capacity to negate what is or has been and project itself into the future...is variously referred to as flight, bad faith, and the spirit of seriousness—all synonyms for self-alienation.” Busch, “Sartre and the Senses of Alienation,” 152. Busch does not seem to notice that this characterization of negation is also the description of freedom. Nikos Georgopolous finds in the varieties of bad faith the same “basic attitude in which man sees himself as something other than what he is...the man of bad faith turns himself into something or other, something determined and determinate—a thing—and thus alienates himself.” Nikos Georgopoulos, “Sartre and Alienation,” in *Continuity and Change in Marxism*, ed. Norman Fischer (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1982), 146. For Georgopolous, however, his aim is to explain the relationship between bad faith and alienation that he believes is typically ignored. On the other hand, many scholars refer to bad faith as self-alienation or self-imposed alienation frequently without any explanation; this indicates only the fact that it has become conventional wisdom to refer to it as such. For instance, Nick Ferrell Fox claims that Sartre’s “Cartesian tendencies” are “obscured...where he turns his attention to the ways in which freedom becomes alienated. This is most evident in his celebrated concept of Bad Faith.” Nicholas F. Fox, *The New Sartre: Explorations in Postmodernism* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 16. Linda Bell claims that Sartre distinguishes his notion of alienation in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* “from the self-imposed alienation of bad faith” Linda Bell, “Sartre: Alienation and Society,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 6, no. 4 (1979): 415.. Additionally, John Carney claims that “bad faith is Sartre’s depiction of a sub-species of alienation: that of self-alienation.” John C. Carney, *Rethinking Sartre: a Political Reading* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 2007), 55. Sartre hardly “depicts” it in this manner, for he nowhere uses the term “self-alienation” if by this term we mean an alienation effected by oneself, and if it is meant that the self is alienated, then it is redundant. Other variations of this reading, with more subtlety, appear in Bergoffen, “Casting Shadows,” 235. and Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 141.

⁵⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 275 (both quotes)

⁵⁹ Exemplary in this regard is a passage from Thomas Busch: “This loss of freedom, or self-alienation, which is its true name, is not ontological. Transcendental consciousness, in its being, remains thoroughly free, so that it must put itself into a state (natural attitude) in which it diminishes itself, or better, hides itself. Given the structure of consciousness as pure act and perpetual self-creation, it is impossible to accept that this alienation is inflicted on consciousness, caused in it from the outside. Consciousness must inflict this alienation upon

First, consider the evidence for bad faith as a form of self-alienation. Sartre rarely refers to alienation in an explicit manner as something the for-itself does to itself. He does imply it on many occasions. In those instances where it is near explicit, for instance, in the discussion of Love in “concrete relations” as seen above, it was expressed in the manner of consenting to alienation. Sartre seems to believe the attitude fails however, precisely because it involves a qualified consent (i.e., not absolute). It is not absolute because this is impossible, and as qualified, it is not alienation at all: it retains something for-itself. On the other hand, Sartre *does* refer, in the discussion of bad faith, to the formulation of alienation often attributed to Hegel’s master/slave dialectic. In referring to the bad faith involved in *sincerity*, Sartre says “A person appeals to another and demands that in the name of his nature as consciousness he should radically destroy himself as consciousness, but while making this appeal he leads the other to hope for a rebirth beyond this destruction.”⁶⁰ This characterization of the demand of bad faith is appropriate to the concept of alienation although perhaps not “self-alienation.” The latter would in fact refer to the consent to this demand. But Sartre’s point here is that *the demand is in bad faith*. Nonetheless, the consent to this demand can *also* be characterized

itself.” Thomas W. Busch, *The Power of Consciousness and the Force of Circumstances in Sartre’s Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990), 10. The point here is that Busch claims that ‘self-alienation’ is the “true name” of bad faith and patterns of flight. And this is because the structure of consciousness requires it could not have been received from outside. But “to receive from outside” is precisely the meaning of alienation for Sartre, and the only sense he uses the term. A similar theme can be found in the following passage from Juliette Simont: “In *Being and Nothingness* the two faces of alienation—the spirit of seriousness or reification of the quest of the in-itself-for-itself and the theory of the for-others, or the mortification of individual consciousness via the Other—appeared to be a kind of fate of enigmatic origin.” Juliette Simont, “Sartrean Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. Christina Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 197. But Sartre only refers to one of these as alienation, and not simply by accident. Scholars seem to be more interested in the ways one alienates oneself rather than the occurrence through encounter with the Other, while Sartre only refers to the latter as alienation.

⁶⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 65.

as bad faith, and would seem to justify the interpretation of bad faith as a kind of self-alienation, even if not in all cases, at least in the one referred to here. However, the meaning of alienation in the context of “the Look” would be applicable here only in the sense that the one who makes the demand holds out the prospect for a “rebirth beyond destruction,” and the implication is that this rebirth would be the means to coerce, or lend the appearance of free agreement to what is actually a relation of domination. This would diminish the responsibility of the one who consents, however, to the extent that there would not be a *project* of bad faith, since the person would make the “agreement” with the qualification that consciousness can be restored. On the other hand, the appearance of the absolute dispossession is what lends the example its relation to the concept of alienation. And both the one makes the demand and the one who consents, to the extent that they believe in the project of sincerity, treat consciousness as a thing to be passed around. At least in this sense then, bad faith resembles making oneself, or consciousness, into a thing

However, the problem with this straightforward interpretation is that Sartre insists throughout the text that alienation is *not* my possibility, and seems to explicitly rule out the possibility of “self-alienation.” The most significant passage for the present argument, is that “being for-others is a fall through absolute emptiness toward objectivity. And since this fall is an alienation, I can not make myself be for myself as an object; for *in no case can I ever alienate myself from myself.*”⁶¹ This impossibility of self-alienation seems unqualified, and on principle since it is this possibility denied to me that constitutes the meaning of alienation itself:

⁶¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 274-275; my emphasis.

by fixing my possibilities the Other reveals the *impossibility* of my being an object except for another freedom. I cannot be an object for myself...and when I *naively* assume that it is possible for me to be an objective being without being responsible for it [i.e., without cancelling its objectivity], I thereby implicitly suppose the Other's existence; for how could I be an object except for a subject?⁶²

Some of the passages in which Sartre addresses the issue, however, seem to imply that this *is* a possibility. For instance, “consciousness does not know its own character—unless in determining itself reflectively from the standpoint of the Other's point of view.”⁶³ And again, “even in reflection I assume the Other's point of view on my body; I try to apprehend it as if I were the Other in relation to it.”⁶⁴ And yet again, “The nature of our body for us entirely escapes us to the extent that we take upon it the Other's point of view.”⁶⁵ And yet while these passages would seem to indicate that it *is* possible, the opposite is also claimed: “to contemplate my life by considering it in terms of death would be to contemplate my subjectivity by adopting with regard to it the Other's point of view. We have seen that this is not possible.”⁶⁶ And finally, in explicit reference to bad faith, “the origin of all the anguish of a ‘bad conscience,’ that is, the consciousness of bad faith which has for its ideal a self-judgment—i.e., taking toward oneself the point of view of the Other.”⁶⁷

⁶² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 270 (my emphasis). This point is made repeatedly: “The Other is first the being for whom I am an object, that is, the being through whom I gain my objectness. If I am able to conceive of even one of my properties in the objective mode, then the Other is already given.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 270. Again, “I cannot confer on myself any quality without mediation or an objectifying power which is not my own.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 274.

⁶³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 349.

⁶⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 355.

⁶⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 358.

⁶⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 545.

⁶⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 528.

Given the tension among these passages, we can see in some of the existing scholarship on bad faith at least three attempts to resolve the tension. First, consider a typical approach represented here by Thomas Busch. This approach claims that the attempt to “obtain the impossible,”⁶⁸ is precisely the defining feature of the project of bad faith. While I cannot *actually* make myself an object, I am still free to *try*. This interpretation seems uncontroversial. Sartre’s famous example of the waiter in the café, to take one example, seems to manifest an “objectifying” behavior that he brought on himself. Sartre says that the waiter “*attempt[s]* to realize...a being-in-itself of the café waiter,” despite the fact that he “*can not be* in the mode of being in-itself.”⁶⁹ So it seems clear, one *can* try the impossible, and this is how Sartre characterizes bad faith. While some scholars have debated whether the waiter is actually in bad faith, we only mean to show how bad faith is often understood as a form of “self-objectification,” and thus, “self-alienation.”⁷⁰ We can also see in the attitudes considered in the previous section, love for example, failed as an attitude because it tried to “obtain the unobtainable.”

The problem is that if this is a possibility that can be projected, why is it not a free choice? Of course, bad faith is a free choice, otherwise we would not be responsible for it. But if it is a free choice to attempt to be a thing, does this indicate the ability to

⁶⁸ Busch, “Sartre and the Senses of Alienation,” 152.

⁶⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 60 (my emphasis).

⁷⁰ See the debate in the journal *Philosophy* in the 1980s, for discussion of this issue, R. F. Khan, “D. Z. Phillips on Waiters and Bad Faith,” *Philosophy* 59, no. 229 (1984): 389–391; James Mark, “The Waiter and the Philosopher,” *Philosophy* 58, no. 225 (1983): 386–388; D. Z. Phillips, “Bad Faith and Sartre’s Waiter,” *Philosophy* 56, no. 215 (1981): 23–31; Leslie Stevenson, “Sartre on Bad Faith,” *Philosophy* 58, no. 224 (1983): 253–258. For instance Mark claims that the waiter has been “forced...into...surrendering that capacity for taking his own decision which is the expression of his own freedom.” (Mark 1983, 387) Webber also believes that “it is mistaken to claim that the waiter himself is *not* in bad faith.” Jonathan Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 78.

dispose of freedom, or the impossibility of doing so? We will return to this below.

While there is nothing patently false about attributing alienation to the concept of bad faith in the manner proposed by Busch and others, there is a risk of reducing several related phenomena to a concept of self-alienation that is not really present explicitly in the text. A consequence of this interpretation is that alienation is treated as if it *primarily* refers to conduct in bad faith, while alienation as discussed in “the Look” and being for-others (the only contexts in which he refers to the concept explicitly) is treated as being of *secondary* importance. They are no doubt related, but how, and why Sartre only refers to alienation in connection with being for-others, is rarely addressed in such an interpretation.⁷¹

A second approach in which the relation might be explained, and the tension resolved, is to claim that bad faith is a *consequence* of alienation. For instance, Matthew Eshleman has argued that, for Sartre, “Others must objectify me *before* I can attempt a pseudo-objectification of myself and a complete analysis of bad faith must consider the technical details of Sartre’s treatment of Others in later portions of the text.”⁷² Eshleman goes further in claiming that since being for-others is a “passivity that bad faith preys upon, when one believes in an objective set of characteristics that indirectly limit freedom, one is not altogether mistaken that one’s freedom really is limited.”⁷³ In other words, one must be alienated by the Other before bad faith (at least it’s pseudo-

⁷¹ To be fair to Busch, he acknowledges that alienation in “the Look” and the “self-alienation” of bad faith are distinct. But why both deserve the name “alienation” despite their distinction is not really addressed.

⁷² Matthew C Eshleman, “The Misplaced Chapter on Bad Faith, or Reading Being and Nothingness in Reverse,” *Sartre Studies International* 14, no. 2 (2008): 2. my emphasis

⁷³ Eshleman, “The Misplaced Chapter on Bad Faith, or Reading Being and Nothingness in Reverse,” 10.

objectifying forms) is possible. Since bad faith in the sense of a choice of pseudo-objectifying forms of behavior depend on the actual objectification of the Other, Eshleman argues that the discussion of bad faith is misplaced in the text, because bad faith appears much earlier than the discussion of the objectification that occurs in “the Look.”

Another aspect of this interpretation that can become reductive, however, is that alienation is reduced to objectification, which in turn, refers to assigning “objective characteristics” to oneself. This is involved in bad faith, but alienation refers just as much to the absence of such features, not to say because of a desire for such characteristics, but because we might not know what they are.⁷⁴ The tendency here is the same as in the case of the first interpretation, namely, the reduction of somewhat diverse phenomena to a common denominator. Ironically, this is precisely what is characterized as being objectifying, and for some, even violent. But it is not necessary to take this issue that far. The interpretation offered by Eshleman makes sense to the extent that what is impossible for me (being an object) becomes possible through the Other (who makes me an object) and when I think I can make myself an object, this possibility is revealed to me by the Other. While this makes sense, it also raises other questions. Why would this be bad faith? Even if we eliminate the necessity that bad faith is negative, the ability to take oneself as an object is, to some extent, necessary for (self) critical thought. In fact, Sartre claims in the discussion of existential psychoanalysis that its method is precisely to adopt

⁷⁴ See for instance the discussion in the previous chapter of the “unpredictability” of what we are for-others.

the Other's point of view with respect to oneself.⁷⁵ Does this mean self-analysis is in bad faith? Perhaps instead the project of self-analysis is equally in danger of bad faith as any other project, since this is a "permanent possibility" in Sartre's view. But this threat presents itself with any project and not simply because it adopts an Other's point of view toward oneself. We will return to this point after the final approach.

There is a third approach to this problem that will serve as a point of entry for my own argument concerning bad faith and alienation. Jonathon Webber has claimed in a recent study of Sartre that that "Sartre...is aiming to describe the features of interpersonal experience within bad faith."⁷⁶ And since "Sartre considered there to be only one project of bad faith which is the attempt to deny freedom and see oneself and people in general as having fixed natures...the alienation of the look should be understood in a way that is consistent with this."⁷⁷ While the whole of Webber's argument might not be effected by what follows criticism, the purpose of the discussion is not to refute the whole argument but only his claims about alienation.⁷⁸

To the extent that bad faith is motivated by anguish and alienation, Webber argues

⁷⁵ "Both our psychoanalyses refuse to admit that the subject is in a privileged position to proceed in these inquiries concerning himself. They equally insist on a strictly objective method, using as documentary evidence the data of reflection as well as the testimony of others. Of course the subject can undertake a psychoanalytic investigation of himself. But in this case he must renounce at the outset all benefit stemming from his peculiar position and must question himself exactly as if he were someone else." (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 570) And also, "projects revealed by existential psychoanalysis, will be apprehended from the point of view of the Other. Consequently the object thus brought into the light will be articulated according to the structures of the transcended-transcendence; that is, its being will be the being-for-others even if the psychoanalyst and the subject of the psychoanalysis are actually the same person." (571)

⁷⁶ Jonathan Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 119

⁷⁷ Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 122

⁷⁸ Webber's argument completely misreads Sartre on several occasions. To take one example, despite Sartre's laborious insistence that the other *cannot* be an object for me *first*, Webber claims "either could occur first." (120) To those familiar with the text, an explanation would at least be in order.

that this only makes sense as a continuation of the project of bad faith. There are several problems with this claim. For one thing, since Sartre believes that the look and the experience of alienation is his way to escape (at least) the appearance of solipsism, why exactly would he need to situate this theoretical move from *within* the project of bad faith?⁷⁹ Since bad faith might be seen as an effort to attain the impossible, why would the appeal to a *cogito* of sorts be appealed to from within the attitude of bad faith that, for all we know, might even try to deceive itself as to the validity of the *cogito*?⁸⁰ We might be able to grant that the discussion of “Concrete Relations” occurs within the project of bad faith, but there, alienation is taken for granted on the basis of what occurs in “the Look.”⁸¹ And it is with respect to “the Look” that Webber claims alienation is an experience within the project of bad faith.

More problematic is the fact that Webber believes we can that Sartre believes that conversion to authenticity can prevent alienation, since we will no longer live the project of bad faith. However, if we escape the project of bad faith that produces the experience of alienation, the experience of the look (and our interpretation of it as the experience of vulnerability or alienation) will no longer occur. On our interpretation of alienation, it is not something that makes sense to say it can be escaped, since we cannot imagine *not*

⁷⁹ Webber claims that the purpose of the discussion in the look is to show how “bad faith fistorts our interactions with one another.” (118) Of course, Sartre’s aim is to show how he avoids solipsism, and while Webber acknowledges this, he diminishes it by claiming that “Sartre discusses relations between people *alongside* the problem of solipsism,” as if this was somehow secondary.(119) He also says that he “introduces his theory by presenting an extended narrative example that *is also intended* to illustrate his response to the problem of solipsism,” (121) again, as if this was a secondary concern.

⁸⁰ Sartre seems to operate in the *other* direction, in fact, that the pathological reveals the truth in a distorted form, as for instance madness retains the *cogito* and the fact of alienation. But he makes clear not only in madness do these appear.

⁸¹ Webber acknowledges that “Concrete Relations” must be understood in terms of “the Look” (on p. 118).

being vulnerable, though certainly more or less tolerable forms of being vulnerable.

And since Sartre intended alienation to function as the indubitable experience of the Other's freedom, to say that we can escape the experience of the Other as free in this sense would, in my opinion, take us back into solipsism, where we can imagine ourselves not vulnerable to others.

Finally Webber claims that "according to Sartre, anguish is exclusively a feature of the inauthentic life of bad faith...Sartre's recommendation is certainly one of a life in which anguish will not arise."⁸² And since anguish and alienation and formally equivalent in this scheme, it seems that alienation will not arise. Does this mean it is *impossible*? Sartre claims that bad faith is a permanent threat to every human project, as mentioned above. Webber avoids this problem by claiming that "Bad faith might be essential to the empirical reality of the way people are, but it is not an ontological necessity, and it can be escaped in favor of an authentic attitude to existence."⁸³ This claim depends on a distinction between being for-itself and "human reality" where the latter refers to "the empirical reality of human life in our culture rather than the ontological structure of our way of being."⁸⁴ This argument collapses however when it comes to existence for-others. Being for others is *not* an ontological feature of the for-itself, but it *is* a factual necessity of "human reality." It seems that this leaves the door open again to solipsism since it would mean we could aspire to a world beyond our empirical human reality in which we had no dimension of existence for-others.

⁸² Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 117

⁸³ Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 109-110

⁸⁴ Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 109

Returning to the issue of bad faith (and therefore alienation) as being impossible once there is a conversion to authenticity, it is not clear to me why in order to live beyond bad faith one would need to eliminate the very possibility for it. What is to be gained from a *complete* absence of either anguish or alienation, once one has been born again outside bad faith?

We saw at the beginning of this section that Sartre insisted that bad faith was an immediate and permanent *threat*, a permanent risk, to every human project. For Webber's account to be valid, he would need to show that the project to escape bad faith was not *itself* a human project, in other words, that it has already escaped the "empirical reality of human life," since this project of escape would be *itself* at risk of bad faith. Bad faith was also a paradoxical attitude in the face of freedom, in the same manner that we can be consumed with anguish (as indecision) in order to flee the anguish of facing our own possibilities as our own. Another dimension to the relationship between anguish and bad faith can be seen here. Bad faith conceals *itself* as a possibility; it conceals the possibility that bad faith is *my possibility*. It is in this sense that bad faith is motivated by anguish, by eliminating anguish, I refuse to see bad faith as *my possibility*.. It is not (only) the failure to consider my possibilities *in the world*, or as mine as such, but the possibility that the conduct one has adopted is an escape. Why is anguish apprehended in reflection when in reality, consciousness (of) freedom should be adequate to reveal the nothingness of being for-itself?⁸⁵ Why is anguish fear of one's own freedom? In fact, this makes sense once we see that it is the non-thetic consciousness (of) *the possibility of bad faith* that produces anguish. Since bad faith is possible, it is one of *my possibilities*, and it is this threat (that I

⁸⁵ Or, why does this reflection not take nothingness for its object? Sartre is not clear.

could be deceiving myself) that one flees, and this very flight is its bad faith. It is bad faith in so far as it is a belief that I *could not be deceiving myself*. This possibility is always there, it is inescapable as a possibility. One can acknowledge *this* possibility as my possibility, and try to surpass it. But it will not cease to be my possibility.⁸⁶ And it will, to the extent that it is acknowledged as a possibility, produce anguish. Webber's claim that we might escape bad faith "once and for all" by some magical conversion to "authenticity," would be in reality a project of bad faith, *born-again*. It shares with the project of bad faith the belief in the impossibility of its own self-deception. Furthermore, the appeal to a concept of authenticity, as what is "essentially my own" is an odd choice of a concept to use for promoting *social relations* in Sartre's thought. This is not to say that the first person point of view should be abandoned, since essential to the phenomenological tradition and Sartre's thought as a whole. But this simply means that subjectivity is inescapable, and this is how we would arrive at an other's subjectivity. None of this requires an addition of "authenticity."

Now, the difference with alienation can be understood again in terms of possibilities. We saw above the ambiguity of the negations involved in the relation to others. There is a genuine concealment of the negation by which I refuse my refused Me. In terms of possibilities, it is not that I conceal my possibilities, but a possibility that is not mine comes into the picture. Previously, in bad faith, one tried to escape at least one

⁸⁶ This interpretation seems to be consistent with the view of anguish as found in Detmer, for example; "anguish arises...when I desperately want to escape my ever present freedom and responsibility to nihilate the given, and wish instead to allow my personality, or resolutions, or motives, or situation" or, I would add, *conversions* "to determine for me what I am to do. What I then find is that these objects for my consciousness always fail to perform this desired function, but instead ceaselessly refer me back to my own freedom." David Detmer, *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity* (Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 2008), 74.

possibility, and deny that this escape is itself another possibility. If bad faith and alienation are related somehow, their relation is that when one finds oneself presented with a choice of refusing or not refusing to be *this self* that is presented by the Other, it is also possible that *this* choice will be made in bad faith. The other reveals that my choice is always going to be *alienated*, always have an outside, always escape being completed and done with. It is a choice that must be made over and over. The same possibility presents itself in the reflective apprehension of anguish, except that the possibility that appears is that I am always capable of escaping myself, not that this escape also has its escape ahead of me, on the other's side.

This does not mean that one must constantly bring the possibility of deception into mind, that one must try to avoid bad faith at every turn, or worse, collapse into indecisiveness. The point is that the belief in a state of purity where the very possibility of self-deception is eliminated, is precisely what bad faith is. Likewise, the belief in a unity of wills, where there is no opposition from others, even as a possibility is precisely what solipsism is—for Sartre, at least, it would seem.⁸⁷ The desire to be free from the possibility of alienation, is likewise how Hatred and Sadism are characterized.

Anguish and alienation both reveal possibilities, the former the possibility of bad faith and the latter the possibility of violence. The former is revealed in the reflective app- of freedom, the latter, the apprehension of another freedom across and through being

⁸⁷ It is worth noting, perhaps, though Webber does not consider it, that in the *Notebooks*, Sartre says both that if I had a true intuition of freedom in anguish, it would be impossible for me to even have the idea of denying my freedom, and likewise, if I had a true intuition of the Other's freedom as the same as my own, it would be impossible to deny it (because my own freedom would be that of "anyone"). The latter makes sense, the former, if bad faith is possible, does not. As an intellectual matter, it is true in the same way that the intuition of consciousness (of self makes denial of this an impossibility. But as a practical matter, the situation is different.

a vulnerable object for another freedom. Both the possibility of bad faith and the possibility of violence converge with the idea of responsibility. It is responsibility that is at issue in the problem of alienation, and it is the responsibility for one's choices that makes bad faith a social phenomenon; for if bad faith occurred in isolation, one would be able to judge oneself only in reflection, and would only do so as a free act, and so would only be faced with one's responsibility as a matter of one's own choice. The possibility of deception, and the possibility of fleeing deception into deception—all this would be simply the infinite possibilities of a free being, and the reflective move would be yet another possibility which reveals the rest as "mine." It is with Others that we become responsible for all this. To conclude this discussion, the encounter with the other, our alienation, the revelation of vulnerability, presents the for-itself with an opportunity to be responsible or to try to flee this responsibility—for which it would, of course, also be responsible. But seeing alienation in this light is quite different than something that must be eliminated from experience. When we experience vulnerability we can acquiesce, we can follow, we can recover it and account for it in other ways, i.e., live it. In this sense we are responsible for what is made out of us.

Critical Discussion

In this section, I will try to clarify some of the points of the interpretation by considering some possible objections. One of the issues that might be raised is whether "opposition" is a vague term to explain the relation to Others. First, the meaning of the term 'opposition' must be clarified, in so far as it is used to characterize the relation to others. Are "Others" necessarily *opposed* to "my" point of view? How strong must this "opposition" be in order to be "real"? Must this opposition be as strong as a *threat*, for

instance? Is the experience of opposition inherently negative, as the term conflict, which it replaces, had implied? Can we experience “Others” without the experience of vulnerability or opposition at all? If so, how would this experience be characterized?

The Meaning of Opposition

Consider what it would mean for a consciousness, a being for-itself, to never encounter any opposition from other consciousnesses. Such a person would encounter “other people,” only they would offer no resistance or opposition. The example is not entirely exceptional; many people choose to surround themselves with people who reflect their own point of view. The question is, do these individuals encounter “real” Others? If they do not encounter an *opposing* point of view but a *repetition* of their own point of view, does this mean they can avoid the experience of “Others”?⁸⁸ If we revise Hegel’s formula for the struggle for recognition, would Sartre believe that that the individual who has not encountered Others with opposition have not attained the truth, or certainty, of the Other’s existence?⁸⁹

Sartre seems to believe that the elimination of the opposition of others is the elimination of Others as Others; it eliminates “otherness.” But as was shown in the section on “Concrete Relations,” this never actually succeeds. It does not succeed in the

⁸⁸ This example refers to the kind of repetition of a point of view in the sense that for Hannah Arendt, the multiplicity of individuals in the household do not constitute a plurality to the extent that they reproduce the point of view of the “head-of-household.” Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Related to this, from an entirely different view, although perhaps more appropriate to Sartre’s concerns, see Freud’s remarks on narcissism. Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 547–562.

⁸⁹ “The individual who has not staked his life may no doubt be recognized as a person, but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.” Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, 233.

generic case mentioned at the outset, because otherness is not really eliminated. Put differently, they are not in fact one point of view, and the *danger* that the others will suddenly become other, the *threat* of alienation, itself becomes ubiquitous. But the threat of alienation is already a revelation of vulnerability, and hence already alienated. This means that the person can behave in such a way that tries to anticipate anyone “stepping out of line.” The meaning of opposition shifts, in other words, to the *possibility* of being opposed. We will return to this shortly.

