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The Evolution of Sartre's Concept of Authenticity

From a Non-Egological Theory of Consciousness to the Unrealized Practical Ethics of the Gift-giving (No-)Self

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Abstract

Over forty years have passed since the death of Jean-Paul Sartre, still, his oeuvre stands out as a paramount achievement in existential-phenomenological thought. Among the numerous ideas and challenges he offered to contemporary continental philosophy, the problem of authenticity deserves a special place, for it connects many of existentialism's key concerns. The ever reforming conceptualization of authenticity had spread from the mid-1930s (La transcendance de l'ĕgo) till Sartre's posthumously published Cahiers pour une morale that appeared in the early 1980s, and it had a profound impact not only on ethical and literary theories, but also on psychiatry and psychotherapy. The present essay's undertaking is to closely follow the trajectory of this celebrated concept, to contextualize its development in accordance with Sartre's shifting philosophical as well as ethical projects over the years, and to point out some of the affinities this concept might have with East Asian thought, and with Buddhism in particular

Keywords: authenticity, bad faith, existentialism, nothingness, self-transformation

> *Man makes himself; he does not come into the world fully made, he makes himself by choosing his own morality, and his circumstances are such that he has no option other than to choose a morality* (Sartre 1946/2007, 46).

When discussing the concept of authenticity in Sartre's thought, it is both customary and expedient to compare it to that of Heidegger's, the latter having had a palpable effect on Sartre's own meditations. Like Heidegger, Sartre also begins with the program of Husserlian phenomenology. Before probing into the deeply problematic questions of being, and particularly those of *Dasein*—which were indisputably central to Heidegger's early inquiries—, however, he turns to another key concept that was conspicuously absent from the German philosopher's reflections: *consciousness*. Already in his early essay, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre sets out to problematize those philosophically fundamental questions that will be elaborated in his later writings in more detail, and which will eventually lead to the radical conceptualization of authenticity. This early essay attempts to delineate the relationships between ego, self, and consciousness, and in its conclusion the orientations and boundaries of the mature Sartrean phenomenological ontology are also distinctively outlined.

What are the fundamental questions discussed in *The Transcendence of the Ego*? Most of these questions are linked, above all, to the nature of consciousness. In contrast to Husserl's view, Sartre claims that in order to explain the nature of perception, phenomenology does not need to postulate a transcendental consciousness which possesses egological structures. "Rather, consciousness is defined by intentionality" (Sartre 1936/2004, 3). To adequately describe how consciousness functions, we need nothing else but to point to the mental act of seizing objects; in other words, one must provide an explanation concerning the phenomenon of intentionality. According to Sartre, the

mind is not a virtual space or container within which the ego—or the subject—resides. The primary activity of consciousness is a ceaseless self-transcendence toward the object: consciousness keeps stepping out of itself, so as to become the consciousness *of* an object. In itself, however, consciousness is nothing. Consequently, the notion that such entities as mental pictures or ideas exist in the mind is decidedly false: consciousness does not *store* anything—instead, it exists insomuch as it is the consciousness *of* something.

At this point we can see emerge one of Sartre's key ideas: namely, that the concept of an 'unconscious consciousness' is a self-evident self-contradiction. Consciousness is at all times conscious (of something), argues Sartre: it is always aware that itself is nothing else but consciousness. Nevertheless, "it becomes conscious of itself *insofar as it is consciousness of a transcendent object*" (Sartre 1936/2004, 4). But when is consciousness the consciousness of a transcendent object? According to Sartre, it has always been, and remains so, interminably. Consciousness is the uninterrupted consciousness of something *other than* itself, something that is thus beyond itself. By the same token, it is also the consciousness *of itself*, simultaneously—it is self-consciousness. How is this possible? The answer lies in Sartre's view that there are two distinct kinds of consciousnesses: an *unreflective* and a *reflective* one. In the first case, when the consciousness is unreflective, it is primarily the consciousness of a transcendent object, but 'non-thetically' it is the consciousness of itself, too. In other words, in this kind of unreflective consciousness, the object of consciousness is something external, but it does not entirely cease to be aware of itself, either—it does know about itself *without reflecting* upon itself. As soon as the direct object of consciousness becomes consciousness itself, unreflective consciousness turns into reflective consciousness. At that moment, the object of consciousness is nothing but consciousness itself.

"My question is this: is there any room for an I in a consciousness of this kind? The reply is clear: of course not" (Sartre 1936/2004, 5). If the ego has no place within consciousness, then it appears that perception as such—the emergence of concrete phenomena—does not take place due to the activity of personal cognition. (My) consciousness is not my consciousness; it precedes any sort of self-nature, personhood, or subjectivity.[1] Similarly to everything else that can appear on the perceptual horizon of consciousness, the ego is also transcendent to it. In other words, the ego does not belong to consciousness: it belongs to the world. Sartre draws attention to the fact that it is "consciousness that renders the unity and personality of my I possible. [Not the other way around— L.B.] The transcendental I thus has no *raison d'être*" (Sartre 1936/2004, 4). According to Sartre, the transcendental field of consciousness is characterized by spontaneity and impersonality. Individuality and subjectivity can only emerge 'outside', in the world, as a result of the reflective activity of consciousness, in relation to other people, and not 'inside' consciousness itself.

