

The philosophy of



Sartre

Anthony Hatzimoysis



Continental European Philosophy

The Philosophy of Sartre

Continental European Philosophy

This series provides accessible and stimulating introductions to the ideas of continental thinkers who have shaped the fundamentals of European philosophical thought. Powerful and radical, the ideas of the philosophers have often been contested, but they remain key to understanding current philosophical thinking as well as the current direction of disciplines such as political science, literary theory, social theory, art history, and cultural studies. Each book seeks to combine clarity with depth, introducing fresh insights and wider perspectives while also providing a comprehensive survey of each thinker's philosophical ideas.

The Philosophy of Agamben

Catherine Mills

The Philosophy of Derrida

Mark Dooley and Liam Kavanagh

The Philosophy of Foucault

Todd May

The Philosophy of Gadamer

Jean Grondin

The Philosophy of Habermas

Andrew Edgar

The Philosophy of Heidegger

Michael Watts

The Philosophy of Hegel

Allen Speight

The Philosophy of Husserl

Burt C. Hopkins

The Philosophy of Kierkegaard

George Pattison

The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty

Eric Matthews

The Philosophy of Nietzsche

Rex Welshon

The Philosophy of Sartre

Anthony Hatzimoysis

The Philosophy of Schopenhauer

Dale Jacquette

The Philosophy of Sartre

Anthony Hatzimoysis

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First Published 2011 by Acumen

Published 2014 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor and Francis Group, an informa business

© Anthony Hatzimoysis, 2011

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention.

No reproduction without permission.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notices

Practitioners and researchers must always rely on their own experience and knowledge in evaluating and using any information, methods, compounds, or experiments described herein. In using such information or methods they should be mindful of their own safety and the safety of others, including parties for whom they have a professional responsibility.

To the fullest extent of the law, neither the Publisher nor the authors, contributors, or editors, assume any liability for any injury and/or damage to persons or property as a matter of products liability, negligence or otherwise, or from any use or operation of any methods, products, instructions, or ideas contained in the material herein.

ISBN: 978-1-84465-046-0 (hardcover)

ISBN: 978-1-84465-047-7 (paperback)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in Classical Garamond.

Contents

Abbreviations

Preface

1. A narrative prelude
2. Intentionality
3. The ego
4. Emotion
5. Imagining
6. Being

Notes

Bibliography

Index

Abbreviations

- BN** *Being and Nothingness*
- CDG** *Carnets de la drôle de guerre: Septembre 1939–Mars 1940*
- EN** *L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*
- ETE** *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*
- IHP** "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea in Husserl's Phenomenology"
- Ion** *L'Imagination*
- IPPI** *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*
- Ire** *L'Imaginaire: Psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination*
- LTE** *La Transcendance de l'Ego*
- N** *Nausea*
- OR** *Oeuvres Romanesque*
- STE** *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*
- TE** *The Transcendence of the Ego*

Preface

Jean-Paul Sartre is one of the most famous philosophers of recent times; he is also one of the most difficult. His fame owes much to his political and emotional engagements, as well as to the wealth of ideas expressed in his novels, plays, journals and critical essays. The difficulties arise as soon as we ask about the reasons for endorsing those ideas. In order to achieve a proper understanding of his views, and the reasons that might support them, we need to look at that part of Sartre's work where he explicitly addresses their content, presuppositions and implications; in other words, we need to explore his philosophy.

The philosophical writings of Sartre span fifty years. During that period, Sartre articulated, developed and elaborated, in sometimes unpredictable ways, a number of seminal arguments on major topics of philosophical enquiry. The desire for securing a reliable compass through the sea of Sartrean volumes, diaries and still unpublished manuscripts might make one adopt a sideways approach to Sartre's philosophy. We might wish to introduce his philosophy by categorizing his work under fixed headings such as "existentialism", "socialism" or "phenomenology". This is a justifiable way to proceed if we already know what those terms mean, and how they should apply to each Sartrean text that is taken to express those schools of thought. Another approach may introduce Sartre's trajectory as filling the intellectual gap between, say, certain Austrian and German philosophers, on the one hand, and certain French or American philosophers, on the other. Such an approach might be correct in some respects, but it remains distinctively unhelpful for anyone with insufficient grasp of the work of the philosopher under consideration.

For the purposes of this book, I have taken the rather less travelled path of introducing Sartre's thought by focusing just on specific parts of Sartre's own work. Some references to other philosophers are of course inescapable – especially for those who wish to enquire into the context of Sartre's work.

A valuable source of feedback on my work on Sartre comes from teaching, for nearly a decade now, upper-year undergraduate and postgraduate students, who make up the kind of audience to which the present book is primarily addressed. It is not uncommon for students who are acquainted with Sartre through textbook paraphrases of some of his most popular claims, to experience serious puzzlement when they turn to the original texts expecting to see a fixed set of existentialist slogans popping up on every page. What they find instead is a philosopher working in meticulous detail on some fundamental problems in metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of value, meaning, mind and action. Moreover, the Sartrean approach to practical issues is hard to justify or, even, to interpret correctly, if it is not seen from within the Sartrean perspective of reality in general. I have accordingly focused on certain themes whose discussion might help introduce the reader to the Sartrean way of thinking about reality. The themes of intentionality, perception, emotion, imagination, being, existence and essence are also topics of concern to contemporary philosophical enquiry. I have thus tried to articulate how the Sartrean approach may advance our understanding of the current debates surrounding those issues. My reasoning, to be sure, is not that these are the only issues worth exploring in Sartre's voluminous output; it is rather that an exploration of several other topics presupposes or, at least, can most securely proceed on the back of a good grasp of the issues addressed in the present work.