The description in the previous paragraph might imply that the meaning of “otherness” or opposition should be understood in a strong sense, not just as *opposed*, but *against*. For instance, anything that is Other is what threatens me, and anything that threatens me is Other. In some sense this is true, but it is not necessary that otherness be understood *only* as a threat; or rather, the meaning of threat cannot be understood unless we consider the form of organization of a project that is threatened. If the project is to be God, as Sartre seems to believe is the case for most if not all human beings, then the encounter with Others can be a threat. But it is just as easily integrated into this project, as in Sartre’s remarks on love. In this attitude, one tries to trap the other’s freedom, and maintain it as freedom while trapping its excess in such a way that it is no longer felt to be *other*. What would reveal its otherness is perhaps a disagreement, a show of independence, etc. The *illusion* of harmony can be maintained by the fact that there is no *actual* conflict, but this would be an illusion because they do not consider the *possibility* of disruption. But if the awareness of this possibility is necessary in order to avoid the charge of evasion, to what extent must this possibility be focused upon? Must it be a matter of “constant concern”? That there is no precise answer to this question is simply a

manifestation of anguish, in so far as this evasion is also there as a possibility, and no focus on the possibility will guarantee the absence of evasion.

But this still seems to imply that the look would not function as a shock, as Sartre implies it must, unless there is an effort to avoid the acknowledgment of this possibility. This was the source of the opinion, argued against above, that alienation is only encountered from within a project of bad faith. This might lead one to believe that the feeling of otherness (as an opposing point of view) is still inherently negative, or that it would be desirable to avoid it. But this is not how it should be understood.

Consider an example of team sports. If I am on a basketball team, when I win, my team wins. And as in Sartre's discussion of the "us-object," we assume responsibility for each other (and against the "external enemy," although not with the severity this word implies). That the Other is an other is a necessary condition for us to have a *common* project (otherwise the addition of "common" would be meaningless). In this sense the Other or "otherness" is not mutually exclusive with *my* project. But if we have a common project, does this goal as for-myself refer to the same goal of the other members of the team, the Other's goal? That they can mean something individually does not detract from a *common* project. The example of sports is perhaps banal, but it illustrates the point: that for me, *our* winning the game might be an expression of *our* working together *and* an individual achievement, and for another, it might be something else on the individual level. *Our* project is not necessarily *identical to each* although it is only a common project, i.e., cannot exist only by each.⁹⁰ Each can have individual goals that are

⁹⁰ Of course, my project cannot even be said to be identical to itself, given that Sartre rejects the that the principle of identity applies to the for-itself.

compatible with the individual goals of others and compatible with the common project. The compatibility of a plurality of freedoms does not eliminate their plurality.

One point worth noting here is that there is otherness within the team, within the unity of one project, and also, *opposed* to the other team. That unity is posited against an external otherness is also, it seems, insurmountable. Sartre rejects that this external Other is a “Subjectivity” in the sense of being a We-Subject (for instance on the part of the class of employers). But the point is simply that in order to have the status as a unity, whether in passivity or activity, there must be an external point of view (either real or virtual) that provides this unity.⁹¹

But the next question that might be raised is: exactly how much opposition is required in order for the Other (and alienation) to be experienced? How much otherness is required in order to reveal a “real Other”? For example, if opposition is tolerated only to the extent that it maintains the status quo, and does *not* disrupt the status quo: in this case, does the otherness or opposition constitute a revelation of vulnerability? The difficulty here is that the this question assumes a model of disruption as equivalent to an act of violence. The disruption that follows from the presence of opposition is not itself, at least not necessarily, an act of violence. This is a primary claim I have been making throughout the argument. The degree of “opposition” or “otherness” required for Sartre’s argument is only so much as would be found in a disagreement; but this should not imply that there is a “quantity” that must be present for opposition to materialize. We already

⁹¹ Sartre maintains this idea in the *Critique*, where the group in fusion constitutes itself through a common project as a negation to the external imposition. But this point should not be interpreted in entirely negative terms. It is consistent, for instance, with the view of J.N. Mohanty in the argument that while the problem of the sense alter-ego is a topic for phenomenology, there is no such thing as an “other culture,” since this is simply another ‘us.’ Mohanty, “The Other Culture,” 143–144.

saw that language was “originally being for-others,” according to Sartre. So it is plausible to say that any dialogue whatsoever constitutes a sufficient amount of opposition to satisfy the requirement for alienation (as the revelation of vulnerability). But even in such mundane encounters as dialogue with Others, these relations can never be completely free of instability. The difference is that we *accept* this instability for the most part. We accept that we might be misunderstood. We accept (perhaps to a lesser extent) that it might be judged a ridiculous belief. We accept without too much trouble that we speak in order to be understood by others. It is not true that we “conceal” this fact, or that it is not experienced. If we try to make ourselves clear in speech, for instance, this is already behavior directed at others as vulnerable. If it were not aware (of) being vulnerable, it would not try to be clear or precise at all.⁹²

Returning to the case where it seems multiple individuals are unified in one point of view, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, it would be incorrect to say that there is no opposition. In such cases, it is not that opposition (or otherness) is absent entirely, but it the emphasis falls on it as possibility. This means, that it appears as the *possibility of opposition*. Someone who surrounds themselves with like-minded people will no longer experience their vulnerability in the same way. For instance, consider a narcissistic attitude where someone expects everyone to agree with him or her *without question*. The qualification *without question* is already an indication of alienation in so far as it acknowledges the possibility of questions emerging. If the goal of perfect agreement without question is achieved, the individual remains vulnerable to the possibility of questioning. The possibility of disagreement is revealed in behavior that otherwise might

⁹² This should not be misunderstood to mean that speaking in order to be understood is the same as speaking according to some model in order to remain safe, or avoid some other harm.

go without notice, for instance, not agreeing *quickly enough*, or not appearing to support a proposal *strongly enough*. Whereas prior to the “achievement” of this unity, the actual reality of disagreement would constitute the revelation of vulnerability, and reveal the absence of unity. Once the unity is achieved, the possibility of disagreement is the source of anxiety. This is felt in the uneasiness that “they might not obey.” It would be incorrect then to say that there is an absence of opposition (or conflict) in such cases. Opposition is always there as a possibility, in the same way we can always perform the *cogito*. But if conflict is always possible, *when it is felt*, it is felt through an Other-Subject.

Earlier I argued that the possibility of alienation is already the alienation of possibility. This means, since the latter was understood as a modification of possibilities, to say that such a modification of possibilities is itself possible, is a meaningless addition. The revelation of this possibility of modification already modifies the possibilities by revealing them as vulnerable to others. Since alienation reveals the possibility of a wound, the possibility of this possibility refers to the same absent-presence, namely the actual reality of a wound. But when the possibility is two steps removed in this way, a new issue emerges. The reality of the wound can also “step backwards,” as that which to which the possibility refers. If the possibility of vulnerability is experienced as alienation, then the reality of vulnerability is experienced as a wound.⁹³ In other words, in the example above the result is conduct appearing as a “constant concern...to contain the

⁹³ The other is treated as “an explosive instrument which I handle with care because I foresee around him the permanent possibility that they are going to make it explode and that with this explosion I shall suddenly experience the flight of the world away from me and the alienation of my being.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 297. Our point is simply that if the Other is being treated as an “explosive instrument,” one is already aware of one’s vulnerability.

Other within his objectivity,” or conduct “made up of ruses designed to make him remain an object.”⁹⁴ This is alienated conduct that reveals to the observer the alienation of the subject, where the subject is alienated in the presence of the other as an object, which is only possible since it has previously experienced the other as subject.

There is another way this shifting of possibilities can occur, however. If some members of a group conduct themselves in this way, and the emphasis is placed on the possibility of alienation as distinct from its reality (when in fact they are identical), then its reality will be experienced as a wound. But if this is normative, others who experience the revelation of vulnerability are effectively wounded if we apply the social norms consistently.

Can we exist among others without feeling vulnerable? It seems the previous paragraphs were committed to the idea that if this illusion is maintained, vulnerability simply shifts, so that the moment of alienation becomes the possibility of alienation in its original formulation. But much of daily life is possible without apprehending our vulnerability in the presence of Others. Sartre was aware that it is possible to exist among others without an encounter with their subjectivity, we can pass by Others-as-objects, for instance, as a detached observer.⁹⁵ When, for instance, using social objects, these objects are used alongside others. We walk down the street with others passing by; we use the bus others ride, etc. In all these activities we are among others, but we do not experience them as *others*, for the most part. Sartre is equally adamant that we do not experience ourselves as a “We-subject” in any sense. In fact, the explanation of this experience

⁹⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 297.

⁹⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 253-257. This is explicitly indicated in the prelude to “the Look”, and it is considered in order to show that this relation is based on a prior relation to the Other as Subject.

seems to offer some resistance to the interpretation offered thus far, and should therefore be considered next.

Work & Interchangeability

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger proposes that the “subject” of everyday Dasein is not the self that is *mine*, but the “they” of average everydayness. The “they” is anyone. When we use collective objects, as walking down the street and getting on the bus, it is not myself who performs these activities, but “anyone.” Now, Sartre has previously rejected the claim that the subject of everyday conduct is the “they” as Heidegger claims.⁹⁶ In the discussion of the “we-subject” however, Sartre claims that there is alienation in *work*.⁹⁷ Specifically, two dimensions of alienation are indicated in the context of work. First, the alienation of the worker; second, the alienation of the consumer. Sartre views work as “a mode of alienation” when the product “is not strictly destined for the ends of the worker himself.”⁹⁸ Sartre’s view of this mode of alienation makes no reference to Marx and would seem to exclude it given the characterization of the laborer.⁹⁹ For the worker, “the alienating transcendence is here the consumer; that is,

⁹⁶ This is in his criticism of Heidegger before “the Look.” See the discussion in Chapter Two above.

⁹⁷ The alienation discussed in work, as similar to the fallenness in the “they” of Heidegger, could also be used to characterize the alienation in the context of the body, for instance, pp. 357ff. The discussion of the body would be repetitive here, since the dimension of alienation would not be deepened by its inclusion, and the discussion of work necessary given the importance for the later treatment in the *Critique*.

⁹⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 423.

⁹⁹ For Marx, it is not producing something for someone else that is alienating, for in that case, one could still own one’s own labor and sell the product of labor, as in simple crafts. True alienation is revealed in the worker’s labor performed as it is owned by the employer. Since the worker has sold labor-power, the actual process of labor is performed, but directed by an “alien will.” A craftsman would still own his or her own labor. Then again, for Sartre, the craftsman who makes a table according to his own craft but gives or sells it is not anticipating

the ‘They’ whose projects the worker is limited to anticipating.” But the passage continues by immediately referring to the alienation of the consumer as well. “As soon as I use a manufactured object, I meet upon it the outline of my own transcendence.¹⁰⁰ The alienating transcendence of the consumer is the same transcendence that alienates the worker as that which alienates the consumer. This is possible because “The Consumer” that is anticipated is “anyone,” and the experience of being anticipated for the consumer is not anticipated as an individual but also as “anyone,” as “The Consumer.” The Consumer is always the one who is elsewhere, and this is how the worker and the consumer are each alienated but not by each other (which in fact might make more sense), but by the impersonal Consumer. For the consumer, the outline of transcendence is that of the impersonal Consumer. For the worker, the anticipation of the use of the instrument is the anticipation of the impersonal Consumer. Both are transcended by this impersonal subjectivity that does not exist as a reality anywhere.

Sartre continues that “the manufactured object makes me known to myself as ‘they’...it refers to me the image of my transcendence as that of any transcendence whatsoever. And if I allow my possibilities to be channeled by the instrument thus constituted, I experience myself as any transcendence.”¹⁰¹ Since “I apprehend myself as *interchangeable* with any one of my neighbors...we” also “lose our real individuality, for the project which we are is precisely the project which others are.”¹⁰² This seems to

the other’s transcendence as an impersonal consumer. So Sartre seems to have in mind *mass production* without saying so.

¹⁰⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 423.

¹⁰¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 424.

¹⁰² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 424; my emphasis

indicate that any *shared* transcendence is necessarily a loss of “real individuality” and therefore alienating.

The most significant issue raised in this discussion of work is the issue of *interchangeability*. What is the meaning of interchangeability in this context? It can be seen that the worker is not interchangeable in quite the same way as the consumer, although the description is limited and perhaps could be extended to understand the workers condition as one in which the activity is performed on the basis of the demand of the machine, and the machine demands the it be used in order to produce an object for “any consumer,” but now it seems that the worker is simply the “consumer” of the machine just as the product will be consumed by the “consumer.” The machine itself is the product, which makes the worker known as “any worker” whose possibilities are channeled by the instrument as “any transcendence” and apprehends oneself as “interchangeable with any other worker.” That this is a loss of individuality is a common experience is insufficient, in Sartre’s view, for the emergence of a revolutionary class-consciousness, although in the *Critique* he will provide how such a transition would occur. But the issue at the moment is the interchangeability of both the workers and the consumers, the meaning of interchangeability as such. Why is this interchangeability *alienating*?

The rejection of Heidegger’s formulation of the relation to others as “being-with,” was based on the claim that it eliminates the opposition of being *for* others; it eliminates the other as an *opposing* freedom. Now, in the context of work, the “they” subject is experienced as “alienating” in so far as we encounter it anticipating one’s own transcendence. But if this is a transcending transcendence, which he insists it is and it

must be in order to be *alienating*, why was the “they” rejected in the first place?

It was said in the earlier discussion of “being-with” that there was not a genuine opposition, but now, Sartre tells his readers *that it is*, in fact, a genuine opposition. But also, he adds that we are not transcended in our (own) transcendence, but as “anyone.” We are not opposed to our own transcendence, but our transcendence is interchangeable with others. But why is *this* a factor of alienation? It was certainly not a factor in the experience of the look, since in that case it was “me” that was being transcended, and not another. Furthermore, since the “they” is “everyone and no one,” who are these “others” with whom I am interchangeable? Are they those who are also members of the “they”? Are they those who are *not* members of the “they”? If the former, it seems necessary that the transcendence transcends *itself*. But if the latter, what is the status of this lateral relation to others with whom I am interchangeable? Is this a relation to Others, in the sense indicated above, in terms of opposition? If it is not in terms of opposition, why is it a relation *to Others* at all?

This question can be answered by moving beyond the confines of Sartre’s discussion. For instance, it is not the experience of work but the conditions of work that reveal this alienation for the worker. The worker is alienated *less* by the manufactured object *as such* as it by the other workers and the employers. The former because they are in competition—hence the qualification of “conditions of work.” The latter, because the manufactured object is not an indication of free possibilities (as we have seen before). It is an indication of limited possibilities. It is not the limitation of possibilities that occur in the experience of the alienation of possibilities as such, but strict limitation and narrow

possibilities that are not mine. It is less a proposal than a demand.¹⁰³ The possibilities are not mine because they are presented in advance, that is, they are dictated from without. In other words, it is not the manufactured object as such that is alienating but the manufactured object in so far as it was created in order to channel the workers possibilities toward a narrow goal of the production of surplus value.

The remaining issue however, even with this explanation, is the status of the *interchangeability* of the subject. Does this interchangeability refer to a superfluous indifference where one can be *replaced*? Does it refer to a solidarity of common “interests”? Does it refer to a universal capacity that everyone recognizes equally? This, in fact, is where Sartre will begin the analysis of alienation and oppression in the *Notebooks*, and which will be the subject of the next chapter. For now, it will be claimed that Sartre’s opinion remains *incomplete*. That is, he will eventually *require* that, for oppression to be possible, objects of human creation must appear as “there for everyone.” They *must* appear in this way, because it is the negation of *this* feature that will be experienced by those for whom it is negated as a limitation of freedom and oppression. In other words, the alienation of the consumer with which we began is in some ways, what oppression *restricts*. Does this mean that the elimination of oppression is simply the establishment of the “freedom to consume” or an equal share in manufactured products? If this was the sole answer it would be disappointing. We will see this theme of interchangeability emerge with ambivalence in the discussions that follow.

¹⁰³ The significance of the term “proposal” will be seen in the following chapter.

Vulnerability, Inescapability, and Risk

One of the virtues of this interpretation of alienation as the revelation of vulnerability is that it allows us to understand how it can be a negative experience, without being inherently negative, and without being eliminable from social life. If alienation were understood in less precise terms, or too specifically (i.e., as violence) it would make these characteristics irresolvable in the same phenomenon. But vulnerability can satisfy these requirements, as I will show in this section.

Sartre claims, at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, that the situation that expresses the choice of freedom in the world has “the essential characteristic...to be alienated.” And in turn, he claims that “we can not escape this alienation since it would be absurd even to think of existing otherwise than in situation.” The meaning of alienation in this context is that “everything which it undertakes to have always one face which freedom will not have chosen, which escapes it and which for the Other will be pure existence. A freedom which would will itself freedom could by the same token will only this character.”¹⁰⁴ Alienation is inescapable because we are always in a situation with other free subjects. We cannot imagine a situation in which we are not vulnerable in some way to other freedoms, although we *can* imagine situations where there would be an effectively tolerable amount. It is possible that this allows a sensible question to be asked such as what sort of situations do we currently have a tolerable amount of

¹⁰⁴ This and preceding quotes in this paragraph from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 526.

vulnerability without being entirely eliminated? If we identified alienation with violence, this question would make no sense.¹⁰⁵

This might give the impression that vulnerability is equivalent to *risk*. But this is not the case; or rather, a distinction between the two should be maintained. Vulnerability is not reducible to risk, in so far as the notion appears in the Hegelian tradition of struggle for recognition.¹⁰⁶ The reason is, to put the matter simply, that the for-itself *does not choose* the risks brought upon it by the encounter with the Other. The risk is that, as a free being, the Other can expose me to risks that I have no idea about and therefore *cannot consent* to since knowledge is on principle limited. “The appearance of the Other causes the appearance in the situation of an aspect...which on principle escapes me since it is for the Other. This is...the unpredictable but still real reverse side.”¹⁰⁷ Vulnerability is based on ignorance whereas the idea of risk and consent seems to imply adequate knowledge. This does not mean, however, that we cannot choose to live with our own vulnerability, which is to say, choose to live among a plurality of freedoms. But it does not diminish the aspect of vulnerability in existence.

Furthermore, vulnerability must be assumed whether we choose to or not; it is not a matter of winning independence or the truth of self-certainty, as in Hegel’s life and

¹⁰⁵ Or rather, it would never be asked, because this is what is taken for granted: US society, at least, is comfortable with plenty of violence without feeling vulnerable. And as long as they are not the ones who are vulnerable. Vulnerability is *intolerable* from the American point of view.

¹⁰⁶ This is by no means limited to Hegel, but stems from the tradition described by Hannah Arendt as that which holds courage to be the political virtue par excellence. Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Random House, 1994), 421–422. Relevant perspectives on this theme can be found in W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1935), 104. and Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France 1976-1977*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 259–260..

¹⁰⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 265

death struggle. It is precisely because we cannot simply accept the risk, actively try to risk life or any other value, that, Sartre says, we experience our alienation as “slavery” which cannot be overcome.¹⁰⁸ This slavery is simply the symbolic manner in which we are vulnerable whether we accept it or not.

There are two plausible ways of understanding the distinction between vulnerability and risk. First, we might say that risk implies something more appropriate to objects. With respect to objects, however, we can be more careful, so as not to risk something. Recall the example about carrying a vase, and dropping it, from the previous chapter. This was “an act whose consequences are completely opposed to my anticipations and to my desires.” When it comes to risks or dangers, when consequences opposed to our anticipations occur, “there is nothing which I could not have foreseen if I had been more careful...nothing which on principle escapes me.” He says that the Other brings it about that “the situation...has one real dimension by which it escapes me, by which unforeseen reversals cause it to be otherwise than it appears for me.”¹⁰⁹ This seems to imply we *cannot* be careful about the way we are vulnerable to others. But this would be overstating it. The true meaning of the distinction is that, even if we are careful, our *being careful could be used against us*. This is why the aspect of ignorance is so important to understanding alienation as the revealing of vulnerability.

¹⁰⁸ “It is in this sense that we can consider ourselves as ‘slaves’ in so far as we appear to the Other. But this slavery is not a historical result—capable of being surmounted—of a life in the abstract form of consciousness. I am a slave to the degree that my being is dependent at the center of a freedom which is not mine and which is the very condition of my being. In so far as I am the object of values which come to qualify me without my being able to act on this qualification or even to know it, I am enslaved.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 267.

¹⁰⁹ This and the previous quote from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 265

Another way of understanding the distinction, compatible with the above distinction but with a different emphasis, is that risk implies an activity of which the agent is the one who is at risk. Vulnerability, understood in the sense argued throughout, implies a subject who is passive with respect to other subjects. It should not be understood to imply being absolutely passive, however, but rather, the experience of being passive in relation to other subjects.

To conclude then, this idea of vulnerability is not like that of the struggle for recognition in the Hegelian narrative of lordship and bondage, because it is not something that we choose to risk, but find ourselves exposed to, and must assume responsibility for the exposure, of being put at risk.

CHAPTER 5
ALIENATION, VIOLENCE, AND OPPRESSION
IN THE NOTEBOOKS FOR AN ETHICS

The aim of this chapter is to connect the interpretation of alienation in the preceding chapters to the discussions of violence and oppression as they emerge in Sartre's posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics*. The text of *Notebooks* is approached in what follows as Sartre's attempt to work through the problems of violence and oppression. The conclusions Sartre arrives at through this process will eventually appear in advanced form in the *Critique*. The *Notebooks* function as a transition between the concepts of *Being and Nothingness* and the developed concepts of the *Critique*.

The considerations that follow do not, however, claim that Sartre's *Notebooks* are on the same level as Sartre's published writings. The posthumously published text consists of *notes*, not a completely worked out theory in the sense of *Being and Nothingness* or the *Critique*, for example. This approach follows the observation of Arlette Elkhaïm-Sartre, in a note to the appendix of the second volume of the *Critique*, that

Sartre was fond of saying that he thought as he wrote. What does that mean? That he did not set down on paper just ideas already formed or in the process of germination. That instead it often happened that he would explore at length the possibilities of an argument, and simply break off if a difficulty arose without seeking to correct his attempt, only to recommence his dialogue with himself from scratch on another sheet. Thus, more perhaps than for other philosophers, *the status of his notes remains in doubt*.¹

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Vol.2: The Intelligibility of History*, ed. Arlette Elkhaïm-Sartre, trans. Quintin Hoare (New York: Verso, 2006), 396.

The remarks that preface the *Notebooks*, however, claim the opposite. “These ‘notes,’ although they were jotted down and not revised, are something *more than notes*. They have a guiding theme and are often more than half set in order. But they have no overall structure.”² In the argument to follow, I do *not* claim that they are more than notes. But this does not diminish their value in following Sartre’s thought through the problems he engaged. Provided this text is approached as a work in progress, there is no difficulty in resolving apparent contradictions, since they are simply working hypotheses, not assertions or firm conclusions.

Considering the subject matter of this chapter, the approach is even more necessary than might be for other topics. Sartre writes at length in the *Notebooks* about the themes of alienation, violence and oppression; to such an extent, in fact, that it would be impossible to exhaust all that is said about these issues. Selection is even more necessary given that not all of the considerations are equally relevant, nor are all of them maintained in the *Critique*, and would appear therefore to have been abandoned. Given these reservations, there are several problems that can be viewed as essential, and will serve as the focus of the present chapter. Sartre consistently tries to distinguish the concepts of alienation, oppression, and violence, and establish the relation among these concepts. It is reasonable to conclude that he believed they *are* distinct and that he was trying to provide a rationale for their distinction. The next section will provide a series of questions that are raised by the text of the *Notebooks*, the answers to which will be offered in the sections to follow.

² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, ed. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xxiv

Questions

1. One of the most interesting discussions in the *Notebooks* is the lengthy discussion of the “existential conditions of oppression.”³ Sartre offers several conditions for the *possibility* of oppression that appear to be identical with the conditions for the possibility of violence, namely, a multiplicity of free subjects.⁴ But in neither case do the conditions for the possibility indicate that they are sufficient for its reality.⁵ The question is what makes the possibility of violence and oppression into a reality?
2. Following from the previous question, the reality of alienation is the condition for the possibility of violence and oppression.⁶ This is consistent with, and support for, the argument I have provided in the preceding chapters. And Sartre also insists that alienation is distinct from both.⁷ If the reality of oppression and violence are not identical to alienation, then what makes them a reality will be that which distinguishes them from simple alienation. The answer to the question in (1) above should include the feature or features that will distinguish alienation (as the *possibility*

³ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 325–385.

⁴ Although this freedom is somehow only incompletely recognized or mystified. See Sartre, *Notebooks*, 326–332, for the first three conditions of oppression, and Sartre, *Notebooks*, 339; 382–384) for the fourth. For violence, Sartre claims that “violence appears in the world as a pure possibility as soon as men appear.” Sartre, *Notebooks*, 215.

⁵ This might be Sartre’s own judgment, in fact, as at the end of the list of the conditions, he says “The great weakness of the dialectic of the master and the slave is that the reasons given for the fact of oppression are not sufficient.” Sartre, *Notebooks*, 340. This leads to the discussion of Engels and Duhring which he tries to improve upon.

⁶ There are two aspects to this. On the one hand, since being for-others is revealed by alienation, the possibility of violence as the other’s possibility for me is given through this. But additionally, Sartre continues to insist that alienation is the condition for oppression, but is considering whether alienation is more than the pure fact of plurality, or to be extended. In either case, it is almost assumed throughout that alienation is the condition of oppression, and given note 5 above, of violence as well.

⁷ For instance, “alienation is not oppression;” (*Notebooks*, 413); “alienation precedes oppression;” (468–469); “alienation precedes oppression and justifies it;” (385); “alienation perpetuates oppression and oppression perpetuates alienation.” (384). Yet also, “oppression does not come from the objectification of freedom” (358).

of violence and oppression) from violence and oppression (as actually present).

Specifically, since alienation was articulated in terms of a modification of possibilities upon the appearance of another freedom, it must be understood how possibilities are apprehended in the situation of oppression as distinct from alienation.