"Perhaps, indeed, the essential function of the Ego is not so much theoretical as practical … perhaps its essential role is to mask from consciousness its own spontaneity" (Sartre 1936/2004, 27). Sartre goes as far as to accuse consciousness for the creation of the ego 'as a false representation of itself'. The reason of this self-deception is that in pure (self)reflection consciousness recognizes itself as a limitless spontaneity and constant creative activity, and this confrontation with its own nature causes considerable anxiety: "It is this absolute and irremediable anguish, this fear of oneself, that in my view is constitutive of pure consciousness" (Sartre 1936/2004, 28).[2] This approach, in fact, effectively allows for the embedding of the Husserlian concept of 'natural attitude' along with the concept of '*epoché*' in an entirely new context. Inasmuch as it takes consciousness a specific effort to create a 'natural attitude' during the attempt of escaping from the anxiety that it had come

1 It is noteworthy fact that Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō's characterization of 'pure experience' displays intriguing resonances with Sartre's descriptions of an egoless consciousness that Sartre identifies with 'nothingness'. Moreover, Nishida's account of direct experience which is also devoid of a personal agency and which is also portrayed as having to do with the acitivity of 'nothingness'—although in a rather different sense—gives further reason for comparisons. As Nishida famously wrote, some twenty years before Sartre stated that it is consciousness that establishes the appearance of the individual self: "It is not that there is experience because there is an individual, but that there is an individual because there is experience" (Nishida 1911/1990, 19). For more on Nishida's and Japanese philosophy's connections and potential influences on the young Sartre see Light 1987.

2 This observation is echoed by Japanese philosopher and psychiatrist Bin Kimura who contends that when looking for secure spots by which the self could anchor itself in reality and gain comfort and reassurance in the face of the unsettling fluidity of being, the self only manages to entangle itself deeper and deeper into a false representation of reality. This false representation of the world attempts to flee from the inherently event-like nature of phenomena by turning them into things that appear stable; nonetheless, the stability they seem to provide is a fake one. The self compulsively tries to escape from the awareness of the volatility of the world but the world repeatedly informs the self that the efforts on the part of the self to stabilize itself and the world by way of transmuting them into unchanging entities are, after all, spurious (Kimura 1982/2011).

face to face with while discovering its own intrinsically spontaneous nature, the attributive adjective 'natural' in 'natural attitude' does not seem so natural after all as it had appeared before, in Husserl. In addition, the phenomenological *epoché* does not seem to be such a purely and rigorously scientific procedure either, the way Husserl liked to depict it; rather, according to Sartre, it "is an anguish that imposes itself on us and that we cannot avoid" (Sartre 1936/2004, 28).

One's self, then, regarding which one would intuitively assume that it *absolutely* belongs to one, that one can trust it without hesitation and that it can define one precisely and correctly, well this self, according to Sartre, is neither absolute nor reliably stable. Instead, it is, in fact, nothing more than a mere 'solution' to an existential problem, created in 'bad faith' (*mauvaise foi*) by our consciousness so that it could hide from itself and flee from the experience of existential anguish and anxiety. The self that belongs to me is not, in any way, more dependable than the selves that belong to others. "My I, indeed, *is no more certain for consciousness than the I of other men*. It is simply more intimate" (Sartre 1936/2004, 29). The self, as mentioned earlier, is 'outside' in the world among other beings. Nonetheless, man for Sartre is essentially identical with consciousness—or, as consciousness is called in *Being and Nothingness*: *être-pour-soi*, 'being-for-itself'. As a consequence, the main undertaking of the Sartrean *magnum opus* is precisely the analysis and accurate description of this entity: *man as a being-for itself*.

According to the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*, entities can be classified into two major categories: 'being-in-itself' (*être-en-soi*) and 'being-for-itself' (*être-pour-soi*). These two are associated with and inhabit two ontologically separate realms. Having said that, they are nevertheless interdependent: neither exists without the other, neither can be derived from the other. The 'being-in-itself' in Sartre is the concrete phenomenon which stands opposed to the 'being-for-itself', that is, consciousness. Together they make up the synthetic unity of consciousness and phenomenon. 'Being-in-itself' is characterized by the fullness of being and is complete positivity: "being is what it is". It contains no negation, has no distance from itself, and, accordingly, it has no relation to itself, either: therefore, it is solidly self-identical. By contrast, 'being-for-itself' is pure spontaneity, which "can always pass beyond the existent, not toward its being, but toward the meaning of this being" (Sartre 1943/1978, lxiii). Sartre already foreshadows in the introduction of his book that the 'being-for-itself' cannot possibly coincide with itself, for it exists only in a continuous movement that keeps drawing it *away* from itself. If 'being-in-itself' is "being what it is", then, conversely, 'being-for-itself' is "being what it is not" (Sartre 1943/1978, lxv).

