Sartre's Critique of Husserl

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Abstract

This paper articulates a new understanding of Sartre's philosophical methodology in his early publications up to and including *Being and Nothingness*. Through his critique of Husserl across these works, Sartre develops an original and sophisticated variety of transcendental phenomenology. He was attracted to Husserl's philosophy for its promise to establish the foundations of empirical psychology but ultimately concluded that it could not fulfil this promise. Through the analyses that led him to this conclusion, Sartre formulated a new kind of phenomenological reduction and a distinctive kind of transcendental argument to draw conclusions about mind-independent reality from phenomenological premises. His aims were to dissolve the traditional distinction between mind and world, to establish that the mind is accessible to empirical study, and to formulate the conceptual framework required to study the mind systematically. Sartre's philosophy of psychology, therefore, drove the philosophical development of the methodological foundation of his philosophical project.

Sartre's Critique of Husserl

Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical publications up to and including *Being and Nothingness* develop the basic psychology, epistemology, and ontology that ground his entire philosophical project. It is clear that these foundations are developed primarily through a critical appropriation of Edmund Husserl's method of phenomenology. Unfortunately, however, these works do not include any unified or definitive statement of that critical appropriation. It therefore remains unclear whether his comments on Husserl really form a single critique and equally unclear whether Sartre really has a unified philosophical methodology in these works.

One part of this puzzle concerns Husserl's method of phenomenological reduction, which Sartre seems to reject in *Being and Nothingness* while retaining conclusions reached through it in earlier works. Another part concerns the relation between phenomenology and ontology: Sartre's critique in *The Transcendence of the Ego* requires excluding from the analysis any concern with metaphysical structures that the objects of our experience might have in themselves independently of our experience of them, which in this paper will be referred to as 'mind-

independent reality'; yet in *Being and Nothingness* he criticises Husserl precisely for being unable to articulate the structures of mind-independent reality.[1]

This paper articulates a reconstruction of Sartre's comments on Husserl across the works up to and including *Being and Nothingness* as a dilemma. Sartre contends, as we will see, that empirical psychology requires direct epistemic access to mind-independent reality. The dilemma he poses concerns whether the purview of Husserl's phenomenology is restricted to the structures of conscious experience. If it is, then it cannot establish epistemic access to mind-independent reality. If it is not, then the unrestricted scope of the phenomenological reduction prevents Husserl from establishing that the reality to which we have access is mind-independent. Either way, Husserl's phenomenology fails to deliver the foundations of empirical psychology that Sartre had hoped that it would deliver. This dilemma will be elucidated in detail across sections 1-3 of the paper. But our concern is not with whether this is a fair critique of Husserl's phenomenology.

Our concern is to uncover the distinctive philosophical methodology that Sartre developed through this critique. The paper begins by clarifying Sartre's reasons for both his attraction to Husserl's phenomenology and his subsequent rejection of it. It then analyses the

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[1] In this paper, the term 'metaphysical' is used interchangeably with 'ontological' to describe anything pertaining to being, despite the distinction that Sartre draws towards the end of *Being and Nothingness* between 'ontology' as the analysis of the structures of being and 'metaphysics' as the study of the aetiology of those ontological structures, a study which he declares that he has not undertaken (B&N: 639). Sartre's restriction of 'metaphysics' here is highly unusual, perhaps entirely idiosyncratic, in modern philosophy. The usage in this paper, by contrast, is normal in current anglophone philosophy. It should be borne in mind, however, that nothing in this paper pertains directly to the question of the aetiology of either consciousness or mind-independent reality.

two published phases of his critique, finding that *The Transcendence of the Ego* is concerned only with structures of experience whereas *Being and Nothingness* argues that Husserl's phenomenology is unsatisfactory because it cannot articulate the structures of mind-independent reality. These two phases are then formulated together as a single dilemma in order to facilitate drawing out the methodology Sartre develops through this critique.

That methodology comprises a distinctive form of phenomenological reduction and a distinctive form of transcendental argument from phenomenological premises to ontological conclusions about mind-independent reality. The paper concludes by showing how this analysis resolves a series of disagreements and criticisms in recent literature on Sartre's early philosophy.

1. Sartre's Interest in Husserl's Phenomenology

Simone de Beauvoir's famous description of Sartre turning pale with emotion on first hearing about Husserl's philosophy over apricot cocktails in the summer of 1933 has recently been called into question, not least by Sartre himself in a previously unpublished interview (Stawarska 2013: 13-16). But it is certainly true that Sartre first systematically read Husserl during his tenure at the Maison Academique Française in Berlin in 1933-4, where he wrote a short article praising Husserlian phenomenology (IHP) and a paper arguing against Husserl's theory of a transcendental ego and sketching his own theory of a transcendent ego (TE).

Over the following years, he published two books arguing for a phenomenological analysis of imagination (TI; IPPI) and one arguing for a phenomenological analysis of emotion (STE).[2] These books were critical of Husserl's theories themselves, but explicitly indebted to Husserl's methodology and conceptual repertoire. 'Husserl had gripped me', he later wrote in

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[2] Sartre's works are cited using acronyms and listed in the bibliography in order of first publication, for the sake of clarity. All other works are cited by author and publication date.

his diary of this experience; 'I saw everything through the perspectives of his philosophy' and criticised Husserl 'just insofar as a disciple can write against his master' (WD: 183-4).