One of the nice things about completing a manuscript is the opportunity it affords the author to acknowledge the help he received, mostly in the form of incisive remarks from several colleagues. I am

first of all grateful to audiences in London, Oxford, Paris and St Petersburg, where some of the ideas presented in the book had their first airing. I should also thank Chris Daly, Peter Goldie, Harry Lesser and David Liggins for commenting astutely on parts of the manuscript.

I have debts of a different order to Steven Gerrard at Acumen for his Jobian patience, to John Sharkey for his valuable advice and to Jonathan Webber for his constructive remarks on the final draft.

Thanks are also due to the editors and publishers who kindly gave permission to use material from my work that has previously appeared in print, including “The Philosopher and his Novel” (2003), “The Case Against Unconscious Emotions” (2007) and “Emotions in Heidegger and Sartre” (2010).

I hope the reader will find enough, in my brief presentation of Sartre’s views, that might be worth arguing for – or against.

A narrative prelude

I

Sartre enters the systematic study of philosophy with an array of views that will affect the initial choice of themes to explore, and delineate some of the core theses he will later develop. Prominent among those views is that existence is irreducible to thought: the world is not the creation of a web of ideas, and depends for its existence on no design, human or divine. As such, all entities are “contingent”, since they form part of a reality that exists without necessity or reason, and “gratuitous”, as they lack justification and serve no purpose: they simply are.

Often stated in an aphoristic manner, the above views are not self-evident. Yet their significance for appreciating Sartre’s worldview is hard to overstate. They were first encountered on the pages of *La Nausée (Nausea)*, a novel whose flowing narration of human experience imprints on the reader the material presence of things.¹ Written in the form of a personal diary, the novel gives us an intimate picture of events in the life of an individual whose thoughts and feelings are transformed as their objects start presenting themselves to his senses. The book is a rich source of ideas that, by Sartre’s own standards, lacked at that stage the solidity required for a philosophical treatise.² It is these ideas, however, that will provide the rough material to Sartre’s systematic argumentation: we thus need to grasp the former if we are to properly understand the latter.

The connection between perception and existence, and the relations between time and narrative, are just some of the issues the text invites us to explore. I shall delineate the main points expressed on each of those issues. I shall then briefly consider Sartre’s own stance towards the philosophical views of his fictional hero.

II

Perception and understanding are often connected through the act of seeing: the hero of the novel, Antoine Roquentin, resolves to keep a diary “in order to see clearly”.³ Seeing is a sense that operates at a distance from its objects. The space between the perceiver and the item perceived accounts in part for the subject’s awareness of being different from the object. That difference is an aspect of the subject’s own sense of individuality, and is accompanied by awareness of the distinctness of each of the objects of which his sight may focus. Distance, therefore, is crucial for the independence, individuality and distinctness involved in the phenomenon of human vision.

The sense of distance, however, also allows for questions to arise about the correctness of the beliefs we form in light of the information our sight provides. Such questions will enter Roquentin’s mind through an ordinary incident: on a stroll to the beach, while children were playing ducks and drakes, Roquentin picks up a pebble to throw to the sea, suddenly stops, drops the pebble and walks away, as the children start laughing at his bewildered face. What happened inside him involved apparently the fusion of two sense modalities, sight and touch:

There was something which I saw and which disgusted me, but I no longer know whether I was looking at the sea or at the pebble. It was a flat pebble, completely dry on one side, wet and muddy on the other. I held it by the edges, with my fingers apart to avoid getting them dirty.

(N 10; OR 6)

Touch is the sense in which the distance between oneself and the objects is cancelled. It is often the most reassuring of our senses, as we use it to feel the texture, or trace the contours of an object, defining clearly the limits of its body. That sense of security, however, disappears if we feel that an ordinary object extends over its familiar territory, shedding off the ways in which it used to be handled. For Roquentin, ordinary objects lose their domestic character, gaining, for the first time, their presence. As he is on the point of coming into his room, he stops short because he feels in his hand a cold object attracting his attention “by means of a sort of personality. I opened my hand and looked: I was simply holding the doorknob” (N 13; OR 8).

III

If touch creates such uneasiness, the return to sight should restore the distance between oneself and the world, providing the means for identifying each separate thing and its qualities for what they are. Distinctness, as we noted, is an important characteristic of perceived objects, and its loss often implies a defect in our sight, or in the ability to focus visually or conceptually. Our use of words for identifying properties aspires to convey such a distinctness, guarding against vagueness in the description of the object. Vagueness generates problems for a discourse that employs terms for which there are no sharp boundaries of correct application. A pragmatic way of dealing with this problem is to err on the generous side in our use of predicates; this allows communication to continue by predicating of an object characteristics that are to a certain extent different from the properties the object appears to have.

Such an approach assumes that vagueness reflects a limitation in the ways human beings map the world in language and thought. Yet a lack of sharp distinctions might be more than an accident of how we think and talk: vagueness infuses the object itself – or so it is experienced by Roquentin as he looks from his table at the bartender in a blue shirt with mauve braces. The braces can hardly be seen against the shirt; they are obliterated, buried in the blue:

but that is false modesty; in point of fact they won't allow themselves to be forgotten, they annoy me with their sheep-like stubbornness, as if, setting out to become purple, they had stopped somewhere on the way without giving up their pretensions. You feel like telling them: “Go on, become purple and let's hear no more about it”.

