

CHAPTER 1

The Role of Being in Sartre's Model of Transcendence-as-Intentionality

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre develops Husserl's notion of intentionality into what can be read as an 'existentialist phenomenology'.¹ The Sartrean commitment lies in using this phenomenological method to account for our concrete, and ultimately politicized, mode of being in the world. In this sense, his reading of Husserl, in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, formulates the position that the existence of consciousness is absolute, while at the same time, very much immersed in the world of which it is a reflection. To this end, Sartre works to distance his exposition from Husserl's *epoché*, claiming that it is both unfounded by, and unnecessary for the deployment of Husserl's phenomenological method. More importantly, he finds the *epoché* to be that moment of Husserl's corpus in which he undermines what is of most value in his claim concerning the structure of intentionality.²

Hence, *The Transcendence of the Ego* works to establish that the ego is an object in the world, and that it is "for consciousness" much like everything else that makes an appearance. This replaces the Husserlian claim that the ego remains as that transcendental pole of consciousness, after the objectivity of the world "falls away" through the phenomenological reduction. This is what Husserl uses to establish the absolute existence of consciousness. Sartre recognizes that the existence of consciousness is absolute in his own phenomenological account. Nevertheless, he is wary of legitimizing this absolute existence by means of the *epoché*, and develops alternative mechanisms through which to validate the claim that consciousness alone can appear to itself. It can be argued that Sartre's

claim is an overreading of the implications of Husserl's *epoché* insofar as it regards the bracketing of the existence of an external world as not sufficiently recognizing the effects of a transphenomenal being.³ *The Transcendence of the Ego* and *Being and Nothingness* both rest on the premise that the reduction fails to explain why the world experienced is precisely *this* world, and not otherwise. To be sure, this is not a necessarily justified critique of a method that only seeks to suspend all judgments concerning the existence of the external world (or to regard such judgments as hypothetical) for the sake of establishing the intentional structure of consciousness. Nonetheless, the shape of Sartre's existential phenomenology is very much indebted to this way of understanding Husserl.⁴ For this reason, the work in this chapter, and in those that follow, assumes a certain legitimacy to Sartre's appropriation of Husserl, but only for the sake of appreciating those Sartrean positions on the freedom and transcendence of consciousness.

For better or for worse, it is clear that Sartre's renunciation of the phenomenological reduction comes from a thorough commitment to questions of politics and ethics. With good reason, his earlier work in *Being and Nothingness* is read as the most anarchical and individualist moment in his career.⁵ At the same time, the "realist" nature of the phenomenology of *Being and Nothingness* clearly signals Sartre's concerns for the sense in which humans suffer, and the inevitable root of that suffering resting *in* the world.⁶ In *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre explains, "Unfortunately, as long as the I remains a structure of absolute consciousness, one will still be able to reproach phenomenology for being an escapist doctrine, for again, pulling a part of man out of the world and in that way, turning our attention from real problems."⁷ *The Transcendence of the Ego* undeniably provides the groundwork on which Sartre established the lengthier account of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness*. Hence, by the time of the publication of this later text (in 1945), it was already the case that Sartre's motivation was based in those social-political structures out of which suffering in the world acquired signification.

To this end, *Being and Nothingness* presents an account of being, which would explain the patterns of concrete existence. The work's ontology explains the sense in which consciousness is radically empty of being (possessing an "ontological freedom"⁸), alongside its encountering a resisting "reality" from the world. The notion of facticity is used to capture this resistance, and grounds those aspects of our experience that show up as though they are "given" to us, immutable and "to be dealt" with. As it is

employed by Sartre, facticity does not undermine the ontological freedom of consciousness, since it is undeniably the case that consciousness is structurally apart from being (in-itself being). In the words of David Detmer, consciousness “. . . can separate itself from all that is external to it, and from whatever might attempt to ensnare or enslave it, and in so doing, disentangle itself from the chain of causal determinacy.”⁹ So even though facticity is a structure of experience that pertains to certain “brute givens,” it is still the case that experience is also structured as an intentionality.¹⁰ Consciousness is always a consciousness of something (other than itself), which is to say that consciousness is exhausted by its relationality to the object of its experience. But this also means that consciousness is always *not* the object of its experience. In a general sense, intentionality implies that consciousness is radically empty of all (inert, or in-itself) being. It is in this sense that Detmer describes consciousness as “disentangled from the chain of cause determination.” There are certain patterns of existing that consciousness faces, but precisely because such patterns are related to across intentionality, consciousness “faces” them, and is already *not* what it would have been under their determinative influence.

The work of this chapter traces the implications of Sartre’s conception of facticity, and argues that his account prioritizes the transcendence of consciousness.¹¹ In my analysis, I deploy Sartre’s conception of intentionality interchangeably with his understanding of transcendence. This is insofar as intentionality, on Sartre’s account, necessarily positions consciousness in a relation to some object that is precisely not-consciousness. In this regard, “Sartre wants consciousness to [be able to] reach an object that is truly outside of it.”¹² The object must be transcendent to consciousness, and the very relation to that object presupposes a self-surpassing on the part of consciousness. Hence, my exposition reads, in the structure of intentionality, an implied escape (or surpassing). To the extent that intentionality is sustained throughout the effects of facticity, so too do I determine the transcendence of consciousness to be sustained. In other words, I argue that the Sartrean consciousness of *Being and Nothingness* is a complete escape from being, despite the factual component of experience. I recognize that Sartre’s later work (around the period marked by the *Critique of Dialectical Reasoning*) emphasizes certain forms of (real) social and political oppression, and such emphasis undermines the plausibility that consciousness is a radical transcendence of being. However, I hold that the narrative of absolute transcendence, established in *Being and Nothingness*, is carried over in these more socioeconomic accounts of

experience, in which Sartre recognizes that freedom can be compromised by social, economic, and political factors. As such, there is a prioritizing of the value of freedom in these later expositions, which, for this reason, positions them in a continuity with the work of *Being and Nothingness*.