As a result, insofar as 'being-for-itself' is everything that the self-identical, solid being is *not*—keeping in mind that consciousness actually does not even possess a self-identity—, there remains no other alternative open for Sartre than to postulate consciousness as that which stands in complete opposition to being: that is, consciousness is non-being or *nothingness*. To rephrase it, nothingness is essentially identical with consciousness or 'being-for-itself'. More precisely, nothingness is the activity of human existence through which a fissure occurs in the texture of being. Nothingness cannot originate from the 'being-in-itself', for 'being-in-itself' connotes a complete fullness of being. In other words, "if being is everywhere, it is not only Nothingness which, as Bergson maintains, is inconceivable; for negation will never be derived from being. The necessary condition for our saying *not* is that non-being be a perpetual presence in us and outside of us, that nothingness haunt being" (Sartre 1943/1978, 11).

As Kalmanson points out, "Sartre deals with alienation throughout *Being and Nothingness* in his exploration of the question of how the subject gains access to anything outside of its own awareness. Ultimately, his solution hinges on the idea of non-being" (Kalmanson 2021, 112-113). Negation, the possibility—and actuality—of motion and change enters into the world in virtue of the particular activity of the consciousness which Sartre calls "nihilation" (*néantisation*). The existence of consciousness entails practically nothing but this activity. With this explication Sartre indicates that consciousness is the only (non) being which is able to breach and penetrate the otherwise wholly homogenous, rock-solid walls of being by virtue of creating distinctions, of negating and denying being, hence essentially by being able to break away from the givenness of the actual reality of any concrete situation.

Having arrived at this point, it is only one more step in the logical chain to claim that consciousness is responsible not only for bringing into the world the ability of transcending reality, but also for creating the possibility for freedom. According to Sartre, consciousness in itself represents boundless freedom, because it is in the individual's power to supersede and supplant any concrete phenomenon at one's will: as soon as man ceases to relate to a given set of phenomena, those phenomena will, in turn, also cease to relate to man. One could say that this is, then, an unequal relationship, for establishing and maintaining this relation between consciousness and phenomena depend exclusively on man. This is why Sartre regards the freedom of the 'being-for-itself' boundless because one can decide whether one wishes to engage the phenomena or, instead, negate them. As the oft-quoted thesis of Sartrean existentialism declares:

> Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom. What we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the *being* of "human reality." Man does not exist first in order to be free *subsequently;* there is no difference between the being of man and his being-free (Sartre 1943/1978, 25).

As one can observe, Sartre equates human reality with human existence, as well as with consciousness and with 'being-for-itself'. All these titles and labels designate the uniquely human ontological status whose nature is that it has *no nature* whatsoever. Freedom is not just one of the accidental attributes of man, but it *is* human existence itself. Man—neither as a genus, nor as an individual—has no prewired, rigid frame of ontological structure that would predestine its existence. The individuals' destinies are to autonomously create themselves from scratch, without the reassuring authority of a tradition on which one could lay all the blame if things happen to go astray.[3] The extent to which one attempts to escape from one's personal freedom and take refuge in prefabricated constructs—such as the belief in an unalterable personal destiny or in a fixed individual personality or in absolute goals and objective values—indicates the level of denial and self-deception vis-á-vis the emptiness and fundamental meaninglessness of one's existence. "Freedom is the human being putting his past out of play by secreting his own nothingness … consciousness continually experiences itself as the nihilation of its past being" (Sartre 1943/1978, 28). Consciousness perpetually breaks away: not just from the world, but from itself, from its own past too; and its freedom is constituted in this very act of incessant disengagement and breaking away.

That said, as we already learned from the reasoning of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, consciousness tends to flee from the consciousness of its *own* freedom, that is, from itself as 'freedom-consciousness'. The reason for this, as Sartre reiterates in *Being and Nothingness*, is that the awareness of its infinite freedom fills one with anxiety: "it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself" (Sartre 1943/1978, 29). 'Anguish' in Sartre's thought plays a similarly crucial role as *Angst* in Heidegger's existential analytic: just as in *Being and Time*, nothingness manifests itself through the experience of anguish/anxiety. In this scenario one has no choice but to face up to one's own nothingness, to one's groundless existential ground. But, whereas 'nothingness' for Sartre is actually indistinguishable from the human individual and 'nihilation' is the activity of human consciousness, the same cannot be claimed about Heidegger's concept of nothingness. Both authors, however, would agree with Kierkegaard on the elementary difference between fear and anguish/anxiety in the sense that while the latter has no definite object, the former is always directed toward a concretely circumscribable object; when we fear, we always fear *something*.