In these works, he outlined three attractive features of Husserl's phenomenology. Most fundamentally, it promised to secure epistemic access to the shared objective world. Sartre's short article presents this as an exciting new departure for philosophy: we should abandon the 'digestive philosophy' that portrays the mind as passively absorbing information from a reality that lies outside it, he argues, and follow Husserl in seeing experience as direct acquaintance with a reality that exists independently of ourselves (IHP: 41-4). Sartre's paper and three books written under Husserl's influence all emphasise this foundational claim about the nature of the mind (TI: 129-32; TE: 43-4; STE: 34-5; IPPI: 5-7).[3]

The second attraction is that this in turn would facilitate the epistemic access to other minds necessary for empirical psychology. For if the mind were a private inner realm, we would be unable to study the contents and processes of any minds other than our own. But if there is no such inner space, since experience is direct acquaintance with mind-independent reality, then a theory of the mind (or ego) can be formulated that renders it as much a part of the publicly accessible world as chairs and tables (TE: 43-5; IHP: 45-6).

This does leave conscious experience itself private, however. The denial that experiences occur in an inner realm does not itself entail that those experiences are epistemically accessible to anyone other than the person whose experiences they are. The third attraction of phenomenology for Sartre was that it provided a non-empirical method for analysing the structures of conscious experience (TE: 45). Sartre considered the empirical psychology of his

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[3] In the terminology of anglophone philosophy of mind, Sartre is rejecting the idea that the direct objects of perceptual awareness are themselves internal to the mind rather than parts of mind-independent reality, items that have usually been known as 'sense-data'. He is embracing the idea the direct objects of perceptual awareness are parts of mind-independent reality, varieties of which are known as 'direct realism' and 'naïve realism'.

day to be simply stockpiling observations, unable to distinguish essential aspects of any experience from inessential ones, unable to discern deep structural relations between different kinds of experience, and unable to identify the manifestation in experience of structural features of human existence itself (TI: 7-8, 73-6, 125-8; STE: 1-6; IPPI: 52). He argued that phenomenological analyses of conscious experience would isolate the essential structures of mental phenomena, so that empirical psychology could proceed informed by this prior 'phenomenological psychology' (TE: 44-5; TI: 125-9; STE: 13-14; IPPI: 4-5).

Sartre eventually decided, however, that Husserl's phenomenology failed to guarantee that 'two distinct consciousnesses did indeed perceive *the same* world' (WD: 184). It failed, that is, to secure the epistemic access to a shared objective world that Sartre had hoped it would. This motivated his shift from phenomenological psychology to the topic of *Being and Nothingness*, phenomenological ontology. Whereas his phenomenological psychology was restricted to articulating conscious experience, the ambition of his phenomenological ontology encompassed the being and structures of the world itself. The introduction to *Being and Nothingness* is a compact and complex dialectical argument for a new variant of the idea of intentionality, which casts perceptual experience as direct acquaintance with mind-independent reality. This passage endorses Husserl's identification of reality with the series of its actual and possible appearances (B&N: 1-5), raises the question of whether Husserl's version of this view can account for the fact that an object 'does not depend on my whim' (B&N: 4), and eventually decides that Husserl's philosophy is unable to explain this 'opaque resistance of things' (B&N: 19), having already described Husserl's phenomenological reduction as leading ineluctably to this problem (B&N: 8; see also B&N: 34). Sartre intends the variety of phenomenology developed in *Being and Nothingness* to succeed precisely where he considers Husserl's to have failed.

Because he never gathered his thoughts about Husserl into a single sustained analysis, they can seem to be distinct criticisms each vulnerable to rebuttal on Husserl's behalf. Moreover, his attitude towards Husserl's fundamental methodological principle of phenomenological reduction is not clearly consistent. This is the principle that the structures of

conscious experience must be analysed without the presupposition that its objects already exist independently of it. Sartre's critical comments about this principle in *Being and Nothingness* are not formulated sufficiently sharply to make clear why they do not undermine the analyses of the ego, emotions, and imagination developed through the use of a phenomenological reduction in earlier works. Sartre continues to rely on those analyses, as we will see, in the very same book that appears to reject the method of phenomenological reduction.

Sartre's comments on Husserl, however, are consistent and can be formulated as a dilemma that motivates his own distinctive variety of transcendental phenomenology. To see this, we need first to consider in more detail the two major phases of Sartre's critique of Husserl in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and *Being and Nothingness*.

2. Phenomenology and the Transcendental Ego

The first phase of Sartre's critique concerns Husserl's theory of the transcendental ego. Sartre's argument comprises three basic points: that the transcendental ego is not required for the unity and individuality of conscious experience; that the phenomenology of conscious experience is incompatible with such an ego; and that Husserl has failed to apply his phenomenological reduction consistently. Sartre argues that we are sometimes aware of an ego, which is a public 'transcendent' object rather than a private 'transcendental' subject. He then follows his arguments against Husserl with an account of this transcendent ego.

At three key stages, however, Sartre can be read either as making a claim about the structures of conscious experience or as going beyond the structures of experience to analyse structures of mind-independent reality. If we read him as making claims of this second kind, about the metaphysical structures that objects of our experience have independently of our experience of them, then his argument faces obvious objections that do not arise if we read him as only making claims of the first kind. It therefore seems preferable to read him, in this phase of

his analysis of Husserl at least, as taking the phenomenological reduction to restrict the purview of inquiry to the structures of conscious experience itself.

The first of these stages is his argument that the transcendental ego is not required for the unity and individuality of conscious experience. The various aspects of my experience at a given time are unified into a single experience by being aspects of a single presentation of one intentional object, he argues (TE: 6).[4] My experiences across time, he continues, are unified into a single stream of consciousness by 'an interplay of "transversal" consciousnesses that are real, concrete retentions of past consciousnesses' (TE: 7).[5] Read as restricting his inquiry to the

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[4] Sartre's claim is not that the intentional object itself unifies the experience. That would be subject to the objection, which Stephen Priest raises, that the same item in the world features as the intentional object of the distinct experiences of distinct people (2000: 35). Sartre's claim is rather that it is part of the sense of each aspect of the presentation of the object that it is related to the other aspects as aspects of the presentation of one object. It is the unity of the presentation, not of the presented, that unifies a conscious experience. This is why the same idea can be described by saying that it 'is consciousness which unifies itself' (TE: 7). Sartre's view is not that consciousness unifies the intentional object, whose unity in turn explains the unity of consciousness, as Priest suggests (2000: 40-1). That would be a circular explanation that cannot be accepted just by declaring that consciousness and its object 'are inseparable' (2000: 41). Sartre's view is that consciousness unifies itself by presenting the various aspects of its object as aspects of a single object.