3. Furthermore, in addition to insisting that violence and oppression are distinct from alienation, and although their possibility is given through at least some of the same conditions, Sartre insists that violence and oppression are themselves distinct.⁸ What is the difference between these two realities if their possibility is given equally by the same conditions? Or, are there additional conditions for the reality of one over the other? What, in short, is the relation between these two phenomena of violence and oppression?
4. Following from this question, Sartre claims that oppression and violence require not only multiple freedoms, but the mutual *recognition* of multiple freedoms.⁹ This means that the actions of violence or oppression are not simply an indifference to human freedom, nor that freedom is violated by an attitude of indifference towards the human and substitution of relations of exteriority. However, Sartre also

⁸ Sartre insists “one must not confuse violence and oppression.” (Sartre, *Notebooks*, 561) “it is quite clear that today [oppression] distinguishes itself from violence.” (Sartre, *Notebooks*, 347) The claim that oppression distinguishes *itself* is highly suggestive, but remains unclear. At another moment, he offers a qualification that “oppression is not *necessarily* based on violence.” (404)

⁹ For instance “only a freedom can be oppressed. And if it is to be oppressed it has to be recognized as a freedom.” (Sartre, *Notebooks*, 327-328; my emphasis) For violence, he answers the question “what...does it mean to do violence to a man?” by saying “it is to recognize him as freedom.” (178) And again, “because violence is a demand and right, the Other becomes essential because he has to recognize my violence as legitimate and justified.” (177)

characterizes this recognition as incomplete and mystified.¹⁰ It would be simple enough to attribute this to bad faith, as he repeatedly does.¹¹ But there is something else to be gained from this claim. In whatever way indifference toward the freedom of others is characterized, it will need to be distinct from oppression and violence as they are expressed at the fundamental level. Or, the fundamental level of violence and/or oppression will need to be explained differently if they are to be characterized by indifference.

5. In connection with the above stated requirement that violence involves the recognition of multiple freedoms, a discussion of how this is possible should be in order. But some of Sartre's most developed discussions of the phenomenon consider it in a curious manner: violence directed against *things*.¹² This is understandable if one acknowledges that violence against things takes aim at the human element in things, and the human element in things is the reference to *possibilities*, as we have already seen. Some of the features of violence might be understood by considering the way possibilities are negated in destructive behavior. The question here can be formulated as follows: in what way does the destruction of a *thing* in the world reveal the intention of violence in significant ways that can be used to understand direct violence against human beings?
6. In comparing oppressive societies to those without oppression, Sartre explains the difference primarily in terms of access to possibilities.¹³ In the absence of oppression,

¹⁰ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 177; see also 338-339.

¹¹ Among them: for violence, pp. 175, 184, 189; for oppression, 337-339.

¹² This is how the discussion of violence begins and has some of the most interesting remarks on the subject. (Sartre, *Notebooks*, 170-176)

¹³ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 329-331.

Sartre claims, every possibility of the other appears as my own; possibilities appear as possibilities for anyone, for any freedom.¹⁴ Yet this is precisely what was referred to as alienation in *Being and Nothingness* when discussing the use of instruments designed for any transcendence whatsoever, for “anyone.”¹⁵ Now, in *Notebooks*, Sartre seems to claim that the reality of possibilities for anyone is precisely what reveals the freedom of each and all to each and all.¹⁶ But how would this differ from the description of the “they-self,” and the loss of individuality as seen in *Being and Nothingness*? How would my possibles be *mine*, as he says they would be, while also saying, they would not be distinguished? Would the for-itself become “impersonal” or anonymous? In short, is the determination of a possibility as *there for anyone*, a possibility that reveals individual and common freedom, or one that *eliminates both* in favor of a “they subject” who is really *no one*, thus revealing possibilities as *there for no one*?¹⁷

7. Closely related to the previous question, is the meaning of alienation as the “priority of the Other.” Sartre refers in some contexts to alienation as the “priority of the Other,” as was seen previously and it might be argued that he extends this meaning

¹⁴ “If we were in a world of freedom, each act of each person would indicate a possible direction for my transcendence....My freedom...would not distinguish itself from the freedom of one and all. I would choose my own possibles on the basis of the concrete and finite set of possibles of my historical society.” Sartre, *Notebooks*, 29.

¹⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 420-430

¹⁶ See note 14 above.

¹⁷ It is tempting to express this as a problem regarding the status of *objective possibilities*, as whether objective possibilities mean that they are there for anyone and everyone, i.e., public; or whether they are there for no one, for no subjectivity in particular. The reluctance to use these terms is that ‘objective possibility’ seems to have a technical meaning and in fact is used by Thomas Flynn in his study of Sartre. What exactly Flynn means by ‘objective possibility’ is not entirely clear and does not appear to mean what is intended in the above formulation of the problem. Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

further than was present in *Being and Nothingness*. The “priority of the Other” was Sartre’s take on the Heideggerian “they-self,” and in the context mentioned in question 6 above. What needs to be explained now, in *Notebooks*, is how this condition which was characterized as merely “psychological” in *Being and Nothingness*, and *not ontological*, can be grouped among the so-called *ontological* conditions of oppression?¹⁸ Furthermore, Sartre characterizes alienation differently at different moments in the text. How would the characterization of all action—historical, creative, productive, etc—as alienated by virtue of being given over to others fit with the characterization of alienation as the “priority of the Other”? When does this action become the action of the other through me, given the Other’s priority? While the former is consistent with the arguments in the chapters preceding in the discussion of vulnerability, the discussion of priority seems to disrupt this argument or at least require some adjustment. Is there a difference between these types of alienation? In what follows, answers to these questions will be offered.

Alienation, Oppression, Violence

In what follows, answers to the above mentioned questions will be given. In order to provide these answers, I will begin with the discussion of the relationship between alienation, violence, and oppression, from which the answers to these questions will follow. In order to determine the relationship between these concepts, they must be considered in terms of possibilities.

¹⁸ See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 424-425 for the claim that the We-subject/they-subject is merely psychological. That it is now elevated in *Notebooks*, to the status of an ontological condition, see p. “By alienation, we mean a certain type of relations that man has with himself, with others, and with the world, where he posits the ontological priority of the Other.” Sartre, *Notebooks*, 382.

In the preceding chapters, I argued that alienation should be understood as the experience of the possibility of being wounded, with emphasis placed on its character as *possibility* and not as an *actual* wound, or violation. This presupposed the relation between alienation and violence as one of possibility to actuality, to some extent, since there was no discussion of the actual reality of violence, or only very little discussion, in *Being and Nothingness* (or so I argued). It is in the *Notebooks*, however, that the relationship between alienation and its realization is explored, through concepts of violence and oppression. This chapter begins with the concept of alienation as it is extended in the *Notebooks* and proceeds to show how it is used in the evaluation of the concept of oppression in interesting ways, before proceeding to do the same with the concept of violence.

Alienation

Alienation is first discussed in terms of human action. Sartre claims alienation is a necessary feature of action. Specifically, he shows how it functions in the same way for both historical action and creative action. The characteristic of alienation in both cases, and with respect to action in general, can be seen in two aspects. First, when the action is completed, the deed becomes an object. Second, it occurs when the agent becomes aware of this fact, and the action becomes conditioned by the fact that it will become an object for others. The only difference between these two aspects of alienation is the moment when the agent becomes aware of the fact of vulnerability of the deed. The awareness of vulnerability is the moment of alienation, as I have argued throughout.

Alienation is a necessary feature of any human action because “any undertaking...has an encompassing horizon of absolute objectivity. It is necessarily fated

to become a pure object.”¹⁹ This is because the completed action becomes an object for-others when inserted into field of other’s activities. When the agent takes this into account—and limits him or herself to anticipation, as it was put in the context of “the Look”—this action is alienated in so far as the action itself is modified by its destiny in objectivity. Actions are understood by Sartre to have a lifespan of sorts. While the agent (as well as the spectator) can view an action as completed or finished, it does not appear completed in the same way. For instance, an “historical event always leaves a residue,” but this residue is the event as it exists for-others.²⁰ From the agent’s point of view, the action is “handed over to others” and vulnerable to the choices they will make of it. Of course while the agent is on the scene an action might not appear to the agent themselves as completed but as an ongoing concern. However, from the point of view of the others, an action completed can be considered complete. But this does not mean it is closed, rather, “it acts as a pure proposal.”²¹ The concept of *proposal* will be crucial to understanding Sartre’s theory of oppression in the next section. The action is destined for alienation from the agent’s perspective since at some point the end of the action is, in a sense, the end of agency. The completed deed will be able to have a life of its own independent from the agent. But the fact of vulnerability to others would be a pure external relation if it were not realized by the agent. As we have seen, the agent, while alive, must experience alienation, otherwise there is no alienation (as the revelation of vulnerability).

¹⁹ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 48.

²⁰ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 41.

²¹ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 48.

Depending on the moment of realization, or alienation, the action itself can be conditioned by the future destiny in exteriority. In this way exteriority becomes interiorized. This refers to the fact that the agent can *anticipate* the possibilities *for* the present action as an object for others. “History gets alienated from itself in becoming conscious of itself.”²² This becoming conscious of itself is understood as becoming conscious of itself *as* historical action, i.e., as an object for-others. If I project a future generation beyond me, it is a projection, as in death, of what is beyond my possibilities, of what is possible for others and from which I am on principle excluded.

Once this consciousness is realized, the agent becomes capable of acting in accordance with the way he or she conceives it will be for Others in some distant future. The action becomes “limited to anticipating” what it will be for a distant and unknown future. Sartre seems to believe that in such cases of anticipating, there is a feeling of the action escaping the agency of the agent *while* the action is being performed. Actions might be undertaken not for the benefits to those who are “contemporary” but those who will be “successors.” That one can have a sort of “divided” attitude towards the action seems to be Sartre’s point in this. Put differently, the attitude is “wholly governed by my attitudes with respect to the object which I am for the Other,” in other words, according to the awareness of oneself (and one’s deeds) as a vulnerable object.²³

The life of the action beyond the agent leads Sartre to insist that the “historical agent has to accept that his action will be prolonged only as a proposal and that the spirit that animated him will continue to act only in the manner of a residue.”²⁴ This does not

²² Sartre, *Notebooks*, 85.

²³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 363.

²⁴ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 48-49.

count as an argument against action, however. He advises that the agent “take every precaution to delay as much as possible the moment of alienation”; but ultimately this can only be postponed, for “History will always be alienated...Our actions are stolen from us in any case.” Even though “we can imagine a History where otherness is replaced by unity,” ultimately “otherness always remains.”²⁵ It must not be assumed that overcoming alienation involves overcoming otherness, for in that case it would be impossible. There can be a unity provided this is not imagined as one devoid of, or *immune* to, otherness. The problem presented in this manner is that Sartre has not allowed otherness to exist without alienation. Alienation will inevitably occur since historical agents undertake actions that will be alienated to the extent that they are objects for Others in the future. “History is alienated,” and this is “because the result always turns back into an object.”²⁶

In order to neutralize the meaning of alienation from the negative connotations it might be given in this passage, consider the alternative. Historical action *without* alienation is impossible precisely because such action would be meaningless if there is no future anticipated by the agent. Hannah Arendt makes this point explicitly and more straightforwardly than Sartre, though with different focus: “No human courage would be conceivable if the condition of individual life were the same as that of the species.” The human capacity for courage exists “only as long as he knows he is survived by those who are like him, that he fulfills a role in something more permanent than himself.”²⁷ Human

²⁵ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 49; Sartre refers to this as “diachronic” alienation in the *Critique*: “objectified praxis must necessarily allow itself to be modified by a double alienation (both synchronic and diachronic).” Sartre, *Critique vol. 1*, 667.

²⁶ Sartre, *Notebooks*, , 51.

²⁷ Arendt, “Europe and the Atom Bomb” Arendt, *Essays in understanding*, 421–422.; Arendt’s point is that sacrifice makes less sense in a war that can destroy the species. This is something the makers of the bomb actually took into account, supposedly.

beings would be less capable of action as such if it were not for the alienation of actions to future generations, and importantly, for the alienation of past generations to the present (which is the same thing).

That alienation should be appreciated as a more neutral phenomenon should be clear in this example. But this is not to say that it is entirely benign. One of the tendencies Sartre detects in this alienation of action is something that becomes clear in his remarks on creative activity. In the context of commenting on Marx's theory of alienated labor, Sartre notes that "alienation conceals his character of being a creator from him."²⁸ The agent does not feel the creative aspect of work because the action is dictated by an "alien power."²⁹ The only way in which freedom can be concealed from itself is if it is "drowned out" by another freedom-like being unable to "hear oneself think." But as we have already seen, it is still seen and felt as one's own action. This is the experience of being vulnerable, that one is for-oneself only to the extent one is for another.

There is another issue in this theory of alienation that is crucial, as mentioned above, and that is the concept of action functioning as a "proposal." Completed actions function as proposals to the others who constitute it as an objectivity. The deed is alienated from the agent in its capacity as an object *there for everyone*. But objects in the world, as there for everyone, are precisely what populate the practical field with instruments and obstacles to be surpassed by the free projects of anyone. In other words, just as in "the Look," it is through alienated action in this general sense that freedom of

²⁸ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 508.

²⁹ Sartre's remarks on alienation in Marx leave a lot to be desired, not only in *Notebooks*, but in the *Critique* as well, as also noted in Robert E. Birt, "Alienation in the Later Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre," *Man and World* 19, no. 3 (1986): 293–309.. But this view that alienated labor is an action that one must perform despite not feeling entirely as the agent performing it is a point both Sartre and Marx seem to share.

others is experienced. What is a loss of ownership over the action is a proposal for the freedom of others. This alienation of action that occurs through the action becoming objective must not be understood to depend on the fact that the action becomes imprisoned in objectivity or matter. This is something that will be significant for the *Critique* in the following chapter. The *objectifying power* that makes the action an object is not the agent (at least not only), and this is why it is alienation. The action becomes *Other*, not in so far as consciousness or praxis or action is *not an object*, though this is true, but because it becomes an object for an *other consciousness*. Without the mediation of other consciousness, objectification would not be alienation. But objectification is always alienation precisely because anything that becomes inscribed in matter (to use the language of the *Critique*), or leaves a “trace” is also by definition “there for everyone.” It is easy to misunderstand the alienating power to be part of the material world, but it is only in so far as the material world as it is there for everyone.

One can regret that an action will be exposed to others, or, fear that as a proposal, it will be neglected and eventually die. But in both cases, there is an experience of vulnerability as we indicated in the previous chapters. But in order to forestall the moment of alienation, as Sartre says, it is already alienated. This is because by acting in order to delay the moment of alienation, the object as it is for others determines the present action at hand. None of the features of action described here are *required* to be experienced negatively. But the characteristic of vulnerability remains whether it is negative or neutral for the agent. This is the significance of vulnerability as the meaning of being for-others, and alienation as their revelation, in the *Notebooks*. Alienation is

taken up in other contexts, as will be seen later. But this is the most significant in understanding the conditions for oppression, which is the topic of the next section.

Oppression

One of the most interesting discussions in the *Notebooks* appears when Sartre provides an analysis of the “existential conditions of oppression.” These conditions are as follows. First, both “oppressor and the oppressed must be free.” Second, given this plurality, “each freedom has to be an outside for every other freedom.” This refers to the “ontological relation of freedoms to one another,” and not some historical condition. Third, “only one freedom can limit another freedom.” Fourth, neither oppressor nor oppressed “fundamentally recognizes their own freedom.” Fifth, “there is a complicity of the oppressor and the oppressed.” With the fourth condition, the qualification of “fundamentally” is important, since it is necessary also that freedom is recognized, but in a misshapen sense.³⁰ In addition to these conditions, several other factors can be addressed that characterize the reality of oppression, to which we will return in a moment.

In the course of elaborating these conditions, however, Sartre discovers a gap between the necessary and sufficient conditions for oppression as an actual reality. He addresses this gap by locating himself in the same position, in relation to Engels and Dühring, as they occupied in relation to Hegel, on the same question. Hegel failed, on this reading, to supply the sufficient conditions for the emergence of oppression, and this

³⁰ The list of the conditions appear on p. 325; the discussion of each follows on the next 60 or so pages.

is taken up by Engels and Dühring who each in turn fails for related reasons.³¹ Sartre aims to improve on their partial insights.³² Each makes an error that Sartre takes to be exemplary. Engels fails by eliminating the human element in explaining oppression as the result of an economic determinism. The presentation of oppression as a matter of historical, economic, or any other necessary progression, actually contributes to the mystification of freedom that is itself a condition for oppression.³³ Unlike Engels, Dühring locates oppression in a choice, but errs in claiming that the choice to oppress is entirely superfluous. For Sartre, “oppression is not a gratuitous decision, however it is a human fact. It appears in a favorable economic situation, but this situation *by itself is not sufficient* to give birth to oppression without at the same time dehumanizing it and making it lose its meaning.”³⁴ Trying to provide a synthesis of sorts, he claims that “in oppression there is a decision about man made in some situation. The possibility of this decision lies *both* in the economic conditions and the ontological structures.”³⁵

Ultimately, he is going to try to combine all of these conditions into a historical fact, a contingency, that nonetheless bears the mark of an ontological feature (despite his denials). This is the fact of *scarcity*, as it appears in the *Critique*.³⁶ But this is not present in the *Notebooks*, and must be bracketed for the moment. As can be seen from the

³¹ The discussion of Engels and Dühring appears on pp. 340-350

³² See note 5 above

³³ “mystification consists in presenting the historical origins of oppression as determined; that is, in showing humanity had to begin with oppression for economic, social, and other reasons resulting from human nature, rather than presenting oppression as a historical fact; that is, as an event that occurred in certain circumstances, that could have occurred (its ontological structures), that was not necessary,” Sartre, *Notebooks*, 338.

³⁴ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 348.

³⁵ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 349.

³⁶ The discussion of Engels and Dühring is also repeated in the *Critique*, though in condensed form. See Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 711-712

existential conditions of oppression listed above, several of these conditions have already been explored in the discussions of alienation. That alienation is a central condition for the possibility of oppression is significant. But just as significant is the fact that it is *insufficient*. To understand why, however, we need to see what differentiates an oppressive society from others. Sartre complicates this by comparing oppressive societies with both “a world of freedom” and “solitary freedom.” The latter can make the essential features unclear at times. However, I claim that the question can be addressed by asking what differentiates an oppressive situation from one which features alienation in the sense we have been using it in this study? When, in other words, does the *possibility* of oppression and violence given by the plurality of freedoms become a *reality*? This question can be answered by considering how each involves a modification of possibilities. Just as with alienation, “oppression is an internal metamorphosis of my freedom, which is brought about by another's freedom.”³⁷

The first thing that must be noted is that oppression is not fundamentally a material situation. It is a kind of relation between human beings. No matter how bad the quality of life, Sartre insists, “there is no situation so miserable where the oppressed are held down that cannot also be conceived as having been chosen by a society of free men.”³⁸ This claim is no different from that in *Being and Nothingness*, in connection with the “us-object.”³⁹

A simple formula is proposed in order to illustrate the process of this modification. “There is oppression...when a society creates [anything]...and forbids

³⁷ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 329.

³⁸ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 328.

³⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 424.

certain of its members to participate ...want... consume [these creations].” This is because anything “created by freedom...appears to every one as his possibilities.” But this does not mean that everyone apprehends it as a possibility or rather projects oneself toward it. This appearance of possibility is *not exclusively mine*. “Every human possible...appears as possible to every human being. This does not mean that it is his possible or even that he is tempted by it. Simply, since it appears in the dimension of freedom, it is a *proposal* to my freedom.”⁴⁰ The key to understanding oppression is the proposal. This proposal, we saw in the previous section, is a direct consequence of actions becoming objective, since the meaning of objectivity is to be there for everyone. To be there for everyone, as human beings, means that it is there as a proposal, an instrument, an obstacle. But while a mountain might become an instrument/obstacle given my project to climb it, this is different from the way a set of stairs built by human beings appears. The latter appear as someone offering the possibility by the fact that they created something. That these actions are vulnerable to others means that the action might be abandoned by others, or taken up in ways the original agent would not approve. But that the action is not the agent’s exclusive property is what alienates the object and presents it to others as something.

What we can see here is that alienation is in fact necessary for the constitution of many, if not most, human possibilities. It is significant, however, that these creations become proposals and possibilities first for everyone, and then for someone else more specifically. In other words, possibilities are held in common before becoming *mine*. Although this object-proposal exists for everyone, we must recall that it does not exist for

⁴⁰ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 329; my emphasis.

the agent in the same way. It is not for the agent in the same way it is for others, to the extent that the agent identifies with the action. Thus there is a gap between the action as there for everyone and the action as for the agent, in the sense that the point of view of others, beyond the agent, is not able to be adopted. But the primary significance of proposals is how they function in the oppressive situation.

The formula indicated previously stated that oppression exists when a society creates anything that it forbids to some of its members. This is oppressive because the absence of the object would not itself be oppressive, although it might be *undesirable*. Oppression occurs only when there is an offering and a denial. To deny the object to some is an explicit denial of human possibilities. But it is also an effort to negate alienation, in the sense that it arrests the process of becoming there for everyone. But from all indications, the destiny in objectivity is a fact, a factual necessity.⁴¹ Oppression modifies this process by making objects only there for some.

The result is that objects in an oppressive society appear as “there for everyone,” in the basic sense that anyone can see them and see them as proposals to human freedom, but they also appear for the oppressed as being not for them. In other words, they do not participate in the human community for whom objects appear there for. The proposal then appears to the oppressed as “an impossible possible.” This means, it is *a possible*, because it is “a form of human and historical freedom in general,” but impossible, because it is denied to his or her (or their) group. In this sense it is an explicit denial of human freedom, a prohibition: “His impossible is someone else's possible.”⁴² Since

⁴¹ See Chapter 2 above.

⁴² Sartre, *Notebooks*, 330.

everyone else meets their own possible in the object, the excluded are by implication—
—or explicitly—denied membership in the human community.

Cultural products are thus ontologically “there for everyone.” It is as a matter of convention that they appear as there only for some. Creations multiplied are more and more impossibilities for some and possibilities for the others.⁴³ Here Sartre introduces a new distinction which would have been helpful earlier. The world in solitude, taken in the abstract of course, is one in which the world is the pure corollary of the possibles that I project. There is no impossibility for instance if I decide to give up a course of action, since deciding to give up is still my possibility that I freely decide based on my own judgment. In *Notebooks*, Sartre refers to this as non-possibility. Impossibility is something that comes into the world with others. It is a possibility from another point of view. This denial is pushed further in situations of forced labor, where the creation of products are destined for objectivity as there for everyone. But they are denied the possibility that they themselves have created.⁴⁴ This is not the same relation that occurs with any action as considered in the previous section. The laborers create possibilities for Others, which anyone can enjoy, but which are denied to themselves, despite being the source of the possibility as an object created as a proposal. It is no wonder freedom becomes mystified in this situation.

⁴³ “As soon as the body is reduced to powerlessness, all creation of a new possible is oppression because it defines one more form of powerlessness for the oppressed. It does so without touching his freedom, simply because the new end is a real possibility for the oppressed freedom, at the same time that it is taken away from this freedom.” Sartre, *Notebooks*, 334.

⁴⁴ “the project jumps into the sphere forbidden to the worker's freedom. Thus, in producing or in helping to produce the body of a luxury automobile, he is led to apply his freedom to limiting himself in his freedom. He produces something possible for others but impossible for him.” Sartre, *Notebooks*, 332.

Sartre also indicates an aspect of oppression he describes as an effort to “shift the weight of the Other to other people.” What this means, as we will see below, is that possibilities are unequally distributed. But a better way to understand this point would be that the possibilities of the oppressor extend into the world and the more possibilities that are created, the more are denied to the oppressed. But if this means that the oppressor has more possibilities, and alienation refers to the modification of possibilities, does this not mean that the oppressor is more vulnerable, at least quantitatively? This might be true, but the real significance of the “shift” Sartre has in mind here, is that the oppressed are more vulnerable. How can they be more vulnerable if their possibilities are restricted? Simply put, the possibilities of the oppressor extend in various ways into the world, while the possibilities of the oppressed are limited to themselves in their capacity as objects. More can happen *to them*, as passive recipients. Their vulnerability is more *intensive*.⁴⁵

The preceding has been only a simplified account of oppression as Sartre tries to discuss it in the *Notebooks*. The aim was not to be completely exhaustive but to highlight the conditions and features that are relevant to the concept of alienation. We can see now that oppression is possible on the basis of alienation since it is in some sense a perversion of it.⁴⁶ By taking a possibility that is there for everyone and limiting it to a few, the

⁴⁵ For instance, anyone can become sick and seek treatment from the medical establishment available. But it is obvious that those who have more resources can at least receive the treatment they seek. Those who are poor may not receive treatment, or they may incur costs that they cannot repay, and go into debt; or they may lose their job, since their employment is not guaranteed, they may lose their home, etc. To be sick for a wealthy person is problem to become well. For a poor person, a treatable disease might become the catalyst for the collapse of their struggle to survive.

⁴⁶ The relationships between multiple freedoms outside of oppression is still understood as vulnerability, as Sartre makes clear: “as soon as another freedom springs up, there is for it a world and the Other reveals itself to this freedom as a being-within-the-world for which it itself is a being-within-the-world.” “Therefore the other can act on me through the

oppressor makes the fact of objectivity into an exclusive privilege. Several questions must be asked, however, before proceeding to the next topic.

First, none of this explains why there is a decision to oppress. As noted above, this is what led Sartre to criticize Engels and Duhring. Second, it therefore does not explain the transition from the conditions of oppression to their reality. These two situations are separated by a decision that has not yet been revealed. Third, that a human creation functions as a pure proposal, as the possibility that is “there for anybody,” was precisely what Sartre claimed to be *alienating* to the consumer and the worker who produces it, in *Being and Nothingness*, as seen in the previous chapter. However, the significant question is why in the discussion of oppression the revelation of a possibility as “there for everyone” was revealing the freedom of all, while the revelation of the object as an instrument to be used by anyone was alienating. How exactly was alienation a condition for oppression if it is the absence of alienation? Perhaps the discussion of violence can be of some use here, since we will see that the act of violence also takes aim at destroying objects as “there for everyone.”