Sartre maintains that while experiencing anguish the individual is anxious about their personal existence as well as about their total freedom and complete responsibility, too. One is anxious either about one's past or about one's future. If we are anxious about our past, "anguish appears as an apprehension of self inasmuch as it exists in the perpetual mode of detachment from what is" (Sartre 1943/1978, 35). Nothing, not even one's own past can determine what one will or what one should do next. Naturally, man must always become something or somebody, since even if one is reluctant to make strong and concrete commitments, this noncommittal attitude itself is the result of an original—perhaps unreflected—decision: a decision not to be committed. Thus, ultimately, one must always decide with every single moment who one is and who one should become. On the other hand, when one is anxious about the future, one comes to realize that "I am not the self which I will be" (Sartre 1943/1978, 31). Just as the past is unable to determine what the present would become, similarly, the present is unable to force the outcome of the future, argues Sartre. Since man exists in a constant displacement and becoming, one can never completely coincide with oneself. Yet, according to Sartre, man still steadfastly holds onto this belief: by positing a self-identical ego and attributing it to oneself, one proceeds, in effect, to *deliberately* deceive oneself. This self-deceit cannot be understood to constitute an innocent or naïve sort of misconception: it is a perfectly conscious move, since consciousness, as we may remember Sartre's earlier argument, can only perform conscious actions—consciousness is unable to *unconsciously* deceive itself and to hide this deception from itself. When consciousness, in fact, deceives itself, this kind of self-deception is for what Sartre applies the term 'bad faith'.

Concerning the strategies people employ in bad faith, we often try to flee from anguish „by attempting to apprehend ourselves from without as an Other or as a *thing*" (Sartre 1943/1978, 43). We thus quite literally objectify ourselves. To put it differently, we artificially freeze ourselves into a pretense that makes us believe that we have, indeed, become such ontologically solid

3 This is a point where Sartre and Heidegger disagree strongly: the significance of a tradition for authentic existence. For Heidegger, no authentic Dasein can exist without the reappropriation of its tradition; for Sartre, no authentic existence can exist with it.

objects that have stable, fix, 'objective' natures. Of course, we know all too well, that we cannot actually possess such an object-like ontological makeup, adds Sartre. We flee from the inescapable freedom bestowed upon us, yet in this flight we are never truly capable of forgetting about that which we have been trying to get away from in the first place: "the flight from anguish is only a mode of becoming conscious of anguish. Thus anguish, properly speaking, can be neither hidden nor avoided" (Sartre 1943/1978, 43).[4] Man, by nature, is a free being, maintains Sartre; nevertheless, this position also implies that man, by nature, is a being forever in anguish. In other words, these two, freedom and anguish, are inseparably linked together. 'Bad faith' enters into the scene in that particular dialectical relationship which one would try to escape by denying one's existential anguish, along with one's freedom and the ability for nihilation. One is unable to successfully carry out this denial, however, for in order to be able to escape and deny, one must already possess the ability to separate oneself from one's anguish; that is, one must already possess the ability of nihilation. To put it differently, 'bad faith' is aware of its own bad faith and its own self-deception at all times: that it runs away from its freedom, and that it fails to take responsibility even for this running away.

Nevertheless, taking responsibility becomes unavoidable once one owns up to one's prior deliberate self-deceptions, and, instead, confronts the contingency of one's existence. Contrary to widespread popular belief, Sartre did not argue that since there are no objective values in the world, then everything is morally permissible. What he did, in fact, assert regarding the nature of values was the following: "Anguish is opposed to the mind of the serious man who apprehends values in terms of the world and who resides in the reassuring, materialistic substantiation of values" (Sartre 1943/1978, 39). Values cannot simply reside somewhere outside in the world *a priori* given to us, Sartre asserted, because in that case they would cease to be *valuable*; as objective entities they would instantly lose their worth. A value is valuable only inasmuch as it has relevance in relation to man's existence: that is, only if the meaning and significance which the value represents is not an *absolute* meaning and significance, but a particular one which then must always be situational, too. A true value can only be constituted in the recognition created by that 'active freedom' which, according to Sartre, is identical with the human agent:

> It follows that my freedom is the unique foundation of values and that nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable. My freedom is anguished at being the foundation of values while itself without foundation. It is anguished in addition because values, due to the fact that they are essentially revealed to a freedom, can not disclose themselves without being at the same time "put into question," for the possibility of overturning the scale of values appears complementarily as my possibility (Sartre 1943/1978, 38).

Every moment man is 'thrown into the world', which means that the postulation of values does not take place only on a theoretical level but values are being created continuously through real-life choices and practical decisions. Since one must create and realize the meaning of one's existence—along with the meaning of the world—, the values are actually upheld by the individual; consequently, one truly is what one makes of oneself. "In anguish I apprehend myself at once as totally free and as not being able to derive the meaning of the world except as coming from myself" (Sartre 1943/1978, 40).

Is 'bad faith' or inauthenticity (the two are practically the same term in Sartre) avoidable? As Sartre points out, "the first act of bad faith is to flee what it can not flee, to flee what it is" (Sartre 1943/1978, 70). Inauthenticity therefore lies primarily in the fact that one denies who one really is. Man in Sartre's opinion—just as in Nietzsche's—is essentially a value creator, a freedom of existence that lives in a contingent world bereft of inherent structures of meaning. Perhaps one would find it reasonable to suggest that the opposite of 'bad faith', i.e. 'good faith' and honesty could pave the way toward authenticity. Sartre's response to this suggestion is clearly in the negative. "The ideal of good faith (to believe what one believes) is, like that of sincerity (to be what one is), an ideal of being-in-itself" (Sartre 1943/1978, 69); therefore, it does not concern the existence of the being-for-itself. Consciousness can never become a 'being-in-itself'; it would be in vain trying to flee from the anguish of having to face freedom, escaping toward transcendence, toward a comforting tranquility of being. A human individual is unable to consolidate itself into an unchanging entity in 'good faith'. In this way, Sartre demonstrates that the idea of 'good faith' is no better and no more tenable than the idea of 'bad faith': both refer to inauthentic forms of the human existence.