[5] Thus, the diachronic unity of consciousness is explained by structures of experience that relate it to previous experiences, whereas its synchronic unity is explained by structures that relate simultaneous features of experience to one another. It is essential to Sartre's theory that conscious experience involves both kinds of structure. Failure to distinguish them underlies, for example, Priest's objection that consciousness cannot be unified across an individual's lifetime by the unity of the intentional object of experience (2000: 35).

structures of experience itself, Sartre is claiming that the structures of experience themselves ensure that experience is a single coherent flow rather than a chaotic manifold. There is therefore no role for a transcendental ego, or indeed anything else, to play in unifying experience.

However, if he is not read as having this restricted purview, then he faces the objection that he has not explained why my flow of experience includes just these possible experiences and no others. Why does my experience not combine distinct perspectives, either simultaneously or as it unfolds across time? One answer would be that the consistency of perspective in one's flow of conscious experience results from the single unified subject of this flow of experience, something whose existence and structures are not dependent on any experience of them and which is therefore part of mind-independent reality. This subject, the objection would run, is the transcendental ego. If this objection is right, then there is at least one consideration in favour of the transcendental ego that Sartre should have considered, irrespective of whether Husserl himself advanced that consideration.[6] But this objection cannot be raised if the purview of inquiry is restricted to the structures of experience itself. For the objection goes beyond that purview.

The second stage that indicates a restricted inquiry is Sartre's argument that there is no transcendental ego in conscious experience. Consciousness is essentially an intentional presentation of its objects, so if it were to include a transcendental ego, he argues, this would be

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[6] Sartre does consider precisely this issue in *Being and Nothingness*, where he concludes that the unity of the body as persisting subject of experience explains the consistently perspectival appearance of the world. That argument rests, as we will see in section 6 below, on a philosophical methodology that Sartre did not deploy, and seems not to have developed, at the time of writing *The Transcendence of the Ego*. His consideration of this issue at a later stage of his overall philosophical development, moreover, does not obviate the objection that this argument should have considered it.

either a structure of this presentation or an 'inhabitant' of it (TE: 8). If it were the former, then it would be 'a translucent quality of consciousness' and so show up as an experienced feature of the object, which it does not (TE: 8). If it were the latter, then it would be 'a centre of opacity' which 'would violently separate consciousness from itself, it would divide it, slicing through each consciousness like an opaque blade', which is inconsistent with the unity and translucency of experience (TE: 7-8).

If we read this argument as claiming that there is no transcendental ego at all, whether within the structures of experience or beyond in mind-independent reality, then it faces the objection that such an ego might stand behind experience without featuring in its structures. Sartre's argument would seem no less absurd than a claim that our brain cannot be required for seeing because it does not itself appear in the visual experience of other objects. However, if this inquiry is restricted to analysing the structures of conscious experience, then this objection cannot be raised. For then the inquiry is simply not concerned with what lies behind or beyond experience.

The third stage that indicates this restricted purview is Sartre's positive account of the transcendent ego as a synthesis of actions, states of mind such as hatred of Pierre, and 'optionally' broader 'qualities' or traits such as irascibility (TE: 21-8). He claims that the relation between the ego and conscious experience can be described only 'in exclusively magical terms' (TE: 26) and that the ego produces its qualities, states, and actions through 'poetic production' that mostly takes the form of 'magical procession' which 'always retains a ground of unintelligibility' (TE: 32-3).

If we read these terms as describing properties of the transcendent ego itself, then Sartre is making the rather surprising claim that mind-independent reality includes 'magical' processes that cannot be understood. Since he has already argued that Husserl's transcendental ego should be rejected because it plays no explanatory role, he cannot now endorse a lack of explanatory power in his own theory of the transcendent ego. For this would threaten the dialectical integrity of *The Transcendence of the Ego* and leave his argument open to the objection

that the transcendental ego explains those aspects of the transcendent ego that Sartre claims cannot be explained. However, this problem does not arise if we read Sartre's language of optionality, magic, and poesis here within the restricted purview of analysing the structures of experience. For then he is claiming only that these are features of our experience of the transcendent ego, rather than features of any part of mind-independent reality.

We should read Sartre, therefore, as restricting his inquiry in this work to analysing the structures of conscious experience. When he endorses the methodological principle of phenomenological reduction, he takes this to exclude from the inquiry anything beyond experience (TE: 14). He argues that Husserl failed to apply his reduction consistently (TE: 4). Sartre does not, however, take this principle to restrict the inquiry to simply describing experience. He argues for explanations as well as descriptions, as we have seen: the unity of experience is explained by features of the presentation of the intentional object and retentions of previous experiences; the unintelligibility of the ego is explained by the incommensurability of the experienced spontaneity of consciousness with the causal categories applied to intentional objects (TE: 6-7, 25-6). These explanations are governed by the phenomenological reduction. They do not refer to anything beyond the structures of experience.

Moreover, he does not take the reduction to rule out ontological claims entirely. For he considers it an 'absolute law of consciousness' that where its own structures are concerned 'there is no distinction possible between appearance and being' (TE: 23). The phenomenological reduction, as Sartre understands it in this work, thus permits ontological claims about the structures of experience itself. Indeed, the claim that all consciousness is intentional is an ontological claim. Sartre's use of the reduction only rules out making claims about anything beyond the structures of experience.