(N 34; OR 26)

The blue shirt stands out against a wall in the colour of chocolate; and that also brings nausea. Only for this time, he feels that he is the one inside the nausea, which is over there, on the wall.

Roquentin is in the middle of a crisis, but he is unable to understand its cause. He considers that some change in his thoughts has affected the way he sees the world. This explanation, however, rings false to his experience. We may have thoughts about our seeing and touching, but they are part of our reflection on how we see or touch, and we would hardly confuse them with seeing, or touching itself. We hear, smell, taste, see and touch objects, which exist “over there”, independently of us. It is this direct feel of the external world that makes it hard for Roquentin to dismiss what the senses present to him, as a mere

projection of his mind.

The alternative explanation seems at first no less problematic. Is it possible for objects themselves suddenly change in ways we would find upsetting? To answer this question we should consider what is involved in the conception of an object. A physical object is something connected to other things in space and time, on the one hand, and to previous instances of that thing's own history, on the other. These connections are causal, and the idea of causality is related to, if not exhausted by, our sense of regularity. Our understanding of the causal activities of an object are, thus, closely related to our experience of how the object behaves regularly. Whatever grounds causal relations in the world, however, it cannot be our sense of how things regularly behave. Physical objects transcend our ways of thinking, talking or making predictions about them, and they can certainly betray our expectation about how they ought to function.

Still, it is not clear why such change in the objects could create anything more than a practical inconvenience. What can be so upsetting about the behaviour of objects? The answer is that the way objects present themselves to his senses make Roquentin understand what it means to exist.

IV

Existence is the most discrete of our concepts: thinking or stating of every single thing that surrounds that it exists is not a practice in which we normally engage. However, it is not possible to refer to anything in the world without existence being somehow involved in our sentence. When we do talk about existence, it is often by way of placing things under various categories, say that a page is white or belongs to the category of white objects, or that white is a quality of this page; but even when, as we read, we touch and look at the page, we are far from forming the thought that it exists. If we were asked what existence was, we could well reply that it was nothing extraordinary, just a notion that added itself to external objects without changing anything in what they are. The nausea felt by Roquentin has now changed all this. Existence lost its docile appearance and revealed itself as the very stuff of reality: everything is steeped in existence.

In our ordinary dealings with objects, existence hides itself. Accordingly, the realization of existence undermines the sense of identity and difference that makes up the plurality of things perceived. The diversity of objects is but a thin covering of the overwhelming presence of existence. Sitting on a park bench, Roquentin tries to calculate distances, and count trees and compare their heights: he tries to give back to things their individuality. The attempt, though, backfires, as the only thing he can ascertain is how superfluous it all is: "We were a heap of existents inconvenienced, embarrassed by ourselves, without hadn't the slightest reason for being there" (*N* 184; *OR* 152).

What makes everything superfluous is the lack of a justification for existing. An existent cannot be justified by another existent for two reasons. First, the other existent would itself need to be justified by another existent, hence leading our attempt for justification to an infinite regress. Second, justification is a normative notion, concerning not the fact that something is the case but the reason why that is; trying to justify an existent by reference to other existents would simply increase the list of what exists and could not on its own generate a reason for why it does.

We might perhaps wish to account for the existence of an object, say a newspaper page, by presenting it as a structured set of properties, of white colour, rectangular shape, of 30cm width and 40cm length and so on. However, "white", "rectangular", "centimetre" and so on do not exist: ⁴ none of our ideas or concepts or words belongs to the world of existents, and the attempt to reduce the latter to the former is doomed to failure. Colour, shape or size *on their own* do not exist; only an actual object, the rough page

of the newspaper, which smells of ink and smudges my fingers, does. Roquentin brings these thoughts together in a paragraph that will resonate through the rest of Sartrean work: “The essential thing is contingency. I mean that, by definition, existence is not necessity. To exist is simply to be there; what exists appears, lets itself be encountered, but you can never deduce it” (**N** 188; **OR** 154).

V

The belief in the contingency of existence is formed through an intuition that is locked in the present. The perception of motion and, along with it, the awareness of time seem to vanish. If it is hard to see how motion could disappear from view, it suffices to think that what we see is not an object called “motion” but things that change in space through time. Movement implies a point of transition, an intermedium between the before and the after, a gap in the plenitude of being. But no such gap is visible. The stirring of the leaves on a branch does not mark a passage from what was to be (the potential) to what is (the actual); it is the constant renewal of existents (**N** 190; **OR** 157).⁵

Time reigns unique in the diary of Roquentin. The very form of a personal journal reflects how lived experience is framed by intervals, discontinuous events and unfilled pauses. This fragmentary picture, however, is undermined from within by the very act of writing about it. To recount one’s life is to attempt to find order in place of contingency. In telling a story, one takes a point in time and turns it into a beginning, that is, something pregnant with possibilities towards the story’s end. Narration is always more than a keeping of records. We live our life forwards but we narrate it backwards, in the sense that our understanding of things past is guided by their conduciveness to things present (**N** 60–63; **OR** 48–50).