> Good faith seeks to flee the inner disintegration of my being in the direction of the in-itself which it should be and is not. Bad faith seeks to flee the in-itself by means of the inner disintegration of my being. But it denies this very disintegration as it

4 This might remind one of Kierkegaard's contention that the more one tries to escape from existential anxiety, the more one will get oneself entangled in it.

> denies that it is itself bad faith (Sartre 1943/1978, 70).

Even so, it is not entirely inconceivable to step out of and leave behind the *circulus vitiosus* of inauthentic modes of existence in Sartre; it is, in fact, possible to „radically escape bad faith. But this supposes a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted. This self-recovery we shall call authenticity" (Sartre 1943/1978, 70, footnote). The detailed elaboration of authenticity was not among Sartre's projects during the writing of *Being and Nothingness*; he reserved this undertaking for his later works. *Being and Nothingness*, he emphasized, could only deal with the task of what *is*, and not with what *should be*, as the book was, strictly speaking, ontological in nature: that is, it was supposed to be about what exists. "It does, however, allow us to catch a glimpse of what sort of ethics will assume its responsibilities when confronted with a human reality in situation" (Sartre 1943/1978, 625-626). Regarding the nature of human existence, Sartre has come to expose and portray it as an essentially inexhaustible desire for total satisfaction. This total satisfaction can never become an actual reality: the 'being-for-itself' can never transform itself into becoming 'being-in-itself'. The innermost desire of consciousness, according to Sartre, is to have the same sort of solid self-identical nature that the 'being-in-itself' possesses. At the same time, however, consciousness wants to retain its own absolute freedom as well. This seeming contradiction can neither be resolved, nor removed from the scheme. Incidentally, this is why values actually emerge, since a value is a sort of ideality which reinforces the fantasy of the aforementioned unattainable synthesis: of becoming an entity with solid self-identity *and* to keep one's absolute freedom, too. According to Sartre, an 'existential psychoanalysis' would need to undertake the project of examining the universal human pursuit that attempts to achieve this synthesis whereby the inauthentic individual might become authentic.

'Existential psychoanalysis' in Sartre's nomenclature is not a purely scientific or medical practice, but instead a "*moral description*, for it releases to us the ethical meaning of various human projects" (Sartre 1943/1978, 626.). 'Human projects' are those personal plans via which one projects oneself in the future in the form of an attainable chosen goal—or what amounts to the same, to work toward a chosen value. "But the principal result of existential psychoanalysis must be to make us repudiate the *spirit* of seriousness" (ibid.). Why would such an attitude be advantageous? The 'spirit of seriousness', according to Sartre, possesses two characteristics that promote the operation of 'bad faith'; "it considers values as transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity, and it transfers the quality of 'desirable' from the ontological structure of things to their simple material constitution" (Sartre 1943/1978, 626). In sharp contrast to this, existential psychoanalysis ventures to transcend the 'spirit of seriousness' by virtue of revealing the moral agent of the human actions. The moral agent is "the *being by whom values exist*. It is then that his freedom will become conscious of itself and will reveal itself in anguish as the unique source of value and the nothingness by which the world exists" (Sartre 1943/1978, 627).

Considering all these claims together, one may well wonder how one could possibly become an authentic self in Sartre. What would await an individual if they were to renounce all forms of 'bad faith' and would choose to face up to existential anguish instead?

> A freedom which wills itself freedom is in fact a being-which-is-not-what-it-is and which-is-what-it-is-not, and which chooses as the ideal of being, being-what-it-is-not and not-being-what-it-is. This freedom chooses then not to recover itself but to flee itself, not to coincide with itself but to be always at a distance *from* itself (ibid.).

It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this crucial passage in terms of its significance in the evolution of Sartre's concept of authenticity. This is the point where Sartre makes it unequivocally clear that the idea of authenticity envisioned by him is radically different in comparison to what past existentialist thinkers, namely Kierkegaard and Heidegger, have described. According to Sartre, bad faith or inauthenticity is maintained by the spirit of seriousness which can only be eliminated if one does not even *try* to actively transform one's inauthentic self to become a truly genuine self (or to 'win oneself', as Kierkegaard would have us do). These and similar efforts would only achieve to thrust one back and to plunge the individual amidst the tireless waves of the ocean of bad faith. Humans are authentic only insofar as they actively will themselves to be free, that is, if they decide *not* to want to coincide with themselves. In some sense, this suggestion appears somehow to be akin to Nietzsche's idea of authenticity in that it also strongly criticizes the generally accepted axioms concerning the existence and the supposed enduring nature of a personal character. Then again, Sartre perhaps goes even further than Nietzsche when he emphatically calls for avoiding even the *appearance* that it would be somehow possible to create a well-defined nature—a 'style' or a 'taste', as Nietzsche would put it— for ourselves in an authentic fashion. We are irredeemably contingent beings for Sartre that are always in the process of becoming something and somebody else; hence, the acknowledgement of this predicament, along with assuming the responsibility for

the consequences is the only workable way for Sartre that could lead to authenticity.