3. Ontology and the Coefficient of Adversity

In the second phase of Sartre's critique of Husserl, which occurs in *Being and Nothingness*, the focus is on the being and structures of reality that do not depend on our experience of them. Sartre praises Husserl's conception of the intentionality of consciousness as direct apprehension of the world. But he distinguishes two versions of this idea. In his preferred version, consciousness is direct apprehension of a mind-independent reality. He argues that Husserl's phenomenological reduction precludes this version and requires that the world is constructed from entirely subjective materials (B&N: 1-8, 16-23, 34). In this phase of his critique of Husserl, therefore, Sartre does not restrict the purview of his inquiry to the structures of experience. But he does consider the unrestricted scope of Husserl's phenomenological reduction to preclude referring to mind-independent reality.

Sartre's objection is that this necessarily leaves the objectivity of the world entirely mysterious. He identifies the core of this objectivity as the fact that 'the series of its appearances is connected by a *principle* that does not depend on my whim' (B&N: 4), which he later describes as the 'resistance of things' (B&N: 19) and the 'coefficient of adversity' (B&N: 435-6). If phenomenology must analyse the reality of the world from within the constraint of the phenomenological reduction, that is, then it will be unable to explain why the world can resist my intentions. For there seems to be nothing within the structures of my experience that can explain this resistance. Sartre calls this argument his 'ontological proof' that the objects of our experience have a being that does not dependent on our experience of them (B&N: 20-23). If the argument works, it is a proof of the mind-independent reality of those objects.

Sartre frames this reasoning in terms of Husserl's distinction between two kinds of intentional structure of conscious experience. If I am looking at a tree, my experience presents the tree as having aspects not currently manifest to me. It suggests that other aspects will be manifest if I walk around or climb up the tree. Husserl describes those intentions that refer to something not manifest in the experience, such as the far side of the tree, as '*leer*' (empty).

His term for those that refer to something manifest in experience is '*erfüllt*', which is ambiguous. It can mean that the intention is fulfilled or satisfied, which does not carry any

implications concerning the ontology of the items that fulfil or satisfy the intention. But the term can also mean filled, permeated, or suffused. This implies that what is manifest in experience is ontologically internal to that experience. The term Sartre uses to render '*erfüllen*' into French is '*remplir*', which carries the same ambiguity (B&N: 21; see also B&N: 19-20; Webber 2004: xxix-xxx; Richmond 2018: lii).

Interpreters who read Husserl as eschewing any ontological ambition will prefer to read '*erfüllt*' as 'fulfilled' or 'satisfied'. But if, like Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, we are interested in whether Husserl's work can fully address the relation between mind and world, then we will need to read the term ontologically. This is how Sartre understands it: he reads Husserl as holding that the 'matter' (*hylê*) of experience literally fills, permeates, or suffuses its intentional structure. Once the term is understood that way, the question arises whether this matter is ontologically dependent on the experience. Since the phenomenological reduction precludes referring to anything beyond the structures of experience, this matter must be understood as ontologically dependent on experience.

Sartre summarises this point by characterising Husserl's theory as a form of Berkeleian idealism. George Berkeley argued that we directly apprehend the world because we directly apprehend subjective ideas and the world comprises these ideas as ordered and regulated by God. Husserl does not conceive of the matter of experience as itself the intentional object of experience, so his conception of matter is not equivalent to Berkeley's conception of ideas. Nevertheless, argues Sartre, the reduction ensures that Husserl cannot posit any substance to the intentional objects of perception except what is provided by actual and possible subjective matter (B&N: 8, 19-20, 34). Husserl must therefore agree with Berkeley that *esse est percipi* – to be is to be perceived (B&N: 8).

For this reason, Sartre argues, Husserl's theory precludes any explanation of the world's 'coefficient of adversity' or resistance to my efforts. This cannot be grounded in the matter of experience, which is ontologically dependent on my experience. And the 'genuinely objectifying intentions' cannot be the 'empty intentions, intentions that aim, beyond the present and

subjective appearance, at the infinite totality of the series of appearances' either, since merely possible matter cannot resist anything (B&N: 21). Husserl's phenomenological reduction, moreover, prevents him from postulating God or things-in-themselves or anything else to regulate the sequence of possible matter.

Sartre's argument in *Being and Nothingness* is therefore that Husserl's theory renders the objectivity of reality, the world's resistance or coefficient of adversity, entirely unexplainable. If this analysis is right, then Husserl's theory cannot deliver the connection between mind and world that was its fundamental attraction for Sartre. Notice that the argument is not strictly committed to the claim that Husserl has this ambition for his theory. It is consistent with Husserl's ambition being restricted to analysing the structures of consciousness. The argument is rather that Husserl's phenomenology, as it stands, cannot provide a satisfactory theory of our epistemic access to a shared objective world.

4. Pure Reflection as Alternative to Husserl's Form of Reflection

Sartre's critique of Husserl can be formulated as a dilemma. Husserl's phenomenology should be read either as restricted to analysing the structures of conscious experience or as concerned with those structures and mind-independent reality. On the former reading, Husserl's phenomenology cannot demonstrate the existence of a mind-independent world to which we might have epistemic access. On the latter reading, Husserl's phenomenological reduction precludes demonstrating the mind-independence of the world to which we do have epistemic access. Our interest here is not in whether this critique is successful, but in its role in the development of Sartre's own philosophy.

For in this context, the dilemma raises a puzzle. Sartre seems to affirm the phenomenological reduction in the first phase of his critique of Husserl and reject it in the second phase. Sartre seems to argue in *Being and Nothingness* that his own ontological ambition requires him to reject Husserl's phenomenological reduction, while explicitly retaining aspects of

the theory of the transcendent ego developed in *The Transcendence of the Ego* (B&N: 159, 324-5) along with aspects of his analyses of emotion developed within the confines of the phenomenological reduction in *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, published between the two phases of his critique of Husserl (STE: 8, 34-55; B&N: 105, 584-5). How can he reject the phenomenological reduction while retaining insights that he claims to have reached through the use of that reduction?