I. The Implications of the Intentional Structure of Consciousness

In his essay on the theory of intentionality, Sartre confirms his appreciation of Husserl's phenomenology. He identifies the method as one that would allow us to move away from the "digestive philosophies" of idealism and realism, precisely because it recognizes the world as both "external to consciousness," but also as relative to consciousness insofar as the latter is inevitably immersed in the world.¹³ "Consciousness and world are given in one stroke,"¹⁴ which, for Sartre, means that "everything is finally on the outside, everything, including consciousness itself." In this regard, the Husserlian account of intentionality positions consciousness as a radically empty field of spontaneity (and not as some container of ideal objects that point to their external correlates). At the same time, "world" is that which is transcendent to consciousness, making it necessary for consciousness to go "beyond itself" in order to relate to "world." In this reading of Husserl, Sartre determines that without "world" remaining transcendent, consciousness is no longer the field of radical spontaneity on which Husserl builds his phenomenological method.

To be sure, Husserl adopts a form of idealism by 1913, from which Sartre distances himself in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Though it is not an explicit treatise on transcendence, this 1937 text sets up the groundwork for Sartre's formal model of transcendence-as-intentionality.¹⁵ In large part, the essay lays out a critique of Husserl's phenomenological method as an idealism that compromises the truth of the theory of intentionality, which is that all consciousness is "consciousness of" that which is other than consciousness.¹⁶ As a corrective, Sartre develops the idea of the ego as a transcendent object *for* consciousness, and not a transcendental (and unifying) pole *of* conscious experience. This view is mirrored in his essay on intentionality, where he reinforces the position that consciousness is but a reflection of objects of experiences. He agrees with Husserl's claim that both "consciousness" and "world" are equally fundamental, separate in abstraction only. However, he also determines that, included in this conception of intentionality, is "this necessity for consciousness to exist as

consciousness of something other than itself.”¹⁷ In this regard, experience is always already the experience of a consciousness that has transcended those objects of experience. As a movement of intentionality, consciousness is “out there,” *in* the phenomenon. “[It] is the nature of consciousness to intend objects, that is, to point away from itself and out toward the things with which it is concerned.”¹⁸

It is on this foundation that Sartre formulates his phenomenological ontology of experience. The being of consciousness is radically otherwise than the being of the objects of experience. Consciousness is purely an activity of relating to things, and unlike “things,” has no inside (consciousness is nonsubstantial). The ontology of *Being and Nothingness* shows that, though an experience of objects presupposes an inevitable intentional (surpassing) movement of consciousness, the actual being of those phenomena does *not* fall away at the level of concrete experience. As such, this being would have phenomenological implications that ought to be taken into account. Hence, Sartre’s ontology is meant to ground a phenomenological analysis of experience in a field of “in-itself” being. To be sure, in-itself being does not become part of that experience. Sartre recognizes that by the time we make the claim that consciousness is having an experience, we are already at the level of “world,” and thus no longer at the level of being in-itself. To this end, David Detmer’s question is a pertinent one: “How can a book [like *Being and Nothingness*] that takes a phenomenological approach deal with ontology, the study of being? After all, phenomenology is concerned with phenomena—that is, with what appears to consciousness—and precisely not (at least in its more orthodox versions) with what really exists.”¹⁹ Nonetheless, Sartre proposes the ontological question insofar he recognizes being in-itself as that (contingent) foundation on which consciousness (and “world”) upsurges into existence.²⁰ This is the most notably the reason for Sartre’s rejection of the phenomenological reduction. He holds that it renders phenomenology unable to account for the effects of the “in-itself” or transphenomenal being that grounds intentional experience.

Husserl’s Position, According to Sartre

Husserl claims that, unlike what we find in Kant, the principle that lies behind any series of appearances of an object is shaped by what that object actually is. That is to say, the meaning (or the truth) of the object is not distinct from the way that object appears to consciousness. In this sense, epistemological as well as ontological questions are addressed in terms of

the object *as it is given over* to consciousness. However, in starting with the appearance of objects (with the phenomena), one is ultimately led to the question of that *to which* the phenomena appears. In other words, an appearance necessarily presupposes something (or someone) that receives the appearance. For this reason, Husserl's (and by extension, Sartre's) phenomenology is an elucidation of those principles of consciousness that shape the phenomenon of the world.