By following Sartre's reasoning, one wonders whether all the above amounts to that the personhood of an individual would inevitably disintegrate to escape bad faith and become authentic. If there is not an unshakable integrative core of the personality to speak of, then what or who could be held accountable for the actions of the individual? If there is no self-identity, who can be identified as the actor of the actions? It is important to stress that Sartre never stops insisting that every person is completely responsible for the consequences of their actions as well as of what they make of themselves. What one makes of oneself is what one actively does, what one commits oneself to: an individual is nothing but the accumulated aggregate of their choices and actions. However, nothing obliges or determines one to choose one's particular obligations. There exists neither justification, nor valid external assistance that could tell one what to do: how to live one's life. Even the interpretation and explanation of the events that take place during one's lifetime is a task that only the self entitled to carry out; nobody else can take the burden away of having to give meaning and significance to the events of our lives.

In the last sentences of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre anticipates the undertaking of a future ethical work that would build upon the findings of his lengthy ontological reflections. This ethical work, which would (have) surveyed the possibility of authenticity, was never published during his lifetime, although many hundreds of pages have been completed and compiled throughout the years. Nevertheless, he did not wish to make them public. Thus the *Cahiers pour une morale* could only appear posthumously, in 1983. In this philosophical diary Sartre worked on the detailed elaboration of the previously envisioned ethical work which he announced at the conclusion of *Being and Nothingness*. While studying the highly original musings of the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, one cannot help but marvel at the intensity and the tremendous intellectual effort and struggle with which Sartre endeavored to harmonize the concepts of morality, particularly that of responsibility, with the almost contourless character of human consciousness. According to the program of this ethical undertaking, inauthentic consciousness should reach the state of pure reflection[5] so as to be able to radically move away from bad faith and to recover the being that was corrupted by inauthentic consciousness itself.

> The passage to pure reflection must provoke a transformation:
>
> of my relation to my body. Acceptance of and claiming of contingency. Contingency conceived of as a chance.
>
> of my relation to the world. Clarification of being in itself. Our task: to make being exist. True sense of the In-itself-for-itself.
>
> of my relation to myself. Subjectivity conceived of as the absence of the *Ego*. Since the Ego is εξις (psyche).
>
> of my relation to other people (Sartre 1983/1992, 12).

A considerable shift can be detected here in Sartre's conception of human existence compared to that of *Being and Nothingness* which was rather inclined to reduce human reality to the absolute freedom of consciousness's nihilating potential, and to marginalize the individual's facticity—such as one's body or past—as non-essential parts of one's existential composition. The *Notebooks*, conversely, defines man as a being which can only be a being-for-itself due to the being-in-itself character of its bodily existence that connects it to the world. In other words, man's transcendence is based on man's facticity:

> In every perception of a thing I understand myself as a thing. I apprehend my own passivity along with the weight of this stone (I am what it weighs upon) but this passivity is at the same time a form of activity (I raise my hand, I move the stone from this place to that). A perpetual double relation. I could not act if I were not passive. Yet I can only be passive because I act (otherwise, I would just *be*, that is all); I am that being who through passivity and activity comes into the world for the In-itself and for myself. Passivity is *my connection* to the In-itself, both an ontological and a practical connection at the same time (Sartre 1983/1992, 51-52).

The being-in-itself can neither be passive, nor active: it simply exists. Contrarily, the sole reason why humans are able to be active is that they can be passive, too: it is passivity that allows them to comprehend the phenomena of the world. Bodily existence conceived as part of one's facticity has thus achieved a noticeably higher position in the *Notebooks* in comparison with its place in previous Sartrean works. The role of the body has been indeed reevaluated but it has not become overrated. Personality is seen by Sartre to be made up both by the 'situation'—

5 Once again, the parallel between Nishida's concept of pure experience where the egoless vision of an authentic no-self can emerge and Sartre's conceptualization of pure reflection where bad faith and the self could finally disappear are remarkable.

which has been determined by one's facticity—and by the future projections of the consciousness; separately viewed, these are mere abstractions. Individuals cannot detach themselves from their specific historical situatedness, and in extreme cases even the freedom of choice could seemingly vanish from their lives. For instance, a terminally ill person cannot simply choose not to be terminally ill. Notwithstanding, one's attitude towards the concrete situation, according to Sartre, will always belong exclusively to one's personal area of competence: it is up to the individual whether they would choose to despair because of their looming death, or, on the contrary, whether they would gather the courage to boldly confront it. One is always free to pick one's attitude against a concrete situation.

For Sartre, there is no such thing as 'human nature' which would command us with absolute authority how to react in a given situation. This view can also be bolstered by acknowledging that concrete situations are not uniform occurrences of general 'basic situations', but are through and through singular cases. On this basis, one could claim that there is not a single experience or situation concerning dying that would be identical to any other experience or situation concerning dying; all of these are singular and unrepeatable events that belong to the lives of completely unique and singular individuals.