In Roquentin’s case the interrelations of the past to the present, and the projection of the latter to the future, have been short-circuited. Continuity in time has to be regained through a number of devices, none of which sounds appealing. On the one hand, there is the public past of the commemoration days, religious holidays, bronze statues and condescending looks of the bourgeois portraits, all hanging nicely in the Municipal Gallery. On the other hand, there is the private past explored in his projected treatise on Monsieur de Rollebon, a notorious marquis at the turn of the nineteenth century, whose adventurous life was full of political intrigues and the subject of tantalizing anecdotes. Having spent years collecting data, Roquentin will eventually abandon that project when he realizes that what attracted him to the marquis’ life was its adventures, and the problem with adventures is that they do not exist, or, rather, that they can exist only as narrated (**N** 61, 138–40; **OR** 49, 113–14). A moment in life could be an instant of adventure within a plot that weaves that moment to its (fascinating) future. However, when one is turning into a dark alley, or walking into a noisy pub, the future is not there. If there is such a thing as a “feeling of adventure”, it is not the sense of anything experienced, but the wish for having in the future a past worth talking about.

VI

The attempted separation of living from talking or reminiscing about living is another aspect of the sharp distinction between the present and past. Is it possible to resist such divisions in one’s experience? Roquentin will propose an answer that implies a particular understanding of artistic creation. His proposed solution is to introduce a different time from that of lived experience through the writing of a novel. The fictional hero will thus become the author of a fictional text, opening the door for modernism.

readings of the novel as a closed system whose end (the commitment of creating a novel) is realized by the novel itself, like a melody, is characterized by an internal necessity that composes its different parts into a harmonious whole. Listening to a jazz song, Roquentin feels ashamed of his being, as he is absorbed by the force by which each note follows the previous notes. The song is beyond the contingency and arbitrariness of his life, but it does not exist: "if I were to get up, if I were to snatch the record from the turn-table which is holding it and if I were to break it in two, I wouldn't reach it. It is beyond – ... I can't even hear it, I hear sounds, vibrations in the air which unveil it". The jazz song does not exist "since it has nothing superfluous: it is all the rest which is superfluous in relation to it. It is" (N 248; OR 206).

Roquentin now claims that all he ever wanted was to be. Exploring the jargon that separates existence from being, Roquentin aspires to wash his life from the unbearable "sin of existing" (N 251; OR 209) by being the creator of something that is beyond this time, abstract, necessary and indestructible. Roquentin's life is thus "saved", and along with it his understanding of time, by annulling the lived present for the sake of an aestheticized eternity.

We might think that the above approach to art represents Sartre's own understanding of his activity as an author. Such an interpretation would draw considerably on the assumption that the Roquentin who is planning a novel is the alter ego of his author.⁷ As Sartre brought Roquentin into existence, so the latter explicates on Sartre's behalf the meaning of his text. *Nausea* is thus read as concluding with the unambiguous moral that an artistic object, be it a melody or a novel, is a fortress against the tide of superfluity that characterizes human existence. Is it correct, though, to identify Roquentin with Sartre on these matters? There are at least two reasons for answering this question in the negative.

The first reason is quite general. It concerns Sartre's own view of the activity in which Roquentin appears to devote so much of his time, and which becomes the privileged medium for the creation of his artistic desires: keeping a diary. Reflecting on his work of that period, Sartre notes: "I was not interested in myself at all ... I had a horror of personal diaries, and I was thinking that human beings are not made for seeing themselves, but for fixing their look always in front of them" in the world (CDG 175, my trans.).

The second, and most important reason for dissociating Sartre from Roquentin is internal to the novel itself. The immense fascination with the jazz song is expressed from early on in the vocabulary of escape. Roquentin is absorbed in a melody that lives in "another time" as the notes fill the café from "so far away" (N 37–8; OR 28–9). While the citizens of the provincial town look for an excuse for their existence in the ritualized past, Roquentin aspires through art to transcend time altogether. Not unlike all the petty bourgeois criticized in the novel, Roquentin is seeking a justification in something outside "this time in which the world has fallen" (N 37; OR 28). The novel Roquentin desires to write would shine slim and hard "as steel", with events succeeding one another through a "rigorous necessity" that pushes forth a well-rounded, continuous, whole (N 252; OR 210). Whatever such a novel might be, it does not sound anything like a text of internally frustrated plot and discontinuous structure: that master drawing of contingency that Sartre created with *Nausea*.

Intentionality

I

In “Intentionality”, a short article written around 1934, Sartre puts forward the basic thesis of his philosophical outlook: all consciousness is consciousness of something.¹ This apparently innocuous claim will determine some crucial steps in Sartre’s argumentation: it informs his theory of the self; it motivates a new way of thinking about emotions; it guides his analysis of imagination; and it grounds his understanding of human existence. In the next four chapters we shall explore each of these issues in turn. But, first, we need to address something more basic: what exactly does that claim mean?

The claim that all consciousness is consciousness of something gives expression to the doctrine of intentionality, according to which all and only mental states are directed towards something: in thought, towards what is thought; in perception, to what is perceived; in desire, at what is desired. Intentionality is widely acknowledged as a central feature of our mental life. What is original with Sartre is not the endorsement of intentionality but his distinctive way of unpacking that doctrine. The distinctiveness of his approach comes out clearly in his analysis of perceptual experience. In perception the world is directly revealed to us. In looking at a tree, for instance, you do not look at the idea of a tree, or at a picture of a tree, or at some immaterial replica of a tree. You see, touch or climb on objects, not their images. You see a tree, to be sure, but you see it “just where it is: at the side of the road, in the midst of the dust, alone and writhing in the heat” (IHP 4).