In this section and the next, we will see that Sartre in fact developed all his phenomenological analyses through his own evolving form of phenomenological reduction, which was always distinct from the one he rejected. Then in the final two sections, we will see that his distinctive form of the phenomenological reduction facilitates his use of phenomenological analyses as premises in his distinctive kind of transcendental argument to ontological conclusions about mind-independent reality.

Sartre does not give any clear and definitive statement of his form of the phenomenological reduction. Confusingly, he first uses the term 'reflection' to label the form of reflection that he ascribes to Husserl, counterposing this to a different form of epistemic access to one's own experience, then only later relabels these two kinds of access as different forms of reflection.

Sartre's first use of the term labels what he describes as Husserl's 'reflective operation' that is 'performed by a consciousness *directed towards consciousness*', a form of epistemic access to experience 'which takes consciousness as its object' (TE: 10). He affirms that this presents experience in relation to an ego, which is why he refers to it as a 'cogito' (TE: 10). He then employs a different form of epistemic access to experience in order to discern whether this ego is genuinely a feature of all experience or merely an artefact of this Husserlian reflection (TE: 11). In this form, the original experience 'is not to be posited as an object of my reflection', but rather 'I must direct my attention to the objects' of the original experience as presented in that experience (TE: 11). Through this method, he concludes that there is no ego present in experience, only worldly objects presented 'with values, attractive and repulsive values' (TE: 13).

Sarah Richmond (2004: xxi-xxiii) argues that Sartre here briefly employs a method that he has not properly described or justified and that this exemplifies a general instability and unclarity of his methodology. However, the instability and unclarity are merely features of his terminology. The method employed here is the same one he names a few pages later 'pure reflection' (TE: 23-4). Having first used 'reflection' to mean direction of attention towards a conscious experience itself and contrasted this with another way of studying experience, he then reclassifies these two methods as different forms of reflection.

Sartre's first use of this method is intended to show that experience comprises nothing but objects appearing in a particular way. His strategy here is participative: he invites his readers to adopt this attitude towards an experience, confident that we will see for ourselves that experience is as he describes it. When I run after the tram, for example, my attention is focused on the receding tram itself. It appears to me in a particular spatial perspective and as a tram-to-be-caught, if Sartre is right, but my attention is not focused on its appearance. My attention is focused on the tram. In this first use of the method, Sartre describes the ability to shift attention from the tram itself to its appearance. Through doing this, he thinks, we can see that the experience is nothing but the appearance of the tram.

Having thus established that experience is nothing but the appearance of an object, it follows that to focus on the way an object appears is to focus on an experience. The method he has employed, which is a focusing on the way an object appears, is therefore a form of reflection: it is turning one's attention to experience. He would not be justified in describing this method as a form of reflection before his first use of it: this description is justified by a claim about the relation between experience and appearance that he thinks is established by this first use of it.

5. From Pure Reflection to Phenomenological Reduction

We can reconstruct Sartre's account of the two forms of reflection by considering how it is possible to reflect on an experience. One way is to focus attention on the experiential relation between the subject and the object. Since the relation itself is the foreground focus of attention in this case, the subject and the object of that experience must be presented in the background. This is what Sartre calls 'impure' reflection, because it includes a subject of the experience, which did not itself feature in the original experience (TE: 23-4). The other way would be to shift attention from the object to how it seems, which is Sartre's idea of 'pure' reflection. In this form of reflection, the focus is on the original object's appearance. That object is therefore included in the background. But, if Sartre is right, this appearance does not include a subject of experience.

Sartre introduces pure reflection as a kind of phenomenological reduction (TE: 48-9). It is easy to understand why. For it is a focus on the appearance (phenomenon) of the object rather than on the object (being) itself. It allows analysis of the experience without presupposing that its object exists independently of it, because all that will be analysed is the object's appearance rather than the object itself. This is why Sartre here claims that the reduction is not a technical intellectual method, but a form of experience no less fundamental in everyday life than the 'natural attitude' of focusing on the object. It is simply a shift of attention from an object to its appearance. Husserl mistakenly conceived the reduction as 'a skilled operation', Sartre argues, because impure reflection on an experience as a relation between subject and object does not itself suspend the 'natural' presumption that the objects of experience already exist independently of it (TE: 48-9).

By the time he wrote *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, however, Sartre had decided that the 'purifying reflection of phenomenological reduction' is 'rare' and 'depends upon special motivations' (STE: 61). This is another case of a change in terminology rather than a change in method. In the earlier work, Sartre wrote that pure reflection is 'not necessarily phenomenological reflection' (TE: 23) because there he considered there to be two parts to phenomenological reflection: phenomenological reduction (pure reflection) plus an 'eidetic

reduction' to isolate the essential structures of the experience reflected on (TE: 4; see also TI: 126; STE: 7-8).

But in *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, the terminology changes subtly. The label 'phenomenological reduction' is now reserved for the package of pure reflection and eidetic reduction (the package he had earlier called 'phenomenological reflection'). To add to the confusion, he also now labels this same package 'purifying reflection', which is very close to the label of one of its components, pure reflection. It is purifying reflection, rather than pure reflection, that Sartre describes in *Sketch* as uncovering the role of emotion in constituting the relevant properties of its objects rather than responding to them. Pure reflection focuses on the hateful appearance of Pierre, but only purifying reflection reveals that Pierre seems hateful because I am angry rather than the other way around (STE: 61).