For that reason, the *Notebooks* argues that we do not need an abstract ethics but rather a concrete one which takes the present historical situation as its starting point and which places particular sets of goals in front of the individual existences, while discounting the pursuit after universal values. Human existence in its 'natural attitude' is forever working on creating a being-in-itself from itself. This effort, as we have learned it from the pages of *Being and Nothingness*, is not a viable project, however. What humans strive for basically is to construct a god out of themselves: a god that is able to do and achieve everything the self desires. As soon as one acknowledges the impossibility of this dream, though, one finally enables oneself to realize the experience of pure reflection upon which Sartre theorized already in *The Transcendence of the Ego*.

Pure reflection indicates the beginning of a new way of looking at things, a new vision, a novel approach. The term 'reflection' however can be a bit misleading here: it is not merely a disinterested contemplation, but rather a new venture and a vision that is motivated by the attainment of a particular goal. Pure reflection represents a positive, practical, and realistic morality which aims to realize an ever growing degree of freedom. Whereas, according to Sartre, "Being and Nothingness is an ontology before conversion" (Sartre 1983/1992, 6), the *Notebooks* endeavors to provide an account of the experience that is characteristic of pure reflection *after* the conversion.

The experience of the post-transitive attitude is the experience of *authenticity*. In pure reflection, one accepts the fact that one is not a necessary, substantive entity that has an unquestionable right to exist, but instead an unjustifiable and contingent freedom of existence that endlessly asks itself about the meaning and goals of its existence. One comes to accept that there are not any pre-given, *a priori* values or an authority to which one could appeal for the validation of one's life. Insofar as the individual conceives itself to be a free, contingent, and unjustifiable being, it transcends the dialectics of 'good faith–bad faith': in this way, one can at last realize a truly authentic existence. Yet, Sartre warns us: "If you seek authenticity for authenticity's sake, you are no longer authentic" (Sartre 1983/1992, 4).[6] Being authentic is not a value or a goal in itself but the incidental fruit that accompanies our having been able to come to terms with the groundlessness of our existence and also with the inescapable existential condition that we must create ourselves out of nothingness. This creation, however, is not the construction of something permanent and secure; on the contrary: it is the building of an existence, a (no-)self that is forever in flux, for which one takes full responsibility all the same.

Sartre argues that the world does not have a prearranged, original, objective meaning structure. This, though, does not mean that we would not be able to give legitimate meanings to things. Man is that particular being whose task precisely is to bring meaning into an otherwise perfectly meaningless universe, and this meaning must be constructed in a way that it has significance to one's life practice. The world, as long as we understand it as the already existing multiplicity of discreet objects, has not been created by the activity of human consciousness, evidently. By contrast, if we understand the world as an *orderly* diversity, then this orderly fashion could have only been brought about among the wealth of phenomena by the organizing activity of human consciousness.[7] Furthermore, the human individual, being the nihilating consciousness that it essentially is, has already always been the creator of the meaning and sense of the world (a recognizably Heideggerean thought), and even if one decided to opt out from being a creator of the meaning-universe, one would never actually succeed in doing so. According to Sartre, we are 'condemned to freedom', and by the same token, we are condemned to eternal creation as well. An

6 This caveat reminds us of Zen Buddhism's guidance: if one sits down to meditate with the deliberate aim of becoming enlightened, one has already missed the chance of realizing enlightenment. Only by not trying to achieve, can one achieve it.

7 This is precisely what Camus stated in *The Rebel*: man must create order out of the chaos and absurdity that is the *world*.

authentic personality must then affirm not only one's freedom but also one's own arbitrary creative activity. In other words, only those individuals can become authentic that learn to establish meanings amid the wholly chaotic indifference of being.

Attributing meaning to the world and to our lives is only one side of the coin. Carved on the other side is the resignation of the individual that makes one to decide to get rid of all of one's previous efforts that aimed to form the self into a being-in-itself-style substance. That is to say, one must give up voluntarily and 'generously' the project of becoming oneself so that this 'giving up' may become a 'giving to', a *gift*: a giving of meanings and values to the things that surround and envelope us. Just as in Nietzsche where man is identified as the creator of values, in Sartre too, the extraordinary task—which is at the same time the heaviest burden of human existence—is the necessity of having to give values and assign meanings to things. In light of this, for Sartre, moral behavior becomes in essence the act of gifting ourselves away, of elevating self-presenting into a general practice: it is an "absolute generosity, without limits, as a passion properly speaking and as the only means of being. There is no other reason for being than this giving. And it [is] not just my work that is a gift. Character is a gift" (Sartre 1983/1992, 129.). It is true even more so considering that being can only be 'saved' and transformed into something more humane—that is, more valuable, more ethical, and, ultimately, more free—if authentic individuals establish their own creative freedom as the foundation of the world. Sartre believes that the consequence of this would be that with such an attitude people would experience, for the first time in their lives, what it feels like to be the basis of an existence and a world that was shaped solely by their own efforts and creative powers. This would, in turn, also mean that they would immediately cease to be unjustifiable and contingent entities that aimlessly ramble about in a meaningless, hectic universe. Authentic individuals—due to the circumstance that they attribute meaning and values to the world on their own and also because they affirm themselves as the creators of this world that is abundant in meanings—would become morally superior to inauthentic individuals who try relentlessly, to no avail, to flee from their own creative freedom.