Violence

Sartre believes that violence requires the plurality of freedoms, as seen above. One does not try to violate what is not freedom, only freedom can be “violated.”⁴⁷ So it is strange that Sartre begins his discussion of violence with a discussion of destruction of things by considering the distinction between force and violence. There are several

intermediary of the world. He can use the adverse and destructive forces of the world to destroy me... these forces were nothing other than the real and concrete expression of the chance of failure and death that defines all freedom in principle.” Sartre, *Notebooks*, 333.

⁴⁷ This is one reason why “recognition” is for Sartre insufficient to do any of the theoretical moves his critics would have liked him to perform.

plausible reasons for this departure. First, violence is ambiguous in so far as it aims at freedom in order to deny it. Since an instrument or tool is a human creation with human significance, Sartre tries to determine how in relation to things violence can be detected in the way an action aims at the human element, hidden in the thing.

The distinction between force and violence makes this point accessible. The difference between force and violence can be reduced to difference between appropriate and inappropriate force. Violence might be called unjustified force, but it cannot be claimed that force is justified violence, at least not without further qualification. The force with which I open the door is not “justified violence.” Violence is a *violation* of some established form. Force, on the other hand, is action in conformity with laws established by human beings, so, not a violation of an established form. Force acts in conformity “to some rule,” it is “an operation conforming to the internal laws of an object,” whereas “violence” occurs “when the action is external to the law.”⁴⁸ Force depends on an implicit comprehension of and obedience to a human intention. If I push open a door, I use *some* force to open it, but the force vanishes as force because the door swings on the hinges in accordance with its design. If it is stuck, I might use more force, but the aim remains consistent with the intended purpose, i.e., to be opened. Neither of these acts would be considered violent, and while both employ force, one manifests more force than the other. The ideal of force as action in conformity with laws imposed by human intention is not to appear as force at all.

Violence, in contrast, is the act of smashing through the door, of breaking the lock, of removing its hinges with a battering ram. There is destruction of a form, or at

⁴⁸ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 171.

least a deterioration of form. Perhaps the door is not actually broken, but its hinges become loose from repeated blows. To the extent that the form is preserved, the less it appears to have been violated. Violence and force would appear to be opposites tending toward each other in degrees of appearance. The more force appears, the more it is like violence, and the more violence is invisible, the more it appears merely as force.⁴⁹

Force acts in compliance with the intended purpose of the object. Violence is a violation of this purpose. These observations are consistent with those phenomena Sartre referred to as *negativités* in *Being and Nothingness*.⁵⁰ Destruction was considered a *negativité* since for a natural disaster to destroy something, it must be something posited as something destructible. And it must be considered as such by a human witness. If it were possible to take a perspective on an event from the point of view of being-in-itself, there would be no destruction per se; there would be something different, perhaps: a different arrangement of things; but mostly there is being before and being after, and nothing more nor less. In the case of violence, it occurs “only when the form that is opposed to you is destructible,” or “when the laws of normal usage are established by wills...it is a question of some human lawfulness.”⁵¹ And it is this human lawfulness that is violated by violence. But this raises an important question: is the violation here the intention of the agent? Can the destruction of a building by storms be referred to as violence? Does the

⁴⁹ Think of the way a burglary might be depicted in film. There’s the violent smash through the window or door, but then there’s the more professional crew that cuts through glass rather than breaking it, or even better, dismantles the alarm system and walks right in. In the case of the latter someone will probably say, there was “no sign of forced entry,” meaning, force didn’t appear at all.

⁵⁰ For a similar discussion of this connection of the discussion of violence see (Dodd, *Violence and Phenomenology*, 58-70)

⁵¹ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 171.

above description depend on the violated in absence of an intention to violate, or does it depend on both?

The human form is violated, but this could also be deemed force to the extent that the definition of violence and force stated that force is action in accordance with the object. If a building is destroyed by heavy storms, this is *still* in accordance with the nature of the object. The destruction occurs because it was contrary to the human form or because the object had use for human beings that is no longer possible.

But what differentiates violence from destruction for Sartre is that violence *aims*, that is, *intends*, to violate. As with oppression, he states that one cannot be oppressed by or violated by an avalanche of rocks, unless brought upon by another. Likewise, one does not oppress a rock. Destruction is a negation of form as it appears for a witness. The destruction that occurs in the absence of the witness is not destruction because it is only operating on indifferent exteriority. But If I am the agent of destruction, it is not seen as a violation of form except to the extent that I posit a form in order to violate it. This is because the form is a human intention and a destruction by human intention is consistent with its own intention. This means, violence is a violation to the extent that I posit a form *for others*, and choose to violate this form. An intention of violence therefore requires an acknowledgment free human projects other than one's own.

The discussion of violence directed at things is meant to consider the intention of violence, in order to understand at what it aims and how it conceives itself. For the victim, it is straightforward that it experiences a violation of some meaningful reality, and the violation is severe enough to constitute an experience of trauma or being wounded. I claimed before that the possibility of violence is revealed in the experience of alienation,

the presence of another freedom. This means that a natural event could not present itself as violence unless one attributes to it a human agency. This is not to say that it cannot violate (or rather, destroy) a human form, but since it does so without intending to do so, it can be experienced as destruction or as harmful without being violent. On the other hand, a person who inflicts suffering on another person can be viewed as violent or as simply careless, depending on the intention attributed to the agent. If I eagerly await a phone call that never arrives, I can feel this act of silence as hurtful, and perhaps as severe as violence, depending on the expectation or form imposed on the situation. If I discover that the call was not made because of factors outside the agent's intention, it might be excused, and while it would be true that I had been hurt, I am no longer harboring this as an open wound. Just as with vulnerability, since we are dealing with human relations, there is a great deal of flexibility. But the main point here is that typically, in mundane experience, intention matters in the constitution of the phenomenon "violence" at least relatively, since in the total absence of intention, there would be only indifferent exteriority.

The analysis of violence directed at objects is intended to determine the features of the intention, that is, what the violent act aims to accomplish. One of the findings of this analysis is particularly significant. "Violence is not just the refusal of making use of something, *it is the destruction of the possibility of such use for everyone*, the refusal of *all* lawfulness."⁵² We can see here how violence is linked to the previous discussion of alienation and oppression. Violence is a destruction of the object as a possibility for everyone. Oppression involved objects that are presented as there for everyone but

⁵² Sartre, *Notebooks*, 182; my emphasis.

restricted only to some, such that they appear as proposals for everyone excluding the excluded. For the excluded, the object is an impossible possibility. Violence destroys the object as a possibility as such. Objects are possibilities only for free human projects, and this is the real aim of the violent act. Violence realizes the possibility inherent in the plurality of human beings, the possibility of being wounded. But the realization of this possibility is the destruction of human possibility. Seen in this way, alienation is the possibility of the absence of possibility. This is why Sartre claims that “all violence...implies a certain confidence in chance (taken as unknown laws)” and at the same time claims that it has “confidence...in total order as opposed to partial lawfulness”⁵³ Partial lawfulness represents a lawfulness imposed by human beings—limited, contingent, fallible, etc. These are not the same features as “chance,” however. The latter is a secret investment in being as a totality as opposed to the human world which has probabilities and anomalies.

If the analysis remained at the level of violence directed against objects and instruments, it would be disappointing in not addressing the way violence differs when it is directed at human beings in face to face encounters. Sartre does not disappoint in this manner, but another feature which holds true for the intention of violence against both human objects and human subjects is the above mentioned imposition of a intention as a negation of a form for-others. This means that for an agent to intend to inflict violence, for the violent intention to exist for the agent, it requires its own appearance as violence

⁵³ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 171, 173; also, (on the same page) “this right implies the position that every form and organization are dirt cheap.”

for others.⁵⁴ It differs from force, as we saw, since force disappears as force. But violence differs from force in that in its appearance, it justifies itself.

Violence justifies itself, but this would be tautological, or meaningless, if this meant only that it justified itself to the violent agent. Justification only makes sense as a justification for *others*. Justification is possible only in a world of others, because the intention of the agent is its own justification, although this is not quite the correct way to express it. To justify something is to bring it in line, to make it right or straight. For a solitary agent all action is intentional and therefore in no need of justification, it is the line; there is nothing outside it to be brought into line with it or vice versa. When others appear on the scene, this possibility of being out of line emerges. To say violence has its own justification, then, means that it brings the Other's point of view in line with the action performed on the victim. It requires that the victim submit to the act, and the submission to the act proves the act was justified, that violence is a *right* of the agent.

The intention of violence aims to be justified by a recognition of the *right* to violence: "violence bears its own justification within itself; that is, by its very existence it claims the right to violence."⁵⁵ In the case of violence directed at instruments, there was no witness. This is because the human form was captured in the in-itself, and the justification was retrospectively given through the actual destruction. The right to destroy the object was proven by its destruction. With human subjects, the case is similar but not identical. Violence aims to appear as violence in order to be justified by the victim's recognition of the right to violence. The violation proves the victim's own inability to resist the imposition. The inability to resist the imposition of violence amounts to a

⁵⁴ This is why it depends on the Other's recognition. See note 11 above

⁵⁵ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 173.

recognition of right and a justification that the victim deserves what he or she receives. The final moment of this process is the moment when violence disappears entirely, that is, disappears into force. The victim deserves what is imposed on it in the same way that the wobbly table that gives way under the weight it supports was destined to collapse, in accordance with what it is, an object incapable of supporting the weight imposed on it. We return to force then, that violence is a process where it appears first as a spectacle and ultimately disappears into force.

The disappearance of violence into force requires several other conditions beyond the recognition of the victim, however. Since the victim is necessary initially, but ultimately is made to disown its own point of view,⁵⁶ in order for the process of violence to be complete and justified in full, it must appear to *other* witnesses. This is a key feature of violence in the manner Sartre desires to explore it. Violence not as a random act of violence, but as a sustained, prolonged, human endeavor, that can paradoxically become normative. A lone gunman can wound an individual to the horror of all. In a sense, the randomness of an action of this sort explains it sufficiently; it is recaptured by the contingency of fact, like a natural disaster.⁵⁷ There is no need for justification by the agent if it appears as a singularity, a random act, i.e., if it does not try to demonstrate its consistency with some principle. But Sartre is not concerned with such acts of violence, which in no way diminishes their significance. Violence as a sustained activity is his object of study. Since the *intention* of violence necessarily concerns other people, in some way, any sustained activity of violence must be even more concerned with

⁵⁶ In the sense of an absolute—that is, impossible—alienation, in the sense typically understood

⁵⁷ But as with natural disasters, the response to these “isolated incidents” can conceal more problematic social phenomena that can be evaded precisely by claiming it was a random “unforeseeable” event.

justification. But this can be either or both of at least two kinds: justifications to others of the same class as the agent, or likewise, the victims. The latter, of course, might be essential witnesses in order to recognize the legitimacy of a hierarchy of some sort. The former might be essential to proving one's allegiance to the status quo.

In any case, once violence is given a normative sanction, it is no longer violence, but oppression.⁵⁸ This hardly means that violence is absent, but that it does not *appear* to the agents with as much frequency as it does for the victims. Its process of justification collapses entirely into force. Force is a natural activity; animals can be forced into a pen, whipped, etc. There is no violence here from the agent's point of view. It only requires justification when it is given an outside by another point of view which must be brought into line with it. Violence wants the victim to prove the impossibility of its own being violated, the impossibility of its own possibilities.⁵⁹

Violence differs from oppression in other ways. Primarily, Sartre characterized oppression as having a positive and negative side. Positive only in the sense that it involves a proposal to human freedom, and the negative side is the denial of this proposal for some. Without the proposal, there would be no awareness of oppression. It is a limitation of the possibilities of some but a maintaining of the possibilities of some others. Violence is a destruction of all possibility when it destroys an object. It destroys it as it is there for everyone. Violence does not involve a proposal to freedom. It is itself,

⁵⁸ Sartre makes this point clear in the discussion of slavery in the US, in Sartre, *Notebooks*, Appendix 2.

⁵⁹ Any explanation of the possibility of violence directed against the self would need to explain itself in these terms. For it would be necessary to apply to oneself actions which others consider violent, or, apply to oneself what one would believe was violent if one were considering someone else. It is interesting to note however that the often used example for violence and violation, namely, rape, does not seem possible to inflict on oneself, even in these imaginary modes.

however, an expression of freedom. The “violent” resistance to slavery might appear to other slaves as a proposal to resist their enslavement.⁶⁰ Without the intention violence would not be possible, there would be simply destruction, perhaps negligence. The violence that appears in a slave revolt is an expression of freedom. It is consistent with the above descriptions, but with the difference that it exists in a context of oppression. Since it exists in a context of oppression, it is a destruction of the possibilities of a few who exist as possibilities of denying the possibilities of the slave. It is the revenge of the instrument. The slave destroys the possibility of the slave owner using the slave as an instrument. The slave destroys his or her own instrumentality by destroying the user; but by destroying the user, he or she aims to destroy him or herself *as an instrument*. This means *it is the destruction of the slave as an instrument* by his or her own hand, and the affirmation of human freedom, beyond the restrictions imposed from within the institution of slavery, and the destruction of all slaves as instruments for anyone.

I claimed at the end of Chapter 2 that one cannot be coerced, or raped, unless one is free. Such acts are acts of violence, violations. The rapist proves through the violation not only that the victim is capable of being raped, but it proves *itself* as capable of raping. In the case of the former, it has already taken confidence in its own abilities and seeks to prove “what the object is” by putting it in contact with an “active power.”⁶¹ The act of violence involves the agent’s thesis that the victim *deserves* to be raped. This means, in Sartre’s view, that from the rapists point of view, if the victim did not deserve it, they

⁶⁰ Or, as in the case of the US civil war, the Union army functioned as a proposal to the freed slaves to participate actively in their own emancipation. Of course, this is not what the administrators of the war wanted (even though the freedmen were ultimately responsible for the Union victory), such is the alienation of action.

⁶¹ As in Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Book Theta*, trans. Stephen Makin (Clarendon, 2006).

would have been able to resist. This is, in effect, a negation of the distinction between actuality and possibility; it is a negation of the very source of these determinations. It is true that the rapist treats the victim as a thing. But the fact that there was a victim capable of being raped is proven by the fact that the rapist's possibilities were limited by the victim, as in "the Look"—strictly in terms of revealing the Unrevealed. The rapist proves that in fact these possibilities were not alienated, they were there all along to the extent that the victim is unable to resist, and the victim has proven it. This is precisely what Sartre means when he says, "the first justifying maxim about violence: one must not refuse what one does not have the force to prevent from happening. This leads to an identification of freedom and force and the beginnings of an ethics of violence."⁶² And this "ethics of violence" is, when he summarizes its tenets, an ethics of force since it "is simply an ethics of violence justifying itself."⁶³ This is why, at the end of Chapter Two, I insisted that coercion is felt in the presence of freedom. When freedom is completely dehumanized it is not felt at all or is felt as a *force of nature*.

Thus the reality of violence is such that it proves the opposite of alienation. It proves, by means of violation, its own right to violate, and the right to be violated in the victim. It proves that its possibilities were not alienated by showing the inability to resist the wrenching back from Unrevealed. If alienation is the revelation of vulnerability before another freedom, then violence is an actualization of this vulnerability—it turns the ability to be wounded into an actual wound. But in demanding the recognition of its right to violence, it becomes a justified wound that is no longer a *wrong*. Since violence is often directed against bodies, as objects, in order to "hit" freedom, it needs the

⁶² Sartre, *Notebooks*, 182.

⁶³ Sartre, *Notebooks*, , 186.

justification, it needs the appearance of spectacle that turns into conformity with what is lawful. It demands that freedom accept its wound as something that was deserved, without denying its reality as a wound. It believes the relation among freedoms is the same as that between different qualities of matter. The violent agent proves his or her own freedom by violating another freedom, and proves this freedom was violable in the victim's inability to resist. Violence demands from the victim the impossible: that it feels itself wounded while acknowledging the impossibility of being *wronged*, since it demands acknowledgment of the right of whoever inflicts the harm. Sartre summarizes the point: "The universe of violence is the justification of violence. Violence is a metamorphosis of the universe such that violence becomes a right."⁶⁴

Violence can become force by appearing to have acted in conformity with the nature of the object. It aims at a retrospective justification. It also acts against objects as there for everybody, it acts against being anyone, it rejects human possibilities as possibilities for anyone. If this is only able to be partially realized, it can do that by denying possibilities to some. It differs from oppression, however, in addressing the material world, or the object, rather than freedom itself, because strictly speaking, it cannot touch freedom. Oppression is like a legal prohibition, say, against certain marriages, while violence is castration. They are both negations of a possibility. But in so far as they are both denials of possibility, they involve a violation of freedom, and should not be distinguished too sharply with regard to what they destroy. When Sartre says that

⁶⁴ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 200-201; Sartre mentions also that it alienates freedom because it is alienable. This could be misinterpreted to mean that alienation is violence. We must remember that the look does not refer to a violation per se but to the presence of the violable elements. There is no question of right in the Look. What Sartre has in mind here is something along the lines of spying on someone who is not careful enough to secure their privacy.

oppression is distinct from violence, he means that it has become normative, its rules have become respected. This is contained already in the form of violence as it aims to justify itself. But once it becomes justified, it becomes force, and as force, a natural force, a blind force, and as such necessary, orderly on its own count. So the oppressive prohibition that is violated is enforced with an attack on the person, they are beaten, and the immediate appearance is violent. But the appearance of violence disappears into force as it settles into justification. But this sudden flare up of violence also reveals what was there all along, the project of some human beings of destroying human possibilities.

Alienation and the Origins of Oppression

Before concluding this chapter and providing answers to the questions with which it began, we must return to the question posed at the outset of Part II, namely, how the decision to oppress comes about. If we took the analysis of oppression in the *Notebooks* to be definitive, we would not have this answer. If we took the analysis of violence to be definitive, it would be simply a violence that has become normatively supported and applied to groups. But this cannot explain the *decision* to oppress. The decision to oppress would not exist if it simply involved an intention of violence, or, if it was not a decision with regard to oppression at all. The agents might not represent “oppression” to themselves, but the aim is to restrict the possibilities of some in favor of others, without changing the appearance of possibles as such. This is explained in terms of scarcity in the *Critique*. But it is explained in terms of the priority of the Other in the *Notebooks*, and should be addressed here. The priority of the Other is considered through analysis of “primitive” society, and this is taken up in order to address the origin of the psychology of interest that Sartre detects at the root of Engels presuppositions. It will be this sense of

alienation that serves as the immediate background for the emergence of the economic conditions of oppression.

“By alienation,” Sartre says, “we mean a certain type of relations that man has with himself, with others, and with the world, where he posits the ontological priority of the Other.”⁶⁵ The theory presents alienation as prior to the selfness from which the relation self/other is constituted. But this is a description of the attitude adopted, not the ontological reality of the for-itself. In other words, in an alienated condition such as this, the for-itself imagines the other to be an ontological priority. This is precisely what we had seen when, in the discussion of being-for-others in Chapter 3, I said that the negation by which selfness is reinforced, is concealed by the negation by which the Other makes him or herself be for-itself. We can also see what Sartre means here in his discussion of God. God was the concept of the Other pushed to the limit,” the other side of “the reification of my being an object.”⁶⁶ In *Notebooks*, Sartre continues this line of thinking. “The Other is not some specific person but a category or, if you will, a dimension, an element. There is no object or privileged subject that has to be considered as Other, but anything can be Other and the Other can be anything. It is just one way of being.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 385.

⁶⁶ “If, however, I conceive of the “they” as a subject before whom I am ashamed, then it can not become an object without being scattered into a plurality of Others; and if I posit it as the absolute unity of the subject which can in no way become an object, I thereby posit the eternity of my being-as-object and so perpetuate my shame. This is shame before God; that is, the recognition of my being-an-object before a subject which can never become an object. By the same stroke I realize my object-state in the absolute and hypostasize it. The position of God is accompanied by a reification of my object-ness. Or better yet, I posit my being-an-object-for-God as more real than my For-itself; I exist alienated and I cause myself to learn from outside what I must be.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 291.

⁶⁷ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 363.

The Other's ontological priority is understood as a primary center of reference or organization. For instance "primitive society...is total alienation by definition since society is always somewhere other than where I am."⁶⁸ In Hegelian terms, now employed much more thoroughly by Sartre, the self is rendered inessential in relation to society as essential. In the terms of *Being and Nothingness*, this means that the look cannot be returned, which means, one is always being looked at. The implications of this point are extensive. If there is no occasion to reassert selfness, there will be no way to distinguish one's own choices from those "imposed" from outside, because the "imposition" will simply be assumed as such. It will not quite "feel forced," but neither will it "feel free." It will function as an in-itself, as an exteriority towards which we must be indifferent. But it will retain the otherness of others, the resistance of an alien freedom. It will be the collapse of human action into the materiality things, or, as it is called in the *Critique*, practico-inertia.

Sartre's view is that "oppression is an event, an act of human responsibility, a decision by man affecting humanity that can take place only if two conditions are fulfilled: a technical and economic condition, and an ontological condition."⁶⁹ He now explains these conditions as follows. The economic condition is the "crystallization of diffuse relations of alienation" at a certain moment of economic development. Whereas the "ontological condition that makes the appearance of slavery possible (*but not necessary, since there are alienated societies without oppression*) is alienation. So far from alienation being one of the consequences of oppression, it is one of its factors."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 363.

⁶⁹ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 381-382.

⁷⁰ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 382; my emphasis.

Finally, the reality of oppression is to be found when in “the decision to take some men as tools there is an ontological decision to liberate myself from the other by enslaving him. *Oppression is an effort to shift the weight of the Other to Other people, just as an electrified object seeks to discharge itself of its electricity by contact.*”⁷¹

This passage contains many of the claims I have argued throughout this chapter. First, there is the decision to take some men as tools, to realize the possibility given in the mere plurality of freedom, given as a possibility but no more. Then, the need to explain this in a way that is motivated without being deterministic. Here, it is the *ontological* decision to liberate oneself, meaning, in other words, the prior condition of feeling *in need of liberation*, i.e., in bondage. The link between the Other’s possible utilization as a labor force, and the possibility that this will also be the liberation from some bondage to the other, are in conjunction, what results in oppression and slavery. But that is not all. It is an effort to *shift the weight to other people*. The weight that bears down on those who decide to use men as tools is none other than the vulnerability given in the human condition in the presence of plural freedoms. This presence of Others was certainly more alienating than might have been described in “the Look” in *Being and Nothingness*, but it was still a simple vulnerability. Sartre’s point is that Others are taken to be a threat to oneself and one views oneself as needing to strike first because one thinks the other thinks like the way we are thinking, because we are the Other. In order to short cut this circulation of otherness, the decision is made to make some members bear this weight. Finally we, see that this is imagined to be a sort of discharge of an electrical current (by Sartre, presumably) which is a characteristic seen in the discussion of violence.

⁷¹ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 383.

To summarize, the moments in the process can be understood as follows. First there is alienation, as the exteriority of multiple freedoms living among each other, being vulnerable for one another (diffuse alienation) as such. The ontological moment is the plurality of freedoms. This is alienation, the fact that each is vulnerable to each in so far as they recognize the freedom of others as the same as his or her own. These become “crystallized” which is to say, established in practices. The decision to “take some men as tools” in order to “liberate oneself,” to “shift the weight” of what might have been a communal life, more or less, experienced in common.

Since “the look is always somewhere else than where I am looking,” it “becomes the pure possibility of objectification and actualization of every subject as Other.” The look is “is the potentiality of Otherness as such, it is the power the Other has to actualize me as Other.” An “alienated society,” he concludes, is one in which “society is the Other thought of as essential, not insofar as he is the same as himself but insofar precisely as he is other.”⁷²

All this constitutes the “background” against which the economic conditions of oppression will appear. It indicates the conditions on the basis of which it will be possible to make the decision to oppress. Thus “it is starting from the Other that some men are designated as possible tools. They are the ones who have lost the protection of the Other.”⁷³ They are vulnerable precisely because they are not capable of conferring otherness on me. They have lost the “power” of the other, this power is understood as a form of protection and as itself a threat. Oppression “comes from the heart of alienated freedom, which cannot get rid of its alienation except through a concrete act. The slave is

⁷² Sartre, *Notebooks*, 362.

⁷³ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 382-383.

chosen to bear the whole weight of all Otherness...he is chosen in a world where this choice is ontologically possible since it is the world where everyone is prey to the Other. The slave is the man caught without the Other.”⁷⁴ The reason why everyone is “prey to the Other,” is that “man is first of all present to himself as other.” This means, that I recognize the Other’s freedom as my own. And since my own freedom is bent on liberating itself from the weight of the Other, I transfer this motive to the Other, which in turn justifies my initial characterization of the other as a threat to be eliminated. In such a situation it is not even necessary that anyone actually harm or threaten another in order for oppression to begin. For “oppression has its origin in an initial fact that man is first of all present to himself as other...not the fact of violence.” Sartre seems close here to concluding that there is no origin of oppression in a decision at all, but that it is a decision which appears to itself as a reaction to the exigency of the situation. “This is a vicious circle that does not invite optimism since alienation perpetuates oppression and oppression perpetuates alienation.”⁷⁵

There remains a problem in what was seen in this account of oppression. How is the decision proposed by Sartre any *less* gratuitous than that proposed by Dühring, as Sartre criticized earlier? What Sartre does not propose here in the *Notebooks*, but offers in the *Critique*, is the material condition that renders the emergence of hostility and antagonism and the possibility of oppression more than a merely logical possibility, but without being reduced to determinism. This condition is *scarcity*, and it essentially functions as a catalyst to transform vulnerability as a mere possibility of violence into an urgent, immediate threat. With scarcity, the three phenomena of violence, alienation, and

⁷⁴ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 384.

⁷⁵ Sartre, *Notebooks*, 384.

oppression will become much more clearly related. However, we are in a position of being able at present to offer a preliminary definition of these relations in Sartre's thought at the point prior to the *Critique*. They will be modified and extended where necessary in the next chapter, although they do not substantially change.