The directness of our contact with reality does not entail some metaphysical fusion of consciousness with the world. The perceived object cannot enter inside consciousness because consciousness is not an object with an inside and an outside, but a movement of fleeing oneself towards the world (IHP 4). If, *impossible*, we were to enter “inside” a consciousness, we would be seized by a whirlwind and thrown outside, next to the tree, in the street, “because consciousness has no ‘inside’” (IHP 5). The consciousness of a tree is not some large thing that includes two smaller things, one called “consciousness” and the other “tree”; rather, it is an event whereby one thing is “presented to”, or “given to”, or “aimed at by” consciousness.²

Appealing to the ordinary perception of spatiotemporal objects is a good way of illustrating the Sartrean claim that *consciousness is necessarily consciousness of something that is other than consciousness itself* (see *TE* 16).³ This claim qualifies the general doctrine of intentionality in a subtle yet crucial way. Its point is to exclude a rival view of intentionality according to which consciousness is bound to things internal to the mind. We may distinguish here between two versions of that view. According to the first, a conscious phenomenon is a relation between a subject that perceives (thinks, desires or wills) and an intra-mental object;⁴ according to the second, conscious experience involves the direct apprehension, or “animation” of internal items – such as uninterpreted data, impressions or sensations – that might stand in for, or represent, external objects that can be thus only indirectly apprehended, if at all.⁵ Both versions seem to afford, in principle, a complete account of intentionality in the absence of any contact with the world outside the human mind. And that is something that Sartre finds philosophically – and, at times, almost personally – offensive (IHP 5). The whole point of Sartre

initial involvement with the notion of intentionality is to see how this notion can deliver us from the stifling atmosphere of subjectivism, and lead us back on to the open field of human engagement with the world.

Sartre thinks of consciousness as being necessarily directed at something other than peculiarly mental stuff. Understanding how this view of intentionality permeates Sartre's account of perceptual and affective phenomena is the aim of this chapter. In order to achieve this aim we need to introduce some vocabulary that will help us depict more accurately the structure of perceptual experience.

II

Our intentional relation to the world is an opening to the phenomena. The study of phenomena as they present themselves in our experience is the subject matter of phenomenology. What phenomenology purports to offer is an understanding of what appears to us, to the extent that, and in the exact manner in which, it does. To achieve this aim, phenomenological analysis switches attention from objects to the act of consciousness through which the objects are presented to us. Yet that switch does not remove objects from view. On the contrary, it helps to make all the more vivid the rich texture of reality, and the subtlety of conscious activities through which the manifold of our experience is synthesized into a meaningful whole.

Consider an ordinary case of perceiving a wooden box, like the one that lies at the top corner of my bookcase: what I can see from where I sit is two sides, each receding from view in a different direction, neither looking square, both occluding from view any of the other sides. What I perceive is not a brown trapezoid, but a square side of the brown box viewed from a specific angle. I am directly aware of a physical object with six sides, four of which are given to me as not visible. If I stand up and walk towards the bookcase I will see different aspects of the box, my visual intentions will be multiplied, and they will be joined by tactile, and even olfactory intentions if I raise my hands, grasp and open the box to let the scent of dead roses fill the study. During that time, what I perceive is not a disorderly sequence of trapezoidal surfaces and colours floating around in space, but a physical object: the self-same mahogany box. To the great variety of my experiences corresponds the unity of the object intended by my consciousness.⁶

Throughout this episode, the object of my perception was the same: the box. However, in some sense what I was seeing at one moment from the comfort of my chair was not the same as what I was seeing at another moment, when, standing up, I held the box in my hands. Different aspects of the object came into view, making the two experiences differ in their content. Let us consider more carefully what this difference consists in, starting with the notion of "aspect".

III

Talk of "aspect" is ambiguous; it can have what we might call "subjectivist" and "objectivist" interpretations. In the objectivist sense, an aspect belongs to the object-side of the perceptual relation. Thus, a perceptual intuition that aims at the facing aspects of the object is "filled", whereas an intuition that targets the currently non-visible aspects of the object is "empty". We may rephrase this by stating that in a filled intuition the aspect is that through which an object is presented to us (see e.g. *TE* 13–14). But this turn of phrase invites a subjectivist reading of "aspect" as something intermediary, through which the perception has to pass in order to reach the object. In a subjectivist sense, the aspect

something internal to consciousness, for example, a set of data with which consciousness creates the appearance of a three-dimensional object. The objectivist account sets the aspect as lying outside of an in that sense, as *transcendent* to, consciousness; the subjectivist understands “aspect” as being internal and, in that sense, *immanent* to, consciousness. Which of the two meanings of “aspect” is intended by Sartre?

In the works published during the 1930s, Sartre’s analysis seems to trade on the ambiguity of the notion of aspect. In my opinion, that is not so much a matter of theoretical indecisiveness on Sartre’s part as a lack of his considering the issue explicitly. A reason for such lack of detailed consideration is that Sartre employs the term as one of the translations of the German word *Abschattung*, a word that supposedly enjoyed a standard usage in the phenomenological tradition.⁷ The word *Abschattung* though, is itself subject to different interpretations, as testified by the fact that it has been variously rendered by Sartre – and his commentators – as *esquisse*, *profil*, *projection*, *facette* and *face* (see e.g. *TE* 13–14, 59–60; *Ion* 141–7; *IPPI* 8; *Iere* 18; cf. *BN* 5; *EN* 15). Each of these words offers an indication of what the term might mean, without, though, committing its referent to either side of the objective/subjective division.