For Husserl, these principles of consciousness represent that point of absolute certainty, from which systems of knowledge must begin. Put differently, it is from the intentionality of consciousness that the sciences receive their metaphysical grounding. Husserl establishes this in what he refers to as a leaving behind of the natural attitude. As a phenomenologist, one brackets all assumptions concerning the values one ascribes to an actually-existing external reality, and in so doing, no longer takes for granted the independently objective existence of objects of experience. Subsequent to this phenomenological reduction, consciousness remains as that (alone) which possesses absolute existence. In the words of Aron Gurwitsch, "What remains after the phenomenological reduction has been affected is . . . the field of noeses with their noematic correlates."²¹

Despite his renunciation of Husserl's exercise of bracketing, Sartre also conceptualizes the existence of consciousness as the absolute starting point from which phenomenology (and the sciences) attains its certitude. As phenomena, objects in the world depend, for their appearing,²² on the absolute existence of consciousness. It is *for* consciousness that they appear.²³ On the other hand, consciousness is the only being that can appear to itself, and in this sense, the only being whose existence is self-grounded. Michael Sukale writes, "[something] is a relative existent when it is an object *for* something. The *world* for example is a relative existent because it is an object for consciousness. Consciousness however is not relative because it is not *for* anything. . . ."²⁴ For this reason, Sartre identifies consciousness as the phenomenon whose existence is absolute. Its existence is independent of its appearing to anything (even to itself).²⁵

"Indeed," Sartre tells us, "the existence of consciousness is an absolute existence because consciousness is consciousness of itself."²⁶ In other words, the necessity with which all consciousness is simultaneously self-consciousness, is evidence for its absolute existence. Consciousness is a "special phenomenon," since there is always self-consciousness simultaneous to consciousness of a transcendent phenomenon. To recall, implied in the structure of intentionality is that appearances for consciousness are transcendent; they are "other than" or "not" the consciousness for

which they make an appearance. This means that consciousness cannot be, for itself, its own phenomenon, insofar as it would have already surpassed that appearance. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which a kind of “self-consciousness” necessarily accompanies every experience, since, for Sartre, there is no consciousness that is not also *self-consciousness*.

It is important to understand that this does not compromise the intentional structure of consciousness, the implication of which is that appearances for consciousness must be transcendent to consciousness. An account of an everyday experience might be of use here. In our present experience, certain objects appear to us (computer screens, keyboards, the windows to our left, and so on). Sartre tells us (in both *The Transcendence of the Ego* and *Being and Nothingness*) that I am conscious of these objects only because I am conscious of myself as being conscious of them. Put differently, I have an awareness of myself *in the form of* an awareness of these objects that comprise my present experience. This is not to say that I appear to myself the way an object of experience appears to me. In other words, “consciousness is not for itself its own object.”²⁷ All this means is that I must necessarily be self-conscious in the mode of “myself qua having this experience” in order for the experience to even be possible. Hence, consciousness is aware of itself through its awareness of the objects of experience, establishing that self-consciousness is a product of there being consciousness of an object. Phyllis Kenevan affirms that this is essential to a movement of intentionality: “This condition expresses the structure of consciousness as *intentional*. [Consciousness] posits an object other than itself. It is also, as consciousness, *self-consciousness*. [This] self-consciousness is always a *non-positional* consciousness; that is, it cannot posit itself as object.”²⁸ It is in this sense that consciousness is necessarily self-consciousness at the same time its being is intentional through and through. It is as “a prereflective (or nonpositional) taste” that I am aware of myself while objects of experience appear for me.²⁹

*Sartre’s Critique of Husserl*³⁰

Sartre’s critique of Husserl is founded on this understanding of the structure of consciousness. As absolute, the being of consciousness cannot depend on that which is outside of consciousness. No other phenomenon has this ability to appear to itself, and subsequently legitimize its being on its own. For Sartre, a transcendental pole behind experience places this in jeopardy. I discuss this in more detail shortly, in what I name Sartre’s “detrimental” critique of Husserl. Appearing to itself in this way,

consciousness depends on nothing outside of itself for its “being there.” Phyllis Sutton summarizes Sartre’s quarrel with Husserl as follows, establishing what I call Sartre’s “gratuitous” critique of the *epoché*. “[Sartre] denies Husserl’s claim that the transcendental ego, qua subject of consciousness, is presented to intuition. [Second], Sartre’s strategy against Husserl . . . is to claim that the transcendental ego is unnecessary for its traditional function of unifying consciousness.”³¹ For Husserl, a pure ego remains standing after employing the phenomenological reduction, which he then takes to mean that it constitutes the being of consciousness. Was this the case, experience would then have the equivalent of “object” and “subject” poles. “To the strictly phenomenological observation [or reduction] the intentional act appears thus as a ray directed toward the object and issuing from a *center or a source of radiancy* [emphasis added].”³² However, insofar as this transcendental pole does not make an appearance (either explicitly or implicitly), Sartre finds it unverifiable from the vantage point of the very phenomenological method to which Husserl’s analysis subscribes. Furthermore, he finds it superfluous insofar as experience is given as unified and belonging to consciousness without positioning a pure ego “behind” conscious acts. As a consequence, much of Sartre’s phenomenological ontology rests on his naming of this “polarized” (or egocentric) conception of experience as unnecessary for the phenomenologist’s method of inquiry.³³

Sartre describes the self-consciousness accompanying all experience as nonpositional.³⁴ Hence, despite the fact that such self-consciousness will not necessarily amount to self-knowing, it must always be the case that consciousness appears to itself. Without this (appearing to itself), the very relation of intentionality becomes compromised. “It is . . . part and parcel of the intentionality of consciousness that it be consciousness of an object other than itself. Intentionality is a *relation* to an object, and so it must be *between* something and something else. In order for consciousness to be consciousness of an object other than itself there must be some sort of awareness of self in opposition to awareness of the object.”³⁵ Sartre locates such awareness of self at the nonpositional level.