Conclusions

Alienation is the necessary condition for the possibility of violence and oppression. When combined with the sufficient condition, the result is the reality of violence. This sufficient condition is *scarcity*—but it is not given in the analysis of *Notebooks*. This will not become evident in full until the following chapter. Scarcity is present in the *Notebooks* in so far as it is absent. Once it appears in the *Critique*, everything comes together. Here it can be seen how the answers to questions 1 and 2 from the beginning of this chapter can be formulated. It is scarcity that makes violence and oppression a reality. It makes the possibility of violence, given with the mere plurality of freedoms, into the presence of an urgent threat. It negates the distinction between the possibility and the reality of violence. This also explains the priority of the Other (question 7).

The distinction between violence and oppression (question 3) can be understood in two ways. First, oppression involves groups, although Sartre does not emphasize this feature. Oppression has a positive and a negative aspect. It involves a proposal to freedom, and a denial of freedom. Violence, on the other hand, is not the proposal of a possibility to freedom but a negation of possibility as such. The consequence in many cases is the same but the manner of achieving it is different. They occupy different places in the same process. The real distinction can be seen in that the proposal to freedom in the

oppressive situation comes from the social world and is given to the social collective.

There is a sense of normal society in the oppressive situation. This means, that society offers possibilities to some but not all. To say this is an inequality would not capture the meaning entirely, since inequality could exist if the possibilities were universally proposed. Oppression is a willed inequality. But violence, on the other hand, can be aimed at individuals or groups. What distinguishes violence from oppression is that the persistence of violence requires an oppressive situation in order to maintain itself. Violence at the individual level requires a justificatory scheme at the social level. There is a dialectical relationship between violence and oppression, in the way violence seeks to justify itself and disappear as violence.

That violence and oppression require the recognition of freedom (question 4) can be understood on the basis the above mentioned dialectical relationship between violence and oppression. Violence that becomes institutionalized and supported socially is capable of giving rise to violence with indifference. Indifference is therefore something that arrives late, i.e., once these relations of violence become institutionalized, or become latent in the practico-inert (to use the language of the *Critique*).

Violence seems to have a character of destroying the transcendence of human beings in terms of the possibilities through which human beings exist (question 5). Violence towards things indicates the aim of violence against human beings in that the destruction of an instrument eliminates that which points toward something else and from which it came—in both cases, transcendence. To destroy an instrument is to destroy it for everyone. It is in this sense a destruction of possibilities for everyone. If, however, the destruction aims at destroying one's own capacity of being an instrument, for instance, in

a slave rebellion, this basically affirms common freedom in destroying the transcendence that aims only at the subordination of others. So while it is a destruction, perhaps, of an individual freedom it nonetheless affirms a common freedom.

One of the questions that remains unanswered in the *Notebooks*, concerns the ambivalence regarding the interchangeability of freedom for instance when using “common objects.” In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre claimed that using the instrument designed for anyone was alienating. Now, he claims that being unable to use the instrument designed for everyone is oppressive. Since the meaning of alienation is not necessarily negative on our reading, these are not inherently incompatible. However, we can also see another dimension of the issue that will become more clear in the *Critique*. With respect to the use of objects, when we use an object designed for anyone, and use it as anyone, this still reveals possibilities. When objects are restricted from being used, this is a restriction of possibilities that are still revealed. But more importantly, while Sartre does not grant the “common” usage of social objects any positive value here, in the *Critique*, he explains the negative side of this interchangeability as seriality, in which everyone experiences the impotence of others and in relation to Others. The positive side of this issue emerges when objects no longer mediate between human relations in the

CHAPTER 6

ALIENATION IN THE CRITIQUE OF DIALECTICAL REASON

In the previous chapters, I argued that alienation is revelation of being for-others, the experience of being vulnerable to another freedom. Vulnerability expressed the experience of the modification of possibilities of the for-itself by the possibilities of another, and this allowed us to understand that alienation was related to violence as the possibility that could be brought to the for-itself by another freedom. Alienation was not itself violence, but rather the experience of it as a possibility through the modification of my possibilities. In the *Notebooks*, Sartre examined violence and oppression on the basis of alienation as the condition for the possibility of both phenomena. It was found that as a condition alienation was not sufficient to generate either.

Sartre returns to these issues in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, and I will show in what follows the various instances of alienation as they appear in the text, as well as the connection to the meaning of alienation argued in previous chapters.

Alienation and Individual Praxis

In the *Critique*, Sartre aims to determine “without reference to concrete history, the incarnations of individual praxis, the formal structural conditions of its alienation.”¹ The new vocabulary of praxis takes the place of vocabulary employed in *Being and Nothingness*, but the differences are negligible. The for-itself is replaced with the

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Vol.1: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, ed. Jonathan Ree and Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (New York: Verso, 2004), 66. The quotation refers only to the first two moments of the investigation, the constituent dialectic and anti-dialectic, corresponding to individual praxis and the practico-inert.

practical organism, and just as through the project of the for-itself the “world” comes to be “there” as an instrumental complex correlative to my possibilities, so it is that praxis is the totalization whereby the material environment becomes a practical field of the possible satisfaction of needs for the practical organism.² It is through the totalization of the practical field that the determination of scarcity will come to things, as something lacked, which the practical organism is lacking in order to satisfy its needs.³

It is through need that the practical field is unified as the field of possible satisfaction. This is the first totalization of matter by a human being. But the practical field is not just there for one solitary praxis. It is there for everyone. The same practical field is there for everyone and as such it is the field of possible satisfaction *for anyone*. According to Sartre, praxis has an immediate comprehension of this fact.⁴ But the multiplicity of praxes do not become unified until it is totalized by the material environment (the passive unity) in the discovery of scarcity. This is the second totalization, the totalization of human beings by the material environment. It is on the basis of both totalizations that alienation will be considered throughout the *Critique*.

² “Praxis ... is a totalization whose movement toward its end practically makes its environment into a totality.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 87.

³ Need is “the first totalizing relation between the material being man and the material ensemble of which he is a part,” and it reveals “the material environment to infinity as the total field of possibilities of satisfaction.” The possibilities of satisfaction as “abundance or scarcity” will be revealed “in terms of the total field that need seeks possibilities of satisfaction in nature and it is thus totalization which will reveal [this] in the passive totality.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 80–81.

⁴ It is a matter of debate why this immediate comprehension of the praxis of others given in one’s own praxis is adequately explained by Sartre. Some scholars seem to believe that Sartre’s account here in *Critique* of the fundamental relation to others is somehow more rigorous than that in *Being and Nothingness*. But the account in *Critique* is simply an assertion of that reciprocal, internal negation, that was involved in the abstract account of being for-others. How the absence of explanation can constitute an improvement over a previous account escapes me. For the argument alluded to here, see Leo Fretz, “Individuality in Sartre’s Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 67–99.

Fundamental Alienation

Sartre refers to a variety of phenomena as “alienation” in the *Critique*, and this makes it difficult to have a precise sense of what he means by the term. This section will indicate the general features of alienation, what might be understood as fundamental alienation, so that the specific manifestations of it to follow will be clear.

Sartre refers to fundamental alienation as “the type of passive action which *materiality as such* exerts on man and his History in returning a stolen praxis to man in the form of *counter-finality*.”⁵ Counter-finality refers in general to the struggle that emerges between praxis and itself, in so far as the agent's “own action...becomes other.”⁶

Several issues with this definition can be raised. First, alienation is presented as the theft of praxis by *materiality as such*. Second, this would seem to identify the objectification of praxis with the alienation of praxis. And third, this identification would seem to place Sartre at odds with Marx, for whom alienation was not identical with objectification, and place him on the side of Hegel, for whom objectification is always alienation. Marx's well known criticism of Hegel was that he reduces human beings to abstract thought.⁷ Hegel regards objectivity as something to be overcome, not just as an estrangement, but as such. “Man,” Marx says “is regarded as a non-objective, spiritual being.”⁸ What is at stake here is whether Sartre has affirmed the existence of praxis in terms of a non-objective, spiritual being, by identifying alienation and objectification.

The scholarly discussion of this issue has been ambivalent. According to Robert Birt, “Sartre distinguished between types of alienation...there is primitive or fundamental

⁵ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 124.

⁶ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 124.

⁷ Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 149.

⁸ Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 150-151.

alienation which accompanies all objectification as an original metaphysical relation between human interiority and material exteriority. The human being must submit himself to the law of things (exteriority) in order to master them for his own ends.”⁹ Linda Bell also claims that “primitive alienation” is to be found in the inescapable fact that one must make oneself inertia in order to act on inertia. This “fundamental” alienation is contrasted with that “more extreme” alienation of the exploitation of labor in which one “turns himself into an inorganic means to an end which has nothing to do with him, rather than an exterior materiality in which he might objectify himself.”¹⁰ The difference between the fundamental alienation and the more extreme variety, in Bell's opinion, seems to be one of results, where the end “has nothing to do with him” in the case of the more extreme kind. But fundamental alienation was understood precisely as the counter-finality of action turned against itself; in other words, an end having—perhaps not nothing, but—something other than what the agent intended to do with it. What, exactly makes the relation to matter alienating? According to both Birt and Bell, in fact, it does not sound alienating at all, because praxis remains in control.¹¹ It seems that the alienating factor refers to praxis becoming “absorbed” in matter.

If this is true, it would seem that Sartre shares with Hegel an aversion to objectivity, or as Marx said, “consciousness takes offense not at estranged objectivity, but at objectivity as such.”¹² Klaus Hartmann criticizes Sartre on this account for “laps[ing] into obscurantism when he makes of matter a magical force or a principle of anti-praxis

⁹ Birt, “Alienation in the Later Sartre,” 307–308.

¹⁰ Bell, “Sartre: Alienation and Society,” 414–415.

¹¹ Birt said “in order to master them,” Bell said “in order to act.”

¹² Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 158.

which acts as a counter-finality defeating man's purposes.”¹³ But this is not quite what Sartre is saying. For Sartre, it is only because matter is *exposed to other praxes* that materiality “as such” can return a counter-finality. In other words, the real objectifying power and alienating power remains what it was in the previous chapters, an other freedom, or in this case, other praxes.

Now the odd thing about this claim is that scholars have also recognized this point, and yet they claim that Sartre is talking about a relation to materiality (not a relation to materiality concealing a relation to people).¹⁴ So what follows is intended to be less of a critical restatement than an insistence on the interpretation, which seems widely recognized and yet diminished in significance: fundamental alienation in the *Critique* is a

¹³ Klaus Hartmann, “Praxis: a Ground for Social Theory,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 1 (May 1970): 50–51.

¹⁴ Birt also recognizes that “both the Other and the material world must be objective realities” if there is to be “the externalization of the self on the part of the human subject who is alienated by his objectification of himself in something Other.” (Birt, “Alienation in the Later Sartre,” 304) Hartmann also recognizes that “matter is ambivalent: it permits of my objectification just as much as of my alienation...[it] impinges on me negatively, restricts and vitiates my freedom if only because others scramble for it, too, or co-operate in shaping it.” (Hartmann, “Praxis,” 50-51) Even Pietro Chiodi, one of Sartre's harshest critics on the issue of a return to Hegel, acknowledges that “from the social standpoint, the determining element is the presence of the Other. Hence the *Critique's* pervasive tendency to identify alienation with multiplicity...As long as multiplicity persists, alienation will persist in the dispersion of exteriority and of reciprocal struggle. Hence Sartre defines multiplicity as seriality, and seriality as a destiny of impotence and alienation.” Pietro Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, trans. Kate Soper (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976), 92–93. Frederic Jameson is ambiguous as well, but he acknowledges that “alienation takes yet another form, owing to the identification already commented on between matter and sheer multiplicity or number...the uncontrollable result of a host of collective actions and wills working together. [deforestation, flight of gold]” Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 246. Finally, Peter Caws notes that the practico-inert has been perceived “as alien and oppressive; but...the other side of this coin is its character as liberating and facilitating. Any given episode of that life is an intersection of our freedom with its fixity.” We claim that it is alien, but not necessarily oppressive, but the alien characteristic is often elided by the emphasis of matter is distinct from that animating principle that makes it alien, since “it consists of everything we encounter as ready-to-hand, as there waiting for us, at our disposal, that has been devised and put / in place by the praxis of our fellows and predecessors.” Peter Caws, “Sartrean Structuralism?,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. Christina Howells (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 309–310.

function of the plurality of praxes, and matter, only in so far as it is the “site” of this intersection, that, in so far as it mediates the multiplicity of praxes.¹⁵ As I have argued in previous chapters, to be objective is to be “there for anyone.” To the extent that praxis is always objective, it is always vulnerable to the praxes of others. It is not objectivity, or materiality, as such, but the sense of objectivity, as there for everyone, understood by the agent, that gives alienation its meaning.

Sartre misleads the reader to the extent that he states fundamental alienation is the action of materiality *as such* on praxis, returning to it a counter-finality. But provided we understand materiality as such as being there for everyone, this mistake can be easily corrected. Materiality is alienating, it returns the praxis as counter-finality only in so far

¹⁵ There is plenty of support for this view as well, but those who insist on it are rare (potentially the reason why they insist). Some example of scholars who put it strongly include Ingbert Knecht, who claims that for Sartre “dependence upon the performance of others in a ready made practico-inert field appears as the moment of alienation.” Ingbert Knecht, “Seriality: a Ground for Social Alienation?” (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980), 201. It is not the individual relation to matter that is the root of alienation, but the individual relation which is a condition for the possibility of the totalization by matter: “alienation emerges from the opposition between individual activity and the totalization of multiple praxis...alienation results from the activity of plurality under conditions of seriality. alienation consists in the totalization of multiple praxis dominating the actions of particular individuals.” (Knecht, “Seriality,” 201; my italics) Georgopoulos makes the point as clearly as can be made: “praxis is alienated when it objectifies itself in worked matter mediated by others,” Georgopoulos, “Sartre and Alienation,” 164. “It is *not matter as such* that turns man's action against him as it becomes other. Worked matter affects man and negates human praxis, but it does so only through the mediation of other equally free, identical, and irreducible praxes.” (Georgopoulos, “Sartre and Alienation,” 156; my emphasis) Stephen Hendley observes that “my own actions as well...escape me to the extent that I share my field of action with others. Our multiple actions combine there to produce material effects unintended by anyone...Sartre describes these...as counter-finalities.” Steven Hendley, *Reason and Relativism: A Sartrean Investigation* (New York: SUNY Press, 1991), 62–63. And it was “counter-finality [that] was the first practical experience of necessity.” (219n8) And finally, according to Klockars, “praxis...may be alienated: by being (i) objectivistically interpreted as a physical process (objectivism), (ii) analytically interpreted as separate from other praxes in the field (analytical interpretation), (iii) socially interpreted differently by some other individual or group in the field (conflict of interpretations), (iv) re-acted against by some other group in the field (conflict of actions) or (v) lead to the opposite of what was intended due to the socio-material circumstances (social counter-finality).” Each of these requires another subjectivity. Kristian Klockars, *Sartre's Anthropology as a Hermeneutics of Praxis* (Ashgate, 1998), 185.

as matter is *there for everyone* in the same practical field. So since matter “as such” is necessarily there for everyone, then praxis is alienated when matter “as such” returns a counter-finality. But this would be impossible were it not for the praxis of others. By itself, praxis is just the transcendence of the given toward an end. The encounter with matter as exteriority is interiorized when taken up in the course of action. And while “the tool made by the Other represents an element of exteriority in the dialectical field of interaction,” Sartre is clear to add that “*this exteriority does not derive from the external connections which are characteristic of inorganic materiality*. All these connections are effectively taken up in the practical field of action. Exteriority exists to the extent that the tool as materiality is *part of other fields of interiority*.”¹⁶

It is in this sense that alienation can be understood in the *Critique* as the revelation of vulnerability, in so far as praxis is objectified in the same practical field of other praxes. This is the fundamental alienation that is inescapable, not the various forms it takes in historical society, for instance, nor does it occur only in the milieu of scarcity.¹⁷ “*Objectification becomes other because it produces its object in the free field of another's action*.”¹⁸ It is “through the very freedom which produces it, [that] the Thing, *transformed by other freedoms*, presents, through its own characteristics, the objectification of the agent as a strictly predictable but completely unforeseen alteration of the ends pursued.”¹⁹

Sartre’s characterization of being an object in the field of other praxes is based on the fact that others cannot be taken up and interiorized in the same way that material

¹⁶ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 224 (my emphasis)

¹⁷ In fact, it is a condition for the possibility of scarcity.

¹⁸ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 321.

¹⁹ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 339.

obstacles can be. We have already seen this in the discussion of ignorance and obstacles above.²⁰ In the *Critique*, Sartre incorporates this to the experience of necessity, because “the Other-Being which I am is in principle incapable of living in the dialectical development of praxis, it is the fleeting object of consciousness rather than consciousness itself; an abstract and imprecise limit of knowledge rather than a concrete presence to intuition.”²¹

Alienation is referred to as an experience of *Necessity*, and this is equivalent to “the experience of the Other,” to the extent that one feels oneself subject to the manipulation of an alien force.²² The alien force is nothing other than the fact that *other praxes* work the same material environment, and this brings about results that no one intended. It is both an experience of being “robbed of our action *by worked matter*,” as well as “the historical experience of matter as praxis without an author,” and finally the experience of freedom’s “own inertial limit.”²³ But as mentioned above, these characterizations require a plurality of praxes: it is experienced *only* when “the multiplication of actions and responses is unified in the object which posits itself for itself.”²⁴ It appears when “the final result...also appears as radically Other, in that it has never been the object of an intention on the part of the agent.”²⁵ It occurs most forcefully, for example, when “a human praxis directs itself at the worker and tends to make him work for others when he is still working for himself.”²⁶ It occurs finally “as the necessity of the existence of this

²⁰ See Chapter 3, first part, second section, the discussion of ignorance and obstacles.

²¹ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 338.

²² Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 226.

²³ Sartre, *Critique* vol. 1, 224, 226, 323

²⁴ Sartre, *Critique* vol. 1, 323

²⁵ Sartre, *Critique* vol. 1, 223

²⁶ Sartre, *Critique* vol. 1, 322

field of inert activity.”²⁷

Necessity is not a magical property of matter to absorb praxis. It is “only in the milieu of a praxis which transcends it and knows it better than it knows itself” that alienation can occur.²⁸ Sartre insists that this *could not* happen by matter alone. “Matter does not make a constitutive return to praxis in order to transform it into a controlling fatality,” whereas with “a trap,” for instance, “the freedom of the enemy, through the complex of material means involved...has given our own freedom a negative aspect, and has made it objectively a practico-inert process of counter-finality.”²⁹ Nor should alienation be understood as “alienating oneself” by “making oneself inert,” as he seems to say in some instances.³⁰

In conclusion, fundamental alienation refers to the reversal of praxis against itself when turned against it by matter, *in so far as* matter exists as there for everyone, and thus subject to the praxis of others. Fundamental alienation is equivalent to objectification, but to be objectified means that it becomes an object *there for anyone*.³¹ The possibility of an action becoming other in matter is only a consequence of matter becoming objective in being there for everyone.

²⁷ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 319

²⁸ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 236

²⁹ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 236–237.

³⁰ The most egregious example being in the footnote where he says “Necessity, for man, is conceiving oneself originally as Other than one is and in the dimension of alterity. Certainly, praxis is self-explanatory; it is always conscious of itself. But this non-thetic consciousness counts for nothing against the practical affirmation that I am what I have done (which eludes me while constituting me as other). It is the necessity of this fundamental relation which explains why, as I have said, man projects himself in the milieu of the In-Itself-For-Itself. Fundamental alienation does not derive, as *Being and Nothingness* might mislead one into supposing, from some prenatal choice: it derives from the univocal relation of interiority which unites man as a practical organism with his environment.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 227–228.

³¹ As we saw in the previous chapter, this means that it appears as a proposal for the projection of possibilities of others freedoms.

This account of “fundamental alienation” would still seem to be significantly different than Marx’s account of the alienation of labor power that is the necessary condition for transforming money into capital, the form of alienation unique to capitalist economies.³² But, if we consider that for the alienation of labor-power to occur, as it does in Chapter 6 of *Capital*, there must have occurred *prior* to this, the positing of the worker as a potential instrument, then this is sufficient to see the consistency between Sartre and Marx on this point. Sartre is operating at a stage prior to the alienation of labor power, as what must be necessary for labor power to be alienated. For labor power to be sold as a commodity, it must be posited as a commodity to be sold.³³ Marx is clear that this would never occur to the laborer if there were not already a separation between labor and the objective conditions of labor.³⁴ From Sartre’s point of view, it is precisely the relationship between labor and its objective conditions that is *manipulated* by the expropriation of the means of production. “The characteristic of being a commodity comes to the product of peasant labor from the outside...If circumstances enable one praxis to appropriate the meaning of the other praxis, this only means that the object in which the latter objectifies itself takes on a different meaning and a counter-finality (for its producer) in the practical field of the former and through a reorganization of this field.”³⁵

³² Marx, *Capital vol. 1*, 266-273.

³³ Marx also claims this: “Human alienation was accomplished through turning everything into alienable, saleable objects in thrall to egoistic need and huckstering. Selling is the practice of alienation.” Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Penguin Books, 1992), 241.

³⁴ “A situation in which labor is merely exchanged for labor...presupposes the separation of labor from its original intertwinement with its objective conditions” “Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Penguin Books, 1993), 515.

³⁵ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 322.

Alienation as described above does not refer to any specific context. But the whole *Critique* takes place in the “milieu of scarcity.” Scarcity is the first totalization of the multiplicity and everything takes place in the milieu of scarcity, including counter-finality. The counter-finality that appears in the context of scarcity is of a specific sort, namely one that occurs on the basis of a false separation. On the other hand, the relation of seriality which characterizes mundane social relations as well as the being of class will be a false form of togetherness. But each of these concepts are intimately related, and can be detected in the others. The aim here is only to make clear the common elements of alienation as the revelation of vulnerability.

Scarcity

Scarcity is the first appearance (in the text) of praxis turned against itself.³⁶ In the milieu of scarcity, praxis is turned against itself in so far as the activity by which human beings satisfy their needs appears to others as a threat to the satisfaction of *their* needs. And, in so far as this brings about antagonism which will leave the needs of some unsatisfied, the agent’s praxis becomes the means by which his or her needs are unfulfilled.³⁷

Scarcity is “the expression of a quantitative fact. There will be an insufficient quantity of a particular natural substance or manufactured product in a particular social

³⁶ Scarcity must be understood as the first reversal of praxis: “the original structure of scarcity as a primary unity transmitted to matter through men and returning to men through matter [is at the basis of the passive actions of worked and socialized materiality].” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 123. This *does not mean* that alienation would not exist without scarcity. Scarcity cannot be the original foundation of alienation as such, because “the inversion of the unity of human multiplicities through the counter-finalities of matter would still subsist” in the absence of scarcity, since “this unity is linked to labor as to the original dialectic.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 124.

³⁷ “In reciprocity as modified by scarcity, the same appears to us as anti-human in so far as this same man appears as radically Other—that is to say, as threatening us with death.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 131–132.

field, given the number of members of the groups or inhabitants of the region. *There is not enough for everybody.*³⁸ Everyone experiences their unity “as the possibility of universal destruction” by the material environment. But more significantly, it reveals “that this destruction through matter might come to any individual through the praxis of other men.”³⁹ In other words, it reveals their vulnerability to the Others in the same practical field. But this vulnerability is not quite the same as seen in the discussion of being-for-others in *Being and Nothingness*.

In the case of “the Look”, the Other did not need to try to do anything directly for vulnerability to be revealed. In the context, or milieu, of scarcity, it is a bit more complicated. It would be incorrect to say that the Other does not *do* anything to appear as a threat. If it was meant that the Other does not intentionally try to harm another practical organism, this might be true. But precisely because the Other is a *practical* organism, and as such organizes the practical field, it is as praxis aiming to satisfy needs that the Other is a threat, not because the Other tries to harm but because there is a conflict in the satisfaction of needs. But this praxis is not itself an act of hostile aggression against another, but in the basic sense of praxis as a transcendence of the given toward the satisfaction of need. In other words, in satisfying one’s own needs, some are a threat to others, because they will *possibly* deprive others of the ability to satisfy their own needs. So it is by the appearance of multiple praxes in the same field that the praxis of one agent appears to another as *dangerous*, and if another tries to minimize this danger, the source of the destruction of praxis would be the movement of praxis itself in satisfying its needs. In the context of scarcity, the Other’s free praxis becomes limited to a freedom for evil,

³⁸ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 127–128. Emphasis in original.

³⁹ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 127.

precisely because it's satisfaction threatens the others in the field with death. This ultimately justifies the decision to oppress.⁴⁰

Scarcity is the condition and the support for antagonistic social relations.⁴¹ This is because “scarcity in any form transforms separation into antagonism.”⁴² It produces antagonism almost exponentially because the praxis of Others is threatening in so far as it is *the same* as mine. This means that they aim to satisfy the same needs by the same objects and discover the same things threatening. In this case, the threat would be oneself. One discovers oneself as a threat to others, and others as a threat to oneself, in the judgment that they aim to dissolve threats to their own survival. This creates a normative context of violence, since the possibility of a threat from another is determined by one's own desires to be successful in the same endeavor as the others, who are dangerous precisely because they are the same. The agent is present to oneself as another, and acts according to the potential actions of others, which have the urgency of an imminent threat. This means “violence as a negative relation between one praxis and another characterizes the immediate relation of all men, *not as a real action* but as an inorganic structure re-interiorized by organisms.”⁴³

Two things are immediately apparent from these observations. First, we can see

⁴⁰ Sartre makes this point explicitly in connection with the anti-Semite: “it is necessary in order to be able to hate the Jew—for one does not hate natural phenomena like earthquakes and plagues of locusts—that it also have the virtue of freedom. Only the freedom in question is carefully limited: The Jew is free to do evil, not good; he has only as much free will as is necessary for him to take full responsibility for the crimes of which he is the author; he does not have enough to be able to achieve a reformation. Strange liberty, which instead of preceding and constituting the essence, remains subordinate to it, is only an irrational quality of it, and yet remains liberty.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate* (Schocken Books, 1995), 27–28.

⁴¹ “The origin of struggle always lies, in fact, in some concrete antagonism whose material condition is scarcity...the destruction of the adversary is only the means.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 113.