This terminology evolves further in *Being and Nothingness* when the relation between impure reflection and bad faith is introduced. Pure reflection, Sartre tells us here, is 'the original form of reflection' and part of the structure of impure reflection, yet in everyday life reflection is usually impure and pure reflection requires 'a sort of *catharsis*' (B&N: 223; see also B&N: 229-32). We can make sense of these passages if we read them as eliding his own earlier distinction between 'pure' and 'purifying' reflection (Stevenson 2016: 123). Impure reflection includes recognition of how the object seems, such as Pierre seeming hateful. It thus includes the content of pure reflection. But the theoretical prejudice of bad faith, which Sartre considers pervasive in our culture, entails viewing ourselves as objects standing in causal relations with other objects in the world. In bad faith, therefore, reflection takes its impure form as a focus on this experience conceived as a causal relation between subject and object (B&N: 231-2).

The catharsis of purifying reflection requires us to consider our experience without the influence of this theoretical prejudice (Morris 2016: 208-13; Webber 2009: 100-1, 128; Williford 2016: 84-90). One aspect of this purifying reflection, as we have seen, is the pure reflection of focusing attention on the object's appearance, rather than on the object or on the experience as a relation between subject and object. This requires a prior aspect, the removal of the

theoretical prejudice that leads to impure reflection. The third aspect remains the eidetic reduction that isolates the essential structures of the appearance revealed in pure reflection. These three aspects together form the full conception of phenomenological reflection that Sartre employs in *Being and Nothingness*.[7]

Sartre's critique of Husserl, therefore, comprises more than his rejection of the transcendental ego and his point that the mind-independence of reality cannot be explained from within the constraint of Husserl's phenomenological reduction. At its core is a thorough critical analysis of Husserl's conception of phenomenological reflection itself. Sartre rejects the form of reflection that he considers central to Husserl's methodology, identifies an alternative form of reflection to ground the study of appearance, and argues that a specific theoretical prejudice must be suspended for this form of reflection to occur.

The resulting 'purifying' reflection is Sartre's form of the phenomenological reduction in *Being and Nothingness*, but it has been evolving since *The Transcendence of the Ego*. It is therefore imprecise to say that Sartre rejects the phenomenological reduction in *Being and Nothingness* while

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[7] Kathleen Wider (1997: 78-85) argues that Sartre has not delineated a conception of pure reflection that distinguishes it from both impure reflection and the 'pre-reflective awareness' that he considers essential to consciousness. Sartre's conception of pre-reflective awareness is supposed to be a structure of all conscious experience, including experience that focuses attention on the object rather than its appearance or on the relation between subject and object. Therefore, it cannot be identical with either form of reflection. Matthew Eshleman (2016: 192-4) proposes a relation between pure reflection and pre-reflective awareness that could be adapted to fit the model of pure reflection developed here. His metaphor of pure reflection 'amplifying' what is present in pre-reflective awareness would only need to be modified to pure reflection focusing attention on what is present at the margins of attention in pre-reflective awareness. I leave open here whether that would fully capture Sartre's idea.

still relying on ideas developed within its constraint in earlier works. His ideas in the earlier works are developed within his own version of the phenomenological reduction. In the later work, he explicitly rejects Husserl's form of it while finalising and employing his own. The refinements he makes to his own form of phenomenological reduction do not seem inconsistent with using the ideas developed within its earlier forms.

6. Transcendental Argumentation from Phenomenological Premises

This development of his own form of phenomenological reduction, however, does not itself resolve the fundamental problem that Sartre finds in Husserl's phenomenology. It does not directly provide a way for phenomenology to explain the reality of the world. For what needs to be explained is the world's ability to resist my efforts, its coefficient of adversity, the fact that the sequence of my experiences is not wholly dependent on my intentions. Sartre's form of phenomenological reflection restricts philosophical attention to the essential structures of the world's appearance, but it remains that whatever regulates the sequence of appearances cannot be internal to those structures.

The reality of the world therefore cannot be explained from within the confines of Sartre's phenomenology. Sartre's method of phenomenological analysis, however, is essential to the form of argumentation that he deploys to identify the ontology that explains the regularity of that experience. For this is a form of transcendental argument whose premise is a linguistic articulation of the structure of experience from the perspective of the subject of that experience, an articulation that should capture the structures of experience identified through Sartre's form of phenomenological reduction. As a transcendental argument, its conclusion is intended to be derived as a necessary condition of that premise. But this is not logical necessity: there is no logical contradiction (not even an unobvious one) in asserting the premise but denying the conclusion. It is rather factual necessity: the conclusion must be true, since otherwise experience would not have the structures described in the premise.

Sartre's form of transcendental argument is similar to that recently identified by Mark Sacks. The premise is what Sacks called a 'situated thought': it is not simply a proposition; it is rather a proposition that cannot be properly understood except from the perspective of having the actual or envisaged experience it articulates (2005a: 444, 446). Sartre's form of transcendental argument diverges from the one Sacks identifies, however, in two important respects.

One is that Sacks argues that the premise must be 'indisputable', something 'that the sceptic cannot doubt' (2005a: 452). It is not clear why Sacks thinks this. The premise does need to articulate an experience that the reader either has had or can envisage having, since it cannot be properly understood except from that perspective. But the premise is not itself an actual or possible experience. It is a linguistic articulation of that experience. There is therefore scope for the sceptic (or anyone else) to dispute the way the experience has been articulated in this premise. Sartre recognises this scope, as we have seen. Part of his form of phenomenological reduction in *Being and Nothingness* is to clear away what he sees as a theoretical prejudice that leads people to misdescribe their own experiences.

The second divergence is that Sartre draws ontological conclusions beyond the scope of experience, whereas Sacks considers this form of transcendental argument restricted to 'the level of possible experience' (2005: 455). This is because Sacks assumes that the conclusion must be of the same logical kind as the premise, a situated thought (2005: 451). This is perhaps why Sebastian Gardner, influenced by Sacks here, considers Sartre's transcendental arguments to identify only 'lateral, horizontal interconnections revealing the mutual cross-conditioning of the immediate structures of the for-itself' (2011: 53). It is perhaps also why Matthew Eshleman focuses his discussion of Sartre's transcendental deductions entirely on the structures of experience (2011: 31-2; 2013: 344-8; 2016: 180-1).