Hence, nonpositional self-consciousness preserves the structure of intentionality insofar as it is a prerequisite for consciousness’s transcending movement beyond itself. It is also supportive of the claim that consciousness exists absolutely, depending on nothing outside of itself for its being (as an appearing). In other words, consciousness is *both* nonpositional self-aware *and* conscious of that which is “by nature outside of [consciousness].”³⁶ Roland Breuer’s description is quite apt in this regard.

“The lung is not intentionally involved with the air,” but an act of perception rests on this intentional relation to that which is perceived. I may not possess knowledge of “myself as perceiving an object,” in the sense that I can very well be oblivious to my engagement with the object. Nevertheless, “the act of perception is . . . conscious of itself.”³⁷

Sartre uses this distinction between positional and nonpositional consciousness to then establish that to which I eluded earlier on, and what I call his “detrimental” critique of the transcendental ego. The model of transcendence that he develops in *Being and Nothingness* rests on this critical reading of the transcendental ego, as well as the account of intentionality from which Sartre launches his critique.³⁸ He demonstrates that, in positing the ego as an aspect of the transcendental nature of consciousness, or as belonging to the conditions for the possibility of experience, it can no longer be said consciousness possesses an absolute existence. In other words, Husserl’s transcendental ego destroys both the intentional and absolute features of consciousness. “[However] formal, however abstract one may suppose it to be, the *I*, with its personality, would be a sort of center of opacity, [and] if one introduces this opacity . . . consciousness is no longer a spontaneity.”³⁹ Said differently, an ego that stands behind acts of consciousness is ultimately outside of the scope of experience. It is not an appearance *for* consciousness, precisely because it represents the conditions which make possible the appearance of objects in general. This would imply that there exists an aspect of conscious life of which there is no immediate self-awareness. Consciousness is no longer self-consciousness through and through, which means that it cannot be the absolute existence from which phenomenology must start. Hence, for Sartre, the transcendental ego introduces into consciousness a type of existence that is broken off from appearing to consciousness.⁴⁰

Sartre’s critique of the phenomenological reduction is heavily shaped by his commitment to this idea of an absolute consciousness that is strictly a movement of intentionality. He understands, in the theory of intentionality, the determination that all consciousness is consciousness of an object that is not-consciousness, which establishes that “consciousness” and “world” are separate in abstraction only. A world of objects is no longer separated off from consciousness, since the latter is exhaustively an (intentional and self-aware) engagement with that world. If the ego is not an appearance (dependent on the absolute existence of consciousness), but is, instead, a structure of consciousness, existing independently of its appearing, “we would then [again] be in the presence of a monad.”⁴¹ There would be introduced into consciousness an aspect that is not implicated

in the world via intentionality, hence potentially re-creating the problem of how two distinct beings are able to relate. So while the theory of intentionality implicates consciousness in the world wholly and completely, the ego, as transcendental, cuts it off into a private and inaccessible monad.⁴²

Sartre's Position: Consciousness is an Impersonal Field of Spontaneity

Sartre takes the ego “out” of consciousness, and places it on the side of objects of experience, as an object *for* consciousness. Not only does this position place consciousness back into the world, as completely a reflection of “world,” but it is also one that is, according to Sartre, more phenomenologically sound than Husserl’s egological position. Sartre presents evidence to show that, at the most immediate level of experience (the prereflective level), there is no ego that either inhabits or accompanies acts of consciousness. Put otherwise, it is only through a subsequent *reflective* act that we “discover” our ego as the “subject” of our intentional experience.⁴³ However, this is only because a reflective act of consciousness can spontaneously *create, for itself*, an ego on which to reflect. “The consciousness which says *I Think* is precisely not the consciousness which thinks.”⁴⁴ Hence, every time we apprehend an ego (*our* ego), it is already “not us,” or not of consciousness.

One of phenomenology’s founding premises—that we ought not to affirm more (or less) than concrete experience would allow—grounds Sartre’s argument for the transcendent nature of the ego. “[The] *I* of the *I Think* is an object grasped with neither apodictic nor adequate evidence,” he tells us. “The evidence is not apodictic, since by saying *I* we affirm far more than we know. It is not adequate, for the *I* is presented as an opaque reality whose content would have to be unfolded.”⁴⁵ At the most concrete level, there is no ‘I.’ This does not mean that Husserl’s ego does not exist; it only means that it is a transcendent object for reflective consciousness, and not a transcendental structure of prereflective consciousness. To be sure, the ego differs from all other objects of experience, insofar as it is apprehended as the *source of origin* of conscious acts. In other words, consciousness creates the ego as though *it* were created *by* the ego. But insofar as the ego is necessarily transcendent (a necessity that “saves” the intentional and absolute structure of consciousness), Sartre points out that it is but a “pseudo-spontaneity.” “The ego is a *virtual* [emphasis mine] locus of unity, and consciousness constitutes it in a *direction contrary to* that actually taken by the production.”⁴⁶ The personal aspect of con-

sciousness (that aspect apprehended when we take on a reflective attitude toward ourselves) is subsequent to a more prior *impersonal* consciousness—impersonal precisely because *all* objects of experience, including the object “representative” of the “self,” lies outside.⁴⁷