The French word *esquisse* (meaning “sketch” or “outline”) is a common translation of *Abschattung* and is often taken to denote the part of the object perceived by an observer. However, a “sketch” cannot literally be part of something; it might present at most a rendering of that thing. And while the term “outline” might bring us closer to the side of objects, it can arise only as an abstraction from the object whose outline it is. The word “profile” can perhaps be taken to denote something found in the object itself, but we can equally talk about the profile of something by referring to the subjective impression that thing arises in us. A “projection” is amenable to a subjectivist reading (for which what we see is thought to be nothing but a mere projection of our images or ideas onto the world), and to an objectivist interpretation (according to which the object “sends out” – and thus “projects” – to us, parts of itself). Finally, the terms *facette* and *face* can point to what we “take in” by facing an object, as well as to the object itself in its alleged capacity of orientating itself toward the observer, so as to “face” her directly.⁸

It might be thought that lack of clear distinctions could be a virtue for a theory of perception that purports to overcome the traditional metaphysical divide between “the subjective” and “the objective”. However, that is not Sartre’s own agenda. For him, intentionality is significant because it denotes the connection between two items that are clearly distinct and irreducible to each other: consciousness, and what one is conscious *of*. It is this predilection for sharp and clean conceptual distinctions that cancels any mixture of perceptual consciousness (which is “clear and lucid”, “as a strong wind”) and the perceived world (marked by the “solidity” of things) (*IHP* 4–5; *TE* 9).⁹

I submit that the Sartrean view of consciousness lends weight to an objectivist interpretation of “aspect”, and kindred notions, as referring to integral parts of the object itself, rather than to some subjective “data”, or “sensations” that supposedly mediate our relation to things.¹⁰ That interpretation is supported by Sartre’s subsequent writings on how perception differs from other types of intentional activity (*IPPI* 8–10), and acquires an unambiguous expression in his major work on “phenomenological ontology”:

It is true that things give themselves in profile; that is, simply by appearances. And it is true that each appearance refers to other appearances [of that same object]. But each of them is already in itself a transcendent being, not a subjective material of impressions – a plenitude of being, not a lack – a presence, not an absence.

IV

Perception is a conscious act that intends its object always in a specific way: the object appears from a particular angle, or at a certain distance, showing itself in this or that particular manner. Although in the multitude of our perceptual experiences of some object, what is revealed to us in profiles is the self-same object, the particular way the object appears to us, at each moment, might differ according to the standpoint we occupy relative to that object.¹² The difference here can be identified as a difference in the *content* of the various experiences of the same object.

On the face of it, the term “content” points to an ordinary and indispensable dimension of our experience, and its employment should raise no philosophical eyebrows. However, the notion of “content” has been burdened with so much metaphysical baggage that in the opening lines of “Intentionality”, Sartre counts employing that notion as a trademark of bad philosophizing (IHP 4). Making sense of Sartre’s hostility to the notion of content will help substantially our understanding of his view of experience; it will also assist us in addressing crucial interpretative questions in the following chapters.¹³

Let us first distinguish between intentional and immanent content. “Intentional” is whatever pertains to the directedness of consciousness on its object. The intentional content of a conscious act is the object as intended by the particular act.¹⁴ When we specify what an experience is about we refer to its intentional “matter”. The intentional matter is what gives the act its grip on the object: it establishes reference for the act, and identifies the act as being about this object, seen or imagined under this aspect or thought under this conception. Because in intending an object one is conscious of it as something, the reference to the matter of the act tells us how the object is meant; it gives us, in other words, the “meaning” of the act, or the sense in which something is intended in our experience (as a flower vase, as a gift from my aunt, or as the only hand-painted object on my shelf, or as something made of fine china).¹⁵ To be sure, an act is not exhausted by its matter, given that the same matter can be intended in many different ways such as perceiving, thinking, judging, doubting, wishing or imagining, all of which give us the “quality” of the particular act. Note, finally, that quality and matter are not self-subsistent entities; each feeds on the other, and can only be separated through abstraction from lived experience. Consider now that the same object can be intended at different moments, but in the same way, by the same subject. Those different intentions, being directed from the same standpoint toward the same object, share the same intentional content. The intentional matter of each of those acts is the same, yet the experiences are numerically different. To understand this basic phenomenon we need to refer to what is not shared by acts that have the same intentional content. We must, in other words, look at what is immanent to each occurrence of the various conscious acts. “Immanent” is whatever lies, as it were, on the side of consciousness: whatever can be counted as part, moment, phase, character, or feature of the act. Any conscious act, such as thinking of a cube, is a real, subjective occurrence, that takes place in, and extends over, a period of time. Immanent content refers to the actual phases of conscious activity that make up a particular experience. Conscious acts intending the same object under the same aspect can have the same intentional matter but necessarily differ in their immanent content.

We may sum up the above distinctions by stating that whereas intentional content is what is intended by, presented to or meant by consciousness, immanent content is what is undergone by, or lived through in conscious experience. Drawing distinctions, however, is one thing; seeing how they can help us resolve

philosophical issues is another. And a major issue here is the structure of intentional activity. It could be argued that intentionality denotes the relation of consciousness to what it is about; and what consciousness is about is its content.¹⁶ Thus, the existence of content is a necessary condition of intentional activity, whereas the presence of an object is a welcome bonus.