It is not clear why Sacks assumes that every factually necessary condition of a situated thought must itself be expressible as a situated thought. Indeed, one of his own most striking examples of this kind of argument draws an ontological conclusion that does not articulate any

experience: it is because 'I am thinking' is a situated thought, Sacks argues, that Descartes is right that a factually necessary condition of it is that I exist (2005: 446).[8]

Sartre does use transcendental arguments to identify relations of factual necessity between situated thoughts. But he also, like Descartes on this interpretation of the cogito, uses them to draw conclusions about structures that reality has in itself independently of our experience of it. This is how he draws conclusions about mind-independent reality from phenomenological premises. His first such argument forms the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, where the premise is that the world can resist my efforts and the conclusion is that consciousness is nothing more than the revelation of some part of mind-independent reality (nicely summarised at B&N: 22-3).

Sartre later presents essentially the same argument to show that the conscious subject is dependent on the being in-itself of the world. The premise in this version is that the object of perception is 'present to consciousness as *not being* consciousness' (B&N: 284). He does not explain this, but it seems to indicate the coefficient of adversity identified in the Introduction as fundamental to experience of worldly objects. For the potential resistance of an object to my intentions manifests the object's independence of my experience.[9] This version of the argument

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[8] In a separate paper, Sacks (2005b) reads Sartre's analysis of 'the look' as a transcendental argument of the kind he has identified. Given the differences I have indicated between Sartre's style of transcendental argumentation and the style Sacks identified, this interpretation of Sartre's analysis of 'the look' might stand in need of revision. For some thoughts on how 'the look' ought to be interpreted, see my 'Bad Faith and the Other' (Webber 2011).

[9] This reading is complicated by Sartre's view that imagination also presents an object as not being consciousness. In this case, there can be no coefficient of adversity: the object is not present to set limits on how it can change in my imagination. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the presentation of an object as other than consciousness needs a single explanation

consists in considering how experience must be in order that this premise is true. Sartre first argues that consciousness must be internally structured as not being its object rather than the object being internally structured as not being consciousness (B&N: 249-50). Next he argues that this negation cannot be a consequence of prior knowledge, since ultimately perception is prior to any knowledge of its objects (B&N: 250). He concludes that it is therefore a necessary condition of the truth of the premise that the object of experience is mind-independent and the experience is simply the presentation of this object in its mind-independent reality (B&N: 251-2).

Sartre deploys this kind of transcendental argument again to argue that a factually necessary condition – 'the *de facto* condition' – of the consistently perspectival and practical appearance of the world is that the body is the persisting subject of experience (B&N: 439). By this point, he has already identified the 'psyche' as the locus of the states of mind and qualities that endow the experienced world with its practical structure, and as the locus of action itself (B&N: 232-7). This 'psyche' is equivalent to the 'transcendent ego' described in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, except that he now considers qualities to be an ordinary component rather than 'optional'. This argument and his transcendental argument that the body is the subject of experience together entail that the body is the psyche's 'substance and its constant condition of possibility' (B&N: 452). His form of transcendental argument therefore allows him to answer the

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across both imagination and perception. Sartre considers these to be two fundamentally distinct forms of conscious experience (IPPI: 8-16, 120-2, 180-2). Imagination 'posits its object as a nothingness'; the object is experienced as not-present (IPPI: 12; see also IPPI: 13, 20, 116, 180, 183, 185). This is why imagination presents its object as not consciousness, and indeed as not anything else that is present. Perception, by contrast, 'posits its object as present' (IPPI: 12). For an object posited as present to be experienced as other than consciousness is for it to be experienced as potentially resisting my intentions. (For a more detailed analysis of Sartre's distinction between imagination and perception, see my 'Sartre's Phenomenological Psychology of Imagination', forthcoming.)

ontological question left unaddressed in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, as Phyllis Sutton Morris (1985: 187) points out: the contents of my particular flow of experiences are determined by the location, actions, and abilities of this body.

7. Sartre's Phenomenological Ontology

Sartre's philosophical method therefore deploys an original conception of phenomenological analysis to formulate the premises of a distinctive kind of transcendental argument that draws ontological conclusions beyond the scope of his phenomenological reduction, conclusions about the structures of mind-independent reality. Sartre's form of phenomenological reflection is necessary for this kind of transcendental argument. For in viewing an experience as a relation between subject and object, impure reflection adopts an external perspective on that experience. It therefore cannot ground situated thoughts that articulate experience from the subject's perspective. The situated thoughts that form the premises of this kind of transcendental argument are linguistic articulations of structures that can be identified only through purifying reflection.

Sartre's form of transcendental argument draws conclusions by identifying them as factually necessary conditions of the structures of experience described in these premises. Sartre's description of his method as 'phenomenological ontology' is therefore apt. Literature on Sartre's philosophy offers three main interpretations of this phrase. It has been understood to indicate a methodological presumption that reality is as it appears to be (Danto 1991: 37). It has been understood to indicate that Sartre is interested only in the structures the world seems to have, irrespective of whether it really has them (McCulloch 1994: 2-3). And it has been understood as indicating a rejection of the conceptual distinction between appearance and reality (Solomon 2006: 67; Morris 2008: 25-6, 39-40; Morris 2016: 214-5).