From this analysis, one begins to see the radical sense in which Sartre determines consciousness to be spontaneous. More importantly, according to Sartre, Husserl’s theory of intentionality *requires* that consciousness be spontaneous in this radical sense. Sartre’s portrayal of the freedom of consciousness is not only nonegological, but it presupposes that consciousness is *never* identical with itself. The formal model of transcendence that is developed in *Being and Nothingness* is founded on this noncoincidence. The ego is not constitutive of the structure of consciousness, precisely because this structure is exhaustively, “an absolute escape from.” Though consciousness spontaneously constructs the ego, as a structure that might “hold it in place,” it is that very spontaneity which ultimately threatens the ego’s existence, from all sides.⁴⁸ “[Man] has the impression of ceaselessly escaping from himself, of overflowing himself, of being surprised by riches which are always unexpected.”⁴⁹

II. The Role of Being in Sartre’s Theory of Consciousness

Thus far, I have presented what Sartre identifies to be the consequences of Husserl’s theory of intentionality, the most specific of which is Sartre’s nonegological (or impersonal) conception of consciousness. At this stage in my analysis, I determine the ways in which this account (and critique) of Husserl determines what *Being and Nothingness* develops as the relationship between consciousness and being. For Sartre, consciousness “is” only as a reflection of all that is (all of being). In its reflecting of being, there has already been an ordering or arrangement of being such that, through consciousness, there is a reflection of “world.”⁵⁰ An egological account destroys the lucidity required for this process of reflection, which is why the ego must be, for Sartre, on the “outside.” His ontological framework functions to support his understanding of these notions of transcendence and intentionality.⁵¹

To be sure, a predifferentiated being (what is “not-yet-world”) is never a phenomenon for consciousness, and in this regard, being is *transphenomenal*. The idea of a transphenomenal being plays a decisive role in the realism of Sartre’s project, insofar as the world, though posited by

consciousness, also exists independently of consciousness. In other words, objects are truly transcendent to consciousness insofar as they rest on the foundation of a transphenomenal being. To be sure, the qualities of these objects ultimately refer to the active constituting of consciousness. Said otherwise, the very possibility of there being “objects” with meanings and interconnections is a consequence of consciousness-as-intentionality, and not a consequence of being itself.⁵² But transphenomenal being does account for the sense in which these objects are given over as independent of consciousness.

I am interested in tracing the implications of this “givenness” of the world for Sartre’s conception of facticity (or, more precisely, for his conception of the relationship between facticity and transcendence). I argue that, despite Sartre’s somewhat inconsistent rendition of its implications, facticity does not undermine the formal (or structural) transcendence of consciousness. This is primarily because the “brute” (or factual) aspects of experience will always show up as already meaningful for consciousness, which is to say that its formal spontaneity persists, uncompromised. In this regard, my work is in conversation with the analyses of scholars like Thomas Anderson and Thomas Martin, who both grapple with what might have been Sartre’s position on the implications of consciousness’s facticity. Martin writes of two “distinct” readings of Sartrean facticity, one of which understands “human reality” as “simply pure, unconditioned freedom as transcendence.”⁵³ He identifies a second possible reading that would understand “human reality as transcendence *and* facticity, or, more precisely, that freedom is always situated such that transcendence and facticity are inseparable . . .”⁵⁴ Although Thomas Anderson also recognizes the unitary “facticity-transcendence” dyad, his interpretation of this “inseparability” means that, for Sartre, “[no] matter what its facticity or situation, freedom always nihilates, denies, detaches itself from it by intending nonexistent ends.”⁵⁵ In other words, on Anderson’s account, Martin’s first reading of Sartre very much collapses into the second (and what, according to Martin, is an alternative) reading. According to Martin, if transcendence and facticity come hand-in-hand, it is also the case that facticity “limits” the workings of freedom, even though this limitation is not a determination.⁵⁶ From Anderson’s reading, this is ultimately evidence for an understanding of Sartrean freedom as “absolute and without limit,” since it is always the case that those limiting obstacles/resistances acquire their “coefficients of adversity” from the transcendence of consciousness.⁵⁷

Though these distinctions are useful for a reading of Sartre, their significance does not quite pertain to my juxtaposing Sartre’s work along-

side Levinas's. This will become clear as my claims are further developed. However, suffice it to say that I am in agreement with Anderson's position that a Sartrean phenomenological analysis illustrates a total freedom of consciousness. Nevertheless, I additionally argue that the concrete descriptions employed are always in tension with the formal structures (of radical spontaneity) that Sartre intends them to illustrate. This is not to say (along with Detmer) that *Being and Nothingness* gives an absolute freedom in an ontological sense and a more limited freedom in the practical sense. My reading of Sartre alongside Levinas will reveal that, even for the more practical account of freedom, Sartre's formal structures would have it that freedom is always more fundamental, and exhaustively accounts for "human reality." Hence, any and all "limitation" that one identifies at this practical level will ultimately support the premise of "ontologically absolute freedom." My work argues that, to the extent that they resonate with the work found in Levinas, Sartre's concrete descriptions potentially reveal entirely alternative formal structures.