⁴² Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 221.

⁴³ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 152.

now that scarcity is the source of existing for oneself first as another, in Sartre's view.

If the Other is a threat in so far as we want the same thing, then whatever I want is represented as being threatening to the Other as well, and so forth. This also shows, the second point, that the distinction between possible violence, or vulnerability, and its actual reality, becomes blurred and basically disappears in the milieu of scarcity.

We can also see where Sartre's discussions of violence as seen in the previous chapter are taken in the *Critique* in the concept of scarcity. Any violence that aims to deal with this threat (of praxis) is understood for itself as counter-violence, in other words, justified violence directed against the violence of another. There is an actual threat, namely, the survival of each of the organisms in the practical field. But the source of this threat resides in the objects absent in the practical field. Since the object is absent, it cannot be acted upon, so the practical organisms try to act against the threat represented by the other praxis. In other words, one can modify "abundance" by modifying the number of individual needs that determine the objects as "scarce."

But this characterization of the concept of scarcity might seem problematic for several reasons. Sartre's use of this concept of scarcity has been with criticism by some readers.⁴⁴ What Sartre is saying about scarcity must be made more precise. Scarcity is

⁴⁴ Some of Sartre's critics have claimed that scarcity is too vague. William McBride criticizes Sartre for this reason and contrasts Sartre's concept with Marx, where scarcity and need are *relative* terms. McBride wonders whether "the condition of the majority of the population of the United States in the early 1960s [was] truly one of comparative abundance?" William Leon McBride, "Sartre on Marxism," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1981), 621. If class conflict persists in the context of abundance, "scarcity...cannot be very useful in explaining these familiar social *structures of dominance and subordination*, since they *seem to have survived the elimination of scarcity*." McBride, "Sartre on Marxism," 621–622; my italics. If on the other hand the appearance of abundance "was only an illusion...then we must confront the problem of defining scarcity." McBride, "Sartre on Marxism," 622. The problem here is that McBride is appealing only to Sartre's first claim that scarcity is "the expression of a quantitative fact." If this was all there was to say of scarcity, McBride's question would be appropriate, he could simply ask what this

expressed as a *quantitative fact*, of the ratio of needs to objects; but this ratio is not the meaning of scarcity. Scarcity is also a *milieu*. If scarcity were merely a quantitative fact, the knowledge (or ignorance) of this fact would determine the presence (or absence) of scarcity. An unknown scarcity could hardly influence conduct in the way Sartre intends. And yet Sartre allows the possibility that “this member of this society does not even know how many individuals it contains...may not know the exact relation of man [to goods]—the relation which strictly defines scarcity. And he may account for present poverty in ways which are completely untrue and absurd.”⁴⁵ If we think that scarcity is merely an illusion, however, this would not fit either, for Sartre insists that “no one has the right to regard the fear of famine which is so striking in underdeveloped societies...as mere subjective feelings. On the contrary, they represent the interiorization of objective conditions and are in themselves an origin of praxis.”⁴⁶ The meaning of scarcity is that it was real, at some point, and society organizes itself accordingly. But even when it is possible to eliminate scarcity, the mentality of scarcity still operates in the field of practico-inertia.⁴⁷ The mentality (for lack of a better word) of scarcity is operative for instance when praxis deals with scarcity by aiming at other praxes rather than the fact of

ratio was at any given time. But scarcity is not merely a fact, as will be shown. Mark Poster also seems to misunderstand Sartre’s use of scarcity as seen in the following remarks on the *Critique*: “its concept of scarcity is flat and unhistorical, taking no account of the relative conquest of scarcity in advanced technological society.” Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Post-War France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton University Press, 1975), 299. That scarcity is not the source of alienation per se, is recognized by Raymond Aron: “alienation by means of projection into materiality owes nothing to scarcity. Once again, scarcity seems necessary less for the origin of history than for its (possible or necessary) end.” Raymond Aron, *History and the Dialectics of Violence* (Basil Blackwell, 1975), 44.

⁴⁵ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 128.

⁴⁶ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 150.

⁴⁷ A good discussion of the concept of scarcity can be found in Michael J. Monahan, “Sartre’s Critique of Dialectical Reason and the Inevitability of Violence: Human Freedom in the Milieu of Scarcity,” *Sartre Studies International* 14, no. 2 (2008): 48 – 70.

scarcity itself.⁴⁸

Sartre believes that scarcity “is the basic abstract matrix of every reification of human relations in any society.”⁴⁹ But reification is not, Sartre claims, “a metamorphosis of the individual into a thing, as is often supposed, but the *necessity* imposed by the structures of society on members of a social group, that they should live the fact that they belong to the group and, thereby, to society as a whole, as a molecular statute.”⁵⁰ The origins of this statute are to be found in scarcity which reveals the impossibility of co-existence of human beings.⁵¹ Given that human beings live in separation, and understand their relations in terms of exteriority, counter-finality as a phenomenon is understood in terms of separate actions on the same practical field. Counter-finality, like necessity and seriality all take place in the context of scarcity; it conditions everything that follows.

To conclude this section, scarcity must be understood as the first reversal of praxis, the first appearance of alienated praxis: “the original structure of scarcity as a primary unity transmitted to matter through men and returning to men through matter [is at the basis of the passive actions of worked and socialized materiality].”⁵² However, while scarcity is the first appearance of alienation and inverted praxis, it must not be thought that alienation only exists in the context of scarcity. Scarcity cannot be the original foundation of alienation as such, because Sartre insists “the inversion of the unity of human multiplicities through the counter-finalities of matter would still subsist” in the

⁴⁸ Or, we might even add in some contexts, rather than modifying its own needs to accommodate the ability of others to satisfy their own needs.

⁴⁹ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 132.

⁵⁰ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 176; my italics.

⁵¹ “Scarcity is not the absolute impossibility of the human organism surviving...But in a given situation...scarcity makes the passive totality of individuals within a collectivity into an impossibility of co-existence. The group or the nation is defined by its surplus population; it has to reduce its number in order to survive.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 128–129.

⁵² Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 123.

absence of scarcity, since "this unity is linked to labor as to the original dialectic."⁵³

Counter-finality

As indicated above, counter-finality is the general abstract form of alienation. But it occurs in certain forms under conditions of scarcity. Counter-finality refers to the univocal relation to materiality of which scarcity is a contingent determination.⁵⁴ It is a general reversal of praxis, but it refers specifically to the reversal of praxis through the positive presence of worked matter, as opposed to its absence (as with scarcity).⁵⁵ Since scarcity revealed the "impossibility of co-existence," counter-finality can be understood as emerging in the aftermath of the determination of this negative unity. Counter-finality occurs in the context of scarcity in so far as individuals have the illusion of living in separate "sectors" of materiality, having accepted the "impossibility of co-existence."

Since everyone lives an isolated existence, given the fact of scarcity, and aims to satisfy his or her individual needs, each isolated praxis is turned against itself in the moment of objectification when the results of several isolated actions in the same practical field are counter to the intentions of each and all.⁵⁶ Counter-finality reveals, in

⁵³ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 124.

⁵⁴ The point here being simply that scarcity, which is the first appearance of praxis turned against itself, is only a "*contingent determination* of our univocal relation to materiality," Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 125. and "a *determination* of this general relation [between multiple praxis and materiality]." Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 124.

⁵⁵ "Alienation becomes the rule of objectification in a historical society to the extent that materiality, as the positive presence of worked matter (of the tool), conditions human relations." Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 151.

⁵⁶ The inertia of praxis inscribed in matter "transforms natural meaningless forces into quasi-human practices, into passivized actions." These forces appear as "counter-finalities" in the sense that they appear as "praxis without an author." The totality of actions of human beings appear as natural forces that are beyond control. But in order to occur in this way, actions must be carried on elsewhere and in isolation, so that they have the *effect* of a joint undertaking (as far as matter is concerned) without being one as such, i.e., without any individual nor the collective being "responsible" for it. Scarcity is what makes this possible in so far as individuals become isolated given the impossibility of co-existence.

fact, *the impossibility of separate existence*, since the material environment is indifferent to whether the result was a joint undertaking or not. It is, in some ways, the experience of necessity seen above was the necessity of this field of practico-inert activity. The illusion of isolation is the expression of the reified human relations alluded to in the context of scarcity. It reveals “a sort of mechanical rigidity [that] haunts them in the concrete undertaking of *living* and subjects *the results* of their actions to *the alien laws of totalizing addition*. Their *objectification is modified externally by the inert power of the objectification of others*.”⁵⁷

However, it is not necessary that the separation of praxis seen here is actually ignorant of each others’ praxis. In fact, the point is that the individual agents might even be aware that the others in isolation are also performing their own action. But having adopted an attitude of indifference toward the actions of others except in so far as they are antagonistic, the point is that if neighbors know that others doing the same thing will bring about a counter-final result, the alternative (cooperating) is not persuasive. The individual choice not to act would not prevent the actions of others nor would it satisfy one’s own needs. Each will act therefore in spite of the actions of their neighbors.

The practical aspect in the phenomenon of counter-finality has been emphasized here, primarily because scholarship has occasionally erred in placing the emphasis on a disposition in matter to “absorb” praxis by some sort of “magic.” It is hardly the case that the inertia of materiality by itself is capable of bringing about a counter-finality, precisely because the individual in isolation (not the false isolation brought about by scarcity) would not be able to put a dent in the material configuration of the sort necessary to be experienced as radically opposed to his or her individual aims. If an individual farmer

⁵⁷ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 176; my italics.

ruins the soil, and we assume the simple relation of an individual to the material environment, this is not a counter-finality since it “is simply a freedom which fails.”⁵⁸ To the extent that this option is not available to the farmers in the case of Sartre’s example of deforestation, it is because they occupy the same practical field; thus it would be supporting the illusion of the impossibility of co-existence to propose that counter-finality follows simply from the “univocal” relation of praxis to materiality (as indeed Sartre does claim at times, only to modify at other points in the text). It would be better expressed as the multi-vocal field of praxis in which each tries to maintain the illusion of a univocal relation.

Seriality

If scarcity revealed the impossibility of co-existence, and counter-finality revealed the impossibility of separate existence, then seriality is a synthesis of both.⁵⁹ While acknowledging the impossibility of existing separately, the series does not quite agree to co-exist. It agrees to exist together in isolation. Sartre’s example of the line at the bus illustrates the point adequately. Everyone arrives and falls into line, few acknowledge each other, everyone minds his or her own business. Serial co-existence is one way to

⁵⁸ “Of course, it often happens that, in trying to avoid some annoyance, we fall into worse trouble; but if nobody has deliberately arranged the first danger in order to lead us into the second through the complicity of our personal activity, this involves nothing more than the inherent uncertainty of praxis; for every praxis, to some degree, takes account of its areas of ignorance, reckons on probabilities (in the strict sense of the term), makes wagers, and takes risks. The freedom of an action which ends in failure is simply freedom which fails, since the fundamental relation of the organism to its environment is univocal. Matter does not make a constitutive return to praxis in order to transform it into a controlling fatality.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 236–237.

⁵⁹ “The contrast between ‘reciprocity as a relation of interiority’ and ‘the isolation of organisms as a relation of exteriority,’ which, in the abstract, conditions an unspecified tension within multiplicities, is in fact transcended, and merged in a new type of ‘external-internal’ relation by the action of the practico-inert field which transforms contradiction in the milieu of the Other into seriality.” Sartre, *Critique* vol. 1, 255.

eliminate the antagonism that would exist in the context of scarcity, for instance, everyone agrees to an arbitrary principle of selection (first come first served).

Serial relations are characterized by two related features that are only implicit in the example of the line at the bus. First, everyone experiences his or her relation to others as an experience of *impotence*, that is, a common inability.⁶⁰ Second, everyone experiences his or herself as another and acts only as the Other.⁶¹ Both features can be seen in the example of the depreciation of money, which is one of the simpler examples offered by Sartre. In the situation where there is a fear of money depreciating, everyone is equally impotent to act upon this process. Someone who worries about a future depreciation by the actions of others can try to convert paper money into other goods, but it is this action that brings about the future result that was feared. The person “adapts to it by imitating it...he makes himself Other.”⁶² Since the person acts out of fear of what some other person might do, and the only way to act against this fear is to act first, the person becomes the Other whose action was feared, and brings about the result for others that he or she wanted to avoid. Sartre summarizes the example as follows:

because I cannot prevent some unknown person from changing his money as quickly as possible into goods which he will stockpile, I hasten to exchange mine for other goods. But it is my own action, in so far as it is already inscribed in economic behavior as a whole, and my future action, which determine the action of this unknown person. I return to myself as

⁶⁰ “A series reveals itself to everyone when they perceive in themselves and Others their common inability to eliminate their material differences.” Sartre, *Critique vol. 1*, 277.

⁶¹ In the competitive market “all their operations are determined by the action of the Other. But it is also the action of everyone in so far as he is Other (for other sellers and for other customers).” Sartre, *Critique vol. 1*, 284. “Everyone determines both himself and the Other in so far as he is Other than the Other and Other than himself. And everyone observes his direct action deprived of its real meaning in so far as the Other governs it, and in his turn hastens to influence the Other, over there, without any real relation to his intention.” (286)

⁶² Sartre, *Critique vol. 1*, 289.

Other and my subjective fear of the Other...appears to me as an alien force, the accelerated depreciation of money.⁶³

We can see the presence of counter-finality in this example as in the previous instances of alienation. The joint result is brought about by the separate actions of the individuals in the gathering. We can also see how the series itself has a negative unity because it is unified by the practico-inert object, since it is the practico-inert object which combines multiple human efforts.⁶⁴ But this sort of serial praxis is not the same thing as *common* praxis. While these attributes of serial relations are clearly present in the previous instances of alienation, the series is unique in that the impotence and alterity represented by it are what become destroyed in the emergence of the action of a group.

Common Praxis: The Negation of Alienation

The group is the negation of seriality, it replaces the mediation of materiality between individuals with the mediation of the third party. It transforms multiplicity and quantity from impotence into an instrument for accomplishing the objective. This comes about at first, however, through a totalization from the outside. The totalization from the outside must present the gathering of the multiplicity as a negative unity against which they must unite, and it must do so with more urgency than is present in the mundane relations of serial impotence common to these gatherings. In realizing the common praxis of each and all the gathering is transformed into a group in fusion.

The group in fusion is the praxis of all geared toward a common objective, it creates itself through a negation of the external threat. Just as the for-itself exists as a nihilation of the in-itself and not prior to it, so does the group exist only as a revealed

⁶³ Sartre, *Critique vol. 1*, 289.

⁶⁴ Sartre, *Critique vol. 1*, 308.

revelation of itself as *not* being the unity imposed from outside. It is the explicit negation of this unity and gives itself its own unity.

The group-in-fusion is only the first adventure of the group. Previously we saw that seriality unifies the gathering in a collective object. We will see that this unity is not simply a unity in an object but it is constituted by the action of the institutional group on a gathering. The stages to the group will be explained beginning with the fused-group and transitioning to the statutory or pledged group, then to the organizational group, then to the institutional group. The purpose of this discussion is not to provide an exhaustive treatment but simply to indicate the general features of the transitions from one to the other, and ultimately, to see the manner in which alienation functions throughout the transformations.

The Group-in-Fusion

There are two moments in the emergence of the group in fusion.⁶⁵ First, since the group emerges as a negation of serial co-existence, this gathering must be constituted by a totalization from the outside. In Sartre's example of July 14th, the King totalizes the gathering of Parisians by surrounding the city with the militia. The gathering thus comes to experience itself as a negative unity in so far as they are all threatened by the same danger—a common experience of impotence in relation to an object. The difference between this unity from outside and the sort present in serial relations as such is that this occurs as a moment of concerted praxis on the part of the King and not just a practico-inert object.

The second moment comes from the actualization of this unity. The individuals

⁶⁵ “The objective and the danger are two stages of a single process which designates the developing totalisation from the outside.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 384.

constitute themselves as a group by actualizing the totality that has come to them from the outside. This actualization occurs not as a simple affirmation, but as an explicit negation. That which is negated are the features of alienation as seen above. If serial relations were an inversion of human relations, common praxis takes the form of an inversion of this inversion.⁶⁶

First, the practical field is no longer the practico-inert field but the group itself as the common field of action.⁶⁷ Second, the Other is no longer other in so far as he or she is free, but everyone is the same in so far as everyone recognizes their own freedom in the Others So freedom recognizes itself in the Other.⁶⁸ The mediation between individuals by exteriority and inertia is replaced by human mediation, and what was a mediation of things becomes a mediation of praxis.⁶⁹ Since the Other's freedom reveals itself as the same, the dictates of the Other's praxis is not encountered as an alien force but as freedom giving itself its own laws.⁷⁰ The consequence is that the relations of alterity and exteriority that characterized the series are now human relations, which means that the collection of units and the "alien laws of totalizing addition" are in the case of group-praxis transformed into an instrument for its own free objective.⁷¹ Whereas before the

⁶⁶ "The reality of the praxis of a group depends on the liquidation of the serial and its replacement by community." Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 387.

⁶⁷ "Since the group is the practical milieu of this relation, it must be a human relation which we will call mediated reciprocity." Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 374.

⁶⁸ "In group praxis...there are no others, I am sovereign, and I discover my own praxis the orders which come from the other Third parties." Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 396.

⁶⁹ "The reason for this new structure resides in the fundamental characteristic of mediation. The mediator is not an object but a praxis...the group is an action. I try to integrate my praxis into the common praxis." Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 377.

⁷⁰ "The basis of the intelligibility of the fused group is that the structure of certain objectives is revealed through the praxis of the individual as demanding a common unity of praxis which is everyone's." Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 386.

⁷¹ "Number is (as a structure of action) an elementary kind of weapon. Addition, instead of being a mere inert summation of units, becomes a synthetic act for everyone: everyone joins the

group was a dispersed quantity of impotence, it now has *power in its number*.

Although the group in fusion “liquidates” seriality and alterity, it contains the seeds of its own dissolution in so far as the third party (mediation between individuals in the group and between group as a whole and individual members) occupies a contradictory position in the group, expressed as a tension of immanence-transcendence. The meaning of immanence-transcendence tension is simply that transcendence without immanence would lead to absolute separation and the impossibility of common action, whereas immanence without transcendence would eliminate the possibility of *common* action since the unity of the group would be the unity of an organism. The seemingly contradictory statute of the group at this level is not a problem since the group exists only as common praxis, only in the realization of its objective. Whatever orders are given during the “apocalypse” are dissolved, however, as soon as the objective is realized. But having achieved its objective, a new structure is found in the group as a *statutory* group.

The action of the group in fusion was a violence directed against the enemy and against necessity.⁷² When the enemy is no longer an imminent threat, the distant threat posed by a possible return of hostilities can only be anticipated, and this anticipation takes the form of acting in order to maintain the permanence of the group. And in order to maintain the group it must posit the group for itself, and the task of maintaining the group takes the form of “the pledge, ” and the group in fusion becomes a statutory group.

group in order to be more numerous and hence the increase of the group becomes everyone’s praxis.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 393–394.

⁷² “common praxis...is...not only a practice of defensive violence against the violence of the enemy but also, as sovereignty, violence against necessity, that is to say, violence against the practico-inert field in so far as it is constituted by Thing-destinies and by enslaved men.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 406.

The Statutory Group

The pledge emerges as “the surviving group’s resistance to the divisive tendency of distance and differentiation...a guarantee against the future.”⁷³ But the action directed against the differentiation, against inertia, against isolation and against the contingencies of the situation, are all simply ways of saying the same thing: it is *individual freedom* that threatens the group. It does not address freedom itself as a threat, but rather in so far as individual freedom or the multiplicity of dispersed praxes unified by the practico-inert is the basis of relations of seriality. The pledge is proposed as “a practical device”⁷⁴ by which the group makes “itself its own tool against the seriality which threatens to dissolve it; it creates the factitious inertia to protect itself against the threats of the practico-inert.”⁷⁵ We can see here why it was essential to understand the alienating aspect of the practico-inert as animated by the multiplicity of isolated praxes, for seriality will emerge to the extent that freedom becomes individual, which is to say, not integrated into the common action of the group. We can see how freedom is the root of the pledge in its articulation as a mediated reciprocity.

The pledge is intended to protect against individual freedom, which in the milieu of the group, is freedom as other. Since there is no otherness in the group, and the other is the same in so far as we are all third parties, the fear of “other-freedom” is a fear of oneself becoming other as much as it is a fear of the other’s freedom: “the third party fears dispersive dissolution in the other third party as much as in himself.”⁷⁶ The solution of the pledge is intended to guarantee through mediation: each guarantees the other

⁷³ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 419.

⁷⁴ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 420.

⁷⁵ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 421.

⁷⁶ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 421.

against him or herself as other, and the guarantee of the pledge is bound by the Other's guarantee by oneself. If the Other guarantees that I will not become Other, I can guarantee that I will not allow him or her to become other. However, just as the negative unity that is produced by the external force that serves as the revealing possibility of the group in fusion to dissolve its seriality, so in the case of the pledge, the practical "impossibility that alterity should come to me from outside" brought about through the pledge reveals "the possibility that I should make myself Other...as a possible future coming to me through Others."⁷⁷ But precisely since everyone is already a mediating third, it is as oneself that the pledge is proposed in order to prevent oneself from lapsing into seriality. The danger of dissolving the group presents itself as the *absence* of fear, and so it must be eliminated by a *production* of fear which is called Terror.⁷⁸ Terror is in turn a real possibility given the aforementioned tension of immanence-transcendence, since it is this tension which indicates the *possibility* of desertion.⁷⁹

As a consequence of the pledge, two characteristics emerge in the group as a whole and in each of its members. First, the pledge is what "ensures an ontological statute which will mitigate the dangers of differentiation."⁸⁰ Second, "the pledge defines everyone as a common individual."⁸¹ Both differentiation and the common individual are brought about through the *organization* of the group.

The Organization

Organization refers to the group and to its action, and its action at the level of the

⁷⁷ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 422.

⁷⁸ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 430.

⁷⁹ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 432.

⁸⁰ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 443.

⁸¹ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 443.

group occurs only as an action on itself, in the form of a distribution of tasks.⁸² The action of the group in so far as it accomplishes the objective it has set for itself, can be brought about only through the functional achievement of individual praxis. Thus there are two mediated relations: the common praxis to the common objective is mediated by individual praxis. Individual praxis is integrated in the group by performing a task delegated by the group, the performance of which is not reducible to the delegation and requires praxis to be individual but also with the aim of common objectification.⁸³ Thus the individual is a common individual in so far as he or she performs a function.⁸⁴

The distribution of tasks and differentiation of functions is made possible by the unity following from the pledge, but this is not to say that its unity is “guaranteed” as was previously claimed. For the organization can act only through individual praxis, and since it must retain individual praxis even if it is “annulled” in the common objectification when a member performs a task, it cannot “surpass” the level of individual praxis and attain the unity of an hyper-organism: this is the limit of the group as an organization. Seen in the dimension of the common individual performing a function, the moment of individual praxis is “passed over in silence, since it would negate the team if it were to posit itself for itself.”⁸⁵ But it is an impossibility that the common individual should posit

⁸² “the group acts on its object indirectly, only in so far as it acts upon itself; and its action upon itself ... its only action as a group—defines itself on the basis of a praxis.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 447.

⁸³ “Function...only defines the abstract possibility of making...and performing particular actions in a situation which is both limited and indeterminate...the meaning of the particular undertaking lies in the use made of it elsewhere in the undertakings of the other [group members].” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 457.

⁸⁴ “Function is the positive definition of the common individual...he belongs in so far as he carries out a certain task and only that task.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 449.

⁸⁵ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 460.

an aim without it taking on the appearance of an individual aim.⁸⁶ This is because the “efficacy” of the common individual “depends on the mediating moment of organic praxis.”⁸⁷ If common praxis is not capable of overcoming the individuality of organic praxis—and it is certain that it cannot⁸⁸—this is because of its origin in the pledge, which already revealed the always possible threat of dissolution.

The pledge was adopted “in response to the problem of struggling against...multiplicity by interiorizing it.”⁸⁹ But since the group would never have distributed its tasks according to a differentiated organization if its unity were not already guaranteed, it is clear that the pledge itself produces what it aimed to prevent: “the danger that common individuals will dissolve is not prior to the pledge, but subsequent to it.”⁹⁰ Thus the organized group encounters its own limits, its inability to attain the status of a hyper-organism, in the fact that the unforeseeable horizon of the future must be lived in anticipation,⁹¹ and in the fact that it requires the mediation of organic praxis in order to bring about a common objectification. But each of these are simply ways of saying the same thing, namely, that individuality—multiplicity, plurality, quantity, etc.—is the death

⁸⁶ “The common individual suffers in praxis itself an alienation to freedom: he cannot set himself a common aim without it immediately metamorphosing into the individual aim of a free constituent praxis. But this...is only a moment...which leads up to the disclosure of common objectification.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 459.

⁸⁷ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 463.

⁸⁸ “The dialectical rationality of common praxis does not transcend the rationality of individual praxis; individual praxis goes beyond it...precisely because it fails to become a totality...to transcend individual praxis by a hyper dialectic, it falls short of the level of praxis which alone could provide it with the model of active unity...this factual untranscendability necessarily refers to the impossibility of being a hyper-organism, which is the limitation of the group; and this impossibility itself is primarily simply the impossibility of acquiring an organic unity.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 538.

⁸⁹ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 540.

⁹⁰ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 541.

⁹¹ “Inertia as ontological limit of integration...is the objective field of the unforeseen; through it the passive action of the practico-inert is reintroduced to the free group...as the interior danger of dispersal; this pure exteriority...is lived in interiority as a permanent threat and a permanent possibility of betrayal.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 556.

of the group. And this is why, for Sartre, “the untranscendable contradiction of History” is “the opposition and identity of the individual and the common.”⁹²

This contradiction is pushed to the limit in the transformation of the organization into an *institution*. The institution is the product of the tension of the individual praxis necessary to perform a function and the realization of common individuality that is objectified by the functional performance. In the organized group, “a temporary balance was established between the common individual...and organic freedom.”⁹³ But to the extent that the group posits itself as “a common transcendent subject,” it “denies individual freedom and expels the individual from function.” The result is “function positing itself for itself,” and thus it becomes an institution.⁹⁴

The Institution

The strength and the “force of inertia” characteristic of the institution derives from the fact that “it posits...men as the inessential means of its perpetuation.”⁹⁵ In the organized group, the organization could not act but indirectly through the mediation of organic praxis. Its action was not superfluous, and it was the means by which the individual could carry out the task as a common individual, that is, by having a task proposed with a common aim. It should be obvious that the institution resembles the exigency of the machine which posits the worker as inessential in relation to its own perpetuation, and it was precisely this mediation which the group negated. The difference

⁹² Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 559.