This paper's reconstruction of Sartre's methodology shows that all three interpretations are mistaken. Sartre's method is indeed 'phenomenological ontology' in the sense that it derives

ontological conclusions from phenomenological premises. But he does not presuppose that the structures of reality are as phenomenology reveals them to appear to be. Neither does he restrict his purview to the structures that phenomenology reveals reality to appear to have in experience. Neither does he reject the conceptual distinction between appearance and reality, since his transcendental arguments employ this very distinction in deriving conclusions about reality from premises about appearance. Sartre's method is to use purifying reflection to correctly identify the structures of appearance, then to identify the mind-independent reality factually necessary for experience to have these structures. His aim is to show how reality must be in order that it can appear as it does.[10]

This methodology affords arguments for what Sartre had hoped Husserl's methodology would establish: that perception is direct experience of mind-independent reality. He uses this kind of transcendental argument not only to demonstrate the mind-independent reality of being-in-itself, but also the mind-independent reality of the essential structures of the world as we experience it. He argues that two factually necessary conditions of our perceptual experience of the world as comprising distinct items, for example, are the mind-independent reality of the spatial relations between these experienced items (B&N: 258-63) and the mind-independent

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[10] Sartre's use of the conceptual distinction between appearance and reality is complicated by two factors. One is that he is emphatic that experience is how it appears to be, since there is no conceptual distinction between an experience and the appearance of that experience (TE: 23). The other is that he clearly rejects any *ontological* distinction between appearance and reality at the outset of *Being and Nothingness* (B&N: 1-2). He rejects the idea that reality lies hidden behind some ontologically separate realm of appearance. He holds that what appears in perceptual experience is reality itself. But this is not a rejection of the *conceptual* distinction between appearance and reality. Indeed, his view cannot be stated except by employing that conceptual distinction.

reality of their temporal duration (B&N: 270-3).[11] He argues that a factually necessary condition for our experience of the world as an arena of 'tasks' is the mind-independent reality of these objects' potential for causal effects on one another, their potential as means to our ends, which he calls their 'equipmentality' (B&N: 280; see also: B&N: 439; Webber 2019). These conclusions are necessary, as he points out (B&N: 303), for his later identification of the psyche with a particular region of the world, the body.

If we fail to recognise that Sartre deploys transcendental arguments to draw conclusions about mind-independent reality, then we are left with the puzzle that Gardner faces of understanding why, on Sartre's picture, 'the formal features of empirical reality and the structures of the subject interlock' (2011: 53; see also 2011: 55-7). The answer to this puzzle is that Sartre's transcendental phenomenological method allows him to dissolve those formal structures of the subject, such as the spatiality and temporality of experience, into the mind-independent being-in-itself that is the foundation of all reality. Sartre's view is that these are structures of perceptual experience only because they are structures of its mind-independent objects. This transcendental derivation of mind-independent structures of the world is necessary for his identifying a particular structured region of that world, the body, as the subject of experience.[12]

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[11] The mind-independent reality of space is also factually necessary, Sartre argues, for our awareness of consciousness as non-extended (B&N: 254-5) and our experience of the Other (B&N: 319-20; see also: B&N: 325-8).

[12] Gardner argues that Sartre objects to drawing ontological conclusions from transcendental statements of necessity (2011: 58-9). He cites the opening comments of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, where Sartre agrees that 'it must be possible for the "I think" to accompany all our representations' but rejects the inference that an ego is part of the structure of every experience (TE: 2-4). However, the point of this passage is to distinguish two steps of the inference. Sartre

Sartre's distinctive form of phenomenology therefore seems to fulfil the promises that had originally attracted him to Husserl's phenomenology. His transcendental arguments are designed to establish not only the existence and structures of mind-independent reality, but also, as we have seen, that these are structures directly manifest in experience. This entails that minds are not private inner realms beyond empirical reach. His transcendental argument that the mind's formal structures are realised by the body and its environment, moreover, entails that empirical psychology should study the body and its environment in order to study the actions, states, and qualities of the mind. And his phenomenological reduction provides a method for identifying the essential structures of experience so that empirical psychology can move beyond merely stockpiling observations.

Moreover, the essential structures of experience that Sartre identifies in the course of developing this methodology themselves require the direct realist ontology that he then establishes through his transcendental arguments. This is most obvious in his conception of perception as direct apprehension of an object that is independent of that perceptual experience. But it is also true of his theory that intense emotions are temporary transformations of the experienced world from its usual mechanistic structure to a magical realm when dealing with it mechanistically becomes too difficult (STE: 41-7; B&N: 584-5) and his theory that imagination deploys some present object as an 'analogon' for an experience directed at some other intentional object (IPPI: 52-3; see B&N: 104). In both theories, a perceived mind-independent

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argues that the transcendental condition requires only that each experience must be a possible object of impure reflection (TE: 3, 9-10). The first step of the inference is to take impure reflection to reveal a subject already indicated in the original experience (TE: 3). The second is to take this subject to be a real ontological entity (TE: 3). Sartre does not object to either step in this passage, though as we have seen his overall position rejects the first. This passage, therefore, does not raise a problem for my analysis of his philosophical method.

reality able to resist my intentions is a point of departure necessary for the emotional or imaginative experience and an inevitable point of return at the end of it.[13]

Sartre's interest in the philosophy of psychology, therefore, drives the philosophical development of the distinctive methodology that facilitates his phenomenological analyses and the ontological theory he derives from them. His initial attraction to Husserl's philosophy, his dissatisfaction with it, and his transformations of its central ideas are all presented as in pursuit of the aim of securing the foundations of empirical psychology, itself a specific form of Husserl's more general aim of securing the foundations of the sciences.

It is thus mistaken to read Sartre's response to Husserl as primarily aimed at establishing a fundamental ontology of frail and contingent being in opposition to the Nietzschean theory of chaotic and energetic will to power (Churchill 2013: 53) or at drawing philosophy away from the foundations of knowledge and towards practical ethics and politics (Stawarska 2013: 12-13). He does want philosophy to address existential, moral, and political issues, of course, but he argues that we must do so on the firm ground of secure knowledge of how human minds work.

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[13] These brief descriptions of the theories of emotion and imagination Sartre developed during the decade between reading Husserl in Berlin and publishing *Being and Nothingness* are extensively elaborated and defended in my forthcoming papers 'Sartre's Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions' and 'Sartre's Phenomenological Psychology of Imagination'.

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