In his essay on the history of existentialism, Jean Wahl explains that Sartre's phenomenology borrows heavily from Heidegger. Like Heidegger, "Sartre has 'the ontological concern,' the need to study the idea of Being . . ." ⁵⁸ From his essay on the imagination, we already see Sartre's endeavors to "fix" phenomenology's failure to address this idea of being. "Now phenomenological descriptions [done upon performing the reduction] can discover, for instance, that the very structure of transcendental consciousness implies that consciousness is constitutive of a world. But it is evident that they will not teach us that consciousness must be constitutive of such a world that is exactly the one where we are, with its earth, its animals, its men and the story of these men. We are here in the presence of a primary and irreducible fact which presents itself as a contingent and irrational specification of the noematic essence of the world." ⁵⁹ As has already been shown, Sartre's position is critical of the phenomenological reduction insofar as it is gratuitous and detrimental to the phenomenological method. Now, we also see that, for Sartre, Husserl's bracketing leaves unaccounted for the givenness or resistance that consciousness encounters in its (free) constituting activity. As such, the reduction fails to give an account of the precise relation between existence (or rather, that mode of existence of consciousness) and the Being that "lies behind" existence.

Husserl's reduction does make clear that the meaning of phenomena that constitute our experience is to be found in their manner of being intended by consciousness. So, for instance, the meaning of a rose would

depend on that act of consciousness, of which it is a noematic correlate. If one apprehends the rose as pleasing, its meaning is “rose as pleasing.” Conversely, it could mean “rose to be avoided,” were one *not* to apprehend it as pleasing (in the case of some adverse allergy to rose pollen, for example). The reduction establishes the absolute existence of consciousness, by showing that the phenomenon of the world depends, for its being, on a transcendental constituting field that is itself independent of the being of the world. However, in *The Psychology of Imagination*, Sartre tells us that this exercise leaves out the fact that “the matter” of these noema cannot be accounted for solely in the acts of consciousness. To put this differently, there is a noetic difference between an imagined-rose and a perceived-rose. The latter appears as an object existing “out there” in the world, while the former does not. According to Sartre, it is impossible for consciousness to “cause” an imagined-rose to appear as a perceived-rose, precisely because the *matter* of these two *noemas* is different. In this sense, the phenomenological reduction does not “give Being its due.”⁶⁰ In Thomas Busch’s discussion of the influence of the phenomenological reduction on Sartre’s novel, *Nausea*, he points out that Husserl himself makes similar concessions. “[In] his discussion of the ‘nullifying of the world,’ [Husserl] said with regard to actual experience patterns, ‘we cannot extract such patterns purely from the essence of perception in general.’”⁶¹ Hence, it seems as though Husserl recognized what Sartre points out as a shortcoming of the reduction, which might indicate that he understood his objectives as simply varying from Sartre’s. Nonetheless, insofar as Sartre *does* address it, he finds it necessary to augment the “noematic essence of the world” (completely derived from acts of consciousness) with an account of the underlying “matter” (which *cannot* be derived from acts of consciousness) on which these noema rest.

Transphenomenal Being

In this vein, his ontology presents two categories (or modes) of being—that mode which is consciousness (or being-for-itself) and the mode which is nonconscious (or being-in-itself).⁶² The objects that make an appearance (to, or for, consciousness) all exist in the mode of being-in-itself, which is to say that they “are what they are.” This is in contrast to the manner of the being of consciousness. Sartre’s “human reality” is for itself, and as such, escapes the confines of identity. This would then assure that the mode of being of consciousness is exhausted by its being in relation to something other than itself. For Sartre, it would also assure

that consciousness is always radically free, insofar as it is always free from the restrictions of identity.⁶³ To reiterate, both modes of being rest on a single “transphenomenal being” that will account for the matter of both consciousness and “world,” though remaining beyond the phenomena of which existence is comprised. In other words, transphenomenal being supports the two “ways of being” that Sartre identifies, while never making an appearance *for* consciousness. This is not to compromise the absolute existence of consciousness, or its radical spontaneity. Within Sartre’s ontology, consciousness is maintained as that absolute point of certainty for the phenomenological enterprise. In this sense, its existence (or appearing) is not relative to something other than itself. So though Sartre will place consciousness in a necessary and nihilating relation to transphenomenal being, consciousness continues to bear an absolute existence that is independent of the phenomenon.⁶⁴

To reiterate, consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. Transphenomenal being ensures this independent (or rather, transcendent) nature of objects of experience insofar as it presides as the “materiality” of the phenomenon itself. This means that consciousness must move *out* of a region of interiority, “confronted with a concrete and full presence which *is not* consciousness,”⁶⁵ in order for there to be an appearance for consciousness. For Sartre, an adequate account of how this takes place necessarily opens onto the question of being—that which is other than consciousness, and on which the phenomena of experience rest. In so doing, “we have left pure appearance [pure phenomenological description] and have arrived at full being.”⁶⁶ Hence, underlying all phenomena for consciousness, there is this fully “present” being. It is only in this sense that these phenomena are truly transcendent, and that a (freely transcending) movement of intentionality can be accounted for. Being-in-itself does not make an appearance as such, so its pure presence is in a strictly non-phenomenological sense. This does not mean that phenomena hide some “noumenal reality” behind its existence-as-appearing. In other words, Sartre is not re-creating the “double relativity of Kant’s *Erscheinung*.”⁶⁷ Consciousness “touches” transphenomenal being most immediately, insofar as, through the movement of intentionality, it appears (which is to say that its appearance is already “with meaning”) *in the form of* the phenomena that comprise experience. Hence, transphenomenal being reveals itself directly as a meaningful world that is *there* for consciousness.⁶⁸

Subsequently, without this field of transphenomenal being, consciousness never engages in a transcendence, or moves outside of itself. In other words, without this grounding of the world of appearances, there

is nothing that avoids an idealist conception of what it means to have an experience. So transphenomenal being supports the movement of a spontaneous intentionality, forcing consciousness outside itself in an experience of an object. But it is only through the intentionality of consciousness that being-in-itself is a "world." So even though Being, as "what-it-is," stands independently, its *meaning* is relative to the being of consciousness.