⁹³ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 600.

⁹⁴ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 600.

⁹⁵ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 600–601.

is that the inertia in the case of the institution derives from the fact that materiality is not the mediation between individuals, but mediated reciprocity that makes itself inert.⁹⁶

But to return to the moment in which the individual is eliminated from the functional performance of his or her task, it is because freedom as individual praxis is associated with alterity that it comes to be eliminated. The rejection of the individual is part of the effort to eliminate the danger of seriality, which is associated with the positing of freedom as essential and for itself, or as separate from the group. This is nothing other than the reemergence of the tension motivating the adoption of the pledge.⁹⁷

The consequence at the moment of institutionalization is that individuals and traitors are purged from the group. But this is insufficient, precisely because the action of purging creates what it seeks to eliminate: suspicion.⁹⁸ Just as in the context of *scarcity*, the exhibition of freedom is itself the basis for the action taken against it, but in this case, it is the survival of the group that is at stake, and not that of the organism.⁹⁹ The institution is a perfect circle since its actions are wholly in the service of maintaining its existence, which requires action directed against seriality, but it is seriality itself that allows it to persist.¹⁰⁰ The result is the need for a new form of mediation, and this takes

⁹⁶ “The group will ... actually reproduce alterity in itself and freeze into the inorganic so as to struggle against it within so that it gradually gets closer to the collective statute.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 591.

⁹⁷ “The conflict between the essential and the inessential ... is a permanent danger both for the group and for the common individual. In fact the pledge posits the inessentiality of the organic individual by making it impossible for him to dissolve the group in himself.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 583.

⁹⁸ “Individual praxis... appears suspect to the apparatuses of terror... because terror is suspect in its own eyes... through the purge the purger constitutes himself as suspect and always liable to be purged... it is the freedom of the regulatory third party which he everywhere pursues, confusing it with elusive alterity.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 596.

⁹⁹ “Every proposal is ‘divisive’ and its proposer suspect, because he offers a glimpse of his freedom.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 602.

¹⁰⁰ “An institution, its real being and strength come to it from emptiness, from separation, from inertia, from serial alterity. It is therefore praxis as other.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 603.

the form of an embodiment of common praxis in the individual will of the sovereign.¹⁰¹ The sovereign is nothing other than the incarnation of the structure producing seriality in order to secure itself against it.¹⁰²

With the institution, of which only a handful of its characteristics have been indicated, Sartre's inquiry returns to the point from which it began with the existence of social objects. For in the case of the series, we saw that the practico-inert structure which unified the gathering was one which existed prior to the physical presence of the multiplicity. We can now see that the multiplicity itself is anticipated by the institutional mechanisms which regulate the series as its worked matter. Thus when the group negates its serial existence in order aim at a common objective, it aims at its own future existence as what must be destroyed. It is not necessary, however, that this appearance of a cycle should give the impression that group praxis is futile. It can just as well reveal the need for constant renewals of the enthusiasm that constituted the first emergence of the group in fusion. This does not mean the emergence of a group is the renewal of the group as it was, however, for this is precisely what leads to its transformations and therefore its deterioration. It is necessary that *new* groups form on the basis of, and the ashes of, and as a negation of, those that were previously formed.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ "In the framework of institutions the community tries to acquire a new type of unity by institutionalizing sovereignty...the common individual transforms himself into an institutional individual." Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 591.

¹⁰² The sovereign's "activity is to reign against the invasion of the group by seriality—against the very conditions which make his office legitimate and possible...the contradiction is resolved in practice by a new form of alienation...that of each and all to one person. In order to avoid relapsing into the practico-inert field, everyone becomes a passive object or an inessential actualization for the freedom of the other...the group alienates itself to a single man so as to avoid alienating itself to the material and human ensemble, in fact everyone experiences his alienation as life instead of as death." Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 628.

¹⁰³ Frederic Jameson, who finds the meaning of the transformations undergone by the group to be its "temporal irreversibility: once having grown rigid in its structures, having given itself a sovereign, the group cannot swim back up the river to its heroic moment of formation." This

Alienation: The Deterioration of Common Praxis

Alienation is a constant feature of all the transformations of the group, because the group exists only in relation to alienation and its more specific determinations. This means the group only exists as a negation of alienation. It is possible in fact that the meaning of alienation in any given context—at least with respect to the group—refers to whatever reveals the instability and fragility of the group—what we have referred to as vulnerability when discussing individuals. If this hypothesis is correct, it would be incorrect to suppose that we can associate alienation with any of its specific determinations as such, whether as objectification, inertia, violence, limitation, constraint, otherness/alterity, or whatever. In the context of the group, alienation is simply the Other of the group, its becoming other than itself. This comes about through the same reversals as it did for individual praxis, namely, counter-finality, and to the extent that it is subject to the free praxis of others, which in the context of the group, is any individual praxis. We can see the plausibility of this claim by noting just a few of the primary manifestations of this understanding of alienation.

The emergence of the group was based on “the liquidation of the serial and its replacement by community.”¹⁰⁴ Group praxis is distinguished from the serial in that it involves a discovery of freedom through the Other, whereas in “serial activity...freedom

means that an “ossified group cannot be renewed, it can only be replaced, by a new thrust of group formation.” Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 272. This is seen in the idea of cultural revolution, as well as theorizations of permanent revolutions. for discussion see Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 267–272; see also Frederic Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 2009), 267–278, “Cultural Revolution.” See also C.L.R James in his *Notes on Dialectics* C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980), 115–119.

¹⁰⁴ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 387.

posits itself only to reveal its alienation in the passive activity of impotence.”¹⁰⁵

Through the interiorization of multiplicity and number as a means, the objectification in common praxis is the “inversion of alienation.”¹⁰⁶

At first, the group was capable of bringing about its common praxis on the basis of the unity that was imposed from outside by the enemy and by the common perception of the necessity of freedom directed against the violence of inertia. But once this threat is eliminated, the sign of alienation changes. After its inversion by the group, alienation is signified not by the threat that had been eliminated (the threat posed by another group), but the possibility that the group will default into relations of seriality.¹⁰⁷ This is what I have characterized as the revelation of vulnerability in the previous chapters of this study. It is not the actual imminent threat of an enemy force (etc.), but alienation as the revealed possibility of a threat by virtue of the existence of Otherness. In this context, this otherness is not another group but its own members dispersed in serial impotence.

So the group directs its activity against the possibility of dissolving, just as it directed its activity initially against the impossibility of living. This brings about the pledge which takes the form of a guarantee against the Other in so far as one is guaranteed against oneself by the Other. It is, again, the mere *possibility* of freedom becoming other that leads to the pledge, and the possibility is equal in all precisely because at this stage of the group, freedom is the same in everyone. And freedom becomes other by becoming individual. There does not even need to be an actual likelihood that this would occur, and in fact it emerges precisely because the enemy has been defeated. Precisely by the *success* of its common action, the group is faced with the

¹⁰⁵ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 396.

¹⁰⁶ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 378.

¹⁰⁷ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 585.

result which is already *other than it intended*, in that the result of the success requires the preventing the emergence of serial relations. And in this sense it is already a counter-finality.

To better achieve its common objective while maintaining unity, as we saw, the pledge allows the group to become differentiated and to distribute tasks which become for the common individual the means of being integrated into the group. But since the individual cannot be integrated *totally*, and because the organization cannot attain the statute of an organism, it encounters its own limits in the individual praxis which is the mediation between the group and its common aim. That individual praxis is “untranscendable” is not a contingent fact but a necessity of its own, and reveals to the group the infinite task of incessant integration. But this constant need to interiorize multiplicity is only a side-effect of “inertia as ontological limit of integration...[and] the objective field of the unforeseen.” By the limitation of integration “the passive action of the practico-inert is reintroduced to the free group...as *the interior danger* of dispersal; this pure exteriority...is lived in interiority as a permanent threat and a permanent possibility of betrayal.”¹⁰⁸

The untranscendable limit that is encountered in “the objective field of the unforeseen” reappears in the discussion of the institutionalized-group, embodied in the sovereign.¹⁰⁹ Sartre rejects the view that the members of a group consent to the power of the sovereign. Rather, he claims that

¹⁰⁸ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 556. Sartre mentions elsewhere the connection to alienation: “The consciousness of being betrayed is to the collective consciousness of a sacred group what a certain form of schizophrenia is to the individual. Like the latter, society could cry out ‘I’ve been robbed of my thought.’ In short, it is a form of madness.” Sartre, *Saint Genet*, 173.

¹⁰⁹ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 556.

consent to his power is an interiorization of the impossibility of resisting it...he imposes himself through the impotence of all, and everyone accepts him as a way of bartering inertia for obedience. This element of nothingness, this 'Devil's Share,' is the true support of sovereignty. Everyone obeys in seriality: not because he directly adopts an attitude of obedience, but because he is not sure whether his neighbor has undertaken to obey.¹¹⁰

In this example of the institutional group, we can see the complete absurdity of the process, in that the members are serialized in order to be maintained as a group; but it was as a negation of the serial impotence that the group was formed. What can be seen in the example of the consent to sovereign power is the serial relation within the group, and this series will need to negate its own impotence and form a new group against the sovereign in the same way the discussion began with the example of 14 July.

Alienation with the group has the same the meaning of alienation as in the case of individual praxis. Alienation is the reversal of praxis against itself in so far as it appears objectively in the fields of other praxes. This is consistent with my interpretation of alienation in the preceding chapters as the revelation of the vulnerability of the for-itself, or in the case of the *Critique*, the practical organism. This vulnerability is not the threat of death, since this can exist in isolation. It is the unique threat posed by other free praxes. The threat of *other free praxes* is precisely what threatens the existence of the group, once the group constitutes itself through the negation of the impotence and alterity of the serial co-existence. Whether in the case of individual or group praxis, then, alienation is the experience of being vulnerable to individual freedom. In the case of individual praxis, it is the possibilities of another freedom. With the case of group praxis, it is the possibility of individual praxis as such. Individual freedom is the untranscendable limit in

¹¹⁰ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 630.

both cases. The experience of this untranscendable limit is the experience of alienation, of being vulnerable.

One point that must be noted before concluding this chapter. The group, in all its manifestations, takes aim at serial co-existence, which it negated in forming a group and which it aimed to prevent by adopting the pledge. It associated individual freedom with seriality in so far as individual freedom exists separately than in the group, while in the group all the members co-exist and recognize their own freedom in the freedom of others. But it would be easy (for the reader) to forget after working through these transformations that the origin of the series itself was the fact of *scarcity*. It seems that the error of the group, much like the error in the attitudes of Sadism and Hatred in the previous chapters, was the desire to be immune from the freedom of Others. Sartre presents this attempt to forestall the emergence of individual freedom through the pledge as an effort to prevent the emergence of seriality lacking an external enemy on which it could act. But perhaps, rather than view seriality as its mortal enemy, the group would be better off eliminating the scarcity on which seriality was itself based. Perhaps, in other words, the problem was to eliminate the oppressive alienation that results from a milieu of scarcity and relations of oppression which reduce the coexistence of a gathering to a series, and not to eliminate alienation as such, since it is, after all, inevitable.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show the persistence of alienation as vulnerability, consistent with, but nonetheless, expanded upon, its original meaning in *Being and Nothingness*. Alienation refers, in the *Critique*, to the objectivity of praxis as “there for everyone.” That praxis is there for everyone is experienced as the vulnerability of praxis,

by virtue of the fact that multiple praxes share the same practical field. That these praxes can be unified in a common project, and replace the field of practico-inertia with a field of common praxis, is no guarantee against alienation, and since alienation is nothing other than the experience of vulnerability to other free praxes, the group is alienated by its efforts to attain an ontological statute which is impossible precisely because of the unsurpassable dimension of individual praxis.

In the previous chapter, however, we had indicated the significance of understanding alienation, violence, and oppression. The discussion in this chapter was limited to the occurrences of alienation and only a brief mention of violence, but without offering a unified account. In the following chapter, the conclusion to the present study, I will show the relationship between these concepts, and demonstrate the significance of understanding them as distinct, but related, phenomena.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This chapter will conclude the discussion of alienation and vulnerability in the philosophy of Sartre. In the first part below, I will provide a brief summary of the argument that preceded. In the second part, I will discuss the implications of the distinction between alienation and oppression as it emerges from the *Critique*. And finally, in the third part, I will indicate some of the directions to pursue in the future.

Summary

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that the meaning of alienation in Sartre's philosophy is the experience or revelation of the vulnerability of human beings, whether in the form of a look, or some other form in which being for-others is experienced. Alienation is the experience of being for-others, and the meaning of being for-others is to be vulnerable.

I argued that vulnerability is distinct from violence, although intimately connected with it. I argued that alienation was an experience of the modification of possibilities such that they are experienced as having a dimension which is unrevealed and escapes the project of being for-itself. This was the manner in which the Other is encountered, and when this is experienced, we "make proof" the Other's subjectivity. The modification of possibilities in alienation was an experience of what is outside our possibilities, and the possibility that we are, for another, of potential violence and manipulation. I claimed that the experience of this possibility is not itself violence, provided it is understood in broad enough terms.

Alienation was the experience of oneself in a certain manner as a possibility for another, but a possibility that was not mine. This meant that it required the other as a transcendence in opposition to the for-itself, such that the for-itself retains “selfness” in the experience, but that this selfness is concealed. This concealment is not an act of bad faith on the part of the alienated, but a necessary consequence of the relation with others. While alienation was the experience of my possibilities for others, violence was defined as the actualization of the possibility revealed in alienation (the experience of vulnerability). Violence is the explicit destruction of human possibilities. Violence realizes the actual presence of a wound, and it presents the wound itself as a necessary consequence of the possibility that is present as a possibility in the plurality of human freedoms.

While alienation reveals the possibility of violence, and violence realizes this possibility, oppression differs from both in constraining the objective possibilities of the for-itself. Possibilities created by human beings exist for everyone from the moment they appear in human form; they function as “proposals” to other free subjects. The proposal is an alienation to the agent of the activity, in so far as it becomes a vulnerable object for others. For others, this object functions as a proposal, which is a possibility for anyone, before it becomes for “me.” The possibility appears as a proposal for the possibilities of anyone by virtue of coming from a human act. Oppression constrains the possibilities of some by restricting the proposal as there for anyone. The restriction of the possibilities for some do not modify the possibilities in the same way as alienation is a modification of possibilities. The latter is an experience that the Other *can* make my project into an object, it is the realization of an “outside” my possibilities. Oppression occurs when

possibilities are proposed as human possibilities and denied for some and “there for others.”

These distinctions become blurry in the context of scarcity, as seen in Chapter 6. In the milieu of scarcity, the distinction between actual and possible violence is eliminated. Alienation becomes the reversal of praxis in matter due to the status of matter as there for everyone in the same practical field. The transformations of alienated praxis in the practical field of others occurs not because matter is itself constraining to human projects but because others act on the same matter, and matter returns to everyone a finality counter to the intentions of each and all.

Scarcity is itself a form of alienation, in so far as it reveals to everyone their vulnerability to all the others on the basis of their status as free praxis, that is, in so far as they aim to satisfy the same needs. Different levels of alienation are explored at different levels of co-existence, culminating in the serial existence of collectives, in which everyone acts as the Other and is present to oneself primarily as vulnerable to others. Group praxis is the common experience of free praxis as the negation of alienation in aiming at a common objective. When this objective no longer exists, the group turns toward itself in order to give itself an impossible ontological statute. Through the transformations of the group in the statute of the pledge, the organization, and the institution, the group descends back into serial inertia. The counter-finality of group praxis occurs in that the group negates its serial coexistence and in trying to prevent it from reemerging, produces it. This understanding of alienation as the reversal of praxis, however, is none other than the necessary vulnerability of praxis that becomes objective in the same practical field of other praxes. It is, in other words, vulnerable to the praxis of

others. Thus from its first emergence in *Being and Nothingness* in “the Look,” through the *Notebooks* and on to the *Critique* in which praxis is alienated when it turns against itself by means of objectifying itself in the same practical field of others, alienation retains the same invariant meaning of the experience of being vulnerable to an Other freedom.

What remains to be seen is how alienation, violence, and oppression are all related in the *Critique*. In the previous chapter, the discussion was limited to alienation and its various forms. Alienation in the context of scarcity gives rise to oppression, and the oppressed group exists as a series in relation to the practico-inert objects of social existence, that mediates between the members of the series, and this is what the group destroys in taking up a common objective against an external enemy. It might appear then that Sartre believes alienation is to be destroyed, and yet he also claims it is inevitable. In what follows I will try to show that the mere co-existence of the members of the series is insufficient to explain oppression in Sartre’s own terms, as well as explore the implications of this view in some contemporary applications of the idea of the series.

Alienation & Oppression

I claimed at the outset of this study, and have insisted throughout, that one of the benefits to the interpretation of alienation as the revelation of vulnerability was that it would allow us to understand alienation as distinct from violence and oppression, and allow us to understand the relations among these concepts. In the preceding chapter, the discussion of oppression and alienation in the *Critique* was minimal. In order to return to these issues, this section will explore one of the most interesting scholarly developments to come out of Sartre’s *Critique*, namely, the use of *seriality* as a conceptual resource for

understanding certain kinds of oppressive collective experience. Two essays are particularly noteworthy in this regard. The first is Iris Marion Young's "Gender as Seriality;" the second is Christopher Buck's "Sartre, Fanon, and the Case for Slavery Reparations."¹ Both essays aim to make an argument *using* Sartre's concept of seriality, not to comment on the concept itself. For this reason, the criticisms to follow must be understood as not simply claiming an inaccuracy in the interpretation of the concept, but challenging the usefulness of the concept *as it has been employed* (without challenging its usefulness as such). What I want to indicate through a discussion of these essays is that the notion of seriality, by itself, leaves some questions in need of discussion. These questions concern the nature of seriality as alienation, and the relation between alienation and oppression.

Iris Marion Young argues that gender, properly understood as a serial form of collective existence, can provide feminist theorists with the necessary resources to avoid some common theoretical pitfalls.² For instance, critical theories which aim to undermine any claims of essentialism would seem also to undermine any meaningful claims about women as a group, but theoretical treatments of women as group are mobilized with the aim of undermining liberal individualist norms. It is necessary to counter liberal

¹ Iris Marion Young, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective," *Signs* 19, no. 3 (1994): 713–738; Chris Buck, "Sartre, Fanon, and the Case for Slavery Reparations," *Sartre Studies International* 10, no. 2 (2004): 123–138.

² "Recent discussions among feminists about the difficulties and dangers of talking about women as a single group...have cast doubt on the project of conceptualizing women as a group, arguing that the search for the common characteristics of women or of women's oppression leads to normalizations and exclusions." (Young "Gender as Seriality," 713) On the other hand Young agrees "with those who argue that there are pragmatic political reasons for insisting on the possibility of thinking about women as some kind of group." (713-714) This presents "a dilemma for feminist theory. On the one hand, without some sense in which 'woman' is the name of a social collective, there is nothing specific to feminist politics. On the other hand, any effort to identify the attributes of that collective appears to undermine feminist politics by leaving out some women whom feminists ought to include." (714)

individualism because Young claims “individual ideology...obscures oppression.”³ It is necessary to think of women as a group or collective, according to Young, because “feminist politics evaporates...without some conception of women as a social collective.”⁴

Understanding women as a series organized by the practico-inert object of gender has the benefit of specifying the shared experiences of women, without attributing to them the status as a group in the more specific sense. What is not clear, however, is why the series “women” would be qualitatively *different* than the series “men,” since this series is *also* organized by the practico-inert object of gender, also constrained in actions, etc. Men are also a series, gender is the practico-inert object that organizes the series of men *and* the series of women and perhaps also mediates the relation *between* these series (as a series of series), and in more specific determinations within these series, among the serialized. The question that must be asked of Young’s argument is: does conceiving of the relation between men and women as a serial relation result in precisely what Young wanted to avoid, namely, *obscuring oppression*?

If we suspend the Sartrean terminology for a moment, the problem might become more clear. Certain ideals and normative practices can be seen to constrain the activities of the members of the collectives unified by these ideals. But are the members of the series constrained in the same way? To be sure, Young is not addressing the issue of the ways men are constrained by their serial existence, but she is aware that serial constraints hold for everyone in a gendered practical field. Are these constraints equivalent? If they are not, how are we to understand or compare these different forms of constraints as

³ Young “Gender as Seriality,” 718.

⁴ Young “Gender as Seriality,” 719.

applied to each series? Seriality is a form of alienation for Sartre, this is clear. But if seriality is itself *oppression*, then it would require that men and women are both oppressed by the practico-inert object of gender. Perhaps, to some extent this is true, and one could even grant that they are not oppressed in quite the same way. But the problem emerges which was seen in earlier in the discussion of oppression. If we are unable to identify an oppressor, which was necessary according to Sartre, then oppression ceases to be a human relation. If there is no oppressor, then the *necessity* imposed is not different than the “oppression” of gravity. Oppression might function like gravity, but the project to overcome it is not the same as the effort to defy gravity (i.e., by obeying its laws). My point here is that it would be a mistake to collapse alienation (as seriality) into oppression. They are not quite the same thing. Men are not oppressed as a series in the same way that women are. Nor, for that matter are they alienated in the same way.

To see this point, recall the famous example of a gathering waiting for a bus that never comes. This example is used to explain the formal fact of the series mediated by the practico-inert object, but *without* reference to the features that make it *undesirable*. To put the matter bluntly, there is nothing in this example that would lead us to believe that the gathering is *oppressed* by their need to ride the bus, or that they are oppressed in their serial existence as “bus riders.” To see the example as alienating is quite easy; as Young notes, I leave work early in order to avoid the line. I choose to act on the basis of the anticipated behavior of others, none of whom are known in any respect other than their number as riders of the bus. I know that my anticipation is likewise anticipated, so I take a shortcut that will lead me right to the line, rather than to the other end of the street. I will be able to see from a distance how crowded it is and whether I must hurry, and so

forth. This is strictly speaking alienating in so far as action is based on the anticipated actions of others. But why, in this case, is this a bad thing? Perhaps there is something negative about imagining the other bus riders (or at least their number) as obstacles to be overcome.

Young's argument could provide several possibilities for why this is a bad thing. First, being serialized "is precisely the obverse of mutual recognition and positive identification of oneself as in a group." Second, in being serialized "I experience a serial *interchangeability* between myself and others." The first presupposes that "mutual and positive identification" is desirable, and the second presupposes that interchangeability reveals something about serial being and *not* about the being of a group that is preferred over the series. But Sartre's point—keeping in mind the criticism here is not directed against the reading of Sartre *per se* but the use of the concept—is that there *is* a great deal of mutual recognition in serial behavior, and in fact, this is precisely what allows the "interchangeability" of the members of the series. I recognize that Others might get to the bus first, and they recognize that others might try to get there before them. When we arrive, we all recognize that a line forms based on who arrived first. To say there is no recognition seems overbroad.

We know that the series is opposed to the group, and that the latter is the negation of serial coexistence. Serial coexistence is a certain form of being *alone together*. But the formation of the group does not eliminate the *interchangeability* of its members when it eliminates seriality. It changes the meaning of *being interchangeable*. Since everyone becomes a third party, mediating between the individual members and the group, they

must be interchangeable as common individuals. Nothing that has been mentioned so far would necessarily distinguish the series of men from the series of women.

The point about *interchangeability*, a recurring theme in the preceding chapters, continues in Young's argument as follows, and it will bring us to a crucial point: "In the newspaper I read about a woman who was raped, and I empathize with her because I recognize that in my serialized existence I am rapeable, the potential object of male appropriation. But this awareness depersonalizes me, constructs me as Other to her and Other to myself in a serial interchangeability rather than defining my sense of identity."⁵ But what, exactly, is the function of *otherness* in this example? Why would this make one "other" to oneself?⁶ It would do so only to the extent that someone organizes their behavior in order to avoid being placed in such a situation. The example in fact appears more as an instance of solidarity than a revealing of serial existence. To put it bluntly, this does not seem to reveal a serial relation at all. The revealing of serial being would occur if, in reaction to the story, someone thinks "luckily it wasn't me." Or, "I shouldn't walk in that neighborhood." Or even, "what was she doing walking alone at night?"⁷ Or, if someone, in discussion with a third party, makes the same remarks. These are thoughts from another point of view, i.e., "if I was in that circumstance, someone might wonder 'what was she doing walking alone at night' so I should avoid being vulnerable in that manner."

⁵ Young "Gender as Seriality," 730.

⁶ And we might add, does not the "empathy" for the victim entail the recognition (albeit not mutual) that Young said was absent in the series?

⁷ This is (unfortunately) a common reaction to the actualization of vulnerability in a violent act: that the person seems to be somehow responsible for it. But the point here, in connection with seriality, is more complicated than the victim blaming that occurs in the media, for instance.

The main point here is that what distinguishes the series of women from the series of men is the difference in the ways they experience their common powerlessness. Serial existence is characterized by *impotence*, or else it is simply an abstraction. But the impotence is a consequence of the domination of (worked) matter over human beings, not *directly* human beings over human beings. Young's expression of empathy, of being vulnerable, shows that the series is structured according to the vulnerable objects which women experience themselves to be, within the practico-inert field of gender relations. And it is the vulnerability of the series that distinguishes the way women live the lack of power that characterizes seriality.