For Sartre, man is not god; creating a world *ex nihilo* is not in mankind's power. In a certain sense, however, it is appropriate to call man's freedom to create 'absolute'—insofar as it is not dependent on anyone or anything else. A human is a creator, a creator of values, simply because human existence, as we have seen, endows man with the task of creation. It is possible to subjectively justify the values and the meanings of the world, but "I can never persuade Others of my objective necessity … It is me, which nothing justifies, who justifies myself inwardly" (Sartre 1983/1992, 482). It appears, then, that the idea of subjective necessity is satisfactory for Sartre to argue that the ideal of freedom ought to stand on the top of the moral hierarchy of values. The reason why freedom must be the *foremost* value is that the freedom of values can only rest on the basis of acknowledging the principal value of freedom itself. Were it not in my freedom to freely evaluate what is valuable and what is not, how could we even talk about freely chosen values in the first place? This provides the key to understanding why Sartre stressed in his famous presentation *Existentialism is a Humanism* that by choosing one's own freedom one chooses, at the same time, the freedom of others, as well. If one did not do so, one would slit the roots of one's very own freedom (Sartre 1946/2007).

After having arrived at this point, it appears uncomplicated now to integrate the elements of interpersonality—which was portrayed in *Being and Nothingness* as a rather problematic issue that would significantly contribute to the alienation of the self—into the fabric of an authentic existence. As a matter of fact, Sartre does not only use the term 'authentic' to describe the desirable manner in which an individual should inhabit its own existence but also to illustrate one's ideal form of relationship to others. In this sense, a human relationship can also be conceived as authentic, provided that one acknowledges that the totality of one's human existence includes not only one's mode of being-for-itself (*freedom*) but also one's mode of being-in-itself (*facticity*): that is, one's past, and, likewise, one's body. In pure reflection, i.e. following the existential conversion, the objective aspect of human existence, which is readily accessible for other people as well, does not bring about automatic alienation from the self or estrangement from the others (or from the world). Sartre expands:

> This comes about only if the Other refuses to see a freedom in me *too*. But if, on the contrary, he makes me exist as an existing freedom as well as a *Being/object*, if he makes this autonomous moment exist and thematizes this contingency that I perpetually surpass, he enriches the world and me, he *gives a meaning* to my existence *in addition* to the subjective meaning I myself give it, he brings to light the *pathetic* aspect of the human condition, pathos I cannot grasp myself, since I am perpetually the negation through my action of this pathos (Sartre 1983/1992, 500).

The generosity, then, with which authentic individuals decide to give up the project of morphing themselves into complete being-in-itself-style entities—which, as we know, is an impossibility in any case—and instead give meanings and values to the world, finds its full and final

form in the gesture that secures the existence and the freedom of the other person as a being-for-itself as well.

We may conclude our overview by stating that in Sartre the meaning and significance of the authentic individuality extends beyond itself. Although their goals are essentially particular to their personalities and life projects, authentic individuals are also universal inasmuch as a chief objective of theirs is to assist their fellow human beings in the realization of *their* goals. Sartre mentions 'authentic love' and 'authentic friendship', too, by which he, in my interpreation, means something very similar to the later Heidegger's notion of 'letting beings be' (*Gelassenheit*). Authentic love for Sartre does not attempt to arbitrarily solidify the reality of the other person into objective categories; instead it lets the other person's freedom come forth and freely reveal itself. In other words, authentic modes of relating do not try to shape the unfolding personal reality of the other to the self's own image. Authentic individuals would not try to coerce the ever-changing, living, event-like reality of the other into inflexible mental images that would inevitably distort the unique and fluid reality of another person. One should keep in mind, though, that Sartre does not speak about the letting be of *any kind* of freedom: he refers exclusively to the freedom of the authentic personality that has already gone through the transition that was brought about by the renunciation the workings of bad faith. Only this kind of personality who has migrated to a higher ethical plain and acquired a clearer vision of reality has been enabled, for Sartre, to support the plans and projects of other authentic individuals, since, evidently, not every plan is worthy of the authentic person's support. Those projects, however, that indeed deserve encouragement and aid, must be appropriately acknowledged; supporting them is, in fact, a moral obligation for the authentic individual. The willingness to allow and assist the other persons to attain their own authentic freedom, for instance, constitutes such a moral obligation.[8] In Sartre, this sort of support could only become realistically possible if the other person is also willing to grant me my own existential freedom; that is to say, if freedom is recognized between equal parties in a mutually respectful manner.

8 Similarly, in Mahāyāna Buddhism the willingness to assist others to find liberation after one has achieved liberation for onself is an ethical imperative which is freely realized and enacted by the enlightened person (cf. the Boddhisatva way).

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