According to Sartre, it is ultimately from this idea of being that we obtain the full implications of Husserl's theory of intentionality. In grounding objects of experience on an underlying transphenomenal being, Sartre truly emphasizes the sense in which the intentional movement places consciousness "out there" in a world that will contain certain "coefficients of adversity." As consciousness surpasses toward the transcendent phenomenon, in a movement of intentionality, it also encounters those "given" aspects of being, and of *its* being.⁶⁹ As the "matter" of phenomena, transphenomenal being is given over to consciousness (or rather, consciousness finds itself faced with it) in a nonconstitutive relationship.⁷⁰ Sartre captures this factual aspect of consciousness in the claim that consciousness is always a *situated* movement of intentionality, transcending toward objects of experience within the confines of facticity. In other words, concrete freedom is always a situated freedom.⁷¹ However, the fundamental relation that Sartre identifies between consciousness and transphenomenal being is such that these conceptions of facticity and "being in situation" do not undermine the radical freedom of consciousness. Though transphenomenal being seems to indicate an aspect of the human condition that resembles a fullness of being, it ultimately functions as a *support* for the freedom of consciousness.⁷² This becomes clear is a more thorough understanding of the relationship between consciousness and being, particularly insofar as this relationship is founded on negativity.

III. Intentionality Rests on a Negative Relation to Being

Since being-in-itself appears, as a phenomenon, through the being of consciousness, Sartre determines that both (being-in-itself and consciousness) are distinct in abstraction only. "[The] concept of being has this peculiarity of being divided into two regions without communication, [and] we must nevertheless explain how these two regions can be placed under the same heading."⁷³ The being of the phenomenon (transphenomenal being) and the being of consciousness are one and the same, existing "without communication" only insofar as they both represent distinct modalities of this one being.

The intentionality of consciousness rests on this necessary “communication” or relationship. As a movement of intentionality, consciousness transcends toward that which it “is not”—the transcendent object whose manner of being is “being-in-itself.” However, this does not mean that Sartre proposes two distinct *beings*. There is being, inseparably one, but determined through two phenomenologically distinct yet relating modes.⁷⁴ The *mode* of the being of consciousness “is not” the *mode* of the being of the in-itself. It is across this fundamental negation that being-in-itself and being-for-itself relate. More importantly, through transcendence *as* negation, Sartre reinforces the absolute freedom of consciousness. “[Being-for-itself] is free because consciousness, as a negating activity, introduces nothingness into the world . . . The nothingness with which consciousness encases its objects . . . separates being-for-itself from the world of cause and effect, thus removing being-for-itself from determination and giving it radical freedom.”⁷⁵ In this sense, the freedom of consciousness is despite the underlying condition of (transphenomenal) being. Furthermore, it is *because* Sartre construes this relation with being as one of negativity that he can also determine consciousness to be, exhaustively, a movement of intentionality.⁷⁶

Consciousness is the Source of the ‘Not’ in Being

From Sartre’s critique of Husserl in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, consciousness is always “consciousness of that which is not consciousness.” It must be a lucid reflection of all of being. For this reason, Sartre places the ego *outside* of consciousness, and into the world. In a similar sense, Sartre places *all* of being outside of consciousness—consciousness *is* only as a radical negation of being’s fullness. In order for consciousness to exist as strictly a revealing intuition of that which is not-consciousness, all of being must necessarily reside on the *outside*.

Sartre cites, as the phenomenological “evidence” for this, those interrogative acts that permeate our human experience. When consciousness formulates a question, there is introduced, into the fullness of being-in-itself, the “lack” across which being reveals itself as an *absence*. “In every question we stand before a being which we are questioning . . . [and the] permanent possibility of non-being, outside of and within, conditions our questions about being.”⁷⁷ In other words, the act of questioning is always accompanied by the possibility that the response (to that question) might be in the negative. This means that this act must originate in a creative freedom, through which being can appear as “what it is *not*,” despite its fullness and density. The condition for this possibility lies in

consciousness's ability to introduce "a certain negative element . . . into the world."⁷⁸ It is in this sense that Sartre conceives of the being of consciousness as the "not" of transphenomenal being (the "not" of this plenitude). Through negation, consciousness surpasses this ontological density, to represent that mode through which there can be creative spontaneity.

One of Sartre's examples describes a person entering a crowded room, expecting to find her acquaintance there. As her eyes peruse each face in the crowd, and until she encounters her acquaintance, these faces, in their positivity, appear for her as what they "are not." The realization that her friend is nowhere to be found is, simultaneously, an introduction of the quality of a lack into the fullness of the room. It shows up as a room that "lacks" her friend. This negative meaning cannot originate from being itself, since being simply "is what it is," or pure fullness. As such, it must come from that original negation (that original "germ of nothingness") at the heart of being, which is consciousness. This relation of negativity allows Sartre to secure a real intentional movement of consciousness. Said otherwise, the "communication" between being-in-itself and being-for-itself is one that grounds the radical freedom, spontaneity, and transcendence of consciousness.