This approach seems particularly well suited to phenomena of conscious activity directed toward what is not currently present. After all, it would be hard to deny that we may think of things that no longer exist (in memory), as well as of things that have not physically existed, or even could not physically exist (in imagination). One way to account for these phenomena is to keep separate the intentional object from the intentional content. We can thus dissociate the necessary relation between thought and its content from the contingent connection between a thought and its intended object. Intentionality requires that one is thinking something (that there is some content thought) whether or not that about which one is thinking actually exists.

Whatever the virtues of the above approach, it is not one Sartre would endorse at his first foray in the phenomenological maze. For Sartre, consciousness is a movement of fleeing oneself: to be conscious is to transcend oneself towards something. The very phenomenon of intentionality would be annulled if consciousness could not be directed upon anything. Given Sartre's interpretation of intentionality as transcendence, the idea of consciousness directing itself towards its content is absurd. But that is precisely what the notion of "content", as interpreted by Sartre at this stage, seems to require. For Sartre, the appeal to mental content plays straight into the hands of idealists. The suggestion that consciousness directed towards mental content would sound plausible only if the mind were a non-material substance including the pictures, ideas or replicas of material things:

What is a table, a rock, a house? A certain assemblage of "contents of consciousness," a class of such contents. O digestive philosophy! Yet nothing seemed more obvious: is not the table the content of my perception? Is not my perception the present state of my consciousness? Nutrition, assimilation ... of things to ideas, of ideas by ideas, of minds by minds ... assimilation, unification, identification. (IHP 4)

The idealist fixation with mental immanence finds its contrary in Sartre's philosophy of transcendence (IHP 5). To be conscious of the world is not some intra-mental affair. As he plainly puts it, "to perceive is to bump against a presence".¹⁷ The question remains, however, whether that philosophy can make sense of conscious phenomena where there seems to be nothing "out there" in the world towards which consciousness can be directed. Sartre's early approach is silent on this matter. In order to get a systematic answer, we shall need to explore Sartre's developed theory of imagination (see [Chapter 5](#)). In the remainder of this chapter, let us consider another important dimension of our experience of what is present.

V

The world as experienced is rarely neutral; things can be interesting or boring, provocative, frightening or simply charming. It is often claimed that none of these qualities characterizes things as they are; whatever significance a situation might have, it is something not encountered, but invented. However, that claim rings false to our experience. Sartre is unequivocal on this point: "it is things which abruptly unveil themselves to us as hateful, sympathetic, horrible, loveable" (IHP 5). This might appear

problematic as an explanation of what it is for something to have positive or negative significance. However, Sartre is not presently advancing a theory about the nature of values. His concern is with the accurate description of reality as it is revealed in human experience. Under normal circumstances, the occurrence of an emotionally significant event precedes, and thus accounts for, our emotions *vis-à-vis* that event. We do not first feel fear and then notice something fearful, as we do not first feel surprise and then perceive something unexpected. Our sentiments are attuned to changes in reality, because they are a kind of perceptual state of those aspects of reality relevant to our concerns. The overall point of this analysis is that emotions are not the blind denizens of a spiritual realm, but “ways of discovering the world” (IHP 5).

The Sartrean approach sets itself against a subjectivist analysis of affective phenomena. The subjectivist, in this context, is someone who takes feeling to be some “purely subjective and ineffable shiver”, enclosed within a subject whose affective experience is dissociated from the world of materiality and social interaction. Mechanical links between one’s feeling and one’s representation of the world are of course feasible, but they form at best only contingent associations that might lack any rhyme or reason (IPPI 67–8). Among the various kinds of subjectivism, Sartre singles out for consideration a theory that conceives of feeling as a direct apprehension of organic phenomena, whereby one becomes aware of changes in particular aspects, or in the overall state and posture of one’s body. The details of this theory and of the Sartrean objections to it, will occupy us in [Chapter 4](#), when we consider Sartre’s account of emotions. What is of direct relevance to the present discussion is that subjectivism severs consciousness from its object. Hence, the intentionality of feeling is ignored, and the emotional experience is isolated from its signification, producing the psychological counterpart of idealist metaphysics, that is “the solipsism of affectivity” (IPPI 68).

Feeling, no less than seeing, is a way in which consciousness aims at the world. Against the “*immanentist* prejudices of outdated psychology” (Sartre 1947: 63, emphasis added), Sartre affirms that feelings have special intentionalities; they are a way of transcending (IPPI 69). What is “special” about them is simply the fact that they cannot be reduced to, or substituted for, by other kinds of intentionality. Two errors are quite common on this point. The first is the intellectualist error of presenting feeling as a kind of propositional attitude – usually as a judgement on, or belief about, the affective object (IPPI 69). The second is to confuse the intentional structure of reflection on the feeling (how we think about the experience), with the intentionality involved in the feeling itself (how the world appears to us during the emotional episode.)¹⁸

Sartre’s analysis of emotions is one of his lasting contributions in the history of philosophy. However, his early approach to emotions as in many ways similar to sense perceptions leaves open at least two questions. The first concerns the relation between emotions and feelings: what is the relation between, say, seeing that someone’s behaviour is offensive, and actually feeling angry at the sight of him? Perception of a behaviour as offensive is not necessarily identical to being in a state of anger, and more needs to be said before we can interpret accurately the relation of emotion to perception. A second question concerns the relation between emotion and action. There is often a clear connection between the way one feels about someone and the way one behaves towards that person: it is not by pure coincidence that angry people might exchange blows instead of compliments. Yet it is not clear how emotions, as mere perceptions, can have the power to motivate our actions. The question of how emotion relates to behaviour is an intriguing one that would exercise Sartre for the best part of his philosophical career. At one point he argued for a thesis that sounds diametrically opposed to his initial view: “affectivity is [neither cognitive nor perceptual but] practical” (1960–85: 189). Giving both action and perception their dues is by no means an easy task in the phenomenology of emotion. As we shall see

in Chapter 4, Sartre will try to address this problem by drawing attention to the embodied nature of consciousness as a key to the correct understanding of our perception of, and stance towards, the world.