Now men are alienated by the practico-inertia of gender roles as well, but not in the same way as women. Men are expected to respond in certain ways and they comprehend that if they do not, they are vulnerable to certain actions, and their actions might be motivated by the avoidance of something rather than because they expressly want to perform an action. Structurally there is a formal equivalence, that is, there is a potential for harm; but the harms themselves are not even close to equivalent, and they are not subject to the same practices by the same series in the same way. For instance, if we consider the practico-inert object of gender as unifying the series "men," all members of the series might be subject to being challenged for being un-masculine by men and by women; depending on the circumstances, the woman might have greater power in this regard, while in other contexts, much less. This also illustrates the practico-inert field as a field of counter-finality: men who dominate create women able to emasculate them; women who emasculate men create men who must show their masculinity, which can

lead to violence against women or other men. But again, the point is that these two series are not symmetrical.

None of this is intended to shed new light on debates within theories of gender. The point is to indicate that serial relations do not, by themselves, explain relations of *oppression*. It does not even explain *violence*, since the experience of being vulnerable does not require that an actual instance of harm occur, but simply that one behave according to an expectation of violence (as with Young reading the newspaper). This should not be reduced to a banal claim that “it was always already violence,” since it is precisely because there is something which is to be avoided that is worse than the awareness of being in danger one experiences as a member of the series. The woman who experiences herself as “rapeable” while reading the newspaper story of a rape is surely not having the same experience as the woman who was raped. But to respond to the news story as feeling potentially so, equally vulnerable, that is, is simply the formal aspect of alienation in the series.

The problem, then, to which we will return after the next discussion, is that the appeal to seriality does not allow us to understand the oppression of women by men, that in turn organizes the series of men and women. It is true that women as a series experience a vulnerability that is common to the members, but the vulnerability that is common to members of the series of men is not the same kind of vulnerability. The vulnerability of women is a function of a oppression.

Switching to a discussion of race can help to bring these concepts more into focus. Christopher Buck argues that understanding the practico-inert legacy of slavery, and the structural factors which create series affected by this legacy, can provide a new

way of looking at the issue of reparations for the injustices of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Like Young's aim to show a "loose unity" among women through the concept of the series, so Buck tries to show a unity among African Americans across time—diachronically, as Sartre would say. Thus series can provide a way of understanding the relation between African Americans living today and stretching back in time, even if their ancestors were not "actually" victims of enslavement.⁸ The descendents of slavery as an institution, not simply the biological descendents, are a serial collection in the same way as the series "women." Since the series can understand itself as a gathering unified from outside by the institutional legacy of past praxis (worked matter), it can seek a remedy for the entire series.

The problem with Buck's argument can be understood by considering the relationship between the members of a series and the beneficiaries from the institution of slavery. In many ways, the claim that whites benefit from white supremacy is inarguable. But when getting more specific, for instance, did whites benefit from the policies that undercut the Reconstruction effort after the civil war? The institutions that black enfranchisement required would have benefitted whites as a whole, at least from a certain point of view (i.e., the human one). On the other hand, when institutions are neglected, and everyone is worse off, whites are less worse off. We need only think of unemployment here, which effects everyone negatively but disproportionately impacts blacks Americans (although this statement could be applied outside national boundaries).

⁸ "What unites the series of African Americans over time is that the individuals contained within it are positioned in such a way that their actions are constrained by the racist ideas, habits and practices that arose from the practice of slavery and congealed into a materiality that continues to exist today. Similarly, the series of white Americans consists of those individuals occupying privileged positions in relation to these practico-inert traces of slavery that stand to benefit (to various degrees) from their existence." Buck, "Reparations," 134.

Buck continues, “one might object that treating race as seriality underestimates the positive aspects of affirming a racial identity for those who experience racial oppression. It ought to be noted, however, that conceptualizing race as seriality does not preclude subsets of a series from participating in intentional group practice that attaches a more substantive significance to their race, but it does guard against the possibility of such attributes from excluding other members of the series who do not share those attributes or wish to maintain more fluid approaches to self-identification.”⁹ The question here is whether the *identity* of the members of the series, while certainly important, is the most significant feature of the serial relation. To put the matter simply, it is not *only* identifying the group wronged by the slave trade that is necessary, but identifying those responsible, and most importantly, the wrong that *is* being carried out. To be sure, the virtue of seriality as a concept is that it can help to explain alienating practices which do not seem to have an author at all. It explains how certain social objects can be the intention of no one. But with respect to *both* race and gender, intentions still matter.

Just as Young views serial collectives as a theoretical resource capable of capturing the shared condition of women without falling into an essentialism, so too Buck argues that “the significance of treating race as seriality for slavery reparations is that it enables African Americans to demand compensation for the crime of slavery and white Americans to acknowledge the ways in which they benefit from the legacy of slavery without positing a shared identity or essence with their respective ancestors. A commonality exists between members of a racial series across space and time, but this

⁹ Buck, “Reparations,” 134-135.

commonality results simply from sharing a similar position in relation to the practico-inert materiality produced by the practice of slavery.”¹⁰ These are two series, and they experience their being in series differently, as is the case with the formulations that the series of blacks experienced a crime and the series of whites benefitted from it. But serial relations are experienced in impotence and otherness. The feature of interchangeability noted in Young’s essay certainly holds good in the context of race for Buck. But it does not explain the relation between the two series, and it is the relation between the two series that is the real issue. It is not *just* that blacks (not limited to African Americans) share a similar position in relation to the practico-inert object produced by slavery. The share a similar position in relation to the oppressive praxis of whites. Whites are also in a similar position with respect to the practico-inert object produced by slavery, but this position affords them at least one possibility denied to the other series: the possibility to oppress. Furthermore, if the relation between the series whites and series blacks were simply a serial relation of series to series, would they not be interchangeable *as series*? If they are not simply in a serial relation, then what is their relation?

Within the limits of the individual projects of both Young and Buck, the concept of the series and seriality is indeed useful. But for the purpose of this discussion, the arguments are significant for what is not discussed. Both succeed in showing a shared or similar experience in relation to the practico-inert object of race and gender. But there is no consideration as to why this amounts to *oppression*. This is because seriality is a support for oppression but does not itself explain it. Seriality an aspect of oppression. The reason seriality does not adequately address the features of oppression is that it applies to

¹⁰ Buck, “Reparations,” 135.

everyone in their interchangeability. In other words, it is practico-inert. Men and Women, Blacks and Whites, are all subject to the serial statute, but if not equally, *the reasons why it applies unequally* are outside the rule of the series. The practico-inert objects of gender and race are not *created* by serial relations, but by an oppressive praxis. They are maintained by all, though not necessarily equally.

Consider for instance the serial conduct that occurs in the dominant series. A white shop owner does not want black customers, but claims that they themselves do not dislike blacks but since their clientele might, it would be bad for business so they adhere to the norm, because of the “urgency” of the market and public demand. This is serial behavior in so far as the owner acts as Other, and their activity is dictated by their vulnerability to the market, and to the racist attitudes of their customers (and competitors). But the customers who demand the absence of black people are not behaving serially; their practice is oppressive. Furthermore, the vulnerability of the shopkeeper is hardly the same sort of vulnerability in relation to the practico-inert object of race as is faced by black men who are disproportionately vulnerable to unjustified imprisonment and all its consequences. And it is not the practico-inert object of race that makes them more vulnerable, but the choice of law enforcement to target them.¹¹ This doesn’t mean that institutions that function on their own to maintain the status quo are not also at work in oppression, but that materiality as such would be nothing without the praxis of others to animate it.

¹¹ A thorough discussion of the ways that black Americans are explicitly targeted, not simply at the mercy of institutions beyond their control, can be found in Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (The New Press, 2010).

Likewise, in the case of gender, the behavior of men who behave a certain way towards women in order to ingratiate themselves to other men for some professional benefit, is a serial behavior. The behavior of the individuals who expect this sort of conduct from their employees or colleagues is not serial behavior but a function of their oppressive practices. Seriality is one aspect to dominating social relations but since it explains how everyone is impotent to worked mater, even if in different ways, it does not explain the reason for the different forms of impotence. Sartre even uses several examples in explaining seriality where it is the factory owner who experiences a serial relation, or the buyers on the free market, who experience their impotence. These are certainly not the most dominated, or the oppressed, in the social order. But they are serialized nonetheless. The relationship between seriality and oppression must be better understood so that the condition of oppression is not obscured.

Sartre's remarks on oppression in the *Critique* are by no means clear. But since we are already familiar with oppression as it appeared in the *Notebooks*, we can show how the former is built on the latter. . Recall that violence was an explicit negation of possibility, but one that seeks to justify itself. In the language of the *Critique*, violence is always for itself praxis of counter-violence, directed against the freedom of the anti-human, that is, freedom that can only be evil. And as we saw in the discussion of scarcity, the Other's freedom becomes freedom for evil when there are not enough objects to satisfy the needs of all. But it is not the absence of necessities that results in oppression, it is the decision to designate some group as dispensable. When Sartre says that violence is

always “freedom against freedom through the mediation of inorganic matter.”¹² This means not only that freedom is attacked by using a material weapon, but that its action is justified on the basis of material conditions, for instance, the restriction imposed on some that they cannot satisfy their needs is mediated by the possession of the objects in the hands of a few.

In the *Notebooks*, oppression was the denial of the proposal that appears to everyone by virtue of human action. Oppression involved a “shift of the weight of the Other to other people,” which I explained to be a shift of vulnerability so that some are more vulnerable than others, or that more can happen *to* the oppressed than the oppressed are encouraged to do. In the *Critique*, oppression is described by Sartre as a kind of violence, one that is aware of itself as such practically, “because it is determined by its object, namely freedom.” Violence becomes oppression, according to Sartre, “when it is used against one or more individuals, imposing an untranscendable statute on them as a function of scarcity.” This imposition “is always abstractly constituted by the same practical determinations; given a scarcity...certain groups will constitute...a community both defined by the obligation to do surplus labor and by the need to reduce themselves to controlled under consumption...it will define the multiplicity of dispensable workers not despite their reality as free practical organisms, but because of it.”¹³

¹² This has “two aspects: free praxis may directly destroy the freedom of the Other...through the material instrument, or else it may act against necessity...against freedom as the possibility of becoming other...and this is Fraternity-Terror. Thus violence is always a reciprocal recognition of freedom and the negation of this freedom through the intermediary of the inertia of exteriority.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 736. Oppression is also referred to as “the power given to worked matter of...compulsion over free individuals in so far as they have been recognized...in their freedom...whether this worked matter is a machine or a gun.” Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 747.

¹³ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 737.

We can see in these formulations how they build on the understandings of violence and oppression in the previous chapter. Oppression specifically, has the additional aspect of scarcity which was not determined in the *Notebooks*. Now, an additional feature in the *Critique* is that Sartre distinguishes exploitation as a process from the praxis of oppression: “direct oppression gives itself the practico-inert being as exploitation.” While the terminology tends to hold back the discussion, what Sartre is getting at here is that oppression aimed at freedom, at restricting it in order to gain access to what otherwise would be enjoyed by all. When oppression becomes exploitation, the aim seems to be to extract surplus labor from the exploited class.¹⁴ The result is that the relation becomes less personal, or more indifferent.

Several features of this are worth noting. First, as a consequence of being transformed into exploitation, oppression *loses its agent* and becomes simply a result of the process of exploitation that no one intended. But it also happens that the oppressors, for instance the owners of the means of production in this example, find that: “oppression turns into an inability not to oppress, or...[it] experiences its necessity: it is no longer I who oppress, but the Other; it is always the Other, in fact, who makes use of machines or is capable of making use of them.”¹⁵ In other words, there is a serial relation among the other oppressors; so that it seems to *them* that there is no oppression since they are simply obeying the “iron laws” of economic necessity, and forced into decisions by their competitors. But these “iron laws” betray their source, since “alienation transfers the principal feature of oppression—which must be ruthless in order to exist—into the process itself and thereby betrays its human origin: it is only through the practico-inert

¹⁴ Exploitation is “the practico-inert functioning of the system once it has been installed.” (721)

¹⁵ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 747.

that a necessity can be affected by the practical quality of ruthlessness.”¹⁶ But again, it must be remembered that the practico-inert is active only to the extent that it is activated by praxis.

Sartre does not claim that the series of employers are oppressed by the practico-inert object of the “laws of economic necessity,” nor that the wretched condition of the workers is a function of these laws alone. In fact, it is quite unambiguous that “in their practical, everyday life, the exploited experience oppression through all their activities, *not as alienation*, but as a straightforward deliberate constraint of men by men.”¹⁷ Again, for the oppressing groups in the example of French colonization, Sartre is clear that “the relations between the *oppressing* groups are always the conditioned conditions of the serialities of series...of the inert gathering of the ‘occupants.’” And, with respect to class struggle, Sartre insists that the series among series and economic groups for the oppressor

cannot determine their reciprocal action except other things being equal, that is to say...without having one fundamental object at the heart of their antagonism: keeping the proletariat in its statute of impotence. It is as if everyone’s praxis had two components: one horizontal and opposed to the praxis of the adverse group and the other vertical, an oppressive and repressive force against the proletariat.¹⁸

The point then is that what is absent from the discussion of series in the essays by Young and Buck is that the vertical praxis, the oppressive praxis, is absent when discussion of oppression is limited to the existence of the series.

To conclude this discussion, the point was not that seriality was invalid in the discussion of certain groups, but that this does not explain the feature of a series that made it interesting to talk about in the first place, in the discussion of Young and Buck.

¹⁶ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 748.

¹⁷ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 724; my emphasis.

¹⁸ Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, 751

While it is true that seriality can explain how a variety of individuals can exist in a sort of collective without being unified in a strong sense, the reason why the authors would want these groups would be unified is for political action against the groups in question. Negative unity can be gained through the practico-inert objects of gender and or race, or the external praxis against which there is a need for *struggle*. The point here was simply to indicate the limits of what can be explained by the concept of serial collectives alone, and to indicate how specifically this concept is limited when applied to certain contexts. It also allows us to see that the removal of alienation (as seriality) might not be of the same priority as oppression, although Sartre is not entirely clear on this himself as mentioned at the end of the previous chapter. But given the whole of the argument presented throughout this study, it seems reasonable to conclude that the vulnerability that exists along with the plurality of freedom is an inescapable part of human existence that need not be oppressive even if it is made intolerable in the context of oppression. This means that the absence of vulnerability is not the goal of Sartre's philosophy, but the possibility that it would not be oppressive or intolerable.

Potential Issues for Further Study

Several implications of the argument presented in this study are worth noting. These issues would be impossible to cover adequately given the scope of the present study, and are intended only as possible directions for future research.

First, the concept of alienation as the revelation of vulnerability can open a dialogue on the possibility of *politics* in Sartre's thought. The main way this can begin is by understanding the experience of vulnerability, as the possibility of being wounded, as equivalent to appearance in public. I characterized it as possibility of being wounded,

rather than possibility for violence, since there might be a useful distinction to be made having arrived at the end of this study. Politics might involve getting wounded, but it cannot exist alongside violence. Political life and political action require an ability to appear as vulnerable in such a way that is not simply dangerous. In short, alienation is an experience not only negatively of the possibility of being wounded, but perhaps it is also the positive potential for political participation. One possibility for exploring this idea might take the form of Sartre's ideas concerning the responsibility of intellectuals and writers. Another might be to explore the relationship between this idea of public freedom and that found in the work of Hannah Arendt.

Another issue in need of further consideration is Sartre's ambivalence concerning the *interchangeability* that was characterized as alienating at several points in this study, while at other times, it was characterized as oppressive when *restricted*, and in the present chapter it was seen in the form of seriality as alienating to the extent that it was experienced in impotence, i.e., that which none of us can do. It seems that the characteristic of common freedom in the group in fusion is its interchangeability with other freedoms, while this is characterized as part of the impotence involved in serial coexistence. A critical discussion of whether the impotence of the members of the series and the power of the common individual in the group is an adequate distinction, given that the latter ultimately collapses into the former.

Finally, one domain which this study might be most productive would be to function as a critical point of view on several concepts in receiving attention in post-structural theory. To name only a few, it would be interesting to consider how Sartre theory of alienation as I have interpreted it here can function critically in relation to

Giorgio Agamben's theory of "bare life," or, in relation to the concept of precarious labor that has received attention across several disciplines. It would also be interesting to see how Sartre's argument comes into tension with, or if it is compatible with, the idea of vulnerability as Judith Butler has written about extensively. In closing, I hope that the argument presented in this study can provide a basis for thinking about contemporary problems of alienation, violence, and oppression, in dialogue with Sartre, as I believe his thought continue to be relevant.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow*. The New Press, 2010.
- Anderson, Thomas C. *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1993.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*. Edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Random House, 1994.
- . *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Aristotle. *Metaphysics: Book Theta*. Translated by Stephen Makin. Clarendon, 2006.
- Aron, Raymond. *History and the Dialectics of Violence*. Basil Blackwell, 1975.
- Arthur, C. J. *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and His Relation to Hegel*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.
- Bell, David. "The 'Rediscovery' of Alienation: Some Notes Along the Quest for the Historical Marx." *The Journal of Philosophy* (1959): 933–952.
- Bell, Linda. "Sartre: Alienation and Society." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 6, no. 4 (1979): 408.
- Bergoffen, Debra. "Casting Shadows: The Body in Descartes, Sartre, De Beauvoir and Lacan." *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française* IV, no. 2–3 (1992): 232–243.
- Birt, Robert E. "Alienation in the Later Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre." *Man and World* 19, no. 3 (1986): 293–309.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1935.
- Buck, Chris. "Sartre, Fanon, and the Case for Slavery Reparations." *Sartre Studies International* 10, no. 2 (2004): 123–138.
- Busch, Thomas W. "Sartre and the Senses of Alienation." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 15 (1977): 151–160.
- . *The Power of Consciousness and the Force of Circumstances in Sartre's Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

- Carney, John C. *Rethinking Sartre: a Political Reading*. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 2007.
- Carr, David. "The 'Fifth Meditation' and Husserl's Cartesianism." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 34, no. 1 (1973): 14–35.
- Catalano, Joseph S. *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Caws, Peter. "Sartrean Structuralism?" In *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, edited by Christina Howells. Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Chioldi, Pietro. *Sartre and Marxism*. Translated by Kate Soper. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976.
- Desan, Wilfrid. *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*. New York: Doubleday, 1965.
- Detmer, David. *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity*. Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 2008.
- Dodd, James. *Violence and Phenomenology*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Easton, Loyd D. "Alienation and History in the Early Marx." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 22, no. 2 (1961): 193–205.
- Enns, Diane. *Speaking of Freedom: Philosophy, Politics, and the Struggle for Liberation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Eshleman, Matthew C. "The Misplaced Chapter on Bad Faith, or Reading Being and Nothingness in Reverse." *Sartre Studies International* 14, no. 2 (2008): 1 – 22.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Feuer, Lewis. "What Is Alienation? The Career of a Concept." *New Politics* 1, no. 3 (1962).
- Flynn, Thomas R. *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- . "The Alienating and the Mediating Third in the Social Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre." In *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy: Heirs and ancestors*, 6:3–38. Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1973.
- Foucault, Michel. *History of Madness*. Translated by Jean Khalfa. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- . *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France 1976-1977*. Translated by David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003.

- Fox, Nicholas F. *The New Sartre: Explorations in Postmodernism*. New York: Continuum, 2006.
- Fretz, Leo. "Individuality in Sartre's Philosophy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, 67–99. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Freud Reader*. Edited by Peter Gay. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995.
- Georgopoulos, Nikos. "Sartre and Alienation." In *Continuity and Change in Marxism*, edited by Norman Fischer, 144–169. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1982.
- Gerassi, John. *Talking with Sartre: Conversations and Debates*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Gurwitsch, Aron. "A Non-Egological Conception of Consciousness." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1, no. 3 (1941): 325–338.
- Hartmann, Klaus. "Praxis: a Ground for Social Theory." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 1 (May 1970): 47–58.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Alan Wood. Translated by H.B. Nisbett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- . *Phenomenology of Mind*. Edited by J.B. Baillie. New York: Harper Colophon, 1967.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Edited by Joan Stambaugh. New York: SUNY Press, 1996.
- Hendley, Steven. *Reason and Relativism: A Sartrean Investigation*. New York: SUNY Press, 1991.
- Henry, Michel. *Material Phenomenology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- Heter, T. Storm. *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement: Authenticity and Civic Virtue*. New York: Continuum, 2006.
- Hoffmann, Stanley. "A Note on Sartre and Violence." *Journal of Romance Studies* Volume 6, no. Numbers 1 & 2 (2006): 61–65.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*. Translated by Anthony J. Steinbock. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001.

- . *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Dorian Cairns. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960.
- . *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book*. Translated by Fred Kersten. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982.
- . *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Translated by David Carr. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- Hutcheson, P. "Husserl's Fifth Meditation." *Man and World* 15 (1982): 265–284.
- Hyppolite, Jean. "Alienation and Objectification." *Philosophy Today* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 119–132.
- James, C.L.R. *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin*. Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Marxism and Form*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- . *Valences of the Dialectic*. New York: Verso, 2009.
- Kain, Phillip. "Alienation and Estrangement in the Thought of Hegel and the Young Marx." *The Philosophical Forum* 11 (1979): 139–160.
- . *Hegel and the Other*. New York: SUNY Press, 2005.
- Kant, Immanuel. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Khan, R. F. "D. Z. Phillips on Waiters and Bad Faith." *Philosophy* 59, no. 229 (1984): 389–391.
- Klockars, Kristian. *Sartre's Anthropology as a Hermeneutics of Praxis*. Ashgate, 1998.
- Knecht, Ingbert. "Seriality: a Ground for Social Alienation?" 188–208. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980.
- Langer, Monika. "Sartre and Merleau-Ponty: A Reappraisal." In *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, edited by P. A. Schilpp. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1981.
- Leland, Dorothy. "The Sartrean Cogito: A Journey Between Versions." *The existentialists: critical essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre* (2004): 153.
- Löwith, Karl. "Man's Self-Alienation in the Early Writings of Marx." *Social Research* 21 (1954): 204–230.

- Mark, James. "The Waiter and the Philosopher." *Philosophy* 58, no. 225 (1983): 386–388.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin, 1992.
- . *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Martin Nicolaus. Penguin Books, 1993.
- . "On the Jewish Question." In *Early Writings*, translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton. Penguin Books, 1992.
- . *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: And the Communist Manifesto*. Translated by M. Milligan. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1988.
- McBride, William Leon. "Sartre on Marxism." In *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, edited by P. A Schilpp. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1981.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Mészáros, Istvan. *Marx's Theory of Alienation*. Harper and Row, 1972.
- Mohanty, J. N. "The Other Culture." In *Phenomenology of the Cultural Disciplines*, edited by M. Daniel and L. Embree, 135–146. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994.
- Monahan, Michael J. "Sartre's Critique of Dialectical Reason and the Inevitability of Violence: Human Freedom in the Milieu of Scarcity." *Sartre Studies International* 14, no. 2 (2008): 48 – 70.
- Murchland, Bernard. "The Myth of Alienation." *Diotima: Review of Philosophical Research* 2 (1974): 203–215.
- O'Neill, John. "The Concept of Estrangement in the Early and Later Writings of Karl Marx." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1964): 64–84.
- Oliver, Kelly. *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Petrović, Gajo. "Marx's Theory of Alienation." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 23, no. 3 (1963): 419–426.
- Phillips, D. Z. "Bad Faith and Sartre's Waiter." *Philosophy* 56, no. 215 (1981): 23–31.

- Plato. "Phaedo." In *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997.
- Poster, Mark. *Existential Marxism in Post-War France: From Sartre to Althusser*. Princeton University Press, 1975.
- Rotenstreich, Nathan. "On the Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of 'Alienation'." *The Review of Metaphysics* 16, no. 3 (1963): 550–555.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*. Edited by Susan Dunn. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Santoni, Ronald E. *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*. Schocken Books, 1995.
- . *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.
- . "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self." In *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, edited by Nathaniel Morris Lawrence and Daniel Denis O'Connor. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967.
- . *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Vol.1: Theory of Practical Ensembles*. Edited by Jonathan Ree and Arlette Elkaim-Sartre. Translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith. New York: Verso, 2004.
- . *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Vol.2: The Intelligibility of History*. Edited by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre. Translated by Quintin Hoare. New York: Verso, 2006.
- . *L'être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.
- . *Notebooks for an Ethics*. Edited by David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- . *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*. Edited by Bernard Frechtman. New York: Pantheon, 1963.
- . *Situations*. Translated by Benita Eisler. New York: Fawcett, 1965.
- . *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*. Translated by Jonathan Webber. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- . *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Translated by Forest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1988.

- . *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War, November 1939-March 1940*. Translated by Quinton Hoare. New York: Verso, 1999.
- Saunders, Jason Lewis. *Greek and Roman Philosophy After Aristotle*. Simon and Schuster, 1966.
- Scanlon, John D. "Desire, Need, and Alienation in Sartre." In *Dialogues in phenomenology*, edited by Don Ihde and Richard M. Zaner, 211–223. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975.
- Schacht, Richard. *Alienation*. New York: Doubleday, 1970.
- Schott, Robin May, and Sara Heinämaa. *Birth, Death, and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- Schroeder, William Ralph. *Sartre and His Predecessors*. New York: Routledge, 1984.
- Schutz, Alfred. "Sartre's Theory of the Alter Ego." *Philosophy and phenomenological research* (1948): 181–199.
- . "The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl." In *Collected papers*, 3:51–84. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.
- Seeman, Melviin. "On the Meaning of Alienation." *American Sociological Review* (1959): 783–791.
- Simont, Juliette. "Sartrean Ethics." In *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, edited by Christina Howells, 178–212. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Skempton, Simon. *Alienation After Derrida*. New York: Continuum, 2010.
- Stevenson, Leslie. "Sartre on Bad Faith." *Philosophy* 58, no. 224 (1983): 253–258.
- Theunissen, Michael. *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*. Translated by Christopher Macann. MIT Press, 1984.
- VanBreda, H. L. "Maurice Merleau-Ponty Et Les Archives-Husserl à Louvain." *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 67 (1962): 412.
- Webber, Jonathan. *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Wider, Kathleen V. "Through the Looking Glass: Sartre on Knowledge and the Pre-Reflective Cogito." *Man and World* 22, no. 3 (1989): 329–343.
- Young, Iris Marion. "Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective." *Signs* 19, no. 3 (1994): 713–738.

“Alienation as a Concept in the Social Sciences.” *Current Sociology* 21, no. 9 (1973):
9–39.