In the end, Sartre's is not an account guilty of reproducing an idealism, since consciousness is always conscious of that which is "not consciousness." It is also not the case that consciousness and phenomena are two distinct *beings* in need of reuniting, since the being on which the phenomena rest is the same being on which consciousness rests.⁷⁹ This relation of negation grounds the intentional structure of consciousness, insofar as the latter (nonbeing) is a "consciousness of" all of being (revealed immediately in the phenomenon of "world").

IV. Sartre's Model of Transcendence: The Movement of a Radically Free Consciousness

In his discussion of the role of negation in *Being and Nothingness*, Peter Caws points out that "[it] is Sartre's merit to have seen that negation does not belong in the objective world . . ."⁸⁰ This reference to an "objective world" is used in a very imprecise sense, since, for Sartre, "objectivity" is already a part of a revelation of the meaning of being. It is already a noematic correlate to acts of consciousness, and as such, populated with negativities. We might understand Caws's statement to mean that it is *through consciousness* and not by virtue of the brute "matter" of the world, that

there is negation. Hence, Caws merits Sartre for identifying consciousness as the proper source of the “nots” that constitute everyday experience.⁸¹

This negative formulation of existence has its foundation in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, where Sartre says, “[The] spontaneity [that is consciousness] goes toward the I, rejoins the I, lets the I be glimpsed beneath its limpid density, but it itself is given above all as *individuated and impersonal* spontaneity.”⁸² This is yet another instance in which the transcendent nature of the ego is used to underscore the *ecstatic* nature of consciousness. Consciousness is a spontaneity, which perpetually moves toward not only the “I object,” but toward *all* objects of experience. Sartre determines that it is through this ecstatic movement that consciousness takes on a separate (distinct) existence, which is to say that individuation occurs (despite the “I” being an object *for* consciousness) through these ekstases.⁸³ Phyllis Kenevan points out that consciousness is “shattered in its very being” by these movements. “[Consciousness] is a split process of present intention, past retentions, and future protensions . . . it is [also] split into pre-reflective and reflective consciousness, and it is non-positional *self*-consciousness of a positional consciousness of something *other* than itself.”⁸⁴ Consciousness is its past, but in the mode of no longer being it. It is its future, but in the mode of not-yet being it. The present is similarly constituted across instants to which consciousness relates through these past and future *ekstases*. From Sartre’s analysis, there is no instantaneous present when consciousness “is what it is,” precisely because it relates to both itself and to being ecstatically.⁸⁵ Likewise, in the case of positional self-reflection, consciousness is no longer the self it apprehends in certain *self*-reflective acts. One might say that it *is* this self, but in the mode of no longer being it.

These ekstases emphasize that consciousness has, for its being, the being of that which it is not. It *makes* itself not-be the objects of experience as well as the self on which it reflects, by a perpetual surpassing or transcendence. Hence, in order to understand the sense in which consciousness exists as a nothingness of being, one must come to terms with this negating, transcending (intentional) activity of consciousness that, for Sartre, exhausts consciousness’s mode of being.

The Free Creativity of Consciousness

In making itself not-be (its “self,” its past or its future), consciousness rejects, or withdraws from all of being.⁸⁶ Transcending negation “is presumably a means of detaching human beings from the causal nexus of

events,”⁸⁷ and this is included in Sartre’s sense of radical freedom.⁸⁸ Its intentional structure requires that it must make itself “not be” that of which there is consciousness (or “not be” all of the revelation of being). Of this relationship between transcendence and negation, Thomas Martin writes, “[In] being conscious of X, consciousness is *not* X. In this way, consciousness *transcends* its object.”⁸⁹ To be sure, there is a difference to be noted between what it means for consciousness to “transcend its object,” on the one hand, and for consciousness to “transcend being,” on the other. This is insofar as Sartre’s conception of an object of experience is what makes an appearance for consciousness (is already a phenomenon), and whose existence is apprehended as independent of the existence of consciousness. “Being” (in the pure and undifferentiated sense) is not part of the phenomenal world, which is to say that it precisely does *not* make an appearance. Both consciousness and its object of experience represent two modes or ways of being, which places both in an ontological relation with this transphenomenal being. Nevertheless, Sartre’s *phenomenological* account of consciousness holds that this relation is one of negativity. For the purpose of this work (which is to bring Sartre and Levinas into dialogue across conceptions of transcendence and freedom), it suffices to determine that being-for-itself (as a mode of transphenomenal being) is exhaustively a negation, or emptiness of being. On the contrary, being-in-itself is phenomenologically accounted for as a *fullness* of being. To this end, I understand Sartre’s analysis as one in which the intentionality of consciousness also implies that consciousness is a total movement of transcendence of being, distancing itself from the full positivity of being.

It is in this vein that Sartre writes, “[This] nothingness [the nothingness of consciousness] is not anything except human reality apprehending itself as excluded from being and perpetually beyond being.”⁹⁰ The existence of consciousness (its existing as nonbeing) signifies the “beyond being” that is at the end of a journey of transcendence.⁹¹ He offers this model of transcendence (as negation) as that which provides the conditions for the possibility of experience. Hence, the phenomenological account in *Being and Nothingness* sustains the claim that experiences in general (and the ones Sartre describes in particular) are concretizations of this formal model of transcendence. Put otherwise, transcendence-as-intentionality holds the formal conditions for the possibility of experience.⁹² In a typical experience, consciousness makes itself “not be” the particular object that appears, by carrying out a (negating) surpassing movement. The distance thus set up, between itself and the phenomena, conditions the possibility of experience. Throughout *Being and Noth-*