VI

The sharp distinction between consciousness and the world is the source of Sartre's original take on intentionality, as well as the source of some of the problems we have mentioned. I think that the problems are indicative of an oscillation in Sartre's philosophical attitudes in the period leading up to his first article on intentionality.

On the one hand, he treats reality as an object of contemplative, almost aesthetic, curiosity, open to the fascinated gaze of a young philosopher who wishes nothing less than to survey the meaning of the totality of facts (*OR* 111; *CDG* 487). By his own lights, this approach was conducive to a "retreat *vis à vis* the objects of the world: I was contemplating them. I was nearby them. They were not extending to me, neither I to them" (quoted in Contat 1996: 461).

On the other hand, his sound refusal to treat consciousness as a substance, and the concomitant view that to be conscious is to fly out into the world, make Sartre a staunch critic of the idealist preoccupation with the empty cosiness of the human mind, as a privileged focus of philosophical understanding. The interpretation of intentionality as transcendence entails that everything on which consciousness is directed is outside consciousness: "everything, even ourselves. It is not in some hiding-place that we discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men" (*IHP* 5). Whether this view is able to make sense of what it is to be oneself will be the topic of the next chapter.

The ego

I

Philosophical tradition has it that where there is thinking, there is an “I” that thinks. This “I” is sometimes seen as an entity dwelling within the mind, an immaterial substance whose activity constitutes our conscious life. Some other times, the “I” is considered as a formal principle that synthesizes disparate perceptions or ideas into complete thoughts. Either way, the I is at the heart of consciousness, sustaining the creation, reception and manipulation of mental content: without an I, conscious activity seems to collapse. Sartre thinks that tradition has it wrong: the I could not be residing inside consciousness since consciousness has no inside. If the I exists, it can only exist “outside, *in the world*” (TE 1; LTE 13).

The Latin transliteration of the first personal pronoun in Greek is “*ego*”, and that is the favourite way for many philosophers to refer to important aspects of our self, both as the initiator of thoughts, volitions or actions – what I do – as well as the seat of sensations, feelings or passions – what occurs in me. Sartre’s critique applies to both sides of the ego, with special emphasis on the ego as the alleged leader of our conscious life. For Sartre, the ego is not the subject of, but an object for consciousness and depends on the latter for its existence.

In reversing the traditional priorities between consciousness and the ego, Sartre employs some important distinctions between different modes of consciousness. Pre-reflective consciousness is the ordinary consciousness of objects in the world; reflective consciousness is the consciousness of being conscious of something. Pre-reflective consciousness is a *positional* consciousness of a certain object, in the sense that consciousness posits, sets before itself, the object as a target of its intentional activity. However, when one is positionally conscious of a particular object, one is *non-positionally* conscious of being conscious of that object. Pre-reflective consciousness is thus non-positionally aware of itself being directed towards its objects. Let me explicate the meaning of the above terms, with the hope of averting some popular misunderstandings of the relevant distinctions.

II

In ordinary circumstances, when I pass by a garden looking at a rose, I am positionally conscious of the flower, without necessarily thinking to myself, “I am now looking at a flower”. Indeed, while my sight is absorbed by the colour of the roses or the shape of the garden, I am not conscious of any “I” or “me” doing anything. I am, of course, aware of seeing the rose; if you ask me what I was doing I will truthfully answer that I was seeing a flower. And if, at a later point, I start thinking about the fact that I was seeing that object, then my attention is directed not at the rose, but on my act of seeing, that is now posited as the explicit object of my reflection. In reflection the act of seeing becomes the positional object of my thought, while at the pre-reflective level, the consciousness is non-positionally aware of its acts while being absorbed by the external focus of its attention.

According to the Sartrean account of consciousness, while I am perceiving an object I am conscious of perceiving it, without having to interrupt my activities so as to think explicitly about (and, in that sense

- [Foreign Body pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- [download online The Land of Painted Caves \(Earth's Children, Book 6\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [read online The Knife pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous book](#)
- [Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries book](#)

- <http://www.gateaerospaceforum.com/?library/A-Christmas-Carol--The-Graphic-Novel.pdf>
- <http://www.satilik-kopek.com/library/The-Land-of-Painted-Caves--Earth-s-Children--Book-6-.pdf>
- <http://fitnessfatale.com/freebooks/Tales-of-the-Sacred-and-the-Supernatural.pdf>
- <http://hasanetmekci.com/ebooks/Hacker--Hoaxer--Whistleblower--Spy--The-Many-Faces-of-Anonymous.pdf>
- <http://www.uverp.it/library/Analects--With-Selections-from-Traditional-Commentaries.pdf>